Workplace Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: Reviewing the Role of HR Policies in Women Empowerment

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Abstract

Diversity, equity and inclusion of the workplace (DEI) are critical factors of women's empowerment, but significant gaps persist between political intention and implementation. This review article examines the role of HR policies in the advancement of gender equality in India, focusing on the recent Delhi labor reforms, including the policy of night change to women. Although legislative structures such as Posh (2013) and Maternity Benefits Law (Amendment) (2017) provide fundamental support, empirical data reveal continuous challenges, such as low female labor participation (40.3% in 2023-24) and leadership sub -representation (24% at management levels). The analysis highlights the importance of robust safety protocols (ex. mandatory transportation, CCTV surveillance) and inclusive practices (e.g. flexible work agreements, orientation programs) in promoting safe and equitable workplaces. However, implementation barriers, including employer reluctance, inappropriate conformity monitoring and intersectional disparities, make progress difficult. The findings emphasize the need for data - oriented responsibility, leadership compromise, and culturally adapted strategies to translate policies into significant empowerment. This review concludes that synergistic efforts between government initiatives (e.g. stand-up India, She-Box) and HR corporate practices are essential to accelerate gender parity and economic growth.

Keywords: Women Empowerment, HR Policies, Workplace Diversity and Inclusion, Gender Equality. Labour Reforms

1.   Introduction

Diversity, equity and inclusion of the workplace (DEI) emerged as critical pillars for sustainable organizational growth and social progress in the 21st century. Historically, women face systemic barriers in professional environments, ranging from gender -based discrimination and salary gaps, limited access to leadership functions and unsafe working conditions. These challenges are particularly pronounced in cultural and socioeconomically diverse contexts, such as India, where patriarchal norms and structural inequalities prevent women's economic participation. However, the global change for the recognition of gender equality as a fundamental factor of development has catalyzed efforts to redefine organizational practices through Strategic Human Resources Policies (HR) designed to enable women [3] [8].

The concept of women empowerment is just beyond representation to include economic freedom, psychological security and justice for development. As defined by the European Institute for Gender Equality, empowerment includes women's "sense of self-value, their right to determine options and their ability to influence social change" [3]. In the workplace, it translates into policies that ensure protection from fair recruitment, promotion, compensation and harassment, as well as with initiatives that promote inclusion and leadership development [2]. In India, such efforts guarantee constitutional mandate (e.g., Article 14, 15, and 16 equality and restrict gender-based discrimination) and guarantee equality by legislative structure such as the Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition, and Prevention) Act, 2013 [6].

Recent government initiatives such as Mission Shakti and Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, along with the corporate adoption of international principles such as Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs), highlight a growing commitment to enable women [1] [4] [8]. For example, programs such as One Stop Centers (Sakhi Centers) and Helplines Women (181) provide critical support to victims of violence, while schemes such as India Stand-Up and Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana promote entrepreneurship and financial inclusion [1] [13]. These efforts produced tangible results, including better sexual proportions (1020 women by 1000 men), increased female literacy (70.3%) and greater representation in grassroots governance (46.94% in Panchayats) [3] [13].

Despite progress, significant challenges persist. India occupies the 127th position of the 146 countries in gender parity, with only 32.8% of women in the workforce and a 21% gender salary gap [3]. Deep social norms, inadequate implementation of emerging policies and threats, such as

digital harassment, continue to prevent women's empowerment. This review article examines the role of HR policies in the approach of these gaps, analyzing strategic structures for Dei, intersectional challenges and measuring mechanisms to assess the impact. By synthesizing government report ideas, academic research, and case studies, this article aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how HR practices can turn work places into gender equality and development engines led by women.

1.1. Objectives:

These objectives directly address the gaps and themes identified in the literature review, such as the "broken rung" in promotions, the importance of flexible work arrangements, the impact of regional policies like night-shift reforms, and the need for an intersectional approach to move beyond one-size-fits-all solutions. The focus on the Delhi NCR region provides a specific contextual lens to the study.

- To identify and examine the specific HR policies and practices (e.g., recruitment, promotion, pay equity, flexibility, anti-harassment) implemented by private sector companies in Delhi NCR aimed at fostering women's empowerment.

- To assess the impact of these HR policies on key indicators of women's empowerment, including career advancement opportunities, representation in leadership roles, workplace satisfaction, and retention rates.

- To investigate the challenges and barriers (e.g., organizational, cultural, structural) that hinder the effective implementation and outcomes of DEI-focused HR policies for women.

2. Literature Reviews

Based on a comprehensive review of recent literature, workplace diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives are critically enabled by intentional HR policies that go beyond compliance to embed these principles into organizational values and daily operations, with research consistently demonstrating that such strategies—including bias-free recruitment, inclusive leadership, continuous diversity training, and robust safety frameworks—significantly enhance innovation, employee engagement, and financial performance

Recent literature highlights the change of diversity, equity and inclusion (Dei) to diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging (Deib) as a critical evolution in organizational strategies. Deib emphasizes not only representation and justice, but also psychological security and a sense of belonging

essential to women's empowerment. Studies show that organizations with strong Deib structures report higher retention rates, increased productivity and better financial performance. For example, companies with diverse leadership are 36% more likely to overcome their peers [1] [6]. HR policies that integrate the principles of Deib-including inclusive hiring practices, equitable salaries and guidance programs have significantly promoting women's careers, especially in men-dominated industries [6] [13].

Flexible work arrangements (e.g., remote work, compressed workweeks) have emerged as a key enabler of women's empowerment, especially for caregivers and marginalized groups. Research indicates that flexibility reduces the "flexibility gap" and promotes psychological safety by minimizing exposure to microaggressions often faced in traditional office settings. For example, 81% of working parents rank flexibility as crucial for job retention 7. However, biases persist, as women using flexible policies are often stigmatized and overlooked for promotions. HR policies must explicitly address these biases and ensure equitable access to flexibility to truly empower women **Error! Reference source not found.Error! Reference source not found.**.

The "broken rung" phenomenon—where women, especially women of color, are disproportionately underrepresented in their first managerial roles—remains a significant barrier to empowerment. Literature reveals that for every 100 men promoted to manager, only 89 white women and 58 Black women are promoted 59. HR policies targeting this issue include structured promotion processes, bias training for evaluators, and sponsorship programs for high-potential women. Organizations that implement these strategies see improved representation in senior roles and better overall gender equity outcomes **Error! Reference source not found.Error! Reference source not found.**.

Gender pays gaps persist globally, with women earning approximately 83 percents for every dollar earned by men. Recent literature emphasizes the role of HR in conducting regular pay audits, establishing clear pay bands, and promoting transparency to address disparities. Research shows that pay equity initiatives not only improve financial fairness but also enhance women's trust in organizational leadership. For example, companies like Accenture have invested heavily in pay equity audits and mentorship programs to close gaps **Error! Reference source not found.**. However, legislative challenges and political pushback against DEI efforts threaten progress,

requiring HR to navigate compliance while advancing equity **Error! Reference source not found.Error! Reference source not found.**.

Microaggressions—subtle, often unintentional discriminatory behaviors—continue to undermine women's empowerment. Studies indicate that 38% of women have their judgment questioned in their area of expertise, and 39% are frequently interrupted or spoken over 5. HR policies must prioritize psychological safety by implementing anti-discrimination training, clear reporting mechanisms, and accountability measures. Literature suggests that inclusive leadership and safe team environments are critical for reducing microaggressions and fostering belonging **Error! Reference source not found.Error! Reference source not found.**.

A strong business case exists for DEIB initiatives, with research linking gender diversity to improved innovation, profitability, and employee engagement. Companies in the top quartile for diversity are 36% more likely to achieve above-average financial returns **Error! Reference source not found.**. Additionally, organizations with inclusive cultures report 56% higher job performance and 75% fewer sick days among employees **Error! Reference source not found.**. HR policies that align DEIB goals with organizational strategy—such as leadership accountability, data-driven metrics, and employee resource groups—are essential for sustaining women's empowerment efforts **Error! Reference source not found.Error! Reference source not found.**.

Recent executive orders and political shifts have threatened DEIB initiatives, particularly in the U.S. For example, Executive Order **Error! Reference source not found.Error! Reference source not found.** rescinded affirmative action requirements for federal contractors, creating uncertainty for private sector DEIB efforts **Error! Reference source not found.**. Literature highlights the importance of HR in ensuring compliance while advocating for evidence-based DEIB practices. Strategies include framing DEIB as a learning opportunity, fostering open dialogues, and leveraging data to demonstrate ROI. Failure to address these challenges may increase legal risks and perpetuate discrimination **Error! Reference source not found.**.

Intersectionality—the overlapping of gender with other identities such as race, ethnicity, and disability—is critical for understanding women's experiences. Research shows that women of color face compounded barriers, including higher rates of microaggressions and lower access to mentorship. HR policies must adopt an intersectional approach by collecting disaggregated data, tailoring initiatives to specific needs, and promoting inclusive leadership. For instance, programs

targeting mid-career women of color in tech have successfully increased representation in leadership roles **Error! Reference source not found.**.

Formal mentorship and sponsorship programs are proven tools for advancing women's careers. Literature indicates that women, especially women of color, are less likely to receive support from managers and sponsors**Error! Reference source not found.**. HR policies that create structured mentorship opportunities—such as pairing women with senior leaders and measuring program outcomes—can bridge this gap. For example, Ethos DEIB consultancy's program for female technologists resulted in 16 out of 17 participants achieving their career goals **Error! Reference source not found.Error! Reference source not found.**.

Data-driven approaches are essential for evaluating the effectiveness of HR policies in women's empowerment. Key metrics include promotion rates, pay equity, employee engagement scores, and retention rates. Literature emphasizes the role of HR in regularly auditing these metrics, sharing progress transparently, and adjusting strategies as needed. Tools like inclusion surveys and demographic analyses help organizations identify gaps and track improvements over time **Error! Reference source not found.Error! Reference source not found.**. However, recent trends show a decline in DEIB prioritization, with only 15% of HR leaders listing it as a top priority in 2025 **Error! Reference source not found.**.

3. Research Methodology

This review paper employs a systematic literature review (SLR) methodology to synthesize existing research on the role of Human Resource (HR) policies in promoting women's empowerment through Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives in the workplace. The primary aim is to provide a comprehensive, unbiased, and critically analytical overview of the current body of knowledge, identify key themes, research gaps, and suggest directions for future research. This methodology is designed to be transparent, replicable, and rigorous, ensuring the review's credibility and academic value**Error! Reference source not found.Error! Reference source not found.**.

3.1. Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative systematic review design. Unlike a traditional narrative review, a systematic review follows a strict protocol to minimize bias at every stage: from identifying and evaluating relevant literature to synthesizing the findings**Error! Reference source not found.**.

This design is chosen for its ability to provide a holistic understanding of complex, context-dependent phenomena like organizational policies and empowerment**Error! Reference source not found.Error! Reference source not found.**.

3.2.   Keywords and Search Strings: A combination of keywords and Boolean operators (AND, OR) was used to create comprehensive search strings. The key concepts were:

- Population/Context: ("Women" OR "female employees" OR "gender") AND ("workplace" OR "private sector" OR "corporate" OR "India" OR "Delhi NCR")

- Intervention: ("HR policies" OR "Human Resource practices" OR "Diversity policies" OR "Inclusion strategies" OR "Equity initiatives" OR "talent management")

- Outcome: ("Empowerment" OR "advancement" OR "leadership" OR "career development" OR "psychological safety" OR "inclusion")

- Review Focus: ("literature review" OR "systematic review" OR "meta-analysis")

Sample Search String:

("HR polic*" OR "human resource management" OR "diversity polic*") AND ("women empower*" OR "female empower*" OR "career advancement") AND ("workplace" OR "DEI" OR "private sector")

The asterisk (*) was used as a truncation symbol to capture variations of a word (e.g., polic* retrieves policy, policies). Searches were primarily conducted within the title, abstract, and keywords of articles to ensure relevance.

3.3. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria:

Inclusion:

- Peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and conference proceedings.

- Literature published primarily between **2015 and 2025** to ensure relevance, with seminal works from prior years included for foundational context.

- Studies focused on the role of organizational HR policies in women's empowerment.

- Research conducted in global and Indian contexts, with a specific interest in studies from Delhi NCR.

Exclusion:

▪   Non-English publications.

▪   Articles not directly related to HR management or workplace empowerment.

▪   Opinion pieces, editorials, and non-academic magazine articles (unless from a highly credible source like McKinsey or EY reports, which were included for current data trends).

3.4.   **Data Analysis: Thematic Synthesis**

The analysis followed a thematic synthesis approach, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). This involved a three-stage process:

1.   **Familiarization and Initial Coding:** The identified literature was read and re-read to achieve deep familiarity. Initial codes were generated to describe key findings and concepts from each study (e.g., "flexible work stigma," "pay transparency," "broken rung," "microaggressions").

2.   **Theme Development:** These codes were examined and grouped into broader descriptive themes that summarized the main patterns across the literature**Error! Reference source not found.**. For example, codes related to remote work, childcare support, and part-time policies were grouped under the theme "Flexible Work Arrangements as an Empowerment Tool."

3.   **Analytical Theme Generation:** The descriptive themes were further analyzed and refined to generate higher-order analytical themes that directly address the research question**Error! Reference source not found.**. This involved interpreting the findings to answer "what is the overall story of the literature?" Key analytical themes include:

•   The evolution from compliance-driven DEI to a holistic DEIB (Belonging) framework.

•   The critical role of HR in mitigating political and legal challenges to empowerment initiatives.

•   The necessity of an intersectional approach in policy design.

3.5.   **Quality Appraisal**

To ensure the integrity of the synthesis, all selected studies were subjected to a quality appraisal using a checklist adapted from the **Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP)** for qualitative and quantitative research**Error! Reference source not found.**. Key criteria included:

•   Clarity of research aims.

•   Appropriateness of methodology.

•   Research design and data collection rigor.

•   Ethical considerations.

- Value of the research to the field. This process helped weigh the findings of each study and ensure that the synthesis was based on credible and high-quality research.

3.6. Findings: Thematic Synthesis of HR Policies for Women's Empowerment

The systematic review of the literature revealed several key thematic areas where HR policies significantly impact women's empowerment **Error! Reference source not found.**. The table below synthesizes the primary findings, linking specific HR policy domains, their intended empowerment outcomes, and the critical challenges identified in their implementation.

Table 1: Metrics for Evaluating HR Policy Effectiveness in Women's Empowerment

Policy Domain	Key HR Policies & Initiatives	Intended Empowerment Outcomes	Critical Challenges & Barriers
Talent Acquisition & Hiring	- Blind recruitment processes - Diversity slates for candidate shortlists - Structured interviews with gender-neutral criteria - Partnerships with women-focused professional networks	- Increased representation of women at all levels - Reduction of unconscious bias at the point of entry - A more diverse talent pipeline from the outset	- "Culture fit" bias can override structured processes. - Inadequate representation in the pipeline for senior roles. - Potential for bias to re-enter the process during final selection.
Career Development & Advancement	- Formal mentorship & sponsorship programs - Leadership development programs for women	- Closing the "broken rung" in the first-step managerial promotion. - Increased representation in senior leadership and board	- Women, especially women of color, are often over-mentored but under-sponsored. - Stretch assignments are more frequently

	- Clear, transparent criteria for promotions - High-potential identification programs	positions. - Equitable access to growth opportunities and challenging assignments.	offered to male employees. - Lack of accountability for managers to develop female talent.
Performance & Pay Equity	- Regular pay equity audits and adjustments - Transparent pay bands and salary ranges - Standardized, objective performance evaluation criteria - Bias training for evaluators	- Elimination of the gender pay gap for equal work. - Fair and unbiased performance assessments. - Increased trust in organizational fairness and transparency.	- Pay secrecy cultures persist, hindering transparency. - Historical salary gaps can be baked into starting offers. - Subjective performance metrics can perpetuate bias.
Flexible Work & Life Integration	- Remote and hybrid work options - Flexible working hours (Flextime) - Generous and equitable parental leave policies - On-site or subsidized childcare support	- Enables retention, especially for caregivers. - Reduces the "motherhood penalty" and supports workforce re-entry. - Promotes psychological safety and well-being.	- "Flexibility stigma" can lead to perceptions of lower commitment. - Those using flexible policies are often sidelined for promotions. - Unequal uptake by gender can reinforce traditional roles.

| Inclusive Culture & Anti-Discrimination | - Unconscious bias training
- Strong anti-harassment policies with clear reporting mechanisms
- Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) for women
- Inclusive leadership training for managers | - Creation of psychological safety and a sense of belonging.
- Reduction in microaggressions and discriminatory behavior.
- Empowered voice for women to report issues without fear. | - One-off training is ineffective without sustained effort and systemic change.
- Fear of retaliation often prevents reporting of incidents.
- Policies can be perceived as performative without visible leadership commitment. |
| Accountability & Measurement | - Publicly stated DEI goals and targets
- Linking leader compensation to DEI metrics
- Regular publishing of diversity data and progress reports
- Inclusion surveys and climate assessments | - Creates ownership and accountability at the leadership level.
- Data-driven insights allow for targeted interventions.
- Demonstrates a genuine, measurable commitment to change. | - Can lead to a "check-the-box" approach if not integrated into core strategy.
- Metrics can be gamed (e.g., hiring without focusing on retention).
- Recent political backlash has caused some organizations to scale back public goals. |

4.   Results

Based on a comprehensive review of the literature, the results indicate that while HR policies are powerful levers for women's empowerment, their effectiveness is highly dependent on strategic implementation and a commitment to intersectionality. Proactive, integrated Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) frameworks—such as structured hiring protocols, formal mentorship programs, and regular pay equity audits—have demonstrated significant positive impacts, including higher

retention rates, a reduction in promotion disparities like the "broken rung," and improved financial performance for organizations. However, these gains are unevenly distributed, as women of color face compounded barriers requiring targeted interventions beyond general gender initiatives. Furthermore, the efficacy of these policies is increasingly challenged by a complex landscape of political opposition, legal uncertainty, and persistent subtle discrimination, underscoring the critical need for robust measurement, stronger accountability mechanisms, and adaptable, evidence-based strategies to translate policy into meaningful and equitable outcomes for all women.

Table 2: Synthesis of Results on HR Policies for Women's Empowerment

Key Theme	Major Findings from Literature	Impact on Women's Empowerment	Notable Data Points
1. Policy Frameworks & Implementation	Proactive, integrated DEI strategies are more effective than compliance-only approaches. Structured hiring (centralized protocols, skills-based assessment) significantly reduces recruitment bias.	Creates transformative cultures where diversity is valued. Increases fairness in hiring and promotion processes.	• 36% more callbacks for underrepresented groups with blind resumes.[25] • Dedicated DEI task forces increase accountability and success.[8]
2. Workforce Participation & Advancement	Mentorship/sponsorship programs directly address the "broken rung" in promotions. Labor reforms (e.g., allowing night shifts with safety protocols) expand economic opportunities.	Increases retention, advancement to leadership, and overall economic participation for women.	• For every 100 men promoted to manager: 89 white women and 58 Black women**Error! Reference source not found.**. • 81% of working parents cite flexibility as crucial for job

			retention**Error! Reference source not found.**. • Companies with diverse leadership are 36% more likely to outperform peers**Error! Reference source not found.**.
3. Intersectionality & Inclusive Practices	Women face compounded barriers based on race, ethnicity, and other identities. "Misogynoir" (racism + sexism) requires targeted interventions. Comprehensive LGBTQ+ policies are crucial for inclusion.	Ensures empowerment initiatives benefit all women, not just a privileged subset. Fosters a greater sense of belonging and safety.	• Resumes with distinctively Black names receive fewer contacts. • Black workers are 23% less likely to receive support for advancement. • 98% of top-scoring CEI companies have explicit LGBTQ+ protections in policies**Error! Reference source not found.**.
4. Measurement & Evaluation	Data-driven approaches (pay audits, promotion analysis, inclusion surveys) are essential for identifying gaps and measuring	Provides accountability, reveals hidden disparities, and allows for	• 91% of CEI-rated employers offer transgender-inclusive healthcare. • EEOC charges

progress. Standardized benchmarks (e.g., Corporate Equality Index) drive improvement.	evidence-based adjustments to policies.	increased by 9.2% in FY2024, indicating persistent issues.**Error! Reference source not found.**
5. Emerging Challenges	Discrimination persists subtly through microaggressions and biased evaluations. Political/legal opposition (e.g., anti-DEI executive orders) creates regulatory uncertainty. Retaliation for reporting discrimination remains high.	Threatens to reverse progress on gender equity. Creates a "chilling effect" that discourages reporting and undermines psychological safety.	• 59% of professionals report ongoing workplace discrimination. • Nearly 50% of all EEOC filings are for retaliation.**Error! Reference source not found.**
6. Future Directions	Technology (AI, blockchain) offers new tools but must be monitored for bias. Intersectional and tailored interventions are needed. Stronger accountability (e.g., linking leader pay to metrics) is critical.	Points to more sophisticated, effective, and sustainable approaches to closing gender gaps and fostering genuine inclusion.	Global coordination and adapting policies to local contexts will be key for multinational organizations.**Error! Reference source not found.Error! Reference source not found.**

In this table 1 comprehensive analysis underscores that while HR policies have demonstrably advanced women's empowerment through structured DEI frameworks, measurable gains in representation, and targeted inclusion practices, the journey is far from complete**Error! Reference source not found.**. The persistence of deep-rooted challenges—from subtle microaggressions and the stark "broken rung" in promotions to rising political opposition and the critical need for intersectionality—reveals that policy implementation must be continually evaluated and

adaptively refined. Ultimately, the future of empowering women in the workplace hinges on moving beyond performative measures to embed genuine accountability, leverage technology ethically, and foster an organizational culture where equity and inclusion are inextricably linked to overall strategy and success**Error! Reference source not found.**.

4.1. Result Analysis

The synthesis of these results presents a complex and somewhat paradoxical landscape: while HR policies have become increasingly sophisticated and widespread in their aim to empower women, their effectiveness is heavily contingent on implementation depth, cultural context, and their ability to address intersecting and evolving forms of discrimination. The analysis reveals that the most significant empowerment gains are achieved not through standalone initiatives but through integrated, systemic approaches that treat DEI as a core strategic function rather than a peripheral HR compliance activity. The documented success of companies scoring highly on benchmarks like the Corporate Equality Index supports this, demonstrating that comprehensive policy ecosystems—encompassing recruitment, benefits, mentorship, and transparent metrics—create a multiplicative effect that singular policies cannot achieve. This underscores a critical insight: the empowerment of women is not a program but a paradigm shift in organizational governance, requiring unwavering commitment from leadership and structural integration into all business operations**Error! Reference source not found.Error! Reference source not found.**.

However, this analysis also exposes a troubling implementation gap between policy design and lived experience. The persistent statistics on the "broken rung," pay disparities, and microaggressions indicate that even within organizations with robust formal policies, informal cultures and unconscious biases can subvert their intent. The fact that discrimination and retaliation claims are rising, even as more companies adopt DEI statements, suggests that procedural box-ticking is insufficient. This gap is particularly pronounced for women at the intersection of multiple marginalized identities, as evidenced by the starkly different promotion rates for white women versus Black women. Therefore, the analysis must conclude that the mere presence of an HR policy is a poor indicator of its empowering outcome; its efficacy is determined by the organization's commitment to rooting out bias in its daily interactions, decision-making processes, and performance evaluations**Error! Reference source not found.Error! Reference source not found.Error! Reference source not found.**.

Furthermore, the analysis must grapple with the external political and economic pressures that threaten to undermine these institutional efforts. The recent wave of anti-DEI legislation and executive orders creates a precarious environment, forcing organizations into a reactive stance. This highlights a fundamental vulnerability of corporate-led empowerment initiatives: their sustainability can be jeopardized by shifting political winds. Consequently, the long-term empowerment of women may require a dual strategy of strengthening internal HR policies while also advocating for a stable, supportive regulatory framework that protects and encourages equity efforts. Ultimately, this analysis posits that the future of women's empowerment in the workplace depends on moving from *transactional* compliance to *transformational* change—building resilient cultures of belonging that can withstand external challenges and consistently convert policy into meaningful power and opportunity for all women**Error! Reference source not found.Error! Reference source not found.Error! Reference source not found.**.

5.   Conclusion

This review systematically examined the multifaceted role of human resources policies in the advancement of diversity, equity and inclusion in the workplace as a mechanism for women's empowerment. Evidence conclusively demonstrates that well-designed and robustly implemented HR structures-implemented-biased, equitable promotion paths, payment transparency, flexible work agreements, and inclusive leadership development are not just peripheral initiatives, but they are fundamental factors of gender equity and organizational success. The documented results, from the closing promotion gaps and the increase in retention to the promotion of a genuine sense of belonging, say a powerful and ethical case to prioritize these policies. They are fundamental to dismantle structural barriers and create environments where women can thrive, lead and contribute to their entire potential. However, this review also discovers a critical and persistent disconnection between policy adoption and significant impact. The lasting challenges of the "broken step", widespread microaggressions and significant intersectional disparities reveal that written policies are insufficient without deep cultural integration and unshakable responsibility. Women's empowerment depends on going beyond performative compliance to promote a transformative organizational culture that actively challenges biases and shares power. This requires that the incorporation of Dei principles within the DNA of operations, leadership expectations and strategic objectives of an organization.

The path to genuine empowerment requires a more subtle and resilient approach. Organizations should adopt intersectionality to ensure that initiatives benefit all women, leverages technology ethically to mitigate bias and develop strong

Acknowledgements

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