



Exploring the Role of Women in Philippine Workplaces



June 2023



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Investing in Women, an initiative of the Australian Government, catalyses inclusive economic growth through women’s economic empowerment in South East Asia.

Established in 2016, Investing in Women tackles one of the most critical social and economic issues of our time: gender inequality.

Women’s economic empowerment is not only a fundamental aspect of promoting gender equality, but it is vital to enhancing business competitiveness, fueling inclusive economic growth and building equitable societies. In collaboration with corporations and business leaders, impact investors, entrepreneurs and advocates, we are working with those who are driving change for women’s economic equality in our region.



The Philippines Business Coalition for Women Empowerment (PBCWE) was launched in March 2017 through a partnership between the Philippines Women’s Economic Network, Inc. (PhilWEN) and Investing in Women (IW), an initiative of the Australian Government. It is made up of influential businesses that are large employers who will take the appropriate steps to improve gender equity in their own workplaces and to influence businesses, both in their supply chains and other large businesses, and to also become better employers of women.

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Introduction

The Philippines currently ranks 19th out of 146 countries in the 2022 iteration of the World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Report.

The country slipped two places from 2021, and this is the lowest ranking since the annual report was first published in 2006. This is attributed to a decrease in gender parity in education and economic participation. While the entire Philippine labour force was impacted due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the labour force participation rate of women is now 24.5% lower than men (WEF, 2022). The gender gap in labour force participation is amongst the widest in Asia and is driven by a number of factors including stereotyped gender roles at work and at home. For example, national data suggests that women tend to drop out of the labour force during child-bearing years, with many of them not returning to work, due to prevailing gender norms around women's role as child carer (NEDA, 2019).

The persistence of gender stereotypes in the workplace has also been one of the key findings of the 2019 MBC study of women in the Philippine C-Suite. While traditional expectations regarding the role of men and women have evolved over time, women continue to battle harmful gender stereotypes and restrictive gender norms as they climb the corporate ladder.

Cislaghi (2020) defines gender norms as follows:



Gender norms are social norms defining acceptable and appropriate actions for women and men in a given group or society. They are embedded in formal and informal institutions, nested in the mind, and produced and reproduced through social interaction. They play a role in shaping women and men's (often unequal) access to resources and freedoms, thus affecting their voice, power and sense of self.

Gender norms underpin family relations, educational and work choices, and affected the culture and relationships in the workplace. Gender stereotypes can bias human perceptions and create standards for behaviour that can pigeonhole women in specific roles and obstructing career progression (Tabassum & Nayak, 2021). These can also shape the different working relationships between colleagues, peers, and subordinates in an organization, influencing individual and organizational performance (Elnaga, 2012).

Deeply embedded gender stereotypes may also influence organizational policies and practices (Birkelund, et.al, 2020), thus addressing gender norms and stereotypes is critical to gender diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I) in the corporate sector. Gender DE&I practices can create and reinforce a positive work environment and shift norms to where all individuals are valued. This leads to an organizational culture that allows individuals to reach their full potential and contributes to achieving the company's strategic goals (Tabassum & Nayak, 2021).

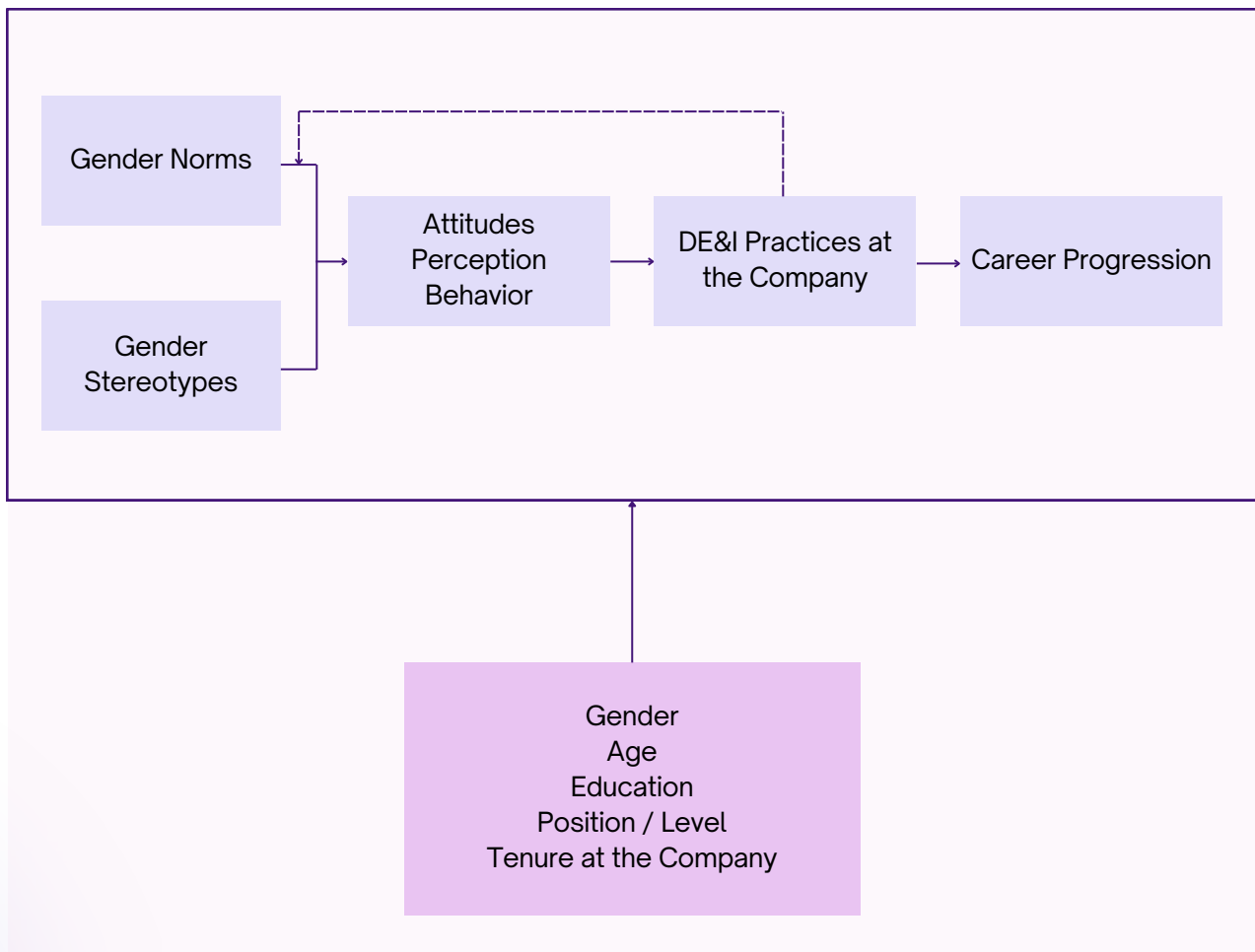


Figure 1. Conceptual framework for the research

1.1 Objectives

This new report highlights the role gender norms play in the career progression of women in Philippine organizations. This research sought to gather evidence on how gender norms and stereotypes impact the development, implementation and take-up of workplace gender equality policies and practices in the private sector. Specifically, the objectives are (1) to understand existing gender norms and stereotypes in workplaces and how they impact the growth and experiences of the female employees as well as the policies and practices in companies; and (2) to discover what organizations do or could do to minimize the negative impact of gender norms and stereotypes.

1.2 Methodology

Two online surveys were released, one for C-level executives and one for middle managers to assess the perceptions on gender norms in the workplace. The team also conducted parallel interviews and focus group discussions with C-level executives, human resource managers, and middle managers to extract narratives of lived experiences and diversity and inclusion practices and policies. A learn-and-share session was also conducted where executives and mid-managers were given a platform to openly discuss diversity and inclusion in the workplace.

Position	Gender	Survey Respondents	KII / FGD Respondents	Safe Spaces Participants
C-Level Executives	Female	22	4	4
	Male	12	1	2
Middle Managers	Female	34	5	7
	Male	5	0	5

Table 1. Participant sample size

The C-level survey were answered by executives from 27 companies, while the survey respondents for mid-managers were from 21 different organizations. Nine out of the 27 companies represented in the C-level survey have counterpart respondents in the mid-manager survey. Interviews with managers represented 4 different companies, while C-level conversations were conducted with 5 corporations, with two companies participating across both levels. All but one of the companies represented in the mid-manager focus group discussions responded to the survey while all companies participating in the C-level interviews also responded to the survey.

1.3 Limitations

Only nine companies are represented across both the C-level and mid-manager respondents. Further, the limitations in sample size made it challenging to perform a robust statistical analysis on the data. The interviews were also not able to capture the perspectives of a male middle manager, compounding the limited survey insights from male mid-managers. It should also be noted that it can be challenging to triangulate self-reported behaviour. Thus, survey results were supported with previous MBC gender surveys, the previous MBC gender reports, and other sources related literature to substantiate the findings.

Moreover, this study does not intentionally correct for social desirability bias. It is not able to examine rational responses against actual organizational practices, and how norms are reflected in the way people behave. Many employees may be aware of the need to avoid biases, and so respond in a way that reflects this awareness in theory, but this does not necessarily mean that this theoretical belief is translated into actual practise within the workplace itself. They may believe all genders are equally fit for all jobs, but in practise still limit hiring of women and men to those fields they are believed to be better suited for.



Key Findings

2.1 Gender norms pigeonhole men and women into specific work roles that are deemed ‘suitable’ for their gender.

When asked broadly about work roles, most C-level executives and mid-managers surveyed said both genders are equally fit for all types of jobs except when it comes to jobs that require heavy physical work. Interviewed mid-managers agree that there is a need to accelerate gender balance in male dominated fields. However, when asked about the suitability of men and women for specific roles gender bias was evident, with a view that some jobs are a better fit for men, and some are more suitable for women.



We asked C-level executives about who they think are most suitable to do certain jobs.

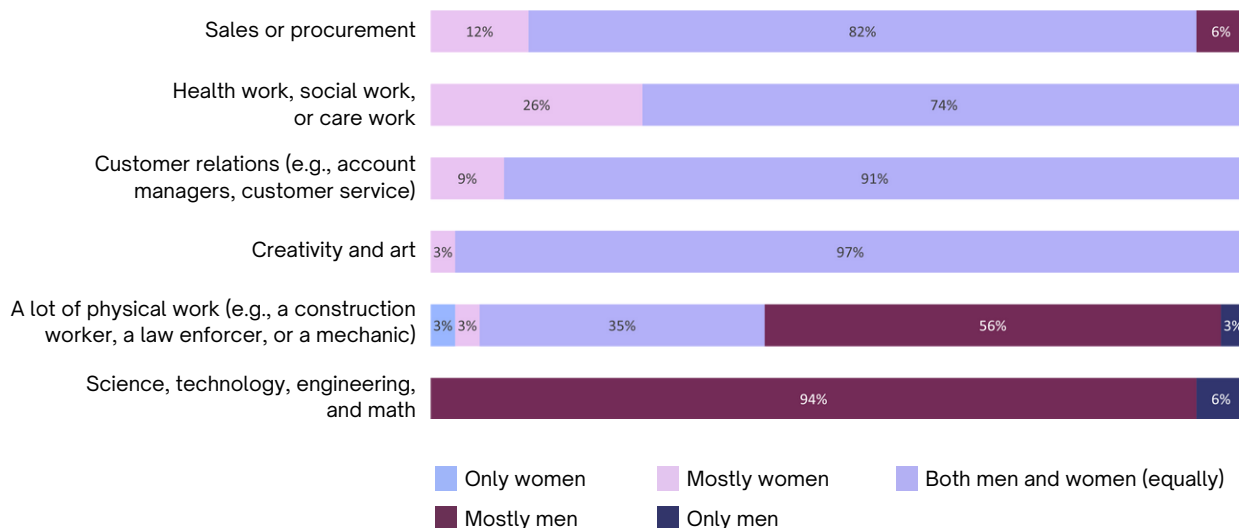


Figure 2. C-level beliefs about gender-based job segregation

We asked mid-managers on who they think are most suitable to do certain jobs.

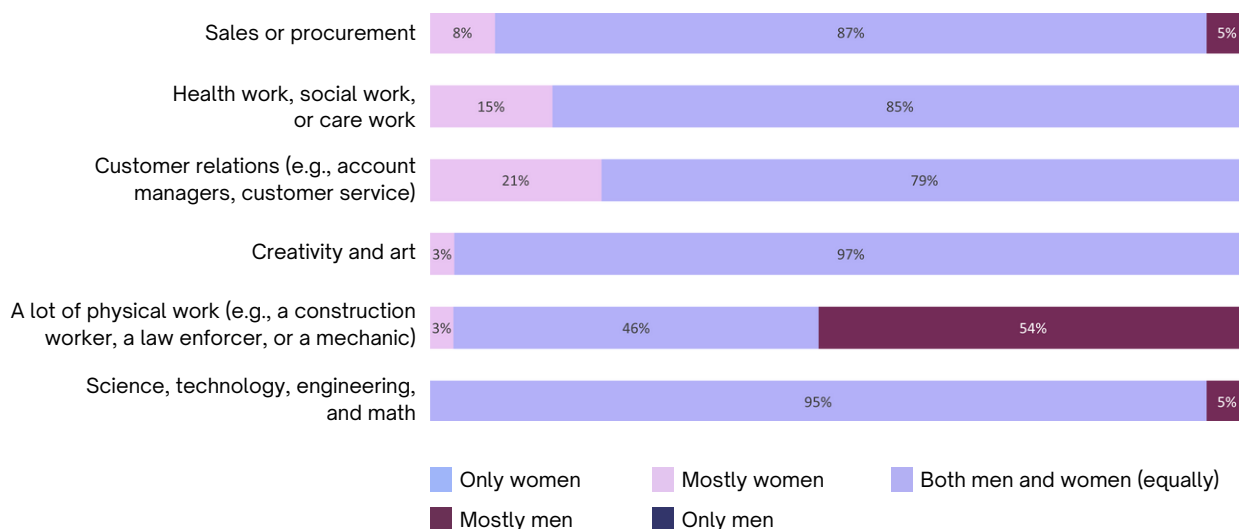


Figure 3. Mid-manager beliefs about gender-based job segregation

This insight provides more context to the results of the 2022 MBC surveys of women in workplaces, which indicate that gender bias is mostly not felt nor experienced by mid-managers, but when they do, it would most likely be in terms of work roles, hiring practices, growth opportunities from assignments, or work schedules and arrangement.

We also asked the respondents about their perceptions of their colleagues' beliefs on the same topic. These are second-order beliefs^[1]—in this case, respondents' beliefs about mid-managers' beliefs on gendered work roles. Both C-level and mid-manager level respondents said they thought mid-managers have a bias towards men doing physical roles.

Research suggests that second-order beliefs can influence behaviour. For example, an employee may personally believe that women and men should be given equal opportunities for jobs that require physical work, but if they believe that the people around them (i.e. their peers) believe such jobs are better suited to men, they may behave according to this second-order belief, even if it goes against their own beliefs. On the other hand, when second-order beliefs match personal beliefs, it can reinforce personal beliefs and behaviour based on those beliefs.

[1] First-order beliefs are the actual beliefs of the person while second-order beliefs are beliefs about other people's beliefs. This research asked C-level executives about their beliefs regarding their mid-managers beliefs. It also asked mid-managers beliefs about their colleagues' beliefs. First-order beliefs that proliferate gender stereotypes may generate second-order beliefs that further perpetuate gender inequalities, which result in persisting gender gaps in the workplace. (Dustan, Koutout, & Leo, 2022).

2.2 Most C-Level executives think men and women have similar drive and ambition, but that women are held back by caring roles.

The majority (56%) of C-suite respondents generally think that both genders have the same level of ambition (56%) to take on leadership roles within the company. However a significant portion of C-suite respondents believe that men are more ambitious (32%), and only a few (12%) believe women have more ambition.

However, the majority (75%) of the mid-manager respondents, which are 87% women, agreed that they have the ambition to progress to leadership roles. This means C-level gendered perception of ambition contradicts that of the actual ambition of mid-managers. Women are often in a double bind wherein they are challenged to counter both the perception that they lack ambition and that they are too ambitious. This shows that perception of ambition is informed by gendered interactions (Sools, et al., 2007).

We asked C-level executives who amongst their mid-managers will exhibit this behaviour.

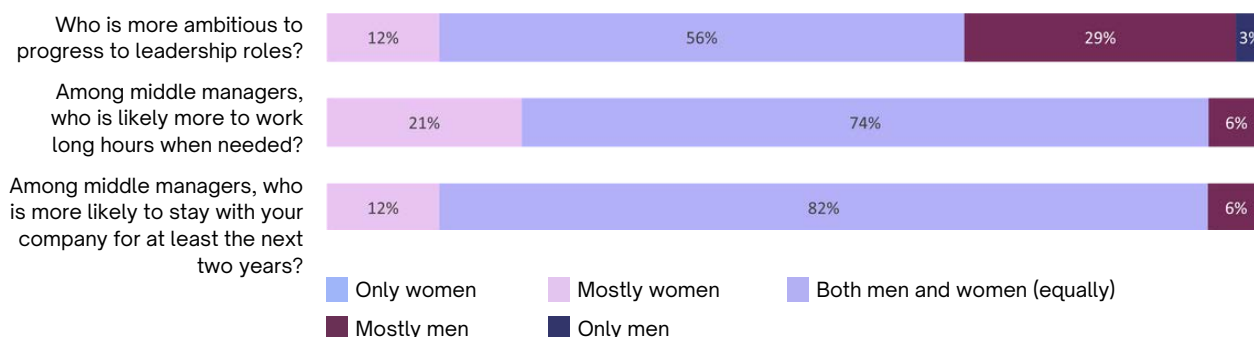


Figure 4. C-level beliefs about mid-manager ambition and commitment

However, the majority (75%) of the mid-manager respondents, which are 87% women, agreed that they have the ambition to progress to leadership roles. This means C-level gendered perception of ambition contradicts that of the actual ambition of mid-managers. Women are often in a double bind wherein they are challenged to counter both the perception that they lack ambition and that they are too ambitious. This shows that perception of ambition is informed by gendered interactions (Sools, et al., 2007).

Mid-managers' response to the question: I am ambitious to achieve leadership roles.

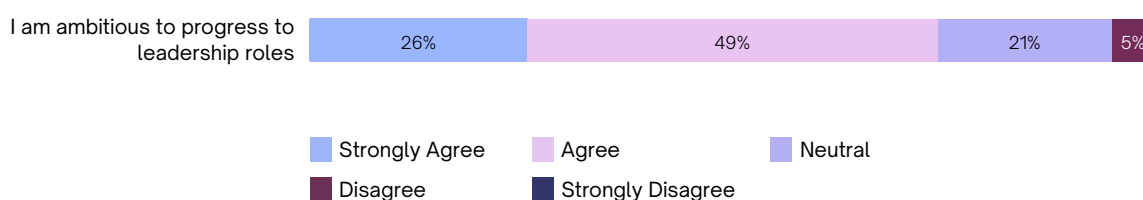


Figure 5. Ambition among mid-managers

Interestingly, although C-level respondents said women and men are equally ambitious, 74% of the same respondents said women are more likely than men to step back from leadership roles. Among mid-managers, 59% said women are more likely than men to back out of leadership. A further 8% of mid-managers said only women will behave this way. None of the respondents at any level thought that men are more likely to do this or that only men do this.

When asked during interviews for this research about factors impacting promotion, C-suite respondents said women and men generally face the same challenges. The survey results, however, show a strong gendered response from C-level executives on who is most impacted by the challenge of balancing caring responsibilities.

Three in every four C-suite respondents surveyed said women are more likely than men to be impacted by this obstacle.

For all other obstacles listed, most C-level respondents said women and men are equally challenged.

We asked C-level executives who amongst their middle managers would face the following obstacles for promotion

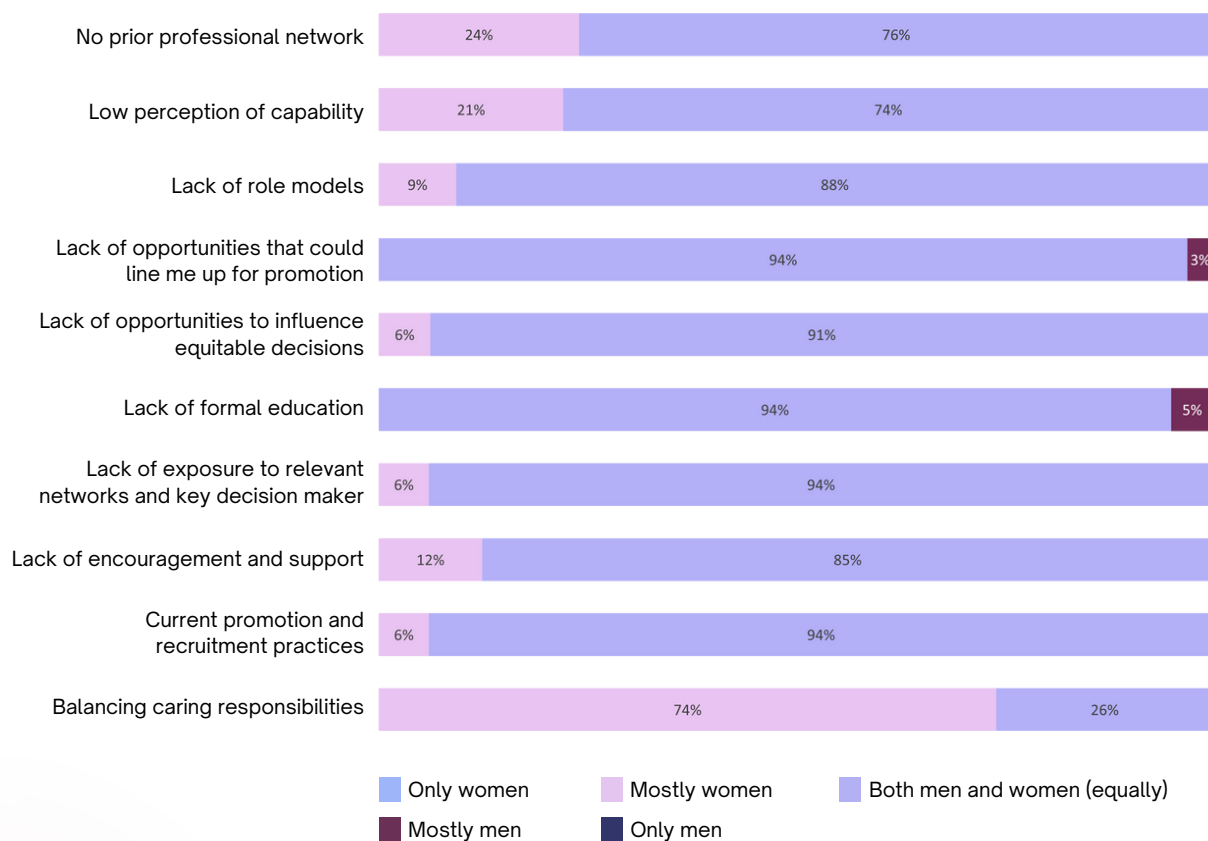


Figure 6. C-level beliefs about obstacles for promotion





2.3 Having children is seen to negatively impact women’s careers.

Beyond holding women back from leadership positions, caring responsibilities, including childcare, tend to be seen as generally having a negative impact on women’s careers. Almost a third (31%) of C-level executives think that their mid-managers believe mostly women are responsible for care work, but the reality is that only 8% of mid-managers believe it. Interestingly, at both levels, no respondents said men are primarily responsible for care work.

We asked C-level executives about their personal beliefs on competing priorities

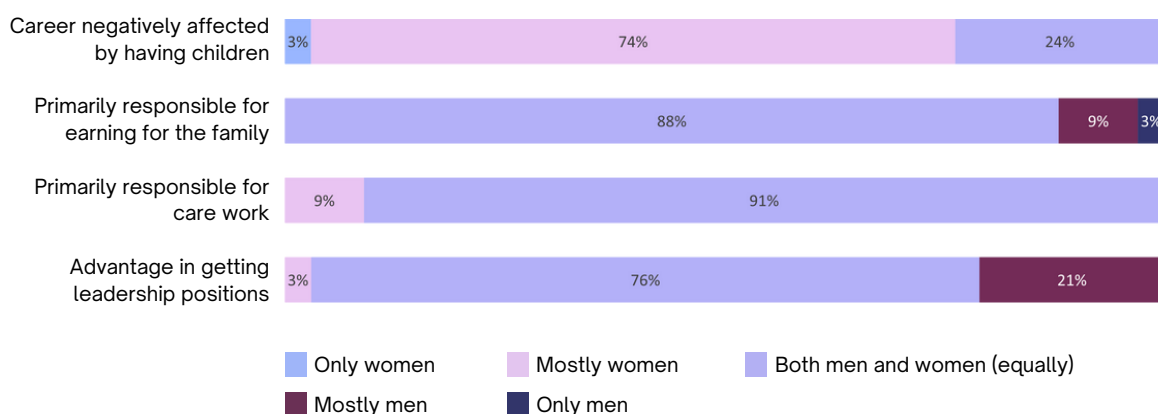


Figure 7. C-level beliefs about competing priorities

We asked C-level executives about what they think their mid-managers' think about competing priorities

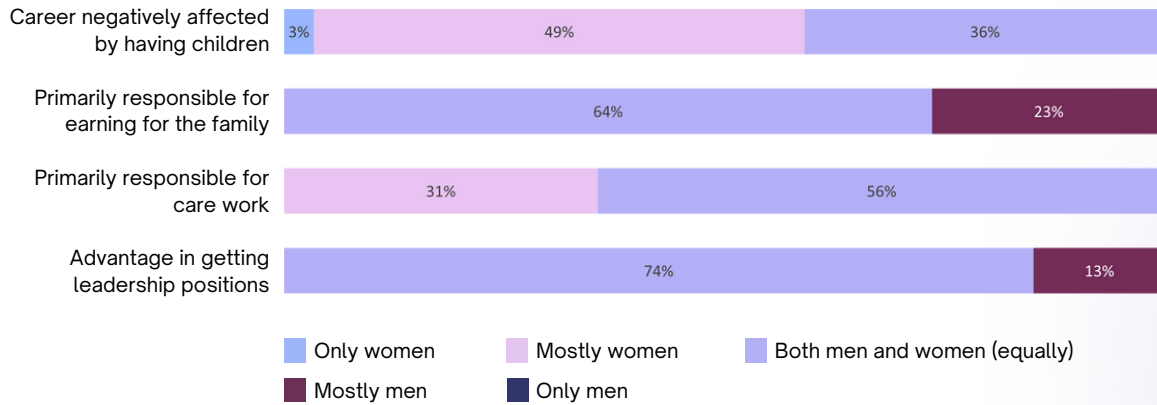


Figure 8. C-levels' second-order beliefs on competing priorities

Both C-level executives and mid-managers felt that women have their career negatively affected by children, but the proportion is significantly higher at the C-level positions. While both C-level executives and mid-managers think that both genders have an equal chance of advancing to leadership positions, some C-level respondents admit that men have the advantage in that area of career growth.

We asked mid-managers about their personal beliefs on competing priorities

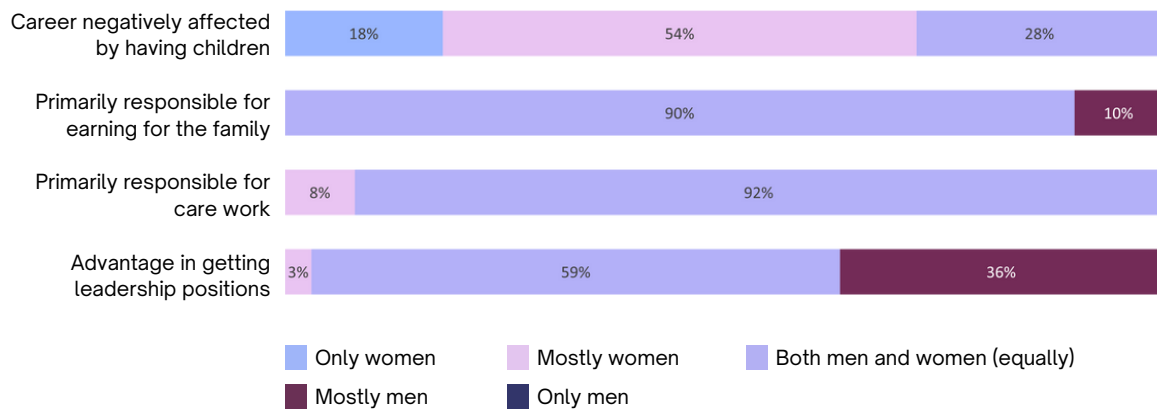


Figure 9. Mid-managers' beliefs about competing priorities



2.5 Mid-managers think their colleagues adhere more to the norms than they do.

There are differences in the gendered views mid-managers say they adhere to and what they think their peers adhere to. On one hand, this may signal misperception or pluralistic ignorance—a situation wherein individual’s second-order beliefs do not reflect the actual beliefs reported by the people around them. On the other hand, the mid-managers might also be seeing behaviour in others which they fail to also see in themselves.

From these survey results, mid-managers seem to think that their colleagues are more adherent to gendered norms than their colleagues in fact are when it comes to caring responsibilities.

For example, only 8% of women mid-managers believe that mostly women should be primarily responsible for care work, but 46% think their colleagues believe that mostly women should be primarily responsible for care work.

However, when it comes to income earning responsibilities, mid-managers seem to think that there is more openness among their peers to sharing across genders than there actually is. Perceptions on the views of peers also affirm studies on the double burden on women, where they are expected to earn while taking on more of the care responsibilities.

We asked what mid-managers perceptions of their colleague’s thoughts and beliefs on competing priorities

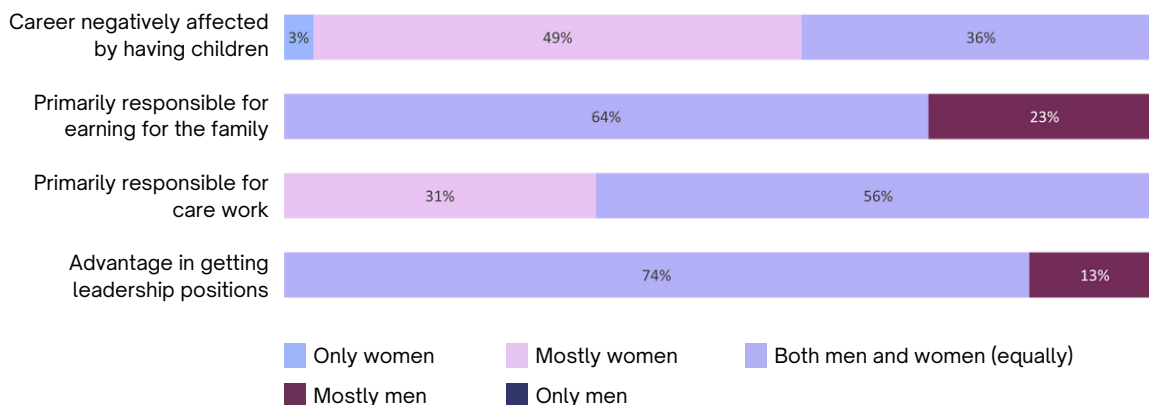


Figure 10. Mid-managers’ second-order beliefs about competing priorities

It must be noted that the extent to which the survey corrected for social acceptability bias is limited. Survey responses were anonymized, but it remains possible that respondents were overweighting their own behaviour or progressiveness in comparison to their peers.





2.6 Women are seen to be more likely than men to need support to balance competing priorities.

Competing priorities hindering career advancement was one of the key insights of the 2021 MBC report on Women in the Philippine C-Suite. The current survey revealed that the majority of the respondents at both levels felt more women have stepped back from leadership roles to prioritise family. None of the respondents thought there was a similar challenge for men. It also reinforces the perception that both C-level executives (38%) and mid-managers (44%) think that women face greater challenges in balancing competing priorities.

On one hand, women are seen to be more likely than men to feel pressure to prioritise family (65% among C-level, 56% among mid-managers). On the other hand, more respondents think men are more likely than women to feel pressure to prioritise work (18% among C-level, 36% among mid-managers). This data suggest that gendered roles continue to permeate, with women as the primary caregiver while men are the primary earners.

It logically follows that women are seen to be more likely than men to feel the need for more support from their partners (53% among C-level, 38% among mid-managers) or company leadership (53% among C-level, 41% among mid-managers) to balance work and childcare responsibilities. Very few think that it would be male employees that needed more support.

We asked C-level executives who they think are more likely to be experiencing these challenges

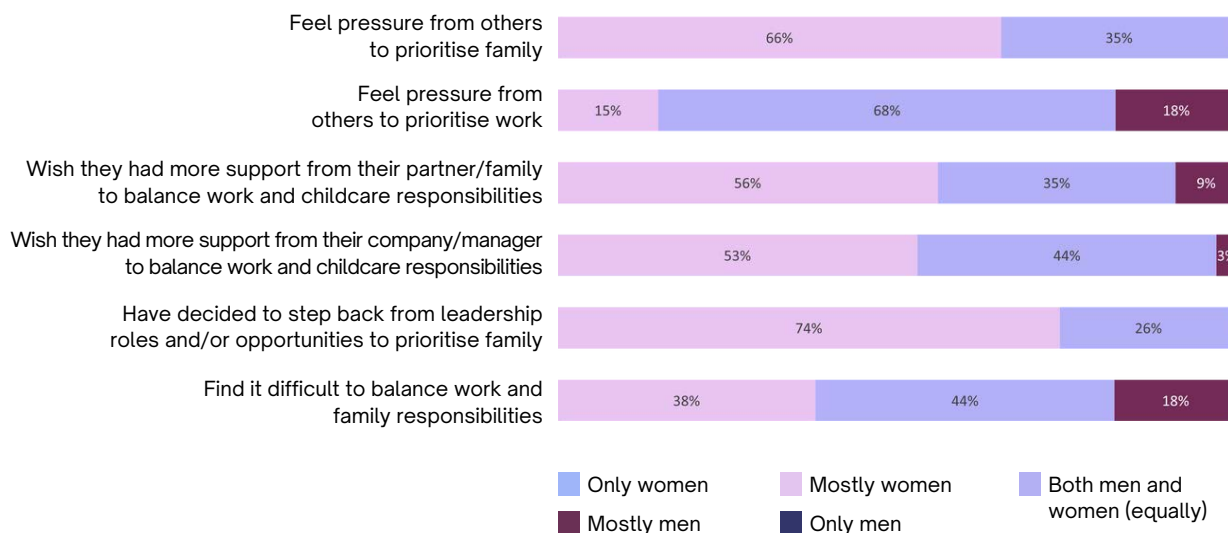


Figure 11. C-level beliefs about gendered challenges in career advancement

We asked mid-managers on who they think are most suitable to do certain jobs.

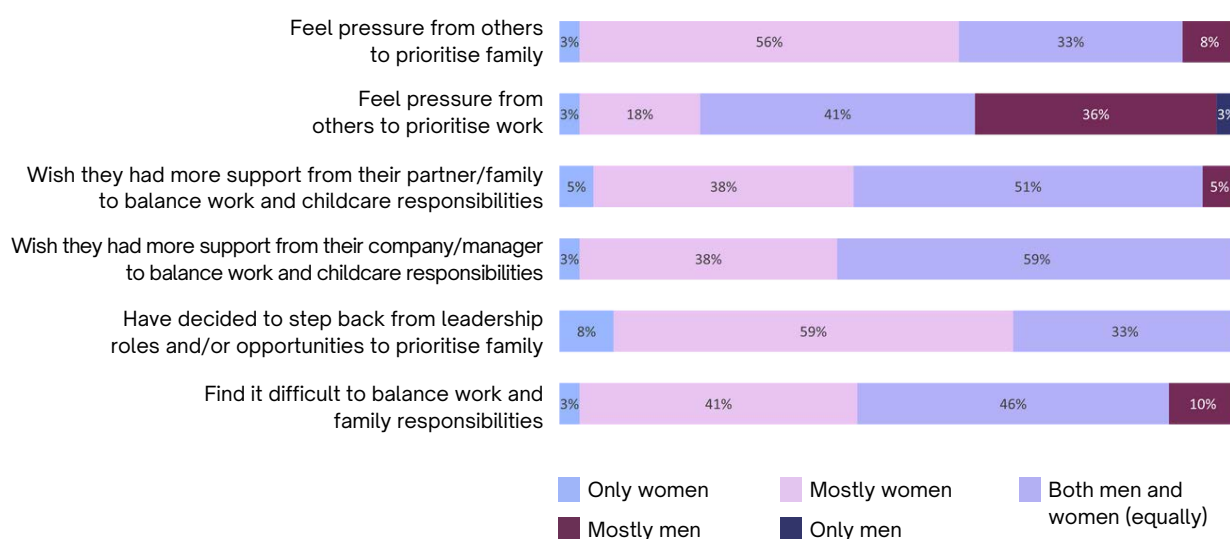


Figure 12. Mid-managers' beliefs about gendered challenges in career advancement



2.7 There is a gap between C-level and mid-manager awareness of policies seen to be supportive of gender DE&I.

Both C-level and mid-manager surveys were asked which policies or practices that support gender DE&I are being implemented in the respondents' companies. While the representation of companies may not be the same in both surveys, the results in Figures 11 and 12 suggest that there are differences between C-level and mid-manager awareness of these policies. Both C-level executives and mid-managers are highly aware about company policies regarding non-discrimination, prevention of gender-based harassment, and continuing education and training. It is interesting to note that while the C-level respondents are keenly aware of employee protection and fair remuneration policies, there is a significant variance (>20%) with the awareness level of mid-managers.

We asked C-Suite respondents on their knowledge regarding company policies, and mid-managers on their awareness and access to policies

Policy	Policy awareness among mid-managers	Percentage of mid-managers who have accessed the policy in the past year	Policy awareness among C-level executives
Company policies on non-discrimination or equal opportunity	95%	31%	89%
Prevention of gender-based harassment and discrimination, sexual harassment, and bullying	92%	36%	81%
Continuing education and training	87%	44%	85%
Mentoring and career road mapping	77%	33%	70%
Human rights policies	74%	28%	63%
Employee protection policy (e.g., whistleblowing or anti-retaliation policy)?	72%	23%	96%
Flexible work arrangements	69%	49%	81%
Gender diversity related events (e.g., women's month activities)	69%	31%	63%
Mental wellness support	69%	31%	81%
Training policies that cover all employees- regardless of gender?	67%	56%	81%
Gender diversity training (e.g., anti-harassment, use of gender-neutral language)	67%	21%	59%
Fair remuneration policy	59%	31%	89%

Policy	Policy awareness among mid-managers	Percentage of mid-managers who have accessed the policy in the past year	Policy awareness among C-level executives
Childcare facilities and breastfeeding programs	44%	10%	41%
Paid extended parental leaves	44%	5%	37%
Trainings to remove gender-based biases and promote DE&I?	41%	23%	37%
Anti-racism, anti-harassment trainings?	41%	18%	59%
Succession plan with diversity targets	38%	8%	44%
Employee-led networking and resource groups	33%	8%	37%
Company-wide policy on setting boundaries on time availability	31%	18%	19%
Allocate resources for employees to form and lead groups that promote gender DE&I?	28%	21%	30%
Formal mentorship or sponsorship programs for employees from underrepresented groups (e.g., women)?	26%	10%	26%
Returnship/reskilling/upskilling after long-term leaves (due to pregnancy, illness, etc.)	23%	3%	19%

Figure 13. Self-reported awareness and uptake of policies

More advanced policies such as support for returnship or reskilling after a long absence from the workplace, setting boundaries for time availability, formal mentorship programs from underrepresented groups, and resource allocation for employees to form groups have consistently low awareness across both C-level and mid-managers. This could imply that these policies are either largely absent from represented organizations or that there is low awareness regarding these types of programs.

It is also important to note that while these policies aim to positively influence gender equity and inclusion, this study did not verify the actual existence and documentation of these policies, nor did it assess the impact of these policies. Thus, this report is unable to triangulate employee and CEO awareness and perception are unable, let alone make claims on the resulting policy effect on employee and company performance.

2.8 Awareness of policies and benefits does not always result in employee take-up.

The survey results also show that are differences between policies that mid-managers say they are aware of and the policies they say they were able to access or benefit from. For instance, 69% of respondents were aware of company policies on flexible work, yet only 49% claimed they were able to benefit from it. Similarly, 87% are cognizant of continuing education and training policies but only half of that number was able to access it. Results are similar with policies that mid-managers are highly aware of, except for training policies and flexible work arrangements, the two policies that have similar percentages between awareness and access. On the other end of the scale, policies that mid-managers are barely aware of have an even lower take-up.



Conclusion

Gender norms and stereotypes influence perceptions, language, behaviour, and relationships in the workplace, both at the C-suite and amongst middle management.

They also shape personal beliefs and colours perceptions about others' beliefs. The resulting conscious and unconscious biases can impede women's advancement in the workplace. Negative stereotypes regarding work roles, ambition, pressures from competing priorities can be used to judge and pigeonhole women as less able, less suited for certain jobs, and ultimately, less of a priority for career growth and development. Deeply embedded norms and biases can also affect self-esteem and confidence and lead women to self-eliminate in terms of work opportunities.

Many companies espouse their gender DE&I policies and take positive action towards positively shifting gender norms in the workplace. However, the variances in awareness of these policies across different levels in organizations and the uptake of these policies indicate gaps in how gender DE&I initiatives are communicated, promoted, and implemented. Much is still unknown on the impact of gender DE&I policies on individual and organization performance, highlighting the need for companies to carry assessments and evaluations to understand their needs but also to measure success against intended outcomes.

Recommendations

4.1 What Companies and C-Suite Executives Can Do

Building a culture that values all roles in the organization.

An organizational culture that espouses no roles are too small encourages both men and women to explore new fields and roles. Amplifying stories of charting career paths in fields traditionally dominated by a different gender can encourage people to seek growth opportunities and take on new challenges.

Evaluate company policies at a deeper level.

It is quite easy to treat gender DE&I policies as nothing more than a checklist with the simple existence of these policies as the main metric for inclusion in the organization. It does not provide an assessment of the uptake of these policies and how responsive these policies are at creating meaningful organizational change. Creating a responsive policy entails an in-depth understanding of factors contributing to the issue that the policy seeks to address. For instance, there is a need to delve further into factors that contribute to gender pay inequity, such as job segregation. Fair remuneration policies where salaries are based on job titles and levels and not gender, might at first glance, be an inclusive policy. However, it does not address that core issue that stereotyping has led to men and women being pigeonholed into certain work roles, with women often assigned to jobs that are lower paying.



Promoting awareness about company gender diversity, equity, and inclusion practices.

Gender DE&I programs can form part of the conversation during the sourcing and recruitment of talents. Candidates are increasingly becoming discerning about working for an organization that mirrors their values. The presence of gender DE&I initiatives, or the lack thereof, is now becoming a deal breaker for joining the organization. Companies should formalize gender DE&I practices and build awareness not just with employees but with potential hires and the general public as well.

Ensuring diversity amongst candidates for promotion.

Talent managers can be deliberate and purposeful in shortlisting candidates so that decision-makers will have a wide pool of qualified candidates with diverse backgrounds and viewpoints. This does not mean compromising on the qualifications just to meet the quota, but rather providing equal opportunities to those who might be overlooked for advancement.

Being purposeful in job design.

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Opening conversations about shared responsibilities at home.

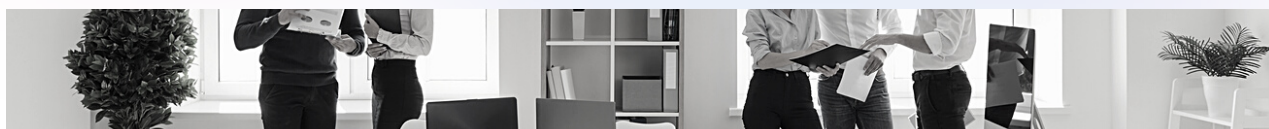
Programs that seek to influence views on care work may encourage behaviour change. The younger generation is already more open to shared parenting. This can address difficulties in balancing work and home responsibilities and competing priorities.

Developing leave and benefit policies that are gender neutral and open to different family configurations.

Families come in all sorts of shapes and sizes. Parental leaves and other benefits that are gender neutral encourages all genders to share in the care responsibilities of children and family members. Accommodations should be given to all parents.

Measuring belongingness.

A sense of belongingness is at the heart of diversity, equity, and inclusion practices. Measuring belongingness through a gender DE&I index or a broader People Index, will allow organization to do a temperature check of the culture and governance of the organization. Moreover, many clients and investors now are very particular with environmental, social and governance measures and companies want to show that they are diversified company by tracking their metrics and making it public.



4.2 What Mid-Managers Can Do

Check own biases.

The research shows that both C-level executives and mid-managers carry biases on their thoughts and perceptions, including second order beliefs. Being aware of one's own biases and adherence to the norms is the first step towards counteracting them. Be mindful that these biases may manifest in language, behaviour, and relationships in the workplace.

Check in with colleagues at work.

Peer feedback can help address challenges in failing to see behaviour in oneself but are seen in others. Ask peers whether gender biases are being expressed in the workplace and provide feedback if others are exhibiting gender bias in their workplace behaviour. Holding people accountable to stereotyping and gender bias can help stimulate behaviour change.

4.3 What Regulators and Policymakers Can Do

Positively influence gender norms with education policy reforms.

Beliefs are established at an early age through the family, school, and community environments. Reforms in the Philippine educational system can be a pathway towards gender equality in the workplace by addressing gender education gaps and reducing inequalities in education. It is also important to ensure that what is being taught in school, including learning materials, do not reinforce existing gender biases.

Establish clear a policy framework to close the gender-wage gap.

Gender equality in the workplace should first and foremost ensure that the work being done by all genders is valued equally. It also requires addressing job segregation and women's overrepresentation in roles that are often undervalued, such as health, social, or care work and low representation in high-paying technical jobs. Policies requiring wage transparency will be key to monitoring progress in closing the gender-wage gap.

Develop a stricter monitoring system to ensure companies comply with regulatory requirements.

The Philippines has a robust set of policies that support gender equality, are anti-discrimination, and prevent gender-based harassment and violence. However, legislation needs to be supported by a monitoring system that would enforce these regulations, and effectively penalized companies that violate. Preventing these kinds of practices and behaviours can also support the transformation of the underlying norms.

Develop a stricter monitoring system to ensure companies comply with regulatory requirements.

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4.4 What Researchers Can Do

Further investigate the differences between policy needs versus uptake.

While this report analysed data on mid-manager awareness of gender DE&I policies and the different policies they accessed or benefitted from, there is a need to gather data on gender DE&I policies that mid-managers needed but either did not or were unable to access such policies. Understanding the possible mismatch between the uptake of existing company policies and what mid-managers need can surface interesting angles on how companies can be more supportive of gender DE&I.

More research on intersectionality is needed.

It is important to recognize that analysing data based on gender is not enough. Each gender sub-group is heterogenous, with a diversity of experiences in the workplace influenced by other intersecting identity factors such as race, ethnicity, religious, socio-economic class. Researchers can provide the discourse for how gender DE&I initiatives can be shifted to also address other inequalities from these intersecting factors.

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