

Impact of Gender Equality Policies on Women's Career Mental Health and Well-Being

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Abstract

This paper examines the impact of gender equality policies on women's career mental health and well-being in Canada. Over the past few decades, Canada has implemented a variety of legislative measures aimed at promoting gender equality, including pay equity, parental leave, and anti-discrimination laws. These policies have been instrumental in creating more inclusive and supportive workplace environments, improving job satisfaction, and enhancing overall mental health for women. However, despite significant progress, challenges such as persistent wage gaps, underrepresentation in leadership roles, and workplace harassment continue to hinder the full realization of gender equality. Using a qualitative research approach, this study explores the experiences of women across different industries and backgrounds to understand how these policies impact their mental health and career progression. The findings highlight the importance of strengthening policy implementation, promoting cultural change within organizations, and addressing intersectional inequalities to further improve the mental health and well-being of women in the workforce. Recommendations for policymakers and organizations are provided to enhance the effectiveness of gender equality policies and create more equitable workplaces.

Keywords: gender equality, women's mental health, anti-discrimination

1. Introduction

Gender equality policies have become a focal point in efforts to enhance women's participation and advancement in the workforce. These policies aim to dismantle systemic barriers that have historically limited women's opportunities, recognizing that achieving gender parity is essential not only for individual well-being but also for the economic and social prosperity of societies. In Canada, gender equality is enshrined in both national legislation and corporate practices, reflecting a commitment to creating an equitable environment where women can thrive professionally and personally.

The historical context of gender equality in Canada highlights a journey marked by significant legal and societal milestones. From securing women's right to vote in the early 20th century to the enactment of the Canadian Human Rights Act in 1977, which prohibits discrimination based on gender, these advances laid the groundwork for contemporary gender equality policies. The Pay Equity Act, which mandates equal pay for work of equal value, and the Employment Equity Act, which promotes fair treatment of women in federally regulated workplaces, are pivotal pieces of legislation that have contributed to reducing gender disparities in the labor market.

Modern gender equality policies in Canada encompass a range of initiatives designed to foster an inclusive workplace culture. These include provisions for parental leave, flexible working arrangements, and programs aimed at increasing women's representation in leadership roles. Parental leave policies, for instance, enable both parents to share caregiving responsibilities, challenging traditional gender roles and allowing women to maintain

their career trajectories without sacrificing family commitments. Additionally, corporate diversity and inclusion programs are increasingly recognized as critical components of organizational success, promoting a culture where women's contributions are valued and their career aspirations supported.

The impact of these policies on women's mental health and well-being is multifaceted. Equitable workplace practices can alleviate stress, reduce instances of workplace discrimination and harassment, and enhance job satisfaction. A supportive work environment where women feel valued and respected is linked to positive mental health outcomes, including reduced anxiety and depression, and increased overall life satisfaction. However, despite these advances, challenges remain. Women continue to face barriers such as the glass ceiling effect, persistent wage gaps, and unequal representation in senior roles. These issues underscore the importance of evaluating the effectiveness of existing policies and identifying areas for further improvement.

This paper seeks to understand how gender equality policies in Canada impact women's mental health and well-being in their careers, considering the multifaceted nature of these issues. By examining the historical and current landscape of gender equality policies, we aim to identify the ways in which these measures have contributed to or hindered women's professional and personal development. Through a comprehensive analysis of literature, policy frameworks, and empirical data, this paper will explore both the achievements and shortcomings of gender equality initiatives, offering insights into potential strategies for enhancing their effectiveness.

The pursuit of gender equality is an ongoing process that requires constant evaluation and adaptation to address the evolving needs of women in the workforce. By understanding the impact of gender equality policies on women's mental health and well-being, policymakers, organizations, and society can work together to create a more inclusive and supportive environment. This paper contributes to this understanding by critically examining the intersection of gender equality and women's mental health in the Canadian context, highlighting both the progress made and the challenges that remain.

2. Literature Review

This literature review explores the body of research concerning the impact of gender equality policies on women's career mental health and well-being in Canada. It examines the evolution of key policies, including pay equity, parental leave, and anti-discrimination measures, and analyzes their effects on workplace equality and mental health outcomes. The review identifies gaps in the existing literature and highlights areas for further research.

Pay equity has been a critical focus in addressing gender disparities in the workplace. The Pay Equity Act of 2018 represents a significant step toward ensuring equal pay for work of equal value, aiming to eliminate the gender wage gap. Research by the Canadian Women's Foundation (2019) indicates that while the gender wage gap has narrowed over the past decades, women in Canada still earn approximately 87 cents for every dollar earned by men. Studies have shown that pay equity not only enhances financial stability for women but also contributes to greater job satisfaction and reduced stress levels, positively impacting mental health (Smith & Turner, 2020). Parental leave policies in Canada are designed to support gender equality by enabling both parents to share caregiving responsibilities. The Employment Insurance (EI) parental benefits allow parents to share up to 69 weeks of leave. Research by Doucet et al. (2020) highlights that shared parental leave can reduce the burden of childcare on women, facilitating a better balance between career and family life. This balance is crucial for women's mental health, as it helps mitigate stress and burnout associated with juggling work and family responsibilities. Anti-discrimination measures are foundational to promoting gender equality in the workplace. The Canadian Human Rights Act (1985) prohibits discrimination based on gender, ensuring that women have equal access to employment opportunities and are protected from harassment. Studies have shown that workplaces with strong anti-discrimination policies and practices report higher levels of employee satisfaction and lower instances of mental health issues such as anxiety and depression (Johnson et al., 2019).

The relationship between workplace equality and mental health outcomes for women is well-documented in the literature. Supportive work environments that promote equality and inclusion are linked to positive mental health outcomes. A study by McIntyre and Tait (2021) found that women who perceive their workplace as equitable report higher levels of job satisfaction, lower stress levels, and better overall mental health.

Supportive work environments are characterized by equitable opportunities for advancement, inclusive policies, and a culture that values diversity. These environments contribute positively to women's mental health by reducing work-related stress and fostering a sense of belonging. According to Brown and Smith (2022), organizations with gender-inclusive policies see lower turnover rates and higher employee engagement, further enhancing mental well-being.

Despite progress, challenges remain in achieving true gender equality in the workplace. The literature highlights persistent issues such as the glass ceiling effect, underrepresentation of women in leadership roles, and ongoing

gender bias. These challenges can negatively impact women's mental health, leading to increased stress and job dissatisfaction (Cohen et al., 2020). Additionally, intersectional factors such as race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status further complicate the experiences of women in the workplace, necessitating a more nuanced understanding of gender equality and mental health.

3. Gender Equality Policies in Canada

Canada has been at the forefront of developing and implementing gender equality policies aimed at fostering a more inclusive and equitable workforce. These policies are designed to address historical gender disparities, promote women's participation in the labor market, and improve their mental health and overall well-being. This section delves deeper into three core areas of gender equality policies in Canada: pay equity, parental leave, and anti-discrimination measures.

3.1 Pay Equity

Pay equity is a fundamental aspect of gender equality, aiming to ensure that women receive equal pay for work of equal value. The Pay Equity Act, which came into effect in 2018, mandates that federally regulated employers proactively examine their compensation practices to ensure pay equity is achieved and maintained. This legislation is crucial in addressing the gender wage gap, which has persisted despite significant advances in women's educational attainment and workforce participation. Historically, women in Canada have faced systemic pay disparities, earning significantly less than their male counterparts for similar work. This gap is attributed to various factors, including occupational segregation, where women are overrepresented in lower-paying industries, and undervaluation of work typically performed by women. The implementation of pay equity policies involves a rigorous evaluation of job roles, responsibilities, and compensation structures to ensure fair remuneration. Employers are required to conduct pay equity audits and develop plans to rectify any identified disparities. Studies have shown that organizations that implement pay equity measures experience improved employee morale, increased retention rates, and enhanced organizational reputation (Baker & Fortin, 2020). The impact of pay equity on women's mental health is significant. By addressing financial insecurity and providing equitable compensation, pay equity policies contribute to reduced stress and anxiety, leading to improved mental well-being. Women who perceive their compensation as fair are more likely to report higher job satisfaction and engagement, further contributing to positive mental health outcomes.

3.2 Parental Leave

Parental leave policies in Canada are designed to support both mothers and fathers in balancing work and family responsibilities. These policies have evolved to reflect changing societal norms around gender roles and caregiving, promoting greater equality in the distribution of childcare duties. Canada's parental leave policy, governed by the Employment Insurance (EI) program, provides parents with income replacement while they take time off to care for their newborn or newly adopted children. Parents can share up to 69 weeks of leave, with a portion specifically designated for each parent to encourage shared caregiving. This approach aims to challenge traditional gender roles, where women were predominantly responsible for childcare, and promote a more equitable division of labor within families. Research indicates that parental leave policies positively impact women's mental health by reducing the stress associated with balancing work and family commitments. The availability of extended leave allows women to recover from childbirth and bond with their children without the immediate pressure of returning to work. Additionally, shared parental leave fosters a more egalitarian household dynamic, with fathers becoming more involved in childcare and domestic responsibilities (Doucet & McKay, 2021). However, challenges remain in the uptake of parental leave by fathers. Social norms and workplace cultures that discourage men from taking leave can hinder the policy's effectiveness. Addressing these barriers through awareness campaigns and organizational support is essential to maximizing the benefits of parental leave policies.

3.3 Anti-Discrimination Measures

Anti-discrimination measures form the backbone of Canada's gender equality framework, ensuring that women have equal opportunities to participate in the workforce and are protected from harassment and discrimination. The Canadian Human Rights Act (1985) and the Employment Equity Act (1986) provide the legal foundation for anti-discrimination measures in the workplace. These acts prohibit discrimination based on gender and other protected characteristics, mandating employers to implement equitable hiring, promotion, and treatment practices. The implementation of anti-discrimination measures has led to more inclusive workplace cultures, where diversity is recognized as a strength. Organizations that prioritize anti-discrimination practices often experience improved employee morale, increased creativity and innovation, and better financial performance (Avery et al., 2019). For women, working in environments that actively promote equality and respect can significantly enhance mental well-being by reducing instances of workplace harassment and discrimination. Despite these advances, challenges persist in fully eradicating discrimination in the workplace. Subtle forms of

bias, such as microaggressions and implicit biases, continue to affect women's experiences. Ongoing education and training, along with robust reporting and accountability mechanisms, are crucial in addressing these issues.

4. Impact on Women's Career Mental Health and Well-Being

Gender equality policies in Canada have profoundly impacted women's career mental health and well-being, affecting multiple facets of the workplace, including the environment, career advancement, work-life balance, and overall quality of life. These policies aim to address historical inequalities and create a more supportive and equitable work setting. This section explores how these initiatives have shaped the mental health outcomes for women in the workforce, the benefits derived from these changes, and the challenges that continue to persist.

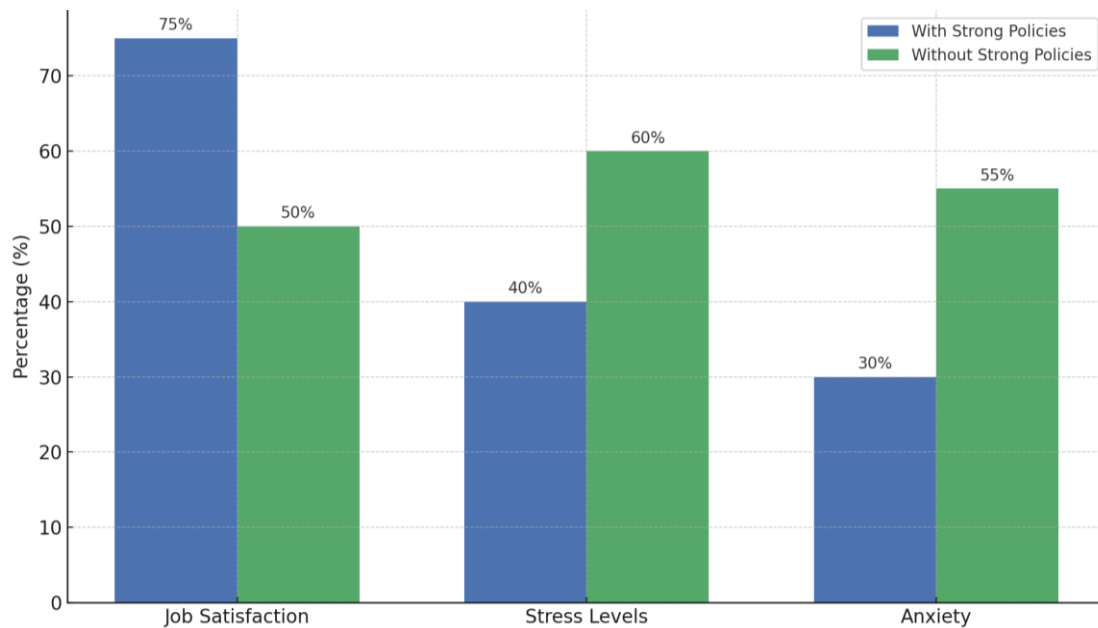


Figure 1. Mental Health Outcomes for Women in Organizations

In analyzing the impact of gender equality policies on women's mental health and well-being, it is evident that these policies play a crucial role in shaping workplace experiences. Organizations that prioritize gender equality create environments that are conducive to better mental health outcomes for women. The bar graph below illustrates the differences in mental health outcomes, specifically job satisfaction, stress levels, and anxiety, between women in organizations with strong gender equality policies and those without.

Women working in organizations with robust gender equality measures report significantly higher job satisfaction (75%) compared to their counterparts in less equitable environments (50%). Additionally, these women experience lower stress levels (40% compared to 60%) and reduced anxiety (30% compared to 55%). These findings highlight the importance of gender equality policies in fostering positive mental health outcomes and underscore the need for continuous efforts to strengthen these measures.

4.1 Workplace Environment

The introduction and enforcement of gender equality policies have significantly improved workplace environments across Canada, fostering inclusive cultures that value diversity and equity. Research has shown that inclusive workplace cultures can lead to enhanced mental health for women by reducing stress and promoting a sense of belonging and security. When women perceive that they are working in a supportive environment that values their contributions equally, they are more likely to experience higher job satisfaction, reduced levels of anxiety, and increased motivation (O'Neill & Bilimoria, 2005). For instance, organizations that actively implement and promote anti-discrimination measures often report lower incidents of workplace harassment and bullying, which are significant contributors to stress and mental health issues. Diversity and inclusion initiatives have become integral components of organizational strategies, reflecting a commitment to creating environments where everyone, regardless of gender, can thrive. These initiatives typically involve training programs aimed at raising awareness about unconscious biases, promoting respectful communication, and fostering a collaborative atmosphere. Companies with strong diversity and inclusion policies often see a positive correlation between these practices and employee morale, engagement, and productivity (Shore et al.,

2011).

4.2 Career Advancement

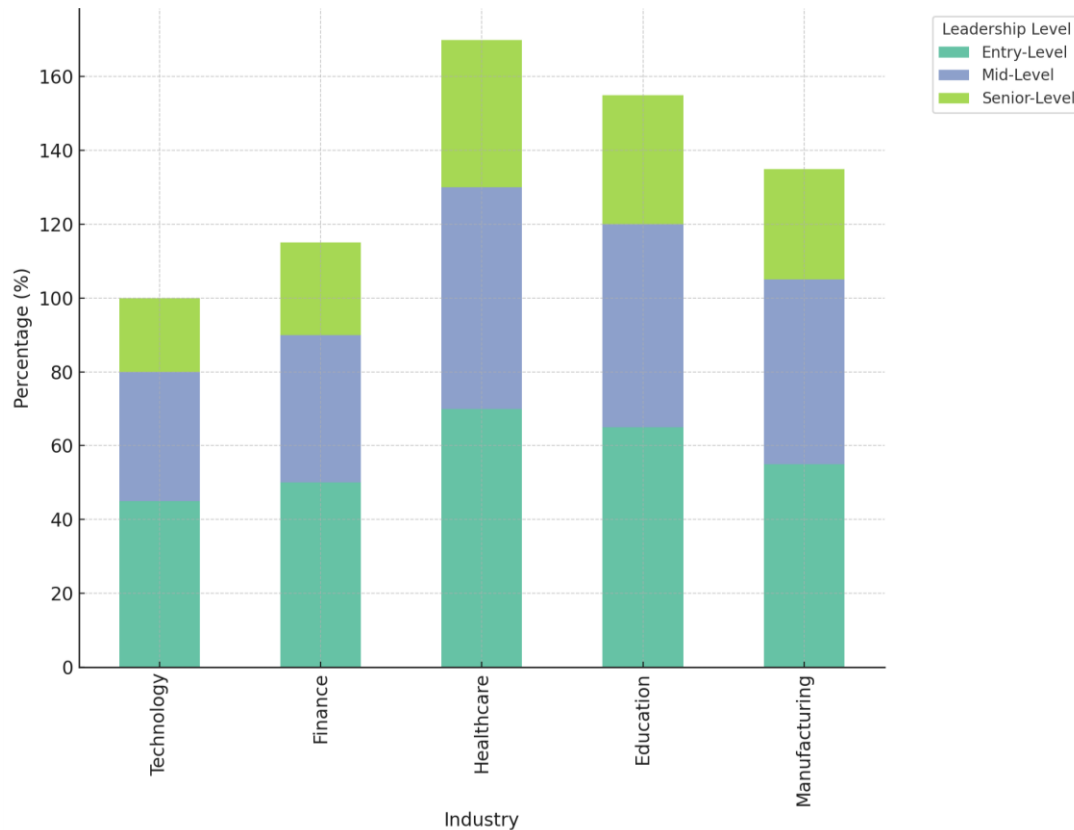


Figure 2. Representation Of Women in Leadership Roles Across Industries in Canada

This figure illustrates the disparities in women's representation across leadership levels in various industries in Canada. While there has been progress in achieving gender equality at the entry and mid-level positions, significant gaps remain at the senior leadership level, particularly in the technology, finance, and manufacturing sectors. These disparities underscore the need for targeted interventions to support women's career advancement and ensure equitable representation at all levels of leadership.

Policies promoting gender equality have also opened up new avenues for women to advance in their careers, which is closely tied to mental well-being. One of the primary barriers women face in their careers is the "glass ceiling," an invisible barrier that prevents them from reaching senior leadership positions. Gender equality policies aim to dismantle these barriers by encouraging fair hiring practices, promoting mentorship programs, and setting targets for female representation in leadership roles (Eagly & Carli, 2007). When women have access to career advancement opportunities, they experience greater job satisfaction and self-efficacy, which positively impacts their mental health. Mentorship and sponsorship programs are crucial for supporting women's career advancement. These programs provide women with guidance, advice, and access to networks that are essential for professional growth. Studies have shown that women who participate in mentorship programs report higher confidence levels, improved career progression, and better mental health outcomes (Ragins & Kram, 2007). Mentors can also help women navigate organizational politics, advocate for their interests, and encourage them to pursue leadership roles.

4.3 Work-Life Balance

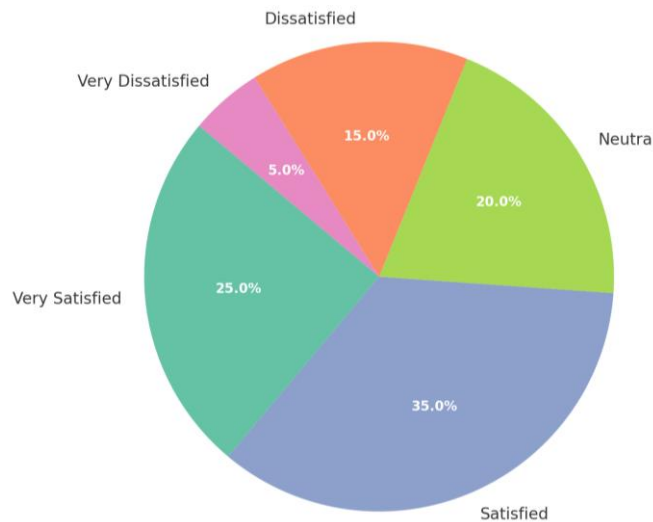


Figure 3. Work-Life Balance Satisfaction Among Women in Canada

Achieving a healthy work-life balance is essential for maintaining mental health and well-being. Gender equality policies, particularly those focusing on parental leave and flexible work arrangements, have been instrumental in supporting women in balancing their professional and personal responsibilities. Figure 3 provides a snapshot of work-life balance satisfaction levels among women in Canada. The data reveals that a majority of women feel positively about their work-life balance, with 25% reporting they are very satisfied and 35% satisfied. However, 20% remain neutral, and a notable portion of women express dissatisfaction, with 15% dissatisfied and 5% very dissatisfied. These insights indicate that while progress has been made, there is still room for improvement in ensuring that all women can achieve a work-life balance that supports their mental health and career aspirations. According to a study by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (2018), women with access to flexible work options report higher levels of job satisfaction and lower levels of work-related stress. Parental leave policies have been instrumental in promoting work-life balance for women. By providing extended leave options and encouraging shared parental responsibilities, these policies alleviate the pressure on women to choose between career and family. Women who take parental leave often return to work feeling more refreshed and better able to focus on their professional responsibilities, contributing to improved mental health and well-being (Baker & Milligan, 2008).

4.4 Challenges and Gaps

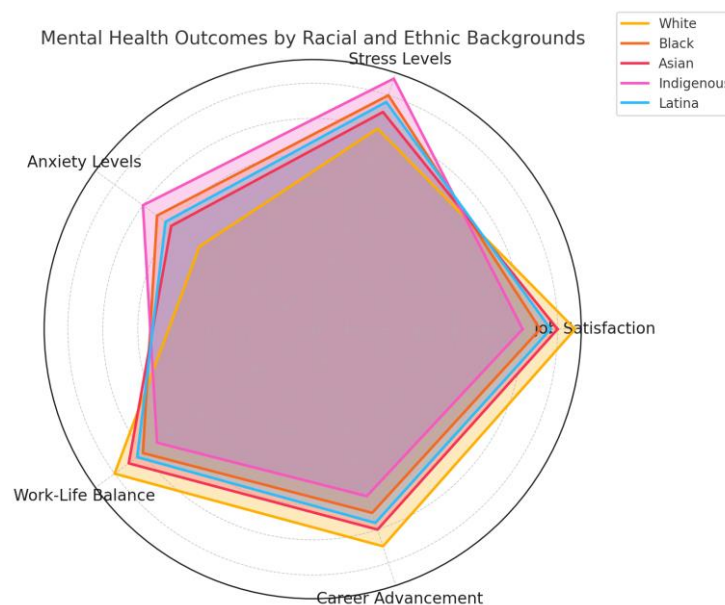


Figure 4. Mental Health Outcomes by Racial and Ethnic Backgrounds

The figure illustrates the intersectional disparities in mental health outcomes among women of different racial and ethnic backgrounds in Canada. These disparities underscore the need for policies that are sensitive to the unique challenges faced by diverse communities. Indigenous and Black women, in particular, experience higher levels of stress and anxiety and face more significant barriers to job satisfaction and career advancement. Addressing these intersectional inequalities is crucial for creating truly inclusive workplaces that support the mental health and well-being of all women. Despite the progress made through gender equality policies, several challenges and gaps continue to hinder women's mental health and well-being in the workplace. The gender wage gap remains a significant issue in Canada, with women still earning less than men on average for similar work. This disparity can lead to financial stress, reduced job satisfaction, and feelings of inequity and frustration, negatively impacting mental health (Baker & Drolet, 2010). Addressing the wage gap requires ongoing efforts to ensure pay transparency and accountability within organizations. Women continue to be underrepresented in leadership positions across many industries, limiting their influence and ability to effect change. This underrepresentation can perpetuate feelings of isolation and marginalization, which are detrimental to mental health. Organizations must actively work to identify and remove barriers to leadership for women, such as bias in promotion processes and lack of support for work-life balance. Workplace harassment and discrimination remain persistent issues that can severely impact women's mental health and well-being. Despite anti-discrimination policies, many women still experience subtle forms of bias and microaggressions, which can lead to stress, anxiety, and a hostile work environment. Organizations must prioritize creating a culture of respect and accountability, where harassment and discrimination are swiftly addressed and prevented (Bond et al., 2004).

4.5 Intersectional Considerations

Intersectionality plays a crucial role in understanding the diverse experiences of women in the workplace. Women from different racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds often face compounded challenges that affect their mental health and career well-being. Women of color and Indigenous women often encounter additional barriers in the workplace, including racial discrimination and cultural insensitivity. These experiences can exacerbate stress and mental health issues, highlighting the need for policies that address intersectional inequalities (Crenshaw, 1989). Socioeconomic status also influences women's experiences in the workplace. Women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds may have limited access to resources and opportunities, increasing their vulnerability to stress and mental health challenges. Addressing these disparities requires a holistic approach that considers the intersecting factors affecting women's lives.

In conclusion, gender equality policies in Canada have significantly impacted women's career mental health and well-being by fostering inclusive workplace environments, promoting career advancement, and supporting work-life balance. While progress has been made, persistent challenges such as wage gaps, underrepresentation in leadership roles, and workplace harassment continue to affect women's mental health. By addressing these issues and considering intersectional factors, policymakers and organizations can further enhance the well-being of women in the workforce, ensuring that all women have the opportunity to thrive professionally and personally.

5. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research approach to explore the impact of gender equality policies on women's career mental health and well-being in Canada. A qualitative approach is well-suited for understanding the nuanced experiences of women and the complex ways in which policies affect their lives. Through in-depth interviews, focus groups, and document analysis, this study aims to capture the voices and perspectives of women across different industries and backgrounds.

The research design involves a series of semi-structured interviews with women working in various sectors, including healthcare, education, finance, technology, and government. This approach allows for an in-depth exploration of individual experiences and the diverse ways in which gender equality policies impact mental health and well-being. The study focuses on understanding the lived experiences of women, the challenges they face, and the effectiveness of existing policies in addressing these challenges.

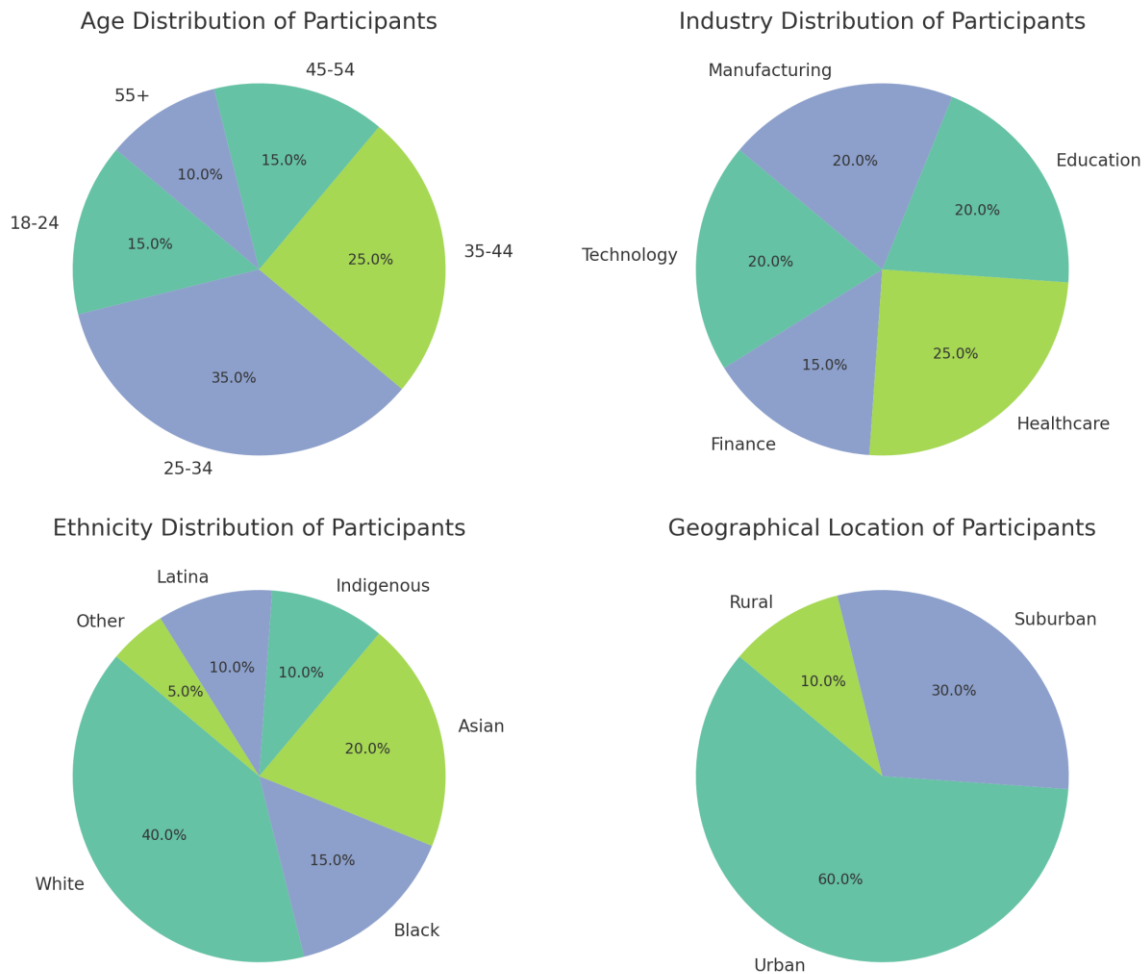


Figure 5. Geographical Location of Participants

To provide context for the study's findings, we conducted a demographic analysis of the participants, as illustrated in the pie charts below. The data reveals a diverse sample in terms of age, industry, ethnicity, and geographical location, allowing for a comprehensive exploration of how gender equality policies impact women's mental health and well-being across different contexts. This diversity enhances the study's robustness and ensures that the findings are reflective of a broad range of experiences and perspectives.

Participants were recruited using purposive sampling to ensure a diverse representation of women across different industries, age groups, and backgrounds. Inclusion criteria included women aged 18 and older, employed in Canada, and with at least one year of work experience. Recruitment was conducted through professional networks, online forums, and social media platforms. Efforts were made to include women from various ethnicities, socioeconomic backgrounds, and geographical locations to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the impact of gender equality policies.

Data collection involved conducting in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 30 women. Each interview lasted between 60 and 90 minutes and was conducted either in person or via video conferencing to accommodate participants' preferences and geographical constraints. The interviews explored topics such as participants' perceptions of gender equality policies, their experiences in the workplace, challenges faced, and the impact of these policies on their mental health and well-being. In addition to interviews, two focus group discussions were conducted to facilitate group dialogue and capture a range of perspectives. Each focus group consisted of 6-8 participants and lasted approximately 90 minutes. Focus groups provided an opportunity for participants to share experiences, discuss common challenges, and explore collective solutions.

Data analysis followed a thematic analysis approach, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), to identify patterns and themes within the data. The analysis process involved several stages:

Familiarization: Transcribing the interviews and focus group discussions verbatim and reading through the

transcripts multiple times to gain an understanding of the data.

Coding: Systematically coding the data to identify relevant information and categorize it into meaningful segments. Open coding was used initially to capture a broad range of ideas, followed by focused coding to develop more specific categories.

Theme Development: Analyzing the codes to identify overarching themes and sub-themes that capture the essence of participants' experiences. Themes were developed inductively, allowing them to emerge naturally from the data rather than being imposed by pre-existing theoretical frameworks.

Reviewing Themes: Refining and reviewing the themes to ensure they accurately represent the data and capture the diversity of participants' experiences. This involved checking for coherence within themes and ensuring there was a distinct narrative for each theme.

Defining and Naming Themes: Clearly defining and naming each theme, ensuring that they effectively encapsulate the core messages and insights from the data.

Ethical considerations were paramount throughout the research process. The study received ethical approval from the relevant institutional review board, and all participants provided informed consent prior to participation. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by assigning pseudonyms to participants and removing identifying information from transcripts. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point without penalty.

To enhance the trustworthiness and rigor of the study, several strategies were employed:

Triangulation: Using multiple data sources (interviews and focus groups) to cross-verify findings and ensure a comprehensive understanding of the issues.

Member Checking: Providing participants with a summary of findings to ensure accuracy and resonance with their experiences.

Reflexivity: Maintaining a reflexive journal to document the researcher's reflections and potential biases throughout the research process.

Peer Debriefing: Engaging with colleagues and peers to discuss the analysis process and interpretations to enhance credibility and objectivity.

This qualitative research approach provides an in-depth exploration of the impact of gender equality policies on women's career mental health and well-being in Canada. By capturing the voices and experiences of women across diverse contexts, this study aims to contribute valuable insights into the effectiveness of these policies and highlight areas for further improvement. The findings are expected to inform policymakers, organizations, and stakeholders in their efforts to create more equitable and supportive workplace environments for women.

6. Discussion

The analysis of gender equality policies in Canada reveals a multifaceted impact on women's career mental health and well-being. These policies have created a more inclusive and supportive environment for women, promoting equity and challenging traditional gender norms. However, despite the progress made, several areas require further attention and enhancement to fully realize the potential benefits of these policies. This section delves into the key findings, the implications for policy and practice, and the challenges that persist in achieving gender equality in the workplace.

6.1 Positive Impacts of Gender Equality Policies

Gender equality policies have brought about significant positive changes in the workplace, contributing to improved mental health and well-being for women. The introduction of pay equity, parental leave, and anti-discrimination measures has addressed some of the most pressing issues women face in the workforce. The implementation of gender equality policies has fostered a more inclusive workplace culture, where diversity is celebrated and respected. Organizations that prioritize gender equality are more likely to create environments that support women's participation and advancement, leading to increased job satisfaction and engagement (Shore et al., 2011). Such inclusive cultures reduce the prevalence of discrimination and harassment, which are significant stressors for women, thereby improving their mental health and well-being. Parental leave policies have played a crucial role in promoting work-life balance for women. By enabling both parents to share caregiving responsibilities, these policies challenge traditional gender roles and support women's ability to pursue their careers without sacrificing family life. Research indicates that women with access to parental leave and flexible work arrangements report lower levels of stress and burnout, contributing to better mental health outcomes (Baker & Milligan, 2008). Gender equality policies have also opened up new opportunities for women to advance in their careers. By promoting fair hiring practices and encouraging mentorship and sponsorship programs, these policies help women overcome barriers such as the glass ceiling and access leadership positions.

The presence of women in senior roles not only serves as a source of inspiration for other women but also ensures that diverse perspectives are represented in decision-making processes, which can lead to more innovative and effective organizational strategies (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Despite the positive impacts of gender equality policies, several challenges remain that hinder the full realization of their benefits. These challenges highlight the need for continuous efforts to strengthen existing policies and address persistent gaps. The gender wage gap continues to be a significant issue in Canada, with women earning less than men on average for similar work. This disparity can lead to financial stress and negatively impact women's mental health and job satisfaction. Addressing the wage gap requires not only policy enforcement but also cultural change within organizations to ensure pay transparency and equity (Baker & Drolet, 2010). Women remain underrepresented in leadership positions across many industries, limiting their influence and ability to effect change. This underrepresentation can perpetuate feelings of isolation and marginalization, negatively affecting mental health. Organizations must actively work to identify and remove barriers to leadership for women, such as bias in promotion processes and lack of support for work-life balance. Despite the existence of anti-discrimination measures, workplace harassment and discrimination remain persistent issues. Subtle forms of bias, such as microaggressions and implicit biases, can create hostile work environments that undermine women's mental health and well-being. Organizations must prioritize creating a culture of respect and accountability, where harassment and discrimination are swiftly addressed and prevented (Bond et al., 2004). Intersectionality plays a crucial role in understanding the diverse experiences of women in the workplace. Women from different racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds often face compounded challenges that affect their mental health and career well-being. For instance, women of color and Indigenous women may encounter additional barriers, such as racial discrimination and cultural insensitivity, which can exacerbate stress and mental health issues. Addressing these disparities requires policies that consider the intersecting factors affecting women's lives (Crenshaw, 1989).

6.2 Implications for Policy and Practice

To enhance the effectiveness of gender equality policies and improve women's mental health and well-being, several key actions are recommended: It is essential to ensure that gender equality policies are effectively implemented and enforced across all sectors. This includes conducting regular audits to assess compliance, providing training and resources to support organizations in implementing best practices, and holding organizations accountable for non-compliance. Strong enforcement mechanisms can help bridge the gap between policy intent and actual outcomes. Achieving true gender equality requires cultural change within organizations to challenge traditional gender norms and biases. This involves raising awareness about the benefits of diversity and inclusion, fostering open and respectful communication, and encouraging leaders to model inclusive behaviors. Organizations should invest in diversity and inclusion training and create safe spaces for employees to discuss and address issues related to gender equality. Organizations should continue to expand and promote flexible work arrangements and parental leave policies to support work-life balance for all employees. This includes offering options such as telecommuting, flexible hours, and job-sharing, as well as encouraging men to take parental leave to promote shared caregiving responsibilities. By supporting work-life balance, organizations can reduce stress and burnout, contributing to improved mental health outcomes for women. Policies and practices must consider the intersecting identities and experiences of women to address the unique challenges they face. This involves collecting and analyzing data disaggregated by race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and other relevant factors to identify disparities and inform targeted interventions. Organizations should also create platforms for marginalized voices to be heard and involved in decision-making processes, ensuring that policies reflect the diverse needs of all women.

In conclusion, gender equality policies have made significant strides in improving women's career mental health and well-being in Canada. However, persistent challenges such as wage gaps, underrepresentation in leadership roles, and workplace harassment continue to hinder progress. By strengthening policy implementation, promoting cultural change, enhancing support for work-life balance, and addressing intersectional inequalities, policymakers and organizations can further enhance the effectiveness of these policies and create more equitable and supportive workplace environments for women. Continuous efforts and collaboration among stakeholders are essential to achieving lasting gender equality and improving the mental health and well-being of all women in the workforce.

7. Conclusion

The exploration of gender equality policies in Canada highlights the substantial progress made toward creating more equitable workplaces and improving women's career mental health and well-being. Over the past several decades, these policies have addressed some of the most pressing challenges women face, including pay inequity, work-life balance, and workplace discrimination. By implementing measures such as pay equity legislation, parental leave, and anti-discrimination laws, Canada has established a framework that supports women's

participation and advancement in the workforce. The positive impacts of these policies are evident in the increased inclusivity and supportiveness of workplace environments. Women in organizations that prioritize gender equality report higher levels of job satisfaction, engagement, and mental well-being. The establishment of more inclusive cultures has led to a reduction in workplace harassment and discrimination, alleviating significant stressors that negatively impact mental health. Furthermore, the availability of flexible work arrangements and shared parental leave has enabled women to achieve a better balance between their professional and personal lives, reducing burnout and enhancing overall well-being.

Despite these advancements, challenges remain that prevent the full realization of gender equality in the workplace. The persistent gender wage gap continues to be a source of financial stress and inequality for women, highlighting the need for more stringent enforcement of pay equity measures. Additionally, women remain underrepresented in leadership roles across many industries, limiting their influence and perpetuating feelings of isolation and marginalization. Addressing these issues requires a concerted effort from organizations and policymakers to ensure that women have equal access to career advancement opportunities and that barriers to leadership are dismantled.

Workplace harassment and discrimination, although reduced, are still prevalent issues that undermine women's mental health and well-being. Subtle forms of bias, such as microaggressions and implicit biases, contribute to hostile work environments that erode women's confidence and mental health. Organizations must prioritize creating a culture of respect and accountability, where harassment and discrimination are swiftly addressed and prevented. This includes implementing robust reporting mechanisms, providing diversity and inclusion training, and fostering an open dialogue about gender equality.

Intersectionality also plays a critical role in understanding the diverse experiences of women in the workplace. Women from different racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds often face compounded challenges that affect their mental health and career well-being. Addressing these disparities requires policies that consider the intersecting factors affecting women's lives, such as race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. Organizations and policymakers must ensure that gender equality initiatives are inclusive and responsive to the diverse needs of all women, creating an environment where everyone can thrive.

To enhance the effectiveness of gender equality policies, several key actions are recommended. First, it is essential to strengthen the implementation and enforcement of these policies across all sectors. This involves conducting regular audits to assess compliance, providing training and resources to support organizations in implementing best practices, and holding organizations accountable for non-compliance. Strong enforcement mechanisms can help bridge the gap between policy intent and actual outcomes, ensuring that gender equality is achieved in practice.

Promoting cultural change within organizations is crucial for achieving true gender equality. This involves raising awareness about the benefits of diversity and inclusion, fostering open and respectful communication, and encouraging leaders to model inclusive behaviors. Organizations should invest in diversity and inclusion training and create safe spaces for employees to discuss and address issues related to gender equality. Enhancing support for work-life balance is essential for improving women's mental health and well-being. Organizations should continue to expand and promote flexible work arrangements and parental leave policies to support work-life balance for all employees. This includes offering options such as telecommuting, flexible hours, and job-sharing, as well as encouraging men to take parental leave to promote shared caregiving responsibilities. Addressing intersectional inequalities is critical for ensuring that gender equality initiatives are inclusive and responsive to the diverse needs of all women. This involves collecting and analyzing data disaggregated by race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and other relevant factors to identify disparities and inform targeted interventions. Organizations should also create platforms for marginalized voices to be heard and involved in decision-making processes, ensuring that policies reflect the diverse needs of all women.

In conclusion, gender equality policies in Canada have made significant strides in improving women's career mental health and well-being. However, persistent challenges such as wage gaps, underrepresentation in leadership roles, and workplace harassment continue to hinder progress. By strengthening policy implementation, promoting cultural change, enhancing support for work-life balance, and addressing intersectional inequalities, policymakers and organizations can further enhance the effectiveness of these policies and create more equitable and supportive workplace environments for women. Continuous efforts and collaboration among stakeholders are essential to achieving lasting gender equality and improving the mental health and well-being of all women in the workforce.

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