

Women in Leadership in the Health Sector in India



About the Study

The Women in Leadership in Health Sector study was conducted in partnership with Global Health 50/50 (GH5050) and African Population and Health Research Center (APHRC). It is a two-country study- conducted in Kenya and India, with ICRW leading the India study.

▶ Study Objectives

- To examine the career pipeline for women in the health sector in India.
- To identify the unique barriers and enablers women face in accessing equal opportunities for career growth within the health sector.
- To analyze opportunities and measures that can support women to participate equally in the health workforce and advance to leadership positions.

▶ Context

- As per the World Health Organization (WHO), despite making up a significant portion of the workforce (70%), women hold very few leadership roles in the health sector (25%).
- Women entering the health workforce have the right to opportunities for equitable career progression, including advancement to leadership roles.
- Gender discrimination and inequitable social norms operating at many levels lead to missed opportunities for women's leadership in health in India.

▶ Research Approach

- Content analysis of national and state (Uttar Pradesh and Bihar) level legislation affecting women's career pathways within the health sector in India.
- Literature review to analyze the existing evidence for in/equality of opportunity for women's careers in the health sector in India and the enablers and barriers therein.
- A socio-ecological model was adopted to understand the determinants of women's careers in the health sector.
- The primary study sample included 19 organizations working on health — five International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs), five Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Uttar Pradesh (UP) and five NGOs in Bihar, two private sector organizations, and two autonomous bodies.
- Qualitative data was collected from interviews with 55 participants, including 7 subject matter experts, 18 organizational heads, and 30 employees in mid to senior management roles (men and women).
- Analysis of workplace policies and workforce data of participating organizations.

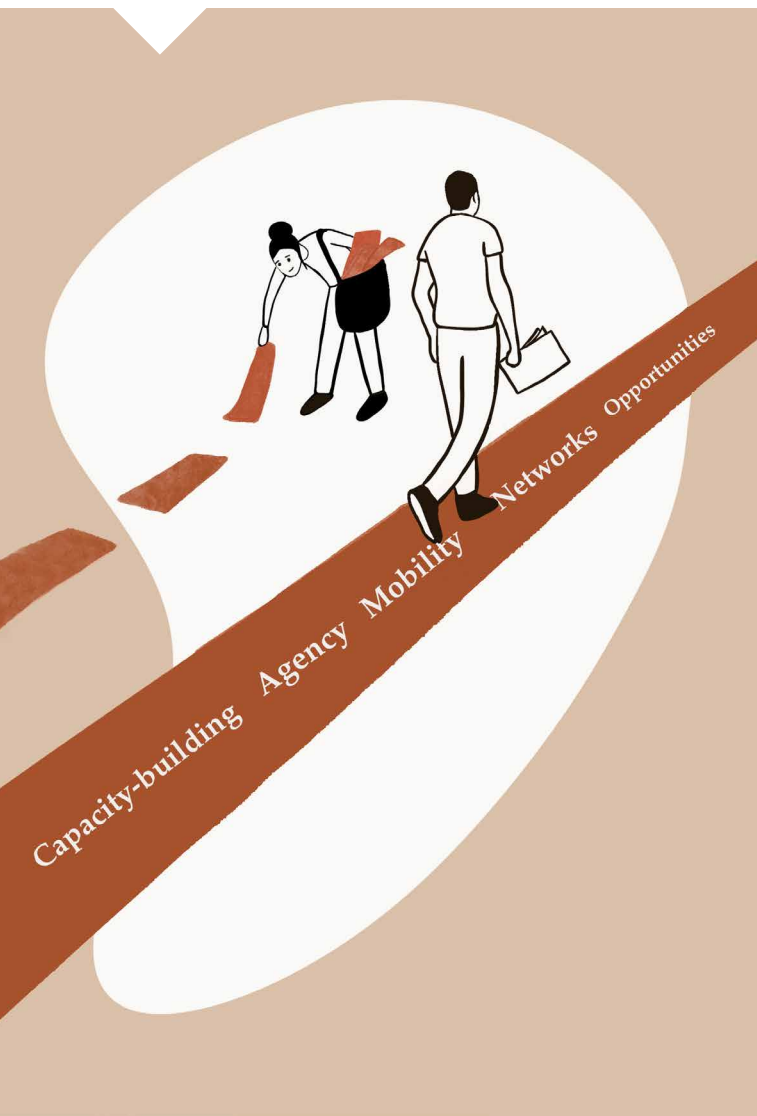
Key Findings

► Individual Factors

- Self-confidence, passion and commitment to a social cause fuel women's desire for career growth.
- Women often feel a pressure to prove themselves more than their male counterparts.

► Organizational Factors

- Gender-inclusive policies (e.g. flexible work, childcare support, travel support) promote women's career advancement.
- A positive work culture comprising supportive supervisors, female role models and provisions of 'safe spaces' has been helpful.
- Leadership based on empathy, collaboration, accountability, and transparency positively affects women's workplace experiences, leading to improved growth and retention within the organization.
- A workplace culture that emphasizes masculine traits like aggression, competition, rigid gender roles, and microaggressions (such as intrusive interruptions, sexist remarks, and undermining a woman leader's authority) hinders women's confidence and professional development.



► Interpersonal Factors

- Family support, including support from parents, in-laws and partners increased women's confidence and enabled them to concentrate on their careers.
- Lack of family support acts as an impediment, sometimes resulting in women taking career breaks and forgoing leadership positions.



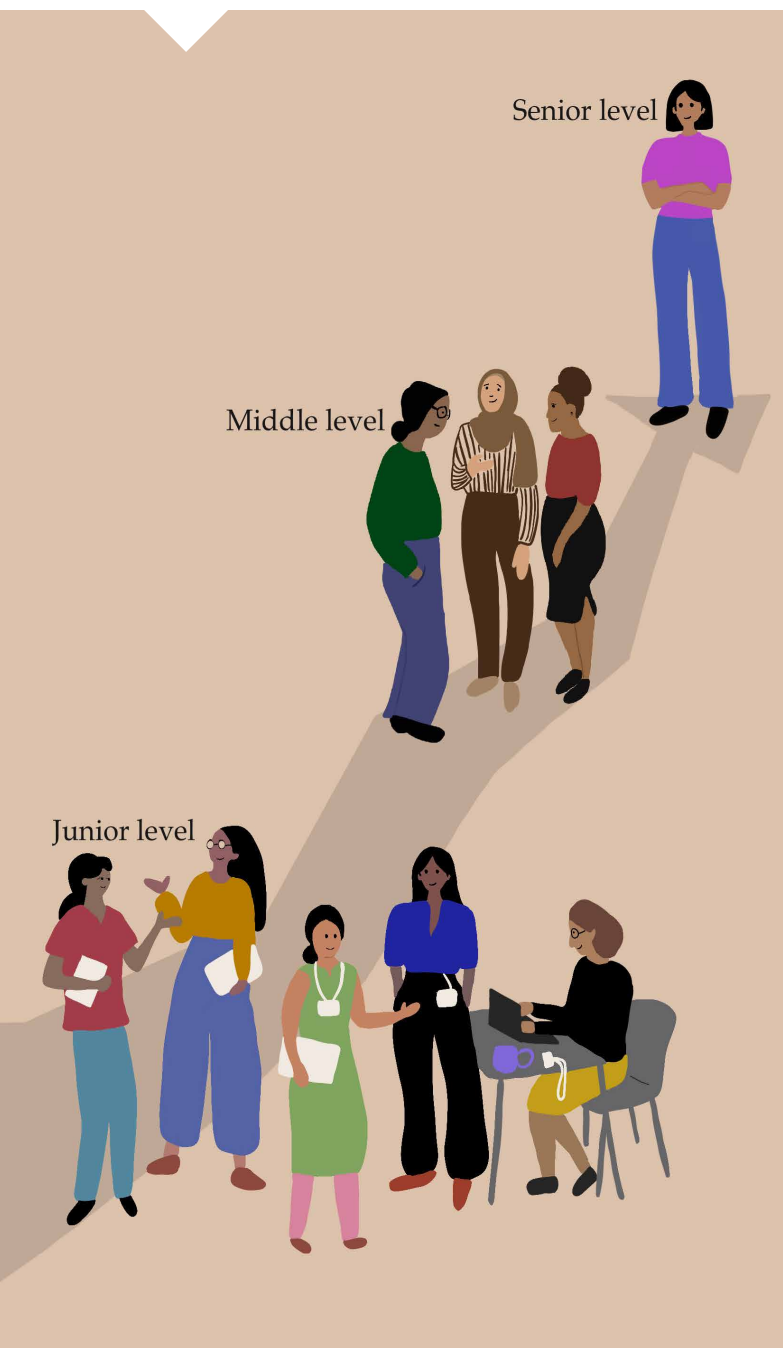
- The workforce data from the participating organizations reveal a significant gender disparity in leadership roles. In 11 out of 14 organizations (79%), the Board chair was male, while three (21%) were female. Among the Heads of 19 organizations, 15 (79%) were men, and four (21%) were women.
- Additionally, women continue to be underrepresented in senior positions within these organizations.

► Structural Factors

- The Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act (2017) provides 26 weeks of paid maternity leave to women, however in absence of parental leave laws it reinforces ideas of childcare work as women's work.
- Lack of comprehensive legal provisions covering redistribution of care work and family life and work-life balance impact women's careers.
- The absence of specified accountability mechanisms may impact the effective implementation of existing legislation, undermining their potential to promote equal opportunities.

► Normative Factors

- Societal expectations around gender roles, particularly those related to unpaid household and care work limits women's entry, promotion and retention in the workforce. Women are often expected to prioritize family responsibilities over career aspirations.
- Perceived inability of women to devote time and energy to their career due to family responsibilities and relocation due to marriage contributes to discrimination and bias in hiring.



Key Recommendations

▶ Structural Level

- Introduce and enforce laws that focus on redistribution of care work and advance work-life balance.
- Strengthen accountability mechanisms within existing laws like reporting to independent review bodies and ensure that future laws account for robust accountability measures.
- Protect informal health workers, largely women, through labour legislation.

▶ Support Systems

- Work with boys and men to promote their participation in care work.

▶ Research

- Build publically available gender-disaggregated health work-force data in India.
- Develop and test strategies like parental leave to recognize and redistribute the unpaid care work burden on women.
- Identify factors that have the potential to influence the development and adoption of legal instruments that promote gender equity at the workplace.
- Conduct research to examine how intersectionality shapes career trajectories of marginalized women.

▶ Organizational Level

- Strengthen the implementation of gender-inclusive policies.
- Publish policies and workforce data online to promote greater transparency and accountability.
- Foster a positive and inclusive work culture that promotes gender equity.
- Provide capacity building and mentoring programs for women starting from an early career stage and customized to their career development aspirations.
- Develop and implement executive leadership training programs grounded in feminist values and principles for senior and mid-management leaders.
- Increase awareness and training on gender biases and microaggressions in the workplace.



About Us

International Center for Research on Women (ICRW):

The International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) is a global research institute with regional hubs in Washington D.C., United States; New Delhi, India; Kampala, Uganda; and Nairobi, Kenya. Established in 1976, ICRW conducts research to identify practical, actionable solutions to advance the economic and social status of women and girls around the world. ICRW Asia's thematic focal areas include access to education and livelihoods, adolescent empowerment, gender-based violence, masculinities, gender inequitable attitudes, HIV prevention, and violence against women and girls.

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