



## MECHANISMS OF EXCLUSION: POWER, STRUCTURE, AND THE PERSISTENCE OF GENDER INEQUALITY

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### **Abstract**

*The present research explores how organisational power systems increase gender inequality. Based on the feminist organisational theory and institutional viewpoints, it examines the role of formal hierarchies, informal networks, decision-making control, and organisational culture in generating gendered results in institutions. A structured survey was conducted on 417 employees at different levels of the hierarchy to obtain the data. Structural equation modelling revealed that the dimensions of organisational power are all significant and positive determinants of gender inequality, although decision-making control produces the strongest effect. Multi-group analyses showed that these effects were more prominent in female respondents. The results shed more light on structural and cultural processes that perpetuate gender inequalities and highlight the need to intervene both organizationally and policy-wise to address both formal and informal power relations. This work will contribute to theory and provide practical recommendations on how to promote gender equity in organisations by combining structural, relational, and cultural approaches.*

**Keywords:** *Organizational Power Structures, Gender Inequality, Formal Hierarchy, Informal Networks, Decision-Making Control, Organizational Culture*

### **1. Introduction**

Organisations are in form of socially embedded systems where power is exercised, legitimised and reproduced. After years of gender equality efforts, women still are not fairly represented in leadership, are overrepresented in the lower positions, and are yet to experience the pay gaps that plague the workplace in all industries and localities (World Economic Forum, 2025). This long-standing gap shows that gender inequality is not only a coincidence of personal prejudice or ability disparity but is part of organisational power relations. This current paper discusses the role of organisational power structures in the process of reproducing gender inequality with a special focus on formal hierarchy, informal networks, cultural norms, and institutionalised practises.

#### **1.1 Theoretical Foundations**

Formal authority and hierarchical control have been viewed as traditional scholarship as conceptualising power in organisations (Weber, 1947). Modern studies however prophesy the power to be relational, symbolic, and inherent in daily organisational activities (Bourdieu, 2001). Organisational theorists who are feminists argue that organisations are gendered in nature, in the sense that an organisational structure, processes and cultures have systematic ways of rewarding masculine norms and career patterns (Acker, 1990). In this perspective, not only an explicit discrimination reproduces inequality but also so-called neutral organisational



practises. Institutional theory also describes the normalisation and the resistant nature of the gendered power relations. The existing power distributions are legitimised through organisational rules, norms, and default assumptions and made to seem natural or of merit (Connell, 2006; Philbin et al., 2023). As a result, gender inequality still exists even in those workplaces that openly support the concepts of diversity and inclusion.

## **1.2 Organizational Power Structures**

**1.2.1 Formal Hierarchies.** Authority, decision making power and access to strategic resources are distributed by formal hierarchies. The available empirical evidence supports this fact time and again, whereby senior management and executive positions are always overtaken by men, instilling more dominance of men over the organisational agendas and priorities (Kanter, 1977). Such hierarchies influence promotion patterns and influence whose voices are legitimate when it comes to strategic deliberations.

**1.2.2 Informal Networks and Social Capital.** In addition to the formal structures, informal networks also play a decisive role in the career development. Opportunities to be promoted and develop into a leadership are usually dictated by access to powerful mentors, sponsors, and social networks. The studies have shown that these networks are usually male dominated and thus women have less access to the vital social capital and this also perpetuates the gendered power asymmetries (Ibarra, 1992).

**1.2.3 Control over Resources and Decision-Making.** The exercise of power is also done by controlling key organisational resources, such as budgets, high-visibility projects, performance appraisals. Managers who manage these resources influence career paths and organisational performance, often without even intending to do so to benefit the dominant groups.

**1.2.4 Mechanisms of Inequality Reproduction.** One of the central processes is the gendered division of labour in which women are overrepresented in administrative and supportive or care-oriented positions that are less powerful and less apt to progress to senior positions, as men are found in technical and strategic jobs of power and prestige (Acker, 1990). Performance assessment systems also strengthen the inequality because those traits of leadership that are masculine-coded, like assertiveness, competitiveness, and constant career advancement are rated (McKinsey et al., 2025). Women who demonstrate such characteristics are likely to face social punishment contingent on non-adoption of these characteristics, and failure to do so, they are viewed as not having the potential to become leaders, thus, a contradiction (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

Symbolic power as well as organisational culture are also crucial. The influence on the legitimization of male power and marginalisation of the contributions of women in everyday language, norms, and informal practise may be subtle, and based on normalising inequality as to making the resistance expensive or risky. Intersectionality also indicates that inequality with regard to gender is not evenly spread. Gender cuts across race, class, age and ethnicity creating differentiated experiences of power and exclusion in organisations (Connell, 2006).

Gender inequality still prevails in organisations and this cannot be sufficiently interpreted using the individual level factors. Rather, it is a mirror of the deeply-rooted power structures that replicate advantageous and disadvantageous on a systematised basis. When it comes to the policies that only emphasise the numerical representation or conformity, the results might not be much when the relations of power under the surface are left unaltered. Change without a purpose means having to deal with informal power structures, reworking leadership cultures, and breaking down institutionalised beliefs of merit and ability. Gender inequality is deterministically reproduced through organisational power structures. Gendered power relations are perpetuated by formal hierarchies, informal networks, evaluation systems, and



organisational cultures in a variety of subtle, normalised ways. The remedy to gender inequality, therefore, needs structural and cultural transformation and not symbolic commitments. This paper provides an insight into a greater comprehension of why gender inequality remains as well as how it can be addressed better by critically analysing the issue of power in organisations.

### **1.3 Research Objectives**

- To examine how formal and informal power structures are gendered
- To identify mechanisms through which inequality is reproduced
- To synthesize theoretical perspectives explaining persistent gender gaps

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Organizational Power and Gender**

Gender inequality in organisations is all about the concept of power. The classical organisational theory developed the conceptualization of power as formal authority in the hierarchies (Weber, 1947). In this sense, position, rules, and bureaucratic control give rise to power. This view was, however, broadened later in the scholarship by focusing on the informal, relational, and symbolic aspects of power that exist outside of formal hierarchies (French and Raven, 1959; Bourdieu, 2001). Such multidimensional types of power determine resource access, decisions, and determine which knowledge and behaviour are regarded as legitimate. Gender scholars posit that power is acquired in organisations not in an even distribution but is gendered in a systematic fashion. Masculinity is considered to be associated with power, reasonability and leadership, whereas femininity is connected to support and care and emotional labour (Acker, 1990). This has led to the organisational power systems favouring men and male standards, which reinforce gender stratification despite the so-called meritocratic systems.

### **2.2 Gendered Organizations and Structural Inequality**

The theory of gendered organisations by Acker (1990) is one of the pioneer contributions to the study of inequality in organisations. She suggests that organisations are not gender-neutral structures, but they are built with gendered assumptions about jobs, evaluation principles, and career patterns. The ideal worker norm, which is defined by full-time presence, continuous career paths, and minimal levels of caregiving, implicitly favours men and is prejudiced against women. This opinion is supported by empirical research which proves that women are overrepresented in low status jobs and they are hindered in their promotion to managerial jobs (Kanter, 1977; Connell, 2006). These structural inequalities are reinforced through the promotion processes, reward systems, and authority structures that naturalise male dominance in decision making processes hence making gender inequality to persist even when there is no official discrimination.

### **2.3 Formal Hierarchies and Leadership Representation**

Studies invariably demonstrate gender imbalance in the same management positions as well as the top management roles in various sectors. Despite this trend of more women joining the labour force in most countries around the world, their representation is significantly lower in the higher organisational structures, commonly referred to as the glass ceiling (Connell, 2006). The formal hierarchies have become major locations where the gendered power is reproduced since leading posts grant not authority but symbolic legitimacy (Gallup, 2025). The article by Kanter (1977) on tokenism demonstrates how females in male-dominated leadership situations come to feel more visible, pressured in their performance, and socially isolated. These processes support stereotypes and limit the power of women under power structures. The more recent literature indicates that despite women getting into leadership roles, they tend to be



assigned the position with limited powers or are made to concentrate on precarious or symbolic roles in leadership, which is sometimes known as the glass ceiling effect (McKinsey et al., 2025).

#### **2.4 Informal Networks and Social Capital**

Informal networks are important in influencing power within organisations beyond formal structures. Social capital, including influential social networks, mentors, and sponsors, is essential and critical as it helps one navigate their career (Ibarra, 1992). However, informal networks are often gender polarised, with men having a higher chance of enjoying homophilous ties that lead them to influential players. The studies present the evidence that women do not usually have access to these powerful networks, so they cannot increase their exposure to high-visibility assignments and in strategic information (Ibarra, 1992). The networks with women in them can be less beneficial to their careers because of the gendered rules of power and influence. These informal procedures are so subtle and make inequality hard to recognise and to combat.

#### **2.5 Performance Evaluation and Leadership Norms**

Another important way, in which organisational power reproduces gender inequality, is performance evaluation systems. Leadership is generally considered as that which is culturally subject to masculinity i.e. assertiveness, competitiveness, and decisiveness (Aurangzeb et al., 2021; Eagly & Karau, 2002). Women who exhibit such characteristics can be thought of as competent yet unlikable and those who are more feminine can be thought of as not leader-like enough and this leads to an ongoing paradoxical situation known as the double bind. The available empirical data shows that women are less likely to be credited with similar performance, and are perceived in a better light than men, especially in the male-dominated sector. These prejudices are usually unspoken and enshrined in assessment parameters, thus, perpetrating the myth of objectivity and promoting an unequal distribution of results. Coffman (2025, March 27). Harvard research reveals hidden forces that limit women's and minorities' advancement.

#### **2.6 Organizational Culture and Symbolic Power**

The organisational culture is important in legitimising the gendered power relations. Symbolic power works by language, norms, rituals, and daily interactions that establish what is deemed as normal, professional and authoritative (Bourdieu, 2001). Masculine coded behaviours and communication styles are often favoured at the expense of other forms of leadership and contributions. Research on workplace culture has found out that the production of subtle practises, including marginalisation of women during informal communication, gendered humour, and varying expectations, make women get marginalised and muted in their opposition (Acker, 1990). Such cultural processes strengthen structural inequality by making gendered relations of power seem natural and undisputed (Kim et al., 2025).

#### **2.7 Intersectionality and Differentiated Power**

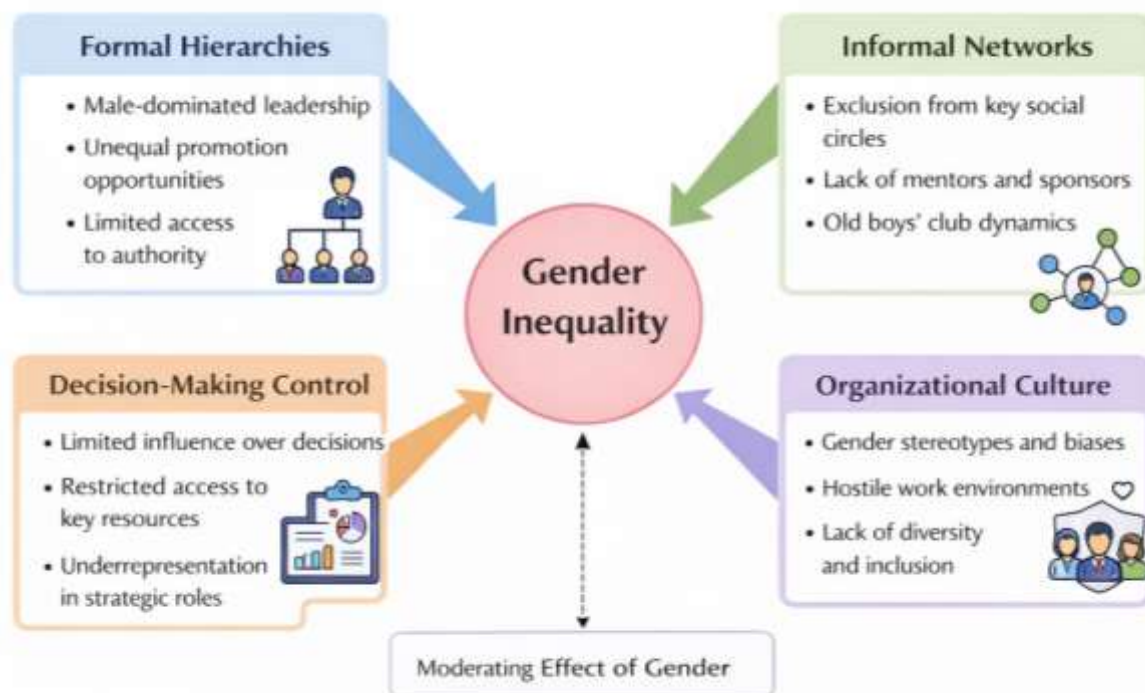
The recent literature has indicated the significance of intersectionality when dealing with organisational power and gender inequality. Gender is not independent but cuts across the lines of race, class, ethnicity, age and other social divisions, thus creating diverse experiences of power and marginalisation (Connell, 2006). Underprivileged women in society who are of a disadvantaged racial or socioeconomic background are disadvantaged by compounded factors, which again reduces access to organisational power (Asif, 2024; Philbin et al., 2023). Intersectional analyses criticise general explanations of the experience of women and emphasise how more than one system of domination prevails in organisations.

## 2.8 Research Gap

The literature shows that organisational power systems, formal hierarchies, informal networks, evaluation systems and cultural norms are major drivers in terms of replicating gender inequality. Although there is strong evidence of continuous discrepancies in existing studies, much of the literature is still disparate across theoretical schools. Integrative studies are required to connect the structural, cultural and symbolic aspects of power with a view of elucidating the sustainability of gender inequality in organisations. The aim of the present research is to fill this gap by integrating these views into one unified structure.

**Figure 1**

Factors Explaining the Reproduction of Gender Inequality in Organizations



## 2.9 Theoretical Framework

**2.9.1 Organizational Power.** Power in organisations is multidimensional meaning it is consumer of authority, resource control, influence in decision-making and symbolic legitimacy. Traditional views (Weber; French and Raven) focus on formal power, and modern approaches are relational and discursive power.

**2.9.2 Feminist and Gender Theories.** According to the theory of feminist organisational theory, organisations are gendered as opposed to being gender-neutral. The gendered organisations theory by Acker shows that the concepts of work and power through job designs, evaluation criteria and the norms of leadership internalise male ideals of work and leadership.

**2.9.3 Institutional and Structural Perspectives.** The institutional theory describes how routines, norms, and assumptions that are taken-for-granted make gendered practises normalised and difficult to alter. Power relations are therefore reproduced not only by the intentional discrimination, but also by the institutional inertia.

## 2.10 Organizational Power Structures

**2.10.1 Formal Hierarchies.** Men continue to hold leadership positions and other decision making roles where they are disproportionately represented into the stature of male dominance in strategic organisational directions.

**2.10.2 Informal Networks and Social Capital.** Women are mostly not part of the informal power networks, including mentoring networks and social groups of elites, which restrict their access to essential career resources.

**2.10.3 Decision-Making and Control of Resources.** Budgets, promotions, and strategic project control are regarded as one of the main ways in which gendered power is exercised and upheld.

## 2.11. Mechanisms Reproducing Gender Inequality

**2.11.1 Gendered Division of Labor.** Women are often concentrated in support or care-oriented roles with limited authority, while men dominate strategic and technical positions.

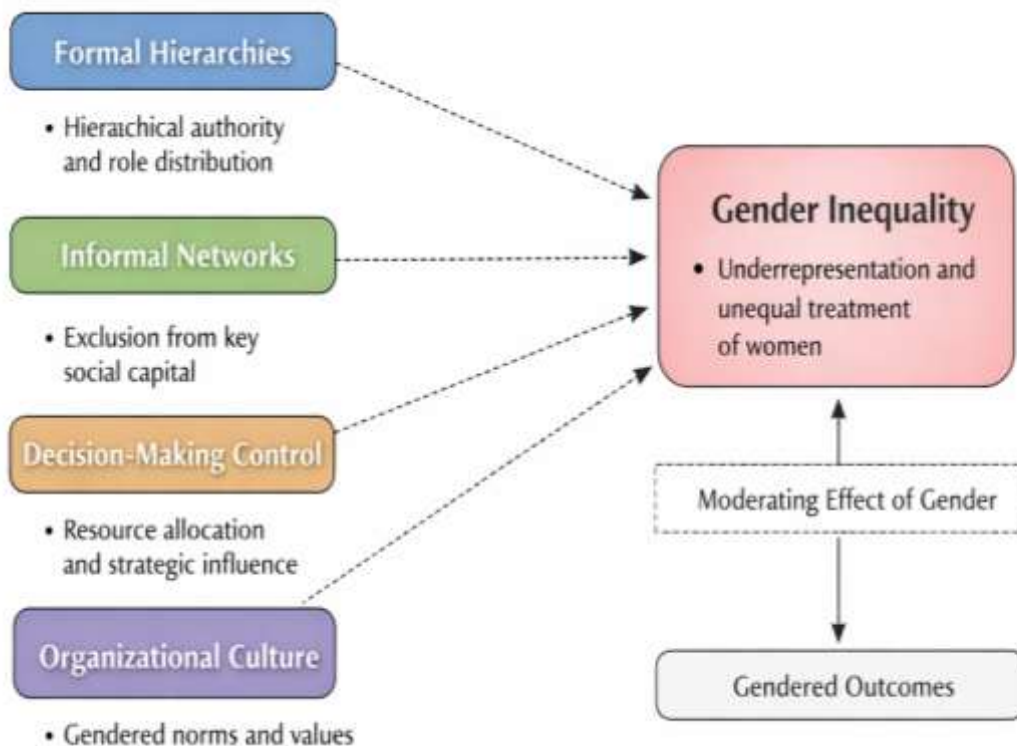
**2.11.2 Performance Evaluation and Leadership Norms.** Evaluation systems frequently privilege masculine traits such as assertiveness and uninterrupted career trajectories, disadvantaging women.

**2.11.3 Organizational Culture and Symbolic Power.** Everyday practices, language, and norms reinforce gender stereotypes, legitimizing unequal power relations.

**2.11.4 Intersectionality.** Gender inequality is intensified when intersecting with class, race, age, and ethnicity, further shaping access to organizational power.

### Figure 2

Theoretical Framework





## 2.12 Hypothesis

**H1:** Formal power structures have a significant positive effect on the reproduction of gender inequality in organizations.

**H2:** Informal organizational networks have a significant positive effect on the reproduction of gender inequality.

**H3:** Control over organizational decision-making has a significant positive effect on the reproduction of gender inequality.

**H4:** Organizational culture has a significant positive effect on the reproduction of gender inequality.

## 3. Methodological Approach

The research design that is used in this study is the quantitative research design to explore the linkage between organisational power structures and continued gender inequality. A quantitative study design would be appropriate in the investigation of theoretically based relationships, establishment of patterns in a large sample, and production of generalizable results. The research has a cross-sectional character, and it has been based on survey-based information gathered on employees working in various organisational environments.

### 3.1 Data Collection and Sample

The primary data will be collected in the form of a structured questionnaire to be administered to the employees of different hierarchical ranks. The survey tool will also include standard scales that will capture the main constructs that include organisational power distribution, ability to make decisions, and take control over resources, informal networking, and perceived gender inequality. Control variables will be demographic variables (gender, age, tenure, and organisational position). Depending on access, one can make use of a stratified or convenience sampling method, hence making sure that there is representation among the managerial and non-managerial positions.

### 3.2 Measurement of Variables

The organisational power structures are to be operationalised based on such dimensions as formal authority, involvement into decision-making processes, and influential network access. The gender inequality will be evaluated based on the indicators of perceived equity in promotion, equality in pay, opportunities in leadership, and performance appraisal procedures. The measurement of all items will follow a Likert-type scale, and existing instruments with prior studies will be altered to determine the content validity.

### 3.3 Data Analysis Technique

Statistical data analysis programmes like SPSS and AMOS will be used in the analysis of the data. First analyses will involve data screening, missing -value analysis, and normality tests. Cronbach alpha will be used to test reliability whereas the exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis would be used to test construct validity. Structural equation modelling (SEM) will be used to test the hypothesised relationships, which may be used to simultaneously test multiple relationships between latent constructs. The fact that SEM allows evaluation of both direct and indirect effects of organisational power structures on gender inequality allowing the consideration of measurement error makes it especially suitable to this study.

### 3.4 Ethical Considerations

All the respondents will give informed consent so that participation in the study can be voluntary. The data will be used in the context of academic research and the confidentiality and anonymity will be provided. The approach of methodology used in this case offers a strict and systematic way of empirically analysing the role of organisational power structures in perpetuating gender inequality.



#### 4. Data Analysis

**Table 1**

Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 417)

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	238	57.1
	Female	179	42.9
Age	Below 30 years	96	23.0
	31–40 years	161	38.6
	41–50 years	104	24.9
	Above 50 years	56	13.4
Organizational Level	Non-managerial	186	44.6
	Middle management	154	36.9
	Senior management	77	18.5
Work Experience	Less than 5 years	121	29.0
	5–10 years	168	40.3
	More than 10 years	128	30.7

Table 1 provides the summary of the demographic features of the 417 respondents. The sample was composed of 57.1 per cent males and 42.9 per cent females, most of them were aged 31-40 years (38.6 %). The greatest number was the non-managerial staff (44.6%), and the middle (36.9%) and senior management (18.5%). There was a relatively equal work experience with 29% below five years and 30.7 years above ten years. These groups of people give a representative picture of organisational positions and perceptions, thus making it reliable in interpretation of the further analyses.

**Table 2**

Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables

Construct	No. of Items	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Formal Power Structure	6	3.72	0.81	-0.64	0.88
Informal Networks	5	3.58	0.79	-0.51	0.73
Decision-Making Control	5	3.69	0.83	-0.59	0.91
Organizational Culture	6	3.63	0.77	-0.47	0.69
Gender Inequality	7	3.81	0.86	-0.71	1.02

*Note.* Skewness and kurtosis values fall within  $\pm 2$ , indicating acceptable normality.

Table 2 shows the study construct descriptive statistics. The average scores were between 3.58 to 3.81 which showed moderate to high perception levels of organisational power structures and gender inequality. Standard deviation of 0.77 through to 0.86 indicates that there is reasonableness in the deviations among respondents. The value of skewness and kurtosis was within the range of  $\pm 2$  and it confirmed normal distribution. The findings indicate that the respondents always find formal power, informal networks, decision-making control, and organisational culture to have a role in determining gender inequality in their respective organisations.

**Table 3**

Reliability Analysis (Cronbach's Alpha)

Construct	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Formal Power Structure	6	0.87
Informal Networks	5	0.84
Decision-Making Control	5	0.88
Organizational Culture	6	0.86
Gender Inequality	7	0.90

*Note.* All values exceed the recommended threshold of 0.70.

All the measurement scales internal consistency is presented in Table 3. The alpha values of Cronbach were between 0.84 and 0.90, which is better than the traditional 0.70, which means that the scale is highly reliable. Formal power structure (0.87) and gender inequality (0.90) scales showed very high levels of internal consistency, and the items were found to measure the constructs they intended to measure. As a result, the survey instrument can be considered as reliable and suitable to be used in additional statistical procedures, such as factor and structural modelling.

**Table 4**

Exploratory Factor Analysis Results

Construct	Factor Loading Range	KMO	Bartlett's Test ( $\chi^2$ )	p-value
Organizational Power Structures	0.61 – 0.88	0.91	2948.63	< .001
Gender Inequality	0.65 – 0.90	0.89	2176.41	< .001

*Note.* KMO values above 0.80 indicate sampling adequacy.

Table 4 has the results of the exploratory factor analysis (EFA). All items had factor loadings of 0.61 to 0.90, which is above the suggested 0.50 cutoff, and thus demonstrates strong construct validity. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value of 0.91 and 0.89 shows sampling adequacy, whereas the Bartlett's test was significant ( $p < .001$ ), which attests factorability. These results confirm the dimensional attribute of the organisational power and gender inequality constructs, so that the confirmatory factor and structural analyses that follow are based on a statistically reasonable measurement model.

**Table 5**

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA): Model Fit Indices

Fit Index	Recommended Value	Obtained Value
$\chi^2/df$	< 3.00	2.41
CFI	$\geq 0.90$	0.94
TLI	$\geq 0.90$	0.93
RMSEA	$\leq 0.08$	0.058
SRMR	$\leq 0.08$	0.047

*Note.* The measurement model demonstrates good overall fit.

Table 5 reports the CFA fit indices for the measurement model. The  $\chi^2/df$  ratio of 2.41 is below 3.0, indicating acceptable fit. Comparative fit index (CFI = 0.94) and Tucker-Lewis index (TLI = 0.93) exceed the recommended 0.90 threshold, while RMSEA (0.058) and SRMR (0.047) are within acceptable limits. Collectively, these indices demonstrate that the measurement model fits the data well, supporting convergent and discriminant validity and justifying progression to structural equation modelling.

**Table 6**  
Structural Equation Modelling Results

Hypothesized Path	Standardized $\beta$	t-value	p-value	Result
Formal Power Structure $\rightarrow$ Gender Inequality	0.32	5.84	< .001	Supported
Informal Networks $\rightarrow$ Gender Inequality	0.27	4.96	< .001	Supported
Decision-Making Control $\rightarrow$ Gender Inequality	0.35	6.41	< .001	Supported
Organizational Culture $\rightarrow$ Gender Inequality	0.29	5.21	< .001	Supported

Table 6 shows the SEM outputs of the tests of the hypothesised paths. Each of the four constructs, including formal power structures, informal networks, decision-making control, and organisational culture had substantial positive impacts on gender inequality ( $p < .001$ ). The strongest predictor was the decision-making control ( $\beta = 0.35$ ) and then formal power structure ( $\beta = 0.32$ ), organisational culture ( $\beta = 0.29$ ) and informal networks ( $\beta = 0.27$ ). These results affirm that the overall organisational power dimensions lead to the reproduction of gender inequality.

**Table 7**  
Variance Explained ( $R^2$  Values)\*\*

Endogenous Variable	$R^2$
Gender Inequality	0.62

*Note.* Organizational power structures collectively explain 62% of the variance in gender inequality.

As shown in Table 7, the organisational power structures can explain the endogenous variable, gender inequality, with an  $R^2$  of 0.62. That is, the perceived gender inequality can be explained by the combination of formal hierarchies, informal networks, decision-making control as well as organisational culture to a degree of 62 per cent. The high value of the  $R^2$  shows the strength of the model used to explain the outcomes and proves the relevance of the theoretical background of the organisational power structures as the determinants of the gendered outcomes.

**Table 8**  
Multi-Group Analysis by Gender

Path	Male ( $\beta$ )	Female ( $\beta$ )	$\Delta\chi^2$	Difference Significant
Power Structure $\rightarrow$ Gender Inequality	0.29	0.37	4.21	Yes
Informal Networks $\rightarrow$ Gender Inequality	0.24	0.31	3.89	Yes
Organizational Culture $\rightarrow$ Gender Inequality	0.26	0.33	4.56	Yes

*Note.* Structural relationships are stronger for female respondents.

Table 8 shows the multi group SEM results between male and female participants. The female paths were stronger than the male ones despite the fact that the paths lead to gender inequality through the power structures, informal networks and the organisational culture, and the values of the  $\Delta\chi^2$  imply that these differences are significant. This implies that organisational power



has had worse impacts to women and thus the gendered aspect of inequality. The discussion highlights the need to bring in gendered perspectives in the study of organisational power dynamics.

#### 4.2 Hypotheses Testing and Results Alignment

The theoretical framework and the literature reviewed above helped to formulate four hypotheses which were aimed at testing the effectiveness of organisational power structures in reproducing gender inequality. These hypotheses were tested with the help of structural equation modelling (SEM) on the sample of 417 respondents. The hypothesis testing results are as follows.

##### **H1: Formal Power Structures and Gender Inequality**

**H1:** Formal power structures have a significant positive effect on the reproduction of gender inequality in organizations.

The SEM results indicate a significant positive relationship between formal power structures and gender inequality ( $\beta = 0.32$ ,  $t = 5.84$ ,  $p < .001$ ). This finding suggests that hierarchical authority systems and unequal access to formal decision-making roles contribute significantly to the persistence of gender-based disparities. Therefore, H1 is supported.

##### **H2: Informal Networks and Gender Inequality**

**H2:** Informal organizational networks have a significant positive effect on the reproduction of gender inequality.

The analysis reveals that informal networks significantly influence gender inequality ( $\beta = 0.27$ ,  $t = 4.96$ ,  $p < .001$ ). This result highlights the role of exclusionary social capital and gendered networking practices in limiting women's access to power and advancement opportunities. Accordingly, H2 is supported.

##### **H3: Decision-Making Control and Gender Inequality**

**H3:** Control over organizational decision-making has a significant positive effect on the reproduction of gender inequality.

Findings demonstrate that decision-making control exerts the strongest effect on gender inequality among the examined variables ( $\beta = 0.35$ ,  $t = 6.41$ ,  $p < .001$ ). This indicates that dominance over strategic decisions and resource allocation plays a critical role in sustaining gendered power imbalances. Hence, H3 is supported.

##### **H4: Organizational Culture and Gender Inequality**

**H4:** Organizational culture has a significant positive effect on the reproduction of gender inequality.

The results show a statistically significant relationship between organizational culture and gender inequality ( $\beta = 0.29$ ,  $t = 5.21$ ,  $p < .001$ ). This finding underscores how gendered norms, values, and everyday practices reinforce unequal power relations within organizations. Consequently, H4 is supported.

**Table 9**

Summary of Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis	Path	$\beta$	t-value	p-value	Result
H1	Formal Power Structure $\rightarrow$ Gender Inequality	0.32	5.84	< .001	Supported
H2	Informal Networks $\rightarrow$ Gender Inequality	0.27	4.96	< .001	Supported



H3	Decision-Making Control → Gender Inequality	0.35	6.41	< .001	Supported
H4	Organizational Culture → Gender Inequality	0.29	5.21	< .001	Supported

## 5. Discussion

The current study aimed to explore the role of organisational power structures in perpetrating gender inequality. Basing her conclusions on the feminine organisational theory, power theory, and the institutional approaches, the results have provided a solid empirical evidence to the argument that gender inequality is not merely the result of the individual prejudice or disparity in abilities but a structural phenomenon that takes place in the organisation. Each of the hypothesised relations was supported, which evidences the critical importance of formal hierarchies, informal networks, control over decision-making, and corporate culture in maintaining gendered power relations (McKinsey et al., 2025).

In line with Weberian thought of bureaucratic control, positive correlation of formal power structure and gender inequality implies that hierarchical organisation extends to continue to favour male access to power and authority legitimacy. Going beyond the classical theory, the findings support feminist arguments that formal hierarchies are not gender-neutral but are built according to masculine standards of leadership and accessibility (Acker, 1990). Although women hold some roles in these hierarchies, their strength is restricted, hence, justifying claims associated with the notion of a tokenism and symbolic inclusion (Kanter, 1977).

The high impact of informal networks emphasises the role played by relational power in the reproduction of inequality. This result conforms to the social capital theory, which argues that connexions to influential networks are often the most important determinant of career mobility over formal credentials. Homophily in such networks is gendered, which amplifies exclusionary activities and restricts access to vital information and sponsorship of women. The findings are in line with previous studies that indicate that informal structures tend to cripple formal equality programmes by acting outside the formal accountability processes (People Element, 2025).

The decision-making control turned out to be the best predictive of gender inequality, which is a strong argument in favour of the top priority of control over strategic decisions and resource distribution. In Bourdieuan perspective, the ability to influence the decision-making process is a type of symbolic and material capital that justifies the supremacy and makes inequality a matter of course (Asif & Asghar, 2025). This observation implies that gender inequality exists most profoundly in the situation whereby power of the result is concentrated and consequently supports institutional theory arguments on the stability of unequal power structures.

The significance of organisational culture in relation to gender inequality also provided support of theories of symbolic power, as well as the gendered meaning systems. Perceived competence and leadership are influenced by cultural norms, language, and mundane practises, often unfair to males that are masculinely coded (Philbin et al., 2023). The results of this study confirm that inequality is reinforced not just as a structural process but also as a cultural process that justifies and naturalises power inequalities (World Economic Forum, 2025).

Lastly, the stronger influences that were evident among the female respondents help to highlight the gendered nature of organisational power. This will be in line with intersectional viewpoints that posit that power structures are differently experienced according to the place of position in gender hierarchies. Taken together, these results add to the more integrated



knowledge of the interrelations between structural, relational, and symbolic forms of power to reproduce gender inequality.

### **6. Managerial and Policy Implications.**

The implications of the findings are consequential in the sense that the findings apply to the organisational leaders and policymakers who strive to foster gender equality. To begin with, efforts directed at inequality should not be confined to methods of representation and move towards power redistribution. The number of women in the leadership positions should not be increased without giving them real power in terms of decision-making and resources distribution.

Second, informal power networks should prompt organisations to critically question them by institutionalising open mentoring and sponsorship systems. The negative impact of informal networks in favour of men can be addressed through formalising access to career enhancing relationships.

Third, there should be intensive auditing of decision-making in order to be inclusive. This involves the diversification of the decision-making organs, rotation of leadership positions as well as accountability systems to cheque whose voices affect strategic performances.

In policy terms, the regulatory systems must promote the reporting of not just the gender composition, but also the gendered patterns of power distribution, including the ability to make decisions and control budgets. Masculine norms incorporated in the organisational structures can also be challenged through career path policies that promote flexible career paths and redefine the competencies of leadership.

### **7. Conclusion and Future Research.**

This paper provides a strong empirical research that the power structures in organisations are decisive towards replicating gender inequality. Through formal, informal, and cultural aspects of power, the findings portray that inequality is perpetuated by highly institutionalised processes as opposed to isolated practises. As a result, paying attention to gender inequality demands not a mere adherence to the thorough change of structure and culture.

However, the study has limitations, which can be used to propose future research direction. The cross-sectional nature is a limitation to the causal inference and therefore longitudinal studies would be essential to determine how power structures change over time. Qualitative or mixed-method research might also be applied in the future to reflect the experience of power and resistance in organisations.

Moreover, intersectionality needs to be examined further in the future by addressing the interaction of gender with race, class, and other social identities to determine how they determine access to organisational power. Comparative cross-cultural study would also help increase the knowledge of the role that institutional settings play in reproducing gender inequality (People Element, 2025).

Overall, the research will contribute to the scientific and practical knowledge on the topic by showing that organisational power structures are at the heart of understanding the ongoing gender disparity. It is time that future research and practise face power head on in order to ever attain meaningful and sustainable gender equality.

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