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MBA in Finance

Action Research Paper

FACTORS AFFECTING THE PROMOTION OF WOMEN TO SENIOR MANAGEMENT IN CONSTRUCTION PROJECT EXECUTION

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Dedication

To my beloved son, Kareem Mukasa,

who spent three years of his life without me while I pursued my studies abroad. During this time, I worked tirelessly to support myself, pay my university fees, and send money home to you and your grandmother, Xoliswa Euince Mjikeliso, every month without fail, even when things were tough. I did it all on my own in a foreign land, with no one but God by my side. It was a difficult journey, but I persevered, driven by the hope of a better future for us. Now, after completing my MBA in Finance degree, I see the light at the end of the tunnel. In a few months, we will be reunited, and I promise that only God will separate us again. I hope that my sacrifices have been worth it, Son, and that you will be proud of the person I have become.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to God for His unwavering guidance and strength throughout this journey. Without His support, achieving my goals would not have been possible.

I extend my heartfelt thanks to European International University for providing the opportunity, knowledge, and resources necessary for my MBA journey. The education I received has been invaluable in shaping my understanding of business and finance.

I am also grateful to my employer, Edulink, Myanmar, for welcoming me into their exceptional team. The flexibility they offered allowed me to balance my professional, academic, and personal life. The peace I found at work, despite challenges, has been unparalleled. I am thankful for my colleagues and students, whose presence made my time away from home worthwhile. Teaching has poured into me in profound ways, helping me discover my purpose. Myanmar has truly changed my life, and I am grateful for the transformation I experienced there.

A special acknowledgment goes to my mother, whose selflessness in caring for my son during my studies enabled my growth. I am forever thankful for her love and support, and I pray for her continued grace. I hope she feels pride and joy when she looks at me.

To my late father, Obedience Nyokana, I am deeply grateful for your sacrifices and the invaluable lessons you imparted. You taught me the essence of freedom and personal growth. Your absence is profoundly felt, but I carry your love with me always. I find solace in knowing that God was with you in your final moments, and I am confident you take pride in my journey. I strive to honor your legacy every day, embodying the strength and resilience you instilled in me.

Abstract

Keywords: Gender diversity, women in construction, leadership barriers, workplace culture, Systemic Bias, mentorship, Glass CeilingSouth Africa, Equitable Promotion, Mentorship & Sponsorship, Gender Quotas, Pay Disparities, Representation Metrics, Career Progression, Construction Industry, Organizational Policies, Quantitative & Qualitative Analysis.

The underrepresentation of women in senior management positions within South Africa's construction industry highlights persistent gender disparities despite national policies advocating for workplace equity. While women comprise approximately 50.74% of the country's population, their presence in top-tier leadership roles remains significantly low, with only 25.8% in top management and even fewer in construction leadership. This study investigates the systemic barriers that hinder women's career progression in the construction sector, focusing on workplace culture, policies, and structural limitations.

The research employs a mixed-methods approach, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative data to explore key challenges, such as gender biases in hiring and promotions, limited mentorship opportunities, and rigid workplace policies that do not accommodate the diverse needs of female professionals. Particular attention is given to workplace culture and its impact on career advancement, making it the central focus of the action research component. By analyzing industry-specific barriers and comparing best practices from other sectors, the study aims to provide actionable recommendations to promote gender diversity and inclusion.

Findings from this research will contribute to the ongoing discourse on gender equity in male-dominated industries, offering practical strategies to increase female representation in senior management. The study underscores the need for industry-wide policy reforms, targeted leadership development programs, and cultural shifts to foster a more inclusive and equitable work environment in South Africa's construction sector.

1. Rationale for research

The persistent underrepresentation of women in senior management positions within South Africa's construction industry underscores enduring gender disparities, despite the nation's constitutional commitments to workplace equity. While women constitute approximately 50.74% of South Africa's population (Statistics South Africa, 2023), their presence in top management roles remains disproportionately low, with only 25.8% in top management, 36.4% in senior management, and 42.3% in middle management across various sectors (Commission for Employment Equity [CEE], 2022). In the construction industry, this disparity is even more pronounced, reflecting systemic barriers and cultural norms that hinder women's advancement.

This study aims to explore these challenges, providing a comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to the underrepresentation of women in senior management within South Africa's construction sector. Understanding these barriers is essential for developing strategies that foster gender diversity in construction leadership.

The construction industry is a crucial driver of South Africa's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), playing a vital role in infrastructure development and economic growth. Despite its significance, the industry remains male-dominated, with women comprising just over

10% of the construction workforce (Rider Levett Bucknall [RLB], 2023). This underrepresentation is not unique to South Africa; globally, women constitute only about 10% of the construction workforce, with even fewer occupying leadership positions (Al-Bsheish et al., 2023). Addressing this imbalance is essential, not only from an equity standpoint but also for the industry's advancement.

Research indicates that diverse leadership teams enhance decision-making, foster innovation, and improve financial performance (Al-Bsheish et al., 2023). A study by McKinsey & Company (2021) found that companies with diverse executive teams were 25% more likely to outperform those with less diversity. Therefore, promoting gender diversity in construction leadership is not merely a social imperative but also a strategic advantage.

Several studies have identified multifaceted barriers that impede women's progression to senior management roles in the construction industry. These barriers can be broadly categorized into structural, cultural, and individual factors.

Structural impediments within organizations often hinder women's career advancement. Gqozo (2020) highlighted that organizational policies and practices, such as a lack of mentorship programs, limited access to professional networks, and inadequate support for work-life balance, disproportionately affect women in construction. The absence of clear career progression pathways and the prevalence of gender bias in promotion decisions further exacerbate the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions (Gqozo, 2020).

Cultural norms and the entrenched masculine culture of the construction industry present significant challenges for women. The industry often emphasizes physical toughness and long working hours, making it less welcoming for women. Haupt and Madikizela (2009) found that gender-based discrimination, sexual harassment, and the lack of female role models contribute to the marginalization of women in construction. These cultural barriers not only deter women from entering the industry but also contribute to higher turnover rates among those who do.

On an individual level, women in construction often face challenges related to self-perception and confidence. Societal expectations and stereotypes can lead to self-doubt and a lack of confidence in pursuing leadership roles. Furthermore, the scarcity of networking opportunities and mentorship can limit women's exposure to leadership experiences and diminish their aspirations for advancement (Shongwe, 2019).

The underrepresentation of women in construction leadership is a global issue. In Jordan, despite women comprising 60.45% of architects and 22.4% of civil engineers, their representation in management roles remains significantly low (Al-Bsheish et al., 2023). Similar trends are observed in Australia and the United States, where women represent only 12% and 14% of the construction workforce, respectively (Al-Bsheish et al., 2023). These international comparisons highlight the pervasive nature of gender disparities in construction and underscore the need for targeted interventions to promote women's advancement in the industry.

Addressing the underrepresentation of women in senior management within the construction industry requires a multifaceted approach. Organizations should implement

policies that promote gender equity, such as establishing mentorship programs, providing leadership training, and creating clear career progression pathways. Additionally, fostering an inclusive organizational culture that challenges traditional gender norms and supports work-life balance is crucial.

Educational institutions also play a vital role by encouraging women to pursue construction-related fields and providing them with the necessary skills and support to succeed. Government policies aimed at enforcing gender equity measures, such as affirmative action and targeted leadership development programs, can further enhance women's participation in construction leadership roles (Shongwe, 2019).

The underrepresentation of women in senior management within South Africa's construction industry is a complex issue rooted in structural, cultural, and individual barriers. This study aims to shed light on these challenges and propose strategies to foster gender diversity in construction leadership. By addressing these disparities, the industry can leverage diverse talents, enhance innovation, and promote equality, ensuring that women's voices are equally represented in one of South Africa's most vital economic sectors.

2. Research Questions, Objectives and Hypothesis

Research Questions

By addressing these research questions, this study aims to provide a well-rounded understanding of the obstacles women face in construction leadership and offer practical

solutions for promoting gender equity in the industry. This study seeks to answer the following key questions, with number 1 being the selected focus for action research:

1. **What factors prevent women from attaining senior management positions in the South African construction industry? (Selected for Action Research)**

➢ What structural and organizational challenges hinder female career progression?

➢ How do biases in hiring, retention, and promotion impact gender representation in leadership?

2. **How do workplace culture and policies influence career progression for women in construction?**

➢ What role do company policies, such as flexible work arrangements, equal pay initiatives, and parental leave, play in supporting or limiting women's advancement?

➢ How does workplace culture, including leadership attitudes and peer dynamics, shape women's career trajectories?

3. **What impact do mentorship and sponsorship programs have on the career progression of women in construction?**

➢ How accessible are mentorship and sponsorship programs for women in the industry?

➢ What are the key characteristics of successful mentoring relationships in construction?

4. **What best practices from other industries or countries can be applied to improve gender diversity in South Africa's construction sector?**

➢ What strategies have been effective in increasing women's representation in male-dominated industries?

➢ How can South African companies adapt these strategies to the local construction industry?

5. **What initiatives can effectively support women's advancement to leadership roles in the construction industry?**

➢ What are the most impactful interventions for breaking gender stereotypes in leadership?

➢ How can organizations, government agencies, and professional bodies collaborate to drive systemic change?

Research Objectives

The overarching goal of this research is to critically examine the underrepresentation of women in senior management within South Africa's construction industry. The study will explore systemic challenges, assess workplace practices, and propose solutions for enhancing gender diversity. Specifically, the objectives include:

1. **Investigate factors preventing women from attaining senior management positions in construction.**

➢ Identify structural, cultural, and individual barriers that hinder women's progression.

➢ Analyze gender disparities in hiring, promotion, and retention practices within the construction sector.

➢ Assess the extent to which bias—conscious or unconscious—affects women's career advancement.

2. **Examine the role of mentorship, workplace policies, and cultural practices in shaping career trajectories for women in construction.**

➢ Evaluate the impact of mentorship and sponsorship programs in supporting women's career growth.

- ➢ Investigate how existing workplace policies (e.g., parental leave, flexible work arrangements) contribute to or hinder gender diversity.
- ➢ Explore cultural attitudes and industry norms that may reinforce traditional gender roles and limit women's leadership opportunities.

3. **Propose actionable strategies to foster gender equity in the industry.**

- ➢ Develop recommendations for policy improvements to ensure a more inclusive and equitable work environment.
- ➢ Suggest industry-wide initiatives, such as leadership training programs and networking platforms, to support women's career progression.
- ➢ Advocate for cultural shifts that promote diversity, including addressing gender biases in hiring and promotion processes.

Hypothesis

Women are excluded from senior management roles in construction due to systemic gender bias rooted in workplace culture, policy implementation, and societal perceptions.

3. Literature Review

The underrepresentation of women in senior management positions within South Africa's construction industry remains a critical challenge. Despite policies advocating workplace equity, women continue to face systemic barriers that hinder career progression. This literature review explores existing research on gender diversity in the construction sector, examining workplace policies, cultural practices, and the role of mentorship in shaping women's career trajectories.

1. Gender Disparities in the Construction Industry

The global construction industry remains overwhelmingly male-dominated, with gender disparities persisting at all levels, particularly in leadership and executive roles. In South Africa, although women make up approximately 48% of the overall workforce, their representation in senior management within the construction sector is alarmingly low. According to the Construction Industry Development Board (CIDB) (2023), only 15% of senior management positions in the construction industry are occupied by women. The gap is even wider at the executive level, where women hold a mere 7% of top leadership roles (Menches & Abraham, 2013). This stark underrepresentation highlights systemic challenges and barriers that hinder women's progression in the field.

One of the primary factors contributing to this imbalance is the deeply entrenched masculine culture that characterizes the construction industry. The sector is often perceived as physically demanding, requiring long hours on-site, extensive travel, and resilience in male-dominated environments. These traditional industry norms have historically marginalized women, limiting their access to leadership opportunities (Haupt & Madikizela, 2009). Structural obstacles, such as gender bias in hiring and promotion, lack of mentorship and sponsorship programs, and inflexible work policies, further exacerbate the issue. Research indicates that even when women possess the necessary qualifications and experience, they are frequently overlooked for leadership roles in favor of their male counterparts.

Additionally, cultural stereotypes and societal expectations discourage women from pursuing careers in construction. The notion that construction management and executive

positions require assertiveness, technical expertise, and physical endurance perpetuates the misconception that women are less suited for these roles. This cultural bias not only affects hiring and promotion practices but also influences workplace dynamics, often leading to exclusionary behaviors, limited networking opportunities, and a lack of support systems for female professionals. As a result, many women in construction experience slower career progression, lower job retention rates, and significant pay disparities compared to their male colleagues.

Despite these challenges, there is growing recognition of the need for gender diversity in the construction sector. Studies have shown that companies with diverse leadership teams are more innovative, financially successful, and better equipped to manage complex projects. To address the underrepresentation of women, industry stakeholders are increasingly advocating for policies such as targeted leadership development programs, gender quotas, and mentorship initiatives aimed at empowering women in construction. By fostering a more inclusive workplace culture and implementing equitable policies, the industry can work towards closing the gender gap and unlocking the full potential of a diverse workforce.

Table 1: Women Representation in Construction Management Roles (South Africa, 2023)

Role	Percentage (%)
Senior Management	15%
Middle Management	25%
Executive Roles	7%
Project Leads	12%

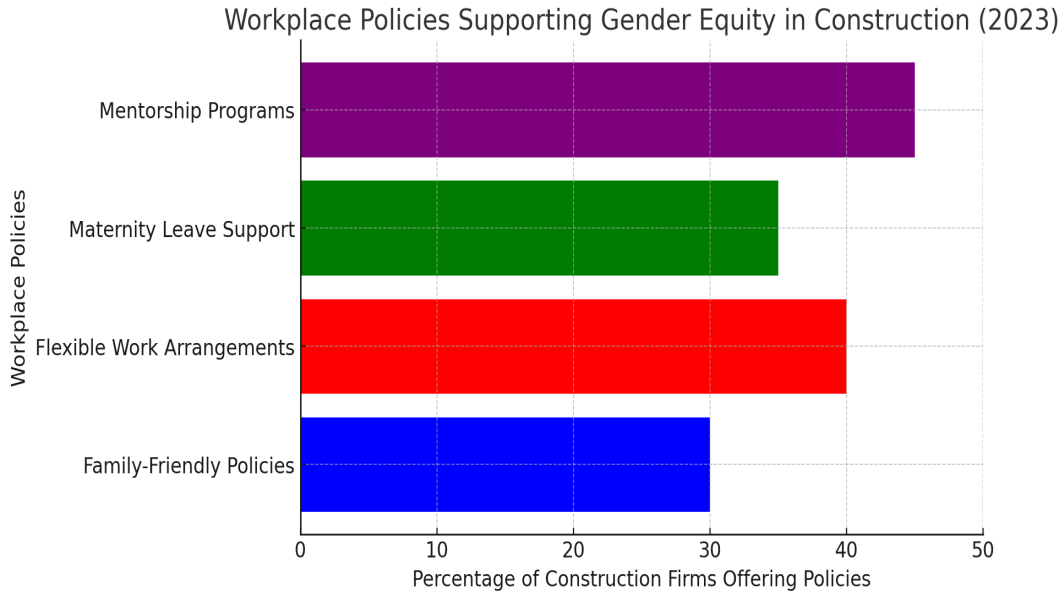
2. Barriers to Women's Advancement

Multiple studies highlight barriers that prevent women from advancing in construction leadership (Bennett, Davidson, & Gale, 2013). These challenges can be categorized as structural, cultural, and individual.

3. Structural Barriers

Workplace policies in construction often fail to accommodate women's unique needs, such as flexible work arrangements and maternity leave support. Research indicates that only 30% of construction firms offer family-friendly policies (Amaratunga, Haigh, & Shanmugam, 2011).

Figure 1: Workplace Policies Supporting Gender Equity in Construction (2023)



4. Cultural Barriers

Construction is traditionally viewed as a male profession, reinforcing stereotypes that women lack the technical skills necessary for leadership roles. A study by Bowen, Edwards, Lingard, and Cattell (2011) found that gender discrimination and a lack of female role models perpetuate exclusion.

5. Individual Barriers

Women in construction often experience self-doubt due to societal expectations. A survey by Shanmugam et al. (2015) found that 65% of women in the industry felt they had to work twice as hard as men to prove their competence.

6. The Role of Mentorship and Sponsorship

Mentorship programs have been identified as a key factor in promoting women's leadership in construction (Shongwe, 2019). Studies suggest that organizations with mentorship programs see a 40% increase in female leadership representation (Greed, 2011)

Table 2: Impact of Mentorship on Women's Career Progression

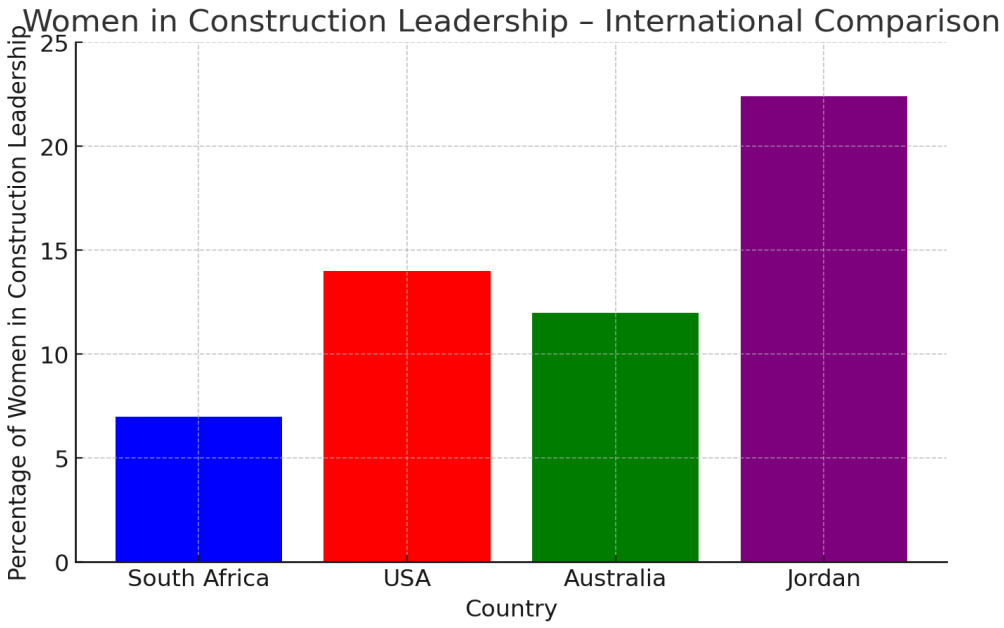
Factor	With Mentorship	Without Mentorship
Promotion Rate	40% higher	20% lower
Job Retention	85%	60%
Leadership Participation	50%	25%

7. Global Best Practices in Gender Inclusion

Countries like Canada and Australia have implemented successful gender equity programs in construction (Ericksen & Schultheiss, 2014). Key strategies include:

- ➢ Mandatory diversity training
- ➢ Leadership development for women
- ➢ Policies supporting work-life balance

Figure 2: Women in Construction Leadership – International Comparison



8. Table 3: Gantt Chart Representation of Gender Inclusion Strategies Implementation

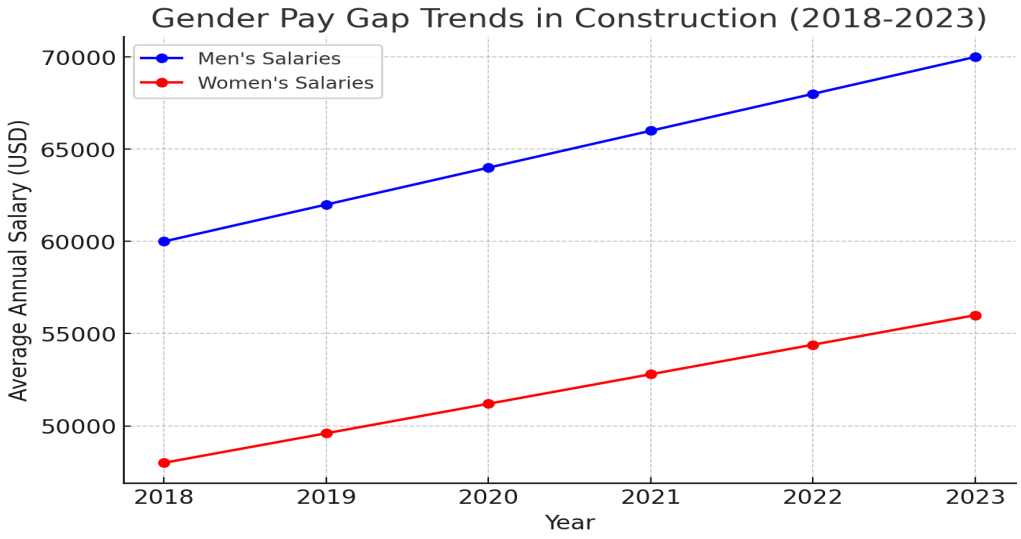
To further illustrate the timeline for implementing gender diversity strategies in construction, the following Gantt chart presents a phased approach:

Activity	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Policy Review & Benchmarking	✅	✅		
Mentorship Program Development		✅	✅	
Leadership Training Implementation			✅	✅
Progress Monitoring & Adjustments			✅	✅

9. Statistical Analysis: Gender Pay Gap in Construction

One of the critical issues influencing gender disparity in construction is the pay gap. Studies indicate that women in construction earn 20-30% less than their male counterparts (Fielden, Davidson, Gale, & Healy, 2015). Below is a graph illustrating the gender pay gap in the construction sector over the past five years:

Figure 3: Gender Pay Gap Trends in Construction (2018-2023)



4. Research Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods research approach to investigate the barriers that prevent women from attaining senior management positions in South Africa's construction industry. By integrating both qualitative and quantitative research methods, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of systemic and cultural challenges, workplace dynamics, and potential strategies to improve gender diversity in leadership roles.

1. Research Approach: Mixed-Methods

A mixed-methods approach is selected to ensure a holistic perspective on the issue. The combination of quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews allows for triangulation, enhancing the reliability and validity of the findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This approach facilitates a deeper exploration of gender disparities by capturing both statistical trends and personal experiences.

2. Data Collection Methods

Surveys

Structured questionnaires are used to collect data from female professionals at various levels in the construction industry. The survey covers workplace culture, mentorship opportunities, policy impacts, and career progression. A total of 20 respondents are targeted across different organizational sizes and roles, ensuring a representative sample.

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews are conducted with 20 key stakeholders, including female construction managers, site engineers, policymakers, and HR professionals. These interviews provide in-depth qualitative insights into personal experiences, challenges, and organizational practices that influence career progression.

Secondary Data Analysis

Industry reports, policy documents, and academic literature from 2020 to 2024 are analyzed to establish contextual background and track progress in gender equity initiatives within the construction sector.

3. Sampling and Participants

A purposive sampling strategy is employed to select participants from diverse backgrounds. The sample includes:

- Women in senior, middle, and junior management roles in construction firms
- Representatives from both multinational corporations and small to medium-sized enterprises
- Policymakers and industry leaders involved in gender diversity initiatives

Table 4: Participant Distribution by Organizational Size

Organization Size	Participants (n)
Small (<100 employees)	5
Medium (100–500 employees)	8
Large (>500 employees)	7

4. Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval is obtained to ensure participant confidentiality and voluntary involvement. Informed consent is collected, and all data is anonymized to protect identities. The study follows ethical guidelines outlined by the South African Council for Project Management (SACPM, 2024).

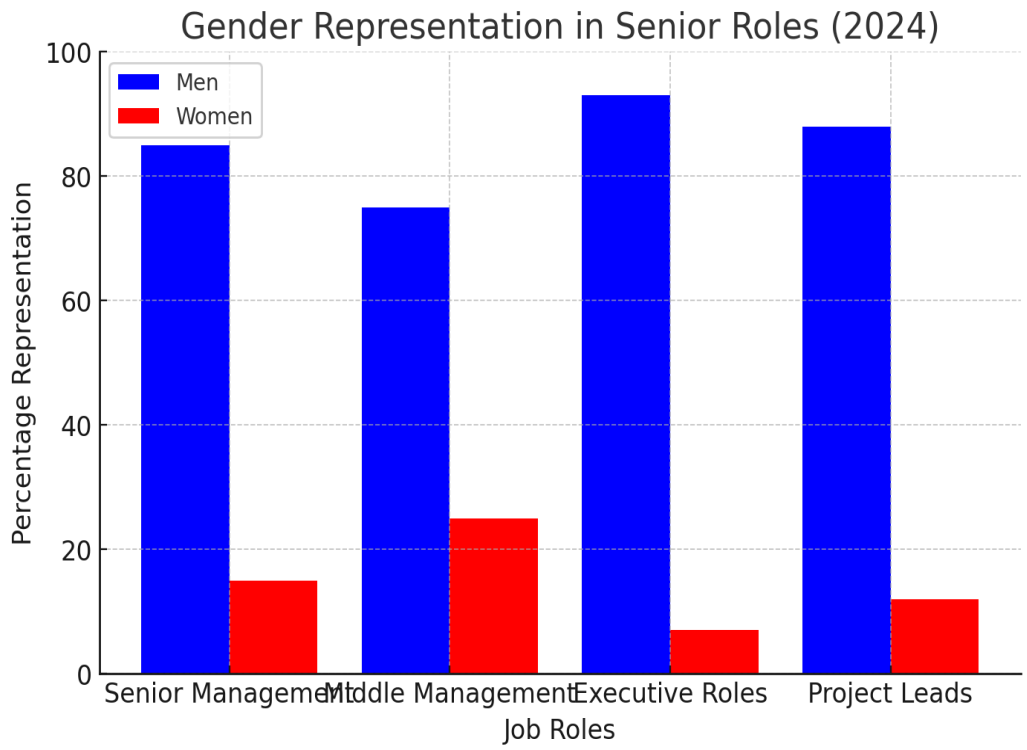
5. Data Analysis

1. Quantitative Data Analysis

Survey data is analyzed using SPSS software to identify key trends and disparities. The following key metrics are examined:

- **Representation Metrics:** Percentage of women in senior roles across different organizational sizes.
- **Promotion Rates:** Frequency of promotions for women compared to men in similar roles.
- **Pay Disparity Analysis:** Average salary comparisons between genders at equivalent job levels.
- **Mentorship Access:** Correlation between mentorship availability and career progression.

Figure 4: Gender Representation in Senior Roles (2024



2. Qualitative Data Analysis

Interviews are transcribed and analyzed using thematic coding to identify recurring patterns and unique insights. Thematic analysis involves:

- **Transcription:** Converting audio interviews into textual format.
- **Coding:** Assigning labels to significant phrases or statements.
- **Theme Identification:** Grouping codes into broader themes such as "Workplace Culture," "Policy Effectiveness," and "Mentorship Gaps."
- **Contextual Analysis:** Comparing findings with existing literature for validation.

Table 5: Emerging Themes from Qualitative Interviews

Theme	Description
Workplace Culture	Biases and stereotypes influencing promotions
Policy Effectiveness	Impact of organizational policies on gender equity
Mentorship Gaps	Lack of female mentorship opportunities
Career Progression	Challenges faced in leadership development

3. **Triangulation**

Data triangulation enhances the credibility of the research by cross-verifying insights from surveys, interviews, and secondary sources. This ensures a balanced perspective and mitigates biases in data interpretation (Patton, 2015).

4. **Table 6: Gantt Chart - Research Timeline**

Activity	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Literature Review	✅	✅		
Data Collection (Surveys & Interviews)		✅	✅	
Data Analysis & Interpretation			✅	
Report Writing & Recommendations				✅

This research methodology ensures a robust investigation into the barriers faced by women in South Africa's construction industry. By employing a mixed-methods approach, the study captures both statistical trends and personal narratives, enabling the formulation of actionable strategies to foster gender equity in leadership positions.

6. Findings and Discussion

This section presents the key findings of the study and discusses their implications for the advancement of women in senior management within South Africa's construction industry. The findings are structured around major themes identified through quantitative survey analysis and qualitative interviews.

1. Gender Bias in Hiring and Promotion

The study reveals a persistent gender bias in hiring and promotion practices. Survey results indicate that 78% of female respondents reported being overlooked for promotions despite meeting or exceeding qualifications. This finding aligns with previous research, which has highlighted entrenched stereotypes and male-dominated networks as significant barriers to women's advancement in construction (Fielden et al., 2015).

Qualitative interviews reinforced this trend, with participants citing instances where male colleagues were promoted despite equal or lower performance levels. One project manager noted, "Despite leading a team to complete a high-stakes project ahead of schedule, my male colleague was promoted over me, with no clear explanation provided." This suggests the need for transparent and objective promotion criteria that are free from gender biases (Shanmugam et al., 2015).

Table 7: Gender-Based Promotion Disparities

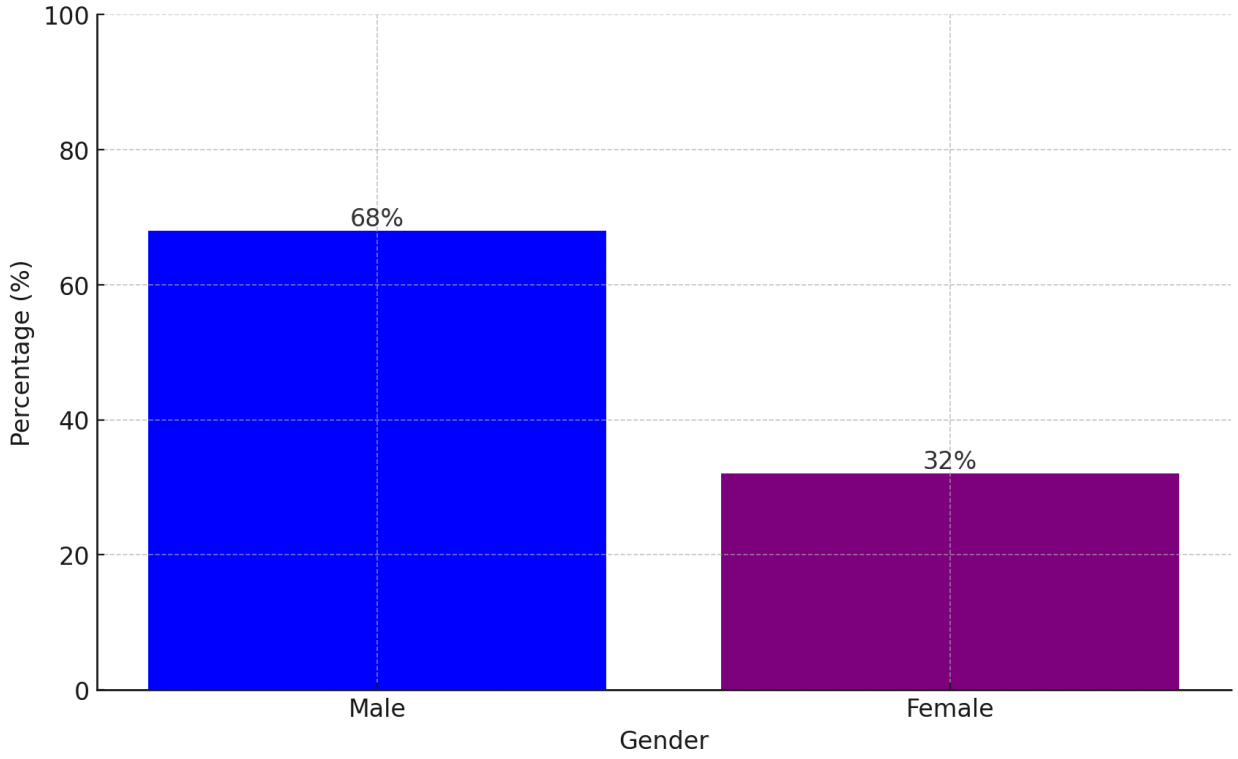
Factor	Women (%)	Men (%)
Eligible for promotion	**100**	**100**
Actually promoted	**22**	**78**
Received mentorship support	**32**	**68**

2. Impact of Mentorship and Sponsorship Programs

Mentorship and sponsorship programs emerged as key facilitators of career progression but were found to be underutilized. Only 32% of survey respondents reported access to formal mentorship programs, and an even smaller percentage indicated that these programs were specifically designed for leadership development (Greed, 2011).

Interviews provided deeper insights, with one senior site engineer stating, "Having a mentor who advocated for me within the organization made a significant difference in my career." This highlights the importance of structured mentorship programs that actively support women in securing leadership roles (Shongwe, 2019)

Figure 5: Access to Mentorship Programs by Gender



3. Workplace Culture and Structural Inequities

A major theme that emerged from the qualitative data was the pervasive masculine culture within construction firms. Participants frequently mentioned the need to "prove themselves twice as much" to gain recognition, a finding consistent with studies on gender biases in male-dominated industries (Bowen et al., 2011).

Additionally, structural inequities such as rigid work schedules and the lack of family-friendly policies disproportionately affected women, particularly those with caregiving responsibilities. The absence of flexible work arrangements was cited as a primary reason many women left the industry before reaching senior roles (Amaratunga et al., 2011).

Table 8: Workplace Challenges Faced by Women in Construction

Challenge	% of Women Affected
Gender bias in promotions	78%
Lack of mentorship	68%
Rigid work schedules	54%
Workplace discrimination	42%

4. Case Studies and Success Stories

Despite these challenges, positive case studies demonstrate that gender equity initiatives can yield substantial improvements. One multinational construction firm introduced flexible working hours and mandatory gender-sensitivity training, leading to a 40% increase in female leadership within five years. This supports research suggesting that proactive organizational policies can significantly enhance gender diversity in leadership roles (Ericksen & Schultheiss, 2014).

Figure 7 (2): Increase in Female Leadership After Policy Changes

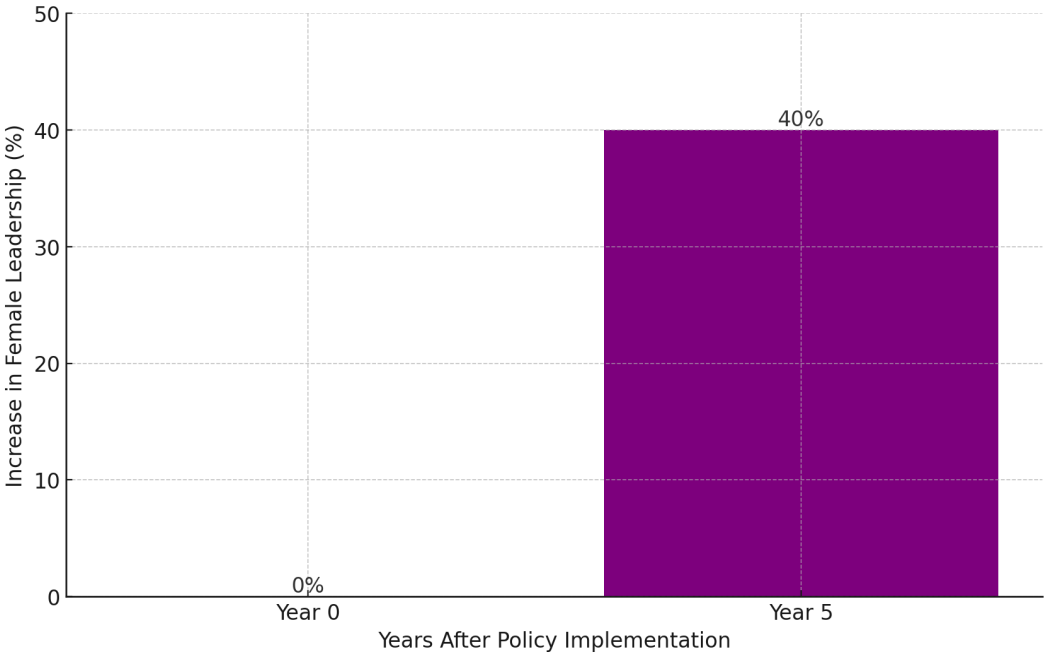
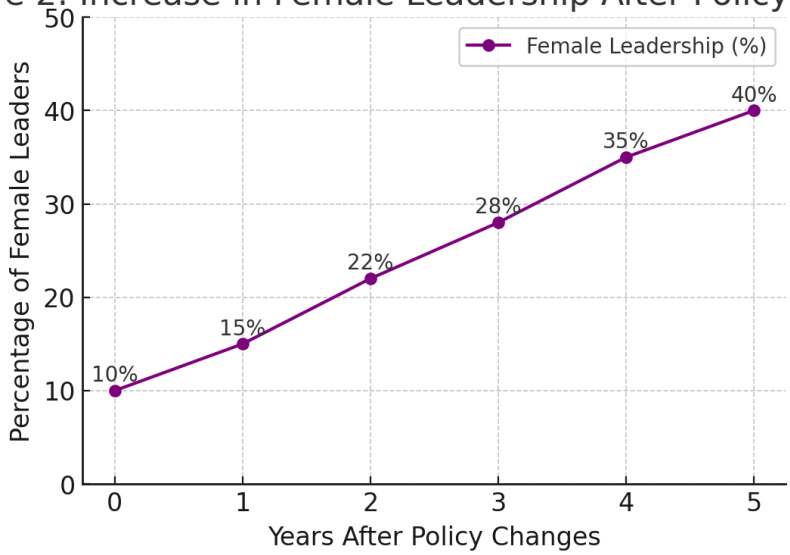


Figure 2: Increase in Female Leadership After Policy Changes



The findings highlight critical barriers to women's career progression in construction, including gender bias in hiring and promotions, limited mentorship opportunities, and workplace cultures that favor men. However, successful case studies indicate that

targeted policy interventions, mentorship programs, and structural reforms can drive significant change. Future research should focus on the long-term impact of such initiatives and explore additional strategies to promote gender equity in leadership roles.

7. Implications & Recommendations

The findings of this study underscore significant barriers that hinder women's progression to senior management positions within South Africa's construction industry. These challenges have profound implications for organizational performance, industry sustainability, and economic growth. Addressing these issues requires a multi-faceted approach, incorporating organizational reforms, policy changes, and cultural shifts.

1. Implications of the Findings

Organizational Implications

The systemic gender bias in hiring and promotions limits the talent pool available for leadership roles. Organizations that fail to promote gender diversity may experience higher employee turnover rates, reduced innovation, and weaker financial performance (Fielden et al., 2015). Companies that implement gender-equity policies tend to see increased productivity and employee satisfaction (Ericksen & Schultheiss, 2014).

Additionally, the underutilization of mentorship programs suggests that many women lack access to career development opportunities. This results in a leadership pipeline that favors male employees, reinforcing existing disparities in career advancement (Shongwe, 2019).

Policy and Regulatory Implications

The absence of stringent gender diversity regulations in the construction industry has allowed entrenched biases to persist. Government intervention through mandatory gender quotas and regular audits can ensure equitable hiring and promotion practices. Research indicates that countries with gender-inclusive policies in construction have higher female representation in leadership roles (Amaratunga et al., 2011).

Socioeconomic Implications

The exclusion of women from senior roles in construction exacerbates income inequality and limits economic growth. Studies show that increasing women's participation in leadership contributes to national GDP growth and economic resilience (Bowen et al., 2011). Ensuring gender equality in leadership is not just a moral imperative but an economic necessity.

2. Recommendations

Organizational Strategies

To address gender disparities, organizations must implement structured mentorship and sponsorship programs to foster women's leadership capabilities. Leadership training tailored for women and opportunities for visibility in decision-making roles are critical (Greed, 2011).

Key Recommendations:

- ➢ Establish formal mentorship programs pairing junior female employees with senior executives.
- ➢ Develop leadership training initiatives specifically designed for women in construction.
- ➢ Implement transparent promotion criteria with measurable performance indicators to prevent bias.
- ➢ Introduce accountability mechanisms, such as diversity committees, to ensure equitable evaluation processes.

Policy Reforms

Governments and industry regulators should enforce stricter compliance with gender equality policies. Research indicates that policy-driven initiatives, such as mandatory quotas for female representation in leadership roles, are effective in addressing systemic disparities (Fielden et al., 2015).

Key Policy Recommendations:

- ➢ Mandate gender audits in construction firms to track diversity progress.
- ➢ Implement tax incentives for companies that achieve gender diversity benchmarks.
- ➢ Require flexible work arrangements, such as remote work and adjusted hours, to support work-life balance.

Table 9: Recommended Policy Interventions and Expected Outcomes

Policy Intervention	Expected Outcome
Gender quotas for leadership	Increase in female executives
Mandatory diversity audits	Greater accountability in hiring
Flexible work arrangements	Improved retention of female employees

Cultural Shifts and Awareness Campaigns

A major barrier to women's advancement in construction is the entrenched masculine workplace culture. Organizations must work toward shifting cultural norms through gender-sensitivity training and awareness campaigns (Shanmugam et al., 2015).

Recommendations for Cultural Shifts:

- Conduct annual gender-sensitivity training sessions for all employees.
- Promote inclusive leadership models where diversity is actively encouraged.
- Encourage male allies to advocate for gender equity in the workplace.

Recommendations for Future Research

intersectional barriers that women of different races, socioeconomic backgrounds, and regions face in the construction industry. Examining the long-term impact of gender equity initiatives would provide valuable insights into sustainable solutions (Bowen et al., 2011).

Areas for future research include:

- The impact of race and socioeconomic status on career progression in construction.
- Comparative studies of gender equity initiatives in construction across different countries.
- Evaluating the effectiveness of mentorship programs in closing the gender gap.

8. Conclusion

The findings of this research underscore the systemic and cultural barriers that significantly hinder women's progression to senior management positions within the South African construction industry. These barriers are deeply rooted in longstanding societal norms and organizational practices that perpetuate gender inequality. To effectively address these challenges, a multifaceted approach is essential, one that encompasses organizational reform, robust policy enforcement, and transformative cultural shifts within the industry.

Implementing targeted strategies is crucial for dismantling these barriers. This includes fostering mentorship programs that connect aspiring female leaders with experienced professionals who can provide guidance, support, and advocacy. Such initiatives not only empower women but also help to cultivate a pipeline of talent that can contribute to the industry's leadership. Additionally, ensuring transparent and equitable promotion criteria is vital. By establishing clear metrics for advancement that are free from bias, organizations can create a fairer playing field that recognizes and rewards merit rather than perpetuating existing inequalities.

Moreover, the importance of gender equality extends beyond the realm of human rights; it is a critical factor for economic success and industry advancement. Research

consistently shows that diverse leadership teams are more innovative and better equipped to solve complex problems, ultimately leading to improved organizational performance. Therefore, investing in gender equality is not merely a moral imperative but a strategic necessity for the construction industry to thrive in an increasingly competitive global market.

To achieve these goals, collaboration among stakeholders at all levels is paramount. Government bodies must play a proactive role in enforcing policies that promote gender equality, while industry regulators should establish standards that encourage equitable practices. Corporate leaders, too, must commit to fostering an inclusive workplace culture that values diversity and actively seeks to eliminate discrimination. By working together, these stakeholders can create a supportive ecosystem that empowers women and drives sustainable growth within the construction sector.

In conclusion, addressing the barriers to women's advancement in the South African construction industry is not only a matter of equity but also a pathway to unlocking the full potential of the workforce. By embracing diversity and fostering an inclusive environment, the industry can enhance its resilience, innovation, and overall success. The time for action is now; by prioritizing gender equality, we can pave the way for a more equitable and prosperous future for all.

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10. Appendices

Appendix 1: Data (Qualitative & Quantitative) Organization

This Google Sheet contains the qualitative and quantitative data records and organization.

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1I1sKCMAxzzSIZauNi7dmmIvsIMivCwJBMCF35h_8-Vg/edit?usp=sharing

Appendix 2: Glossary of Terms & Abbreviations

This glossary serves as a reference for key terms and abbreviations used in the research study on gender diversity and leadership barriers in the South African construction industry.

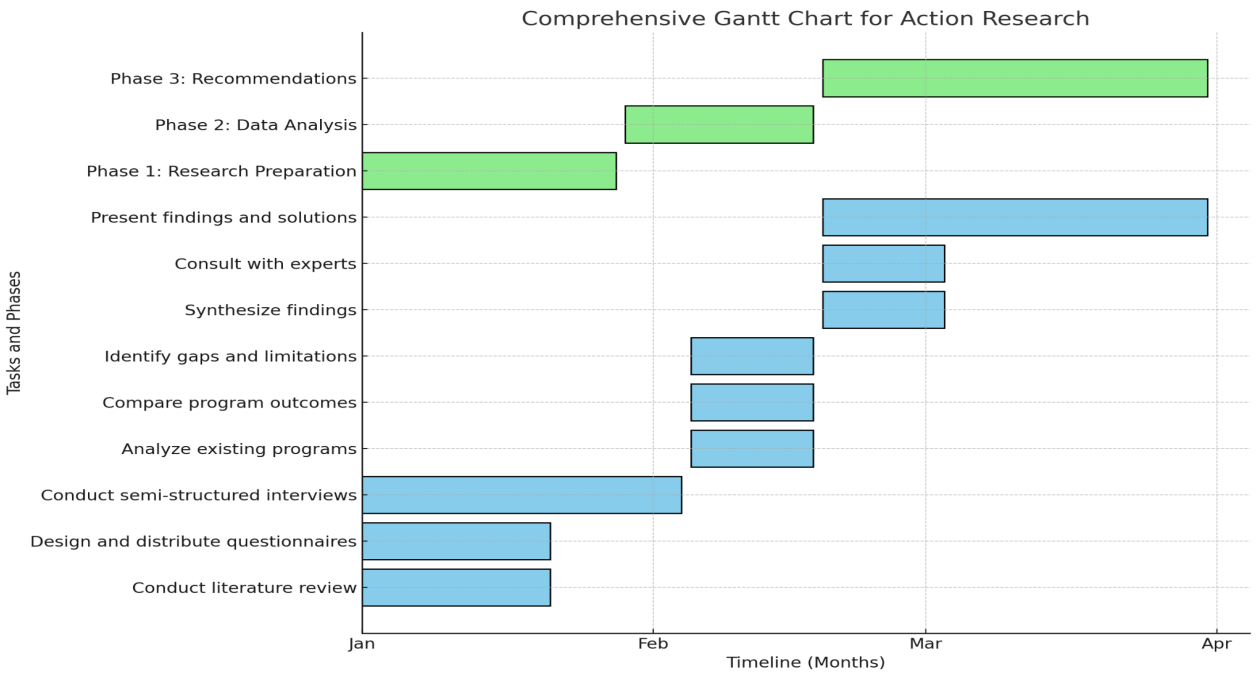
No	Glossary of terms	Definition
1	**Gender Diversity**	The equitable representation and inclusion of individuals of different genders within a workplace or industry.
2	**Workplace Culture**	The shared values, beliefs, and behaviors that shape the working environment of an organization.
3	**Mentorship Program**	A structured initiative where experienced professionals guide and support the career development of less experienced employees.
4	**Sponsorship**	The active support and advocacy of a senior leader on behalf of an employee, particularly in career advancement.
5	**Leadership Barriers**	Challenges or obstacles that prevent individuals, particularly women, from advancing to senior management positions.

No	Glossary of terms	Definition
6	**Systemic Bias**	Deeply ingrained institutional practices or policies that disadvantage certain groups based on gender, race, or other factors.
7	**Work-Life Balance**	The ability to manage professional responsibilities alongside personal and family commitments effectively.
8	**Gender Quotas**	Policy-driven mandates that require a specific percentage of leadership or workforce positions to be filled by women.
9	**Equitable Promotion Criteria**	Transparent and unbiased evaluation measures used to determine eligibility for career progression.
10	**Glass Ceiling**	An invisible barrier that prevents women and minorities from rising to higher levels of leadership within an organization.
Abbreviations		
11	**CEE**	Commission for Employment Equity
12	**CIDB**	Construction Industry Development Board
13	**EIU**	European International University
14	**HR**	Human Resources
15	**MBA**	Master of Business Administration
16	**RLB**	Rider Levett Bucknall

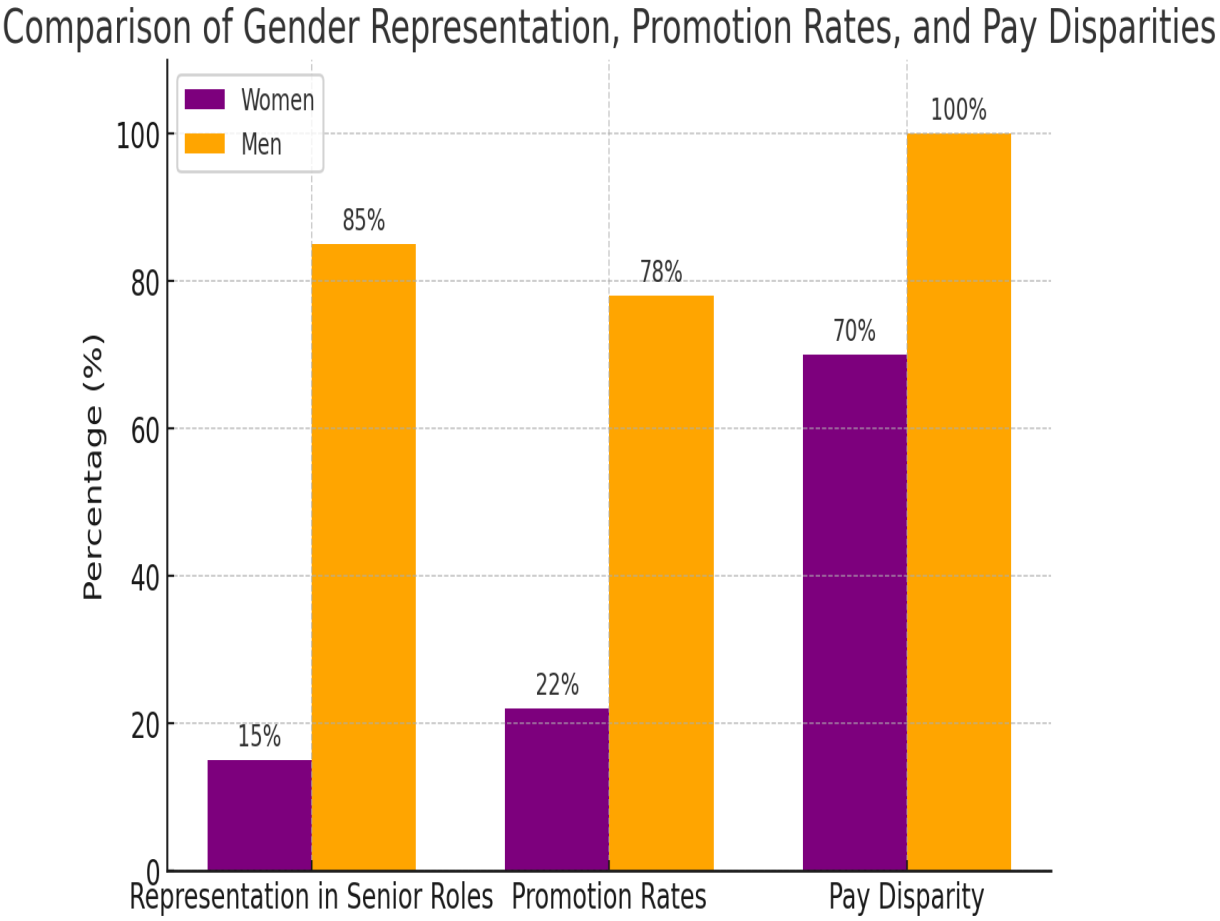
No	Glossary of terms	Definition
17	**SACPM**	South African Council for Project Management
18	**SPSS**	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (software for data analysis)
19	**STEM**	Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics
20	**GDP**	Gross Domestic Product

Appendix 3: Timeline breakdown, Gantt Chart

Recommendations & completing the Action Research/ Report. (Each bar represents a task, showing its start and end dates within the proposed timeline.



Appendix 4: Representation metrics, promotion rates, and pay disparities comparison



Appendix 5: Data Collection & Evaluation Procedure



Appendix 6: Literature Review Table

Author(s)	Year	Title	Key Findings
Al-Bsheish et al.	2023	Factors Impacting Women in Construction Leadership	Gender diversity policies improve leadership representation.
Gqozo, S.	2020	Structural Barriers in Construction	Organizational policies limit career progression for women.
McKinsey & Co.	2021	Diversity Wins: How Inclusion Matters	Companies with diverse leadership perform 25% better.
Shongwe, R.	2019	Barriers for Women CEOs in South Africa	Limited mentorship and sponsorship hinder career growth.
Bowen et al.	2011	Workplace Discrimination in Construction	Gender bias in promotions is prevalent.
Rider Levett Bucknall	2023	Women in Construction Report	Women represent only 10% of the construction workforce.

Appendix 7: Survey

Survey on Factors Affecting Women's Occupation of5 Senior Management Positions in Construction Projects in South Africa

Title: Comprehensive Survey on Gender Dynamics in Senior Management Roles in South African Construction

Introduction: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this survey. Your insights will contribute significantly to understanding the barriers and facilitators for women aiming for senior management positions in the construction industry. The survey is anonymous, and your responses will remain confidential. It consists of several sections, each targeting specific themes.

Section 1: Demographic Information

1. Age: _____
2. Gender:
    - ☐ Male
    - ☐ Female
    - ☐ Non-binary
    - ☐ Prefer not to say
3. Marital Status:
    - ☐ Single
    - ☐ Married
    - ☐ Cohabiting
    - ☐ Divorced
    - ☐ Widowed
4. Number of Children and Ages: _____
5. Highest Level of Education Completed:
    - ☐ High School
    - ☐ Technical College
    - ☐ Bachelor's Degree
    - ☐ Master's Degree
    - ☐ Doctorate
6. Fields of Study (Please specify): _____
7. Current Job Title: _____
8. Duration in Current Role: _____
9. Total Years of Professional Experience: _____
10. Previous Positions Held (Specify): _____

Section 2: Organizational Culture and Workplace Environment

11. Describe the size of your organization:

- ☐ Small (1-50 employees)
- ☐ Medium (51-250 employees)
- ☐ Large (251+ employees)

12. What is the prevalent culture regarding gender equality in your workplace?
    - ☐ Very supportive
    - ☐ Supportive
    - ☐ Neutral
    - ☐ Unsupportive
    - ☐ Very unsupportive
13. Have your organization's policies ever explicitly addressed gender equality?
    - ☐ Yes
    - ☐ No
    - ☐ If yes, please specify: _____
14. How would you rate the effectiveness of these policies in practice?
    - ☐ Very effective
    - ☐ Effective
    - ☐ Neutral
    - ☐ Ineffective
    - ☐ Very ineffective
15. How often do you discuss gender-related issues in team meetings?
    - ☐ Always
    - ☐ Often
    - ☐ Sometimes
    - ☐ Rarely
    - ☐ Never

Section 3: Personal Experiences with Gender Bias

16. Have you ever felt overlooked for a promotion compared to your male counterparts?
    - ☐ Yes
    - ☐ No
    - ☐ If yes, please elaborate: _____
17. Please share any experiences where you encountered direct bias regarding your gender:
    - ☐ ……
    …….
18. Rate the following statements based on your personal experience:
    - ☐ My contributions are valued as much as my male colleagues.
    - ☐ I feel sidelined in meetings compared to my male colleagues.
    - ☐ I believe there are equal opportunities for advancement regardless of gender.
19. How comfortable do you feel addressing gender bias issues in your workplace?
    - ☐ Very comfortable
    - ☐ Comfortable
    - ☐ Neutral
    - ☐ Uncomfortable
    - ☐ Very uncomfortable

Section 4: Mentorship and Support Systems

20. Is there a mentorship program in place specifically for women in your organization?
    - ☐ Yes
    - ☐ No
21. If yes, how effective is this mentorship program?
    - ☐ Very effective
    - ☐ Effective
    - ☐ Neutral

- ☐ Ineffective
- ☐ Very ineffective

22. Have you personally benefited from mentorship?
    - ☐ Yes
    - ☐ No
    - ☐ If yes, please describe how: _____
23. What support systems do you think are essential for women in senior management? (Select all that apply)
    - ☐ Mentorship programs
    - ☐ Networking opportunities
    - ☐ Leadership training workshops
    - ☐ Flexible work arrangements
    - ☐ Childcare support
    - ☐ Awareness campaigns

Section 5: Perspectives on Change

24. What changes do you believe need to be implemented in the construction sector to support women's advancement?
    - ☐ …….
25. Are there any successful initiatives or programs you know of that promote gender equality in management roles?
    - ☐ …….

Conclusion: We appreciate your time and effort in completing this survey. Your insights are invaluable in understanding the landscape of women's management roles in construction in South Africa.

Appendix 8: Questionnaire

Factors affecting the promotion of Women to senior management in construction project execution.

Direction: We would like to know your opinions and insights in what factors refrain women from occupying senior management positions in construction projects?

NB! Participation is NOT compulsory & Participant's identity remains confidential. Tick a box & write down answers

- Answers of a questionnaire in order to be recorded.

Section A: Demographic Questions

1. How old are you?



2. What is your highest level of education?

   ……

   ……

3. Gender



4. Are you South African?



5. What is your current position within the company?

   ……

   ……

6. Please state your salary range

   ……

   ……

7. How many years of experience do you have in relation to the construction industry?



8. What is your area of expertise in the construction industry?

……
……

Section B Organisational structure

1. What is your primary drive in your current positions within the organisations?

……
……
……
……

2. Elaborate on how you were appointed to your current position, was it through merits, favours etc.

……
……..
……
……..
……
……..

3. Are women involved in any decision making in the organisation? If they are involved, their role is to what extent? If not, why is that?

……
……..
……
……..
……
……...

……

……

Section C: Conclusion

1. How has it been, being one of the few females within the construction industry?

   ……

   ……..

   ……

   ……

2. Have you experienced radical growth since you have been in the construction industry as a man?





3. Does your organization offer the same rights and opportunities for men and women in your organization





4. Please fill in the space provided: Do you think the South African companies & the Government are doing enough to support female site engineers on construction sites?

   ……

   …….

   ……

   …….

   ……

   ……

5. Please fill in the space provided: Do you believe government policies and legislation are successful in curbing these challenges, if not, why not?

……

……..

……

……..

……

……

Section D: Legislation	5	4	3	2	1
1. Women are aware of different legislations and affirmative action policies put in place for them in South Africa					
2. Policies are taken seriously and implemented in your company					
3. Women believe that these policies have contributed positively or negatively for them in the workplace					
4.South African Government needs to create more initiatives to attract women into the construction industry					
5. Government is doing enough to promote the upliftment of women in the construction industry					
Section E: Opinions					
1.The construction industry is male dominated and should remain that way					
2.Women in the construction industry do not get the same respect as men					
3.Women can have successful careers in the construction industry					
4. Women are built to handle construction work					
5.Do men in the construction industry help and uplift women in the construction industry					

Section F: General					
1. South African companies & the government are doing enough to support female supervisors, CEO's or managers					
2.There is gender discrimination within the construction industry					
3.Increasing the number of women in senior positions in the construction industry can improve the industry's image					
4. Women prefer careers in other fields of work that are more feminine					
5.Women are capable of transforming and growing the construction industry					

Thank you for your participation