BROKEN RUNG ROLES IN THE FEMALE LEADERSHIP DEFICIT PHENOMENON IN INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT

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The underrepresentation of women in top management positions is marked by a decline in participation as the hierarchy rises. This study investigates the impact of the "broken rung" phenomenon—referring to unfair promotion systems as a key barrier to female career advancement—on the leadership deficit among women in Indonesia. Using a qualitative methodology and a phenomenological approach, data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews. The research analysis followed four stages of coding: open coding, axial coding, selective coding, and process coding. Findings reveal that gender stereotypes in certain industries and occupations contribute to the scarcity of female leaders. The shortage of female leaders initially stems from the limited presence of women in specific industries, influenced by these stereotypes. The "broken rung" is not the primary factor in Indonesia's female leadership deficit, as there were already few women in specific sectors before unfair company systems impacted them. The root cause is not an unfriendly promotion system, but rather the unequal distribution of female workers across industries. Feminine-dominated sectors see higher female representation, while masculine-dominated sectors do not. Unfortunately, a significant portion of jobs are perceived as masculine, leading to an overrepresentation of male-dominated industries.

Keywords: Broken rung; female leadership; gender equality; qualitative

1. INTRODUCTION

In 2022, Statistics Indonesia (Badan Pusat Statistik - BPS) reported that female labour force participation rate made up 53.41% of 100% female workforce, while male labour force participation constituted 83.87% of 100% male workforce (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2023). These data highlight the continued dominance of men in the labour market. However, the fact that women's participation in the workforce exceeds 50% marks a positive development that deserves recognition. Nonetheless, there remains a significant opportunity to achieve true gender equality. While the proportion of women in the workforce is growing, efforts must focus on improving the quality of women's leadership participation. This research centres on women's involvement in top management roles. Evidence increasingly suggests that the inclusion of women in senior and strategic positions benefits companies, particularly in times of crisis and uncertainty, as highlighted by a World Bank report (Salazar & Moline, 2023).

The underrepresentation of women in top management is evident as their representation declines with each ascending level of leadership. According to 2018 World Bank data, while women make up 47% of entry-level professional staff, their presence diminishes in middle and senior management roles. Only 20% of middle management positions are held by women, with a mere 5% advancing to executive-level (C-level) roles

(Huang et al., 2019). In 2023, data from Indonesia showed that only 4% of women serve as CEOs, and just 15% hold board of director positions in public companies listed on the Indonesian stock exchange. This is despite the higher overall work participation rate of women in Indonesia (Salazar & Moline, 2023). Thus, the declining representation of women in managerial roles as the workforce expands is a trend also observed in Indonesia.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) emphasise increasing women's participation in top global strategic positions. SDG goal 5, target 5.5, and indicator 5.5.2 state: "Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic, and public life." Beyond the gender equality mandate set by the SDGs, empirical evidence shows that increasing female representation in leadership brings societal benefits. Female leaders tend to prioritise inclusive growth, a broader stakeholder focus, stronger environmental, social, and governance (ESG) practices, climate-conscious corporate governance, and success in achieving global climate objectives (Salazar & Moline, 2023).

Desvaux et al. (2017) argue that closing the gender gap worldwide could boost global GDP by USD 12 trillion by 2025. In Indonesia, increasing women's participation in the productive sector could raise GDP by USD 135 billion (McKinsey & Company, 2018). Powell and Butterfield (2015) emphasise the significance of women in strategic positions, as their presence helps those at lower levels navigate career challenges more effectively. Moreno-Gómez et al. (2018) found that companies with women in senior management see a positive impact on return on equity and assets.

A considerable number of prominent organisations have implemented gender diversity initiatives, which have helped women advance into mid- and upper-level management roles. The World Bank has noted the positive impact of these initiatives in several countries, with case studies including Pandurata Alimentos in Brazil, Interloop in Pakistan, and CRDB Bank in Tanzania (Salazar & Moline, 2023). However, a significant gap remains in women's ability to reach the highest levels of their professions (Kuruppuarachchi & Surangi, 2019). The deficit in female leadership has been linked to flawed promotion systems, commonly referred to as the "broken rung." This system prevents women from progressing in their careers, allowing men to continue dominating top-level management and leadership roles in many organisations (Huang et al., 2019). This study investigates the role of the broken rung as a catalyst for the female leadership deficit in Indonesia and proposes solutions to help the country maximise the potential of having more women in strategic leadership positions within companies.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Female leadership

Leadership involves the use of influence by leaders to make decisions and set goals for an organisation (Boonla & Treputtharat, 2014). It is shaped by personal, organisational, and cultural factors (Howell & Costley, 2001, as cited in Boonla & Treputtharat, 2014; Kuruppuarachchi & Surangi, 2019). The interpretation of leadership varies depending on factors such as location, social background, work environment, industry, and gender (Wang et al., 2011; Dowling, 2017). Psychologists argue that genetically inherited traits differentiate gender roles in human society (Buss & Schmitt, 2011). According to Eagly's (1997) social role theory, boys and girls are subjected to different rewards and sanctions from infancy (Lathabhavan & Balasubramanian, 2017). This theory suggests that differences between men and women in leadership positions arise, and that women's biological ability to conceive may limit their economic contributions compared to men (Wood & Eagly, 2002; Kiaye & Singh, 2013). Gender is a cultural construct that helps individuals form and maintain relationships with others (Jayachandran, 2021).

Women are often categorised as exhibiting a transformational leadership style, which some authors label as the "feminine leadership style" (Carless, 1998). Ridgeway (2011) found that women are less likely to become leaders in mixed-gender groups, a finding consistent with earlier research by Eagly and Karau (1991). Additionally, women struggle to gain legitimacy in leadership roles (Ritter & Yoder, 2004) and are subjected to harsher evaluations when their effectiveness is questioned (Eagly et al., 1992).

The gender dimension of leadership explores the differences between men's and women's leadership styles, based on the assumption that such differences exist. Women's leadership abilities are often subject to negative stereotypes, which suggest that women are inherently less capable leaders than men (Saleem et al., 2017). These differences affect women's access to opportunities and influence their outcomes (Ridgeway, 2011), perpetuating inequality. Gender inequality is reflected in the unequal opportunities, access, and outcomes that women experience compared to men. It is essential to avoid subjective evaluations and instead rely on objective evidence. For example, Fetterolf and Eagly (2011) found that young women's expected salaries are often lower than those of men. Therefore, striving for gender equality in all areas of life remains crucial.

The key requirement for justice is the equal treatment of all individuals under comparable circumstances. Women in executive positions within companies have faced challenges in achieving gender parity. According to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), gender equality means that women and men have equal access to, and benefit from, goods, opportunities, resources, and rewards. It does not imply that women and men are the same but rather that gender should not limit access to opportunities or life choices. In Indonesia, a rigid division of roles between men and women persists, with gender norms shaping the distribution of family responsibilities. Men are typically seen as the primary wage-earners, while women are expected to manage the household. This traditional division of roles continues to be a significant barrier to achieving true gender equality. However, many women in Indonesia serve as the main breadwinners, assuming roles traditionally held by men, and some even work as migrant workers to support their families financially (Puspitawati, 2012). Therefore, gender equality remains an unfulfilled objective, as significant disparities in benefits, opportunities, resources, and rewards still exist between men and women.

2.2 Broken rung

The broken rung is identified as the primary barrier preventing women from accessing strategic positions within companies (Huang et al., 2019). The promotion system, often referred to as the "Corporate Ladder," creates obstacles that hinder women from advancing to higher roles. According to Huang et al. (2019), for every 100 men promoted or hired as managers, only 72 women receive the same opportunities. This disparity leaves more women stuck at entry-level positions, contributing to the deficit of female leaders, as they are unable to ascend to higher levels within a company. Consequently, leadership remains predominantly male.

The broken rung phenomenon traps many women in entry-level managerial positions, leading to a lower number of female managers. It is unsurprising that men hold 62% of leadership positions at this level, while women hold only 38% (Huang et al., 2019). Given the significant male dominance in leadership roles, promoting women to senior leadership positions remains a substantial challenge. Additionally, the number of women decreases with each successive leadership level.

Some argue that the "opt-out" phenomenon, where women leave their jobs to focus on family or other priorities, explains why fewer women reach top positions. However, the workforce retention rate for women is actually higher than for men (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005). According to Huang et al. (2019), less than 2% of female employees plan to leave the workforce for family commitments, while most transition to other jobs without exiting the workforce entirely. Therefore, the opt-out phenomenon is debated as a valid explanation for the lack of female leaders.

Another key issue contributing to the lack of female leaders is that many companies are unaware of the barriers preventing women from advancing beyond entry-level positions. This is reflected in the insufficient support provided by HR departments to female employees seeking career advancement (Huang et al., 2019; Kuruppuarachchi & Surangi, 2019; Lathabhavan & Balasubramanian, 2017; Saleem et al., 2017). The broken rung highlights problems in the promotion system, including companies' lack of awareness regarding the importance of female representation in early management roles and their complacency with the current number of women in such positions (Huang et al., 2019; Salazar & Moline, 2023).

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative methodology to explore specific topics and research objectives. The chosen approach follows the recommendations of Creswell and Creswell (2023) and utilises a phenomenological framework to uncover the meaning of individual life experiences related to a particular phenomenon. The researchers analysed social actions within this context to elucidate their significance. The study uses in-depth, semi-structured interviews, which allow for a flexible and open dialogue between interviewer and participant. Research participants were selected through purposive and snowball sampling techniques. Data saturation was reached after the 24th informant, with a total of 24 female leaders, either in managerial or human resource management positions across various industries (see Table 1), participating in the study. Informants were chosen based on specific criteria: (1) they are women; (2) they occupy at least a low-level managerial to C-level position; and (3) they have a minimum of two years' work experience. These criteria were selected to address the research focus on women's leadership from the perspective and personal experiences of female leaders.

Qualitative analysis in this study follows at least four stages to extract the essence of the data: open, axial, selective, and process coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). It is important to note that these stages are not rigid or linear but could be revisited throughout the process. Open coding involves identifying categories or dimensions relevant to the study's focus. The analysis is divided into three categories: "what is leadership,"

"women's leadership," and "broken Rung." The first two categories, "what is leadership" and "women's leadership," use template analysis based on previous research by Sidani et al. (2015), while the "broken rung" category was developed during the research process.

Axial coding involves identifying the conditions, actions/interactions, and interests associated with the identified categories and dimensions in the next phase (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The initial classification of "what is leadership" includes concepts such as leadership traits, behaviours, the portrayal of leaders with masculine or feminine characteristics, and the association between "being male" and "being a leader." The "women's leadership" category examines factors that facilitate or hinder women's leadership, as discussed in research on female leaders. The "broken rung" category relates to the company's context, including the number of female managers, promotion policies, and the company's approach to female leadership dynamics.

Selective coding involves identifying relationships between categories and subcategories by analysing sentences that indicate a connection. At this stage, patterns within the research subject are also identified. The final stage, process coding, describes the sequence of actions and interactions that develop over time and space across the three previous stages. This stage aims to find interrelated categories by searching for indicators or hints. New themes and categories will emerge from the interview findings at each stage and will be further explored in the discussion.

To ensure internal validity, the researchers used source and investigator triangulation, which involved utilising research from multiple academic journals and peer-reviewed studies. To enhance external validity, the researchers provided a "thick description"—a detailed explanation of the context and its relevance to the research questions. The reliability of the research was assessed through an inquiry audit, which examined the data and methods used in the study. Conformability refers to the extent to which the study's findings can be corroborated or validated by other researchers. The study includes relevant excerpts from interview transcripts on the topics explored.

Table 1: Informant profiles

I	Age	Informant Status	Position	Industry	Experience (years)
I1	38	Married, two kids	CEO	Technology	19
I2	30	Single	Dive Centre Manager	Tourism	6
I3	27	Married	Professional Health and Hygiene Coordinator	Mining	7
I4	36	Single	Branch Manager	Beauty	13
I5	30	Single	Executive Editor	Media	10
I6	24	Single	Founder & CEO	Mental Health	4
I7	30	Single	Program Coordinator	Social	5
I8	24	Single	CEO and Founder	Garment Technology	4
I9	29	Single	Operational Head	Basic Needs	10
I10	38	Married, one kid	General Manager	Digital Agency	17
I11	43	Married	VP of Strategic Planning & Corporate Management	Oil and Gas	20
I12	37	Single	Construction Director	Public Transportation	12
I13	51	Married	HR Lead	Food	25
I14	28	Single	Assistant Manager	Tourism	6
I15	29	Single	Head of Digital	Media	7
I16	45	Married, four kids	Executive Director	Social	22
I17	45	Divorce, two kids	Head of Human Capital Policy	Mining	20
I18	47	Single	Executive Director	Business Coalition	27
I19	41	Married	Director of Fundraising	Social	17
I20	26	Single	Business Development	Micro Finance	8
I21	29	Married	HR Manager	FMCG	6
I22	32	Married, one kid	HR Leader	Financial technology	10
I23	26	Single	HR Executive	Insurance	3
I24	30	Single	HR Business Partner	FMCG	7

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Female leadership

This study examines the phenomenon of female leadership and the deficit of female leaders, proposing strategies to address it. Informants in the interviews provided positive feedback regarding female leaders. It is not simply an assumption that women can be effective leaders; 14 out of 24 informants (58.33%) stated that women possess unique characteristics, such as qualities derived from motherhood, which contribute to their leadership abilities.

> In some ways, women are better than men because we have differences. We are better listeners, intuitive, persistent, and patient; therefore, sometimes, we can be better leaders in terms of inspiring others. Women can be good leaders because women have qualities that men may not have. (Informant 12)

> One of the advantages women have over men is multitasking, which we are trained for from childhood. For example, we have to manage both family and work, which runs parallel. (Informant 11)

This study explores various theories that categorise leadership qualities as either feminine or masculine (Williams & Best, 1990). Informants highlighted several feminine traits, such as listening, demonstrating empathy, protecting subordinates, and possessing a service-oriented mindset. They also mentioned masculine traits, such as taking responsibility, providing clear direction to subordinates, and managing time effectively.

However, informants more frequently emphasised neutral leadership qualities (distinct from feminine and masculine traits), including the ability to set examples for subordinates, develop other leaders, motivate others toward shared goals, and influence others. This gender-neutral perspective is reflected in their response to the question, 'Can a woman be a good leader?' According to informants, leadership effectiveness is not determined by gender.

> I do not see any difference. Leadership is not about gender. It is about character, knowledge, and competence. (Informant 1)

A total of 11 participants in this study identified women who had a significant personal influence on them as leaders. Of these, 6 mentioned their mother as a true leader, serving as a role model and imparting valuable lessons. Additionally, the informants were notably influenced by male figures as leaders and role models. Six participants mentioned men who had a personal impact on them as leaders, with 3 specifically citing their father as a true leader.

> My mother works and does the housework, and we do not have any domestic help. My mother told me that women should be able to work so that we have our income and are not underestimated. (Informant 4)

> ... by my father, because my mother is just a housewife, so I automatically see the leader as my father. I am also close to my father. Especially when it comes to work, we tend to share stories with those who also work. (Informant 9)

4.2 Cultural and societal barriers

While society has become more progressive in its views toward women leaders, some still believe that women should not hold leadership positions. This belief creates barriers for women aspiring to leadership roles. In certain contexts, women's roles as mothers or wives are viewed as obstacles to their leadership capabilities. In Indonesia, an "implicit quota" phenomenon has been identified, limiting the advancement of women to high managerial positions, with the number of female leaders constrained by these quotas. Educational qualifications alone do not appear to provide women with greater opportunities for managerial appointments (Innayah & Pratama, 2019). Female leaders are often judged unfairly if they do not clearly separate their personal and professional lives, especially when they hold dual roles as leaders and wives/mothers. Additionally, women in leadership positions may face harsher criticism than their male counterparts for underperformance. This leads to a "double bind," where women are expected to manage both their personal and professional lives successfully, a challenge that is particularly difficult to meet in the context of gender-specific expectations (Arquisola et al., 2020). It is important to recognise that women's roles in the workplace are multifaceted, with expectations that they fulfil dual responsibilities as both housekeepers and breadwinners.

People still think that men should lead, but if you are a woman who wants to be a leader, people will always ask: What is the argument? What have you done? So, we must show and prove that we are justified. People always think we, as women, are not enough; we must do more to be seen as equal to men. (Informant 9)

There is a double standard for women; women are assumed to be successful as leaders only if their household is also successful. (Informant 12)

4.3 Broken rung

The Women in the Workplace 2019 report by LeanIn.org and McKinsey & Company identified the "broken rung" as the primary obstacle preventing women from advancing to strategic positions within their organisations (Huang et al., 2019). The core issue lies in company promotion systems, which are not conducive to the career advancement of female employees, leading to fewer women in top positions. The lack of awareness about the importance of gender equality at all career levels further exemplifies the broken rung. Companies that fail to recognise the significance of gender equality often remain content with female representation at various levels, even if the numbers are unequal.

Addressing the broken rung requires companies to reconsider how they view gender equality, particularly in middle and senior management. If a company is unaware of gender equality issues, female leaders are often underrepresented due to male employees being prioritised in the promotion system. Consequently, the broken rung phenomenon persists, where female employees remain in lower positions—not due to incompetence, but due to unequal opportunities.

According to the informants' statements, many were satisfied with their companies' efforts to achieve gender equality. In middle management, 11 companies were led by women and 7 by men. In top management, 8 companies were led by women and 12 by men, with otherwise equal gender proportions at each level.

However, some informants recognised the importance of gender equality but noted that their companies had not achieved it due to the limited availability of female workers. This was often attributed to the perception that certain industries are male-dominated. Informants observed that the low availability of female workers at entry level, particularly in specific industries, contributed to this disparity. While more than half of the informants acknowledged the significance of gender equality at all career levels, only 4 out of 24 companies had achieved gender equality across all management levels. Those companies that had not yet achieved gender equality attributed this to industry stereotypes that divide sectors into "feminine" and "masculine" roles.

According to Adachi (2013), industries with a higher proportion of female employees tend to be those traditionally associated with femininity, such as beauty and mental health, while industries with a higher proportion of male employees are typically linked to masculinity, such as oil and gas, technology, and remote island tourism. Adachi (2013) argues that the proportion of female employees is strongly influenced by gender stereotypes related to work, supporting Gottfredson's (1981) findings that job descriptions often mirror the actual work environment. The gender of the worker is a key attribute shaping job descriptions. These results align with Glick et al.'s (1995) findings that the gender ratio plays a crucial role in determining gender dynamics in the workplace, and Kulik's (1999) report that job gender is influenced by perceptions of male and female distribution across roles. This indicates that occupational gender stereotypes are largely formed based on the perceived ratio of men to women in specific occupations.

At that time, there were not many women who could fill the position. Since the mining industry involves operations that are clearly more suited to men, it becomes increasingly male-dominated. (Informant 3)

I think there are still many men in this company. It goes back to the island culture (where the company operates), where men are the ones who work, and women stay at home. This makes the company male-dominated. This industry is also specific (tourism, diving), so it cannot be compared to banking. (Informant 2)

My job is in a male-dominated field. Not many women want to study geology or metallurgy. How many women study engineering? If only a few women are entering these fields, it reflects in the workforce. To increase the ratio, we need to start from an early stage, from the beginning. (Informant 17)

4.4 Gender-based job stereotype

The underrepresentation of women in senior positions is often attributed to the overall lack of women in the workforce, particularly in industries with strong male stereotypes. Debbie Chastity, Vice President and General Counsel of PT Chevron Pacific Indonesia, presented statistics showing that women make up only 11% of Chevron's 3,500 employees. Although the company has policies and facilities to promote gender equality,

true equality may not be fully achieved due to the disparity in the number of women at the entry level compared to men.

In top management positions, eight companies reported a leadership structure dominated by women. However, informants admitted that this dominance was due to the industries being female-dominated, resulting in a higher availability of female workers compared to men. This outcome was not solely due to gender equality policies. Therefore, the "broken rung" alone does not fully explain the female leadership deficit. Gender-stereotyped occupations contribute significantly to the issue, as many industries are identified as masculine, which limits the number of women entering these fields from the start (Anker et al., 2003). The promotion system struggles to develop female workers due to their low representation in such industries. Consequently, women are often reluctant to enter what they perceive as masculine or male-dominated fields, resulting in a scarcity of female workers in these industries.

> Mining is a male dominated world. Not many women want to study and then work in this field. (Informant 17)

> Because the mining industry has more operations that are clearly seen as jobs for men, women do not want to work in mining. (Informant 3)

Gender stereotypes not only limit the number of women in male-dominated industries but also restrict the number of men in female-dominated fields. The shortage of female leaders is often due to the lack of women in traditionally masculine industries. According to the International Labour Organisation's report titled 'Gender-based Occupational Segregation in the 1990s' (Anker et al., 2003), workplace gender stereotypes can lead to both direct and indirect discrimination against individuals who do not conform to these stereotypes. As a result, individuals often choose careers that align with traditional gender roles to avoid discrimination (Adachi, 2013). Moreover, a greater proportion of jobs are perceived as masculine rather than feminine, limiting the availability of female workers in traditionally male-dominated roles. In Indonesia, a 2020 survey of 129 jobs revealed that 46 were considered masculine, 26 feminine, and 57 neutral (Kinanti et al., 2021). Women may avoid applying for certain jobs due to expectations of discrimination or societal reinforcement of traditional gender roles. In education, women often limit themselves by avoiding subjects like engineering, which do not conform to gender norms (Hill et al., 2010). Meanwhile, direct discrimination tends to benefit men in areas such as recruitment, training, promotions, contract types, and pay. It is essential to recognise that gender discrimination can manifest in both direct and indirect forms (Powell & Butterfield, 2015).

> It is not that I intentionally structured the companies to have more women, but rather, the areas of the companies are related to mental health. Perhaps because of the stigma that mental health is seen as a more feminine field than others, it attracts people with a more feminine side, in this case, female workers. (Informant 6)

4.5 Self-discrimination

Some companies still maintain male-dominated middle management. It has been suggested that factors beyond gender discrimination contribute to the low participation of women in leadership positions (Powell, 2000; Nixdorff & Rosen, 2010; Kiaye & Singh, 2013; Edirisinghe & Udayangani, 2016). Societal perceptions of men and women also play a role in the lack of awareness regarding the importance of gender equality in leadership. The barriers women face in achieving promotions and breaking the glass ceiling are multifaceted. In some cases, self-discrimination occurs as women internalise societal discrimination and limit their own ambitions to avoid external judgment (Anker et al., 2003).

> If this ratio (more men than women leaders) is valid, it is still reasonable because it goes back to stigma. I am not saying that women are poorly educated, but in Indonesian society, as a man, you are expected to be more advanced than a woman, and women are not expected to be as advanced as men. (Informant 22)

> It is often the women who feel intimidated; some do not want to be promoted because, for example, they cannot balance family obligations. The limitation is personal, not systemic. (Informant 11)

An informant whose company has achieved gender parity at the middle management level described the company's ongoing challenges in achieving gender parity overall. She believed that company policies supportive of female workers might still be inadequate due to self-discrimination. This refers to women's mindsets that limit their growth due to low self-efficacy.

Almost every company has gender equality because it is now the standard. At the engineering level, we already have 47% women. The entry-level is already 50:50. The next challenge is retaining them, which involves grooming and developing them from the beginning so they can progress. The company can support that, but if they face issues with their family or themselves, where they have to prioritise certain aspects, it becomes something we cannot help with as much because it is their choice. (Informant 12)

According to Bola Adesola, CEO of Standard Chartered Bank Nigeria, it is often women's own thoughts that prevent them from achieving more in their careers. These thoughts may be shaped by the influence of "reality" or external factors that women encounter, but unfortunately, many women seem to "accept" the realities and assumptions present in their socio-cultural communities (Desvaux et al., 2017) Therefore, resetting women's mindsets is crucial to overcoming this phenomenon. Women must be confident that they possess the same capabilities and opportunities as men. This is evident from the informants who have reached top positions. They recognise that internal obstacles become challenges in their careers, but they maintain a strong belief that women have the same abilities and opportunities as men, provided they possess ambition and motivation.

There is a kind of stigma against women when they reach high positions: 'Is it really her?' Even though I have enough work experience, a solid educational background, and have gone through several stages to reach this position. When some people doubt my ability, it becomes a challenge to prove that we can do it too, instead of giving in to the stigma. (Informant 3)

4.6 Plausible solutions

These findings can guide individuals, professionals, organisations, and decision-makers in understanding the root causes of the female leadership deficit. Stereotypes in certain jobs and industries categorise roles as either feminine or masculine, leading to a disparity in the number of female and male employees, starting at the entry level. Thus, the issue extends beyond the "broken rung" to the unavailability of female employees in industries perceived as masculine. Moreover, social stigma discourages women from advancing their careers on par with men due to their perceived societal roles.

If a company is committed to gender equality, it must find ways to address stereotypes within the industry or workplace. Companies can promote gender equality by demonstrating their commitment in industries where gender stereotypes are prevalent. This can be achieved through empowerment programs for minority employees in the industry. For example, in male-dominated fields, empowerment programs for female employees could include training and development initiatives to ensure their skills and competencies are on par with male employees. Additionally, the promotion process should prioritise diversity to provide greater opportunities for women. Since women are vulnerable to both social and self-discrimination, companies can offer support through motivational training programs, support groups, and the creation of a supportive, fair corporate culture.

In male-dominated industries, beyond empowerment programmes, companies must ensure a supportive and safe environment for female employees. In addition to ensuring fairness and objectivity in evaluating employee performance, companies must recognise that a healthy, supportive environment is key to retaining female employees and preventing opt-out or turnover. Female employees often feel discriminated due to perceptions that they are unfit for leadership roles, making them more vulnerable to leaving the company. This contributes to the continued scarcity of female employees in these industries.

5. CONCLUSION

Despite their potential and advantages, women still face obstacles in reaching top positions. This is largely due to the limited number of female leaders in strategic and decision-making roles within organisations. As a result, women remain underrepresented, particularly in male-dominated industries, where their needs and voices are rarely heard. This situation is unlikely to change as long as there are few women in leadership roles. While the "broken rung" is often cited as one of the causes of the female leadership deficit, it is not a significant factor in industries characterised as female-dominated or feminine.

The broken rung is not a major contributor to the shortage of women in management because, before companies even implemented promotion systems that were unfriendly to women, there were already few women in certain industries. This lack of representation meant that companies in male-dominated sectors, such as mining, oil and gas, and technology, inevitably had few women in top management. From the entry level, the proportion of male workers far exceeds that of female workers in these masculine industries.

The most fundamental internal factor contributing to this issue is self-discrimination among women, which arises from the internalisation of social discrimination. Women who engage in self-discrimination limit

themselves in their actions and decision-making, particularly in industries perceived as masculine. Working in a male-dominated field already challenges societal norms, and aspiring to leadership roles only intensifies the perceived deviation from these norms. Consequently, female workers in male-dominated industries are often seen as overreaching by simply aiming for leadership, as their presence alone is considered a violation of existing gender stereotypes.

The solution to this problem lies in a complete shift in mindset, coupled with strong beliefs and motivation on the part of women. It matters little if a company has a sound promotion system but female employees themselves do not match the number of male employees available for promotion in a male-dominated industry. These findings indicate that the root cause of the female leadership deficit in Indonesia is not primarily the promotion system's lack of support for female employees. Instead, it is an external factor beyond a company's control—the availability of female workers in one industry (typically female-dominated or perceived as feminine) but not in another (male-dominated or perceived as masculine). Additionally, there is a societal stigma suggesting that women do not need to advance as far in their careers as men.

Suggestions for future research: Further research should aim to broaden the scope to encompass a more diverse range of industries. Expanding the research scope would allow for a deeper exploration of how female employees in male-dominated industries struggle to reach top positions. Is the broken rung phenomenon evident in these situations? Additionally, future research could focus specifically on female-dominated industries, which are influenced by job and industry stereotypes, to provide a more balanced, two-sided perspective.

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