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# Excelling on Campus, Lagging in the Workplace: A Feminist Social Reproduction Analysis of Gender Equality in Indonesia

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## Abstract

Despite significant advancements in women's higher education in Indonesia, where female enrolment now surpasses that of men, major gender disparities persist in the labor market. This paper investigates the enduring disjuncture of "Excelling on Campus, lagging in the Workplace," wherein higher educational attainment for women does not translate into equitable outcomes in labor force participation, remuneration, and career advancement. Employing a qualitative methodology through a systematic literature review, this study synthesizes and critically analyzes national data, institutional reports, and academic literature published between 2004 and 2025. The analysis is framed by Feminist Social Reproduction Theory, arguing that this disjuncture persists because conventional economic models ignore the sphere of social reproduction, the unpaid domestic and caregiving labor disproportionately shouldered by women. The findings demonstrate that the participation gap, wage disparities, and the "glass ceiling" are not separate issues but are interconnected manifestations of a system that structurally penalizes women for their socially-mandated reproductive roles. The study concludes that achieving substantive gender equality requires a policy shift beyond promoting education, pointing toward concrete policy directions that address these structural barriers, such as implementing equitable parental leave policies and formally recognizing the economic value of care work through state-subsidized childcare.

**Keywords:** Gender Equality, Educational Capital, Social Reproduction, Labor Market

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## Introduction

The pursuit of gender equality, as enshrined in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 5), represents a critical benchmark for national Development and social justice globally. In Indonesia, this agenda has been a central component of policy-making, with education widely regarded as the most potent instrument for female empowerment and socioeconomic mobility. Over the past few decades, Indonesia has made significant strides in dismantling barriers to female education, a policy orientation that has yielded remarkable and quantifiable success (Widiastuti, 2025). This progress is most evident in higher education, where a notable reversal of the historical gender gap has occurred.

This trend is consistently demonstrated in data from the Indonesian Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS) over the past two decades, culminating in finalized data for 2025, where the Gross Enrolment Rate (Angka Partisipasi Kasar, APK) for women in tertiary education has not only reached parity with but has substantively surpassed that of men. This phenomenon, in which women are more likely than their male counterparts to pursue higher education, signals a profound shift in social norms and in familial investment in female education. On the surface, this educational attainment represents a monumental victory, suggesting that Indonesia is well on its way to cultivating a highly skilled female workforce, poised to contribute equally to the nation's economy (Astuti, 2023).

However, a critical examination of the subsequent transition from academia to the professional sphere reveals a stark and troubling disjuncture. The educational advantages gained by women do not seamlessly translate into equitable outcomes in the labor market (Khan et al., 2025). Despite being better educated on average, Indonesian women continue to face significant structural and systemic disadvantages. This discrepancy is manifest across several key labor market indicators. Firstly, the female Labor Force Participation Rate hovers around 55-60%, starkly contrasting with the male TPAK of over 84%. This indicates that a substantial portion of educated women remain outside the formal workforce. Secondly, a persistent gender pay gap remains entrenched, with data indicating that women, on average, earn approximately 22% less than men, even within similar sectors and educational levels.

Thirdly, women remain significantly underrepresented in Leadership and managerial positions, confronting a "glass ceiling" that curtails their career progression. This observable disjuncture between high educational attainment and constrained employment outcomes problematizes the linear and often simplistic narrative that equates education with automatic empowerment and equality. It suggests that while the barriers to entering a university may have been lowered, formidable barriers to entering and advancing within the workplace remain firmly in place (Karpov & Karpova, 2022).

This discrepancy points towards the existence of complex, deeply embedded structural and socio-cultural factors that moderate the returns on educational investment for women. These factors may include, but are not limited to, prevailing gender ideologies, the disproportionate burden of unpaid domestic and care work (the "double burden"), occupational segregation, and discriminatory practices within corporate structures.

Therefore, this study aims to deconstruct the prevailing notion of gender equality in Indonesia by critically examining the gap

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between women's educational achievements and their subsequent labor-market outcomes. The primary research question guiding this paper is: Why, and through what mechanisms, do the significant advancements in women's educational attainment fail to translate into equitable participation, remuneration, and advancement in the Indonesian labor market?

To provide a structured answer to this overarching question, this study deconstructs the problem into several interconnected dimensions. Specifically, it first investigates why high educational attainment fails to translate into correspondingly high labor force participation. Second, it examines how the disproportionate burden of unpaid reproductive labor shapes wage disparities. Finally, it analyzes the specific mechanisms through which the "glass ceiling" is constructed and maintained, limiting women's career advancement in Indonesia.

To address these research questions, this study will first empirically establish the scale of the discrepancy. Utilizing national survey data from 2025, the analysis will quantify the gap between women's high educational attainment and their comparatively low labor force participation, remuneration, and career progression. Subsequently, the paper will delve into the underlying causes of this phenomenon, drawing upon established theoretical frameworks of gender and labor to interpret the data.

This involves examining how structural barriers within the labor market and persistent socio-cultural norms intersect to limit women's professional opportunities. By undertaking this nuanced, data-driven analysis, this study seeks to move the discourse beyond an education-centric view of empowerment (Rahim, 2025). It aims to provide critical insights for policymakers and academics, highlighting the urgent need for a more holistic policy framework that directly confronts and dismantles the barriers women face in the workplace, thereby contributing to a more substantive vision of gender equality in Indonesia.

## Theoretical Framework

### The Feminist Critique of Human Capital Theory: The Epistemological Critique

While Feminist Social Reproduction Theory (FSRT) provides the structural backdrop, the Feminist Critique of Human Capital Theory offers the specific epistemological critique needed to challenge dominant economic narratives.

Advanced by economists such as Gary Becker, mainstream Human Capital Theory posits a seemingly neutral, rational market. In this model, individuals are atomized actors ('homo economicus') who make rational choices to invest in their own "human capital" through education, training, and experience, expecting a corresponding return in the form of higher wages and career success (Rottenberg, 2022). From this perspective, disparities in outcomes are simply reflections of differential investments in capital or individual preferences.

The feminist critique, however, argues that this model is not merely incomplete but fundamentally flawed in its epistemology, its very way of seeing the world. It is socially and historically blind precisely because it ignores the entire sphere of social reproduction (Ainsworth & Pekarek, 2022).

This omission is not a minor oversight; it is the central analytical failure that renders the theory incapable of explaining the persistent gender disparities observed in Indonesia and globally. The critique reveals that the "rational actor" of economic theory

is implicitly male, an unencumbered individual whose ability to "invest" in his capital is predicated on a hidden support system of reproductive labor performed by others. This critique powerfully reframes concepts like "choice." For instance, where a human capital theorist might interpret a woman's "choosing" of part-time work as a rational preference for leisure, the feminist critique reveals it as a "constrained choice."

The so-called choice is a reaction to the immense, uncompensated demands of her "second shift" at home. This leads directly to the "flexibility penalty," in which employment that accommodates caregiving responsibilities is structurally underpaid and offers limited advancement opportunities. Moreover, career interruptions for childbirth and child-rearing, the "motherhood penalty," are viewed by the market not as a contribution to the reproduction of society but as a depreciation of human capital, further penalizing women financially upon their return to the workforce. Furthermore, the critique dissects the phenomenonof occupational segregation. It asserts that channeling women into "pink-collar" sectors (such as care, primary education, and administrative support) and their subsequent underpayment are not market responses to lower skill requirements. Instead, it is a direct consequence of systemic devaluation.

The skills required in these sectors, empathy, communication, nurturing, and emotional labor, are culturally coded as "natural" feminine attributes rather than as professional competencies acquired through effort and experience. Because these skills mirror the unpaid, devalued labor of the domestic sphere, the market refuses to compensate them adequately, regardless of the educational credentials of the women performing them (Best, 2021). Therefore,

the Feminist Critique of Human Capital Theory is essential for this study. It moves the analysis beyond a simplistic, education-centric model and refutes the notion of a neutral market.

Instead, it exposes the market as a primary site where the structural inequalities originating from the unequal division of reproductive labor are actively reproduced, codified in wages, and inscribed onto women's career trajectories.

## Feminist Social Reproduction Theory: The Structural Framework

Feminist Social Reproduction Theory (FSRT) serves as the primary and foundational structural explanatory framework for this study. It represents a critical epistemological rupture from classical Marxist analysis. While traditional Marxism brilliantly exposed the exploitation inherent in the 'productive' labor of the marketplace, the creation of surplus value through wage labor, it largely left unexamined a fundamental question: how is the laborer, the source of all value, produced and reproduced in the first place? FSRT confronts this silence head-on, asserting that the entire edifice of capitalist production is fundamentally dependent on the often invisible, unwaged, and socially devalued 'reproductive' labor that sustains human life itself.

This encompasses not only biological reproduction but also the daily and generational work of childcare, cooking, cleaning, healthcare, and emotional support, a burden that is disproportionately shouldered by women globally (Backer & Cairns, 2021). This theoretical tradition, built upon by generations of Marxist-feminist scholars, offers a powerful lens to understand systemic inequality by refusing to separate the "economic" from the "social."

Foundational thinkers provided distinct but complementary insights. Lise Vogel (1983), in her seminal work, meticulously analyzed the reproduction of "labor power." She argued that capitalism has a systemic, structural need for a constant supply of workers, both new ones (through generational reproduction) and existing ones replenished daily. For Vogel, the oppression of women is not an unfortunate byproduct of capitalism but a constitutive feature, as the system relies on the heterosexual family unit to carry out this essential reproductive work at minimal cost.

Building on this, Silvia (Federici, 2004) provides a crucial historical genealogy, arguing that the devaluation of reproductive labor was not a passive process but a violent one. Through her analysis of the witch hunts in early modern Europe, she contends that the rise of capitalism required a campaign of terror to enclose women's bodies and labor within the newly created private sphere of the home. This "primitive accumulation" was not just about enclosing common lands but also about expropriating women's knowledge and autonomy, transforming their life-sustaining activities into unwaged "housework," a precondition for the rise of the male wage-earner. More contemporary theorists, such as Tithi Bhattacharya (2017), have synthesized these strands into a cohesive framework for analyzing contemporary neoliberalism. Bhattacharya's crucial intervention is the conceptualization of a 'totality', an insistence that the spheres of production (the workplace) and social reproduction (the home, community, schools) are not separate but form a single, unified, albeit contradictory, whole.

From this perspective, social crises are often born from the contradictions between capital's drive for endless profit (which often involves cutting social spending on healthcare, education, etc.) and the non-negotiable needs of human life. The stark gap between women's high educational attainment and their low Labor Force Participation Rate (TPAK) in Indonesia ceases to be a "puzzle" of individual choices. It becomes the visible, predictable, and structurally determined outcome of this fundamental contradiction.

The Indonesian state, like many others, promotes education as a path to economic Development while simultaneously failing to provide adequate public infrastructure for social reproduction (e.g., affordable, high-quality public childcare; comprehensive elder care; or paid family leave). This withdrawal of state support forces the burden of reproductive labor back into the private household. Given the deeply entrenched patriarchal norms, this burden falls almost exclusively on women. (Lantano et al., 2025).

## The Ideal Worket Norm: The Organizational Mechanism

Finally, to bridge the gap between macro-structural forces and the tangible realities within workplaces, this study incorporates the critical concept of the "Ideal Worker Norm." While Feminist Social Reproduction Theory (FSRT) powerfully explains the societal-level schism between production and reproduction, the Ideal Worker Norm provides the precise organizational mechanism through which this schism occurs.

Famously articulated by feminist organizational sociologist Joan Acker, this concept posits that workplaces, despite their claims of meritocracy and neutrality, are implicitly and profoundly gendered. They are designed around an archetypal "ideal worker" who is defined by a singular, unwavering commitment to their job. This ideal worker is perpetually available, works

long hours, travels at a moment's notice, and follows a linear, uninterrupted career trajectory. Crucially, they are conceptualized as an abstract, disembodied producer, unencumbered by the messy realities of daily life, such as childcare, illness, or community obligations (Minnotte & Minnotte, 2021).

The insidious effectiveness of this norm lies in its veneer of gender neutrality. On the surface, the performance standards derived from it, such as rewarding "face time," long hours, and uninterrupted service, apply to everyone. However, this neutrality is a fiction. The ideal worker is implicitly male because the norm could only have been conceived in a society where a gendered division of labor already exists. It fundamentally assumes that every "ideal worker" is supported by a hidden, invisible infrastructure of social reproduction, typically a wife or female relative who manages the domestic sphere, allowing him to devote himself entirely to the workplace. In this sense, FSRT explains *why* this norm can exist (because it relies on the externalized subsidy of unpaid reproductive labor), and the Ideal Worker Norm explains *how* this reliance translates into concrete corporate policy and culture.

This norm functions as a powerful engine of exclusion, systematically constructing the "glass ceiling" through three primary mechanisms. First, it shapes performance evaluation and promotion criteria. When career advancement is tied to metrics of constant availability and unbroken years of service, it structurally disadvantages anyone who must accommodate caregiving demands. The "motherhood penalty" is therefore not merely a result of conscious bias against mothers; it is an almost automatic consequence of a system where taking maternity leave or needing a flexible schedule is interpreted as a lack of

commitment and a deviation from the ideal career path (Lee et al., 2022).

Second, it governs informal networks and social capital. Critical opportunities for mentorship, sponsorship, and advancement often arise from after-hours socializing, informal meetings, or networking events. These activities are organized around the unencumbered ideal worker's schedule, making them systematically less accessible to those, predominantly women, who have a "second shift" of domestic labor waiting for them at home. This creates a self-perpetuating cycle where existing (mostly male) Leadership cultivates new leaders in their own image.

Third, the norm perpetuates occupational gender segregation within firms. Roles perceived as more compatible with caregiving responsibilities (e.g., Human Resources, internal communications) become "mommy tracks." In contrast, high-stakes, client-facing roles that demand total flexibility are reserved for those who can perform the ideal worker role. This internal segregation limits women's access to the strategic core of the business, effectively capping their career potential.

Therefore, the Leadership ceiling observed in Indonesia is not merely a collection of individual biases or a failure of women to "lean in." It is the logical and architectural endpoint of a system designed for and by a type of worker that, for the vast majority of women, is a sociological impossibility. It is the concrete organizational manifestation of a society that glorifies productive labor while simultaneously devaluing and rendering invisible the reproductive labor that makes it all possible.

## Conceptual Synthesis for This Study

In synthesis, this study does not merely apply three disparate feminist theories; it

meticulously weaves them into a single, multi-layered, and cohesive analytical model designed to explain the stubborn persistence of gender inequality in the Indonesian labor market. This integrated framework allows the analysis to move seamlessly from the foundational architecture of the capitalist-patriarchal system down to the concrete, everyday mechanisms that reproduce inequality within the workplace. Each theoretical layer performs a distinct and indispensable function, building on the insights of the previous layer to create a holistic explanatory narrative. The deepest level, Feminist Social Reproduction Theory (FSRT), serves as the geological bedrock of the entire model. It exposes the fundamental, structural fault line upon which modern society is built: the artificial but functionally critical schism between the 'productive' sphere of the marketplace and the 'reproductive' sphere of the home and community.

FSRT provides the foundational, macro-level insight that the latter entirely subsidizes the former. It establishes *why* a problem exists in the first place, identifying the unequal, gendered division of reproductive labor not as a cultural leftover, but as a central and ongoing requirement for the functioning of the economic system. It lays bare the invisible subsidy that powers the visible economy. Building directly upon this structural foundation, the Feminist Critique of Human Capital Theory acts as the crucial meso-level, deconstructive lens. If FSRT explains the hidden structure, the Feminist Critique explains how that structure is ideologically mystified and economically codified within the market itself. It launches a targeted epistemological assault on the dominant meritocratic narrative, exposing the fiction that the market is a neutral arbiter of skill and investment.

This critique serves as the analytical bridge, demonstrating how the structural devaluation of reproductive work (identified by FSRT) is actively translated into the seemingly objective language of market economics: The gender pay gap becomes a "flexibility penalty," occupational segregation becomes a "natural" outcome of feminized skills. The motherhood penalty becomes a "depreciation" of capital. It reveals the market not as a neutral playing field, but as the primary arena where social inequalities are given an economic price tag. Finally, the Ideal Worker Norm provides the critical micro-level, organizational transmission belt.

It answers the question: how are these abstract market forces and structural devaluations made real in the day-to-day lives of working women? The norm institutionalizes the gendered schism within the firm itself. It translates the abstract devaluation of care into concrete and seemingly rational corporate policies, performance metrics, and cultural expectations—rewarding long hours, uninterrupted presence, and total devotion. This framework explains *how* the glass ceiling is constructed, brick by brick, through performance reviews, exclusion from informal networks, and biased promotion ladders that are disguised as meritocratic standards. It is the final, crucial link in the causal chain, showing how a woman's career trajectory is ultimately determined not just by her credentials, but by her structural inability to conform to an archetype she was never designed to be.

Together, these frameworks create a powerful analytical engine. They allow this study to transcend simplistic, single-cause explanations (e.g., "culture," "bias," or "choice") and instead offer a cohesive and compelling structural account. By moving fluidly from the macro (the societal division

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of labor), through the meso (market valuation), to the micro (organizational practice), this integrated model provides a robust and theoretically sophisticated explanation for the entire pattern of disadvantage from suppressed labor force participation to the persistent glass ceiling that defines the disjuncture between women's educational success and their professional outcomes in Indonesia.

## Method

This study employs a qualitative research method, specifically a systematic literature review, as its primary research design. This approach was deemed most appropriate for the study's objectives, which are not to generate new primary empirical data but to synthesize, critically analyze, and theoretically reinterpret the existing body of knowledge regarding the discrepancy between women's educational attainment and their labor market outcomes in Indonesia. By systematically mapping and evaluating existing research and data, this method enables a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. It identifies gaps in current explanations, which this study aims to fill through its theoretical framework.

The data collection process followed a structured, multi-stage protocol to ensure transparency and replicability. A systematic search was conducted across major academic databases (Google Scholar, JSTOR, Scopus) and the institutional repositories of key organizations (The World Bank, International Labour Organization [ILO], Asian Development Bank [ADB], and the Indonesian Central Bureau of Statistics [BPS]). Search terms were used in both English and Indonesian, including combinations of: *("gender equality" OR "women's empowerment") AND ("Indonesia") AND ("labor market" OR "workforce*

*participation" OR "pay gap") AND ("education" OR "human capital")*. The initial search yielded 478 potentially relevant documents. These were then subjected to a two-stage screening process.

First, titles and abstracts were reviewed for relevance, narrowing the corpus to 112 documents. Second, the full texts of these documents were assessed against explicit inclusion criteria, yielding a final corpus of 58 core documents. To be included, a document had to be published between January 2010 and December 2025; be written in either English or Indonesian; be a peer-reviewed academic journal article, official report from a major governmental or international organization, or a national statistical publication; and have a primary focus on the intersection of gender, education, and labor market outcomes in the Indonesian context. Opinion pieces, news articles, and unpublished dissertations were excluded.

The final corpus of 58 documents was subjected to a theory-driven thematic analysis. This process involved an iterative reading of all texts to identify and code recurring patterns, arguments, and empirical findings. Initial codes were then grouped into broader, salient themes, such as "narratives of educational success," "structural barriers to participation," "mechanisms of the pay gap," and "the glass ceiling phenomenon" (Abadi et al., 2022). Crucially, the analysis was guided by the study's theoretical framework. Rather than merely summarizing themes, the analysis critically assessed whether the explanations found in the literature sufficiently accounted for the structural impact of unpaid reproductive labor, thereby allowing the study to offer a deeper, theoretically grounded reinterpretation of the data.

Finally, it is essential to acknowledge the inherent limitations of this methodology. As

this study is a systematic literature review, its findings are entirely dependent on the quality, scope, and availability of existing secondary sources. The analysis is therefore constrained by the questions that have and have not been previously investigated by other researchers. Furthermore, this method cannot directly capture the nuanced, lived experiences or subjective perspectives of Indonesian women, as primary qualitative research (such as interviews or ethnography) could.

## Results and Discussion

### The Limits of Educational Capital: From Academic Success to Market Devaluation

The initial thematic finding from the reviewed literature is a consistent and celebratory narrative of women's academic achievement in Indonesia. Numerous reports from national bodies such as the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS) and government ministries prominently highlight the success of Indonesian women in attaining higher education, with their enrolment rates now significantly surpassing those of men.

This finding is almost universally framed within the national discourse as a primary victory for gender equality. This narrative implicitly aligns with the logic of Human Capital Theory (Rottenberg, 2022), which

assumes that the market will rationally reward educational investment. However, applying the Feminist Critique of Human Capital Theory to the specific socio-cultural context of Indonesia reveals the profound limitations of this success. The critique argues that the value of "human capital" is not intrinsic but is mediated by the social context in which it operates. In Indonesia, a university degree for a woman often carries a dual, and sometimes conflicting, social

meaning. While it is a symbol of modernity and personal achievement, it is also frequently viewed as a tool to secure a "good marriage" (*jodoh yang baik*) or to elevate family status, rather than a passport to a lifelong professional career.

This duality leads to the preemptive devaluation of female educational capital in the Indonesian labor market. A female graduate is rarely perceived simply as a holder of skills. Instead, she is often viewed through the powerful cultural archetype of the future *ibu rumah tangga* (housewife). Societal and familial pressure often dictates that her primary role will ultimately be in the domestic sphere, regardless of her academic qualifications. Indonesian employers, operating within this cultural framework, may therefore perceive a young, educated woman not as a long-term Leadership prospect but as a temporary or higher-risk investment whose career commitment is presumed secondary to her future family obligations (Chen et al., 2023). Therefore, the "academic success" so widely celebrated in Indonesia is reframed not as a solution, but as the foundation of the disjuncture. The accumulation of educational capital is systematically undermined because its perceived social function as a pathway to marriage and domestic status competes with, and often overrides, its professional function. This aligns with the work of theorists who argue that social reproduction is a primary organizing force in society (Zanoni, 2023).

Table 1

Devaluation of Female Educational Capital During Campus to Career Transition In Indonesia

| Indicator for University Graduates | Men | Women | Theoretical Implication |
|---|---|---|---|

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Input: Proportion of Graduates in the Young Adult Population (25-34)** | 14.0% | ~16.0% | Human Capital Input: Women enter the labor market with quantitatively higher educational capital. |
| **Output: Open Unemployment Rate (TPT)** | ~5.0% | ~7.0% | Market Devaluation: The market does not provide an equal reward, indicating that female educational capital is valued less upon entry |
| **Output: Primary Reason for Not Participating in the Labor Force** | Continuing Education | Managing the Household | Structural Barrier of Social Reproduction: The reproductive role actively pulls educational capital out of the productive sphere. |

Source: (Synthesized from BPS National Labour Force Surveys (Sakernas) and related reports. Figures represent averages over the 2004-2025 period for university graduates aged 25-34.)

Table 1 provides a stark, quantitative illustration that empirically substantiates this study's central theoretical argument: the systematic devaluation of female educational capital during the campus-to-career transition in Indonesia. The table is structured to map this process sequentially, moving from initial investment to market outcomes and, ultimately, to the structural forces that shape them.

The Table's first row establishes the foundational premise by confirming that women invest more in human capital. The higher proportion of female graduates in the young adult population represents, in the language of Human Capital Theory, a clear and quantitatively superior investment. This data point is critical because, within a supposedly neutral and meritocratic market, it should logically predict, at a minimum, equal, if not more favorable, labor market outcomes for women. It is the empirical anchor for the "Excelling on Campus" portion of this study's title.

However, the second row delivers a sharp and immediate disconfirmation of this neoclassical premise. The significantly higher Open Unemployment Rate (TPT) for this same highly educated demographic is the first observable instance of market failure. This is not a random statistical anomaly; it is powerful quantitative evidence supporting the Feminist Critique of Human Capital Theory. It demonstrates that educational credentials are not gender-neutral and that the market actively devalues women's capital at the very threshold of the professional world.

The market does not provide equal rewards for equal (or even superior) investment, confirming that other, non-meritocratic forces are at play. The third and final row provides the definitive structural explanation for this phenomenon, directly validating the core tenets of Feminist Social Reproduction Theory (FSRT). The gendered dichotomy in the primary reason for non-participation in the labor force is profoundly revealing. While men's non-participation is often linked to further investment in productive capital ("Continuing Education"), women's non-participation is overwhelmingly attributed to "Managing the Household." This data point illuminates a massive structural leakage of human capital. It shows precisely where the "lost" or devalued female educational capital is being channeled: it is actively reappropriated from

the formal, productive economy and redirected into the unwaged, invisible sphere of social reproduction.

Therefore, when viewed as a cohesive whole, Table 1 does not merely present a discrepancy; it empirically maps the dual-front assault on women's educational achievements. The market first devalues their capital upon entry and then actively reappropriates it *for* the domestic sphere. The Table offers a concise, data-driven validation of this study's core theoretical framework, demonstrating how the limits on women's careers are imposed by the interlocking mechanisms of a market that penalizes them and a social structure that claims their labor for uncompensated work.

## The Manifestations of Social Reproduction: A Structural Analysis of Participation and Wage Gaps

Having established the initial devaluation of educational capital at the point of market entry, the analysis now turns to the outcomes for women within the labor force. The literature consistently documents two critical disparities: a significant gap in labor force participation and a persistent gender wage gap. While many studies describe these phenomena, they often attribute them to surface-level factors like "cultural preference" or "individual choice." The theoretical framework of this study, however, allows for a deeper, structural diagnosis. It posits that these are not separate issues but are, in fact, interconnected manifestations of the unequal organization of social reproduction.

The gap in the Labor Force Participation Rate (TPAK) is the most direct manifestation of the "double burden." The reviewed literature confirms a vast chasm between male and female participation rates in Indonesia. FSRT interprets this not as a mass "opting out" by choice, but as a systemic

consequence of a society that assigns the immense, unpaid labor of childcare, elder care, and household management almost exclusively to women. The energy and time consumed by these reproductive duties structurally inhibit her ability to participate in the formal, productive economy on the same terms as her male counterparts. Therefore, what is often described in the literature as a choice related to "family responsibilities" is reframed here as a constrained reaction to a system that provides no support for, and fails to value,

The essential reproductive work that subsidizes the entire economy. For the women who do remain in the workforce, the logic of social reproduction continues to shape their economic reality, creating the persistent gender wage gap (González et al., 2022). Our theoretical lens explains this through two primary mechanisms. First is the "flexibility penalty." The need to juggle caregiving responsibilities often compels women to seek part-time work, informal sector employment, or jobs with flexible hours, all of which are systematically underpaid.

The wage gap is therefore not simply a matter of unequal pay for equal work, but a structural penalty that women pay for their socially assigned role as primary caregivers. Second, the analysis points to occupational segregation and devaluation. The literature shows that women are disproportionately channeled into "pink-collar" sectors such as administration, education, and healthcare. FSRT argues that these sectors are under-remunerated not because they require less skill, but *precisely because* the labor involved (nurturing, communication, care) is an extension of the feminized work of the domestic sphere (Masso et al., 2022).

The market systematically devalues this labor because it mirrors the unpaid work of

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social reproduction. In conclusion, this analysis demonstrates that both the participation gap and the wage gap are not mere statistical anomalies or the results of individual choices. They are the logical and predictable outcomes, the direct manifestations of a system where the immense structural cost of social reproduction is placed almost entirely on

women, thereby limiting their participation and devaluing their labor in the productive economy.

Table 2

The Structural Manifestations of Social Reproduction in the Indonesian Labor Market

| Indicator for University Graduates | Men | Women | Theoretical Implication |
|---|---|---|---|
| Labor Force Participation Rate (TPAK) | ~84.0% | ~56.0% | The 'Double Burden': A vast participation gap directly reflecting the structural barrier of unpaid reproductive labor. |
| Primary Reason for Non-Participation | Continuing Education | Managing the Household (~67%) | Market Devaluation: The market does not provide an equal reward, indicating that female educational capital is valued less upon entry. |
| Average Monthly Wage/Earnings | ~IDR 3.4 Million | ~IDR 2.6 Million (a ~24% gap) | The 'Flexibility Penalty' & Devaluation: A clear monetary penalty, reflecting the market's |
| | | | devaluation of female labor. |
| Dominant Employment Sectors (by gender) | Industry, Construction, Transportation | Trade, Services (Hospitality), Administration | Occupational Segregation: Women are channeled into 'pink-collar' sectors, which are systematically under-remunerated and often extensions of reproductive labor. |

Source: (Synthesized from BPS National Labour Force Surveys (Sakernas) and related reports. Figures represent averages over the 2004-2025 period for university graduates aged 25-34).

Table 2 provides a comprehensive empirical dissection of the structural manifestations of Feminist Social Reproduction Theory within the Indonesian labor market. The indicators, read sequentially, do not merely present disparate facts; they collectively map the mutually reinforcing architecture of disadvantage that women face. This architecture operates as a dual-front system: a formidable barrier to entry, followed by systemic penalties for those who manage to breach it.

The first two indicators jointly illustrate the 'double burden's primary function as a barrier to entry. The vast participation gap, a persistent issue whose determinants continue to be a focus of empirical research in Indonesia (Aini & Arif, 2024), is not an unexplainable anomaly; the subsequent data point directly explains it: "Managing the Household" is the overwhelming reason for female non-participation. This powerful juxtaposition unmasks the lie of "free choice" and provides undeniable empirical validation for FSRT's core tenet. It demonstrates a massive,

gendered reappropriation of human capital: women's educational investment, rather than being deployed in the productive economy, is actively pulled back into the unwaged domestic sphere to subsidize the very system that excludes them.

For women who enter the workforce, the following indicators quantify the systemic penalties they face *in* the market. The significant gender wage gap provides a clear monetary measure of the "flexibility penalty," a finding consistent with recent empirical studies in Indonesia, which attribute the majority of the wage gap to systemic discrimination rather than differences in human capital (Nasution et al., 2022). This is not simply about being paid less for the same work; it is about the market systematically devaluing female labor by pricing in the perceived "risk" and "unreliability" associated with their socially-mandated reproductive roles. This financial devaluation is then structurally reinforced and legitimized through the pervasive occupational segregation detailed in the final row.

The channelling of women into "pink-collar" sectors (trade, services, administration) is not a random distribution based on skill. It is an act of ideological ghettoization. Social reproduction theory argues that these sectors are systematically under-remunerated *precisely because* the skills they require, nurturing, communication, emotional labor, and organization, are culturally framed as natural extensions of unpaid domestic work. The market, therefore, refuses to properly value competencies that it simultaneously assumes women possess for free.

In synthesis, Table 2 maps a comprehensive and vicious cycle of structural discrimination. The demands of social reproduction first act as a mass filter, limiting women's very entry into the workforce. The market then systematically penalizes and segregates those who do manage to enter, reinforcing their secondary status. Therefore, these are not a series of separate problems; they are the interconnected components of a single, coherent system.

## The "Ideal Worker" and the Exclusion from Leadership

The final and most resilient manifestation of the gender equality disjuncture in Indonesia is the severe underrepresentation of women in Leadership and managerial positions. While the literature documents this phenomenon as the "glass ceiling," it often lacks a deep structural explanation, sometimes attributing it to a "leaky pipeline" or women's "lack of ambition" for top roles. The theoretical lens of the "ideal worker norm," as articulated by organizational sociologist Acker (1990), provides the most potent explanation for this phenomenon.

This concept allows us to see the glass ceiling not as a mysterious or passive barrier, but as one actively constructed and maintained by the very design of our professional institutions. Acker's central argument is that organizations are implicitly structured around an archetype of a worker who is, by default, male and completely unencumbered by domestic responsibilities, precisely because he is assumed to have a support system (traditionally, a wife) managing the entire sphere of social reproduction. This "ideal worker" can demonstrate unwavering commitment, work long and unpredictable hours, travel at a moment's notice, and engage in informal after-hours networking crucial for career advancement. The entire Leadership pathway is designed to reward the performance of this specific, masculine archetype (Lott & Abendroth, 2020).

Table 3

Social Reproduction and the Construction of the Glass Ceiling in Indonesia

| Indicator | Men | Women | Theoretical Implication |
|---|---|---|---|
| Average Weekly Work Hours (Formal Sector) | ~45-48 hours | ~40-42 hours | Conformity to the "Ideal Worker" Norm: Men are better able to conform to the norm that demands long, dedicated work hours. |
| Impact of Parenthood on Labor Force Participation (LFPR) | Stays High (~95%) | Drops Sharply (~50-55%) | The "Motherhood Penalty": The reproductive role directly and significantly penalizes the linear career path for women. |
| Daily Time Allocation to Unpaid Domestic Labor | ~1.5 hours | ~5 hours | The Source of Inequality: The unequal burden of reproductive labor is the primary reason women cannot compete on the same terms. |
| Representation in Managerial & Leadership Positions | ~70% | ~30% | The "Glass Ceiling": The inability to conform to the ideal worker norm systematically excludes women from top positions. |

Source: (Synthesized from BPS National Labour Force Surveys (Sakernas) and related reports. Figures represent averages over the 2004-2025 period for university graduates aged 25-34.)

Table 3 empirically illustrates the specific mechanisms through which the "glass ceiling" is constructed and maintained in Indonesia. It juxtaposes the masculine "Ideal Worker Norm" with the gendered realities of social reproduction, demonstrating a clear structural pathway to exclusion. The Table's data reveals a self-reinforcing cycle. First, it establishes the performance standard: long work hours, a key metric of the Ideal Worker Norm. Men are demonstrably more capable of meeting this standard. The structural reason for this is quantified in the third row: women perform a vastly disproportionate amount of unpaid domestic labor, fundamentally limiting the time and energy they can devote to the productive sphere.

The most severe consequence of this time disparity is the "motherhood penalty," as shown in the second row. While fatherhood has a negligible impact on men's labor force participation, motherhood triggers a drastic career interruption for women, breaking the linear, uninterrupted trajectory required for Leadership. The final row is the logical conclusion of these preceding factors. Because women are burdened with a "second shift" and penalized for motherhood, they are systematically unable to conform to the ideal worker archetype,

resulting in their significant underrepresentation in managerial positions. This general finding is stark.

corroborated by recent corporate-level data; a 2023 census of Indonesia's top 200 companies found that women hold only a fraction of executive Leadership team roles, validating the persistence of a hard glass ceiling at the highest echelons of business (Indonesia Business Coalition for Women Empowerment [IBCWE], 2023). The glass ceiling is, therefore, not a mysterious barrier but the predictable outcome of a system designed for a worker unencumbered by reproductive labor (Taparia & Lenka, 2022).

These mechanisms are particularly potent and deeply entrenched within Indonesia's specific socioeconomic context. Pervasive cultural norms, often reinforcing traditional interpretations of women's domestic roles, place immense social pressure on women to prioritize household and family duties above their own careers. A structural deficit in public care infrastructure compounds this cultural expectation. The limited availability of affordable, high-quality public childcare and elder care facilities means that the burden of social reproduction falls almost entirely on individual families, and by extension, on women. Faced with the rigidity of the formal sector's "ideal worker" demands and a lack of state support, many highly educated women are forced into a precarious trade-off, often being pushed towards the informal sector, which may offer flexibility but lacks the security, benefits, and advancement opportunities of formal employment.

## Conclusion

This study set out to deconstruct the central disjuncture in Indonesia's gender equality narrative: why women's undeniable success in higher education does not translate into commensurate success in the workplace. Analyzing the existing literature through the critical lens of Feminist Social Reproduction Theory, this paper has argued that this discrepancy is not an anomaly but a predictable outcome of a system that fails to recognize, value, and equitably distribute unpaid reproductive labor. The analysis has demonstrated that the devaluation of female educational capital upon market entry, the structural penalties of the "double burden," and the construction of the "glass ceiling" via the "ideal worker norm" are not separate issues but interconnected manifestations of a single underlying structural cause.

The primary contribution of this research lies in its shift from descriptive accounts to a cohesive structural diagnosis. By arguing that these are symptoms of the same fundamental issue, this reframing is critical as it demonstrates that policies focused solely on promoting female education, while important, are inherently insufficient for achieving substantive equality. Based on this structural diagnosis, a multi-pronged and transformative policy agenda is required. To move beyond symbolic gestures, policymakers in Indonesia should consider the following concrete policy directions: First, a massive expansion of accessible, affordable, and high-quality public childcare services is non-negotiable. This would begin to socialize the costs of reproductive labor, directly alleviating the "double burden" on women and freeing up their time and capacity to participate

more fully in the formal economy. Second, it is critical to institute legally mandated, gender-equal parental leave policies. By providing substantial, non-transferable leave for fathers, such policies would challenge the deep-seated cultural assumption that childcare is solely a woman's responsibility and encourage a

more equitable distribution of care work from the very onset of parenthood.

Third, the government must commit to formally recognizing and measuring unpaid care work in national labor statistics, for instance, by institutionalizing regular, comprehensive Time Use Surveys. Making this hidden subsidy visible in economic terms is a crucial first step toward properly valuing it. Finally, there needs to be a fundamental reform of rigid workplace norms away from the "ideal worker" model.

This study, of course, has limitations inherent in its methodological design. It cannot capture the nuanced, subjective experiences of Indonesian women. Therefore, future qualitative research is crucial to explore how women negotiate and resist these demands in their daily lives. Furthermore, longitudinal studies tracking career trajectories are needed to precisely quantify the "motherhood penalty" in the Indonesian context. Ultimately, this study demonstrates that "excelling on campus" will only cease to lead to "lagging in the workplace" when the state and the market begin dismantling the structural barriers rooted in social reproduction. Achieving true gender equality requires not just more educated women, but a fundamentally reformed policy and labor market landscape that confronts the unequal distribution of life's most essential work.

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