

Women's motivation at work in Asian countries: a configuration analysis

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this study is to present empirical research on women's motivation, specifically examining the perspectives of married and unmarried women in Asian countries. The study presents empirical findings on women's motivation by building on Pinder's (2014) motivational model. This model suggests that motivation stems from both internal (psychological) and external (environmental) influences. We refine and expand this model within a culturally specific Asian context.

Design/methodology/approach – We collected the primary data from 110 female employees working for UAE/Asian firms. The study examined data using qualitative comparative analysis (QCA), a configurational analysis approach that is an effective research tool for analysing complex causal linkages.

Findings – Our necessity analysis revealed that career aspirations (CA) ranked highest at 0.787, followed by work–life balance (WLB) at 0.747 and family and social influences (FSI) at 0.739. None of these met the cutoff score of 0.8 needed for inclusion as necessary conditions (Fiss, 2011; Ragin, 2008; Schneider and Wagemann, 2012). However, our sufficiency analysis found that women can feel motivated even without official support at work, especially by factors such as fairness, a balanced life and encouragement from their networks.

Research limitations/implications – The study's limitations include the small sample size of 110 female managers from various Asian backgrounds in the UAE and other Asian countries, which may not be representative of the broader population across different regions or sectors. Additionally, the use of the qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) method can restrict the types of insights gained. Future studies should contain longitudinal analyses and larger samples to validate and build on these findings.

Practical implications – The findings are important to human resource (HR) professionals and policymakers in Asian organisations, especially in the healthcare, finance and technology sectors. HR policies should promote fairness, improve work–life balance and create supportive social environments. Such policies can help female employees feel more motivated at the workplace. Balancing aspiration and work–life creates a strong motivational force.

Social implications – The study provides valuable information for HR professionals to understand what motivates women in the workplace. Listening to the voices of married and unmarried women is crucial for developing strategies that support career growth and well-being, ultimately promoting gender equality.

Originality/value – Our findings provide a novel theoretical contribution by refining and expanding Pinder's (2014) work motivation model using a culturally relevant QCA approach. Pinder's (2014) motivational model is multidimensional, and we demonstrate that motivation for Asian women is driven by different combinations of social, organisational, and personal factors, which is different from traditional linear models. We found that motivation can still exist without formal support, especially when combined with fairness, strong family and social influences and work–life balance. This suggests that support from informal relationships can also drive motivation, which challenges the idea that structural support is always necessary for motivation. Our study adds to the existing literature on gender studies, enhances understanding of the Asian context, and proposes potential directions for future research.

Keywords Asian studies, Women, Workplace, Motivation, Human resource strategies, Career development

Paper type Research article

Introduction

This research examines the factors that impact and encourage women to work. Previous studies suggest that recognised leadership styles (Morkevičiūtė and Endriulaitienė, 2020) and organisational fairness (Chowwen and Ivensor, 2009) might impact job motivation, especially among women in the workplace. Deci and Ryan (2012) indicated that a woman's work motivation is influenced by her environment, motives, psychological fulfilment, and goal



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setting. [Pinder \(2014\)](#) defined professional motivation as the direction, strength, and energy people devote to achieving work-related goals.

Key workers, who are required to provide critical services, account for 52% of the worldwide workforce, with women accounting for 38%. Healthcare employs 20% of essential workers in high-income countries. Women account for two-thirds of major healthcare occupations and more than half of key retail jobs ([ILO, 2023a, b](#)). As the world has progressed, women's access to education and employment opportunities have increased dramatically, leading to higher global incomes. However, a significant gender inequality exists, particularly in leadership roles, as seen by the low proportion of female CEOs in Fortune 500 businesses [Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), 2022]. This raises important issues concerning the intricate interaction of personal and external factors that influence women's professional motivations. Women's professional success is critical to the nation's economic productivity and prosperity. Additionally, it has a substantial impact on the mental health of women and their families.

Women's educational and professional achievements are critical to a country's economic output and development. Extensive research has been conducted to determine the reasons behind women's under-representation in managerial roles ([Hoyt, 2010](#); [Lyness and Thompson, 2000](#)). The existing study database is lacking in elements that inspire women to work outside the home. This could include entrepreneurship, corporate management, running her own business, or serving as CEO of a multinational corporation. Motivating factors may differ among married, divorced, and single women. They may differ among married women with and without children ([Patrick et al., 2016](#)). This study inspects the various motivational elements that drive women to work, with an emphasis on gender equity, familial and social influences, work-life balance, career goals, and supportive policies.

Although numerous studies, including [Denmark et al. \(1996\)](#), [Burke et al. \(2006\)](#), [Deci and Ryan \(2012\)](#), [Sabharwal \(2015\)](#), [Pinder \(2014\)](#), [Al-Ahmadi \(2011\)](#), and [Hodges \(2017\)](#), have identified the factors that motivate women to work outside the home, few have used Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA), a configurational approach, to determine the antecedents of female motivation in the workplace. While studies such as [Ali et al. \(2024\)](#) and [Zhang et al. \(2022\)](#) highlight the importance of cultural context in understanding women's work motivation in Asia, they do not use QCA. Our research uses QCA to bridge the gap, particularly across Asian countries. The goal is to clarify the perspectives of women whose experiences have received insufficient attention; thus, we promote a more in-depth discussion. This study examines whether earlier motivators for women persevere in the face of major cultural and technological changes. Our sample comprises women from diverse countries, including Asians, Arabs, Africans, Americans, Europeans, and Australians. Our work contributes to the broader discussion of gender equality and women's empowerment in Asia and beyond. Furthermore, this study makes a theoretical contribution by extending [Pinder's \(2014\)](#) work motivation framework through a culturally embedded lens, utilising QCA to uncover how combinations of personal and societal factors inspire women across diverse Asian contexts—a method that has not been widely used in previous research.

Literature review: Asian context

Issues affecting working women have gained significant attention globally, especially in Asia ([Cooke et al., 2020](#); [Malik et al., 2022](#); [Ojha and Venkateswaran, 2023](#)). However, much of the previous research tends to look at women's work motivation in isolation, focusing on specific national contexts without offering comparative insights across sub-regions. This is problematic since the institutional, policy, and cultural settings in South Asia, the Gulf, and East Asia distinctly differ, resulting in contradicting information concerning what encourages women to work.

For example, recent studies in East and Southeast Asia stress intersectionality and the compounding effects of gender, ethnicity, and class on women's motivation ([Forbes et al.,](#)

2023; Jiang *et al.*, 2024). In contrast, research from South Asia (e.g. Adikaram and Razik, 2023; Rehman and Roomi, 2012) tends to frame women's motivation in terms of necessity-driven entrepreneurship and family obligations. In the Gulf region, studies (e.g. Shaya and Abu Khait, 2017; Abaker *et al.*, 2023) often highlight the role of state support, Islamic values, and evolving socio-cultural expectations. These divergent narratives raise unresolved questions: Is women's motivation primarily constrained by structural inequities, or is it shaped more by family and cultural obligations? Do state-led initiatives offset patriarchal norms, or do they coexist with them in contradictory ways?

In countries like Sri Lanka and Pakistan, women entrepreneurs are driven by both push factors (economic necessity) and pull factors (personal aspirations). They often navigate informal sectors, buoyed by strong familial support (Adikaram and Razik, 2023; Rehman and Roomi, 2012). Conversely, research from East Asia reveals challenges in balancing work identity with subjective well-being, shaped by demanding environments and rigid hierarchies (Jiang *et al.*, 2024). In the Gulf, where governments actively promote women's employment, formal policies and shifting societal norms are gradually redefining gender roles, though informal cultural expectations continue to exert influence (Abaker *et al.*, 2023).

Despite the breadth of this literature, few studies integrate findings from various regions to draw broader theoretical conclusions. Our study aims to fill this gap by using Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) to explore how different combinations of cultural, organisational, and human factors operate in these varying contexts. This approach allows us to identify cross-regional patterns, such as the importance of work-life balance, while also acknowledging regional differences, like the specific impact of religion or the level of institutional support. Ultimately, our configurational insights aim to highlight both synthesis and differentiation within the Asian context.

This review sheds light on the similarities and differences in the motivational experiences of women across Asian sub-regions. It stresses the importance of refraining from oversimplifying "Asia" and advocates for a comparative and intersectional perspective that considers the diverse socio-cultural and policy landscapes influencing women's work motivation. This theoretical shift enriches our understanding of gender dynamics and motivation across various contexts and lays a strong foundation for our empirical research. The subsequent sections of the literature review will delve deeper into these specific studies.

In the following sections, we review previous studies on women's entrepreneurship. For instance, Adikaram and Razik (2023) examined Sri Lankan women through qualitative research and in-depth semi-structured interviews, highlighting that the push-and-pull dynamic significantly influenced their decisions. The main motivators for starting STEM businesses included inspiration from various sources, an inner calling, recognition of economic potential, a desire for flexibility, social contribution, and necessity. Often, pinpointing a single primary motivation was challenging, as multiple factors tended to overlap. Additionally, the study found that entrenched gender preconceptions could undermine motivation; however, many participants expressed a strong desire to overcome these barriers, which ultimately fuelled their drive (Adikaram and Razik, 2023).

Turning to Malaysia, Franck's research on women's informal micro-entrepreneurship challenges the idea that these ventures are solely born from "involuntary exclusion" or poverty. Based on interviews with 39 hawkers in Penang, the study uncovers a range of motivations, such as the desire for income, an interest in business, enhanced flexibility, and the ability to balance family obligations. It suggests that necessity and choice often coexist as drivers of entrepreneurship, moving away from a simplistic binary perspective. These findings shed light on the complex motivations that shape women's experiences in the informal micro-entrepreneurial sector and offer valuable insights for policymakers while encouraging further exploration in this area (Franck, 2012).

In Pakistan, women entrepreneurs often cite the pursuit of work-life balance to meet family needs as a major motivation for starting their businesses. Utilising qualitative phenomenology, the study interviewed twenty women through face-to-face semi-structured questions,

revealing that family needs, flexibility, and the desire for independence were key incentives. Participants emphasised the significance of effectively managing their time while juggling family commitments, which is often difficult with full-time jobs. Support from family, particularly spouses, emerged as a vital motivational factor, with husbands playing active roles in encouraging and guiding their entrepreneurial journeys. Furthermore, a family background with parents who owned businesses bolstered an entrepreneurial mindset, inspiring women to become their own bosses and highlighting the evolving support for women's aspirations in society (Rehman and Roomi, 2012).

A recent study in India delves into the driving factors behind women's entrepreneurship in Rajasthan, surveying 347 female entrepreneurs from July 2018 to January 2019. The analysis revealed that intrinsic motivations like growth, innovation, autonomy, and the rejection of gender norms significantly influenced these women (Shastri *et al.*, 2022). Additionally, research by Rathi and Lee (2017) shows that supervisor support positively correlates with workers' quality of work life (QWL), which in turn relates to their commitment to their organisation and overall life satisfaction. Another study examining 380 middle-level employees in the service and manufacturing sectors employed multiple regressions with SPSS AMOS 21 and found that flexibility in time and location significantly enhances QWL, particularly benefiting married female employees more than their male counterparts (Rastogi *et al.*, 2018).

In Iran, a paper analysing the growth motivations of women managing home-based businesses (HBBs) utilised twenty in-depth interviews, categorising incentives into intrinsic (such as the need for achievement, independence, and socio-cultural concerns) and extrinsic factors (like financial issues and positive feedback). The findings provide crucial insights into the motivations of women entrepreneurs, assisting policymakers in establishing targeted growth strategies for women's HBBs and helping women business owners gain a clearer understanding of their growth drivers (Modarresi *et al.*, 2016).

Finally, a study on workplace empowerment for women in Qatar's public sector identified several factors driving women to work, including access to skill development, advancement opportunities, work flexibility, decision-making authority, and a significant influence on their jobs and organisations. Women who felt supported in pursuing higher positions, professional development, and work-life balance reported a greater sense of empowerment in the workplace. Conversely, gender discrimination negatively impacted women's empowerment, underscoring the need for policies that address poor management practices and promote equitable workplace cultures (Naguib *et al.*, 2023).

This exploratory study on the career performance of Lebanese women managers within an Arab context employs qualitative techniques through in-depth, face-to-face, open-ended interviews, challenging the traditional divide between objective and subjective measurements. The research delves into how institutional factors, gender disparity, and societal norms interact to influence professional success. It highlights the distinctive effects of economic, cultural, and gendered aspects on women's career outlooks while drawing parallels with Western career studies. The findings underscore the significance of both monetary rewards and intrinsic factors, such as work-life balance, in determining professional success. Moreover, the study emphasises the role of personal agency, characteristics associated with human capital, and behavioural approaches in predicting professional success in Lebanon (Tlaiss, 2015a).

Another evaluation focused on the reasons for promoting female workforce participation through a survey of 286 women in managerial and professional roles at a Turkish bank. The results revealed that factors such as age, marital status, education, organisational level, job continuity, and hours worked significantly influenced women's work experiences. The study examined variables encompassing negative perceptions toward women, equitable treatment, support systems, challenges, male norms, and familial responsibilities. The findings indicated that women who faced fewer negative attitudes and received more support enjoyed greater job

satisfaction, improved psychological well-being, and a lower likelihood of resigning (Burke *et al.*, 2006).

Further research conducted in the UAE examined what motivates Emirati women to enter the workforce. Key influences identified include parenting, Islamic work ethics, and government support, creating a unique environment for women's empowerment in the Middle East (Shaya and Abu Khait, 2017). Emirati women entrepreneurs navigate societal patriarchy, socioeconomic challenges, and organisational barriers. The complex interplay of push and pull factors in Arab patriarchal and Islamic cultures aligns with theories of post-materialism, legitimation, and dissatisfaction, which explain their entrepreneurial motivations (Tlaiss, 2015b). A recent study by Abaker *et al.* (2023), involving statistical analysis of primary data from 384 female managers across UAE firms using Survey Monkey and ANOVA, compared average responses based on two variables: years of experience and industry. The findings reveal a positive trend in gender equality within UAE management. Survey participants boasted significant work experience in crucial economic sectors. Traditional cultural biases that once hindered women's advancement in UAE society have diminished, leaving only informal barriers and varying levels of collaboration among female leaders (Abaker *et al.*, 2023).

The literature demonstrates that various personal and contextual factors—such as professional ambitions, work-life balance, gender equity, supportive legislation, and familial and societal influences—impact women's desire to work. This study aligns with Pinder's (2014) work motivation theory, illustrating that motivation is multifaceted, comprising both internal (psychological) and external (environmental) variables. It expands the framework by focusing specifically on women in Asian countries. Additionally, the research explores how gender roles, family obligations, and sociocultural expectations shape the motivational landscape—dimensions not thoroughly addressed by Pinder's model. Finally, this research considers whether different types of support, both formal and informal—such as encouragement from family and social networks—can substitute for formal organisational support, suggesting that theories of work motivation need to evolve to incorporate gendered and culturally rooted realities.

Motivation factors

Research indicates that women's motivation to work outside the home is influenced by a blend of internal needs, personal desires, life satisfaction, stress management, and financial factors that push them to seek employment (Denmark *et al.*, 1996). Moreover, shifts in cultural values brought about by industrialisation and advancements in political rights also play a significant role in shaping women's work choices. Aspects such as involvement in policymaking, perceptions of empowerment, and fairness in organisations can help break down the “glass ceiling,” a term that describes the challenges women face when aspiring to reach leadership positions (Sabharwal, 2015). Further investigations into workplace empowerment in the Arab Gulf states reveal various organisational factors that affect women's experiences in the workforce. These include inadequate leadership training and gender biases that hinder women's ability to take on leadership roles (Al-Ahmadi, 2011; Hodges, 2017). The next sections will delve into the motivating factors that drive women's decisions to pursue employment outside the home.

Gender equity

Government-level equal opportunity initiatives play a crucial role in shaping human resource management (HRM) policies by fostering diversity and boosting women's employment (Konrad and Linnehan, 1995; Leck *et al.*, 1995; Abaker *et al.*, 2019; Guthridge *et al.*, 2022). The events of 2020, particularly with COVID-19 and an intensified focus on racial equity, have highlighted the significance of employee well-being and the urgent need for diversity, equity,

and inclusion (DEI) within organisations. Women leaders, especially those in top positions, actively champion their teams and invest time in DEI efforts. However, the lack of formal acknowledgement for these contributions can create challenges, as it places an undue burden on women and hinders organisational progress. This situation underscores the necessity of recognising and rewarding the efforts of leaders who contribute to employee well-being and DEI so that this essential work gets the attention it deserves (McKinsey and Company, 2021: 17). Moreover, transgender women often feel compelled to hide parts of their gender identities at work and may modify their appearance to achieve professional acceptance. These self-protective strategies can hinder their ability to be their true selves in the workplace (McKinsey and Company, 2024: 20). This situation raises an important question: How does the formal recognition of women leaders' contributions to promoting DEI influence their motivation and commitment to creating diverse and inclusive work environments?

H1. Gender equality initiatives in the workplace positively impact women's motivation to work outside the home.

Family and social influences

Family and social influences play a central role in shaping women's work motivation, but the literature presents contradictory evidence about how these forces operate. External factors such as social policy, family dynamics, financial circumstances, and education significantly influence the choice to either stay at home or work outside (Hu, 2015). Hakim's (1995, 2000, 2004) preference theory suggested women can be neatly divided into "career-centred" and "home-centred" groups, a view later challenged for oversimplifying women's diverse realities (Ginn *et al.*, 1996). While some studies reinforce Hakim's claim that family responsibilities constrain women's participation in demanding careers (e.g. investment banking, senior management), other evidence suggests that supportive work-home cultures may matter more than the mere presence of children (Pas *et al.*, 2011). Women's career motivation extends beyond their job hours; it encompasses their sense of identity and contributions to society (Duncan *et al.*, 2003).

The absence of support for balancing professional and familial obligations often compels some women to abandon promising careers (Heiligers and Hingstman, 2000). These inconsistencies are mostly visible in cross-cultural contexts. In Western samples, structural supports (e.g. childcare, parental leave) appear to mitigate family constraints, whereas in Gulf societies, cultural expectations, such as husbands' reluctance toward wives' long working hours, continue to limit women's career options (Shaya and Abu Khait, 2017; Sherif, 1999; Looker, 2000). Yet paradoxically, some women in these restrictive contexts pursue entrepreneurship as a strategy to reconcile family and work obligations, suggesting that familial constraints may simultaneously hinder and motivate professional participation.

Indra Nooyi, former CEO of PepsiCo, expressed scepticism regarding the notion that women can "have it all," emphasising the constant trade-offs they must navigate between family and career. She addressed the conflict between the biological clock and professional growth, shedding light on the difficulties of juggling family and work responsibilities (Forbes, 2014). Nooyi advocated for a perspective that views work and family as intertwined support systems to better manage the demands of motherhood alongside a demanding career. Ultimately, she acknowledged the challenges of balancing multiple roles simultaneously (Forbes, 2014). This paper aims to investigate how family-friendly policies, supportive work-home cultures, and societal expectations shape women's motivation to pursue and sustain careers, particularly in high-demand professions that require significant travel and hold considerable prestige.

H2. Family-friendly policies, supportive work-home cultures, and societal expectations significantly impact women's work motivation.

Work-life balance

Maintaining a healthy work-life balance is crucial for many women who are managing family responsibilities alongside their careers. This balance is strongly associated with job satisfaction and can play a significant role in reducing employee turnover (Geist, 2005; Holtzman and Glass, 1999; Dreher, 2003; Ali *et al.*, 2024). Research on work-life balance presents conflicting evidence. Some studies argue that flexibility policies significantly improve women's motivation (Rastogi *et al.*, 2018), while others suggest that these policies have a limited impact unless accompanied by cultural change within organisations (Holtzman and Glass, 1999). Still others find that remote work post-pandemic has paradoxically increased ambition and burnout among women (McKinsey and Company, 2024). These unresolved debates raise questions about whether policies alone are sufficient or whether broader shifts in workplace culture and expectations are required.

Post-pandemic, women have shared feelings of increased ambition due to the flexibility that remote work offers. One respondent expressed, "Flexible work has made me more productive because I can build work around whatever I have going on in my personal life. If I wake up early in the morning, I can jump online and go through emails quickly." (Quote from a white woman, mother, and senior manager working remotely, McKinsey and Company, 2024: 11). Michele Flournoy, the highest-ranking female official at the Pentagon, stepped down from her position, highlighting the work-life imbalance faced by many women in senior roles (Associated Press, 2011). Women often find themselves caught in a tough spot between family obligations and career advancement, choosing senior management positions that can lead to the "glass cliffs" phenomenon (Eagly and Carli, 2007; Ryan *et al.*, 2007). This raises an important question: How do well-being policies and well-defined boundaries in flexible work arrangements affect women's motivation to work?

- H3. Improved well-being policies and clear boundaries in flexible work arrangements positively influence women to work outside the home, mitigating burnout risks.

Career aspirations

Research on women's career aspirations reveals conflicting evidence. Even though women have made great strides in breaking the glass ceiling, those in leadership roles still face significant challenges due to biases that favour traditionally male leadership traits. Theories such as "think-manager-think-male," social role theory, and role incongruity theory shed light on this ongoing issue (Croson and Gneezy, 2009; Eagly and Karau, 2002). Such biases perpetuate gender stereotypes, negatively impacting women's career choices and limiting their advancement opportunities (Guy and Newman, 2004; Kelly and Newman, 2001).

Research by Huang *et al.* (2007) emphasises the need to understand women's career trajectories to grasp their aspirations and overall well-being. The study, though it has its limitations, reveals a variety of career pathways available to women. By using a life course perspective and analysing data from a large sample of Swedish women over 27 years, the research provides insight into the timing, sequencing, and duration of various career-related activities. It identifies three primary career patterns: work-centric, family-centric, and a blend of both work and family.

Some studies demonstrate that long-term goals and financial independence highly motivate women's career decisions (Huang *et al.*, 2007), while others highlight structural barriers such as gender stereotypes and the "think-manager-think-male" bias as more decisive constraints (Eagly and Karau, 2002). Meanwhile, mentoring and role models are seen by some as critical enablers of ambition, yet others argue that individual agency can outweigh structural disadvantages in shaping career pathways (Huang *et al.*, 2007). These tensions raise the question: are women's aspirations primarily shaped by personal ambition, social barriers, or institutional supports?

In a recent interview, Indian actor and producer Priyanka Chopra Jonas emphasised the necessity of financial independence for women. She stated, "Every girl needs to be financially

independent so that you are not just someone's wife, someone's daughter, or someone's mother. Your identity will be defined by your ability to be independent. And this ability comes from financial independence in the world that we live in today." This perspective invites us to consider how opportunities for advancement and financial independence influence women's long-term career aspirations.

- H4. Women's long-term career aspirations are influenced by perceiving opportunities for advancement, financial independence, and a desire to empower other women.

Supportive policies

Proper training, career development, mentorship, and access to professional networks significantly boost women's advancement in their careers (Lyness and Judiesch, 1999; Lyness and Thompson, 2000; Brown and Konrad, 2001a; 2001b). Additionally, formalising the decision-making processes in human resource management—particularly in recruitment and compensation—helps promote women into management roles (Reskin and Branch McBrier, 2000; Elvira and Graham, 2002). According to Burke *et al.* (2006), women who benefit from supportive organisational practices tend to report higher job satisfaction, improved career contentment, and greater psychological well-being. Still, barriers to achieving gender equality linger, such as the absence of women-friendly policies, a predominantly masculine organisational culture, and preconceived gender roles. Social networking dynamics and gendered responsibilities often lead to men being favoured for promotions, which obstructs women's progression (Andrade, 2022).

In examining employment patterns before and after maternity and parental leave reforms in Canada and Switzerland, interesting trends emerged. Despite policy enhancements, Swiss women largely maintained their pre-existing employment patterns, often remaining in or moving to part-time positions before childbirth. Conversely, mothers in British Columbia, Canada, took more time off work after the reforms but were more inclined to return to full-time employment. Men's employment patterns in both settings showed little change. Moreover, research indicates that while longer maternity leave can positively influence mothers' re-entry into the workforce, excessively long breaks may restrict job opportunities. Studies conducted in Austria and Germany found that extended leave can negatively affect mothers' short-term employment and earnings (Antonini *et al.*, 2022).

Currently, only 12% of large companies in the U.S. offer childcare benefits, with just a quarter providing on-site or nearby childcare options. Many working parents face significant challenges in securing care for sick children, leading 20% to reduce their work hours or even leave their jobs altogether due to childcare difficulties. A national survey of 2,500 parents revealed that only 30% had backup childcare available, with these challenges varying based on income levels (Chai *et al.*, 2022). This situation underscores the struggles faced by working parents and highlights the pressing need for more accessible childcare solutions. It leads us to an important inquiry: to what extent do supportive policies, such as training and mentorship, help empower women in their career journeys?

- H5. Effective training, mentorship, and formal HR practices empower women, overcoming gender barriers for career motivation.

In summary, we examined relevant literature on the various factors that influence and motivate women in the workplace, aiming to enrich our theoretical framework for the research. We identified key issues surrounding work motivation, such as gender equity, family and social influences, work-life balance, career aspirations, and supportive policies. Building on this review, we introduced a conceptual framework. Figure 1 illustrates the research framework as presented below.

The framework of the study

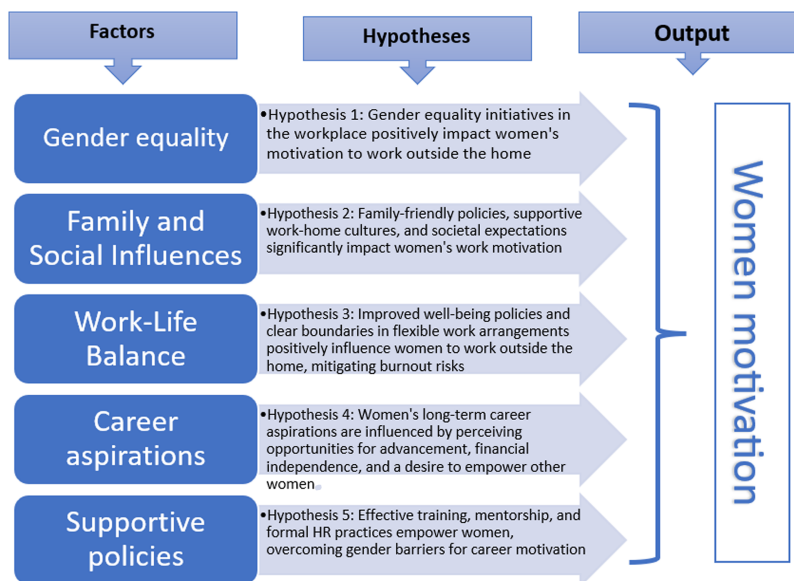


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework. Source: Created by the authors

Research methodology and design

Research method

The present study utilised the configurational analysis approach for the examination of data. Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) has been recognised as an effective research method for investigating complex causal relationships. QCA offers unique benefits over traditional variable-oriented approaches, making it particularly appropriate for specific investigative contexts. One of QCA's key distinguishing features is its focus on configurations. This means that QCA, rather than isolating individual variables, examines combinations of conditions as predictors of outcomes (Fiss, 2011).

While traditional methods such as structural equation modelling (SEM) are effective for examining linear and symmetrical relationships, they often assume homogeneity across cases and prioritise overall model fit over case-specific complexity (Rihoux and Ragin, 2009). In contrast, QCA is better suited for studies like ours that aim to identify multiple conjunctural causations — where different combinations of conditions may lead to the same outcome — particularly when the theoretical model is complex and the sample size is small.

This feature of QCA allows us to attain a more comprehensive understanding of how a range of factors working in tandem can produce a particular outcome. It is this feature of QCA that makes it suitable for embracing complexity, thus allowing researchers to employ QCA analysis in their studies to unearth insights that may have been overlooked by traditional methods.

QCA also presupposes the condition of equifinality (Ragin, 2008; Schneider and Wagemann, 2012). What this means is that QCA identifies multiple causal pathways that can result in the outcome of interest. This is distinctive from traditional methodologies that often seek to establish a single dominant causal relationship. Finally, QCA also assumes asymmetry in causal relationships (Schneider and Wagemann, 2012). Traditional methods often assume

symmetrical relationships where a variable's impact is consistent regardless of contextual factors. Whereas the assumption of asymmetry implies that contextual factors can shape the effect of the determinant variables on the outcomes of interest.

The distinguishing feature of a QCA analysis is that it facilitates the identification of necessary and sufficient conditions for an outcome (Schneider and Wagemann, 2012; Dul, 2024). An essential condition is a prerequisite for the outcome, while an adequate condition guarantees the outcome in the presence of other variables. This distinction enables researchers to investigate complex causal paths for attaining the outcome. These combined features of QCA enable researchers to produce richer insights compared to other analytical methods, such as cluster analysis and chi-squared automatic interaction detection (CHAID) (Ordanini and Rubera, 2014; Woodside *et al.*, 2015).

QCA is particularly well-suited for small-to medium-N samples (typically between 10 and 100 cases) because it focuses on patterns and logical inferences rather than statistical generalizability (Rihoux and Lobe, 2009). In our case, the sample size of 110 participants falls within an acceptable range for fuzzy-set QCA, enabling us to identify meaningful causal configurations while embracing case diversity.

Measurement

We gathered data using a structured questionnaire. All items employed a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly agree, 5 = strongly disagree). These Likert-scale items were adapted from validated instruments used in earlier studies, which are stated below, along with their sources.

Work motivation

Five items were used to measure women's work motivation, adapted from the Quality of Work Life (QWL) scale developed by Sirgy *et al.* (2001). Although the original QWL scale comprised 16 items across seven dimensions, previous validation studies (e.g. Rastogi *et al.*, 2017) indicate that shorter versions with fewer factors can still maintain reliability and validity. By condensing the scale, we reduce the burden on respondents, decrease the likelihood of missing data, and increase response rates (Stanton *et al.*, 2002). Since this scale is grounded in Maslow's needs theory, the limited number of items encompasses both lower-level (such as safety and economic needs) and higher-order (including intrinsic growth and autonomy) motivators, making the shorter version a suitable proxy for measuring work-related motivation. The reliability score for the scale was a Cronbach's alpha of 0.78.

Career aspirations

Four items were used to assess respondents' career aspirations. These items were adapted from the Meaning of Work framework (Ros *et al.*, 1999; Morin, 2003). The measure captures the qualities that individuals value to find fulfilment, personal development, and professional contribution. This is consistent with theoretical models that link work values to career aspirations (Super, 1990). The Cronbach's alpha for the four-item career aspirations scale was 0.82, indicating acceptable internal consistency reliability.

Work-life balance

Work-life balance was measured using Hayman's (2005) Work-Life Balance scale, which has been previously used by researchers in various organisational environments and reported a reliability score of Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.70$.

Gender equity

The Gender Equality Perception Scale for Universities (GEPSU) formed the basis for a seven-item scale used to assess gender equity. Items include essential elements such as equal chances and treatment in academic and social life, as well as institutional commitment to gender

equality (Martí-De Olives *et al.*, 2024). The seven items chosen were those more relevant to workplace and organisational situations. The current study's seven-item gender equity scale had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.84, which was satisfactory.

Family and social influences

Family and social influences were examined using Fouad *et al.*'s (2010) Family Influence Scale (FIS), which measures how people's family of origin influences their career and employment decisions. This measure has been extensively verified in career development research and has demonstrated good psychometric qualities. Furthermore, social support was measured using the short form of Petersen *et al.*'s (2024) Perceived Social Support Questionnaire (F-SozU K-3), a rapid and reliable instrument of perceived social support. Collectively, these instruments provide a multifaceted framework for measuring the social context in which participants' career pathways evolve.

A pilot test involving ten female managers was conducted to assess the reliability and face validity of the adapted items. Cronbach's alpha values for key constructs were calculated ($\alpha > 0.7$ for all major factors), confirming acceptable internal consistency. The feedback from the pilot resulted in minor rewording to enhance cultural clarity within the Asian context.

Data collection process

The survey was administered online using Google Forms and distributed through professional and academic networks, including WhatsApp, Facebook, Messenger, LinkedIn, Gmail, and university emails. Participants were recruited via purposive sampling, with the criteria being women currently employed in managerial or supervisory roles in Asia or the Gulf region. Although the study refers to "Asian countries," it is important to acknowledge that most respondents (89 out of 110) resided in Gulf countries. It is worth emphasising that, while this sample offers cross-national insight, its size and the geographic skew toward Gulf countries limit the generalisability of findings to all Asian contexts. Regardless, this is consistent with QCA's methods, appropriate for small-to-medium N studies, where the goal is to identify causal configurations rather than make statistical generalisations. This constraint has also been acknowledged in the limitations section. Respondents represented industries including education (28%), finance (22%), healthcare (15%), government/public service (12%), retail and services (10%), and technology (13%). Regarding their hierarchical positions, seven respondents held CEO or owner roles, ten were in senior management, fifty-six were in middle management, and thirty-seven were in non-managerial roles, providing a balanced view across leadership levels.

Demographic profile

We surveyed women across various demographics to understand the factors that influence and motivate them to work. The participants were recruited through an online survey circulated via different social media in the UAE, Bangladesh, and Pakistan. A limited number of participants were enlisted by disseminating the survey link via the American University of Ras al Khaimah's email. Our sample included respondents from diverse age groups, educational backgrounds, nationalities, marital statuses, and professional experiences, as provided in Table 1.

The demographic shows the age of respondents is between thirty and fifty. They are well educated, holding bachelor's and master's degrees. The majority are of Asian nationality who reside in the Gulf countries. Half of the surveyed women are unmarried, while others are married and have at least one to two children. Two-thirds of respondents have at least ten years of middle managerial-level work experience, earning a monthly income between two and four US dollars.

Table 1. Demographic profile

Table 1: Respondents' demographic characteristics		
Category		Number of respondents
Age	Less than 30	29
	30–50	74
	51 and above	07
Education Level	PhD	11
	Postgraduate	14
	Bachelor	40
	Masters	45
Nationality	Asian	90
	African	04
	Western	16
Residence	Asia	21
	Gulf Countries	89
Marital Status	Married	77
	Unmarried	26
	Separated/Divorced/Widowed	07
Children	No child	51
	1–2 Children	48
	3–4 Children	11
Work Experience	Less than 5 years	24
	5–10 years	26
	10 years and above	60
Managerial level	CEO/Owner/Founder	07
	Senior Mgmt	10
	Middle Mgmt	56
	Non – Mgmt	37
Monthly Income in Dollars	Less than 2 thousand	39
	\$2000–4000	31
	\$4000 and above	40
Source(s): Authors' own work		

Results and analysis

The QCA process consists of two basic analytical steps: analysis of necessity and analysis of sufficiency. Analysis of necessity involves identifying conditions without which an outcome cannot be achieved. This analysis measures the consistency with which a specific condition is associated with the outcome across all cases that are being investigated. For the present study, the consistency analysis was performed using the necessity function of the QCA package for the R programming language. This package has predefined consistency measures for determining if the condition is necessary. The necessity function measures the necessity of the presence and absence of the conditions. [Table 2](#) shows the results of the necessity analysis.

Analysis and discussion of results

Necessity and sufficiency analysis

The purpose of the necessity analysis was to identify the conditions that must be present or absent for the presence of the outcome of high work motivation (WM). As is evident from [Table 1](#), the highest inclN score in our study was for Career Aspirations (CA) at 0.787, followed by Work-Life Balance (WLB) at 0.747 and Family and Social Influences (FSI) at 0.739. None of the conditions achieved the established cutoff point for the inclusion score (inclN) of 0.8, which has been established as a benchmark for determining a necessary condition ([Fiss, 2011](#); [Ragin, 2008](#); [Schneider and Wagemann, 2012](#)).

Table 2. Analysis of necessity

Condition	Outcome	inclN	RoN	covN
CA	WM	0.7874600	0.7940747	0.7380060
~CA	~WM	0.7558498	0.8338948	0.8028355
WLB	WM	0.7469320	0.7432028	0.6753758
FSI	WM	0.7385377	0.7344996	0.6641812
GE	WM	0.7084665	0.7068055	0.6271567
SP	WM	0.7003609	0.6764844	0.5997669
~WLB	~WM	0.6864451	0.8137862	0.7564413
~FSI	~WM	0.6738719	0.8096261	0.7469004
SP	~WM	0.6674773	0.7077900	0.6544854
GE	~WM	0.6511213	0.7255243	0.6599660
~GE	~WM	0.6321535	0.7948655	0.7128725
FSI	~WM	0.6195263	0.7195684	0.6379352
~GE	WM	0.6158812	0.7387610	0.6065734
~FSI	WM	0.5974013	0.7185047	0.5782938
~SP	WM	0.5965350	0.7541191	0.6104088
~SP	~WM	0.5918220	0.7957973	0.6933921
WLB	~WM	0.5813564	0.7023673	0.6018798
~WLB	WM	0.5596989	0.6976308	0.5386677
~CA	WM	0.5390946	0.6644319	0.5000957
CA	~WM	0.5293524	0.7004946	0.5680404

Source(s): Authors' own work

For the necessity analysis, we used an inclusion (inclN) threshold of 0.8, a conventional benchmark in QCA literature for identifying a condition as necessary (Fiss, 2011; Schneider and Wagemann, 2012). The rationale behind using this threshold lies in its robustness; a consistency level of ≥ 0.8 ensures that the condition is almost always present when the outcome occurs. Similarly, for sufficiency analysis, an inclusion (inclS) score of ≥ 0.8 was used to denote a strong empirical relationship between condition combinations and the outcome. While some scholars argue for flexible thresholds that preferably align closely with the raw consistency score derived from context, adhering to these benchmarks improves the comparability and reliability of results (Greckhamer *et al.*, 2018). We advocate for context-dependent, adaptable thresholds that align closely with benchmarks to improve the comparability and reliability of findings.

As stated above, no conditions met the criteria for being necessary for the presence of the outcome of high WM. This suggests that other factors or combinations of factors might also play a significant role in influencing work. Considering this, the second step in QCA analysis is to perform a sufficiency analysis. Analysis of sufficiency focuses on identifying combinations of conditions that can produce the outcome. A sufficiency analysis is conducted using a truth table that enumerates all potential combinations of conditions and their corresponding outcomes. The sufficiency analysis uses Boolean algebra to minimise the combinations and identify the simplest sets of conditions that can explain the occurrence of the outcome. The consistency and coverage metrics are used to evaluate the sufficiency of these combinations, ensuring they accurately and comprehensively account for the observed outcomes (Ragin, 2008).

The sufficiency analyses produced two solutions, M1 and M2.

$$\text{M1 : CAWLB} + \text{GEWLBFSI} \sim \text{SP} + (\text{CA} \sim \text{GE} \sim \text{FSI} + \text{CAGE} \sim \text{SP} + \text{CAFSISP}) - > \text{WM}$$

$$\text{M2 : CAWLB} + \text{GEWLBFSI} \sim \text{SP} + (\text{CA}_{\text{GESP}+\text{CAGEFSI}+\text{CA}} \text{FSI} \sim \text{SP}) - > \text{WM}$$

Interpreting boolean expressions in QCA

Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) uses Boolean algebra to represent combinations of conditions that are either sufficient or necessary for an outcome. Each configuration is expressed as a logical formula where the presence or absence of a condition is shown symbolically. An asterisk (*) represents the logical “AND”—indicating that all conditions connected by it must be simultaneously present (or absent, if marked with a tilde ~) for the outcome to occur. A plus sign (+) denotes the logical “OR”—meaning any one of the combined pathways can lead to the outcome. The arrow (→) indicates that the configuration on the left leads to the outcome on the right.

To make this accessible, here is a **key to abbreviations** used in our Boolean expressions:

Symbol	meaning
CA	Career Aspirations
WLB	Work-Life Balance
GE	Gender Equity
FSI	Family and Social Influences
SP	Supportive Policies
WM	Work Motivation (Outcome)
~	Absence of the condition (e.g. ~SP = no supportive policies)
*	Logical AND (all conditions must be present/absent)
+	Logical OR (any one pathway is sufficient)

For instance, the Boolean expression $CA * WLB \rightarrow WM$ indicates that Career Aspirations and Work-Life Balance are sufficient to produce Work Motivation. Likewise, $GE * WLB * FSI * \sim SP \rightarrow WM$ implies that even without formal supportive policies, women tend to report higher motivation when gender equity, work-life balance, and strong family and social influences coexist, even in the absence of formal support.

The full solution terms (e.g. **M1** and **M2**) represent **different pathways** or **configurations** through which women’s motivation to work is achieved. These models emphasise that there is no single route to motivation; instead, multiple combinations of conditions can produce the same result—a concept known as equifinality in QCA. [Table 3](#) presents the results of the sufficiency analysis. Two combinations met the criteria of an inclS score greater than or equal to 0.8. The first combination, “ $CA * WLB$ ”, is a combination of high career aspirations (CA) and good work-life balance (WLB), and the data indicate that this configuration is strongly associated with high WM. This suggests that in the configurations studied, individuals with ambitious career objectives and a healthy work-life balance are more motivated. The second configuration identified was “ $GE * WLB * FSI * \sim SP$.” This combination consists of the presence of gender equality (GE), work-life balance (WLB), and positive family and social influences (FSI), combined with the absence of supportive policies (SP), which is also associated with high WM in the identified configurations. This can be interpreted as indicating that even without formal workplace support, individuals can be motivated when they experience fairness, have a balanced life, and receive encouragement from their networks.

This study examined the key factors influencing women’s motivation to work across various Asian countries, focusing on career ambitions (CA), work-life balance (WLB), and familial and social influences (FSI). The results of QCA reveal that configurations including CA and WLB are consistently related to greater levels of WM. The results suggest that career ambitions and work-life balance play a crucial role in motivating women to engage in the workforce. This aligns with existing research that underscores the importance of personal ambition and the ability to juggle personal and professional responsibilities. An increasing body of post-pandemic literature highlights the critical role of workplace flexibility. A 2024 report from McKinsey and Company noted that such flexibility not only enhances women’s productivity but also helps minimise burnout by allowing for a better balance of personal commitments.

Table 3. Analysis of sufficiency

No.	Solution	inclS	PRI	covS	covU	M1	M2
1	CA*WLB	0.811	0.664	0.642	0.032	0.037	0.046
2	GEWLBFSI*~SP	0.800	0.527	0.378	0.034	0.034	0.034
—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
3	CÃ GE ~ FSI	0.864	0.634	0.379	0.003	0.020	—
4	CÃ GESP	0.827	0.624	0.423	0.000	—	0.018
5	CAGEFSI	0.813	0.621	0.509	0.003	—	0.027
6	CAGE ~ SP	0.821	0.601	0.427	0.001	0.020	—
7	CÃ FSI ~ SP	0.855	0.637	0.381	0.000	—	0.029
8	CAFSISP	0.821	0.657	0.518	0.012	0.043	—
—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
	M1	0.757	0.602	0.784	—	—	—
	M2	0.749	0.589	0.771	—	—	—

Note(s): Solution consistency: 0.751255 Solution coverage: 0.787357

- **inclS:** Inclusion score for sufficiency
- **PRI:** Proportional Reduction in Inconsistency
- **covS:** Coverage score for sufficiency
- **covU:** Unique coverage
- **M1:** Model 1 inclusion
- **M2:** Model 2 inclusion

Source(s): Authors' own work

Previous studies with Asian samples support the notion that work-life balance leads to lower turnover rates and higher job satisfaction (Rastogi *et al.*, 2017). Our study reinforces these findings, confirming that cultural expectations frequently place substantial domestic responsibilities on women. Consequently, policies that advocate for a balanced lifestyle—like flexible working hours and remote work options—such policies may contribute to maintaining motivation, especially when combined with other supporting conditions. This conclusion echoes earlier work by Shaya and Abu Khait (2017), which discussed the unique leadership challenges for women in the Middle East, highlighting that women often opt for careers that offer a more harmonious balance between family obligations and professional aspirations.

The sufficiency analysis identified configurations, including fairness and encouragement from social networks (FSI), as strongly associated with WM, even when formal workplace support is lacking. This suggests that social structures and informal support networks commonly coexist with high motivation in the identified configurations. Modarresi *et al.* (2016) found that Iranian women entrepreneurs were driven by both internal and external motivators, such as societal recognition and familial backing. Participants in our study noted that social influences, including support from family and peers, often had a more significant impact on their motivation than workplace policies. This aligns with Rehman and Roomi's (2012) findings, which showed that women in Pakistan primarily pursue entrepreneurial ventures to achieve work-life balance and meet familial obligations, with family support being a crucial factor. Likewise, Tlaiss (2015a) highlighted that in patriarchal societies, familial support can mitigate the adverse effects of insufficient workplace backing on women's career ambitions.

Furthermore, the sufficiency analysis emphasised that gender equality (GE) initiatives significantly contribute to women's motivation. Global surveys conducted by organisations like the International Labour Organisation (ILO) consistently stress the importance of gender-inclusive policies, including fair compensation and leadership opportunities, in boosting women's desire to participate in the workforce (ILO, 2023a, b). Our findings correlate with research conducted in Western contexts, showing that gender equality in the workplace—especially in leadership roles—enhances women's motivation to pursue career advancement

(Burke *et al.*, 2006). However, the unique cultural nuances in Asia make the issue of gender equality more complex. In the UAE, where patriarchal norms and gendered societal roles are still prevalent, regulations promoting gender parity are slowly gaining traction; nevertheless, women continue to face informal barriers, such as societal expectations regarding family duties (Abaker *et al.*, 2023).

Practical and social implications

The study's findings have significant implications for HR professionals, educators, and policymakers working in Asian organisational contexts, particularly in sectors like healthcare, finance, technology, and public administration. Using a configurational lens, we show that women's motivation is not driven by single factors but by specific combinations of conditions—such as Career Aspirations paired with Work-Life Balance (CA*WLB), or Gender Equality reinforced by Family and Social Influences in the absence of Supportive Policies (GE*WLB*FSI*~SP).

One of the study's most prominent configurations is CA*WLB, which combines high career aspirations with a supportive work-life balance. Practically, this means women are more likely to stay engaged and motivated when they see clear opportunities for advancement and have the flexibility to balance personal and family commitments. This configuration suggests two key HR strategies:

- Providing structured career development initiatives (e.g. training, promotions, leadership roles), and
- Establishing flexible work systems (e.g. remote work, flexible hours, caregiving leave).

When these two factors are addressed together, their combined effect serves as a significant pathway to motivation.

The second major configuration, GE*WLB*FSI*~SP, indicates that even in the absence of formal HR policies, women remain motivated if gender equality, work-life balance, and strong family and social support are present. This has crucial implications for HR and public policy. Organisations operating in environments with limited formal policies—such as smaller firms, start-ups, or public institutions with bureaucratic constraints—should enhance informal support networks and foster inclusive cultures to compensate for the lack of formal measures. They should also actively promote gender fairness in opportunities and decision-making, as well as encourage peer support networks and family-friendly environments.

The following strategies stem directly from the successful configurations identified in our QCA findings:

From CA*WLB:

- (1) Implement flexible hybrid work arrangements that do not compromise career progression.
- (2) Offer tailored career acceleration programmes for women returning from caregiving or career breaks.
- (3) Integrate career planning tools and mentorship schemes within performance management.

From GE*WLB*FSI*~SP:

- (1) Invest in peer mentoring, affinity groups, and informal recognition of women's contributions.
- (2) Foster inclusive leadership practices, especially in teams where formal HR support is limited.

-
- (3) Support community-building activities involving employees' families or local networks.

These configurations are especially relevant to medium and large-sized enterprises, multinational corporations, and government ministries that aim to retain and empower female employees. For instance, Gulf ministries employing Asian expatriate women can implement bundled interventions combining flexible scheduling with mentoring. Private sector HR teams across South and Southeast Asia might also benefit from aligning career development pathways with social recognition and flexibility.

At the policy level, national strategies for HR development can incorporate these QCA-derived configurations into promotion pathways for female civil servants. Ministries of labour, social development, and gender equality could incentivise organisations that implement bundled HR initiatives (e.g. CA*WLB) through tax incentives or public recognition schemes. Additionally, gender-sensitive labour laws can be refined to support informal motivators when formal structures are insufficient.

In education, embedding topics such as gender equity, work-life balance, and career planning into high school and university curricula could prepare young women to navigate professional roles with confidence and clarity.

Lastly, the study underscores the societal importance of shared responsibility in caregiving and motivation, particularly in patriarchal societies. NGOs and government bodies can organise awareness campaigns and community programmes that support families in becoming active partners in women's careers—an insight directly derived from the FSI component in our configurations.

In summary, configurations such as CA*WLB and GE*WLB*FSI*~SP offer more than just academic knowledge—they serve as practical blueprints for creating inclusive, motivating environments for women across various sectors and societies.

Conclusion

This study emphasises the importance of career aspirations, work-life balance, and family/social support in motivating women to work in various Asian countries. These factors, along with fair treatment and social encouragement, remain crucial even in the absence of formal workplace support. As Asian businesses expand, there is an urgent need for policies that recognise women's particular cultural and familial responsibilities, fostering conditions in which women can prosper personally and professionally.

Our findings offer a novel theoretical contribution by improving and extending [Pinder's \(2014\)](#) work motivation model using a culturally embedded Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) technique. Specifically, we demonstrate that unique combinations of social, organisational, and personal characteristics drive motivation among women in Asian contexts, rather than relying on single, universal factors. This configurational view stands in contrast to classic linear models. For example, we identified high motivation even in the absence of formal supportive policies, provided there were strong family and social influences, gender equity, and a healthy work-life balance. This challenges the assumption that structural support is always necessary for motivation, suggesting a need to shift theoretical focus toward informal, relational, and culturally situated sources of motivation.

Moreover, through our QCA approach, we discovered that there are multiple pathways to achieving comparable motivating outcomes—known as equifinality—highlighting various combinations of antecedents. This challenges the sufficiency of dominant motivation theories that rely on single, overriding predictors. Our approach not only introduces methodological innovation to gender and motivation research but also promotes a more diverse, intersectional understanding of motivation that considers regional, geographical, cultural, and institutional variations.

Thus, our study contributes to current motivational theories by demonstrating that, in particular cultural circumstances, motivation can emerge through interactive and context-sensitive pathways. This refinement urges future scholars to reconsider the one-size-fits-all assumptions underlying conventional motivation theories. The findings have significant implications for HR practices in supporting women's careers and achieving gender equality in the workplace. Our study contributes to the theory by expanding on [Pinder's \(2014\)](#) work motivation model, focusing on culture, and using QCA to illustrate how diverse personal and social factors motivate women in various Asian settings—an approach rarely employed in previous studies.

Research limitations

This study provides new insights into women's job motivation, particularly in Asia. However, there are limitations related to the sample, which comprised women in managerial positions from various Asian countries. As a result, the findings may not apply to women in non-management roles or those working in different regions. Additionally, the significant cultural diversity within the "Asian" context poses another limitation. Future research should explore these motivational factors in more specific cultural or regional settings to uncover relevant nuances.

A significant limitation of the study is the geographical concentration of the sample. Although the study references "Asian countries," most participants were from Gulf countries. Many of these women are expatriates from various regions of Asia, particularly South and Southeast Asia. This expatriate background introduces cultural diversity but also reflects a unique migration and employment situation that may differ from that of women working in their home countries. Future studies should be cautious when making broad generalisations about Asia and should aim to include more regionally representative populations.

The cross-sectional nature of the study contributes to its limitations. Longitudinal research would be more suitable for gaining a deeper understanding of how women's motivations change as their circumstances or organisational contexts shift. For example, a study could explore how the intersection of gender, culture, and economic changes in Asia influences women's motivations to enter or remain in the workforce over time. Additionally, expanding the demographic scope to include women from various sectors or industries could offer a more comprehensive view of the challenges women face at different stages of their careers.

Future research directions

From a scholarly perspective, this study opens numerous avenues for future research. First, we recommend that researchers apply intersectional frameworks to explore how class, religion, ethnicity, and marital status intersect with gender to shape work motivation, particularly in non-Western contexts. [Atewologun \(2018\)](#) discussed how intersectionality can be integrated with other theoretical frameworks, such as institutional theory, to understand complex social dynamics in the workplace.

Second, we encourage the use of longitudinal research designs to examine how motivational factors evolve across different life and career stages. Research conducted by [Blažev et al. \(2024\)](#) examined the changes in gender-typed career interests and related stereotypes over time, providing insights into how these factors evolve across different life stages. This will help in understanding how motivational factors evolve and shift throughout individuals' careers, capturing the temporal dynamics of work motivation.

Third, future studies could apply comparative QCA across multiple cultural or national contexts to test the robustness of the causal configurations identified in this study. Lastly, scholars may consider integrating self-determination theory or institutional theory with QCA to build richer, theory-informed causal models in gender and work research.

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