

# Gender Bias in Bangladesh Civil Service: A Case Study From 12 Different Cadres

Tasnia Nasir

## ABSTRACT

*This study attempts to identify the core reasons for gender bias in the Bangladesh Civil Service. The purpose is to learn about the current state of such bias and whether and to what extent women civil servants are impacted by it, as well as its consequences in terms of career growth. For this study, the researcher employed qualitative methodologies, relying mainly on primary data acquired through a questionnaire survey of 111 civil servants. Results demonstrate that in the civil service, women are subjected to a greater degree of gender bias than males, followed by the third gender. It also shows that social attitudes and lack of child care facilities are two of the key reasons for such bias and gender stereotyping, underrepresentation of women, the existing gender gap, insufficient paid maternity leaves, biased rules, and a lack of awareness might be regarded as minor sources of gender bias in this sector. Gender bias has a significant impact on postings, leadership positions, major project assignments, and challenging roles, as well as a moderate impact on other variables such as promotion, recognition for equal work, performance review, obtaining mentors and training opportunities, compensation and awards, recommendations, and recruiting, according to the data.*

**KEYWORDS:** Gender Bias, Bangladesh Civil Service, Impact, Civil servants, Women.

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<sup>1</sup> Assistant Engineer (Civil), BCS (Roads & Highways), Bangladesh, Email: [tasniasinsharmin@gmail.com](mailto:tasniasinsharmin@gmail.com) (Corresponding Author)

## INTRODUCTION

### Background

Over the past few years, the number of women working in the Bangladesh Civil Service has significantly increased. According to a statistic provided by MOPA, the percentage of women who held the position of Class-1 Officer in ministries and divisions in 2014 was 19.5 percent, but that number increased significantly to 20.3 percent in 2015. In 2017, the percentage of women who held the position reached a new high of 20.9 percent. In 2014, 19.8 percent of class-1 officers in departments and directorates were women. In 2015, that number grew to 20.0 percent, and by 2017, it had reached 22.3 percent. Despite the fact that more and more women are entering the workforce in Bangladesh civil service, there is still a very small percentage of women holding leadership positions within the government. Notwithstanding the fact that the government has introduced a number of women-friendly policies in recent years, the numbers still remain low. It is likely that this phenomenon can be explained by the unconscious gender bias that exists against women who work in civil service. In this study, gender bias in the Bangladesh civil service is evaluated, and primary data is used to investigate both the possible factors that contribute to the formation of such bias as well as the effects of such bias.

### Research Gap

There has not been a substantial amount of research carried out on the topic of unconscious gender bias from a Bangladeshi perspective. This is one of the topics that has received attention. In Bangladesh, research has been conducted on topics including parental gender bias as well as parental investment in children's health and education (Begum et al, 2022). Researchers in Bangladesh have also looked into the gendered perspectives of government institutions and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that are involved in the delivery of services to the country's impoverished (Chowdury, 2014). In developing countries like Indonesia, researchers have studied the possibility of gender bias in the structural job advancement of civil workers (Krissetyanti, 2018). There have been researches on the increasing participation of women in the civil service. However, there has not been any previous research conducted on the unconscious gender bias that exists in the Bangladesh civil service.

This investigation will close a gap in the existing research.

### **Objectives of the Study**

This study aims to get a knowledge of the current status of gender bias in the Bangladesh Civil Service, causes of such bias and the repercussions of such bias in terms of career development. The objective of this research is to gain this insight.

### **Rationale**

The findings of this study can help future policymakers understand the various dimensions of existing unconscious gender bias as well as the core causes and effects of such bias within the Bangladesh Civil Service and the necessity of eliminating such bias to ensure a better working environment. The results of the study would be the first step in formulating policies to ensure a bias-free workplace for all civil servants to achieve the vision of a developed Bangladesh by the year 2041.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

A gender bias is a preference for one gender over the other. It frequently operates on the basis of preconceived notions and generalizations. A person may be conscious of their gender bias and aware that they have the tendency to favor one gender over another. Unconscious bias against women is a form of bias that occurs when a person is not aware that they have the bias. This phenomenon is referred to as implicit bias. Researchers have discovered that an understanding of such bias can aid leaders radically rethink their strategic decision-making, talent management, inclusion and organizational culture (Cook Ross Inc., 2016). This study was conducted building a conceptual framework for selection of parameters as reasons of gender bias in civil service and selection of parameters affected by gender bias in civil service based on existing research on gender bias.

### **Selection of Parameters as Reasons of Gender Bias in Civil Service**

#### **Gender Stereotyping**

Gender stereotypes are broad ideas about characteristics of men and women. Both descriptive and prescriptive gender stereotypes and the expectations they create can damage a woman's career. By making it seem like the traits women are expected to have do not match up with the traits thought to be necessary for success in traditionally male positions,

descriptive stereotypes make it seem like women won't do well in those jobs. Prescriptive stereotypes set normative expectations for how men and women should act. This causes women who directly or indirectly break gender norms to be devalued and insulted. Gender stereotypes can make it difficult for women to make progress their careers (Heilman, 2012).

### **Under-Representation of Women**

As in civil service number of women has been always low in decision making roles and such under-representation of women in civil service give rise to further gender bias in the service.

### **Societal Mindsets**

Gender bias can be caused by traditional societal mindsets. The importance that society places on men's and women's character in all areas is influenced by the mentality of people. People must abandon social beliefs to prevent gender bias from occurring. An outdated societal mindset stops

women from achieving more in the workplace (Zulqaram et al., 2021).

### **Existing Gender Gap**

Estévez-Abe (2005) states that the gender gap in human capital is one factor that contributes to occupational segregation, which in turn reinforces the vicious cycle of gender bias in the workplace.

### **Insufficient Paid Parental Leaves**

Women who take maternity leaves are viewed as less capable in the workplace (Morgenrothv and Heilman, 2017). Maternity leave alone can promote gender preconceptions regarding women's primary role for childrearing. In addition, women taking maternity leaves for long periods of time are less likely to get promotion or obtain wage increases, resulting in impeded career development. Paid parental leave for both men and women can help reduce the societal stigma associated with women's employment (Kong et al., 2020).

### **Lack of Child-Care Facilities**

Childcare has become a significant concern for all working women. People today live in nuclear households as a result of the shifting family structure; there is essentially no one around to care for the children or

assist with domestic duties. (Kashem et. al., 2002). Karim (2019) argued that women in civil service in Bangladesh avoided some placements for the well-being of the children which prevented them from gaining experiences leading to their exclusion. This eventually contributes in reinforcing more bias in civil service.

### **Biased Policies**

Gender biased policies are also a reason for gender bias in the workplace. As per government policy, women civil servants only get paid maternity leave while men civil servants do not get any leave and also share their duties in the that time, it generates significant bias towards women civil servants (Zafarullah, 2000).

### **Lack of Awareness**

Lack of awareness about gender causes for gender bias in the workplace (Rrustemi et al., 2020). This was also taken as a parameter that causes gender bias in civil service.

### **Selection of Parameters Affected by Gender Bias in Civil Service**

#### **Posting**

Gender bias affects posting of women civil servants in Bangladesh. Women receive fewer posting in field-level posts (Sultan and Jahan, 2016). Posting in Bangladesh civil service was selected as a parameter that could be affected by gender bias.

#### **Promotion**

In general, the promotion system in the Bangladesh civil service is biased against female civil servants since it is significantly skewed toward subjectivity and favors male civil servants (Zafarullah, 2000). As a result, promotion in Bangladesh civil service was selected as a parameter that could be affected by gender bias.

#### **Allocation of leadership positions**

The gender bias that exists in the workplace has a huge negative impact on women, and as a result, it is difficult for women to obtain positions of leadership (Scott and Brown, 2006). So, allocation of leadership positions in Bangladesh civil service was selected as a parameter that could be affected by gender bias.

### **Assigning important projects**

It is possible for unconscious gender biases to play a role in the project assignments made in the workplace ((International Labor Organization, 2015)., 2015). Thus, assigning important projects in Bangladesh civil service was selected as a parameter that could be affected by gender bias.

### **Recognition for work of equal value**

Article 11 of the CEDAW (1979) covers taking all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the workplace by providing equal treatment for equal work of equal value (Assembly, 1979). So, recognition for work of equal value has been selected as a parameter that can be affected by gender bias in Bangladesh civil service.

### **Performance evaluation**

The performance evaluation criteria in the workplace generally have a bias towards men and those without children, and as a result, it discriminates against women, particularly mothers who are employed (International Labor Organization, 2015). As a result, it has been prudently preferred as a parameter that can influence gender bias.

### **Giving challenging roles**

Gender bias affects giving challenging roles in the workplace (Khair et al., 2017). Thus, it has been nominated as a constraint that can be obstructed by gender bias in civil service.

### **Getting mentors and training opportunities**

Training opportunities in Bangladesh civil service may be affected by gender bias (Kenny, 1995). For preexisting gender bias male mentors are sometimes reluctant to work with women. Hence, getting mentors and training opportunities has been identified as a parameter that can be exaggerated by gender bias in civil service.

### **Compensations and awards**

Bias towards women exist in scientific communities in terms of compensations and awards. So, it has been designated as a parameter that can be impacted by gender bias in civil service (Feller, 2004).

### **Recommendations and hiring**

Recommendations and hiring are influenced by gender bias in the

workplace (Isaac et al., 2009). Therefore, recommendations and hiring in Bangladesh civil service has been carefully chosen as a parameter that can be forced by gender bias.

## **METHODOLOGY**

It is difficult to comprehend the prevalent unconscious gender bias in the whole civil service of Bangladesh. In order to have a better understanding of the current scenario, a study approach was implemented that was based on primary data collected from currently serving civil servants who belonged to different cadre services. The researcher utilized a variety of qualitative research procedures and techniques in the course of carrying out this investigation. Due to the nature of the study question, a survey using a semi-structured questionnaire was carried out with one hundred and eleven civil servants who are now working in various positions within the government of Bangladesh. For the purpose of providing support for its hypotheses and findings, this study made use of secondary data sources, in addition to the primary data sources.

### **Research Population, Sampling Technique and Sample Size**

There are approximately 45,363 class-I civil servants now working for the government of Bangladesh, and these individuals belong to one of 26 different cadres, as indicated by the figures provided by the Ministry of Public Administration. The 12 cadres which will serve as the basis for the research were selected through a process of random sampling. There are around 41,221 civil servants working for the government under those 12 cadres. Taking into account the limited amount of time available for the research as well as the sizeable population, the researchers decided to employ the convenience sampling approach with a sampling size of 111 participants, which represented approximately 0.25 percent of the total population.

### **Data Collection Method**

The primary data was collected through an online Google form using a semi-structured questionnaire survey. The form consisted of two parts: the first part was a consent form for the respondent (attached in Annexure), and the second part had eight questions, one of which was linked to the demographics of the participants, while the other seven were regarding the content of the issue itself. These were carried out anonymously so that the participants could be as open and honest as possible.

The secondary data was collected through existing research and literature on the topic. Different Bangladeshi government documents and international laws were also used.

### **Data Analysis Method**

Collected data were analyzed by using following methods of qualitative data analysis.

### **Measurement of scale**

Interval scales have been used for scale of measurement of data related to causes and consequences of gender bias in civil service. 4-point Likert-type scale was used for analyzing data of parameters that are affected by gender bias in Bangladesh civil service and 5- point Likert-type scale was used for analyzing data of parameters that cause gender bias in Bangladesh civil service. Other data collected from questionnaire survey were analyzed using ordinal scale.

### **Computing Scale score**

The scale score for data related to causes and consequences of gender bias in civil service were

computed by taking weighted mean of the responses of the participants in the survey. Microsoft Excel Spreadsheet Software was used for analyzing the scale score and also for preparing graphical representation of other data.

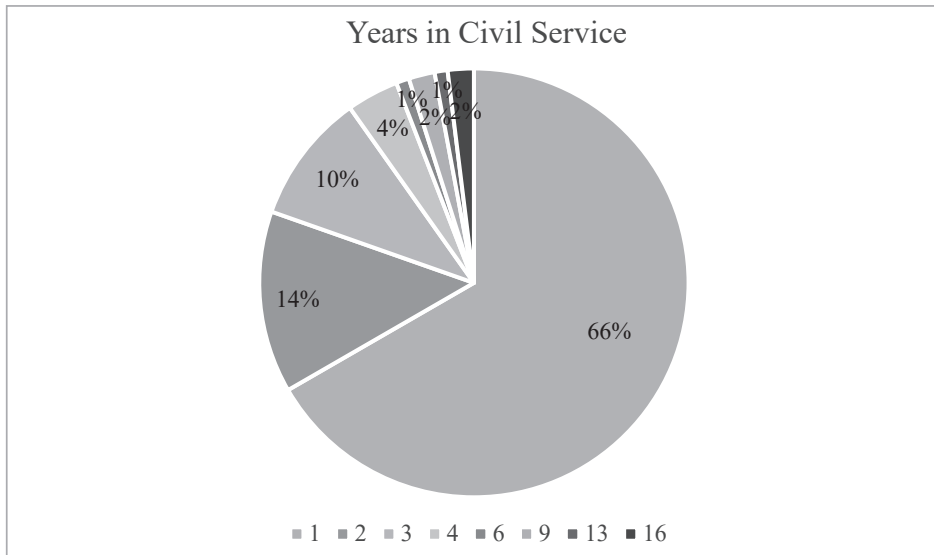
## **RESULTS**

After analyzing primary data from questionnaire survey, following notable findings were drawn.

### **Service Year Distribution among Participants**

Out of the total respondents in the questionnaire survey, 66% civil servants served the GoB for 1 year, followed by 14% civil servants who served for 2 years. 2 of the respondents served the highest (16 years). It is illustrated in the pie chart of Figure-1.



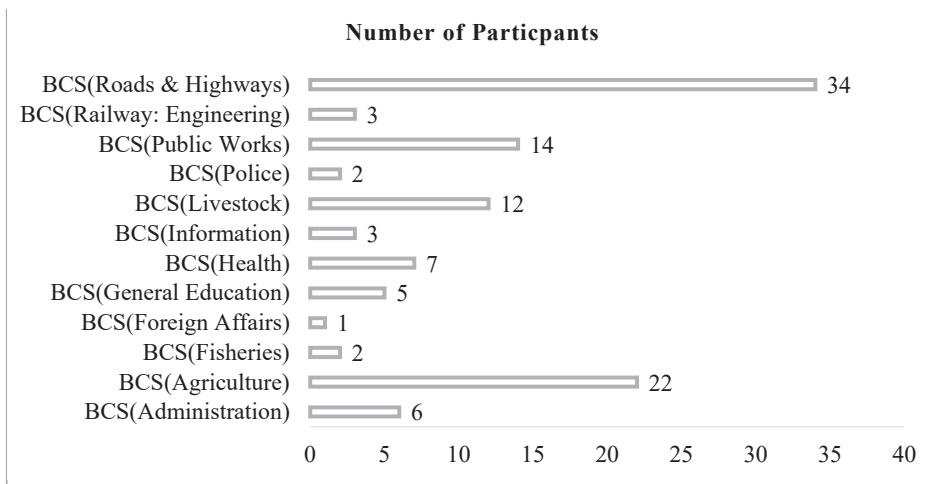


**Figure-1:** Service Year Distribution among Participants

#### Distribution of Participants from 12 Different BCS Cadres

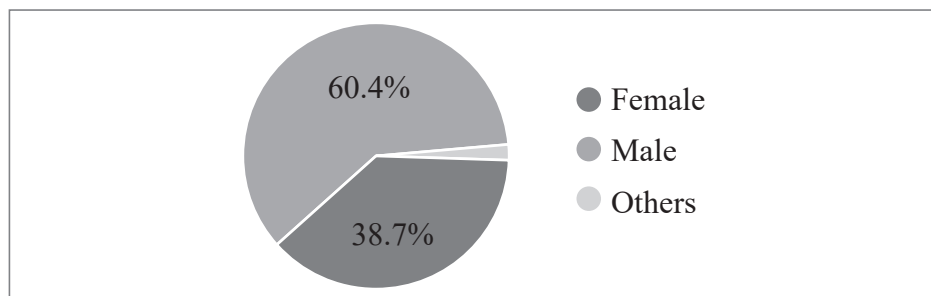
Figure-2 describes number of participants from each of the 12 BCS cadres who were part of this

study. Here, clearly the analyzed data show that highest participation is from BCS (Roads and Highways) cadre and lowest participation is from BCS (Foreign Affairs) cadre.



**Figure-2:** Distribution of Participants from 12 Different BCS Cadres

### Distribution of Participants Based on Sex

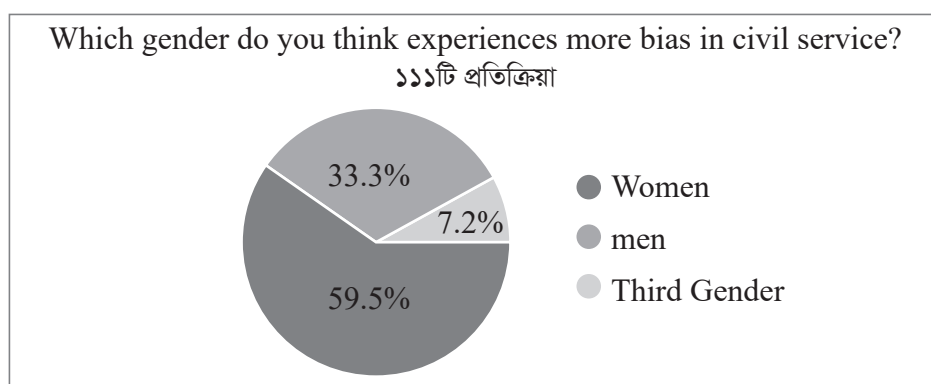


**Figure-3:** *Distribution of Participants Based on Sex*

Figure-3 designates approximate ratio of sex among the participants. Here, visibly the analyzed data show that highest participation is from male members which is 60.4%, followed by female members being 38.7% and lowest participation is from the other sex which is 0.9%.

### Gender Bias Experience in Bangladesh Civil Service

Figure-4 illustrates the perception of the participants in the questionnaire survey. 59.5% of the participants think that women experience more gender bias in civil service, followed by men which 33.3% and 7.2% participants think that third gender experiences more bias.



**Figure 4:** *Gender Bias Experience in Bangladesh Civil Service*

### Reasons of Gender Bias in Civil Service

Eight reasons have been ranked by the participants as reasons of Gender Bias in Civil Service. It can be observed from Figure-5 that most of the participants agree with gender stereotyping, under-representation of

women, societal mindsets and existing gender gap as reasons of gender bias in civil service. Figure-6 illustrates insufficient paid parental leaves, lack of child-care facilities, biased policies and lack of awareness as reasons of gender bias in civil service. After finding the 5-Point Likert-type Scale Score in Table 1, results can be interpreted that societal mindsets and lack of child-care facilities have significant positive correlation with gender bias meaning they are two major reasons for existing gender bias in Bangladesh civil service.

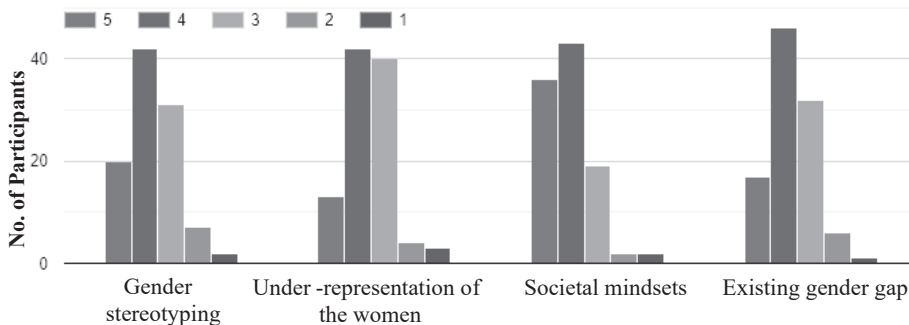
Gender stereotyping, under-representation of the women, existing gender gap, insufficient paid

parental leaves, biased policies and lack of awareness have positive correlation with gender bias

meaning they can be interpreted as minor reasons for existing gender bias in civil service.

How much do you agree with the possible reasons being responsible for gender bias in civil service?

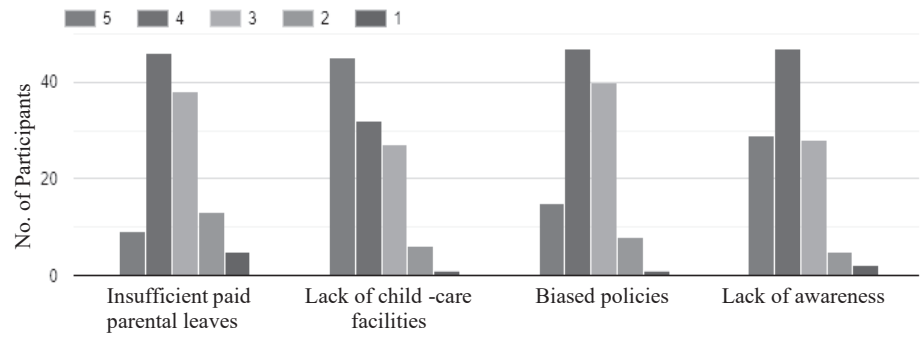
Please note that there are 5 options (5=highly agree, 4=agree, 3=neutral, 2=disagree, 1=highly disagree)



**Figure-5:** Gender Stereotyping, Under-Representation of Women, Societal Mindsets and Existing Gender Gap as Reasons of Gender Bias in Civil Service

How much do you agree with the possible reasons being responsible for gender bias in civil service?

Please note that there are 5 options (5=highly agree, 4=agree, 3=neutral, 2=disagree, 1=highly disagree)



**Figure-6:** *Insufficient Paid Parental Leaves, Lack of Child-Care Facilities, Biased Policies and Lack of Awareness as Reasons of Gender Bias in Civil Service*

**Table 1:** *Scale Score Interpretation Results of Reasons for Gender Bias in Bangladesh Civil Service*

Reason for Gender Bias in Bangladesh Civil Service	5-Point Likert-Type Scale Score	Scale Score Interpretation
Gender Stereotyping	3.7	Positive Correlation
Under-Representation of The Women	3.58	Positive Correlation
Societal Mindsets	4.09	Significant Positive Correlation
Existing Gender Gap	3.73	Positive Correlation
Insufficient Paid Parental Leaves	3.37	Positive Correlation
Lack Of Child-Care Facilities	4.03	Significant Positive Correlation
Biased Policies	3.6	Positive Correlation
Lack Of Awareness	3.86	Positive Correlation

*\*Scale Score Interpretation:*

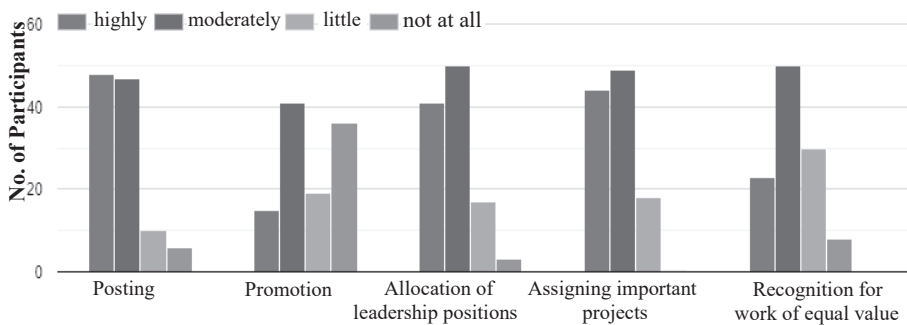
1 = significant negative correlation; 0.01 - 2.00 = negative correlation; 2.01 - 3.00 = no correlation; 3.01 - 4.00 = positive correlation; 4.01 - 5.00 = significant positive correlation.

**Gender Bias Consequences on Different Parameters in Civil Service**

Gender bias consequences on posting, promotion, allocation of leadership position and recognition for work of equal value can be observed from Figure-7. Figure-8 illustrates gender bias consequences on

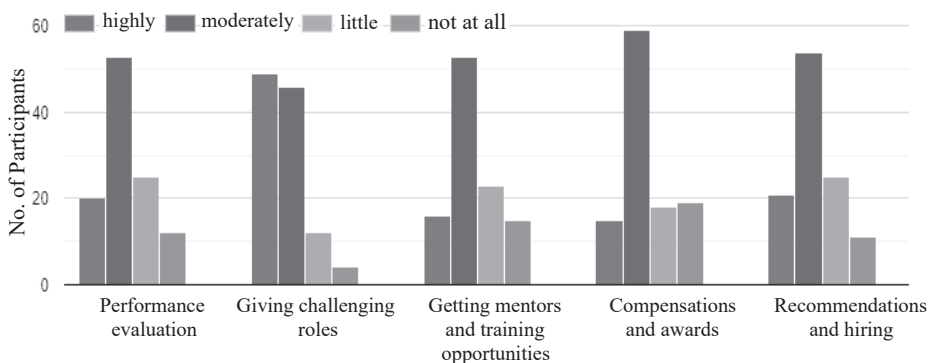
performance evaluation, giving challenging roles, getting mentors and training opportunities, compensations and awards and recommendation and hiring. After finding the 4-Point Likert-type Scale Score in Table 2, results can be interpreted that posting, allocation of leadership positions, assigning important projects and giving challenging roles in civil service is highly affected by gender bias. It also affects other parameters moderately which are promotion, recognition for work of equal value, performance evaluation, getting mentors and training opportunities, compensations and awards and recommendations and hiring.

How much do you think gender bias affects these parameters in civil service?  
Please note that there are 4 options (highly, moderately, little, not at all).



**Figure-7:** Gender Bias Consequences on posting, promotion, allocation of leadership position and recognition for work of equal value

How much do you think gender bias affects these parameters in civil service?  
Please note that there are 4 options (highly, moderately, little, not at all).



**Figure-8:** gender bias consequences on performance evaluation, giving challenging roles, getting mentors and training opportunities, compensations and awards and recommendation and hiring

**Table 2:** *Scale Score Interpretation Results of Parameters Affected by Gender Bias in Bangladesh Civil Service*

Parameters Affected by Gender Bias	4-Point Likert-type Scale Score	Scale Score Interpretation
Posting	2.23	affects highly
Promotion	1.32	affects moderately
Allocation of leadership positions	2.16	affects highly
Assigning important projects	2.23	affects highly
Recognition for work of equal value	1.79	affects moderately
Performance evaluation	1.74	affects moderately
Giving challenging roles	2.26	affects highly
Getting mentors and training opportunities	1.67	affects moderately
Compensations and awards	1.63	affects moderately
Recommendations and hiring	1.77	affects moderately

*\*Scale Score Interpretation:*

*0 = does not affect at all; 0.01 - 1.00 = affects little; 1.01 - 2.00 = affects moderately; 2.01 - 3.00 = affects highly.*

**DISCUSSION**

The study observed that women are subjected to a greater degree of gender bias in the Bangladesh civil service than men, followed by the third gender.

The findings show that societal mindsets and lack of child care facilities have a high positive link with gender bias, indicating that these are two of the primary causes of gender bias in the Bangladesh civil service. Gender stereotyping, under-representation of women, the existing gender gap, insufficient paid parental leaves, biased regulations, and a lack of awareness have a positive link with gender bias, therefore these can be viewed as minor causes of gender bias in the public sector.

The results suggest that gender bias has a significant impact on the posting, allocation of leadership positions, assigning important projects and giving challenging roles within the public service. It also has a moderate effect on other variables, including promotion, recognition for work of equal value, performance evaluation, getting mentors and training opportunities, compensations and awards and recommendations and hiring.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The unconscious gender bias in the workplace harms more than meets the eye. It relates capability and success to preconceived notions rather than skills, thereby preventing people from achieving their actual potential. Bangladesh, being the leader in South Asia in terms of gender equality, has come a long way by achieving substantial increase in participation of women in mainstream workplaces. Despite the achievements, very few women have reached leadership positions in government service. This study explores unconscious gender bias as one of the reasons behind this phenomenon.

This article attempts for an in-depth investigation of the gender bias that is now present in the Bangladeshi civil service. It also explores if and how women civil servants in Bangladesh are affected by gender bias in their career. It also tries to identify the reasons why such bias exists in the first place. The study employed qualitative research approaches and techniques based on 111 civil servants' questionnaire survey responses. According to the analyzed data, women encounter a higher incidence of gender bias than males, and members of the third gender experience a higher incidence of bias than men in the Bangladesh civil service. This conclusion is notable due to the fact that more than sixty percent of the respondents were male, and it was their impression of existing gender bias in the civil service.

It has been identified from data that social attitudes and a deficiency of child care facilities are two of the primary factors that contribute to gender bias in Bangladesh civil service. In addition, it was recognized that gender stereotypes, the underrepresentation of women in society, the gender gap, inadequate paid maternity leaves, biased policies, and lack of awareness were among the minor factors contributing to existing bias. The results suggest that gender bias has a substantial impact on different aspects of career in civil service. It affects significantly the posting, allocation of leadership positions, assigning important projects and giving challenging roles within the service. Moreover, promotion, recognition for work of equal value, performance evaluation, getting mentors and training opportunities, compensations and awards and recommendations and hiring in civil service are moderately affected by gender bias. The findings indicate significant prevalence of gender bias within the civil service impacting various important aspects of career advancement. Therefore, the effect of such bias should not be overlooked.

Bangladesh Civil Service, being the country's most elite workforce, should be a role model in breaking this cycle of gender bias in the workplace and achieving the vision of a developed country by 2041.

The strength of this research is the use of primary data and representative sample of the population as data were collected from currently serving officials. Due to the time constraint the sample size was restricted to 12 cadres only. It is recommended for future researchers to increase the sample size by inclusion of all cadres to understand the condition of gender bias in civil service more precisely. It is recommended for policymakers to adopt policies that can eliminate the existing gender bias in civil service.

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### **CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

There is no conflict of interest.

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