



Closing the Gender Gap: Towards Parity in India's Pharma Sector

Representation of Women in the Indian Pharmaceutical Industry

JULY 2025

Table of Contents

1. About	1
2. Acknowledgements	2
3. Executive Summary	3
4. Methodology	4
5. Sector Overview	5
6. CGG Data at a Glance	6
7. Challenges	8
7.1. Perceptions and Biases	9
7.2. Scarcity of Female Leaders	14
7.3. Gender Burdens and Norms	19
7.4. Safety, Mobility and Infrastructure	23
8. Exemplars in the Sector	28
9. Way Forward & Call to Action	29
10. Annexure	31

About

The Udaiti Foundation

The Udaiti Foundation is committed to drive India's vision of a Viksit Bharat and a \$30 trillion economy, through two key objectives of increasing India's Female Labour Force Participation Rate to 50% and doubling the number of women owned enterprises in the country. As a force multiplier in the Women's Economic Empowerment ecosystem, we actively provide data-backed evidence to the private sector organizations, state governments and the start-up ecosystem and collaborate with them to drive change on the ground.

Close the Gender Gap Initiative

The private sector holds significant potential to enhance women's participation in the workforce. Close the Gender Gap 30x30 is an ambitious initiative to increase women's workforce participation in large enterprises in India to 30% from the current 18% by 2030.

Since the adoption of the Business Responsibility and Sustainability (BRSR) framework, there have been promising efforts to fill the gap in gender-disaggregated company wise data. For instance, reporting of gender data by NSE listed companies has increased from 52% in FY 2022-23 to 57% in FY 2023-24. To this end, the Udaiti Foundation has launched the CGG Data Hub under the ambit of the CGG Initiative, a data-to-solutions platform for data, insights, tools and resources on gender representation and policies in the formal sector. As a browsable web resource, the platform allows users to interact with the data, generate sector-wise, year-wise and comparative reports through the Women's Formal Employment Tracker. CGG aims to catalyze commitments and action for gender parity at work.

To access the CGG Data Hub, and know more about it, please click [here](#)

Acknowledgements

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Executive Summary

Women represent 11% of the pharma workforce including 12% female employees and 11% female workers²
Women representation is below the NSE average of 18%

Theme	Challenges	Data	Solutions
Perceptions and Biases 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Perceived unsuitability and doubts about women's abilities at work - medical rep Family disapproval of long commutes and co-working with men Bias in STEM, ranging from stereotypes of it being male-oriented to inequities in pay 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The sector remains less accessible to women: Only 7% of permanent workers are women The sector is also marked with bias: Gender pay gap of nearly INR 1.2 crore in KMP roles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish women ERGs and offer on-the-job training to women to boost confidence Transparent hiring, promotion, and pay practices with gender sensitivity training for managers Gender sensitization within organizations and families of working women
Scarcity of Women Leaders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A limited talent pool and low retention of women in roles like sales, which form the majority of pharmaceutical hiring, hinder the development of a strong pipeline of future female leaders in the industry Lack of leadership training, networking and mentorship opportunities coupled with a low skilled female talent pool at the outset leads to a lack of female role models in the sector 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only 13% companies have more than 1 female Key Management Personnel Lack of leadership is a consequence of low retention of women in the pipeline : 20% turnover rate of permanent women employees ; 2% points higher than NSE average 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Return to work programmes aimed at bringing experienced senior women back to work and supporting a smooth transition Targeted leadership and mentorship opportunities in order for women to find support, connection and encouragement in their workplace. Hiring and retaining more women especially at the entry level to create a talent pipeline, through initiatives such as referral policy for women
Gender Burdens and Norms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of work life balance, especially for women with childcare responsibilities Policies such as inadequate paternity benefit coverage which disables men from sharing responsibilities Career discontinuity due to childcare and homemaking roles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lower percentage of women return to work (93%) compared to men (99%) post parental leave Inadequate coverage of paternity benefits for men (47%), limiting shared responsibilities with women 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introducing flexible policies at work Enabling policies like adequate paternity leaves and longer sabbaticals for women with childcare responsibilities Establishing care infrastructure such as daycare within office premise
Safety and Mobility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Irregular and restrictive working conditions in factories including laws which bar women from working night shifts Safety concerns, like unsafe transport, workplace sexual harassment, and inadequate safety measures for medical representatives traveling to remote locations Challenges in mobility, with vehicle ownership being a requirement for medical representatives, and non ergonomic and heavy medicine bags and helmets for women 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 29% increase in Sexual Harassment complaints from FY 2022-23 to FY 2023-24 33% increase in the number of unresolved complaints 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employing female security guards at factories especially for night shifts boosting confidence among different stakeholders to enable women to work at different shifts Addressing safety concerns by providing emergency support for women in sales, as well as cab pick up and drop facility in case of late shifts or outstation travel Public-private partnerships can help set up hostels to reduce commute, while ergonomic equipment improves women's efficiency on the field.

1.Guidance note for business responsibility and sustainability reporting format. page 3, point 18. SEBI

2.Ibid

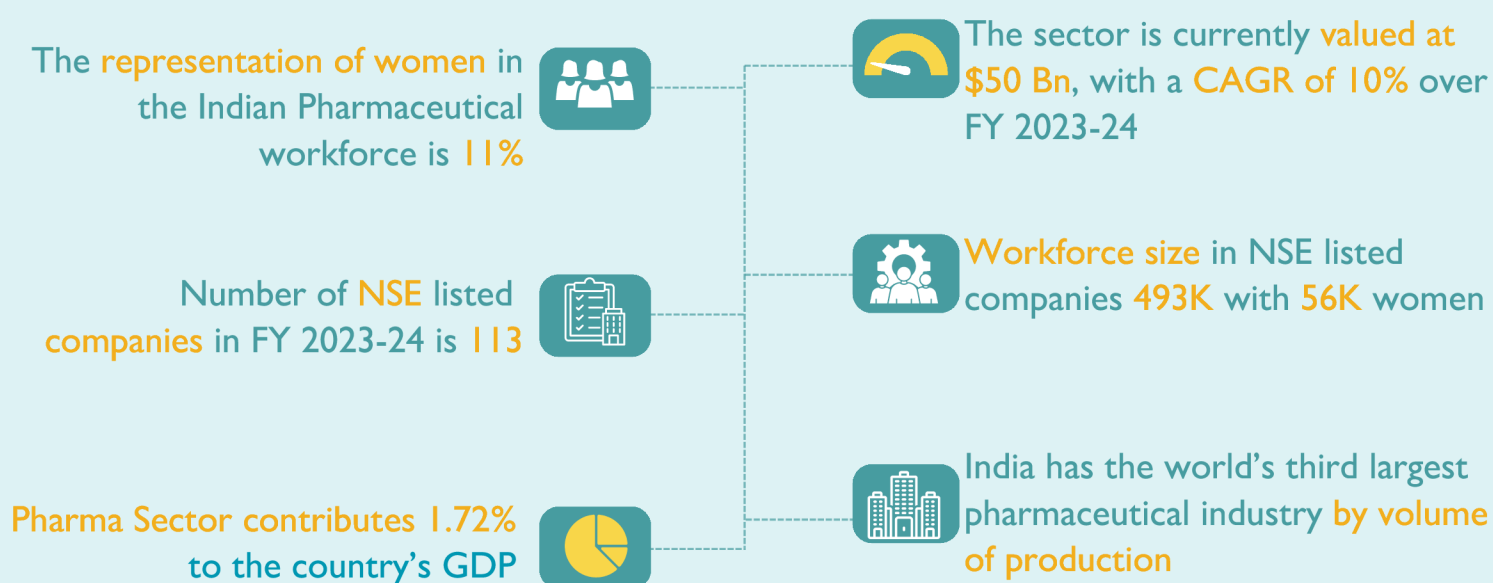
Methodology

- **Qualitative Interviews** : As part of Udaiti's private sector engagement, the team conducted 30 in-depth interviews with leaders and employees from top Pharmaceutical and Life Sciences companies. Interviewees included CEOs, HR teams, Talent Acquisition Partners, Business Leaders, Marketing Heads, DEI Heads, and Medical Representatives. The focus was on workplace experiences to gain deeper insights into the sector. Our interviews focused on workplace experiences to gain a deeper understanding of the sector. These interviews were semi-structured and the questions were pertaining to challenges around hiring, retaining and advancing women in the pharma sector. Individual names, company names, and any other identifying information were kept strictly confidential, and individuals are anonymized in this report. The interview inferences used in this report are broad emerging patterns of the sector which were reiterated repeatedly, and not standalone experiences to ensure credibility and generalizability.
- **Close the Gender Gap data** : The Close the Gender Gap Data is sourced from BRSR and Annual Reports (in case BRSR is not published) of 2209 NSE listed companies, for the 4 consecutive years - FY 2020-21, FY 2021-22, FY 2022-23 and FY 2023-24. Indicators such as Industry type, Market Index (Nifty 50 to Nifty 500), Employee Size and Annual Turnover of the companies were additionally captured to conduct deep-dive analysis of the data to generate actionable insights. For the purpose of this report, the data is filtered for 111 pharma companies in the database, of which 76 companies reported their gender data.
- **Secondary Research** : A wide range of academic papers, sector reports, and news articles were referenced to gather valuable insights into the current state of women's representation in the pharma sector. These sources provided data and context on key challenges such as workplace safety, mobility, long working hours, and leadership representation.

Sector Overview

The Indian pharmaceutical sector is a rapidly growing sub-sector of the healthcare ecosystem. It is a major exporter of pharmaceuticals, occupying a share of 20% by volume in the global supply of generic medicines, and serving more than 200 countries in its exports.³ Other than the supply of low cost vaccines and drugs, the major growth drivers of the sector include strong government support in the form of Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme, numerous US-FDA compliant manufacturing facilities, a vast pool of scientists and engineers and an ever increasing demand for drugs and vaccines.⁴

The government's focus on investment and innovation in engineering and technology is set to significantly expand employment prospects in the pharmaceutical sector. Coupled with growing domestic and international demand for medicines, the Indian pharma and healthcare sector is estimated to add almost one to two million new jobs⁵ by 2030. A substantial portion of the roles in the pharma sector are in the domain of manufacturing and sales, reflecting the production driven nature of the sector. Traditionally, these roles have been male-dominated due to a multiplicity of factors. As employability of women in the sector is on the rise, indicated by the India Skills 2022-23 report,⁶ addressing these challenges presents an opportunity to foster greater inclusivity and diversity within the sector as it continues to grow.



3. Annual Report 2023-24. Department of Pharmaceuticals, Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers, Government of India

4. Pharmaceutical Sector Overview. Invest India

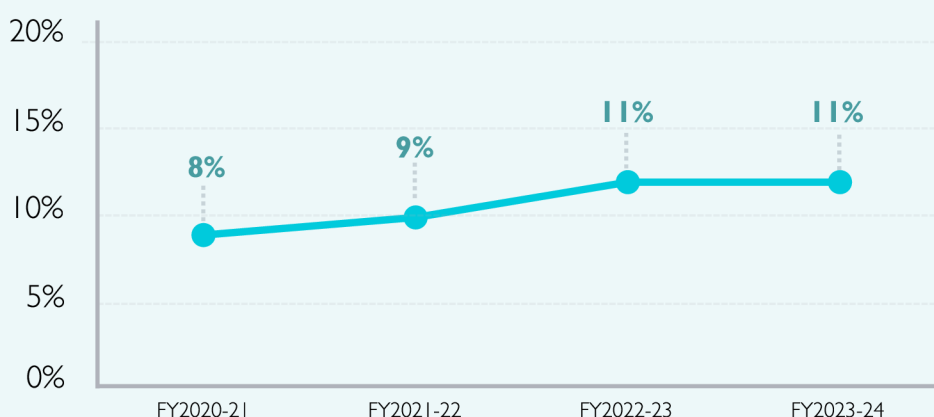
5. Uncovering Employment Dynamics: Insights into Workforce Expansion in Healthcare.ETHHealthWorld. March 18,2024

6. India Skills Report 2024. Wheebox.

Close the Gender Gap data on women in the pharma sector, at a glance

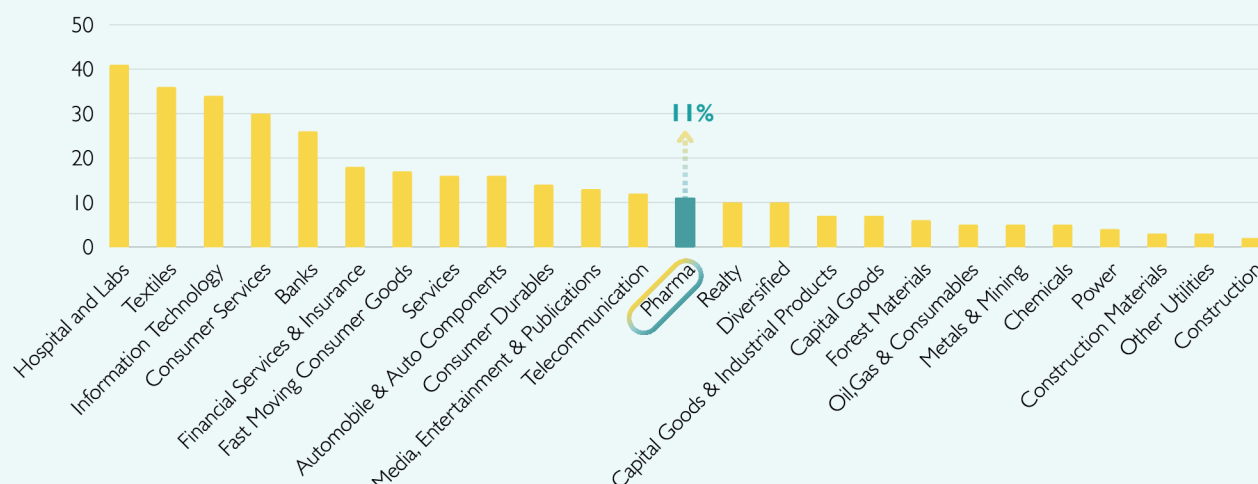
Women comprise 11% of the 493K large pharmaceutical workforce in the NSE listed firms. While the total workforce has steadily risen since FY 2020-21 to FY 2023-24, the share of women has seen an increase of 3 percentage points over the same period.

Fig 1: Women Workforce representation over 4 Years



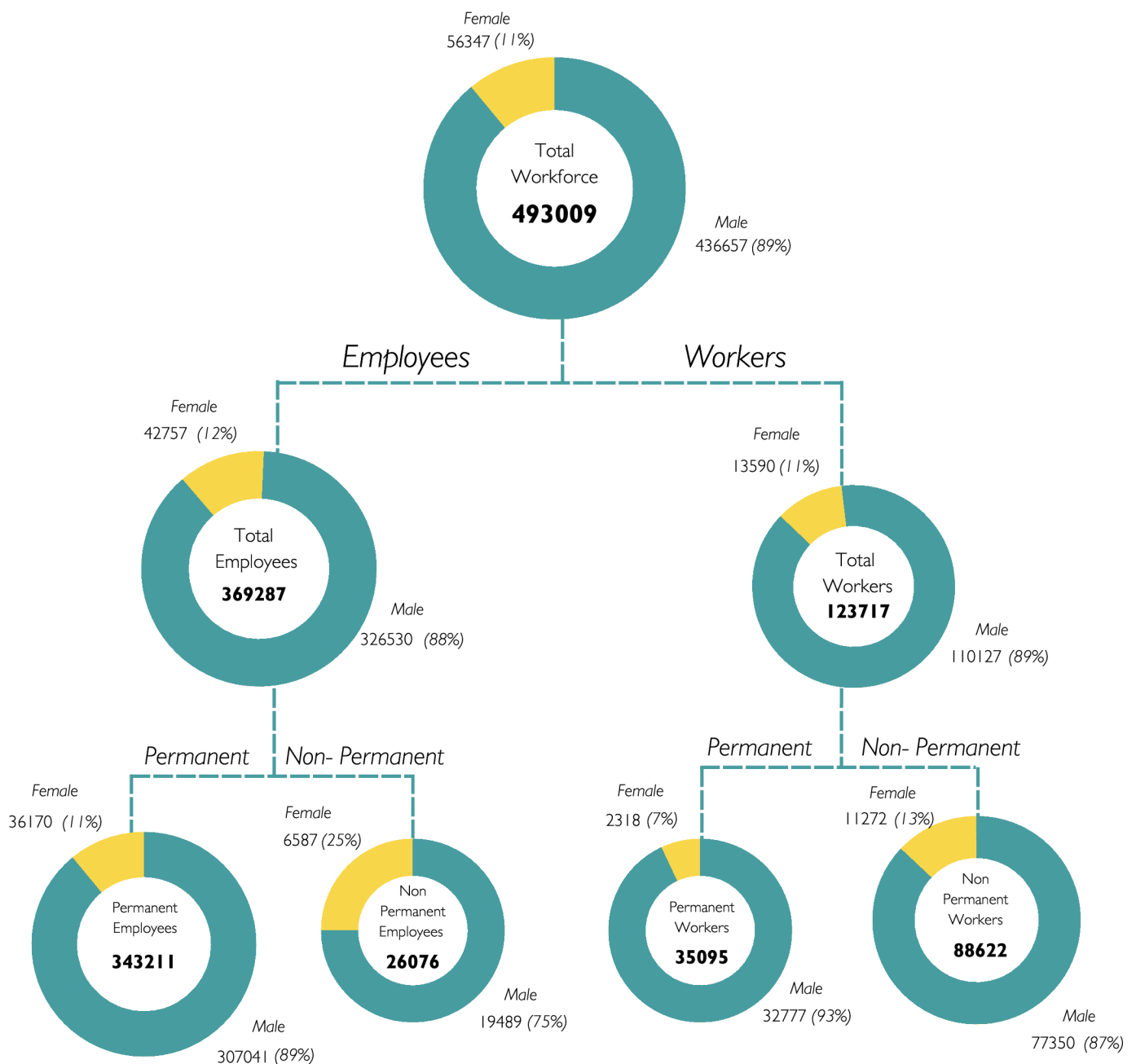
Although this increase surpasses that of other sectors such as IT and Banks, the representation still remains quite low, especially when benchmarked against allied sectors such as Hospitals and Labs (41% women representation).

Fig 2: Women representation in FY 2023-24 (%)



An analysis of women's representation across various employment types in the pharma sector reveals that only 7% of permanent workers in the sector are women, markedly below the NSE average of 18% for female permanent workers. This largely contributes to the low overall representation of women in the pharma sector, as their presence in all other employment categories exceeds 10%.

Fig 3: Women representation at different segments in the pharma sector



CHALLENGES

As indicated by the data, although the increase in women's representation in the pharmaceutical workforce has been consistent, it still falls below the NSE average and requires significant improvement. Women in the sector face diverse challenges which are often interconnected, and cuts across the workplace lifecycle. Most of the challenges are also unique for **women working in manufacturing facilities** (factory or assembly line), as **medical representatives** (field based) or in **research and development** (office or desk based), which broadly constitute the core roles in the pharmaceutical sector. Four key challenges are outlined below to bring forth both the unique and shared obstacles faced by women in the sector.



PERCEPTIONS AND BIASES



SCARCITY OF FEMALE LEADERS



GENDER BURDENS AND NORMS



SAFETY, MOBILITY AND INFRASTRUCTURE

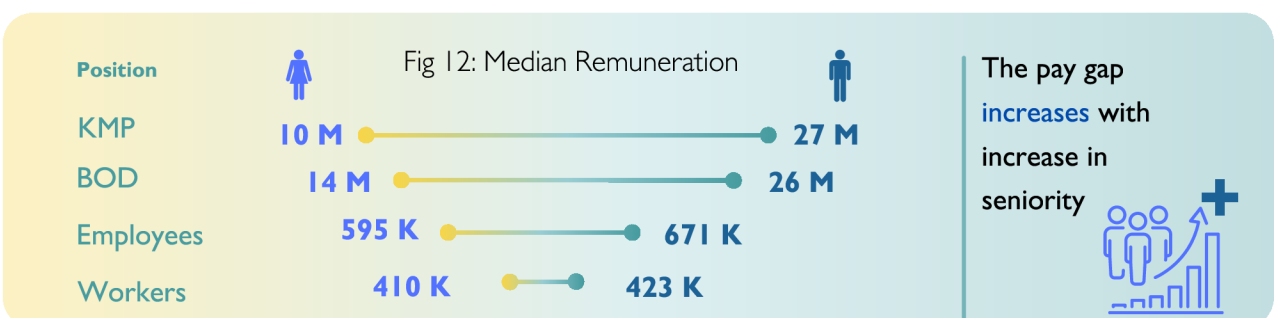
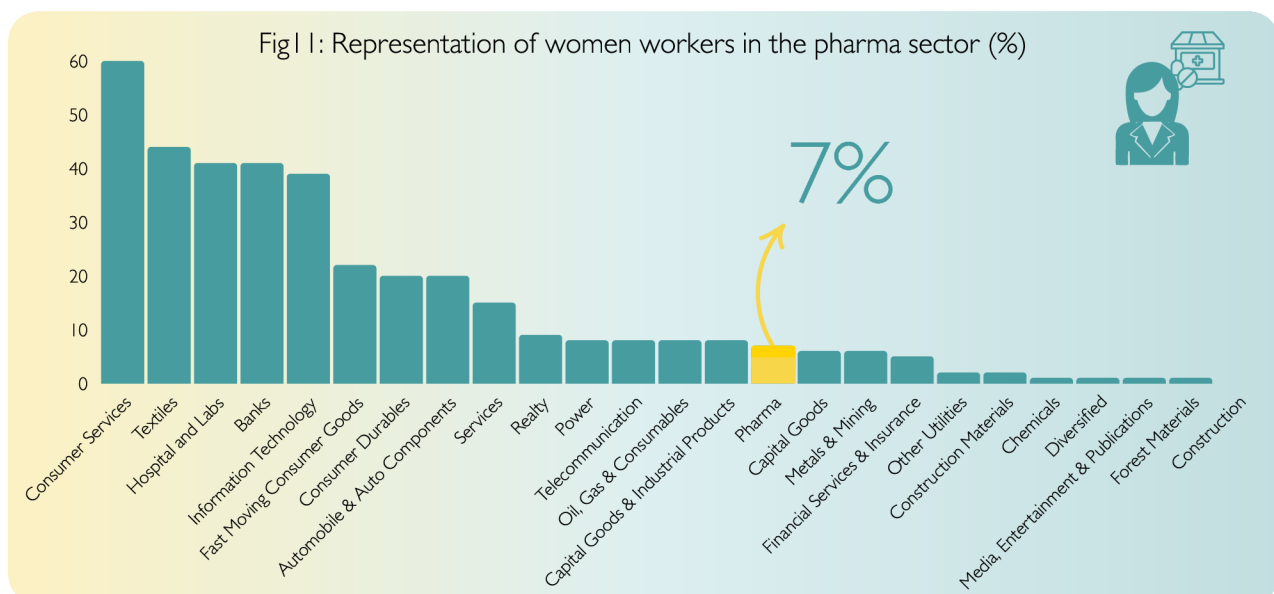


PERCEPTIONS AND BIASES

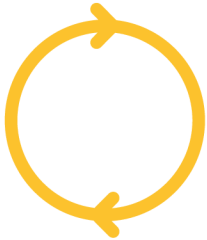
Women in the pharmaceutical sector are often faced with stereotypical perceptions and biases that can impede their career growth. These challenges manifest themselves in questioning women's capabilities, especially in male-dominated manufacturing, frontline field sales roles and leadership roles. Such biases not only affect women's career progression in the sector but also influence hiring and promotion practices.

Close the Gender Gap (CGG) Data

The pharma sector has an abysmally low representation of **7%** permanent women workers, a primary reason being restrictive perceptions which limit access to non-traditional forms of work for women. Bias exists at the other end of the spectrum too, with a stark gender pay gap at the senior level, going up to nearly INR **12 Million** for KMP levels.



PERCEPTIONS AND BIASES



The Cyclical Challenge in Manufacturing Jobs

In most sectors, manufacturing units are concentrated with men. The absence of female peers may lead to a feeling of isolation, discomfort and discrimination.⁷ This in turn has discouraged many women from seeking employment especially in remote areas in India.⁸ A survey on women working in manufacturing finds that 63% of them experience the highest levels of discrimination due to assumptions about their abilities and the suitability of the work for them.⁹

Male Dominated Factories

Shop floors are male dominated, making it challenging for women to make space for themselves and establish their authority, especially in settings where male factory workers are unaccustomed to being supervised by women. Women struggle with confidence while assuming supervisory roles in shop floors due to the misplaced belief that effective leadership requires one to be aggressive or assume overwhelming workload, beyond what their domestic responsibilities allow them to cope with.¹⁰ These spaces are historically accustomed to male presence and success is also defined in traditional masculine frameworks, creating an environment that is unconsciously unwelcome for women.¹¹

SHOPFLOORS ARE
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FAMILY AND
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OFTEN LEAD TO A
**LOW WOMEN
APPLICANT
BASE AT
FACTORY FLOORS**

Family and Workplace Bias

In Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities in India, there exists a large prejudice against encouraging women to travel for work, especially in day long jobs with men, that involves travel by public transport.¹² This prejudice exacerbates in case of manufacturing roles, which lack female peers and supervisors and involve long and tedious shifts. Hiring women to work in factories in remote areas therefore, becomes a challenge for companies. In some cases, there is demand for women to work at factories at assembly lines, due to their superior motor skills and dexterity, yet few women apply to these roles.¹³ On the other hand, there still exists resistance to employing women for night shifts, especially among male managers, as they felt it is inappropriate for women to work late in the night.¹⁴

“ I have faced challenges in having my opinions taken seriously, as colleagues perceive me as more “sensitive and emotional” due to my gender. This happened when I was taking a bigger role. ”
Female Senior Leader

7. Importance of Inclusivity in Workspace for Women in India. Kinara Capital. May 23, 2024

8. Shefali Anand. Bringing More Women to the Factory Floor in India. SHRM. March 9, 2021.

9. Women's Employment in Manufacturing, Operations and Engineering Services Sector. Avtar and GE Vernova. 2021.

10. Gender stereotypes in leadership: Analyzing the content and evaluation of stereotypes about typical, male, and female leaders. Frontiers, January 2023

11. TUF Interviews

12. Shilpa Ranipeta. Future Female Forward, Here's how Cipla is creating a women friendly workplace. CNBC TV 18. April 3, 2023

13. Shefali Anand. Bringing More Women to the Factory Floor in India. SHRM. March 9, 2021.

14. TUF Interviews

PERCEPTIONS AND BIASES



WOMEN HAVE
REPORTED
FACING **BIAS IN
THEIR
INTERACTIONS
WITH VENDORS**

Bias Across The Sales Pipeline

Frontline field sales roles, like medical sales representative positions, are often perceived as being suited for men.¹⁵ It is often believed that the demanding nature of these roles requires individuals who can prioritize work commitments over personal life.¹⁶ This perception systematically excludes women willing to work in this sector. Since sales forms the largest part of hiring for most big pharmaceutical organizations, women lose out on significant gainful employment. Women who enter the field have reported encountering biases at every stage of the sales pipeline, including interactions with vendors, suppliers and doctors.¹⁷ Moreover, many female medical representatives face resistance from their families, who are not comfortable with the extensive travel, especially to remote or outstation locations required for these roles.

Barriers In STEM

Women face obstacles in accessing STEM education and STEM based roles in organizations. Subjects like Mathematics are often viewed as inherently masculine.¹⁸ Moreover, such gender attribution to subjects also influences young women's aspirations to enroll in higher education in STEM.¹⁹ Traditional narratives associating male attributes with STEM roles contribute to their struggles with identity and fit.²⁰ Stereotypes questioning women's suitability in STEM positions contribute to reinforce barriers to career progression. Research finds that the gender gap in promotion is wider for women in technical roles than other roles, with only 52 women being promoted for every 100 men.²¹ Coupled with the imposter syndrome felt by women, which makes them less likely to indicate interest in a promotion, nearly 81% of Indian women in STEM also faced gender bias in performance evaluation and felt that their organizations were unwilling to promote them.²²

ONLY
52

WOMEN ARE
PROMOTED FOR
EVERY 100 MEN IN
TECHNICAL
ROLES

PAY GAP IS
OBSERVED AT KMP
LEVEL, WHERE A
MALE KMP **EARNs**
2.7
TIMES MORE
THAN FEMALE KMP

Gender Pay and Progress Gap

As the CGG data reflects, there is a stark gender pay gap in the pharmaceutical sector, which widens with increase in seniority level, with a male Key Management Personnel (KMP) earning as much as 2.7 times a female KMP. The Racial and Gender Pay Scorecard 2024 notes that the Biotech and Pharma industry has a gender pay gap of 2.2 percent which has improved by only 0.8 percent since 2015.²³ This has a direct and negative impact on engagement and retention of women at the workplace²⁴.

15. Marina Nekrasova, Maegan Becker, and Frances Brooks Taplett. Closing The Gender Gap in Sales Leadership. Boston Consulting Group. 21st November 2019.

16. TUF Interviews

17. Ibid

18. Elen Makarova, Belinda Aeschlimann and Walter Herzog. The Gender Gap in STEM Fields: The Impact of the Gender Stereotype of Math and Science on Secondary Students' Career Aspirations. Frontiers in Education. 2019.

19. Ibid

20. Erin Hunter. Study: Depictions of Diverse Women in STEM on Social Media Can Alleviate Loneliness for Other Women in STEM. Pharmacy Times. August 2, 2022.

21. Repairing the broken rung on the career ladder for women in technical roles. McKinsey & Company. March 1, 2022.

22. Ibid

23. Racial and Gender Pay Scorecard. Arjuna Capital, Proxy Impact, DiversIQ. March 2024.

24. Kaitlin Abrams et al. Gender Pay Gaps White Paper. Intellectual Property Owners Association. 2018.

RECOMMENDATIONS



Unbiased hiring, promotion and pay practices

Recruitment and promotion processes often include gender bias, even when unintentional. Employers can mitigate this by implementing gender sensitivity training for hiring panels and ensuring gender-balanced interview panels. Tracking gender-disaggregated data, setting clear salary ranges, structured interviews, competency-based assessments and gender balanced job descriptions help reduce bias during recruitment.²⁵ Additionally, interviews should be gender-sensitive, avoiding invasive questions about marriage or childbirth.



Forming support groups for women

Creating platforms for women to engage and network reduces the experience of alienation and also provides avenues for networking and professional development.²⁶



Training to build confidence in male-dominated spaces

Tie-ups with educational institutions to render distance learning pharma/STEM training to entry level women while they work at factories can provide encouragement and the confidence to take up jobs in male-dominated sectors such as manufacturing.²⁷ Additionally, offering soft-skill training that focuses on confidence building and effective communication with stakeholders can further strengthen their readiness for these roles.



Sensitisation programmes

Family sensitization in localities around factories to enable women to take up hyperlocal jobs in pharmaceutical plants is a welcome initiative, now being practiced by many organizations. Objection by families is a barrier experienced by far more women than men, however, when families are made aware of the benefits of women's employment and the safety measures in place, it can foster a supportive environment.²⁸ Additionally, special gender sensitization training for internal employees, especially ones on the field, is crucial to make women feel comfortable at work and perform their job at ease.²⁹

25.Rachel Levenson and Layla O'Kane. Gender Inclusion in India. Shell Foundation and UK AID. 2019. 44.Aspirations. Frontiers in Education. 2019.

26.Ibid

27.Shilpa Ranipeta. Future Female Forward,Here's how Cipla is creating a women friendly workplace. CNBC TV 18. April 3, 2023

28.Women's Employment in Manufacturing, Operations and Engineering Services Sector. Avtar and GE Vernova. 2021.Page 13.

29.How women representation in sales can play a role in business productivity. ETHRWORLD.The Economic Times. May 3, 2021.

INITIATIVES BY COMPANIES



Abbott

offers high school youth from diverse backgrounds real-world experience through mentorship and hands-on projects within the company. Abbott advances the probability of interns succeeding in STEM fields through chalking out tailored career paths and increases diversity in its STEM talent pipeline by providing access to experiences for women.



Cipla

has a flagship training programme called Neev in association with Bits Pilani and MIT Manipal, aims at building technical capabilities in manufacturing and quality. The programme empowers students to learn while earning, encouraging women to take up manufacturing jobs while skilling simultaneously. In 2023-24, 61 students were enrolled in the NEEV programme, 34% being women.



Dr Reddy's Laboratories

provides a realistic preview of the day to day work involved in a field sales role along with ample training to prospective women candidates in order to remove any misleading perceptions and biases and ensure commitment.



Dr Reddy's Laboratories

has set clear diversity targets to ensure that the priority to have more women at each level of seniority, and especially in leadership is prioritized. Dr. Reddy's Laboratories has set the target of 35% women in senior leadership and gender parity by the end of the year 2030.

SCARCITY OF FEMALE LEADERS

The Pharmaceutical Sector faces the challenge of a leaky pipeline of women leaders, where there is progressive reduction in women's participation at the different stages of career progression resulting in limited female leadership. Low initial hiring rates create a bottleneck that restricts female talent from advancing into leadership roles, coupled with inadequate networking and mentorship opportunities. A detrimental consequence of the lack of women in leadership positions is a lack of role models for women in pharma.

Close the Gender Gap (CGG) Data

Pharma sector turnover rates are higher than NSE averages, impacting the talent pipeline and women's progression into leadership roles. Consequently, the presence of women leadership especially KMP is quite low, only **13%** companies having more than 1 female KMP.

Fig 7: Turnover Rate in Pharma and overall NSE (%)

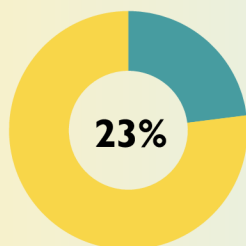
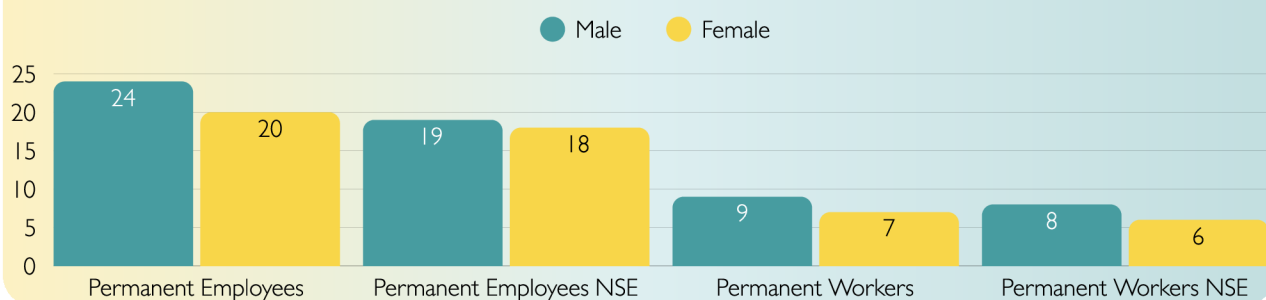


Fig 8: Female BOD

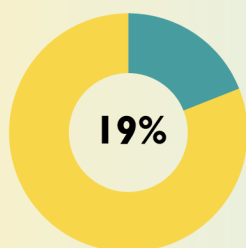
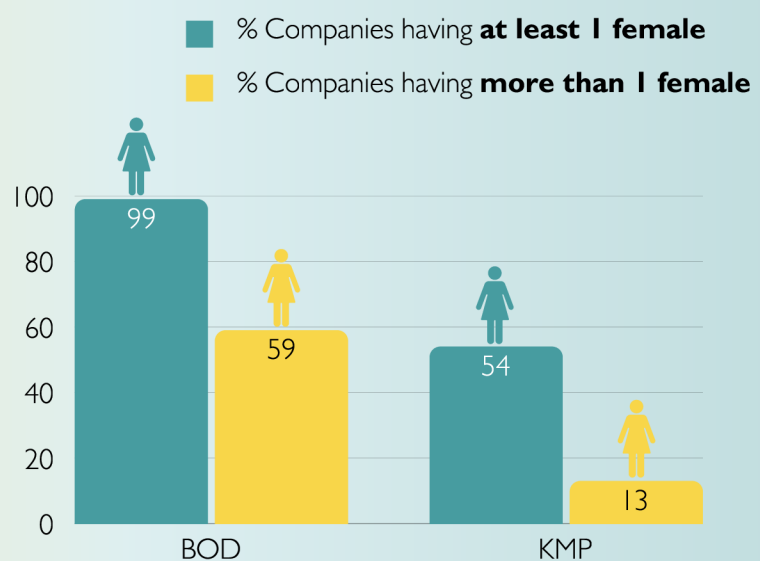


Fig 9: Female KMP

Fig 10: Presence of female leadership in companies



SCARCITY OF FEMALE LEADERS



Lack of Role Models and Unclear Pathways to Leadership

The predominance of male leadership and unclear pathways to leadership result in a scarcity of role-models for women to advance as supervisors or leaders in manufacturing units.³⁰ Most women are hired at the entry level and end up remaining at a similar level as workers.



Lack of Female Mentors

The shortage of visible female leaders in the industry can hinder women's aspirations and create an unclear path for advancement in medical representative roles.³¹ The lack of female mentors in leadership positions makes it difficult for women to find guidance and support. Moreover, women often hesitate to share sensitive concerns with predominantly male managers, slowing their career progression.³²

Early Attrition in Medical Representative Positions

The demanding nature of a medical representative's job, with its unstructured work schedule that often includes late evening or night calls, makes it especially challenging for women to manage family responsibilities, leading to early attrition. Additionally, sales calls frequently require outstation travel and overnight stays, further compounding these difficulties.³³

**UNSTRUCTURED
WORK HOURS,
LATE SHIFTS AND
OUTSTATION
TRAVEL ARE
INTRINSIC TO A
PHARMA JOB**

53%

OF COMPANIES IN
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HAVE ANY
WOMEN IN KMP

Scarcity of Female Talent In Sales

In pharma, given sales is a very crucial vertical, many leaders emerge from the sales roles³⁴ and because sales is one of the most male dominated fields, this creates a cyclical hurdle. The stark underrepresentation of women in the pipeline, hovering around a mere 11%, reflects systemic hurdles in recruitment, retention, and advancement. 53% of companies within the sector do not have any women in KMPs, indicating an area for targeted improvement in the upper echelons of leadership.

Undervaluation of Women's Contribution of Sales

Research indicates that women who pursue careers in sales don't feel sufficiently valued or supported at work. The finding emerges from a recent BCG global diversity report, which surveyed 7,506 men and 8,573 women in 14 countries and a variety of industries, including 648 men and 902 women in B2B sales.³⁵ Sales jobs have historically not been viewed as positions in which women could excel, and fewer women proactively seek them out as a result.



30. Closing Gender Gap in Manufacturing. Cosmo First. 9 April 2024.

31. Marina Nekrasova, Maegan Becker, and Frances Brooks Taplett. Closing The Gender Gap in Sales Leadership. Boston Consulting Group.

32. TUF Interviews

33. Ibid

34. https://www.moneycontrol.com/news/business/companies/why-pharma-sales-function-has-too-few-women-6615731.html#google_vignette, Money Control, 2021

35. Marina Nekrasova, Maegan Becker, and Frances Brooks Taplett. Closing The Gender Gap in Sales Leadership. Boston Consulting Group.

SCARCITY OF FEMALE LEADERS



WOMEN FACE
**LACK OF
CLARITY ON
HOW TO
DEVELOP
LEADERSHIP SKILLS
AND SCALE THE
PROFESSIONAL
LADDER**

Limited Exposure to Leadership Training

Most of the pharmaceutical companies have some form of leadership training in place for employees of different seniority levels, sometimes even specifically targeted towards women. However, most of these have limited cohorts, and the reasons for non selection are not clearly explained. This leads to women being stuck in middle management positions, with a lack of clarity on how to develop their leadership skills and scale the professional ladder.³⁶

Inadequate Networking and Sponsorship Opportunities

Women are frequently isolated and excluded from informal networks, peer groups and support systems in STEM workplaces.³⁷ The inability to access these networks result in inability to navigate institutions to climb up leadership positions. Similarly, they face a lack of sponsorship initiatives where a sponsor can effectively navigate complex corporate ecosystems and play a pivotal role in advocating for female employees.



WOMEN FACE
**LACK OF
ADEQUATE
SUPPORT WHEN
THEY WANT TO
RE-ENTER THE
WORKPLACE**

Progression Challenges

There are specific challenges within the pharma sector that hinder women's advancement into leadership positions, such as the lack of formal professional development opportunities, insufficient support for re-entering the workforce post career breaks for family care, gender disparities in middle management roles, limited avenues for promotion and a dearth of mentorship and sponsorship programs to facilitate career progression.³⁸

“ I believe there is a need to spotlight and create ‘role models’ out of best performing women and woman to woman mentorship so that women can envisage themselves growing.
Male HR Business Lead ”

“ More women in leadership positions would help address unconscious biases. I believe that the focus in medical fields should be on science and patient care, rather than gender, to promote a more equitable work environment.
Female Senior Leader ”

36. TUF Interviews

37. Women in STEM Challenges and Opportunities in India. IWAAGE, Lead Krea University and TQH. October 2023.

38. An Unbalanced Scale: Exploring the Female Leadership Gap in India's Healthcare Sector, Dasra, 2023.

RECOMMENDATIONS



Return to Work Programs

Returnship programs are crucial for supporting women re-entering the workforce after a career break. They provide structured training, mentorship, and hands-on experience, helping women rebuild confidence, update skills, and transition smoothly back into their jobs. It provides flexible work options, and focuses on skill development tailored to individual needs. These programs ensure women do not face a penalty for taking a break and continue advancing in their careers and do not drop off at various stages.



Targeted Leadership Programmes

There is a need to create targeted leadership and learning programs for women at all levels, with a particular focus on senior roles, to equip them with the skills, confidence, and opportunities necessary for career advancement and leadership positions.



Mentorship Opportunities and Referral Policy for Women

Women in pharma require role models to picture their own career trajectories. Mentorships thus allow women to find support, connection and encouragement in their workplace. Alongside mentorship, having referral policies for women through diversity goals and targets allow hiring more women.



Building a pipeline of women's participation

With low female representation in the pharmaceutical sector, especially in sales, it's vital to hire and retain more women at the entry level. Leveraging existing networks, engaging local Self-Help Groups, and partnering with pharma colleges are effective strategies to identify and onboard female talent.

INITIATIVES BY COMPANIES



AstraZeneca India

has an Exclusive Talent and Development Programme for women called 'Women as Leaders.' A female leadership programme can be the missing piece of the puzzle for many women leaders. It helps them discover what's important to them, identify their values and strengths and develop their vision.



Glenmark Pharmaceuticals

has designed the Beacon for Her programme, under which, experienced senior women leaders will mentor talented women for 6-9 months, aligning their guidance with the mentees' career aspirations.



Biocon

has an Employee Referral Policy with an additional reward for every referred and selected female candidate.



Dr Reddy's Laboratories

has set clear diversity targets to ensure that the priority to have more women at each level of seniority, and especially in leadership is prioritized. Dr. Reddy's Laboratories has set the target of 35% women in senior leadership and gender parity by the end of the year 2030.

GENDER BURDENS AND NORMS

Women in the pharmaceutical sector often experience the weight of gender burdens and societal norms, which can hinder their career advancement. These challenges arise from expectations around balancing work and family responsibilities, along with traditional roles that limit their participation in demanding jobs like manufacturing, field sales, and leadership positions. Since core roles like Sales and R&D require extensive time and dedication, women often quit the workforce or switch to support roles or remain in non managerial roles to balance household responsibilities.³⁹

Close the Gender Gap (CGG) Data

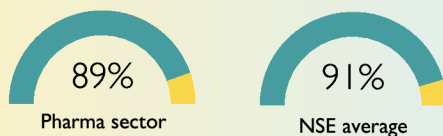
Women face lower likelihoods of returning to work post-parental leave compared to men, as reflected in the data. Additionally, the lack of adequate supportive infrastructure and policies contributes to lower retention rates, with only **89%** of women returning from parental leave employed 12 months later, compared to **91%** among NSE companies.

Fig13: Return to Work (RWR) post parental leave: Women have a **lower tendency to return to work post parental leave compared to men.**



Fig14: Retention Rate post parental leave

Female permanent employees



Female permanent workers

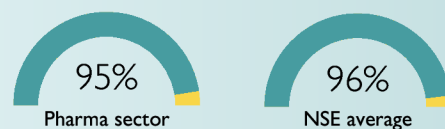
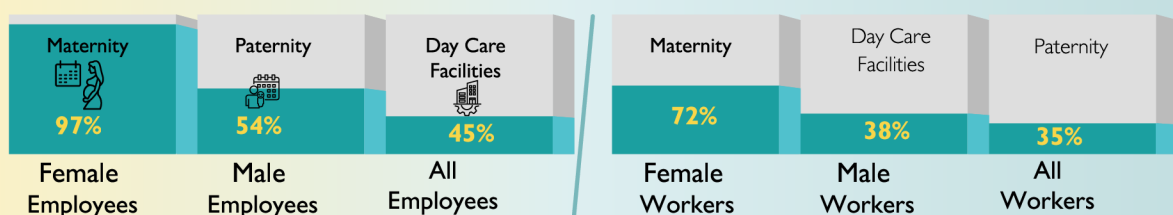


Fig15: % of companies offering benefits to its workforce



39. Inés Hardoy, Pål Schøne, Kjersti Misje Østbakken. Children and the gender gap in management. Labour Economics. Volume 47. 2017. ScienceDirect.

GENDER BURDENS AND NORMS



NEARLY
50%
OF WOMEN LEAVE
MANUFACTURING
JOBS, AFTER
MATERNITY BREAK
DUE TO LACK OF
CHILDCARE
SUPPORT

Lack of Work-Life Balance

At pharmaceutical packaging factories, employees often struggle with work-life balance.⁴⁰ This can often pressure women to choose between their careers and a family life due to gender burdens. Moreover, Close the Gender Gap data finds that only 47% of male employees and 29% of male workers are offered Paternity Benefit Coverage by the NSE listed pharma firms. This disables men from effectively sharing the burden of family and household work with women. Nearly half of the women leave manufacturing roles before the age of 30, soon after returning from maternity leave, due to a lack of adequate child care facilities.⁴¹

Care Burden on Women

According to the PLFS 2023-24 data, around 200 Mn women were out of the labour force, meaning they were not actively seeking employment. Childcare responsibilities and personal commitments in home making were cited as the primary reason for 65% of the women not actively seeking employment, highlighting the significant impact of domestic roles on their career participation.⁴² A recent government assessment found that women account for only 18.6% of researchers in R&D activities in India.⁴³ The report cited family responsibilities as a key factor behind the low participation, often resulting in career breaks and extended absences from the workforce.⁴⁴

65%
OF WOMEN ARE
NOT ACTIVELY
SEEKING
EMPLOYMENT
DUE TO
CHILDCARE AND
PERSONAL
COMMITMENTS

“Within the Pharmaceutical Industry, post career break joining is not smooth. In my personal experience, creches helped me transition back to work and I believe women are equally attached to their careers

Female Product Manager



“Women need to feel empowered in their roles as contributors to the household income. They should be part of sessions where they are made to understand how pivotal their role is. Most women still face the entire burden of household work, which needs to be shared, and they need to exercise authority to change these dynamics.

Male Sales Manager



40. Empowering women in the pharma packaging boardroom. Sustainable Packaging News. 12 March 2024.

41. Subburathinam P. Women's Increasing Role in India's Manufacturing Sector. Teamlease.

42. MoSPI, Government of India. (2021). Periodic Labour Force Survey 2022-23. New Delhi: Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation.

43. Research & Development Statistics At A Glance 2022-23. Ministry of Science and Technology, Government of India.

44. Women in STEM. Kelly Global Workforce Services. 2016.

RECOMMENDATIONS



Flexibility at work

The Pharmaceutical sector is characterized by long work hours, intensive travel and multiple shifts, especially for medical representatives. Offering flexible hours, days of work and hybrid work options can enable women to join the labour force in greater numbers as well as retain themselves for a longer period.⁴⁵



Infrastructure and policies to mitigate gender burdens

Infrastructure and policies, curated to alleviate the double burden on women can effectively reduce the dropout rates and improve the retention of women at all levels.⁴⁶ These can range from creche or daycare facilities for working mothers, paternity policies to enable men to share childcare responsibilities with their spouses, longer sabbaticals for women with childcare responsibilities and tailored return to work programmes for both men and women taking parental leaves.



Second Career or Return to Work programmes

Women who leave the workforce due to homemaking or childcare responsibilities often face challenges re-entering at the same or a higher position. Tailored return-to-work programs, combined with targeted upskilling opportunities, can empower women to rebuild their confidence, reignite their careers, and acquire the skills needed to thrive in the workplace.

45. Hybrid Work and its effect on Women's Labour Force Participation: A Policy Review. 2023. Lead At Krea, IWVWAGE, ZOOM.

46. Childcare and Corporate Policies in India: An Analysis of their effect on working mothers and their productivity. Klay Centres and the Mavericks. 2023.

INITIATIVES BY COMPANIES



Pfizer

has provisions for flexible and part time work. Creche benefit is also applicable to women across the organization. This is to ensure that women find it relatively easier and convenient to make the transition back to work. Women can avail this benefit for 2 children (from 6 months to 6 years) and take reimbursements.



Torrent Pharmaceuticals

has designed the programme ASMITA in order to improve their female representation to 15% by 2025, including comprehensive support to female employees to help with transfers and mobility for those needing to relocate due to family reasons. Additionally, the organization extends creche facilities for female employees with young children.



Dr Reddy's Laboratories

has the WOW programme or the "Womb to World Initiative", which supports working mothers starting from prenatal to early childcare and beyond. Providing emotional, nutritional support and childcare facilities, along with parenting workshops and career counseling for children, WOW fosters a supportive environment for working parents, investing in their well-being and success.



Abbott

has a second careers engagement programme empowering veterans and women returning from career breaks, providing the required flexibility.

SAFETY, MOBILITY AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Women in the pharmaceutical sector face several hurdles in the areas of safety and mobility. In manufacturing, they encounter risks ranging from use of non ergonomic equipment and machinery, while medical representatives often have to travel extensively to remote or less secure areas, increasing safety concerns. These existing concerns discourage women from entering or retaining themselves in the sector.

Close the Gender Gap (CGG) Data

A **29%** rise in Sexual Harassment complaints highlights the need for robust preventive measures and stricter enforcement of POSH policies. Given the nature of work in pharmaceutical companies, involving long shifts and outstation travel, stringent safety measures are essential to ensure a secure and supportive work environment for women.

Fig 4: Sexual Harassment complaints per 1000 women in FY 2022-23 increasing to 1.9 in FY 2023-24

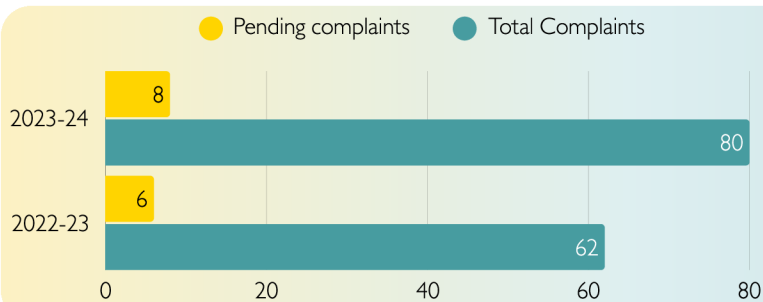
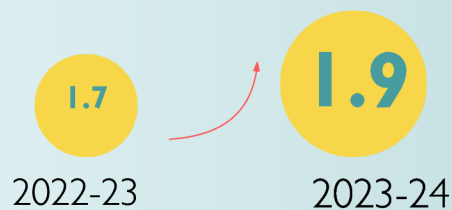
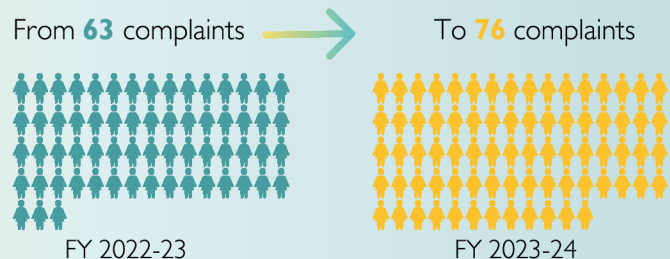


Fig 5: New Sexual Harassment complaints and complaints pending resolution increased by

29% & 33%.



Fig 6: In POSH complaints in the Pharma sector over FY 2022-23 and FY 2023-24



SAFETY, MOBILITY AND INFRASTRUCTURE



THE INDIAN
FACTORIES ACT
1948 RESTRICTS
WOMEN TO WORK
ONLY DAY SHIFTS
BETWEEN
**6 AM TO
7 PM**

Irregular and Restrictive Working Conditions in Factories

The nature of manufacturing activities involves unpredictable, long hours and inflexible shifts. This is aggravated by government policies such as the Indian Factories Act 1948, which restricts women to work only day shifts between 6 AM to 7 PM, allowing states to introduce exemptions with a few conditions. With the exception of a few states like Uttar Pradesh and Karnataka, most states prohibit women from working night shifts. Additionally, the Factories Act prohibits women from working in factories where they may be exposed to hazardous substances, such as toxic chemicals or inflammable materials, which are common in pharmaceutical manufacturing. In Bihar, women are restricted from 49 such hazardous processes, hindering their ability to participate effectively in the sector. Such laws, which were originally meant to protect women, end up reducing their bargaining power, depriving them of opportunities to earn a better livelihood and sometimes even push them towards more harmful occupations.⁴⁷

Sexual Harassment at Workplace

Interviews with men and women employed in manufacturing and operations jobs in India find that while 10% of the women have faced sexual harassment at the workplace, 30% of the men claim to have witnessed acts of sexual harassment against women.⁴⁸ This highlights the urgent need for stringent measures to address and prevent harassment against women in the workplace.

+21%

INCREASE IN POSH
COMPLAINTS IN THE
PHARMA SECTOR
OVER FY 2022-23
AND FY 2023-24

84%

OF THE WOMEN
IN INDIA RELY ON
PUBLIC
TRANSPORT

Lack of Safe Transport Facilities

Women are the largest users of public transport across Indian cities, with 84% of women's travel relying on public transit.⁴⁹ However, the crowded conditions in most buses during peak hours, chaotic transfers and unsafe boarding and alighting increases travel time and discourages women from traveling for work.⁵⁰ Therefore across India, there is an increased preference for hyperlocal work especially among women. Women want to work, but find it difficult to migrate for work due to a multitude of social and economic norms limiting their mobility.⁵¹

“ I feel bags, helmets for women and men should be different. Different needs have to be respected so that diversity is not just a tick mark, but a longer change.
Male Sales Manager ”

47. Bhuvana Anand and Sarvanipun Kaur. State of Discrimination. Prosperity. March 2022. Pharmaceutical Sector Overview. Invest India

48. Women's Employment in Manufacturing, Operations and Engineering Services Sector. Avtar and GE Vernova. 2021.

49. Toolkit for Enabling Gender Responsive Urban Mobility and Public Spaces. India. Volume I, The 'What to do' Note for Policymakers. The World Bank. 2022

50. Sanghamitra Roy, Ajay Bailey, Femke van Noorloos, The everyday struggles of accessing public transport for women in the first- and last-mile stretches in Kolkata. Journal of Transport Geography. Volume 117. 2024

51. Peter S. Goodman. Women in India Face a Job Crisis: Are Factories the Solution? New York Times, July 3, 2024.

SAFETY, MOBILITY AND INFRASTRUCTURE



SHARE OF
WOMEN'S DRIVER
LICENSES WAS
ONLY
6%
IN MARCH 2020

Vehicle Ownership as a Prerequisite for Medical Representatives

Women's mobility outside of home has historically been a challenge, with the percentage share of women's driver licenses being only 6% in March 2020.⁵² The role of a Medical Representative involves intensive travel, both near and far from their home. Resorting to public transport can be both a hassle as well as a time consuming route. Having a private vehicle (particularly a two-wheeler) is an unsaid necessity for a Medical Representatives daily job.⁵³ This can be a systemic hindrance for women applying to sales roles from the outset. Moreover, on examination of multiple job descriptions for medical representatives it was found that none of them specified the ownership of a private vehicle as a requirement, which can provide an unrealistic job preview to the applicant and can demotivate them from further applications if rejected on this basis.

Safety and Hygiene Concerns While On the Field

The role of a Medical Representative requires visiting a variety of public and private spaces and waiting for doctors to become available after patient consultations or for distributors and chemists during their off-trade hours. This raises a plethora of safety and hygiene concerns. The unavailability of clean washrooms, especially during women's menstrual cycles, becomes a barrier in the smooth functioning of their duties. In some cases, women sales staff have been found to avoid drinking water the entire day as they do not have access to clean toilets.⁵⁴ Furthermore, maintaining strong customer relationships is essential for medical representatives, often requiring them to visit customers in their homes or engage with them outside regular working hours.⁵⁵ This presents significant security risks, particularly in rural or peri-urban areas, which may discourage women from applying to these roles unless adequate security measures are implemented.



Non Ergonomic Equipment Design For Medical Representatives

There is a lack of data on the female anatomy, as a consequence of which most products are designed as per the male body, ranging from car seats to phones.⁵⁶ During Udaiti's discussions with female medical representatives at Pharma companies, many claimed that the helmets provided to them as part of the safety kits given by their companies were too large for them, which made it uncomfortable for long hours of wear. Additionally, the bag provided for carrying medicines was also too heavy, and the women reported issues with the ergonomics of the same.⁵⁷

52. Road Transport Yearbook. Government of India. Ministry of Road Transport and Highways. Transport Research Wing. 2019-20.

53. TUF Interviews

54. Lubna Kably. Cos put safety first for women in field work. The Times of India

55. TUF Interviews

56. Criado Perez, Caroline. Invisible Women: Data Bias in a world designed for Men. 2019.

57. TUF Interviews

RECOMMENDATIONS



Employing female security guards at the factories

Especially during night shifts, this move can reassure women and their families about safety during late hours. In fact, some states, such as Haryana, allow factories to employ women during night shifts on the condition that there will be sufficient security guards at all entry and exit points of factories.



Support mechanisms for women in sales roles

Resources like helplines, safety apps and emergency buttons can improve safety for women in field sales roles. A pilot in high-risk and highly frequented areas by agents can enable feedback from women and gather scale at later stages.



Accommodation for women

Arranging for safe accommodation (hostels, hotels, etc.) and clean canteen food, especially for employees in manufacturing roles can be a stimulus for women to join factories especially in rural and peri-urban areas, since travel to and from work can be a limiting factor.



Simplifying travel for women

Multiple pharmaceutical companies offer special allowances and facilities to ease travel for women. Initiatives which allow for doorstep pick up and drop and special travel allowances can significantly improve mobility for women.



Providing ergonomic products for women

Companies should prioritize designing safety gear and equipment tailored to women's needs, including properly fitted helmets and ergonomically designed bags or multiple smaller bags rather than one heavy bag. Conducting gender-specific product testing and feedback sessions can help ensure comfort and safety.

INITIATIVES BY COMPANIES



Pfizer India

has introduced an initiative called Travel Safe, where employees can avail cab facilities on days they work beyond 8 PM.



Torrent Pharmaceuticals

offers a higher hygiene allowance for women on field to seek restroom facilities.



Glenmark Pharmaceuticals

has introduced a mobile application which provides access to the nearest safe and hygienic washroom facilities and includes features such as hydration reminders, menstrual cycle tracking and access to personal care products.



Dr Reddy's Laboratories

provides care kits for its female medical representatives which includes sanitary pads to support women during their menstrual cycles while working on the field.

EXEMPLARS IN THE PHARMA SECTOR⁵⁸



Fig I 6: Pharma companies with **highest female employee representation (%)**

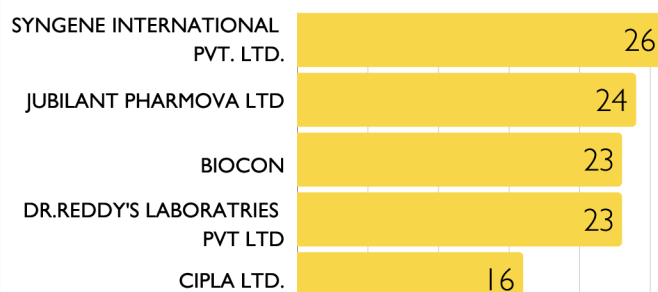


Fig I 7: Pharma companies with **highest female worker representation (%)**

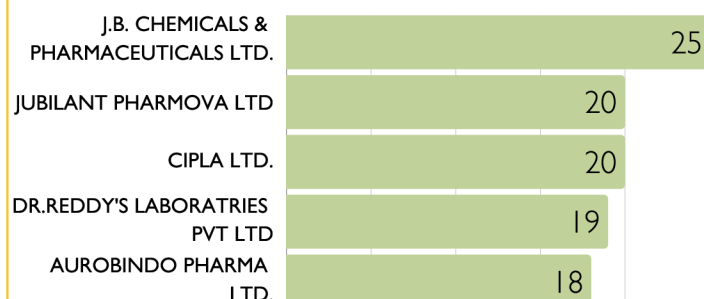


Fig I 8: Pharma companies with **highest representation of women in KMP (%)**

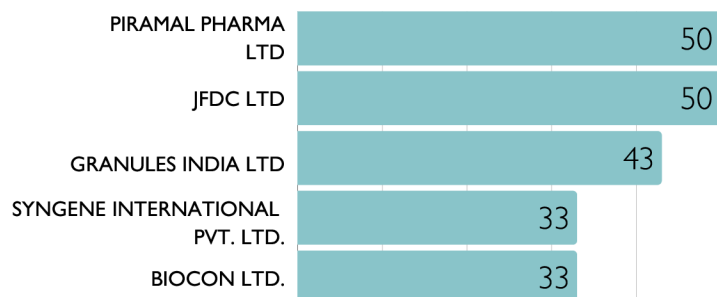
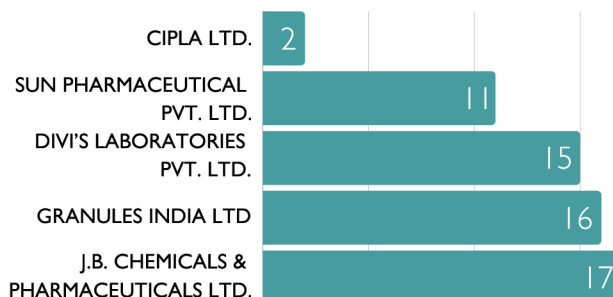


Fig I 9: Pharma companies with **lowest attrition of women employees (%)**⁵⁹



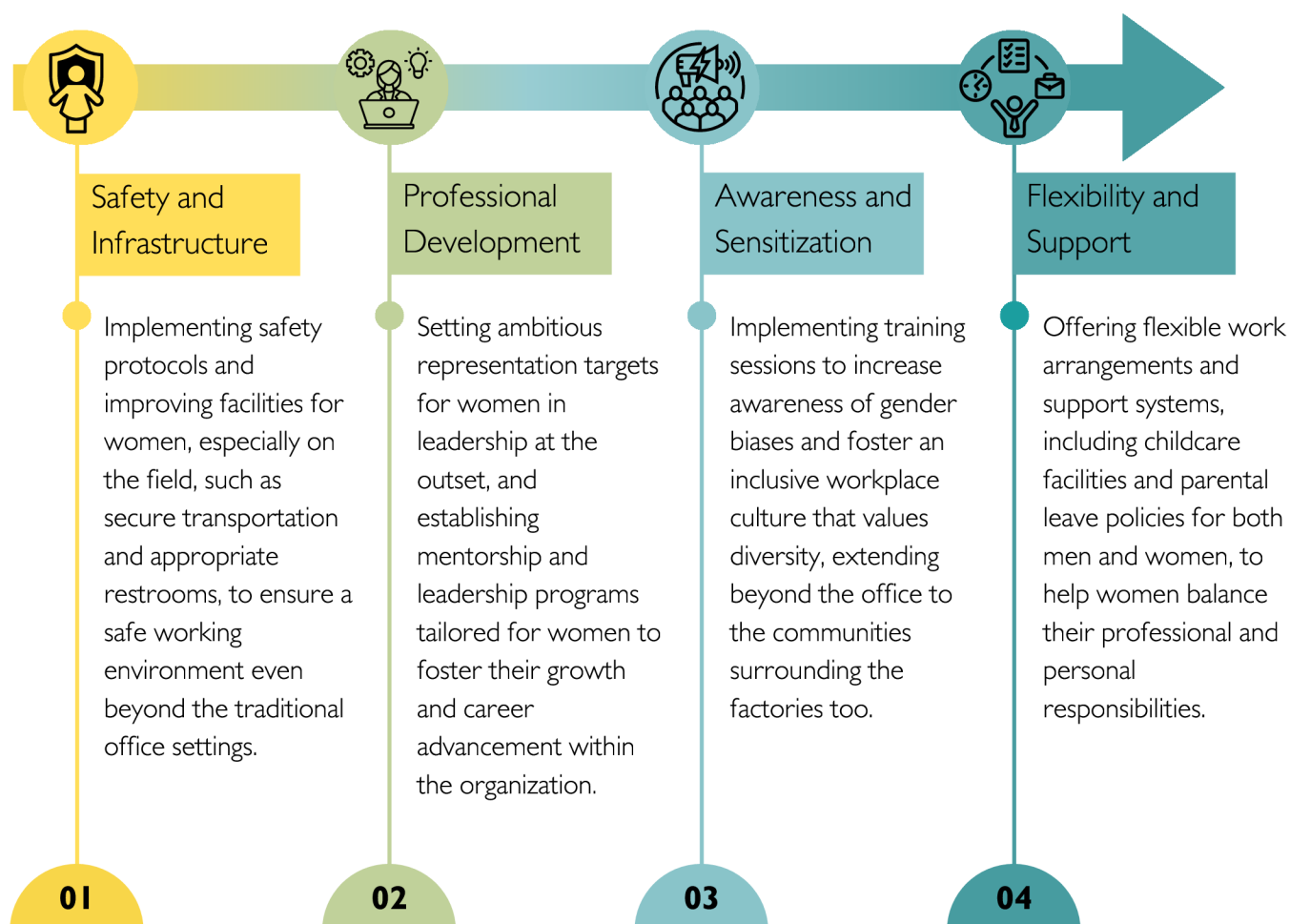
58. The definition of employees and workers here includes both permanent and non-permanent workforce.

59. These turnover rates are just for the permanent female employees.

WAY FORWARD



Pharmaceutical organizations are demonstrating encouraging progress through various interventions aimed at improving the representation of women in the workforce. These initiatives include safety facilities, arranging for restroom access for women on field, sensitization sessions, leadership coaching and many more. However, currently, these initiatives are primarily limited to large scale organizations with employee sizes greater than 2000.⁶¹ Smaller organizations often lack the resources and the intent to implement and invest in such initiatives. Nonetheless, laying the foundation for women focused initiatives with the limited resources available early on can significantly improve the retention and advancement of women for building a future pipeline. Outlined below are four key areas where pharmaceutical organizations can strengthen their initiatives to enhance women's representation for different roles and throughout various stages of their careers.



CALL TO ACTION



Parallel to implementing initiatives, commitment to the cause is also paramount in driving a positive change in women's representation within the pharmaceutical sector. Join the “Close the Gender Gap” Consortium to work with us, the Udaiti Foundation, to boost women's representation in the private sector from 18% to 30% by 2030

Through the Consortium, companies are expected to drive cross-industry and intra-industry collaboration by sharing best practices, strengthening organizational capacity for diverse and inclusive workplaces, and demonstrating leadership through collective goals. Additionally, foster connections with leaders committed to advancing gender diversity and building strategic partnerships.

By joining the consortium, companies will gain visibility as thought leaders through Udaiti's partnerships with top media organizations and industry bodies. They will have the opportunity to showcase best practices in gender diversity, including inclusive hiring, retention, advancement, and return-to-work strategies. Udaiti also provides a comprehensive Gender Diversity and Inclusion Toolkit, enabling organizations to assess, track, and enhance their diversity efforts across key areas. Additionally, members will benefit from in-person engagement through sector-wide events, quarterly meetings, and participation in key industry convenings, fostering valuable connections and collaboration.

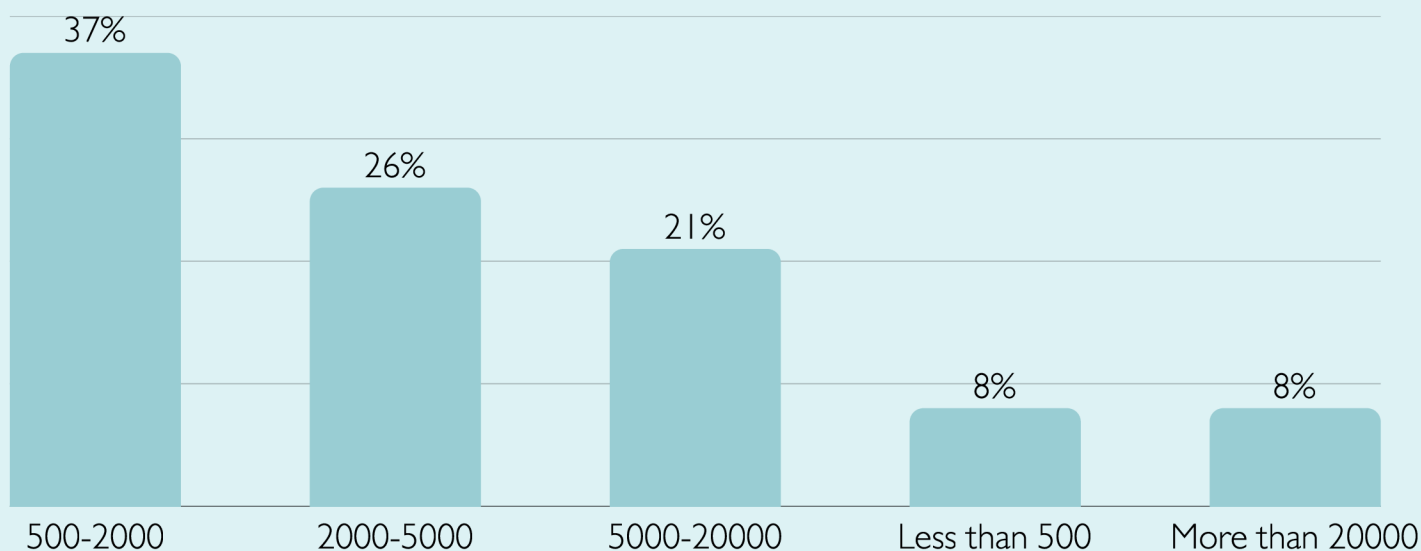


ANNEXURE A - SAMPLE DESCRIPTION

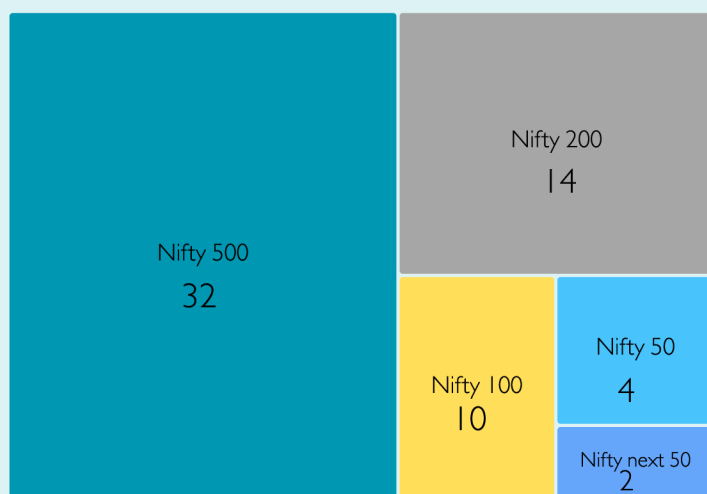
76 companies reported gender data out of 111

2716 median company size

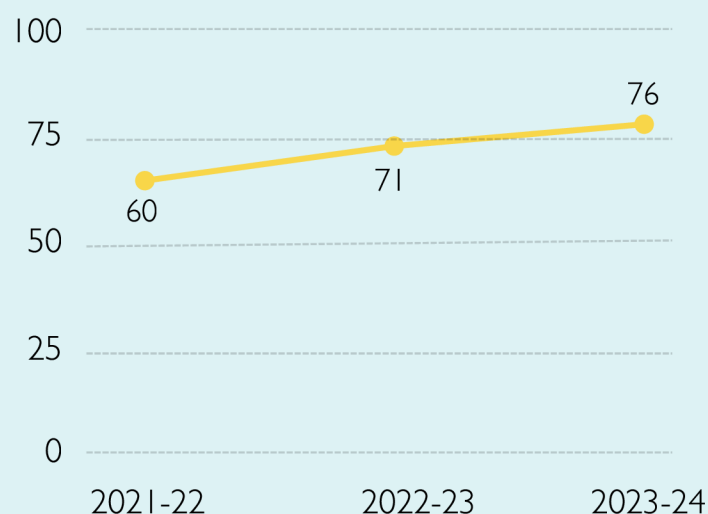
Workforce size distribution of pharma companies



Distribution of Nifty pharma companies



No. of companies reporting gender data



ANNEXURE B - LIST OF PHARMA COMPANIES IN THE SAMPLE

AARTI DRUGS LTD.

AARTI PHARMALABS LTD.

ABBOTT INDIA LTD.

AJANTA PHARMA LTD.

ALEMBIC PHARMACEUTICALS LTD.

ALKEM LABORATORIES LTD.

AMI ORGANICS LTD.

AMRUTANJAN HEALTH CARE LTD.

ASTRAZENECA PHARMA INDIA LTD.

AUROBINDO PHARMA LTD.

BAJAJ HEALTHCARE LTD.

BALAXI PHARMACEUTICALS LTD.

BIOCON LTD.

ALEMBIC PHARMACEUTICALS LTD.

BLISS GVS PHARMA LTD.

BLUE JET HEALTHCARE LTD.

CAPLIN POINT LABORATORIES LTD.

CIPLA LTD.

DISHMAN CARBOGEN AMCIS LTD.

DIVI'S LABORATORIES LTD.

DR.REDDY'S LABORATORIES LTD.

ENTERO HEALTHCARE SOLUTIONS LTD.

ERIS LIFESCIENCES LTD.

FDC LTD.

FERMENTA BIOTECH LTD.

GLAND PHARMA LTD.

GLAXOSMITHKLINE PHARMACEUTICALS LTD.

GLENMARK LIFE SCIENCES LTD.

GLENMARK PHARMACEUTICALS LTD.

GRANULES INDIA LTD.

GUFIC BIOSCIENCES LTD.

GUJARAT THEMIS BIOSYN LTD.

ANNEXURE B - LIST OF PHARMA COMPANIES IN THE SAMPLE

HESTER BIOSCIENCES LTD.

MOREPEN LABORATORIES LTD.

HIKAL LTD.

NATCO PHARMA LTD.

INDOCO REMEDIES LTD.

NEULAND LABORATORIES LTD.

INNOVA CAPTAB LTD.

NOVARTIS INDIA LTD.

IOL CHEMICALS & PHARMACEUTICALS LTD.

ORCHID PHARMA LTD.

J.B.CHEMICALS & PHARMACEUTICALS LTD.

PANACEA BIOTEC LTD.

PFIZER LTD.

JAGSONPAL PHARMACEUTICALS LTD.

PIRAMAL PHARMA LTD.

JUBILANT PHARMOVA LTD.

PROCTER & GAMBLE HEALTH LTD.

KOPRAN LTD.

RPG LIFE SCIENCES LTD.

LAURUS LABS LTD.

SANOFI INDIA LTD.

LINCOLN PHARMACEUTICALS LTD.

SEQUENT SCIENTIFIC LTD.

LUPIN LTD.

SHILPA MEDICARE LTD.

MANKIND PHARMA LTD.

SIGACHI INDUSTRIES LTD.

MARKSANS PHARMA LTD.

SMS PHARMACEUTICALS LTD.

MEDICAMEN BIOTECH LTD.

SOLARA ACTIVE PHARMA SCIENCES LTD.

ANNEXURE B - LIST OF PHARMA COMPANIES IN THE SAMPLE

SUN PHARMA ADVANCED RESEARCH
CO.LTD.

SUN PHARMACEUTICAL INDUSTRIES LTD.

SUPRIYA LIFESCIENCE LTD.

SUVEN LIFE SCIENCES LTD.

SUVEN PHARMACEUTICALS LTD.

SYNCOM FORMULATIONS (INDIA) LTD.

SYNGENE INTERNATIONAL LTD.

THEMIS MEDICARE LTD.

TORRENT PHARMACEUTICALS LTD.

UNICHEM LABORATORIES LTD.

WOCKHARDT LTD.

ZOTA HEALTH CARE LTD.

ZYDUS LIFESCIENCES LTD.



The Udaiti Foundation

 info@udaiti.org



SCAN TO
ACCESS THE
CGG DASHBOARD!