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Gender Discrimination in Promotion and Women's Perceived Career Advancement: A Descriptive Study on Conceptual Framework of intervening effect of Procedural and Distributive Justice

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Abstract
Gender discrimination in promotion remains a significant organizational concern that may restrict employees' career opportunities and negatively influence their perceptions of professional advancement. This descriptive conceptual paper examines the proposed relationship between gender discrimination in promotion and perceived career advancement through the mediating roles of procedural justice and distributive justice. Drawing on organizational justice Theory, supported by equity theory and social role theory, the paper develops a conceptual framework to explain how perceived discrimination in promotion may influence employees' assessments of fairness and career progress.. The framework proposes that gender discrimination in promotion is negatively associated with both dimensions of organizational justice and that procedural and distributive justice are positively associated with perceived career advancement. six research propositions are developed to guide future empirical investigation. The paper contributes to the organizational justice and career development literature by presenting procedural and distributive justice as distinct mediating mechanisms through which promotion-related discrimination may influence perceived career advancement. Practical implications emphasize transparent promotion criteria, consistent evaluation procedures, equitable allocation of career opportunities, and effective accountability mechanisms. The paper also identifies limitations and directions for future research, including empirical testing across diverse organizational and cultural contexts. Overall, the proposed framework provides a theoretical foundation for understanding the relationship between promotion-related discrimination, fairness perceptions, and employees' perceived career advancement.

Keywords: *Gender discrimination in promotion, Procedural justice, Distributive justice, Perceived career advancement*

Introduction

Despite increasing recognition of gender equality and women's participation in the workforce, women continue to encounter structural and organizational barriers that constrain their career progression. Although women have made considerable advances in education, professional development, and labor market participation, their access to senior positions and leadership opportunities does not always reflect their qualifications, competencies, experience, or contributions. Gender discrimination in promotion is an important manifestation of this inequality because promotion decisions influence women's access to authority, professional recognition, financial rewards, and long-term career development. Such discrimination occurs when women are disadvantaged in promotion decisions because of gender-related assumptions, stereotypes, or organizational practices rather than objective and consistently applied performance criteria. These disadvantages may appear in biased performance appraisals, unequal access to developmental assignments, limited sponsorship and mentoring, or the preferential promotion of male colleagues. Consequently, women may face a persistent gap between their professional capabilities and the career opportunities available to them.

Women's experiences of promotion discrimination are particularly significant because discriminatory practices may operate through both explicit decisions and less visible organizational processes. For example, assumptions that women have greater family responsibilities, are less available for demanding assignments, or are less suitable for leadership positions may influence how their performance, commitment, and promotion potential are evaluated. Women may also encounter organizational cultures in which leadership is associated with traditionally masculine characteristics, making their achievements less visible or their leadership capabilities more readily questioned. These processes can restrict women's access to influential professional networks, high-visibility assignments, and decision-making positions that are often important for career advancement. Promotion inequality, therefore, cannot be understood exclusively in terms of whether women receive a promotion; it also requires consideration of the organizational procedures through which promotion opportunities are identified, evaluated, and allocated. Research on women's career progression in Pakistan has similarly highlighted gender-related barriers to advancement, demonstrating the importance of examining promotion practices within their organizational and social contexts (Waqar et al., 2021).

From women's perspective, gender discrimination in promotion is also a question of organizational fairness. When women perceive that promotion criteria are applied inconsistently, evaluation procedures lack transparency, or decision-makers favor male employees, their confidence in the impartiality of organizational decision-making may be undermined. Organizational justice provides a valuable theoretical foundation for understanding these experiences, particularly through the dimensions of procedural justice and distributive justice. Procedural justice refers to women's perceptions of whether the processes used to make promotion decisions are consistent, unbiased, transparent, and based on relevant information. Distributive justice concerns whether the outcomes of promotion decisions—including advancement opportunities, positions, recognition, and associated rewards—are perceived as equitable in relation to employees' qualifications, performance, and contributions. These dimensions are related but conceptually distinct: women may question the fairness of the decision-making process even when they receive a favorable outcome, or they may regard a

procedure as formally consistent while perceiving the resulting promotion allocation as inequitable. Research examining gender and organizational justice in Pakistan provides a relevant foundation for considering how fairness perceptions may vary across organizational contexts (Ansari et al., 2016).

The relationship between promotion discrimination and organizational justice has important implications for women's perceived career advancement. Perceived career advancement refers to women's subjective evaluations of their progress toward professional goals and their access to opportunities for promotion, increased responsibility, recognition, and progression into positions that match their career aspirations. Unlike objective career advancement, which may be assessed through actual promotions, salary increases, or hierarchical movement, perceived career advancement captures how women interpret their career prospects and evaluate their professional progress within an organization. Gender discrimination may adversely shape these evaluations when women believe that their efforts and achievements are insufficiently recognized, that promotion opportunities are inaccessible, or that their gender limits their prospects for advancement. Even in the absence of an explicit discriminatory decision, the perception that career progression is constrained by gender-related barriers may weaken women's confidence in their future organizational opportunities. Accordingly, perceived career advancement provides an important perspective for examining the implications of promotion discrimination beyond immediate promotion outcomes.

Although previous research has examined gender discrimination in promotion, organizational justice, and women's career barriers, these areas can be brought together to develop a more integrated explanation of women's career experiences. In particular, procedural and distributive justice offer distinct but complementary perspectives on how women evaluate discriminatory promotion practices. Procedural justice may capture their concerns about the fairness and impartiality of the decision-making process, whereas distributive justice may reflect their assessments of the equity of the career outcomes they receive. Both perceptions may be relevant to how women evaluate their opportunities for future advancement. Integrating these constructs into a single conceptual framework can therefore strengthen the theoretical understanding of how promotion-related gender discrimination may be associated with women's perceived career progression.

Against this background, the present conceptual paper proposes a framework examining the relationship between gender discrimination in promotion, procedural justice, distributive justice, and women's perceived career advancement. Rather than collecting primary data or testing hypotheses, the paper synthesizes relevant literature to establish the theoretical rationale for the proposed relationships and identify directions for future empirical research. By placing women's experiences at the center of the analysis, the paper seeks to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of promotion inequality and to encourage organizations to develop transparent, impartial, and merit-based promotion systems that support equitable career opportunities for women.

Research Problem:

Despite increasing attention to gender equality, discrimination in promotion continues to limit women's access to career opportunities, leadership positions, recognition, and professional growth. When promotion decisions are influenced by gender rather than merit, women may perceive both the procedures used to make promotion decisions and the outcomes of those decisions as unfair. Previous

studies have examined gender differences in promotion, organizational justice, and career advancement separately, but limited attention has been given to an integrated framework connecting gender discrimination in promotion, procedural justice, distributive justice, and perceived career advancement**.** Therefore, this conceptual paper proposes a theory-based framework to explain how gender discrimination in promotion may influence women's perceptions of procedural and distributive justice and, consequently, their perceived career advancement. The framework is intended to provide a foundation for future empirical testing and for developing more transparent and equitable promotion practices.

Literature review of the principal constructs

Gender discrimination in promotion

Gender discrimination in promotion remains an important organizational issue because women may experience unequal opportunities for advancement despite having comparable qualifications, experience, and professional capabilities. Promotion decisions are particularly significant because they determine access to higher positions, authority, recognition, financial rewards, and organizational responsibilities. Gender inequality may arise through organizational processes and evaluative practices that influence perceptions of employees' suitability for promotion. Heilman et al. (2024) explain that persistent gender stereotypes can affect evaluations of women's competence and leadership potential, particularly when leadership roles are associated with traditionally masculine characteristics. Such stereotypes may create a perceived mismatch between women and leadership positions and contribute to biased promotion evaluations.

Empirical evidence demonstrates the persistence of gender disparities in promotion. Xu (2024) found that women's probability of promotion was 16% lower than men's even after controlling for education, employment background, age, organizational function, rank, and firm characteristics. The study further indicated that women were disproportionately represented in support-oriented positions rather than profit-and-loss roles. However, respectful organizational cultures, public attention to gender diversity, and greater female representation on corporate boards were associated with reductions in the promotion gap. These findings indicate that promotion inequality is influenced not only by individual qualifications but also by organizational structures and workplace conditions.

Evidence from Pakistan further supports the existence of gender-based differences in promotion. Waqar et al. (2021), in a study of 500 middle- and lower-management employees from Pakistan's service industries, found that gender moderated the relationship between work experience and promotion. Female employees were less likely than male employees to receive promotion despite having comparable work experience. The authors attributed this disparity partly to socioeconomic and cultural barriers affecting women's professional advancement and emphasized the need for gender-equitable promotion policies and organizational processes.

Women's experiences within organizations can also influence their expectations and perceptions concerning promotion opportunities. Cuñat, Giné, and Guadalupe (2024) found a substantial gender gap in early partnership aspirations among U.S. lawyers and showed that career aspirations explained a considerable proportion of the subsequent gender promotion gap. The study also indicated that negative workplace experiences, including harassment and demeaning comments, were associated with

promotion aspirations. These findings suggest that organizational experiences and workplace conditions can influence women's expectations regarding promotion and professional progression.

Overall, the literature demonstrates that gender discrimination in promotion is a multidimensional organizational phenomenon shaped by gender stereotypes, organizational structures, workplace culture, and socioeconomic and cultural conditions. Heilman et al. (2024) emphasize the influence of gender stereotypes on evaluations of women's leadership suitability, while Xu (2024) and Waqar et al. (2021) provide empirical evidence of gender disparities in promotion. Cuñat et al. (2024) further demonstrate the importance of workplace experiences and career aspirations in understanding gender differences in promotion. Collectively, these studies highlight the need for transparent, merit-based, and gender-equitable promotion policies and decision-making processes.

Procedural justice

Procedural justice refers to employees' perceptions of the fairness of the procedures through which organizational decisions are made. Unlike outcome-focused evaluations, procedural justice emphasizes whether decision-making processes are consistently applied, unbiased, accurate, correctable, representative, and ethically appropriate. These principles originate from Leventhal's (1980) framework and remain fundamental to the conceptualization of procedural justice. Adamovic (2023) confirms that procedural justice represents an important dimension of organizational justice because employees evaluate not only what decisions are made but also the fairness of the processes used to reach those decisions. Thus, the fairness of organizational procedures can shape employees' broader evaluations of organizational decision-making.

Contemporary scholarship further recognizes procedural justice as an important component of employees' experiences of fairness within organizations. Colquitt et al. (2023), reviewing 75 years of organizational justice research, demonstrate that adherence to justice rules has been associated with employees' cognitions, emotions, behaviors, and well-being. From this perspective, procedural justice extends beyond formal organizational policies and reflects employees' ongoing evaluations of how organizational authorities apply rules and make decisions. Consistent and impartial procedures can therefore contribute to perceptions of fairness and legitimacy, whereas inconsistent or biased procedures may undermine employees' confidence in organizational decision-making.

Recent research has also expanded the understanding of procedural justice beyond individual experiences by considering the broader organizational and social context in which fairness perceptions develop. Adamovic (2023) highlights areas such as justice climate, cultural differences, workplace diversity, conflict, coworker relationships, and changing forms of work as important dimensions for advancing organizational justice research. This perspective indicates that procedural justice may develop through repeated organizational practices and shared experiences rather than through isolated decisions. Consequently, employees' assessments of procedural fairness may reflect broader patterns in the application of rules, communication, and organizational decision-making.

More recent scholarship has additionally questioned whether justice and injustice should simply be regarded as opposite ends of the same continuum. Nguyen et al. (2026), in a scoping review of organizational justice and injustice, found considerable variation in how these concepts are conceptualized and measured. Their review indicates that the distinction between experiencing justice

and experiencing injustice remains an important area of theoretical and methodological debate. This perspective reinforces the importance of examining how employees interpret organizational procedures and evaluate adherence to fairness principles. Overall, the literature presents procedural justice as a multidimensional and context-sensitive construct concerned with the fairness of organizational decision-making processes. Its foundations in Leventhal's (1980) principles continue to inform contemporary research, while recent scholarship has broadened the concept by considering organizational context, collective justice perceptions, cultural differences, and the distinction between justice and injustice. Procedural justice therefore represents an enduring and important construct for understanding how employees evaluate the fairness, consistency, transparency, and legitimacy of organizational procedures.

Distributive justice

Distributive justice refers to employees' perceptions regarding the fairness of organizational outcomes and the manner in which valued resources, rewards, and benefits are allocated. Its theoretical foundation is primarily rooted in Equity Theory, proposed by Adams (1965), which explains that individuals evaluate fairness by comparing the relationship between their contributions and the outcomes they receive with those of relevant others. Organizational inputs may include effort, skills, experience, expertise, time, and performance, whereas outcomes may include salaries, bonuses, recognition, benefits, promotions, and status. Perceived inequity arises when employees believe that their contributions are not appropriately reflected in the outcomes received or when differences in rewards are viewed as unjustified. Thus, distributive justice concerns not merely the amount of an outcome but, more importantly, whether its allocation is perceived as fair.

Deutsch (1975) further expanded the concept by proposing that distributive justice can be based on different allocation principles depending on the purpose and social context of a relationship. He identified equity, equality, and need as three major principles of distribution. The equity principle allocates outcomes according to individual contributions, equality emphasizes equal distribution among individuals, and the need principle gives greater consideration to individuals' requirements. Accordingly, judgments of distributive fairness may vary according to organizational objectives, social expectations, and the allocation principle considered appropriate in a particular context. This perspective demonstrates that distributive justice extends beyond contribution-based allocation and incorporates broader social and organizational considerations.

Empirical research subsequently strengthened the conceptualization of distributive justice within organizational justice scholarship. Colquitt et al. (2001), through a meta-analysis of 183 studies, demonstrated that distributive justice represents a distinct dimension of organizational justice and contributes uniquely to employees' fairness perceptions. Their findings provided substantial support for distinguishing distributive justice from other dimensions of justice, thereby reinforcing the importance of examining the fairness of organizational outcomes as a specific component of employees' justice perceptions.

More recent scholarship has continued to recognize distributive justice as a central component of organizational justice. Adamovic (2023) identifies distributive justice as the evaluation of the fairness of decision outcomes, particularly in areas such as compensation, performance evaluation, and other

organizational allocations. The review further explains that employees assess the relationship between their inputs and outputs when forming judgments about the fairness of distributions. Similarly, Colquitt et al. (2023), in their historical review of organizational justice research, emphasize the continuing importance of distributive justice within the broader development of fairness scholarship and demonstrate how justice perceptions have remained an important area of organizational research. Overall, the literature establishes distributive justice as a multidimensional and context-sensitive perception of the fairness of organizational outcomes and resource allocation. Its theoretical development from Adams' (1965) Equity Theory through Deutsch's (1975) alternative allocation principles and subsequent empirical and conceptual developments demonstrates that perceptions of fairness depend on how employees evaluate the appropriateness of outcomes in relation to contributions, equality, and need. Contemporary scholarship continues to recognize distributive justice as a fundamental dimension of organizational justice and an important basis for understanding employees' perceptions of fairness in organizational settings.

Perceived career advancement

Perceived career advancement refers to an individual's subjective evaluation of progress, development, and achievement throughout their career. It encompasses employees' perceptions of professional growth, increasing responsibilities, skill development, recognition, movement toward higher positions, and attainment of personally meaningful career goals. Hughes (1937) established an important distinction between the objective and subjective dimensions of career experiences, emphasizing that career development can be evaluated through both externally observable achievements and individuals' personal interpretations of their careers. Greenhaus et al. (1990) further emphasized the subjective dimension of career development through the concept of career satisfaction, whereby individuals assess their career achievements against their personal expectations and aspirations. Similarly, Heslin (2005) argued that career success is multidimensional and may be defined according to individuals' own values and standards. Social Cognitive Career Theory further explains career development through self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals within environmental contexts (Lent et al., 1994). Thus, perceived career advancement represents a broader subjective assessment of career progress rather than merely an accumulation of promotions, salary increases, or occupational status.

Contemporary career research increasingly distinguishes between **o**bjective and subjective career success, recognizing that these dimensions represent different forms of career evaluation. Spurk et al. (2019), through a systematic review, demonstrated that objective career success is generally reflected through observable indicators such as salary, promotions, and occupational status, whereas subjective career success concerns individuals' personal evaluations of their career achievements and experiences. Hildred et al. (2023) similarly demonstrated the multidimensional nature of career success by distinguishing objective and subjective career outcomes and examining the different individual, structural, and behavioral factors associated with each form of success. More recently, Seibert et al. (2024) emphasized that contemporary career success should be understood within changing career structures and increasingly flexible employment arrangements, highlighting the continuing importance of both objective and subjective perspectives in career research. These perspectives indicate that career advancement cannot be adequately assessed through conventional organizational indicators alone

because individuals may interpret similar career circumstances differently according to their expectations, aspirations, values, and perceptions of professional development.

The contemporary literature further conceptualizes career advancement as an individualized and dynamic process of career development. Savickas' (2005) Career Construction Theory emphasizes that individuals actively construct career meaning and identities through adaptation to changing work environments, while Chang et al. (2023) provide empirical support for the relevance of proactive career orientation to subjective career success within this theoretical perspective. Jackson (2023) similarly emphasizes that subjective career success incorporates perceptions of professional development, personal accomplishment, and satisfaction, whereas objective career success is reflected through observable indicators such as remuneration and organizational position. Overall, the literature establishes perceived career advancement as a subjective, multidimensional, and dynamic evaluation of career progress, encompassing professional growth, achievement, development, recognition, increasing responsibility, and movement toward personally valued career goals. It therefore provides a broader conceptualization of career development by recognizing that career progress is determined not only by objectively observable achievements but also by how individuals personally interpret and evaluate the direction and quality of their careers.

Theoretical Foundation

The framework draws primarily on Organizational Justice Theory, supplemented by Equity Theory and Social Role Theory. Organizational Justice Theory explains how employees evaluate the fairness of decision-making processes and outcomes. Equity Theory helps explain perceptions of unequal career rewards relative to contributions, while Social Role Theory can help contextualize gender-based assumptions about competence, leadership, and career suitability

Conceptual frame work

Conceptual frame work suggests proposed relationship supported by previous research.

Relationship between gender discrimination in promotion and procedural justice

Gender discrimination in promotion occurs when employees' opportunities for career advancement are influenced by gender rather than relevant qualifications, experience, performance, or established organizational criteria. Procedural justice concerns employees' perceptions of the fairness of the processes through which organizational decisions are made. According to Leventhal (1980), fair procedures should demonstrate consistency, bias suppression, accuracy, correctability, representativeness, and ethicality. Similarly, Thibaut and Walker (1975) emphasized that individuals value fair decision-making processes, particularly when decisions have important consequences. Applied to promotion decisions, these principles suggest that procedures may be perceived as unjust when gender influences the application of promotion criteria, the evaluation of candidates, or the exercise of decision-making authority. Therefore, gender discrimination in promotion represents a potential violation of procedural fairness, particularly when employees perceive that promotion standards are inconsistently applied or that decision-making processes are biased.

Gender stereotypes provide an important theoretical explanation for the possible influence of gender discrimination on procedural justice perceptions. Heilman (2012) explained that gender-based stereotypes can shape evaluations of employees' competence, suitability, and professional capabilities,

potentially influencing organizational judgments even when formal criteria appear gender-neutral. Sweeney and McFarlin (1997) examined gender differences in organizational justice perceptions and highlighted the importance of procedural fairness in employees' evaluations of organizational treatment. Further, Caleo (2016), through four experimental studies, demonstrated that gender-role expectations can influence evaluations of justice-related behavior, although the effects varied according to the particular justice rule being examined. These findings suggest that gender stereotypes may influence how organizational decisions and violations of fairness principles are evaluated. Consequently, formally established promotion procedures may not ensure procedural fairness if their implementation is affected by gender-based assumptions or inconsistent evaluative standards.

Empirical research focusing specifically on promotion systems provides further support for examining this relationship. García-Izquierdo et al. (2012), in a study involving 213 employees and supervisors from 31 private-sector organizations, found that transparency in promotion methods was an important antecedent of procedural justice perceptions. Participants generally considered performance-based promotion methods fairer, while the relationship between transparency, promotion systems, and procedural justice varied according to organizational rank and gender. Russen et al. (2021) also examined gender discrimination and perceived fairness in promotion decisions, offering relevant evidence concerning the role of procedural justice in the evaluation of gender-related promotion practices. More recently, Strah (2024) highlighted limitations in conventional organizational justice research, arguing that commonly used measures may not adequately capture the specific experiences of gender-based injustice. The study reviewed evidence that women can face stricter promotion criteria and other forms of unequal treatment, underscoring the importance of examining how organizational procedures are applied in practice Overall, the literature suggests that gender discrimination in promotion may undermine procedural justice when promotion criteria are applied inconsistently, evaluation practices lack transparency, or gender stereotypes influence decision-making. Although formal organizational rules may appear neutral, their implementation can still produce unequal treatment. Accordingly, procedural justice requires not only clearly established promotion policies but also consistent, impartial, transparent, and bias-free application of those policies. This literature provides a conceptual basis for expecting a negative relationship between gender discrimination in promotion and procedural justice perceptions.

Relationship procedural justice and perceived career advancement

Procedural justice refers to employees' perceptions of the fairness, consistency, impartiality, and transparency of organizational decision-making processes. In the context of career development, it provides a basis for understanding how employees evaluate their professional progress and opportunities. Thibaut and Walker (1975), through their fair process perspective, emphasized the importance of voice and control in decision-making, suggesting that individuals evaluate authorities more positively when procedures are perceived as fair. Similarly, Tyler (1989), through the group-value model, argued that fair and respectful treatment communicates employees' standing and value within an organization. These theoretical perspectives suggest that transparent, unbiased, and consistently applied organizational procedures can strengthen employees' confidence in the legitimacy of decisions affecting their professional development. Conversely, perceived procedural unfairness may undermine

employees' confidence in organizational decision-making and lead to less favorable evaluations of their career experiences.

Empirical research provides further support for the relationship between procedural justice and career-related evaluations. Loi and Ngo (2010), studying 239 employees in a foreign-invested enterprise in China, found that procedural justice contributed positively to career satisfaction. Similarly, Ngo et al. (2015) examined organizational-context factors and career-related attitudes among Chinese employees and reported a positive association between procedural justice and career satisfaction. The publication record for this study lists it as a 2014 article, so the year should be verified against the source used in the manuscript. García-Izquierdo et al. (2012) further demonstrated the importance of transparency in promotion systems, finding that transparent promotion methods were associated with stronger perceptions of procedural fairness. In addition, Wan et al. (2012), examining promotion decisions among managerial employees in Malaysia, reported that perceived procedural injustice was associated with unfavorable career-related and organizational outcomes. Together, these studies indicate that employees' evaluations of their professional experiences are shaped, in part, by their perceptions of the fairness and legitimacy of organizational decision-making processes.

Evidence from public-sector and international organizational settings further highlights the relevance of procedural justice to career-related evaluations. Cho and Sai (2013) examined organizational justice in the federal workplace, emphasizing the importance of fairness in organizational decision-making and employees' workplace experiences. Similarly, Stroppa and Spieß (2021), studying expatriates in humanitarian intergovernmental organizations, identified the perceived procedural justice of career-management systems as relevant to career satisfaction. Collectively, these findings suggest that fair, consistent, and transparent procedures can contribute to more favorable evaluations of employees' career experiences by reinforcing confidence in organizational systems and the legitimacy of career-related decisions. Although career satisfaction and perceived career advancement are related but distinct concepts, this literature provides a relevant foundation for examining the association between procedural justice and employees' subjective assessments of career progress. Accordingly, procedural justice may be expected to have a positive relationship with perceived career advancement, an expectation that warrants direct empirical testing.

Relationship between gender discrimination in promotion and distributive justice

Gender discrimination in promotion occurs when employees' advancement opportunities are influenced by gender rather than relevant qualifications, experience, performance, or merit. Distributive justice concerns employees' perceptions of the fairness of organizational outcomes and resource allocation. According to Adams (1965), Equity Theory explains that individuals evaluate fairness by comparing the relationship between their contributions and the outcomes they receive with those of relevant others. In promotion contexts, qualifications, expertise, effort, and performance represent important contributions, while promotion represents a valued organizational outcome. When similarly qualified employees receive unequal promotion opportunities because of gender, such differences may be perceived as inequitable. Accordingly, gender discrimination in promotion may undermine distributive justice when employees believe that promotion outcomes do not correspond fairly with individual contributions and legitimate organizational criteria.

Empirical research provides evidence that gender is relevant to perceptions of distributive fairness. Lee and Farh (1999) found that gender moderated the relationship between distributive justice and trust in supervisors in one of their samples, indicating that gender can influence how fairness perceptions are interpreted. More directly, Foley et al. (2005), examining Protestant clergy in Hong Kong, found significant relationships between perceived gender discrimination and organizational justice. Their findings indicated that women who perceived greater gender discrimination reported lower organizational commitment, while distributive justice was associated with job satisfaction differently for men and women. Harris et al. (2004) also developed a theoretical account of discrimination perceptions in selection and promotion contexts, emphasizing that individuals draw on fairness-related information when evaluating potentially discriminatory decisions. More direct evidence comes from Russen et al. (2021), whose experimental study of 87 hotel managers examined promotion decisions involving male and female employees. The researchers found that distributive justice mediated the relationship between the promoted employee's gender and perceived gender discrimination, demonstrating that fairness evaluations of promotion outcomes are important in interpreting gender-related promotion decisions.

Evidence from Pakistan and contemporary organizational justice scholarship further reinforces the importance of examining gender-related outcome fairness. Ansari et al. (2016) examined gender differences in organizational justice perceptions among employees at the University of the Punjab, including distributive justice as a central dimension. Although their study was not confined to promotion decisions, it provides contextual evidence that gender is relevant to the assessment of organizational fairness. Similarly, Strah et al. (2024) reviewed evidence of gender-based injustice and highlighted that women may experience less favorable organizational outcomes, including unequal compensation and access to valued opportunities. The authors also emphasized that conventional organizational justice measures may not fully capture gender-specific experiences of injustice. Heilman and Caleo (2018) further explained how gender stereotypes can influence organizational evaluations and contribute to gender-based inequities. Collectively, this literature suggests that when gender influences the allocation of promotion opportunities, employees may perceive the resulting outcomes as unfair, particularly when differences cannot be justified by legitimate criteria. Thus, gender discrimination in promotion is theoretically expected to be negatively associated with distributive justice, although the strength and nature of this relationship require further empirical examination across organizational and cultural contexts.

Relationship between distributive justice and perceived career advancement

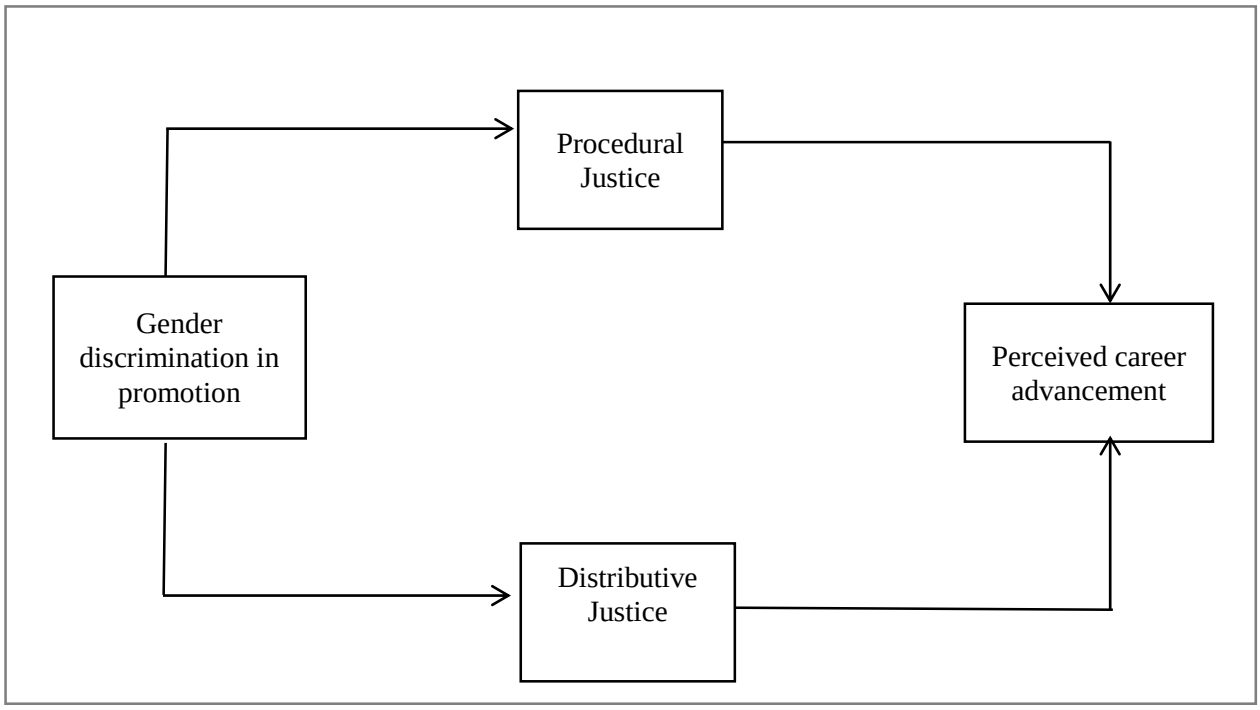
Distributive justice refers to employees' perceptions regarding the fairness of outcomes they receive in relation to their contributions, such as compensation, recognition, rewards, promotion opportunities, and career-related benefits. In the context of career advancement, distributive justice becomes particularly important because employees evaluate whether the career outcomes available to them appropriately reflect their qualifications, performance, experience, and contributions. When employees perceive that desirable career outcomes are distributed fairly, they are more likely to develop positive evaluations of their career progress and believe that their efforts can lead to meaningful advancement within the organization. Moorman, (1991) conceptualized distributive justice as employees' perceptions

concerning the fairness of organizational outcomes, highlighting its importance for employee attitudes and behavioral responses. Similarly, Colquitt et al., (2001) demonstrated through a meta-analytic examination that distributive justice is meaningfully associated with a range of important employee attitudes and outcomes.

The relationship between distributive justice and career advancement can also be understood through employees' evaluation of career-related rewards. Career advancement is not limited to obtaining a higher organizational position; it may also involve recognition, increased responsibilities, professional opportunities, career growth, and perceptions of success. When employees perceive that these outcomes are allocated equitably, they are more likely to regard their career development as attainable and worthwhile. In contrast, perceptions that career-related rewards are unfairly distributed can weaken employees' confidence in their future advancement and may contribute to dissatisfaction with their career progress. Evidence from organizational research indicates that distributive justice is associated with employees' satisfaction with promotion-related outcomes, suggesting that perceptions of fair allocation can influence how employees evaluate opportunities for upward career movement (Seyedna, 2014). Employees' evaluations of their career experiences are influenced not only by the outcomes they achieve but also by whether those outcomes are perceived as fairly allocated. Thus, employees who perceive greater fairness in the distribution of organizational rewards and opportunities are more likely to report favorable evaluations of their career development (Oh, 2015).

More recent research further supports this relationship. Rahman (2024) found that distributive justice had a favorable influence on career satisfaction among commercial bank employees in Bangladesh. The study also demonstrated that self-efficacy played a mediating role in this relationship, suggesting that perceptions of fairly distributed organizational outcomes may strengthen employees' confidence in their capacity to progress professionally, which subsequently contributes to more positive career evaluations. These findings reinforce the view that distributive justice can operate as an important organizational condition for employees' perceptions of career development and advancement. Recent evidence from the public sector similarly demonstrates the importance of fair outcome distribution for career-related satisfaction. Yoshinta et al. (2025) reported that distributive justice was associated with career satisfaction among civil servants and emphasized the importance of equitable distribution of rewards, benefits, and development opportunities. Their findings suggest that employees are more likely to evaluate their career development positively when organizational outcomes and opportunities are perceived as fairly allocated. Consequently, distributive justice can contribute to employees' perceptions that their career achievements and future opportunities are consistent with their organizational contributions.

Conceptual framework model



Research propositions suggested for future testing

Based on the theoretical framework and the reviewed

Research propositions suggested for future testing

Based on the theoretical framework and the reviewed literature, the following propositions are developed for future empirical investigation:

Proposition 1 (P1): Gender discrimination in promotion is negatively associated with employees' perceptions of procedural justice.

Proposition 2 (P2): Gender discrimination in promotion is negatively associated with employees' perceptions of distributive justice.

Proposition 3 (P3): Procedural justice is positively associated with perceived career advancement.

Proposition 4 (P4): Distributive justice is positively associated with perceived career advancement.

Proposition 5 (P5): Procedural justice mediates the relationship between gender discrimination in promotion and perceived career advancement, such that greater perceived gender discrimination is associated with lower procedural justice, which in turn is associated with lower perceived career advancement.

Proposition 6 (P6): Distributive justice mediates the relationship between gender discrimination in promotion and perceived career advancement, such that greater perceived gender discrimination is

associated with lower distributive justice, which in turn is associated with lower perceived career advancement.

Theoretical Contributions

This conceptual paper contributes to the literature on organizational justice, gender discrimination in promotion, and perceived career advancement by integrating these constructs into a unified theoretical framework. First, the paper extends the application of Organizational Justice Theory by positioning procedural justice and distributive justice as two distinct mechanisms through which perceived gender discrimination in promotion may influence employees' evaluations of their career advancement. Procedural justice concerns the fairness of the processes used to make promotion decisions, whereas distributive justice concerns the fairness of the outcomes employees receive. Distinguishing these dimensions provides a more comprehensive explanation of how promotion-related experiences may shape employees' perceptions of career progress. Second, the paper contributes by proposing procedural justice and distributive justice as mediating mechanisms rather than treating organizational justice solely as a direct predictor of employee outcomes. The framework suggests that perceived gender discrimination in promotion may weaken employees' confidence in the fairness of promotion procedures and the equitable allocation of career opportunities. These perceptions, in turn, may negatively influence their assessments of career advancement. This perspective offers a theoretically grounded explanation of the potential processes connecting discriminatory promotion experiences with career-related evaluations. Previous conceptual work has also highlighted the relevance of organizational justice to women's career advancement, while this paper places particular emphasis on the proposed mediating roles of procedural and distributive justice.

Third, the framework contributes to career advancement research by emphasizing perceived career advancement as an employee-level outcome. Career advancement is not necessarily determined exclusively by objective indicators, such as promotions, job titles, or salary increases; employees' perceptions of whether they are progressing professionally are also important. By connecting promotion-related discrimination with employees' justice perceptions and perceived career advancement, the paper encourages a more integrated understanding of career development within organizational settings. Finally, the paper offers a foundation for future empirical research by developing six propositions that can be tested in different organizational and cultural contexts. The proposed framework can be examined using quantitative methods to assess the direct relationships between the constructs and the indirect relationships through the two justice dimensions.

Practical Implications

The proposed framework offers practical implications for human resource managers, organizational leaders, promotion committees, and policymakers responsible for developing equitable career advancement systems.

First, organizations should establish transparent and consistently applied promotion criteria. Promotion requirements should be communicated clearly, and decisions should be supported by documented evidence of employees' qualifications, performance, experience, competencies, and professional achievements. Transparent criteria may strengthen employees' confidence in the fairness of the decision-making process. Second, organizations should strengthen procedural justice by implementing

standardized promotion procedures. These may include structured performance evaluations, clearly defined eligibility requirements, documented selection decisions, independent review mechanisms, and accessible appeal procedures. Regular audits of promotion decisions can help identify inconsistencies in the application of organizational policies.

Third, organizations should promote distributive justice by ensuring that promotion outcomes and career development opportunities are allocated according to relevant and consistently applied criteria. Access to training, leadership development, mentoring, challenging assignments, and other career-enhancing opportunities should be monitored to identify potential disparities. Organizations should periodically review promotion rates, salary progression, and access to advancement opportunities across employee groups. Fourth, senior management should create mechanisms through which employees can express concerns about promotion decisions without fear of retaliation. Confidential reporting channels, feedback sessions, and independent grievance procedures can help organizations identify perceived unfairness and address concerns before they undermine employee confidence in career development opportunities. Finally, human resource departments should monitor employees' perceptions of promotion fairness alongside objective career indicators. Employee surveys, promotion audits, and exit interviews may help identify differences between formal organizational policies and employees' actual experiences. These practices could support more informed decisions about improving promotion systems and strengthening employees' perceptions of career advancement.

Limitations

Despite its potential contributions, this conceptual paper has several limitations. First, the proposed framework is theoretical and has not been empirically tested. Therefore, the suggested relationships among gender discrimination in promotion, procedural justice, distributive justice, and perceived career advancement should be interpreted as theoretically proposed associations rather than established causal effects. Second, the framework focuses on procedural justice and distributive justice as mediating mechanisms. Other organizational and individual factors, such as perceived organizational support, leadership practices, career self-efficacy, mentoring, organizational culture, and access to professional networks, may also influence employees' perceptions of career advancement. The exclusion of these factors limits the scope of the proposed model.

Third, perceived career advancement is the principal outcome of the framework. Employees' subjective evaluations of career progress may not always correspond with objective indicators, such as promotion frequency, salary growth, or movement into senior positions. Consequently, the framework does not fully capture every dimension of career success. Fourth, employees' perceptions of discrimination and justice may differ across industries, organizational structures, occupational groups, and national cultures. The proposed relationships may therefore vary across institutional contexts. Without empirical testing in diverse settings, the generalizability of the framework remains uncertain. Finally, although the model distinguishes procedural justice from distributive justice, the two dimensions may be related in employees' experiences of promotion decisions. Future research should examine their distinct and potentially overlapping explanatory roles while retaining clear conceptual definitions and appropriate measurement approaches.

Future research directions

Future research should empirically examine the six propositions developed in this paper. Quantitative studies could use validated measurement scales and structural equation modeling to investigate the proposed direct relationships and the mediating roles of procedural justice and distributive justice. Such research would help establish whether the proposed mechanisms are supported by empirical evidence. Second, researchers should investigate the framework across different organizational contexts, including public-sector institutions, private companies, universities, healthcare organizations, banking institutions, and other professional settings. Comparative studies could determine whether the relationships differ according to organizational policies, promotion structures, and employment conditions.

Third, longitudinal research could examine how employees' perceptions of promotion discrimination and organizational justice develop over time and how these perceptions relate to subsequent career outcomes. For example, researchers could assess justice perceptions before and after promotion decisions and subsequently examine changes in perceived career advancement, career satisfaction, or actual promotion outcomes. Longitudinal designs would provide stronger evidence about temporal relationships than cross-sectional designs alone. Fourth, future studies could compare perceived career advancement with objective career indicators, including promotion frequency, salary progression, leadership appointments, and changes in job responsibility. This approach would help clarify whether employees' perceptions of career progress correspond with measurable career outcomes. Fifth, future researchers could examine potential moderators, such as organizational culture, leadership support, transparency of promotion criteria, mentoring availability, and organizational policies concerning equal opportunity. These factors may help explain the conditions under which perceived discrimination has stronger or weaker associations with justice perceptions and career advancement. Finally, qualitative research using interviews or focus groups could provide deeper insights into how employees interpret promotion decisions, identify unfair treatment, and evaluate their career prospects. Such findings could help refine the proposed conceptual framework and identify additional mechanisms that warrant investigation.

Conclusion

This conceptual paper proposes that perceived gender discrimination in promotion may be associated with lower perceived career advancement through employees' perceptions of procedural justice and distributive justice. By distinguishing the fairness of promotion processes from the fairness of promotion outcomes, the framework offers a structured explanation of how employees may interpret promotion-related experiences and evaluate their professional progress. The proposed theoretical relationships provide a basis for future empirical testing, while the practical implications emphasize transparent promotion criteria, consistent decision-making, equitable access to career opportunities, and effective accountability mechanisms. Future research is needed to determine the strength, direction, and generalizability of the proposed relationships across organizational settings.

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