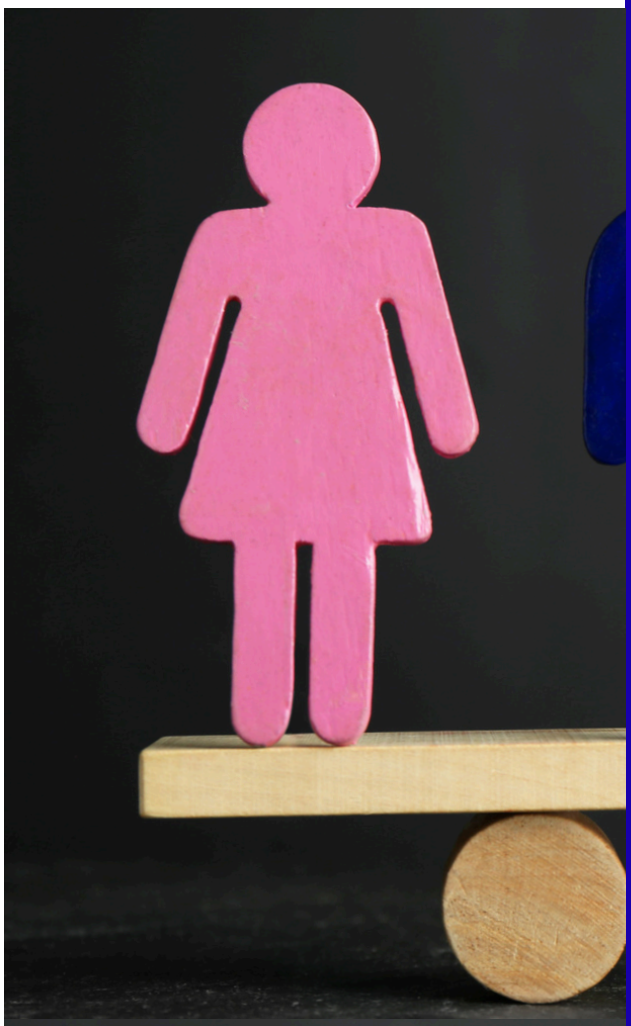

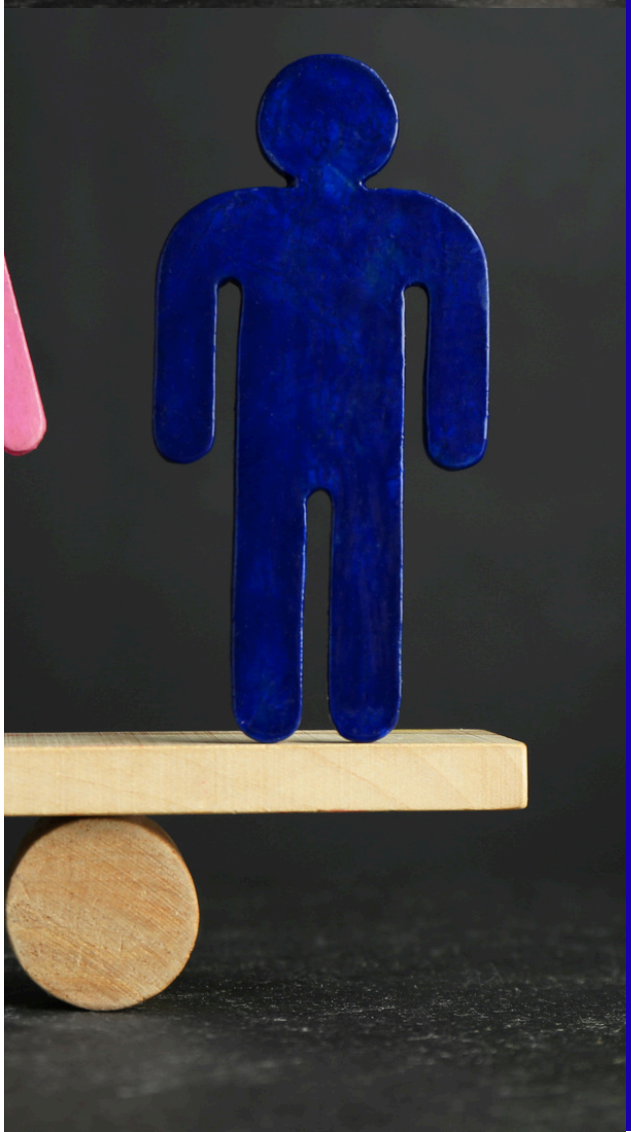

AFRICAN FEMALE VOICES

Insight Report

2025

Exploring Pay Transparency and Gender Equity: A Pilot Study of African Professionals

Insights on organizational practices, employee perceptions, and pathways to closing the gender pay gap in Africa

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A letter from Lebogang Masega

Last year, we launched the #ValueHerWork Equal Pay Campaign, a movement rooted in our collective commitment to ensuring that African women are recognized, respected, and rewarded fairly for their contributions. I would like to begin by thanking you for joining us on this journey, which demonstrates that equal pay is not only a women's issue, but a societal priority.

International Equal Pay Day serves as a poignant reminder of the urgency of this work. It is directly linked to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 5 on Gender Equality and SDG 8.5 on Decent Work and Equal Pay for Equal Value). These goals emphasize that pay equity is not optional, but it is a moral and economic imperative.

This report, our first inaugural Equal Pay Insight Report, is part of our efforts to bring visibility to the issues affecting women across Africa and to highlight the long struggle toward gender parity, which is our collective responsibility.

In Africa, our challenge is compounded by entrenched patriarchal norms and structural inequities that limit women's access to fair wages and leadership opportunities. Dismantling these barriers requires courage, persistence, and above all, evidence. That is why research is a critical arm of advocacy.

> equal pay is not charity. It is justice. It is a necessary step toward building more prosperous, inclusive, and equitable societies.

Lebogang Masega
Founder of African Female Voices

Our pilot study, though small in scale, represents a pivotal step in strengthening the case for equal pay in Africa. It captures the voices, frustrations, and aspirations of professionals who continue to experience disparities. This research serves as both a mirror and a call to action: a mirror reflecting the inequities we must confront, and a call to action urging us to close the gap through collective effort.

At African Female Voices, we believe in the power of knowledge, advocacy, and community engagement to drive systemic change. This inaugural report is not the end of the conversation, and it is the beginning of a series that will deepen our understanding.

Let us remember: equal pay is not charity. It is justice. It is a necessary step toward building more prosperous, inclusive, and equitable societies.

Thank you for walking with us.

With purpose and solidarity,

Lebogang Masega

Founder, African Female Voices

Executive Summary

Pay transparency is a critical strategy to address gender pay inequity across Africa. Women consistently earn less than men, even with equal or higher qualifications. In the East and Southern Africa (ESA) region, according to a UN Women policy brief, women earn only 81 cents for every dollar men earn (UN Women, 2024), a gap that undermines economic growth and SDG 5: Gender Equality and SDG 8.5: Equal Pay for Equal Value.

This pilot study surveyed 53 professionals, primarily in South Africa, on awareness, perceptions, and organizational practices around pay transparency. Over half were unaware of how pay is determined, more than 60 percent reported no information on gender pay differences, and over 70 percent said lack of transparency reduced confidence and motivation. Many workplaces lacked equal pay policies or effective audits.

Qualitative responses highlighted systemic inequities, including men with fewer qualifications earning more and women needing to prove themselves for promotions. Transparency was seen as a tool to promote fairness, empower women in negotiations, and build trust.

These findings align with regional and international research showing that pay secrecy sustains inequality (Card et al., 2023; UN Women, 2023, 2024). Though small in scale, this study underscores the urgent need for organizations and policymakers to embed pay transparency, strengthen audits, and implement structural reforms to close wage gaps and foster inclusive growth.

Abstract

Pay transparency is an important tool for promoting gender equity in the workplace. This pilot study (n=53) explores professionals' awareness, perceptions, and organizational practices regarding salary transparency across Africa, with a few respondents from India providing complementary perspectives. Results indicate limited knowledge of pay structures, dissatisfaction with the level of transparency, and perceptions of gender-based pay disparities. Qualitative responses suggest that greater transparency could enhance women's ability to negotiate salaries and advance their careers. These findings provide initial evidence for the role of pay transparency in addressing systemic inequities and lay the groundwork for larger-scale research across Africa.

These results align with regional evidence from UN Women (2023, 2024) showing persistent wage gaps in East and Southern Africa, highlighting the need for robust organizational policies and providing groundwork for a larger study.

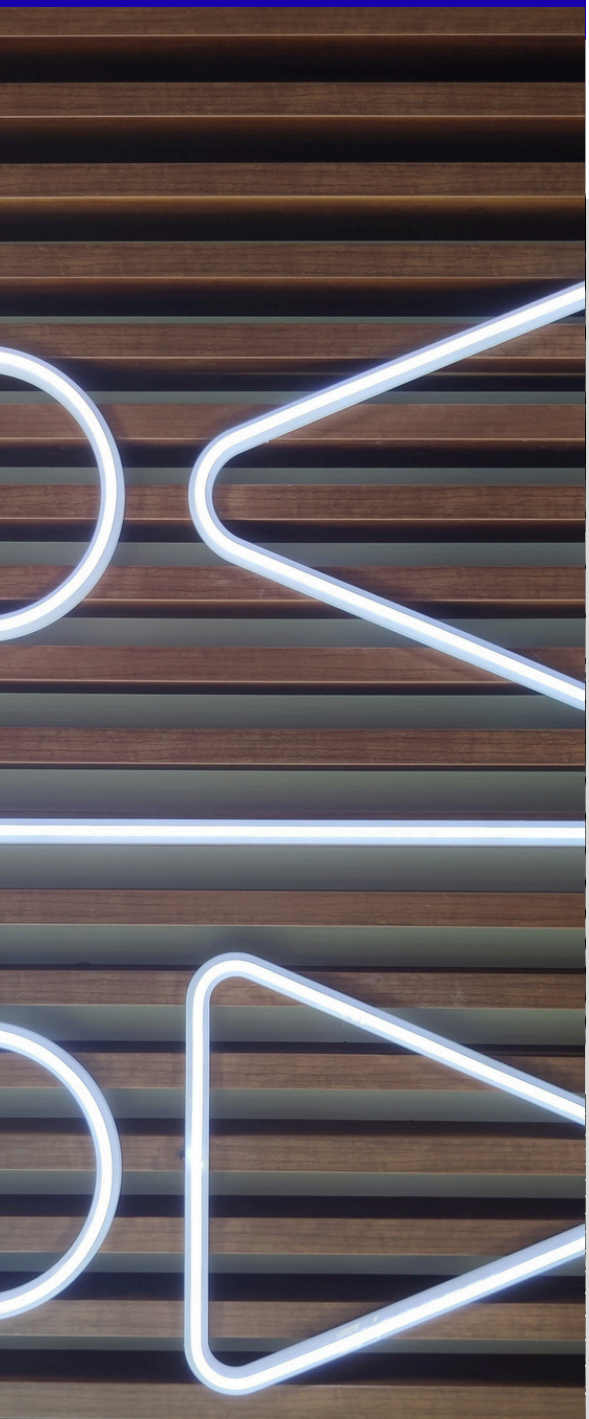
Keywords: gender pay gap, transparency, pilot study, equity, organizational culture

Introduction

The gender pay gap remains a persistent global challenge, with men continuing to outearn women despite decades of policy interventions. On average, women earn 20–30% less than men worldwide, and it is estimated that it will take 134 years to achieve gender parity, highlighting the urgency of exploring interventions that promote gender equity (World Economic Forum, 2024). Pay secrecy has been identified as a significant factor sustaining this disparity (Stofberg, Mabaso, & Bussin, 2022).In East and Southern Africa, women earn only 81 cents for every dollar earned by men on an hourly basis, corresponding to a raw gender pay gap of 18.8% (UN Women, 2024). These inequities are compounded by structural barriers such as limited access to education, formal employment, and career advancement opportunities for women, making the issue of pay fairness particularly critical in the African context. One strategy increasingly recognized for addressing gender pay inequities is pay transparency, defined as the deliberate accessibility of salary information within organizations (Recalde & Vesterlund, 2020). Evidence suggests that employees' understanding of pay transparency is varied: some equate it with access to personal payslips, while others comprehend broader organizational pay practices. This indicates that employers cannot assume uniform knowledge or expectations across staff (Stofberg, Mabaso, & Bussin, 2022).

It is against this backdrop that this pilot study explores employee perceptions of salary transparency and its implications for gender pay equity. By analyzing survey responses, the study identifies patterns of awareness, organizational practices, and cultural attitudes towards pay equity.

Why a Pilot Study?



This research was designed as a pilot study due to its small sample size and exploratory nature. The aim was to test the survey design, capture initial insights, and refine both methodology and focus areas for a larger study. The pilot allowed us to explore emerging themes, assess response quality, and identify gaps in data collection tools. Importantly, all participants in this pilot were women, ensuring that the findings are directly informed by female professionals' lived experiences in the workplace.

Methods

This study employed an online structured questionnaire targeting professionals across sectors. The intended population was African female professionals, with a focus on South Africa. A total of 53 respondents participated: 51 based in African countries (primarily South Africa) and 2 respondents from India. While the study aimed to focus exclusively on African contexts, the Indian responses were retained as they provide complementary insights. The survey included both closed-ended (Likert-scale, multiple choice) and open-ended items. Quantitative data were analyzed descriptively, while qualitative responses were thematically coded using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

Results

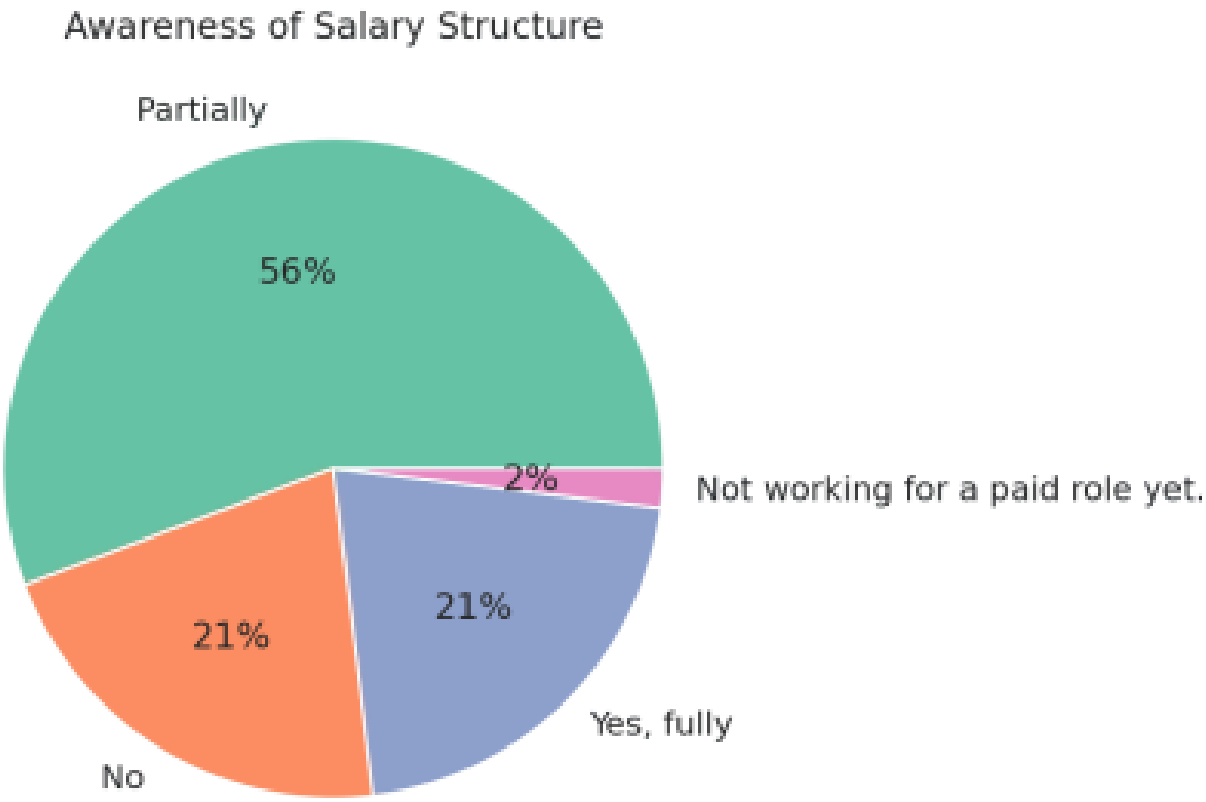
Demographics

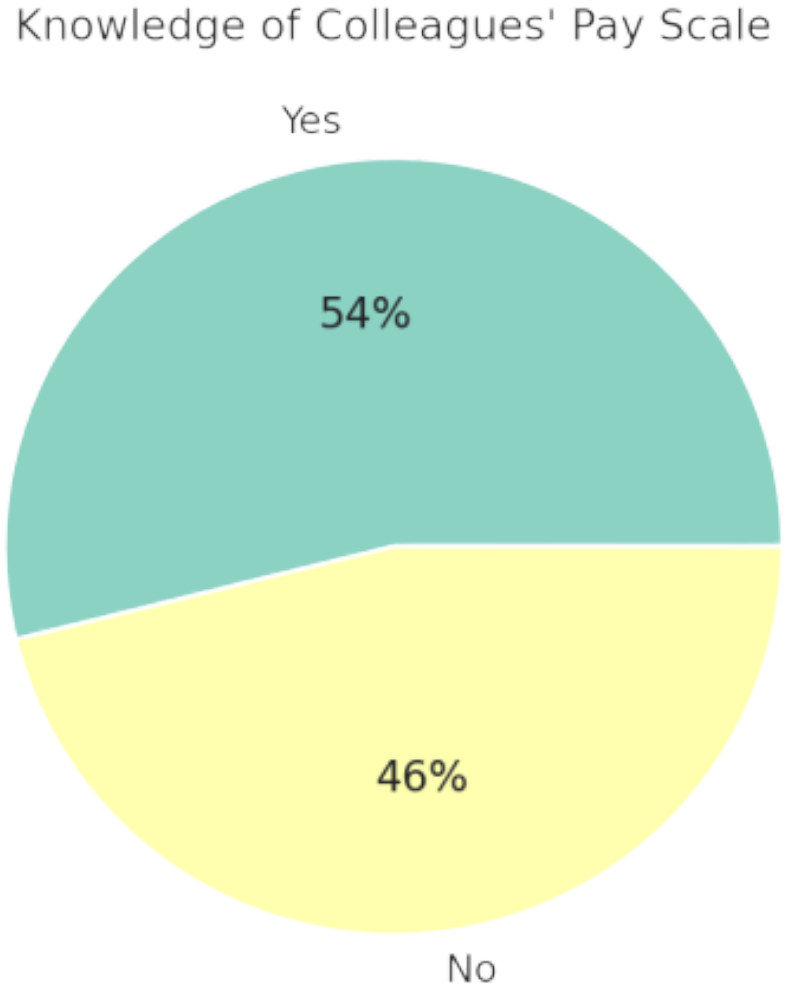
Respondents were primarily South African professionals, with a concentration in the 25–34 age group, many holding postgraduate qualifications, and most working in senior or middle management roles.

Awareness & Transparency

• Approximately half reported being unaware of their organization's salary structure.

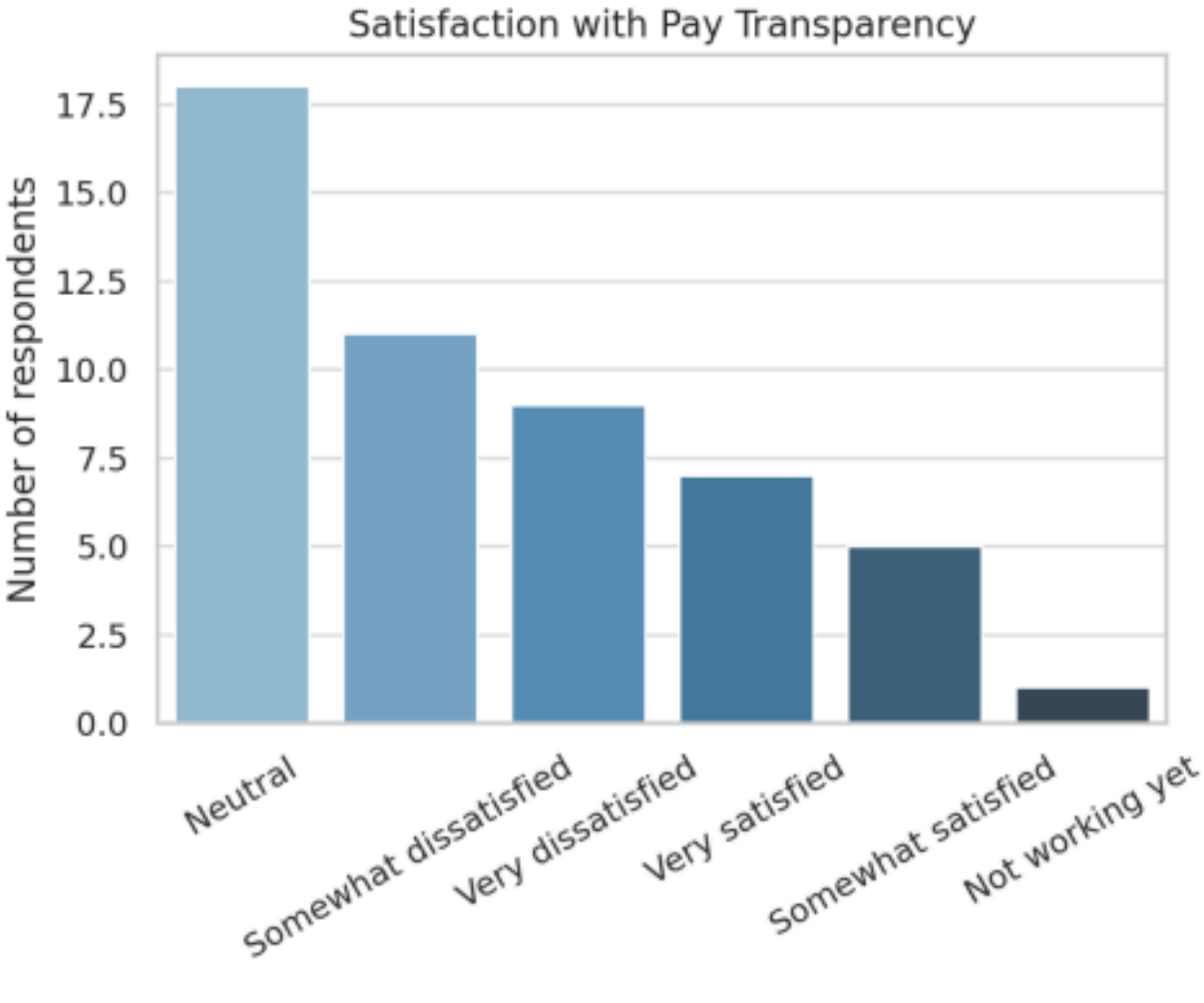
• Over 60% indicated that no information about gender pay differences had been shared by their organization


Awareness of Salary Structure
Partially
56%
2%
Not working for a paid role yet.
21%
21%
Yes, fully
No


Knowledge of Colleagues' Pay Scale
Yes
54%
46%
No

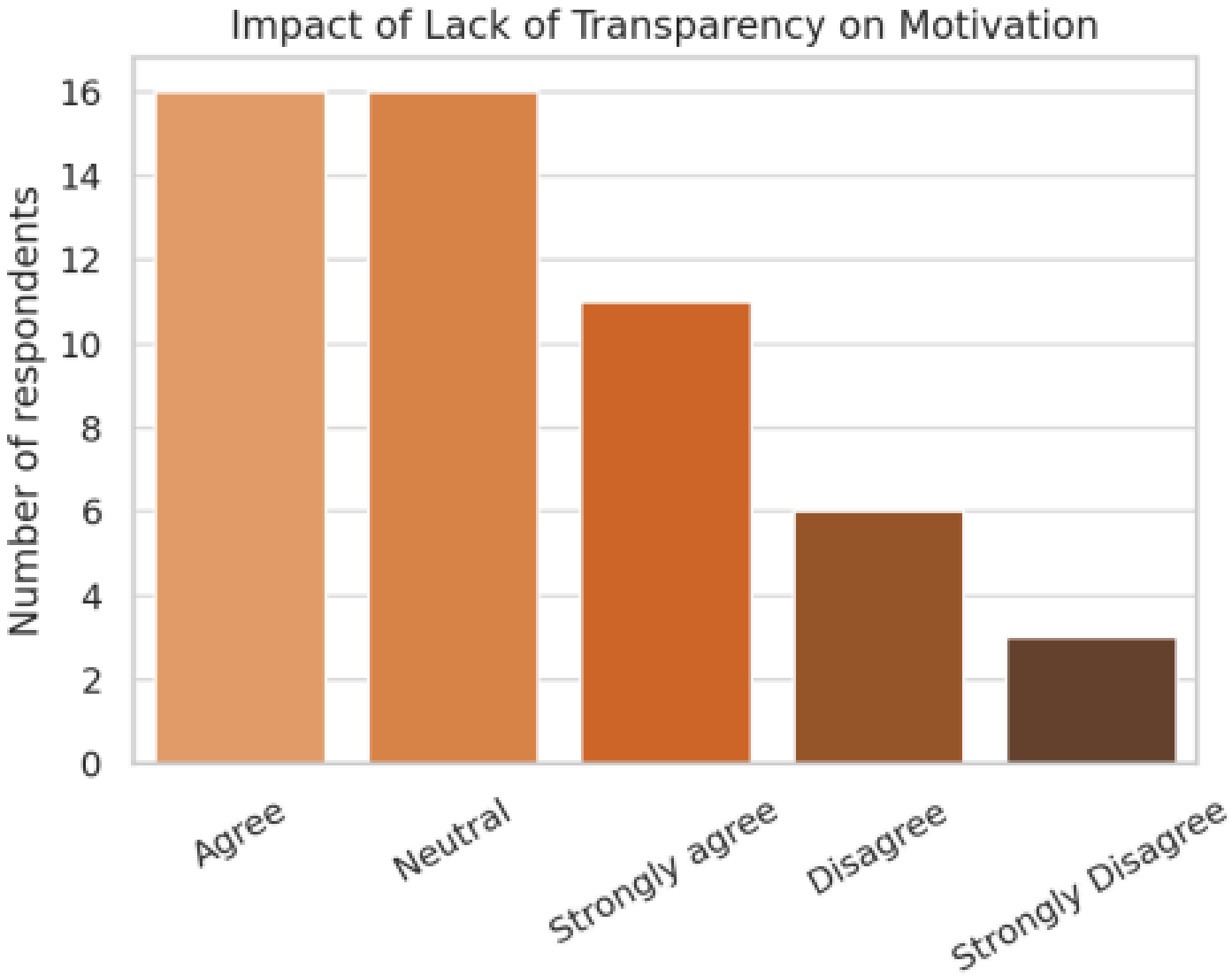
Satisfaction

The majority expressed dissatisfaction with pay transparency, with many selecting “dissatisfied” or “very dissatisfied.”



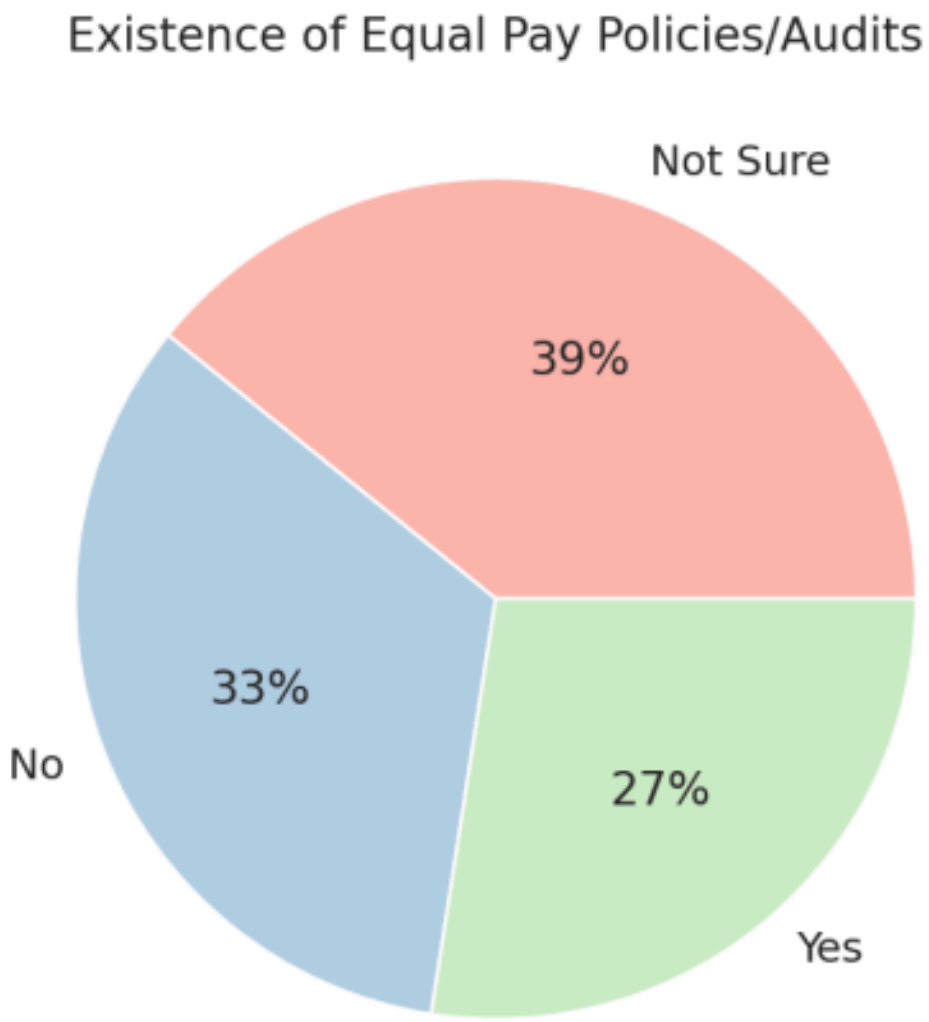
Impact on Motivation

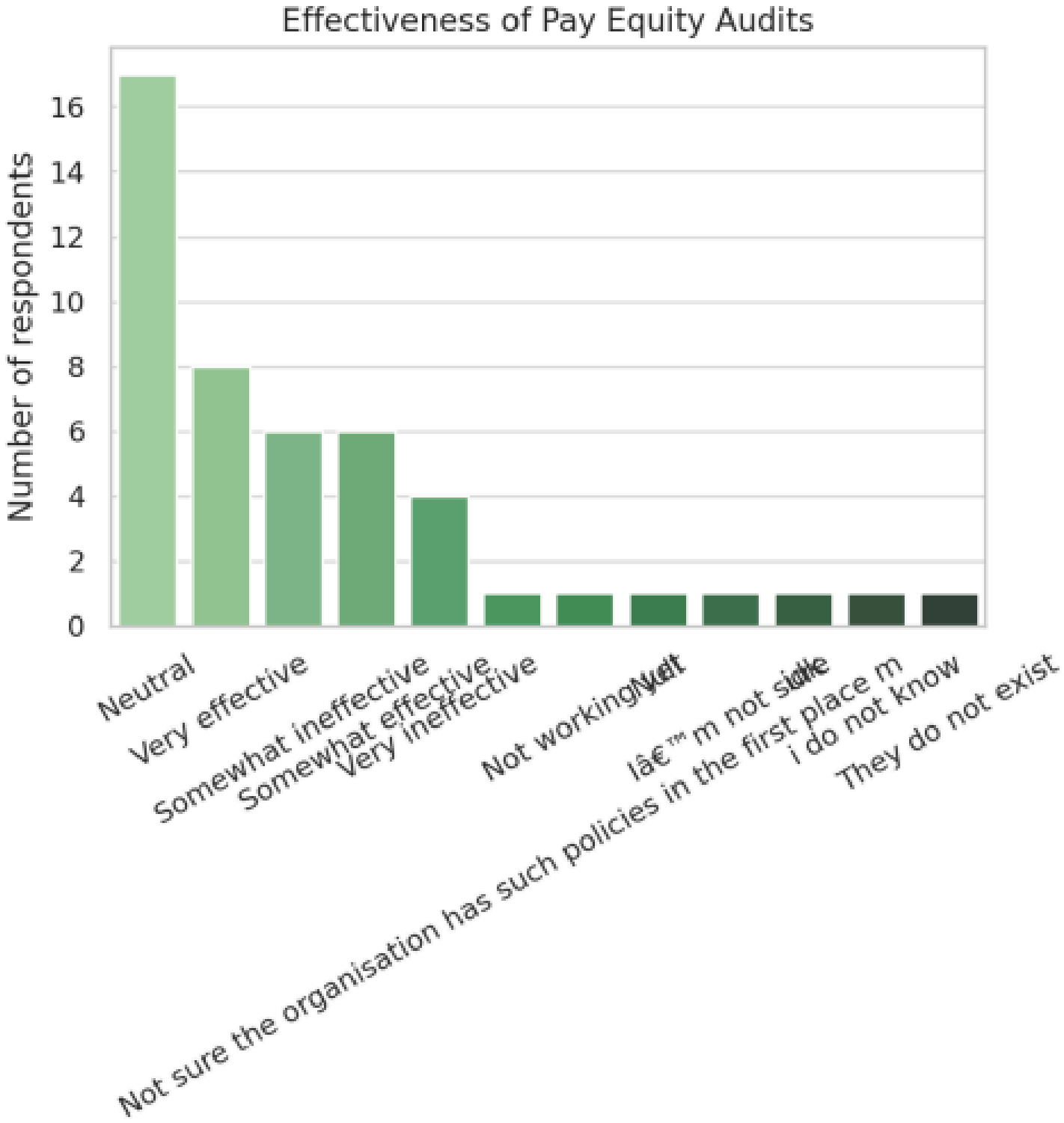
More than 70% agreed that the lack of transparency negatively affected their motivation and confidence at work.



Organizational Practices

A substantial share reported that their organizations had no policies or audits on equal pay.
Where audits existed, many respondents perceived them as ineffective or only somewhat effective.




Effectiveness of Pay Equity Audits
Number of respondents
0
2
4
6
8
10
12
14
16
Neutral
Very effective
Somewhat ineffective
Somewhat effective
Very ineffective
Not working yet
Not sure the organisation has such policies in the first place m
i do not know
They do not exist

Qualitative Insights

Respondents provided rich insights into how pay transparency could impact women's professional journeys. Themes included empowerment, negotiation capacity, motivation, fairness, and retention. Selected responses include:

· Women would not be afraid to negotiate for better salaries and would not downplay their contributions to company objectives.
· It will be a great motivation and activation for women to seek professional growth and financial independence.
· Women would be able to negotiate their remuneration based on the employer's principles around pay.
· It would increase motivation and zeal of the profession one does.
· Will increase morale.

· It would greatly affect it as it will allow women to be paid their worth for the value they bring in the company.
· Women mostly are afraid of taking up that space and demanding their worth and knowing what their colleagues earn could be the motivator they need.
· It would even the score board for negotiation.
· Women will make clear career choices and climb up professional ranks much quicker.

· This will encourage more women to enter job markets as well as encourage more women to achieve high academic levels.
· Better pay transparency would encourage women to stay in male-dominated industries instead of leaving for higher-paying sectors.
· Improved pay transparency can positively impact women's career progression by reducing pay gaps, increasing trust, and enabling better negotiation.

It would help them understand more about their money rights.
· It would empower more women to pursue careers they're passionate about and thrive in male-dominated fields.
· It would make women feel equal and able to do the same jobs as men.
· Improved pay transparency would likely narrow gender pay gaps, empower women to negotiate fairly, and create clearer pathways for career progression.
· It would show us real market value for our skills instead of underestimating ourselves.
· Making salary information public would reduce discriminatory practices and enhance negotiating power.
· Improved pay transparency would result in more inclusive workplaces, greater empowerment, and fewer barriers to promotions.
· Improved pay transparency would motivate women to work better, boost morale, and reduce feelings of being undervalued.

Discussion

Findings from this pilot suggest that pay transparency remains limited in South African workplaces, with widespread dissatisfaction and strong perceptions of inequity. These results are consistent with international research showing that pay secrecy sustains gender gaps (Card, Mas, Moretti, & Saez, 2023). The findings also align with regional evidence from UN Women (2023, 2024), which highlights a 20–30% gender wage gap across East and Southern Africa. Respondents' lack of awareness about salary structures reflects the absence of mandated pay audits or disclosure frameworks in most African countries. Their experiences of men earning more despite lower qualifications echo systemic barriers of discrimination, occupational segregation, and cultural bias identified in the UN Women reports. Qualitative insights underscore the transformative potential of transparency. Respondents linked transparency to fairness, empowerment in salary negotiations, and organizational trust. Yet, the perceived ineffectiveness of existing audits suggests that policies alone are insufficient, and that deeper structural reforms are needed.

Our Recommendations

To meaningfully address gender pay inequity in African workplaces, a comprehensive, multi-layered approach is required. First, organizations must adopt transparent pay policies that clearly communicate salary structures, pay bands, and promotion criteria to all employees. Transparency should go beyond access to personal payslips and include disclosure of organizational practices, criteria for bonuses, and gender pay differences where applicable. Regular and rigorous salary audits should be conducted, with results communicated to staff and actionable steps implemented to rectify inequities. These audits must account for factors such as qualifications, experience, and performance to ensure fairness and to prevent systemic undervaluation of women's work.

Structural reforms are critical to dismantling the barriers women face in career advancement. Organizations should implement mentorship and sponsorship programs specifically aimed at supporting women's progression into senior leadership roles. Policies should also ensure equitable access to professional development, skills training, and opportunities that allow women to demonstrate their capabilities and compete fairly for promotions. Addressing cultural and unconscious biases within organizations is equally important. Awareness campaigns, bias training, and the establishment of safe channels for reporting discrimination can help create environments where women are judged by competence rather than gender.

Empowering women employees through education and negotiation support is essential.

Training programs should equip women with skills to advocate for fair compensation, understand their value in the workplace, and negotiate effectively. Creating peer networks and support groups, such as the AFV Ally Collective, provides additional platforms for guidance, mentorship, and knowledge-sharing, reinforcing women's confidence in navigating workplace inequities.

Leadership commitment is non-negotiable. Executives and managers must actively champion pay equity initiatives, model transparent practices, and foster a culture of accountability. Leaders should link organizational efforts to broader goals, including SDG 5: Gender Equality and SDG 8.5: Equal Pay for Equal Value, ensuring that actions align with global standards and measurable outcomes. Policies should be integrated into performance evaluations for management, making accountability for equity outcomes an organizational priority.

Finally, organizations should engage in continuous monitoring and iterative improvement. Pay transparency initiatives should not be one-off interventions but embedded into the organizational culture through regular review, feedback mechanisms, and adaptations in response to evolving workforce dynamics. Collaboration with industry networks, civil society organizations, and governmental bodies can strengthen advocacy, amplify impact, and provide benchmarks for best practices. By combining clear policies, structural reforms, employee empowerment, leadership accountability, and ongoing monitoring, organizations can reduce gender pay gaps, enhance employee trust and retention, foster inclusive growth, and contribute to broader socio-economic development across Africa.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. The sample size is small (n=53), which restricts the generalizability of findings. While the survey was designed to capture African perspectives, two respondents from India were included, slightly broadening the geographic scope but not detracting from the African focus. Additionally, the survey relied on self-reported perceptions, which may be subject to bias. Future studies should include larger, more representative samples across African countries and triangulate findings with organizational pay data.

Conclusion

This pilot study reveals significant dissatisfaction with pay transparency and perceptions of gender inequity in South African workplaces. These findings reinforce regional evidence that women earn substantially less than men, even when equally qualified (UN Women, 2023, 2024). Pay transparency measures, if effectively implemented, could play a critical role in narrowing gender wage gaps, enhancing women's career progression, and fostering organizational trust. Expanding this research will be essential to inform both organizational reforms and national policy interventions.

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