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Skill Mismatch and the Gendered Structuring of Women's Labor Market Reintegration: A Comparative Analysis of Advanced and Developing Asian Economies

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Abstract: This research identifies the challenges faced by women when they want to return to work after caring for their baby, and how these challenges differ depending on the economic level of Asian countries. Founded on Gender Segmentation Theory, the research investigates how care systems and responsibilities limit employment opportunities, commonly leading women into unstable or informal employment. A systematic literature review was conducted in line with PRISMA guidelines, with searches carried out across major databases (Scopus, ScienceDirect, JSTOR and Google Scholar) in February 2026. A total of 20 relevant articles were selected from the 169 articles identified. The findings indicate that there are systemic limitations to labor reintegration. In advanced economies, women are primarily forced into non-regular employment due to continuous care responsibilities, while in developing countries, strict social norms often push them into informal or self-employment. Overall, the research suggests that current labour market regulations persist in exacerbating the gender gap. It emphasizes the urgent need for stronger re-entry pathways and inclusive policy frameworks across Asia to avoid the undervaluation of female human capital.

Keywords: Skill mismatch, Women's re-employment, Career interruption, Women informal, Asia.

INTRODUCTION

Significant changes have been observed in the global labor sector since the turn of the twenty-first century. These are attributable to digital innovation, major industrial structural changes and the rapid increase in the proportion of the population that has higher education. Despite improvements in educational attainment, especially among women, structural obstacles continue to obstruct fair access to the labor market. In 2024, the International Labour Organization (ILO) said that gender discrimination in the workplace is going to continue. At the current rate, 46.4% of female of working years are employed, compared to 69.5% of male employees. This indicates that it is likely to take almost two hundred years to reach gender

equality. Moreover, the ILO (2018) reports that informal and insecure employment remains widely prevalent, estimating that roughly 61% of jobs worldwide are informal, particularly affecting women and youths. One of key challenges arising from these shifts is the mismatch between workers' skills and qualifications and the requirements of the job marketplace.

There are a number of issues with the skills that people have, such as having too many qualifications, having too many abilities, and not having the right skills. According to a substantial volume of international research, women workers are more susceptible to skill mismatch than their men colleagues, even when their educational levels are equal (OECD, 2023). This situation is of specific concern to women who have had career breaks because of childbirth and caregiving duties. This can result to accelerated skill loss and consequent difficulty in re-entering the workforce for them. The outcome of these changes is that many women are now in less regular, part-time or informal jobs. The result is that wages are going down and the chances of career growth are being restricted.

These patterns are especially evident in Asian job markets. For example, within the Pacific Asia economic region, over 68% of employment is located in the informal sector, highlighting a deeply established tendency towards job vulnerability. In highly advanced Asian economies such as Japan and South Korea, there is a significant issue in terms of skill mismatch, resulting from the high level of education among the women population. The main factors causing this problem are company cultures that are not flexible and differences in parental duties. In developing countries, the informal sector is growing in size, but there are also limits on the development of skills and a lack of skilled workers. This indicates that while advanced economies commonly demonstrate an overeducation type mismatch and developing countries face a skill shortage type mismatch, both phenomena result in unstable employment for women.

It has been shown by a lot of literature since the 2000s that women's labor market stability is systematically weaken by gendered labor market structures based on traditional role norms and unequal care burdens, and that this causes persistent career inequalities. The existing literature identifies several significant limitations. Firstly, there is a lack of systemic and comparative research exploring the role of skill mismatch in the link between career breaks and insecure employment among women. Secondly, comparative research focusing on how different types of skill mismatch are formed in countries at diverse stages of economic development in Asia is limited. This also shows the ways in which these patterns lead to instability in women’s employment. Thirdly, there is still insufficient development of integrated analyses which consider how social care services and cultural gender perceptions influence the relationship between skill mismatch and employment results. Therefore, the focus of this research is to identify the similarities and differences in the pathways into informal or precarious employment due to skill mismatch after career interruptions experienced by women in both advanced and developing Asian economies.

In addition, these research hypotheses aim to answer the two research questions. The first hypothesis is that skill mismatch following career interruptions among women increases the career path of moving into informal or precarious employment in both advanced and developing Asian economies. The second hypothesis is that the manner in which skill mismatch leads to women’s precarious or informal employment varies depending on the level of economic development. In advanced economies, mismatch due to being overqualified is more closely linked to non-regular and part time employment. In contrast, in developing economies, skill deficit type mismatch is more closely linked to informal employment.

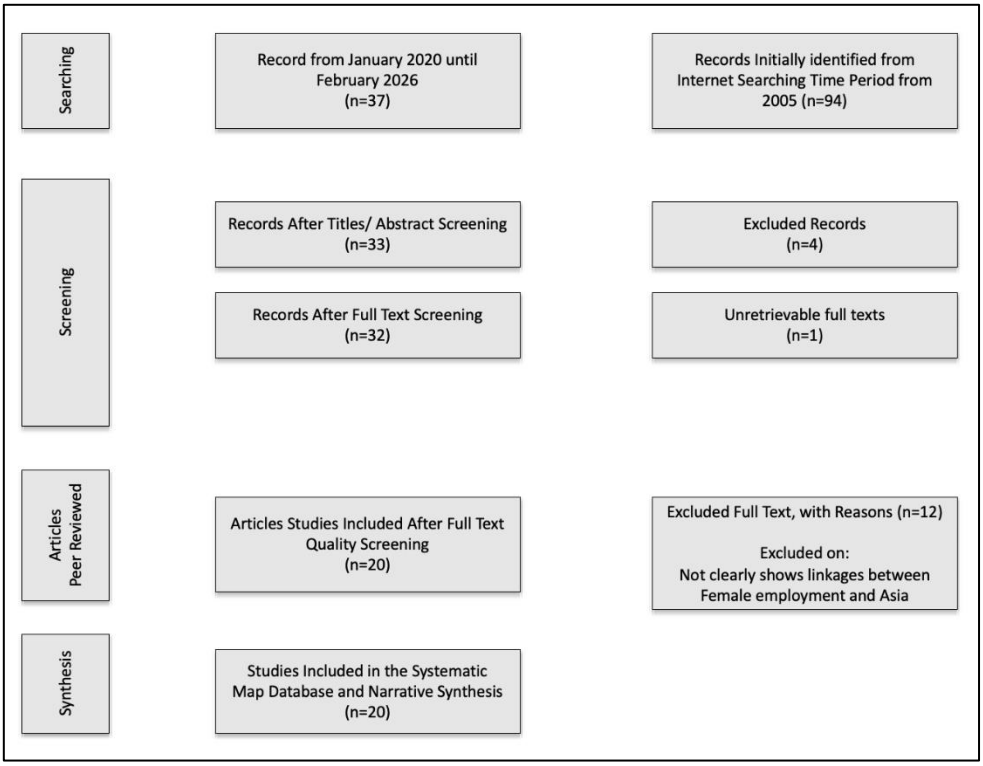
For this research, a PRISMA-based approach was adopted for this comprehensive review of literature, with the aim of addressing the significant gaps in the existing research. The focus here is on the employment pathways and skill mismatch experienced by women in both advanced and developing Asian economies. The analysis shows how a skill mismatch plays a

central role in this pattern, as explained by Gender Segmentation Theory. It also explains how women's usage of human capital is affected and repeated in different institutional environments. This research aims to view inefficient women human capital utilization not as a personal failure but as a result of the structural and institutional environments. It offers theoretical and policy insights to support labor market policies that consider Asia's developmental heterogeneity.

METHODS

The impact of skill mismatch that happens after women stop their careers is analyzed in this research which uses a Systematic Mapping Review approach. It compares women's pathways into informal or insecure jobs in advanced and developing Asian economies. A methodical review of the existing literature is a system that conscientiously compiles, classifies, and evaluates current academic discourse on specific research subject to identify research trends and gaps in theory. A comparison is made in this analysis of skill mismatch and its effect on employment pathways for women in different stages of economic development, using a framework of structured mapping.

The literature search and selection process followed the PRISMA guidelines. Following the PRISMA procedure, the stages of identification, duplicate removal, title and abstract screening, full-text assessment, and final inclusion were undertaken to determine the corpus of literature for analysis. This procedure was created to maintain transparency and replicability in the selection process. The literature search was conducted until February 2026 using major international academic databases, including Scopus, ScienceDirect, JSTOR, and Google Scholar. The search period was also limited to studies published from 2020 onward to focus on the time when discussions about skill mismatch and women's employment increased in relation to digital transformation and the growth of higher education. Only peer reviewed journal articles with full-text accessibility were included. Search terms were combined using Boolean operators.



Source: Modified from Fernandes & Samputra (2022)

Figure 1. Flow diagram illustrating the systematic mapping review process

The primary keywords included ‘skill mismatch’, ‘women employment’, ‘women labor force’, ‘women’s labor market participation’, ‘career interruption’, ‘informal employment’, ‘caregiving’, ‘re-entry’, ‘Asia’, ‘advanced economies’, and ‘developing economies. The terms were included in the title, abstract, or keywords of the selected articles. The selection of relevant literature was carried out in accordance with clearly defined 'Inclusion exclusion principle'. The 'inclusion principle' were as follows: (1) Research primarily focusing on ‘women workers’; (2) Research investigating ‘skill mismatch’ (e.g. ‘over-education’, ‘over-skilling’, ‘skill shortages’) as a key variable. (3) Analyses of the relationship between ‘skill mismatch and employment types’ (e.g. ‘non-regular’, ‘part-time’, ‘temporary’ or ‘informal employment’); (4) Research cover ‘Asian’ countries in that analysis. and (5) Research should be based on clear empirical analyses or theoretical discussions. The exclusion criteria were as follows: research that did not provide a definition of skill mismatch; research that did not distinguish between men and women in general labor market analyses; research that showed no clear link to employment forms; research that had not been reviewed by other researchers in the field; and research that was not available in full text.

A total of 6,946 records were found in the first search. After filtering by secondary core keywords, limiting the time period to 2020 or later and removing duplicates, 37 articles were left. Through title and abstract screening, studies not directly related to the research question were excluded. Subsequent full-text review further eliminated studies that did not clearly analyze the relationship between skill mismatch and women’s employment forms. Ultimately, 20 articles were included in the systematic mapping analysis. The selected studies were categorized based on research scope, including single-country, cross-national comparative, or regional studies, and the level of economic development, distinguishing between advanced and developing economies.

Table 1. Empirical results from systematic literature review

No	Author	Title	Country	Period	Method	Skill Mismatch Type	Employment	Key Findings
1	Abdel Fattah, Botros & Gaber (2024)	The Potential Skilling, Upskilling, and Reskilling Opportunities for the Migration and Mobility of Workers (Gender Focus)	Bangladesh	2004–2023	Qualitative review, national statistics, international data, policy mapping	Horizontal, Vertical, International demand mismatch	Migrant domestic/care work, informal	Women’s migration increased but remains concentrated in low-skilled care sectors; limited certification; vulnerability abroad
2	Ting & Yong (2025)	Graduate Underemployment in Malaysia	Malaysia	2020–2023	Secondary data analysis	Vertical overeducation; occupational mismatch	Semi-skilled service & clerical jobs	1/3 graduates underemployed; women concentrated in semi-skilled jobs
3	Gagnon & Gagnon (2021)	Employment Landscape & Migration in ADD Corridors	GCC & Asian sending states	2020–2021	Policy analysis, interviews	Horizontal & Vertical mismatch; automation risk	Domestic/care, construction	95% migrant workforce; women in care hit hardest by COVID

4	Mendiratta & Sidana (2025)	Rural–Urban Migration in Southern Asia	South Asia	Recent decades	Literature & policy review	Rural-urban mismatch; informal deskilling	Urban informal sector	Women concentrated in informal urban jobs
5	Baadshah (2025)	Job Loss Due to AI	Global, Asia (India focus)	2020s	Policy & labor trend analysis	Automation & digital gap	Informal, repetitive service jobs	AI threatens low-skilled jobs
6	Fatema & Maiti (2026)	Gender Gap in LFPR in India	India	1990–2024	Time-series regression, structural break test	Structural participation gap	Formal & informal	Growth alone doesn't close gap; fertility constrains participation
7	Sato & Dempster (2022)	COVID-19, Long-Term Care & Migration	Asia	2020	Policy & comparative analysis	Care labor mismatch	LTC, migrant care	Severe LTC labor shortages; migrant women central
8	Bastagli & Hunt (2020)	Social Protection & Future of Work	Global	Contemporary trends	Gendered policy analysis	Informal/social protection mismatch	Non-standard, gig, migrant care	Social insurance excludes women in non-standard jobs
9	Ainsworth et al. (2023)	Skill Gaps & Young Women in Food Processing	Indonesia (South Sulawesi)	2023	Mixed-methods	Industry-training mismatch; gender segregation	Technical jobs, micro-entrepreneurship	Women lack access to industrial skills
10	Yılmaz (2022)	Youth NEET in Turkey	Turkey	Post-2012	Quantitative secondary data	Education-industry mismatch	Low-wage employment, NEET	Women NEET higher due to care roles
11	Parajuli & Poudel (2021)	Skills Use of Return Migrants	Nepal	2021	Survey (400 returnees)	Deskilling; job mismatch	Wage work & self-employment	2/3 cannot use overseas skills
12	UNICEF Thailand (2023)	Youth NEET in Thailand	Thailand	2018–2023	Policy & statistical analysis	Education-labor mismatch	Informal, NEET	70% of NEET are women
13	Zhang (2022)	Transnational Marriage Migration	Korea, Singapore & SE Asia	2000s	Qualitative, case analysis	Credential devaluation	Unpaid domestic, informal	Migrant wives categorized as "wives" not workers
14	Zhou (2025)	Unequal Late Careers in China	China	2011–2020	Longitudinal panel	Institutional pension mismatch	Informal, post-retirement work	Low-resource women work longer
15	Appuhamilage (2021)	Gender Inequality in Sri Lankan Construction	Sri Lanka	Retrospective 10+ yrs	Qualitative interviews	Structural occupational exclusion	Professional & site work	Male-dominated sector limits women
16	Saade (2023)	Youth Unemployment & Nurses (Korea)	South Korea	Cohort-based	Econometric causal analysis	Entry-stage mismatch	Hospital nursing	High unemployment at graduation → long-term scarring

17	Samani & Marinova (2020)	Muslim Women in the Economy	Multi-country	21st century	Case studies	Cultural/institutional skill constraint	Formal, entrepreneurship	Education & digital access improve participation
18	Sato & Dempster (2022, Sec.2)	LTC Workforce in Asia	Asia	2020–2022	Policy & OECD data review	Qualification mismatch	Formal & informal care	Growing demand, skill gaps
19	Yeung & Yang (2020)	Youth Labor Market Uncertainties	Global	Past 20 yrs	Comparative literature synthesis	Vertical mismatch	Precarious work	Youth unemployment triple adult rate
20	Astuti et al. (2022)	Women Excluded More than Male	Indonesia	2007 & 2014	Ordered logistic regression	No direct skill mismatch	Informal/retirement	Elderly women more socially excluded

Source: Research data

Developing Asian economies, type of skill mismatch such as over-education, over-skilling, or skill shortage, inclusion of career interruption variables, form of employment including non-regular, part-time, temporary, or informal employment, and research methodology using quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods are important factors to consider. Empirical findings were sorted based on whether skill mismatch was found to increase precarious employment (+), produce statistically insignificant results (×), or show an opposite relationship (−), and then compared and analyzed. This study is limited because it does not conduct original empirical analysis using micro-level national data but instead synthesizes existing research through a literature-based comparative approach. The research aims to ensure analytical credibility and clearly distinguish both developmental differences and common characteristics across Asian economies by using a systematic and visible procedure according to PRISMA standards.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A systematic mapping review highlights the complexity of the link between gendered social expectations and the undervaluing of women's human capital after career pauses. This theoretical foundation gains further validity as it is sustained by recent academic research.

The historical changes in workforce gender discrepancies (Olivetti, C., Pan, J., & Petrongolo, B, 2024). They also assessed the influence of occupational gender differentiation on job selection and attainment. This comprehensive investigation strives to highlight the impact of economic and social forces on the employment possibilities and salaries of the different genders over time. By recognizing these reoccurring situations, it reveals the effects which gender roles and social expectations may have on professional paths and workplace practices. Research founded by empirical evidence illustrates that women entrepreneurs experience the detrimental effect of sudden shifts in the labor marketplace to a significantly greater degree than their male equivalents, thereby emphasizing the persistent structural inefficiencies.

The research also discusses gendered responsibilities in informal economies. These economies are marked by unpaid care duties. These overlap with unstable employment. This topic research indicates that limitations regarding work life balance increased in both during and following the period of the pandemic, with these barriers having a more significant impact on women's professional progress compared to men (Sahni et al, 2025). The findings have been used to provide further support for the gender segmentation theory that the relationship between

skill mismatch and gender roles can be used to explore how uncertain employment pathways are formed.

In above researches can be analysis based on Gender Segmentation Theory which explains labor markets as naturally divided by sex, influenced by social norms, institutional barriers, and expectations about gender roles. Even when men and women have the same level of human capital, labor allocation processes lead to differences in the quality and stability of their employment. Women are often placed in roles that are insecure, poorly paid, and not formalized. This theoretical approach combines labor economics and sociology alongside human capital theory, highlighting factors such as occupation-based gender disparities and unequal pay, as well as the influencing impact of caring obligations on job prospects.

Analytical Framework

This analysis of earlier research focuses on the connections between women's career disruptions, the skill-mismatch experienced by them, and what happens to their employment results following such interruptions in Asia. A total of 169 relevant research articles were found in the initial screening process. Of these, 33 that involved empirical analysis and distinctly defined causal connections between variables were chosen in the first screening.

Twenty studies were identified for detailed analysis based on criteria such as the research design's level of detail, how the research variables were measured, and whether variables related to career disruption were considered. The following types of skill mismatch are analyses in this comprehensive review: overeducation, over-skilling, skill deficiency and skill-mismatch between competencies. Career disruption is also assessed, as are the various types of employment, which can be categorized as regular, non-regular, or informal. The key focus of the research is on labor market outcomes, such as wages, employment stability, and access to social welfare programs. The literature review considers the disparities between countries at more advanced or less developed phases of national development, differentiating between advanced and developing market economies.

The research examines a wide variety of regional contexts. This covers prosperous economies such as South Korea and Japan. It includes rapidly growing economies such as Malaysia and Thailand. And it includes poorer developing countries like India, Bangladesh, and Nepal. Plus, it includes the GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) immigration areas. The career interruptions analysis examines how these changes impact human capital value. It also shows how these changes result in different types of skill mismatch. These include overeducation, over-skilling, skill deficiency and skill-mismatch between competencies. This is based on a country's stage of development. Finally, the 20 articles provide evidence that women's decisions to leave the labor market are not just individual choices, but part of a structural system that results in the under-valuation of women's skills and their removal from social welfare systems. Research consistently demonstrates that career disruptions often result in a mismatch between skills and job requirements, leading to job insecurity.

Structural Interlinkages and Mediating Mechanisms

This article examines 20 research which reveal that women's work experiences are more complicated than merely being employed or unemployed. Rather than this, they illustrate a process of accumulating inequality, in which career disruptions devalue skills and lead to worse career results. There are three main types of functional relationship that can be identified in the research.

Firstly, around 55% of the research, or 11 out of 20, state that career disruptions and caregiving responsibilities are significant factors that lead to or worsen skill mismatch. The findings suggest that quitting the job market after having children or caring for family members is not just a short-term absence. Instead, it makes it more likely that the skills a job requires

will become less valuable over time. For example, in Thailand, women constitute 70% of the NEET population, mainly due to their household and caregiving responsibilities (UNICEF Thailand, 2023). These data demonstrate that job education mismatches are structurally enforced by disruption throughout the life cycle. When women return to work, they often find themselves in a downward career path because their previous skills are not fully valued in job market. This pattern is a common one in Asia.

Secondly, 60% of the research, constituting 12 out of 20 studies, verifies the statistically significant impact of skill mismatch on salary penalties, its concentration in non-regular employment, and exclusion from social welfare systems. The majority of migrant women workers in Gulf Cooperation Council countries(GCC) are employed in lower-skilled roles within the domestic and care service sectors (Gagnon & Gagnon, 2021). This is a result of the cross-border lack of recognized skills, which means women talent is not being used efficiently. Skill-mismatches like this can cause issues with social welfare systems that are designed around regular jobs, which can lead to some people being excluded from society and being more likely to be in poverty in later life. This is especially common for women who have to stop working for a while to care their families.

Thirdly, approximately 40% of the studies (eight out of twenty) examine the effect of macro-level variables such as economic development and industrial change on women's employment results. However, these influences are only of limited significance. GDP increases do not always lead to a decrease in the gender gap in labor force involvement (Fatema and Maiti, 2026). It has been suggested by this structural disjoint that even with technological developments, including AI and automation, risks of job loss continue to be faced by women at a rate higher than men's if factors like caregiving obligations and gender roles are not taken into consideration. Ultimately, skill mismatch should be understood not as a lack of individual capability but as a reflection of labor market inequalities that arise from career interruptions and affect how skills are valued.

In conclusion, combining the 20 studies shows that the Asian women labor market functions within a functional nexus where skill erosion caused by interruption precedes diminished returns through skill mismatch, which then contributes to ongoing inequality within structural barriers. These findings provide empirical evidence that women's employment policies should go beyond just creating jobs. They ought to priorities skill maintenance during career breaks, guarantee precise re-employment matching for returning women workers, and promote the social inclusion of vulnerable groups.

Skill Mismatch Type

Advanced Asian Economies Context (Overeducation and Scarring Effect)

Roughly 60% of the literature reviewed examines educational overqualification in well-developed Asian economies, were higher levels of education in common. Even though access to higher education has risen rapidly, women graduate employment is often found in unskilled service jobs or part-time, temporary positions that do not relate to their degree or educational level. There are three mechanisms that seem to strengthen this discrepancy in abilities between individuals and the requirements of a job.

An estimated 33% of women university graduates in Malaysia are currently underemployed, meaning they are employed in jobs that do not align with their skills and qualifications (Siew King Ting and Za Wei Yong, 2025). This occupational trend is strongly linked to the phenomenon of women predominance in sectors such as services and the sales industry.

Additionally, the 'scarring effect', which shows that young women who finish university during an economic slump often face long-term problems with job security and life quality because of the mismatch between their first job and their qualifications in South Korea (Saade,

2023). Specifically, the nurses entering the labor market during economic decline faced significant wage penalties for six years and, rather surprisingly, increased working hours for a ten-year period. This resulted in long-term losses in life satisfaction and financial security. This shows that a 'bad first step' in nursing leads to lower pay and longer working hours, which can have a negative impact on an employee's quality of life.

Taken together, these results imply that increasing the availability of education does not necessarily lead to better job opportunities. For women who have career breaks, the difference between what they studied and what job they do can become a big problem that makes it hard for them to get better jobs.

Developing Asian Economies Context (Deskilling and Horizontal Mismatch)

In developing country contexts, the key challenges are found to be job loss and skill mismatch between competencies, rather than overeducation. Research has indicated significant skill mismatches between the skills required and those actually possessed by rural to urban migrant women, women migrant workers in the workforce abroad, and women involved in informal employment.

Approximately two-thirds (66.37%) of return migrant workers in Nepal are unable to apply the specialized skills they gained abroad and end up working in self-employment or low-skilled jobs within the local market (Parajuli and Poudel, 2021). From rural to urban migrant women in South Asia face structural barriers to entering the formal sector because their existing skills do not match the demands of urban labor(Mendiratta and Sidana, 2025). Their caring duties and worries about security complicate these difficulties they face. Although skill mismatch takes different forms depending on the stage of development, the absence of cross-national credential recognition systems and limited access to retraining opportunities are common factors that contribute to women's employment insecurity.

Hypothesis Evaluation

In general, the 20 research reviews in this research clearly indicate that the primary problem affecting Asian women's job markets does not result from a lack of education or poor skills. Instead, it arises from structural inequalities that cause women's skills and experiences to be considered less worthy after career disruptions. This discovery also backs up the two research hypotheses mentioned before, which are founded on the literature reviewed above.

Firstly, regarding the primary hypothesis on the baseline effect of skill mismatch, the statement that 'Skill mismatch following women's career interruptions increases the likelihood of moving into informal or precarious employment in both advanced and developing Asian economies' is evidenced by the preceding literature. The employment situations of women are influences not only by the acquisition of qualifications, but also by how the labor market evaluates their skills when they return to work after leaving to have children and care for them. This shows how a structure works where people underrate women's capabilities not due to a lack of ability, but because of the impact linked to a career with gaps.

The reality that the skills mismatch among highly educated women ultimately pushes them into insecure forms of employment, such as non-regular or part time work, emerges particularly through the cases of South Korea and Malaysia within advanced economic systems. Furthermore, despite holding the same university degrees, women are often assigned lower-level jobs in sectors such as administration and services, which are below their qualifications and abilities.

Additionally, the issue of women increasingly taking career breaks to balance household responsibilities is revealed. These skill shortages also lead to more severe informal sector unemployment in countries with developing economies. In Indonesia's South Sulawesi, for case in point, women residents in remote areas tend enter low-income, micro scale employment

in the informal sector when they re-enter the labor market after marriage and motherhood, due to the inadequate professional skills required by industrial sites on a large industrial scale.

Equally, the return of women labor migrants from Nepal and Bangladesh to their home countries highlights the problem of skills underutilization, where the highly skilled work experience gained abroad is either not recognized or not put to good use. Often, this results in these women performing low-skilled, informal jobs like domestic labor or street selling. Regardless of their level of socio-economic advancement, Asian countries tend to experience a similar pattern: women workers are disadvantaged by career breaks. This tends to arise when women workers are treated as temporary, unskilled laborers rather than integrated into a formal system of recruitment and employment.

The economic advantages from growth that women members of our society are due to share will not be equal for as long as unequal gender roles in the workforce and carer duties persist. A gendered type of discrimination is still faced by women when they work across international borders (Dina Abdel Fattah, Jessica Botros, and Nada Gaber, 2024). This negative perception arises from traditional role assumptions and constraints on how their capabilities are employed. The women are more vulnerable to social exclusion during the post-pandemic transition to high-skilled and digitally driven economies (Gagnon and Gagnon, 2021). Skill mismatch in the labor market goes beyond short-term wage penalties and can increase the risk of poverty during retirement (Zhou, 2025). This issue affects individuals throughout their lives and is connected to the intergenerational reproduction of inequality.

The second hypothesis, which concerns the idea that the impact of skill mismatch on women's employment varies depending on the stage of economic development. In advanced economies, skill-mismatch due to being over-qualified of women will be more strongly linked to non-regular and part-time employment, whereas in developing economies, skill-mismatch due to being under-qualified will be more strongly linked to informal employment. The content shows that the impact of skill mismatch on women's employment patterns varies structurally across countries depending on their stage of economic development.

In advanced economic systems, the rapid increase in women's educational attainment has created a gap between the labor market's absorption capacity and the outcomes of their majors and educational systems. This has resulted in significant issues of overqualification and academic overeducation. In particular, the Malaysian case analysis the structural cultural preferences for certain leadership traits, combined with the perception that women may leave the workforce due to family commitments, leads to actual promotion inequality for women (Siew King Ting and Sze Wei Yong, 2025). Overall, this limits long-term growth for women employees. Consequently, one-third of women university graduates in Malaysia end up in jobs below their capabilities. Meanwhile, women graduates were overrepresented in semi-skilled roles such as service, sales and administrative support. They were more likely to choose part-time roles or similar positions, often due to care responsibilities.

The 'stigma effect' affects professional women in South Korea, and how the long working hours culture makes it difficult for women to balance work and family, leading to a high rate of new women professionals leaving their jobs as 26.4% in the first year and not pursuing a career (Saade, 2023). In additional, temporarily opting for non-regular employment to fulfil household duties can result in employers misunderstanding this as an indication of reduced ability or dedication among women job seekers seeking re-employment, thereby hindering their return to full-time roles (Saade, 2023). This leads to a negative circle that essentially blocks opportunities for women professionals to return to well-paid regular positions. Overall, the reasons women professionals in advanced economies choose non-regular employment can be seen as a way to avoid the negative impact of career interruptions, which are often the result of a lack of family-friendly labor environments.

In contrast, in developing Asian countries, as opposed to advanced economies, a combination of factors is cited as the main cause, including skill gaps and, conversely, strong social structures based on patriarchy. Firstly, an analyze of the Indonesian case revealed that deeply established social practices of gendered division of labor define women as 'auxiliary workers' (Ainsworth et al, 2023). Socio-cultural pressures that priorities women's domestic responsibilities actually drive them towards informal self-employment. Furthermore, the case highlights the reality that many women in developing countries face limitations on their decision-making power, such as requiring their husband's permission to participate in paid labor.

The Bangladesh case analysis found that the majority of vocational training centers are situated in urban areas (Dina Abdel Fattah, Jessica Botros and Nada Gaber, 2024). This excludes rural women from opportunities to acquire skills, pushing them into low-skilled informal labor. Moreover, the poor internet infrastructure and poor network-connectivity in rural areas obstruct opportunities to acquire the skills required in the Fourth Industrial Revolution era. The lack of skills is a key reason why women immediately engage in subsistence informal labor, such as street vending, scrap collection or domestic services (Mendiratta & Sidana, 2025).

In addition, informal employment without formal contracts or job security is the typical reality for over 90% of migrants residing in South Asian cities. They are especially vulnerable to hazardous conditions when working in low-wage manual labor roles on building sites. In conclusion, women in developing countries are caught in a difficult situation: they lack the marketable skills required by employers, and they are also burdened by traditional social roles that impose domestic responsibilities. Consequently, their opportunities to enter quality employment are limited, meaning they have no choice but to survive by opting for unstable jobs in the informal economy.

Comparative Insights by Development Stage

A summary of the 20 research studies found that trends in employment security and skill usage in Asia vary systematically according to the country's level of development. This is due to the impact of different institutional weaknesses and social standards on women's skill mismatch. In advanced and emerging economies, overeducation is the dominant issue. Beyond the scarring effect, the key characteristics include unrealized wage premiums, concentration in part-time and non-regular employment, and long -term career scarring (Saade, 2023). Emerging economies like China, career interruptions for women slow down skill accumulation over their lifetime and create lifecycle inequality by restricting access to sufficient social protection in old age (Zhou, 2025).

This finding shows a structural limitation, where higher educational attainment does not always guarantee economic security in later life. In developing countries, the connection between restricted access to social protection and the vulnerability of migrant women is evident in migration contexts. For example, In Bangladesh that even when women gain certain skills through training, the lack of certification systems that are neutral to gender and nationality creates an institutional mismatch (Dina Abdel Fattah, Jessica Botros, and Nada Gaber, 2024). This limits women to low-wage and low-skilled jobs in both domestic and overseas labor markets. An extreme case of horizontal mismatch in East Asia, where highly educated marriage migrant women are legally and socially categorized as domestic helpers or wives, preventing their human capital from being recognized as marketable skills (Zhang, 2022).

Finally, regarding skill deficits and informal sector concentration, key challenges in developing contexts, the structural constraints associated with rapid urbanization (Mendiratta and Sidana, 2025). The pattern of strategic skill downgrading, where Indonesian women with formal skills choose to work in small-scale informal self-employment in order to meet their

caregiving responsibilities (Ainsworth et al, 2023). Although the forms of mismatch differ, the studies converge in persistent employment instability and income inequality among women, showing structural similarities in these outcomes.

Research Gaps and Future Directions

This literature review identifies four major research gaps. First, the lack of empirical evidence on the impact of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and automation AI on women's labor markets in Asia (Baadshah, 2025). Urgent attention is needed to assess the risk of job displacement faced by women who are already in situations of skill mismatch during the AI-driven transition. Second, even with economic growth, women's employment outcomes do not always improve it (Fatema and Maiti, 2026). This decoupling between economic growth and gendered labor market performance shows the importance of creating gender-responsive macroeconomic policy models that can address this structural disconnect. Third, the comparative research is necessary to assess the effectiveness of cross-national Mutual Recognition systems that support the transferability of skills among return migrant women (Parajuli and Poudel, 2021).

Finally, long-term analyses of causal relationships based on long-term data are notably rare. To be more specific, there is a lack of research in this regard, that is to state that research which tracks career interruptions from a life-course perspective over an increased time period. In future, research should focus on analyses of many countries' data over time, and use methods that look at women's lives in the broader contexts of digital technology and structural changes in industry.

CONCLUSION

The results of this analysis indicate that skill mismatch issues experienced by women when they take a career break can have significant impacts on various aspects, including workforce efficiency, gender equality, and social welfare. The underlying causes of this discrepancy are not due to individual choices of career or lack of ability. Rather, it is the result structural factors that lead to career disruptions. These disparities are not the result of personal choices or lack of capability, but rather are driven primarily by societal structures and institutional contexts that depreciate the human capital of women.

To address this challenge, a comprehensive policy approach is necessary, combining economic development with fundamental system reforms, including for care services, welfare state frameworks, vocational training opportunities, and the establishment of credential recognition procedures. These problems can be solved by adopting a whole system strategy that combines targeted gender sensitive skills training, digital reskilling and a system for officially recognizing qualifications. This will ensure that workers' skills continue to be useful and avoid under-employment.

Additionally, the ability of these strategies to achieve their objectives is linked to the advancement of resilient care systems and comprehensive social security programs that promote a balanced work-life harmony. Several important measures should be taken to avoid career breaks like providing paid Maternity Leave, subsidies for companies providing childcare, and incentive policies for employers offering more flexible working conditions (Saade, 2023). In addition, the introduction of mentorship initiatives is recommended to provide assistance to women individuals re-entering the labor force, in synergy with the facilitation of adaptable working hours.

The challenges related to excessive qualifications could be countered by enhancing the efficiency of the system for allocating roles and by instituting policies that take into account any interruptions in an individual's professional path. The following strategies have been identified as potential solutions to the challenge of preventing skills gaps: the regular review

and updating of degree programs to meet industry requirements; the fortification of vocational training frameworks and the promotion of synergies between industry and academia; and the targeted support for women graduates in securing professional roles that fully utilize their qualifications (Siew King Ting and Sze Wei Yong, 2025).

The challenges of over-qualification and skill mismatches can only be tackled by making changes to how roles are distributed and how vocational training is provided, with these adjustments being made in line with what industry needs. This transformation in perspective brings with it notable implications for the way in which career transition is regarded. Rather than denoting the conclusion of our integration into the employment sector, it ought to be regarded as the initiation of a pivotal structural reformation necessary for adaptation and development. This perspective shift means that career changes are viewed not as a point of labor market exit, but as the initial stage of a crucial structural transition required for social adaptation. Overall, this essential fundamental approach must be taken to fulfil the dual purpose of improving gender balance and achieving sustainable economic growth in both Asian developed and developing economies.

This fundamental approach is essential for facilitating the simultaneity of two key objectives: the establishment of gender inequality and the achievement of sustainable economic development.

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