

Human Resources Policies and Practices aimed at women: a study on the perception of men and women in the Mining sector

Políticas e Práticas de Recursos Humanos direcionadas à mulher: um estudo sobre a percepção de homens e mulheres no setor de Mineração

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Abstract

This study sought to analyze the perception of professionals, men and women, regarding HR policies and practices aimed at women in an organization in the mining sector. As for the method, a survey was applied to a multinational organization in the mining sector, covering a sample of 262 employees. Regarding the need to open up space for women through policies aimed at them in a male-dominated segment, the results reveal that the majority of respondents perceive the implementation of initiatives aimed at women in the organization positively. However, one of the issues on which there was the highest level of disagreement was in relation to the creation of quotas for the entry of women into the organization and for their occupation of leadership positions. This finding reflects two positions that are very embedded in the current debate on quotas: while some women criticize affirmative action such as quotas, in line with meritocracy, others defend quotas as an instrument to compensate for historical inequality, to promote inclusion.

Keywords: women; gender studies; mining; HR policies and practices.

Resumo

Este estudo buscou analisar a percepção de profissionais, homens e mulheres, acerca das políticas e práticas de RH direcionadas à mulher em uma organização do setor de mineração. Quanto ao método, foi aplicada uma *survey* em uma organização multinacional do setor de mineração contemplando uma amostra de 262 empregados. Quanto à necessidade de abrir espaço para a mulher através de políticas a ela direcionadas em um segmento dominado pelo masculino, os resultados revelam que a maioria dos respondentes concorda e vê de forma positiva a implementação de iniciativas orientadas para a mulher na organização. Porém, uma das questões em que houve maior nível de discordância foi em relação à criação de cotas para a entrada de mulheres na organização e para a sua ocupação em posições de liderança. Tal achado espelha duas posições que estão bastante presentes no debate atual sobre cotas: enquanto algumas mulheres criticam ações afirmativas como as cotas, na linha da meritocracia, outras defendem as cotas como instrumento de compensação de uma desigualdade histórica, para impulsionar a inclusão.

Palavras-chave: mulheres; estudos de gênero; mineração; políticas e práticas de RH.

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1 Introduction

Women have been managing to reach positions in the job market that were previously reserved solely for men (Rocha-Coutinho & Coutinho, 2011; Silva et al., 2016; Antunes et al., 2018; Mota-Santos et al., 2019; Mota-Santos et al., 2021; Valadares, 2021). Data from the Annual Social Information Report (RAIS) of Brazil's Ministry of Economy shows a significant increase in women's participation in the Brazilian workforce, rising from 13.6% in 1950 to 44% in 2023.

Nonetheless, these advances still require a continuous reaffirmation of women in a corporate world that remains dominated by men. Discrimination in the organizational environment persists as a global phenomenon, as indicated by differentiated salaries, the triple work burden, reduced training opportunities and career advancement (Silva et al., 2016; Mota-Santos et al., 2017; Oliveira et al., 2018; Mota-Santos et al., 2021). Data from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE, 2020) reveal a strong disparity in monthly earnings between women and men in Brazil: in 2020, while a male worker had an average income of R\$ 2,574.00, a woman earned an average of R\$ 1,995.00, even when performing equivalent roles.

The gender segregation still present in various professions contributes to the perpetuation of certain stereotypes, often justifying salary differences and hindering women's advancement in organizations in Brazil (Santos & Amâncio, 2014; Boffi & Oliveira-Silva, 2021). Women are still attributed traits of fragility, emotionality and submission, while men are still associated with boldness, decision-making power and rationality, making them seem more suited to certain contexts and organizational top positions (Carvalho Neto et al., 2010; Antunes et al., 2018).

In this sense, even if the situation is getting better year by year, women in Brazil continue to be often relegated to activities associated with care, support and execution roles, unlike men, who are more frequently directed toward factory operations and higher-responsibility roles, including management and planning—activities that are more valued in the labor market (Silva et al., 2016). Moreover, men have occupied the most demanded roles in the context of Industry 4.0 (Susskind & Susskind, 2017).

Women's entry into the job market and their rise to positions of greater responsibility face many challenges. Their professional trajectories are still marked by segregation and discrimination, placing them in less favorable conditions (Costa et al., 2021). Prejudice against female professionals is also manifested in higher exposure than men to: unemployment, occupational segregation and discrimination in earnings (Galeazzi et al., 2011).

These forms of prejudice are even more visible in certain economic segments traditionally characterized by male dominance (Carrilho, 2006; Santos et al., 2021), such as mining, a sector considered more "suitable" for men due to its historical demand for physical strength (Valadares, 2021; Valadares et al., 2022). This led to legislation prohibiting women's work in mining in England (19th century), Belgium, Russia, and Japan (early 20th century), and in Brazil in 1938 (Carola, 2006; Carrilho, 2006).

Symbolic violence has always been profound in this sector, as evidenced by the belief that the presence of women in mines brought bad luck, causing accidents and deaths that were common due to the terrible working conditions still prevalent in the early 20th century. The exhaustion of a mine was even attributed to the presence of women on site (Castilhos, Lima, & Castro, 2006; Cappelle & Mello, 2010; Quirino, 2011; Valadares et al., 2022).

Data from the Brazilian Mining Corporations Institute (IBRAM, 2019) indicate that female occupation in this sector in Brazil is only 13%, far below women's participation in the

Brazilian labor market, which was 44% in 2023 (Ministry of Economy, RAIS data). Therefore, it becomes imperative to consider HR policies and practices that promote the effective inclusion and development of women in the mining context, which is the focus of this study.

Despite the growing interest in women in the labor market (Vieira & Amaral, 2013; Mota-Santos et al., 2017), there are still few studies in Brazil concerning their roles in certain segments, particularly those with a strong male presence (Santos et al., 2021; Valadares, 2021; Valadares et al., 2022), such as mining.

A survey conducted in the Scientific Periodicals Electronic Library (Spell) of the Brazilian Academy of Management ANPAD using the keywords "woman" and "mining" identified only three publications on the subject. Furthermore, only two studies address the working conditions of women in this sector (Macedo et al., 2012; Valadares et al., 2022), but none discuss HR policies and practices specifically for this gender, indicating the relevance of this study. Thus, especially in Brazil, there is a limited number of publications focused on investigating women in mining.

In an attempt to reduce this gap, this article analyzes the perceptions of professionals, both men and women, regarding HR policies and practices aimed at women in a mining sector corporation.

2 HR Practices and Policies: Women as Protagonists

Considering the increase in women's participation in the job market in Brazil as well as around the world over the past few decades, there is a clear need for organizations to develop HR practices and policies aimed at them (Vilela et al., 2020). However, effectively including so-called minorities in the corporate world is not an easy task; it requires dismantling the notion that organizational policies are made by and for dominant (male) groups (Bitencourt, 2019). If organizations aim to survive in this competitive environment, they must adapt to the cultural hybridity and heterogeneity that comprise women (Pereira & Hanashiro, 2010).

At a macro level, in the realm of public policy, affirmative actions were conceived in the United States as practices to promote diversity, including women, in organizations initially linked to the government (Fleury, 2000). Alves and Galeão-Silva (2004) define these actions as a set of specific policies and practices for groups that face social exclusion and to whom equal treatment and access to opportunities have historically been denied, such as quota policies for black individuals and the law to include people with disabilities in Brazil.

It is undeniable that affirmative actions create space for a more diverse workforce. However, in some cases, due to quota policies, even when individuals from minority groups are qualified, they may be perceived by others as incompetent. According to Pereira and Hanashiro (2010), marginalized individuals, when hired, may fear a negative connotation by its fellow workers regarding their capabilities. For Faniko et al. (2017), some women may even legitimize gender inequality by denying support for quotas.

According to Maccali et al. (2015), despite the rights guaranteed by affirmative action laws, the effective inclusion of individuals in the job market depends on several other factors, such as professional preparation, structural, functional, organizational, and social conditions surrounding the business environment. The authors add that implementing diversity policies requires aligning corporate strategies with all aspects of HR practices, particularly talent attraction, selection, remuneration, training, and organizational culture.

It is with this perspective that the management of diversity emerges, involving policies and practices that go beyond mere legal obligation (Freitas et al., 2017). Torres and Pérez-Nebra (2014) draw a correlation between diversity management and inclusion. They consider diversity

management a set of policies and practices that promote the inclusion of various minority groups within an organization, recognizing and valuing differences in gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, etc.

Despite the growing interest in the topic, the implementation of diversity-oriented policies and practices remains a challenge for most corporations (Kramar & Jepsen, 2021). One reason for this is that these initiatives are often treated as an additional policy, not linked to existing people management practices, which creates a gap between their conception and implementation (Bleijenbergh et al., 2010).

Recent studies indicate that the implementation of diversity policies in organizations at an initial stage usually addresses specific issues impacting the work environment and is developed for targeted groups, such as women and racial groups (Kramar & Jepsen, 2021). At a more advanced stage, the organization begins to consider diversity policies as integrated with strategy, contributing to creating a more inclusive workplace. Moreover, there is still no common understanding of what effective practices for promoting diversity in organizations would entail (Kramar & Jepsen, 2021).

This challenge is not faced solely by Brazilian corporations, but also by those in Europe and North America (Alves & Galeão-Silva, 2004; Neves, 2020). One reason is the skepticism of professionals, who generally question the effectiveness of such programs or exhibit prejudiced attitudes from male colleagues and managers. Additionally, there is institutional resistance to modifying traditional HR policies and adapting them to diversity.

The design of specific HR policies for a social group began in multinational corporations (Fleury, 2000), also known as transnational corporations, which have headquarters in one country and operate in various others, necessitating engagement with multiple and diverse cultures. Movements related to diversity, such as this, have derived from other countries like the United States, and often the significant challenge lies in balancing local values with global policies and corporate guidelines (Fleury, 2000).

According to Abramo (2007), the way an organization's leadership perceives and values the notion of gender influences the definition of that organization's HR practices and policies, consequently affecting decisions regarding which programs to invest in. Therefore, recruitment, promotion and development policies, among others, are closely related to the gender image held by the organization's top managers. Abramo (2007) adds that the image of women is marked by prejudices (Mota-Santos et al., 2017), often associated with high rates of absenteeism, turnover and greater labor costs represented by maternity leave, job security for pregnant women and maternity pay.

Moreover, corporate perceptions regarding women's performance in the job market are often constructed through comparisons, if not in opposition, to men. Women are evaluated based on whether they are seen as more or less costly, more or less productive, more or less committed, and whether they possess decision-making capabilities. Behind these comparisons lie determining questions, such as whether it is worth hiring women, paying them equivalent salaries to men, investing in their training, promoting them, and whether it is worthwhile to create specific policies for this group (Abramo, 2007), making the discrimination faced by women in the corporate world evident (Mota-Santos et al., 2017; Mota Santos et al., 2021).

Regarding this discrimination, Coelho (2006) identifies two models: i) discrimination by preference, where employers prefer to hire a man even if his competence and performance are similar to a woman's, influenced by cultural and psychological factors; ii) statistical discrimination, related to the social stigma that women's productivity is lower than men's due to additional responsibilities they typically assume outside of work, leading to more unstable connections with corporations (Coelho, 2006; Cembranel et al., 2020).

A study by Lucas et al. (2010) on practices adopted in the “150 Best Corporations to Work For” in Brazil found that 47% of them did not have specific programs for women. The other organizations developed projects aimed at family support and women’s health, with few corporations presenting initiatives related to women’s careers.

Research by Pires et al. (2020) points to a limitation of studies on the policies and practices adopted even by large corporations in Brazil to attract and retain women, as well as a lack of concrete indicators within organizations that could support a precise evaluation of these policies. Interviews with employees revealed the existence of the “glass ceiling” phenomenon (a symbolic view of a subtle barrier in organizations that hinders women’s advancement), along with salary disparities and limited access to managerial positions (Pires et al., 2010).

In this regard, research by Vilela et al. (2020) on HR practices aimed at attracting and retaining women indicated a significantly lower presence of women in management levels, a disparity that may reflect the fact that most of the corporations investigated do not have HR practices that encourage women’s career development.

Therefore, the pursuit of equity between men and women should be one of the objectives intended by organizations, and the implementation of HR policies is a pathway to achieve this (Vilela et al., 2020). Despite the existence of laws guaranteeing the same rights for women, this does not seem enough. Therefore, it is necessary to create practices and policies that can dismantle the sexual division of labor that still prevails in organizations, as well as to ensure equal pay and equal opportunities for reaching managerial positions (Próni & Próni, 2018; Vilela et al., 2020).

For Hewlett and Rashid (2011), HR policies should focus on empowering women through actions aimed at reconciling professional and family life, enabling better conditions for them to prepare for leadership positions. This empowerment becomes a competitive differentiator for organizations, as programs aimed at attracting and retaining qualified women are advantages in the competition for essential talent in dynamic markets (Hewlett & Rashid, 2011).

A study by Pimpa et al. (2016), applied in the mining sector, highlights that organizations have been striving to adopt development policies that promote equality between men and women. However, there is still a long way to go for the institutionalization of specific agendas for women, considering that this segment has historically been guided by masculine values.

The authors also present initiatives that could aid in promoting equity, such as: a) specific recruitment and selection policies for women—encouraging applications for machine operation positions or specific technical roles in mines; b) Women’s Health Programs—services and guidance on breast and cervical cancer, pregnancy complications, and others; c) Development and training programs for women—leadership programs and language training, aiming for effective access to career opportunities; d) Celebration of differences—showing how women can benefit the organization; e) Creation of reliable corporate channels that women can use in cases of harassment and discrimination, along with other initiatives to curb these occurrences (Pimpa et al., 2016).

Another study on women in the mining sector is that of Valadares et al. (2022). The research findings reveal that men perceive fewer barriers to women’s careers than women do themselves in the investigated segment. Additionally, women demonstrated a sharper awareness of situations involving prejudice and discrimination in the mining environment.

In this direction, Norberg & Faltholm (2018) point out that women are not recognized as integral parts of the mining sector and, for this reason, are targets of discrimination and harassment. This established norm governing women’s roles in mining excludes them from

certain jobs and positions, causing them to undertake activities considered complementary and secondary.

It is within this literature that the reflections of the empirical research were conducted, considering the perceptions of professionals regarding HR policies aimed at women in the context of an organization in the mining sector.

3 Methodology

Regarding the method, a quantitative survey was conducted in a multinational corporation in the mining sector. The choice of this organization was based on two reasons: i) its extensive experience in the mining market, with over 100 years of operation in the sector; ii) the broad access to the corporation for data collection, as one of the researchers is a manager in the Human Resources department of the multinational. The empirical units selected for the study were six units located in three Brazilian states (Minas Gerais, Rio de Janeiro, and Goiás).

The research questions were developed in light of the literature review, which provided important categories that guided the creation of the questionnaire, specifically: i) HR policies and practices aimed at women; ii) diversity and inclusion policies; iii) quotas; iv) practices of discrimination against women in the organizational environment. Another document considered during the construction of the questionnaire was the organization's "Inclusion and Diversity Policy."

In this direction, Table 1 includes the research questions about policies and practices directed at women applied in the investigated multinational.

Table 1

Research Questions on Policies and Practices Directed at Women in Organizations

Itens	Questions
Q1	I am aware of the corporation's Diversity Policy, which supports the process of including women.
Q2	I am in favor of implementing corporation policies and initiatives aimed at women.
Q3	There are initiatives implemented by the corporation aimed at women's well-being and health.
Q4	I support the idea of women earning their place in the workplace on their own merits, without policies that could favor this process.
Q5	I am in favor of defining a quota for women in leadership positions in the corporation, as an efficient mechanism for combating existing inequalities.
Q6	I am in favor of defining a quota for women in the corporation, as an efficient mechanism for combating gender inequalities.
Q7	I know what I should do if I do not feel accepted or treated equally at work.

Source: Research questionnaire

The scale adopted was the five-point Likert scale, with one (1) being "strongly disagree" and five (5) being "strongly agree" (Gil, 2002). Therefore, means closer to 5 indicate a high degree of agreement among respondents regarding the research questions, while means closer to 1 indicate disagreement. The confidence interval is used both to verify the estimated mean of each item for the population and to compare the mean of the items.

For the validation of the research questions, four metrics were evaluated, as shown in Table 2. The first is the Average Variance Extracted (AVE), which represents the average percentage of variance shared between the items and the Human Resources Policies and Practices indicator, and this value must exceed 0.40. Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability validated the reliability of the indicators. The KMO is a measure of sample adequacy, indicating whether the factor loadings were appropriate or not.

Table 2*Validation metrics for the research questions*

Indicator	Number of questions	AVE ¹	A.C. ²	C.C. ³	KMO ⁴
HR Policies and practices	7	0,73	0,81	0,83	0,61

¹Variance Extracted; ²Cronbach's Alpha; ³Composite Reliability; ⁴Sampling Adequacy

Source: Survey data

According to Table 2, the indicator showed an AVE above 0.40 (0.73), confirming that the indicator is accurately measuring what it should. Regarding reliability levels, Cronbach's Alpha or Composite Reliability should show a result greater than 0.60, which was duly achieved by the Human Resources Policies and Practices indicator (0.81 and 0.83, respectively). For KMO, a result greater than or equal to 0.50 is required, and the indicator met this metric (0.61).

Due to the Coronavirus pandemic, the survey was conducted through Microsoft Office 365, which allowed the distribution of a personalized link available electronically, open from September 2, 2020, to September 17, 2020. The sample population for the research consisted of 262 employees who accessed the questionnaire virtually.

For data processing, R software – version 4.0.2 was used. In the descriptive analysis of the numerical variables, measures of position, central tendency, and dispersion were employed. For categorical variables, absolute and relative frequencies were used. To describe and compare the items of the "HR policies and practices" indicator, in addition to the measures of position, central tendency, and dispersion, the bootstrap percentile interval with 95% confidence was used.

To compare the investigated indicator with categorical variables, the Mann-Whitney test was used for variables with 2 levels, and the Kruskal-Wallis test (Hollander & Wolfe, 1999) was used for variables with more than 2 levels.

To assess the correlation between the ordinal numerical variables and the "HR policies and practices" indicator, Spearman's correlation (Hollander & Wolfe, 1999) was used. This is a measure ranging from -1 to 1, where the closer the coefficient is to -1, the stronger the negative correlation, and the closer to 1, the stronger the positive correlation.

Table 3 presents the variables used to characterize the sample.

Table 3*Descriptive analysis of variables*

Variable		N	%
Sex	Female	147	63,09%
	Male	86	36,91%
Marital status	Married	130	51,79%
	Single	90	35,86%
	Stable Union	29	11,55%
	Widowed	2	0,80%
Age (years)	Between 18 and 28	57	22,01%
	Between 29 and 39	136	52,51%
	Between 40 and 50	53	20,46%
	Over 51	13	5,02%
Working time (in years)	Between 0 and 3	107	41,00%
	Between 4 and 7	98	37,55%
	Between 8 and 11	38	14,56%
	Between 12 and 15	13	4,98%

Education	Over 15	5	1,92%
	Complete Elementary Education	9	3,46%
	Incomplete High School/Technical Education	13	5,00%
	Complete High School/Technical Education	32	12,31%
	Incomplete Higher Education/In Progress	16	6,15%
	Complete Higher Education	56	21,54%
	Incomplete Postgraduate Studies/In Progress	30	11,54%
	Complete Postgraduate Studies	104	40,00%
Children	I don't have any	121	46,18%
	01	69	26,34%
	02	59	22,52%
	03	10	3,82%
	Above 03	3	1,15%
Position	Analyst/Supervisor	112	43,24%
	Assistant	57	22,01%
	Coordinator	34	13,13%
	Director	1	0,39%
	Manager	11	4,25%
	Operator/Auxiliary	44	16,99%

Source: Survey data

4 Data Analysis

4.1 Ordinal categorical analysis

Table 4 presents the findings on the frequency with the respondents agreed or disagreed with each of the seven questions investigated in this research.

Table 4

Descriptive analysis of the indicators

Question	Strongly Disagree	Partially Disagree	Neutral	Partially Agree	Strongly Agree
Q1	12 (4,58%)	18 (6,87%)	21 (8,02%)	75 (28,63%)	136 (51,91%)
Q2	3 (1,15%)	6 (2,29%)	12 (4,58%)	45 (17,18%)	196 (74,81%)
Q3	9 (3,44%)	21 (8,02%)	66 (25,19%)	80 (30,53%)	86 (32,82%)
Q4	15 (5,73%)	23 (8,78%)	23 (8,78%)	61 (23,28%)	140 (53,44%)
Q5	35 (13,36%)	26 (9,92%)	30 (11,45%)	62 (23,66%)	109 (41,60%)
Q6	32 (12,21%)	25 (9,54%)	34 (12,98%)	74 (28,24%)	97 (37,02%)
Q7	6 (2,29%)	18 (6,87%)	32 (12,21%)	64 (24,43%)	142 (54,2%)

Source: Survey data

It was found that the respondents' level of agreement exceeded 60% on all the questions. The two main highlights were question 1 (knowledge about the corporation's diversity policy) and question 2 (support for policies and practices aimed at women), both with results above 80%. This result may indicate that the majority of professionals are aware of the diversity policy that exists within the organization and view positively the implementation of initiatives aimed at women in the corporation under investigation. As highlighted in the literature (Pimpa et al., 2016; 2019; Doubell, & Struwig, 2014), organizational policies directed at women are essential to reduce gender segregation, which is still prevalent in certain areas and activities traditionally seen as masculine, such as mining.

Regarding the first aspect mentioned above, it is worth noting that the investigated organization has had an Inclusion and Diversity Policy since October 2018, which was proposed by the global People (HR) and Organization structure. The policy is applied across all locations

where the organization operates and emphasizes the responsibility of all employees and leaders to promote an inclusive environment.

As part of this diversity policy, there are goals to increase the percentage of women in leadership positions at all levels. There is also a formal, widely-publicized zero-tolerance policy regarding discrimination and harassment, and any incidents can be reported confidentially and are investigated. Another important aspect is the explicit concern about preventing retaliation against individuals who report others involved in an investigation. The diversity policy also includes several examples of behaviors that can be characterized as harassment, sexual misconduct, or discrimination, such as:

- Making unfounded negative comments about a person's failures.
- Withholding necessary information, setting impossible deadlines, or overloading someone with work.
- Deliberately excluding, isolating, or ignoring an individual.
- Spreading malicious rumors or insulting someone.
- Physical or psychological threats.
- Excessive and intimidating supervision or other abuse of power or position.
- Offensive emails, text messages, or social media content.
- Unwanted jokes, teasing, impressions, or belittling of a person.

Questions 5 (setting quotas for women in leadership positions) and 6 (setting quotas for hiring female employees) received a higher proportion of disagreement than the other questions, with results above 20%. This represents a perception among respondents that opposes the idea of establishing quotas for hiring women or for their occupation of managerial positions. An interesting point is that it could be assumed that this disagreement about quotas would come from men, as they are not the ones benefiting from these positions. Surprisingly, however, the data reveal that of the respondents who opposed quotas for women, 55% were male, confirming that men formed the majority, but there was a considerable female representation (45%).

One explanation for this finding is that many women do not feel comfortable being included or requesting some type of quota, as they believe this would devalue their competence and disregard their merit (Mota-Santos, 2012; Pereira & Hanashiro, 2010). Some comments recorded in the questionnaire's observation section support this view: "Competence should be the determining factor for occupying a position, not gender"; "Proud to work for a corporation that does NOT evaluate professionals by their gender."

4.2 Numerical Descriptive Analysis

Table 5 contains data on the respondents' levels of agreement and disagreement with the seven questions under investigation, now with numerical interpretation.

Table 5*Numerical Descriptive Analysis*

Item	N	Avarege	D.P.	I.C. (95%)
Q1	262	4,16	1,12	[4,03; 4,30]
Q2	262	4,62	0,78	[4,52; 4,71]
Q3	262	3,81	1,09	[3,69; 3,93]
Q4	262	4,1	1,22	[3,94; 4,24]
Q5	262	3,7	1,43	[3,54; 3,86]
Q6	262	3,68	1,37	[3,52; 3,84]
Q7	262	4,21	1,05	[4,08; 4,34]

Source: Survey data

In the "HR Policies and Practices" indicator, respondents appear to agree with all the questions, as the averages were above 3.68. Furthermore, the average score for question 2 (support for the implementation of policies in favor of women) was significantly higher than the others, due to the lack of overlap in the confidence intervals, indicating a significant difference between this item and the others. This finding suggests that, at least in theory, respondents seem to agree with the adoption of initiatives in favor of women, which some studies point out as being imperative in fields of work traditionally dominated by men (Castilhos et al., 2006; Quirino, 2011). Regardless of the sector, as suggested by Proni and Proni (2018), the pursuit of gender equity should be one of the goals for organizations, and the implementation of HR practices is a pathway to achieving this.

4.3 HR Policies Directed at Women vs. Respondent Characterization Variables

Table 6 was structured with the variables and their corresponding levels, the frequency for each level of the variable, the average for each level, the standard error, the quartiles, and the p-value.

Table 6*Comparison of Categorical Variables with HR Policies and Practices*

Variable		N	Average	E.P.	1° Q.	2° Q.	3° Q.	p-value
Sex	Female	147	4,22	0,08	3,82	4,28	5	<0,001 ¹
	Male	86	3,54	0,13	2,47	3,55	4,64	
Marital Status	With companion	159	3,82	0,09	2,96	4,01	5	0,004 ¹
	Without companion	92	4,22	0,1	3,64	4,63	5	
Position	Analyst/Supervisor	112	4,1	0,09	3,55	4,28	5	0,001 ²
	Assistant	57	4,09	0,14	3,37	4,28	5	
	Coordinator	34	3,48	0,2	2,47	3,6	4,64	
	Director	12	2,85	0,36	1,83	2,65	3,92	
Workplace	Operator	44	4,08	0,16	3,28	4,28	5	0,155 ²
	Operational Structure 4/ GO	36	4,29	0,16	3,55	5	5	
	Corporate Structure/ MG	94	3,8	0,12	2,83	4,28	5	
	Operational Structure 1/ MG	74	3,99	0,11	3,55	4,28	5	
	Operational Structure 3/ RJ	31	3,98	0,21	3,04	4,28	5	
	Others	27	3,87	0,22	3,37	4	4,86	

1Mann-Whitney test; 2Kruskal-Wallis test; 3Nemenyi test.

Source: Survey data

Analyzing the data from the table 6 above, it is possible to observe a significant difference ($p\text{-value} < 0.001$) in perception between the female and male genders regarding the



indicator of HR policies and practices directed toward women, with women presenting a higher average for the indicator, indicating a greater level of agreement.

The questions with the highest overall level of agreement encompass knowledge about the organization's diversity policy (question 1); showing support for the implementation of policies aimed at women (question 2) (Próni & Próni, 2018); endorsing the idea that women should earn their place based on their own merits (question 4) (Mota-Santos, 2012; Pereira & Hanashiro, 2010); and knowing what to do if they feel excluded or treated unequally in the workplace (question 7).

The questions involving the definition of quotas for hiring women, as well as quotas for leadership positions, had the lowest level of agreement (still a high level of agreement, above 60%, but lower than other items in the indicator). Additionally, these questions also presented the highest level of disagreement (a low level of disagreement, less than 25%), yet greater than all other items in the indicator. As previously mentioned, there was no centralization of agreement among women regarding the quota item, which theoretically could be something they would advocate for as it would provide access to the benefit, but it does not seem to be perceived as such.

This finding may indicate that women want to prove their worth without the need for mechanisms that could facilitate their advancement (Mota-Santos, 2012; Pereira & Hanashiro, 2010). However, if mining is historically characterized by male dominance, how can women stand out in the absence of supporting mechanisms? If, as the literature confirms, there are several barriers to women's growth in organizations in general and in any economic sector, what could be said about an environment so male dominated as mining?

Among the item positions, there was also a difference in perception regarding the indicator "HR policies and practices" (p -value = 0.001), with respondents working as analysts/supervisors presenting the highest average for the indicator. These findings indicate that respondents in the analyst/supervisor position are well aware of the diversity policy, support the creation of practices and policies directed toward women, and agree with the definition of hiring quotas and for leadership positions.

Notably, it was possible to identify that 92% of respondents in the analyst/supervisor position favor the establishment of quotas for women, which suggests that at this career level, they have already been able to identify barriers to progression within the organization, particularly concerning the next level of the hierarchy, which would be a management position. As various studies indicate, women face numerous barriers in the workplace, whether they are salary-related (lower remuneration), due to a triple work burden, or due to fewer opportunities for training and promotion (Silva et al., 2016; Mota-Santos et al., 2021).

Additionally, it was observed that the average indicator for individuals working as directors/managers was significantly lower (p -value < 0.05) than that for individuals working as analysts/supervisors and assistants/technicians. This indicates a tendency for lower levels of agreement among managers and directors regarding five research questions (Q1, Q2, Q5, Q6, Q7). A point of concern is that when evaluating questions 5 and 6, which address the establishment of quotas for hiring women and for occupying managerial positions, only 25% of respondents in the manager/director position agreed, 67% disagreed, and 8% remained neutral. It is also relevant to add that 67% of the total respondents with manager/director positions are male.

The previous data may indicate that since men have already reached top hierarchical positions in the organization due to a context of male dominance favorable to them, the same process should be open to women (Menezes et al., 2013; Mota-Santos, 2012). This fact may

also indicate how little evident and well-known the mechanisms are that often prevent women from reaching the upper echelons.

Table 7 presents the correlation of numerical variables with the indicator of HR policies and practices directed toward women.

Table 7

Correlation of the variables concerning HR policies and practices

Variables	r ¹	p-value
Age	-0,24	<0,001
Working time	-0,16	0,009
Education	-0,04	0,472
Number of children	-0,25	<0,001
¹ rho of Spearman.		

Source: Survey data

By analyzing Table 7, a significant (p-value < 0.001) and negative (r = -0.24) correlation can be observed between the item "age" and the "HR policies and practices" indicator. Thus, the older the employee, the lower the score on the analyzed indicator tends to be, and vice versa. Therefore, professionals in older age groups showed a more critical perception and a lower level of agreement regarding the creation and consolidation of policies and practices directed at women. This finding indicates the need for future research, as the reviewed literature did not highlight any studies on the perception of this older age group.

There was also a significant (p-value = 0.009) and negative (r = -0.16) correlation between the length of employment and HR policies and practices. Therefore, the longer the tenure at the corporation, the lower the level of agreement regarding the creation of HR policies and practices directed at women. This may suggest that workers with longer tenures become more resistant to change, as they have become accustomed to a pattern of discrimination denial.

Regarding education and HR policies and practices, no significant correlation was found (p-value = 0.472).

5 Final Considerations

The main objective of this research was to analyze professionals' perceptions of HR policies and practices aimed at women in an organization within the mining sector. Regarding the need to create space for women through policies directed at them in a male-dominated segment, the findings reveal that the vast majority of respondents perceive as positive the implementation of initiatives focused on women.

Paradoxically, while there was a high level of agreement regarding the adoption of policies for women, one of the items with the highest level of disagreement was the creation of quotas for their inclusion in the organization and for their occupation of leadership positions.

This result, somewhat contradictory, may indicate, from the women's perspective, that they want to prove their competence without "favorable" mechanisms. From the men's perspective, especially those occupying high-ranking positions, it seems fair that women undergo the same process they had to go through to occupy certain top positions. In other words, corroborating the literature that highlights men's general lack of empathy regarding the need for policies that encourage women's presence in positions of power, this study also reveals men's limited awareness of the barriers that hinder women's growth within corporations.

The question that arises from this result is: can it be said that the path to higher positions is the same for men and women? Is it the same process? Several studies in the field of

management over the past 20 years have demonstrated the existence of barriers with different names (glass ceiling, labyrinth, glass walls, sticky floor), making it clear that the path is not the same. “A paved, flat, and well-signposted road for him. A dirty road, with potholes, no lighting, and no signage for her...”

Most respondents claim to be aware of the corporation's diversity policy that supports the inclusion of women in the workplace. The existence of HR policies and practices associated with diversity is a relevant and positive step. However, it is a recent policy within the investigated organization and is still in the process of being institutionalized. As the literature highlights, the process of implementing diversity policies and practices is not simple. Often, organizations either deny differences or treat them in a stereotypical way, generalizing practices that highlight prejudice.

The research showed, therefore, that the mining sector still has a long way to go, and this journey must be undertaken in a structured and proactive manner, through actions, policies, and HR practices aimed at women. Considering the increased participation of women in the labor market in recent decades in Brazil and worldwide, it is evident that organizations need to work towards defining HR practices and policies targeted at this group. Effectively including so-called minorities in the corporate world is not an easy movement; it means deconstructing the logic that organizational policies are made by dominant (male) groups and for them.

Regarding its contributions, this study advances by investigating a topic barely touched in the literature in Brazil: the working conditions of women in mining, which has only been addressed in two national studies (Macedo et al., 2012; Valadares et al., 2022). Neither of these studies focuses on HR policies and practices for this specific gender, underscoring the relevance of this study. Additionally, by bringing this debate to light, this study reinforces the importance of considering human resource policies and practices focused on the needs of women so that they can obtain equal working and advancement conditions in occupational fields where male domination is strong, such as mining.

As for future studies, new investigations are suggested to understand work relations from a gender perspective, in order to identify potential paths that represent progress in this area. Furthermore, the research highlighted that there may be greater levels of sexism among older men, which could warrant further studies. Exploring the specification and characterization of the policies and practices aimed at women that organizations can adopt also seems to be an appropriate avenue. Moreover, the challenges of implementing HR Policies and Practices should be further explored. Lastly, it is also suggested that discussions about the positions occupied by women in this sector be deepened, with the aim of identifying the particularities and singularities of each experience, whether in a leadership position in mining or in a worker's role.

A limitation of this study was that the sample was collected from only one corporation, preventing a comparison between different organizations in the mining sector. Additionally, of the 262 respondents, 147 were women (63.09%), and thus, the research data reflect the majority female perspective compared to 36.91% of male respondents. Finally, only seven questions related to human resource policies and practices were measured, which, as mentioned in the methodology section, are issues of interest to the human resources department of the investigated corporation. There was also no more in-depth and specific discussion of the types of policies that can be implemented by organizations, which could be the subject of future studies.

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