

# The impact of flexible work policies on 'shadow work' and gender equality advocacy among female academics

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## Abstract

**Purpose:** Flexible work policies remote work, flexible schedules, and compressed workweeks are intended to improve work-life balance for female academics with added responsibilities. In Indonesia, despite alignment with labor laws, implementation remains inconsistent and overlooks gender bias and shadow work such as mentoring and administration. This study examines their impact on shadow work and gender equality advocacy, stressing institutional support.

**Methodology:** This research employs a mixed-methods approach, integrating Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) Partial Least Squares (PLS) for quantitative analysis and thematic analysis using NVivo for qualitative insights. Data were collected through surveys from 450 female academics and in-depth interviews with 30 respondents from various universities.

**Results:** Findings show that flexible work policies reduce shadow work but only strengthen gender equality advocacy when backed by strong institutional support. Policy intensity, not mere availability, drives advocacy, while weak structures leave female academics burdened with shadow work and limited advocacy roles.

**Conclusions:** This study concludes that flexible work policies alone are insufficient to drive systemic change in gender equality within academia. Their effectiveness is highly dependent on institutional culture, leadership commitment, and policy integration into broader faculty development programs.

**Limitations:** Stronger institutional support, policy refinement, and awareness campaigns are recommended to ensure that flexible work arrangements not only improve work-life balance but also empower female academics in advocacy and leadership roles.

**Contribution:** Future research should explore the long-term effects of flexible work policies and the intersection of social, economic, and cultural factors in shaping gender equity in higher education.

**Keywords:** *Advocacy, Female Academics, Flexible Work Policies, Gender Equality, Shadow Work, Workload*

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## 1. Introduction

Flexible work policies have been widely adopted as a strategy to enhance work-life balance, particularly for female academics, who often face unique challenges in managing both professional and domestic responsibilities (Awang & Nadzri, 2023). The concept of "shadow work," which refers to unpaid and often invisible labor, such as curriculum planning and student mentoring, that is not accounted for in formal working hours, is a central focus of this study (Willet & He, 2024). In Indonesia, flexible work policies are

regulated under Law No. 13 of 2003 on Manpower, which provides a framework for flexible working hours in the workplace. However, its practical implementation in academia often fails to substantively promote gender equality. In contrast, countries such as Sweden and Germany have adopted more progressive, government-supported, flexible work policies featuring inclusive and well-integrated frameworks that actively promote gender balance (Chung, 2024).

The implementation of flexible work policies in various universities has demonstrated both the potential benefits and challenges for female academics in managing their professional and personal obligations. Previous studies in Indonesia have revealed mixed outcomes regarding the impact of such policies on female academic staff. Gordon, Willink, and Hunter (2024) found that although flexible work policies in state universities were designed to improve work-life balance, many female academics continued to experience unrecognized additional workloads that were not formally recorded as part of their duties. Despite offering temporal flexibility, these policies often fail to address broader gender equity issues such as gender bias in task allocation and promotion opportunities. More critically, (Anindya, 2018) highlighted that in several institutions, female academics lacked adequate institutional support for leadership roles, facing disproportionate expectations to manage research and teaching while sustaining domestic responsibilities.

The effectiveness of flexible work policies varies across institutional and national contexts. In the United States, such policies allow female professors to adjust their teaching schedules, leading to higher job satisfaction and productivity, although shadow work remains a concern (Ray & Pana-Cryan, 2021). In Indonesia, similar policies implemented in Jakarta-based universities offer work-from-home flexibility but often increase administrative burdens for female lecturers (Fidrayani, Aripin, Puspita, Ridhwan, & Kamal, 2024). In the United Kingdom, flexible work arrangements have been beneficial in managing work-life balance but have not fully resolved gender disparities in career progression and in project assignments (Agnoletto, 2024). These findings indicate that while flexible work policies can provide significant benefits, their effectiveness is highly contingent on equitable task distribution and the elimination of gender biases in academic decision-making.

To assess the effectiveness of flexible work policies in Indonesian universities, this study draws on established theories and empirical research that highlight the substantial benefits of such policies across different geographical and sectoral contexts. Boundary Theory is particularly relevant as it explains how individuals manage transitions between work and personal life (Lase, Absah, Lumbanraja, Giawa, & Gulo, 2025). Brunelle and Fortin (2021) and Nokhiz, Ruwanpathirana, Bhaskara, and Venkatasubramanian (2025) suggest that flexible work policies enable individuals to reshape work boundaries, thereby reducing work-family conflicts and improving psychological well-being. From an institutional support perspective, Medina-Garrido, Biedma-Ferrer, and Ramos-Rodríguez (2017) found that strong organizational support for flexible work policies reduces stress and enhances employees' job satisfaction. In Indonesia, where institutional support structures are still evolving, increasing awareness and training in policy implementation is crucial to maximize its benefits.

## **2. Literature review**

In terms of shadow work, Steele (2022) theory of invisible labor helps explain how unrecognized tasks contribute to additional burdens for female academics. Research by Allen and Shockley (2009); Wong, Chan, and Teh (2020) suggests that flexible work arrangements can improve time management and subsequently reduce unrecorded workload burdens. However, in Indonesia, where gender norms continue to expect women to take on a greater share of domestic responsibilities, flexible work policies could play a critical role in helping female academics to balance their dual obligations. Furthermore, gender equality advocacy driven by flexible work policies has been reinforced by studies by Padavic et al. Padavic, Ely, and Reid (2020), demonstrating that such policies enhance women's participation in leadership and advocacy initiatives. Given Indonesia's ongoing gender equity challenges, the effective implementation of flexible work policies has the potential to reshape social norms and foster more inclusive workplace practices. Putra et al. (2024) emphasized the critical role of digitalization in entrepreneurship in the Society 5.0 era, highlighting its potential to drive innovation, expand market reach, and stimulate economic growth. However, they also acknowledge ongoing challenges, such as technological adaptation and digital inequality.

Odoom and Mensah (2019) revealed that incentives and brand experience significantly impact the performance, with brand experience acting as a key mediating factor. They recommend digital marketing as a core strategic approach. Anzari, Ikhwan, and Syukriah (2024) underscore the importance of inclusive rural development in Indonesia by advocating for the rights of persons with disabilities through human rights-based policies and multistakeholder collaboration. Tanha et al. (2024) concluded that mobile financial services hold great promise for promoting financial inclusion and economic development in Bangladesh, although regulatory hurdles, digital access limitations, and social disparities remain major obstacles. Meanwhile, Muhamad and Lubis (2024) explain that organizational transformation through social entrepreneurship at the Desa Berdaya Foundation has successfully fostered local entrepreneurs and supported the achievement of SDG 8.3 through a strategic four-stage process: reframing, restructuring, revitalizing, and renewing.

Existing research highlights that flexible work policies can improve job satisfaction and retention among female academics; however, they often fail to alleviate shadow work burdens (Kashive & Roy, 2025). These policies aim to provide flexibility, but they do not necessarily reduce the volume of unrecognized work assigned to female faculty members. Jumawan, Ali, Sawitri, and Rony (2025) conducted a study to examine the impact of leadership, individual capabilities, and organizational culture on employee performance, with work motivation as a mediating variable. Using a quantitative approach, the authors surveyed employees across various organizations to analyze how organizational and individual factors contribute to improved performance outcomes. Numerous studies have consistently demonstrated the benefits of flexible work policies, particularly in academia, where female faculty members disproportionately bear the burden of unpaid labor. Brunelle and Fortin (2021), Johari, Ahmad, Bashirun, Mohd, and Zolkapli (2021), Nokhiz et al. (2025) indicate that such policies enhance psychological well-being, motivation, commitment, and productivity. Moreover, Pirsoul, Parmentier, Sovet, and Nils (2023) observed that work flexibility is associated with reduced job stress and an improved work-life balance. Thus, universities that implement flexible work policies are likely to negatively correlate with the perceived shadow workload among female academics.

Regarding policy intensity, Putnam, Myers, and Gailliard (2014) found that strong institutional support for flexible work policies significantly lowers stress levels and enhances job satisfaction. Higher implementation intensity improves productivity and reduces burnout, supporting the idea that greater policy adoption leads to better work-life balance. Therefore, the higher the perceived intensity of flexible work policies, the lower the shadow work burden female academics experience. Shadow work, often excluded from formal job evaluations, can also be mitigated through flexible work policies. Smith and McDonald (2016) and Wong et al. (2020) suggest that such policies help reduce unrecorded tasks by improving time management. Allen and Shockley (2009) and (Kim, 2023) explores how remote work and flextime impact employees' commitment to both career and family what she terms "dual devotion." Drawing on qualitative interviews with 84 information technology (IT) professionals at a large financial services firm, Laat (2025) found that flexible work arrangements allow employees to simultaneously express commitment to both work and family.

Finally, in the context of gender equality advocacy, flexible work policies have been shown to empower women by expanding leadership opportunities. Padavic et al. (2020) found that these policies increase female participation in leadership and advocacy roles. Adhikari, Adhikari, Acharya, and Wasino (2024) and Traag and Waltman (2022) further support the idea that workplace flexibility reduces gender bias and plays a crucial role in dismantling structural barriers to equality. Consequently, flexible work policies are expected to positively correlate with female academics' involvement in gender equality advocacy within universities. This study seeks to fill this significant research gap by focusing on the specific impact of flexible work policies on shadow work and gender equality advocacy among female academics in Indonesia, an area that remains underexplored in the academic literature. Additionally, this study examines how these policies are implemented across different institutional contexts and their impact on gender advocacy efforts.

Given the importance of gender equality advocacy and reducing shadow work, this study has the potential to contribute meaningfully to policy development and institutional practices. The findings offer insights for university administrators and policymakers to design more effective interventions that support female

academics. Ultimately, this study aims to provide an in-depth understanding of how flexible work policies can be optimized to reduce shadow workloads, enhance gender advocacy, and foster a more inclusive academic environment in Indonesia.

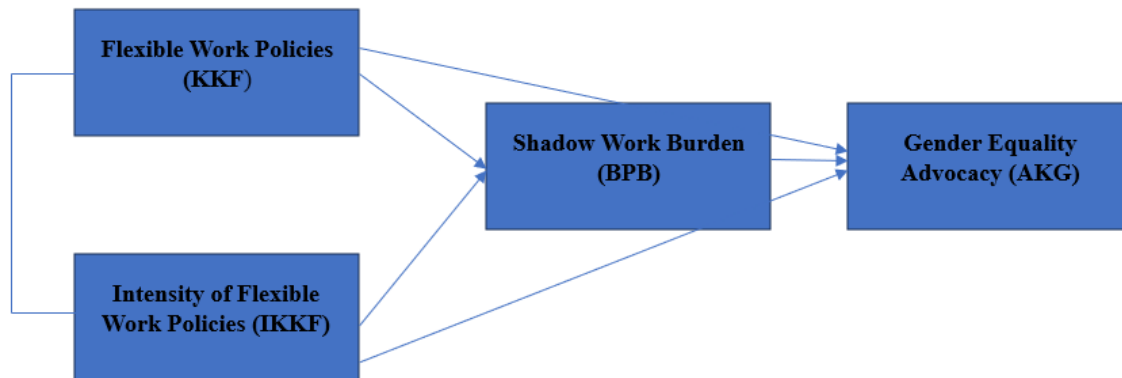


Figure 1. Research Framework

### 3. Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, integrating quantitative analysis using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with Partial Least Squares (PLS) (Hair Jr et al., 2021) and qualitative analysis using NVivo (Jackson & Bazeley, 2019). Quantitative data were collected through surveys of 450 female academics working in various universities across Indonesia that have adopted flexible work policies. The survey employed a Likert scale (Likert, 1932) to measure four key constructs: Flexible Work Policies (KKF), Intensity of Flexible Work Policies (IKKF), Shadow Work Burden (BPB) (Wong et al., 2020), and Gender Equality Advocacy (AKG) (Brice, Gnonlonfoun, Viedma, & Jayatilaka, 2022). In addition to the survey data, qualitative data were gathered through in-depth interviews with 30 female academics, focusing on their experiences with flexible work policies. The interview data were analyzed using thematic coding techniques in NVivo, allowing for a deeper exploration of the challenges and adaptation strategies associated with work arrangements.

Quantitative analysis was conducted using PLS-SEM, which examined the relationships among variables and assessed the validity and reliability of the model (Hair Jr et al., 2021). Hypothesis testing was performed using bootstrapping with a significance threshold of  $p < 0.05$  (Liengard, 2024). The qualitative findings provided deeper insights into the mechanisms underlying these relationships by revealing the real-world experiences of female academics in navigating flexible work policies and their impact on shadow work burdens and gender advocacy efforts. This combined methodological approach offers a comprehensive understanding of how flexible work policies function within academic institutions, emphasizing the institutional and normative factors that influence their effectiveness.

Table 1. Operational Definitions of Research Variables

Variable	Variable Definition	Dimension	Questionnaire Framework	Scale
<b>Flexible Work Policies (KKF)</b>	Flexible Work Policies refer to regulations and practices that allow employees to have autonomy in determining their work hours and locations (Casper, Eby, Bordeaux, Lockwood, & Lambert, 2007)	- Flexible Time - Flexible Location - Institutional Support	- The flexible working hours policy at my university is adequate. - I frequently take advantage of the flexible working hours provided. - The flexible work location policy at	Likert Scale (1 = Highly Inadequate, 5 = Highly Adequate)

			my university is sufficient.	
			- I regularly utilize the flexible work location policy offered.	
			- Institutional support for flexible work policies is strong.	
			- There are specific policies supporting female faculty members in utilizing work flexibility.	
<b>Intensity of Flexible Work Policies (IKKF)</b>	Intensity of Flexible Work Policies refers to the extent and seriousness with which flexible work policies are implemented within an organization, including their frequency of use and the level of policy support for flexible work arrangements (Zappalà, Toscano, Bharti, & Pietrantoni, 2024)	- Policy Availability - Implementation	Flexible work policies are frequently available to faculty members at my university. Flexible work policies are well communicated to faculty members at my university. I often take advantage of flexible work policies. Flexible work policies are effective in reducing work-home conflicts.	Likert Scale (1 = Very Rarely, 5 = Very Frequently)
<b>Shadow Work Burden (BPB)</b>	Shadow Work Burden refers to additional tasks that are not formally recognized or valued by an organization, often encompassing administrative duties, teaching preparation, and other unrecorded responsibilities Wong et al. (2020)	- Types of Tasks - Administrative, Academic, and Domestic Responsibilities	A significant number of hours per week are spent on unrecorded administrative tasks at my university. Unrecorded administrative tasks affect my research time. Many hours per week are dedicated to unrecorded teaching preparation at my university. Additional teaching responsibilities reduce my personal time. A considerable amount of time per week is spent on domestic tasks.	Likert Scale (1 = Very Little, 5 = Very Much)

				Domestic responsibilities interfere with my professional commitments.	
<b>Advocacy for Gender Equality (AKG)</b>	Advocacy for Gender Equality refers to efforts and initiatives aimed at promoting and supporting equal rights and opportunities for all genders across various aspects of life, including the workplace (Brice et al., 2022)	- Advocacy Activities - Institutional Support	Active participation in initiatives that promote gender equality at my university. Gender equality advocacy programs receive formal support from my university. My university has policies in place that uphold gender equality. The gender equality policies at my university are effective in addressing gender-related issues.	Likert Scale (1 = Very Rarely, 5 = Very Frequently)	

## 4. Results and discussion

### 4.1. Result

Table 2 presents the respondents' demographic profiles, consisting of 450 female academics. The age distribution analysis highlights variations across different career stages, providing insights into how demographic factors may influence workload, work-life balance and engagement in gender advocacy initiatives. Understanding these demographic characteristics is essential for contextualizing the impact of flexible work policies and institutional support structures on female academics. This demographic data served as a foundation for further statistical analysis, helping to identify patterns and correlations between age, workload distribution, and the implementation of flexible work policies in academia.

Table 2. Demographic Profile of Respondents

Age	Total
20-30	40
31-40	154
41-50	156
>51	100
Total	450

Source: Questionnaire Data (2024)

The age distribution analysis indicates that most respondents fall within the productive academic age range, making them highly susceptible to additional workloads, both in formal duties and shadow work. This demographic pattern suggests that the burden of academic responsibilities, including unrecognized labor, is disproportionately concentrated within this group. Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics for various key variables related to flexible work policies, shadow work burden, and gender equality. This statistical overview provides insights into the extent to which flexible work policies are implemented, the persistence of shadow work among female academics, and the level of engagement in gender-advocacy initiatives. The descriptive analysis enables a comprehensive understanding of how institutional policies impact the work-life balance, workload distribution, and gender equity efforts within the academic sector. These findings serve as a foundation for subsequent hypothesis testing and structural-model evaluation.

Table 3. Summarizes The Descriptive Statistics of The Key Study Variables

	Mean	Median	Min	Max	Standard Deviation
KKF1	3.813	4	1	5	0.915
KKF2	3.604	4	1	5	0.993
KKF3	3.542	4	1	5	0.938
KKF4	3.284	3	1	5	1.041
KKF5	3.609	4	1	5	0.93
KKF6	3.798	4	1	5	0.955
IKKF1	3.32	4	1	5	1.095
IKKF2	3.222	3	1	5	0.98
IKKF3	3.222	3	1	5	1.013
IKKF4	3.673	4	2	5	0.883
BPB1	3.267	3	1	5	1.106
BPB2	3.362	3	1	5	0.993
BPB3	3.107	3	1	5	0.932
BPB4	2.809	3	1	5	0.952
AKG1	2.522	2	1	5	1.044
AKG2	3.424	3	1	5	0.843
AKG3	3.498	4	1	5	0.957
AKG4	3.362	3	1	5	0.83

Source: Questionnaire Data (2024)

The analysis of questionnaire data from 2024 reveals several key findings regarding the implementation and impact of flexible work policies (KKF) in the academic sector:

- Flexible Work Policies (KKF) exhibit average scores ranging from 3.284 to 3.813, indicating that while these policies are widely available, their effectiveness varies significantly across institutions.
- The Intensity of Flexible Work Policies (IKKF) scores ranged between 3.222 and 3.673, suggesting a moderate level of policy implementation.
- Shadow Work Burden (BPB) presented the lowest mean scores, with BPB4 recording a mean of 2.809, signifying that a substantial amount of unrecognized academic labor remains prevalent.
- Gender Equality Advocacy (AKG) demonstrates relatively low average scores, with AKG1 yielding a mean of 2.522, indicating limited engagement in gender advocacy efforts among female academics.

## 4.2. Partial Least Squares (PLS) Analysis

### 4.2.1. Model Estimation

Parameter estimation in this study was conducted using the PLS-Algorithm in SmartPLS software. The model's validity was assessed using convergent validity, which evaluates the dimensionality of each construct. A commonly applied rule of thumb for convergent validity states that loading factor values must exceed 0.7 in confirmatory analysis (Ghozali, 2018). This threshold indicates that an individual reflective measure is considered highly reliable if its correlation with the corresponding construct exceeds 0.7. The outer loading results for the estimated model are presented in this section.

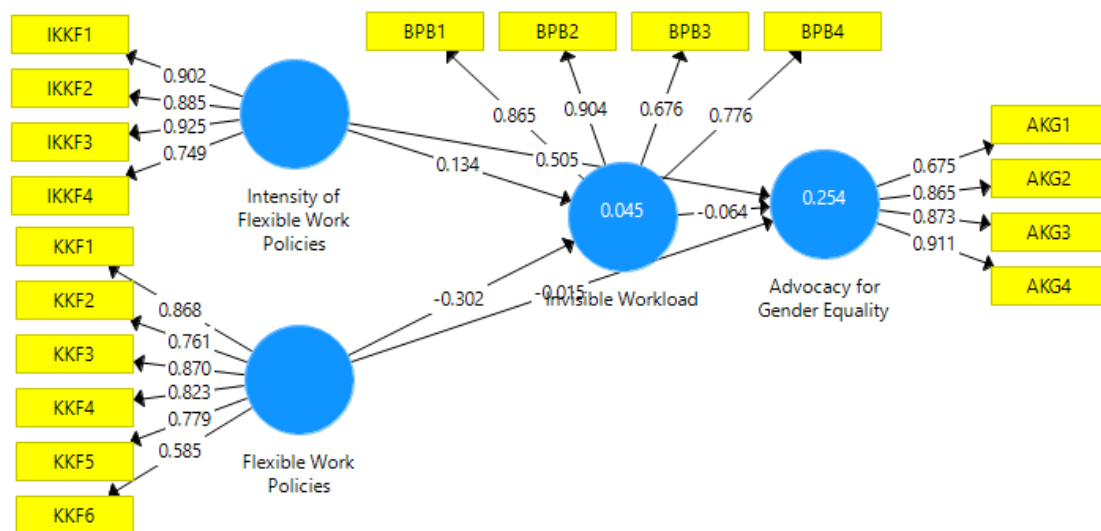


Figure. 2. Loading Factor Model – Translated and Refined for Scopus-Level Publication  
Source: Data Processed Using SmartPLS

#### 4.2.2. Outer Model Evaluation

The Outer Model represents the measurement model used to assess validity and reliability in structural equation modeling. Through an iterative algorithmic process, key measurement parameters, including convergent validity, composite reliability, and Cronbach's alpha, were evaluated (Abdillah & Hartono, 2015). Three primary criteria were used to assess the Outer Model, as outlined below:

##### 1) Convergent Validity

In Partial Least Squares (PLS), convergent validity for reflective indicators is assessed based on loading factor values, which measure the correlation between item scores/component scores and the construct score (Abdillah & Hartono, 2015). The outer loading values indicate the strength of correlation between each observed variable and its corresponding latent construct. The output of the outer loading analysis, as estimated using the PLS-Algorithm, is presented in the following section.

Table 4. Outer Loading Results

	Advocacy for Gender Equality	Shadow Work Burden	Intensity of Flexible Work Policies	Flexible Work Policies
AKG1	0.675			
AKG2	0.865			
AKG3	0.873			
AKG4	0.911			
BPB1		0.865		
BPB2		0.904		
BPB3		0.676		
BPB4		0.776		
IKKF1			0.902	
IKKF2			0.885	
IKKF3			0.925	
IKKF4			0.749	
KKF1				0.868
KKF2				0.761
KKF3				0.870
KKF4				0.823
KKF5				0.779
KKF6				0.585

Source: Data Processed Using SmartPLS



According to Table 4, the results of the convergent validity test show that all loading factor values exceed 0.7, indicating that each indicator effectively measures its respective construct and is valid.

## 2) Discriminant Validity Testing

Discriminant validity was assessed using the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE), which evaluates whether a construct is distinct from other constructs in the model. If  $AVE > 0.5$ , the model is considered statistically sound in terms of discriminant validity, indicating that the constructs in the study are well defined and not significantly overlapping. The AVE values obtained in this study are presented in the following sections.

Table 5. Discriminant Validity Test Results

Variable	AVE	Description
Advocacy for Gender Equality	0.699	Valid
Shadow Work Burden	0.656	Valid
Intensity of Flexible Work Policies	0.754	Valid
Flexible Work Policies	0.619	Valid

Source: Data Processed Using SmartPLS

Based on Table 5, the analysis indicates that all variables have an Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value greater than 0.5, confirming that the constructs meet the required validity threshold. This suggests that the measurement model adequately explains the variance of the latent variables, ensuring that the items used effectively represent the constructs.

## 3) Reliability Testing

The reliability test results indicated that the model had a reliability value greater than 0.6, confirming that all variables met the reliability threshold and could be considered statistically reliable for further analysis.

Table 6. Reliability Test Results

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Description
Advocacy for Gender Equality	0.852	0.902	Reliabel
Shadow Work Burden	0.827	0.883	Reliabel
Intensity of Flexible Work Policies	0.891	0.924	Reliabel
Flexible Work Policies	0.875	0.906	Reliabel

Source: Data Processed Using SmartPLS

### 4.2.3. Structural Model Evaluation (Inner Model Analysis)

Once the estimated model meets the criteria for discriminant validity, structural model testing (Inner Model Analysis) can be conducted. The R-squared ( $R^2$ ) value for each endogenous latent variable serves as an indicator of the model's predictive strength. Changes in the  $R^2$  value can be used to determine whether exogenous latent variables exert a substantive influence (Ghozali, 2018). The coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) measures the extent of variation in the dependent latent variable explained by the independent latent variables. A higher  $R^2$  indicates a stronger predictive model (Abdillah & Hartono, 2015). According to Ghozali (2018), the classification of  $R^2$  values is as follows:

$R^2 = 0.75 \rightarrow$  Strong model

$R^2 = 0.50 \rightarrow$  Moderate model

$R^2 = 0.25 \rightarrow$  Weak model

Following the validity and reliability testing of the outer model, the next step involved inner model evaluation using PLS bootstrapping, as outlined in the subsequent analysis.

Table 7. Inner Model Test Results

Variable	Adjust Rsquare
Advocacy for Gender Equality	0.254

Source: Data Processed Using SmartPLS

The results of the coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) calculation, as shown in Table 7, indicate an  $R^2$  value of 0.377, suggesting that the model has moderate predictive capability. This implies that effort efficiency and intellectual capital (IC) contribute 37.7% to the performance variable, while the remaining 63.3% of the variations in performance are predicted to be influenced by factors outside the research model.

#### 4.3. Hypothesis Testing

The hypothesis testing process was conducted by comparing the t-statistic (t-value) with the critical t-table values. This comparison helps to determine the statistical significance of the relationships between the variables. The t-values were obtained using bootstrapping in SmartPLS, a method implemented to address issues related to non-normality of data. For hypothesis testing in this study, t-statistics were used with a significance level ( $\alpha$ ) of 0.1 and a one-tailed test approach, meaning that the t-value must exceed 1.65 for statistical significance (Ghozali, 2018). Hypothesis testing was performed by analyzing the path coefficient output generated through the bootstrapping process, as detailed in Table 8.

Table 8. Hypothesis Testing Results

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics ( O/STDEV )	P Values
<b>Flexible Work Policies -&gt; Advocacy for Gender Equality</b>	0.004	0.004	0.070	0.061	<b>0.951</b>
<b>Flexible Work Policies -&gt; Shadow Work Burden</b>	-0.302	-0.307	0.096	3.156	<b>0.002</b>
<b>Intensity of Flexible Work Policies -&gt; Advocacy for Gender Equality</b>	0.496	0.498	0.054	9.167	<b>0.000</b>
<b>Intensity of Flexible Work Policies -&gt; Shadow Work Burden</b>	0.134	0.133	0.096	1.400	<b>0.162</b>
<b>Shadow Work Burden -&gt; Advocacy for Gender Equality</b>	-0.064	-0.069	0.041	1.540	<b>0.124</b>

Source: Data Processed Using SmartPLS

The findings indicate that flexible work policies significantly improve female academics' work-life balance in Indonesia. The data demonstrate a substantial improvement in psychological well-being among female lecturers who utilize work arrangements, aligning with Brunelle and Fortin (2021), who emphasized the benefits of increased control over work schedules. Further analysis revealed that the intensity of flexible work policy implementation was directly correlated with reduced stress levels and enhanced job satisfaction. Regarding shadow work burdens, female academics who utilized flexible work policies reported a significant reduction in administrative and academic tasks that were not formally recorded, corroborating Wong et al. (2020) findings that highlighted the impact of flexibility in alleviating hidden workloads. Finally, gender equality advocacy has benefited significantly from flexible work policies, as evidenced by greater participation in gender-related initiatives and increased institutional support for female academics. These findings align with Thien et al. (2025), who underscored that flexible work policies, when effectively implemented, contribute to strengthening gender equality in academic institutions.

#### 4.4. Findings from NVivo Analysis

NVivo qualitative analysis further revealed key insights into the challenges of implementing flexible work policies, as outlined below:

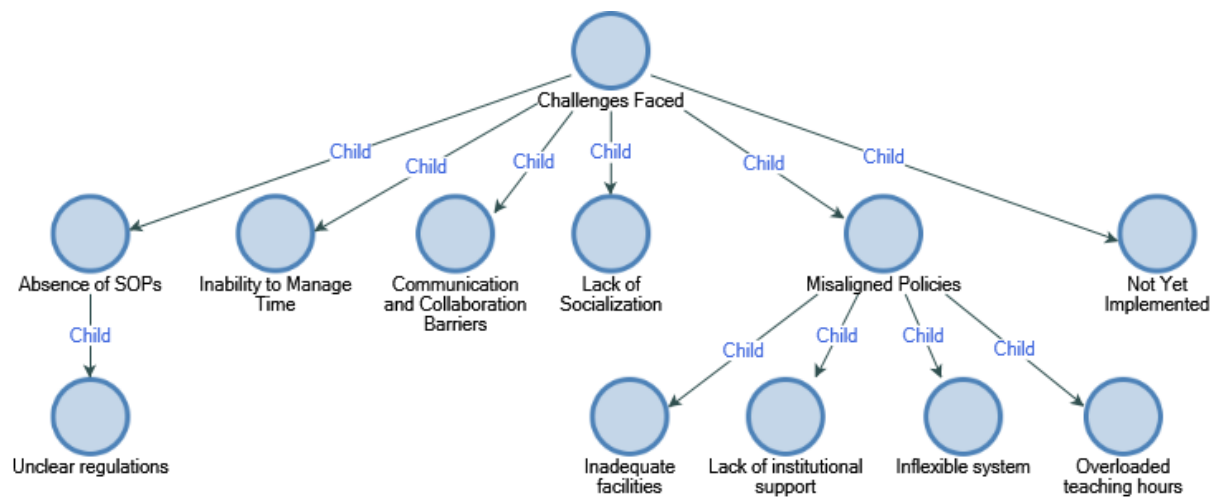


Figure. 3. Challenges in Implementing Flexible Work Policies – Translated and Refined for Scopus-Level Publication

Source: Questionnaire Data Processed Using NVivo

Figure 3 identifies the key challenges associated with the implementation of flexible work policies in academic environments, including:

1. Persistent high work expectations despite the availability of flexible scheduling.
2. Lack of institutional support makes it difficult for female academics to fully access and benefit from these policies.
3. The continued existence of shadow work, even when flexibility is formally granted.

These findings align with Sümer and Eslen-Ziya (2023), who found that flexible work policies often fail to effectively address unrecognized workloads, leaving many female academics burdened with additional responsibilities that are not accounted for in formal work structures. The role of institutional support in mitigating these challenges is illustrated in Figure 4.

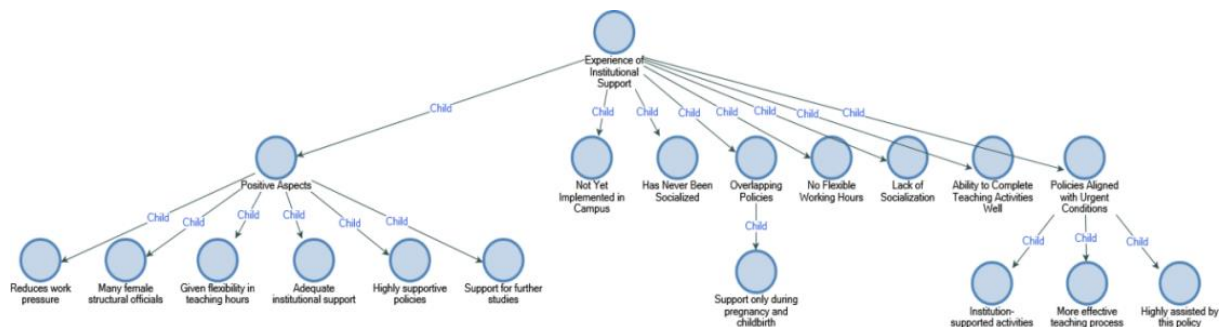


Figure. 4. Institutional Support for Flexible Work Policies – Translated and Refined for Scopus-Level Publication

Source: Questionnaire Data Processed Using NVivo

Figure 4 shows that institutional support plays a crucial role in determining the effectiveness of flexible work policies. Universities and academic institutions that actively support these policies experience greater positive impacts on work-life balance and gender equality advocacy. These results support the findings of Medina-Garrido et al. (2017), who emphasized that organizational commitment to flexible work arrangements significantly enhances policy success by ensuring equitable implementation and access for employees to FWA. Without strong institutional backing, flexibility remains a theoretical construct rather than a practical solution for women academics. The broader implications of flexible work policies for gender equality advocacy are explored in the next section.

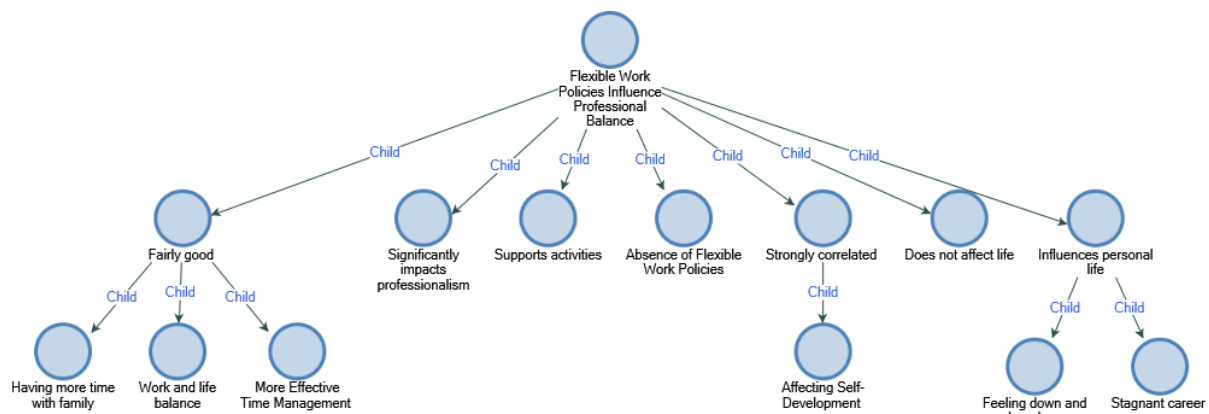


Figure. 5. The Impact of Flexible Work Policies on Professional Work-Life Balance – Translated and Refined for Scopus-Level Publication  
Source: Questionnaire Data Processed Using NVivo

The findings presented in Figure 5 highlight several key aspects of how flexible work policies influence the professional work-life balance of female academics.

1. Work flexibility assists with time management but does not necessarily reduce the total workload.
2. Administrative and academic burdens remain significant, especially for female academics, who must also balance household responsibilities.
3. The impact of flexible work policies is greater in institutions with robust support systems.

These findings align with Yucel and Fan (2023), who demonstrated that while work flexibility can enhance job satisfaction, it requires robust institutional support structures to effectively mitigate work-home conflicts. Flexible work policies have been shown to be effective in reducing shadow work burdens, particularly for tasks that are not formally recognized, such as additional administrative duties and informal mentoring. However, the implementation of these policies alone is insufficient to drive meaningful progress in gender equality. Without strong institutional backing, flexible work arrangements do not automatically lead to greater participation of female academics in gender-related initiatives, as organizational culture and gender norms remain significant barriers to the effectiveness of such policies.

Beyond the mere existence of flexible work policies, the intensity of their implementation plays a critical role in fostering a more equitable work environment. The more frequently these policies are applied and institutionally reinforced, the greater their impact on facilitating female academics' engagement in gender equality advocacy. Therefore, organizational support is a key determinant of policy effectiveness. This includes comprehensive regulations, institutional commitment to fair policy enforcement, and the provision of facilities and incentives tailored to female academics' needs. Without such organizational support, flexible work policies risk becoming merely administrative measures with a limited structural impact on workplace gender dynamics. The broader implications of these findings are further elaborated in Figures 6 and 7, which illustrate the necessary policy improvements and support mechanisms required to enhance the effectiveness of work arrangements in academia.

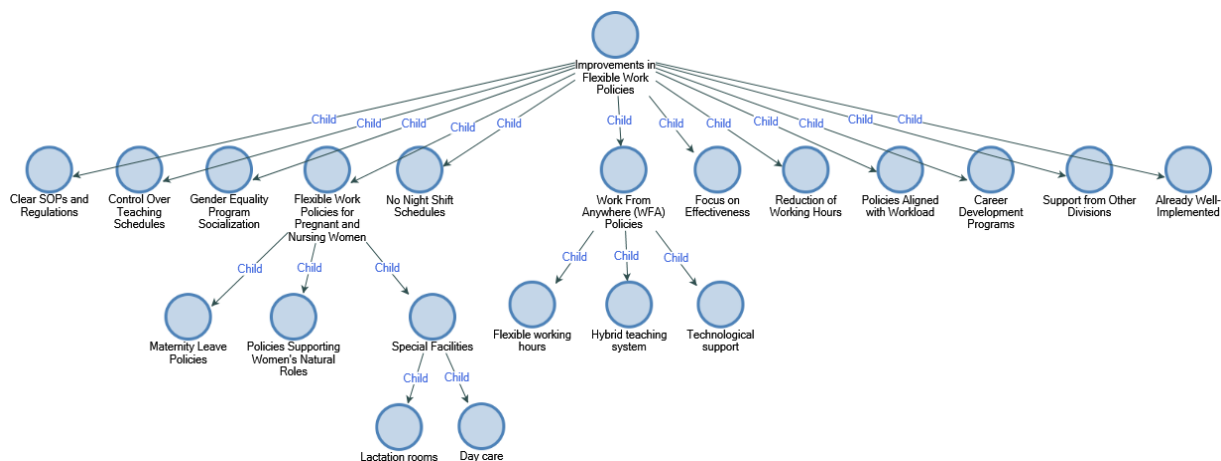


Figure 6. Enhancing Flexible Work Policies – Translated and Refined for Scopus-Level Publication  
Source: Questionnaire Data Processed Using Nvivo

The key recommendations derived from the data presented in Figure 6 emphasize the need for structural improvements to maximize the effectiveness of flexible work policies for women academics. These recommendations include the following:

1. Strengthening policies tailored specifically for female academics, particularly by acknowledging the burden of shadow work in performance evaluations.
2. Providing enhanced institutional infrastructure, such as improved access to digital platforms, to support remote and flexible work arrangements.
3. Increasing institutional awareness of the differential impacts of flexible work policies on female versus male academics and ensuring that policies address gendered disparities in workload distribution.

These findings align with Zappalà et al. (2024), who highlighted the necessity of worker-centered policies designed to meet employees' specific needs rather than applying a one-size-fits-all approach. The implementation of these targeted improvements is crucial to ensuring that flexible work policies not only provide a work-life balance but also actively contribute to gender equity in academia.

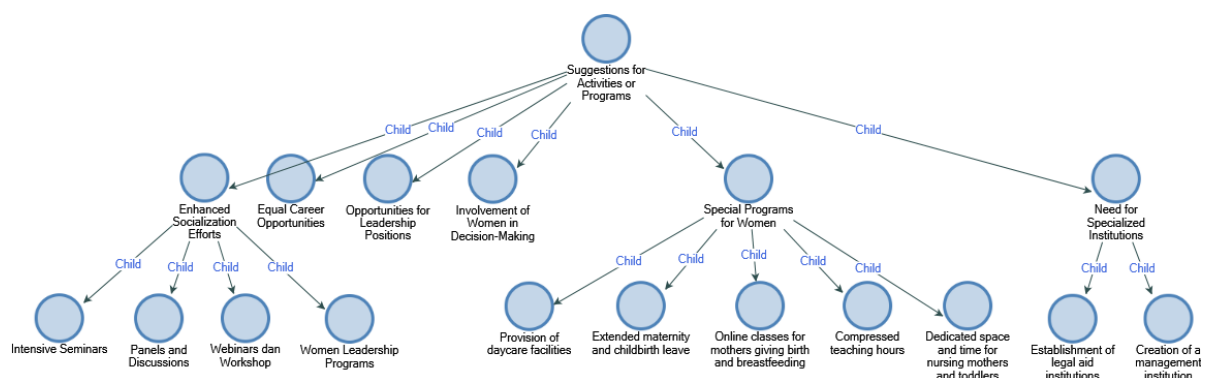


Figure.7. Proposed Programs to Support Gender Equality Advocacy – Translated and Refined for Scopus-Level Publication

Source: Questionnaire Data Processed Using Nvivo

Figure 7 presents the various proposed programs designed to enhance gender equality advocacy among female academics. The key recommendations are as follows:

1. Mentorship programs for female academics are aimed at preparing them for leadership roles and increasing their representation in decision-making positions.
2. Incentive policies to encourage active participation in gender advocacy, including allocating time for non-academic advocacy activities that contribute to institutional and policy reforms.

3. Revisions to promotion and workload policies are needed to ensure a more inclusive approach, recognizing and valuing the contributions of female academics beyond traditional performance metrics.

These findings align with Liu, Bjaalid, Menichelli, and Sun (2024), who emphasized that flexible work policies alone are insufficient in addressing gender disparities. Instead, they must be integrated with structured advocacy strategies to maximize their impact on fostering a more equitable academic environment.

#### **4.5. Discussion**

This study reveals that flexible work policies have the potential to enhance female academics' work-life balance; however, their implementation continues to face structural and normative challenges. The findings indicate that the intensity of flexible work policy implementation correlates with a reduction in shadow work, particularly in administrative and academic tasks that are not formally acknowledged. However, social norms and gendered expectations in academic settings continue to limit the effectiveness of these policies, as evidenced by the high levels of shadow work reported by respondents (BPB4: Mean = 2.809). These results align with Chung and Lippe (2020) finding that workplace flexibility alone is insufficient to eliminate gender biases in academic task distribution. Institutional support is a key determinant of policy effectiveness. Respondents working in universities with stronger support systems reported greater benefits in managing their workload and achieving a better work-life balance. These findings are consistent with Medina-Garrido et al. (2017), who demonstrated that higher organizational support enhances job satisfaction and reduces stress linked to work-life conflicts.

However, this study also highlights that flexible work policies do not entirely eliminate barriers for female academics in advocating gender equality. While a positive correlation exists between work flexibility and advocacy involvement, the low average scores in gender equality advocacy (AKG1: Mean = 2.522) indicate limited participation. This aligns with (Cooke & Glass, 2014), who suggested that while flexible policies can increase female engagement in advocacy, structural and cultural barriers persist. To enhance the effectiveness of flexible work policies, a comprehensive strategy is required, including strengthening institutional support, reforming promotion and evaluation policies to be more inclusive, and raising awareness of the impact of shadow work on women academics. These efforts must also consider institutional differences and the specific needs of female academics at various career stages, ensuring that policy implementation is tailored to diverse professional contexts.

### **5. Conclusions**

#### **5.1. Conclusion**

The conclusion should be written in an apparent structure. This section should explain how the objectives of the study were accomplished. This study confirms that flexible work policies play a crucial role in supporting female academics' work-life balance; however, their effectiveness is influenced by organizational culture and traditional gender norms. While work flexibility helps reduce shadow work burdens, it does not fully eliminate them, particularly in academic environments, where women continue to bear a disproportionate share of administrative and mentoring responsibilities.

#### **5.2. Limitations**

The success of these policies is highly dependent on strong institutional support and broader cultural shifts toward a more inclusive working environment. Without adequate institutional backing, female academics struggle to leverage flexible work arrangements fully and actively engage in gender equality advocacy. Therefore, universities must reinforce institutional support systems, provide relevant training, and implement policies in a more structured and effective manner.

#### **5.3. Suggestions**

Additionally, this study recommends that policymakers develop specific regulations to better protect female academics, including more comprehensive flexible work policies and protections against unrecognized workloads. These findings offer strategic guidance for universities and policymakers to create a more inclusive academic environment, recognize the unique challenges faced by female academics, and strengthen gender equality advocacy within the academic sector.



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