

Journal of

Gender Related Studies

(JGRS)

GENDER DISCRIMINATIONS IN THE WORKPLACE

Winnie Njoki



GENDER DISCRIMINATIONS IN THE WORKPLACE. A CRITICAL LITERATURE

REVIEW

Winnie Njoki

Post Graduate, Cape Town University

ABSTRACT

Gender equality in employment has given rise to numerous policies in advanced industrial countries, all aimed at tackling gender discrimination regarding recruitment, salary and promotion. However, gender inequalities in the workplace persist. The article summarizes gender discrimination against working women in the workplace. Different articles have revealed that gender discrimination is a persistent problem in the workplace. The theory developed by Engels, Patriarchy-capitalism theory and the Conflict theory by Turner and Musick are the major theories that are used in this analysis. This study used a humanistic approach to textual analysis while researching and writing this essay, compared to a behavioral approach, which would involve studying gender discrimination in workplaces. Content analysis shows that females are discriminated more than males in private organizations. Further, the findings show that females are discriminated more than males in private sector than in public sector. The results show that gender discrimination decreases satisfaction & motivation and commitment & enthusiasm level of employees, and increases the stress level in the employees. The study recommends that organizations should review their recruiting processes and also stand up to gender bias when it happens.

Keywords: *Gender discrimination, workplace, women, Men, gender.*

INTRODUCTION

Workplace gender discrimination comes in many different forms, but generally it means that an employee or a job applicant is treated differently or less favorably because of their sex, gender identity, or sexual orientation. Even though the words “sex” and “gender” have different meanings, laws against discrimination at work often use them interchangeably. Sometimes workers experience discrimination because of their gender and something else, like their race or ethnicity (Hentze and Tyus, 2021). For example, a woman of color may experience discrimination in the workplace differently from a white female co-worker. She may be harassed, paid less, evaluated more harshly, or passed over for promotion because of the combination of her gender and her race.

In the Section “Discrimination in HR Related Practices: HR Policy, Decisions, and their Enactment,” we explain the distinction between HR policy, HR-related decision-making, and HR enactment and their relations to each other. Gender inequalities in HR policy are a form of institutional discrimination. We review evidence of institutional discrimination against women within HR policies set out to determine employee selection, performance evaluations, and promotions. In contrast, discrimination in HR-related decisions and their enactment can result from organizational decision makers’ biased responses: it is a form of personal discrimination. Finally, we provide evidence of personal discrimination against women by organizational decision makers in HR-related decision-making and in the enactment of HR policies. Gender discrimination is a problem because it turns the employees emotionally brittle, simple peace-loving employees transform into paranoid and suspicious, fearful and angry individuals (Tiwari et al, 2018). Elimination of Gender Discrimination is crucial for the satisfaction and motivation, commitment and enthusiasm and less stress of the employees.

Objectives of the Study

The main aim of the study was to assess gender discriminations in the workplace.

LITERATUREREVIEW

Theoretical review

A number of universal theories attempt to account for male domination in differing societies. Chodorow (Chodorow 1974) explains the subordination of women to men by stating that personality of a girl is shaped in a different way than personality of a boy. The subordination of one sex to the other is false itself and one of the main barriers to improvement in one’s living standards. It should be replaced with perfect equality principle

1. Engel’ theory of Gender Discrimination.

The theory developed by Engels is also among universal theories which suggest that the situation of women is getting worse and worse in the course of social evolution. According to him, women’s “handicap” stems from the evolution of society and discrimination is connected with the development of private property, patriarchal family (and then individual one) as well as social classes. Women’s “handicap” has been caused mainly by isolation from public sphere (production sphere in particular), economic dependence on men, housework and childcare. With reference to original communism, work done by women in a collective household was public and socially necessary production, and it had become private service to a family in the course of evolution. Women had been driven away from social production as they were not able to reconcile housework with professional career. According to Engels, women’s emancipation was conditioned by their mass entering the sphere of social production and reduction of household duties they did to the minimum. The reduction of household duties was to be plausible due to the development of social industry thanks to which women would be liberated, equal and participate in social and political life to a full extent (Engels 1946).

Engels did not expect that discrimination against women would still be present after reducing the participation of women in household duties and childcare. Therefore, he believed that discrimination against women in professional life was determined by burdening women with housework and childcare. The theory formulated by Engels was developed by feminists-socialists. Sacks had proven that women's "handicap" did not stem from private property as not all men possessed such. On the contrary, this phenomenon resulted from the fact that men were given employment and worked for privileged classes (employment in the form of serfdom or military service) more often than women. They did the work collectively which allowed them to take mass actions to improve their situation. A great dichotomy between public life and household life excluded women from the former and limited their duties to household. Housework done by women was not highly valued as they did not produce exchange values but only use values.

According to Sacks, social subjectivity is a key aspect of social position and can be achieved by participating in social production. As women had been excluded from social production, their social standing automatically declined in comparison with men (Sacks 1974). The theory developed by Sanday is another universal theory accounting for discrimination against women in public sphere. According to her, contribution that women make to earning a living is a major factor determining their status. Each human community must perform three functions to survive, namely earn a living, protect itself and reproduce. Men expended their energy into defending and earning a living, due to which they had greater control over strategic resources. By contrast, women expended energy into reproduction and only then into earning a living⁵. They were dependent on men to a greater extent, which resulted in male domination. Hence, as stated by Sacks and Sanday, discrimination against women is determined by division into female and male activity, which leads to lower position occupied by women both in social life as well as in the labour market.

2. Patriarchy – capitalism theory

Patriarchy-capitalism theory was formulated by feminists-socialists. They tried to combine the analysis of capitalist system presented by Marks and Engels with feminist analysis of patriarchy. Their theory aimed at presenting class divisions and gender divisions. When women earn a living while men are absent (e.g. because of war) and they still do so even when they are back, their status may be a subject to change. The research conducted by Sanday, that covered twenty preindustrial societies in Asia and Africa, showed that women's status is low where their contribution to earning money is very small or where they are the only ones in employment. The highest status is enjoyed by women in societies where their input of work is similar to men's input and where there is a balance in the division of labour by gender. According to Sanday, when women are the only ones in employment, their status may be low just because men have control over excess production and hence make profits. The other explanation provided is that women are dependent on men in satisfying their survival needs (e.g. defence) to a larger extent than men are dependent on women in the scope of earning a living. Mutual dependency of women and men in the scope of earning money may provide them with equal power and make men accept power that women exert in other domains. Patriarchy-capitalism theory has been formulated as a response to concepts developed by radical feminists who believe that the division into men and women is a primal and main class division. They also believe that men's striving after domination over women

is the motor of the history. On the other hand, patriarchy-capitalism theory was supposed to overcome neo-Marxist and feminist concepts showing the functionality of housework and professional work done by women to capitalism. Patriarchy is the relationship between men and women in which the latter are the “handicapped”

3. Conflict theory by Turner and Musick

In their theory, Turner and Musick present reasons behind discrimination against women and inequality between the sexes in historical context. In all societies, social roles have divided into female and male ones. This division is enhanced by cultural beliefs. In the majority of societies, gender diversification is connected with a certain level of discrimination against women. In the age of hunting and gathering, inequality was slight but it was a historical tendency to enhance discrimination against women in such a way so that disproportionately greater power, wealth and prestige were enjoyed and are still enjoyed by men in comparison with women. Why are some people discriminated against then? Because they are competitors in the labour market and accept salaries lower than those received by the dominating population (Turner, Musick 1985, chapter 9). Discrimination may not be practised if there are no substantial differences in power held by the discriminating and the discriminated. In turn, inequality in holding the power affect the level of financial, organizational and cultural resources that every population has. At the same time, discrimination consolidates the existing division of power or even strengthens it as denying the discriminated the access to resources reduces their power (Turner, Musick 1985, 224). Discrimination results in reducing economic, social and political roles that may be performed by the discriminated population and positions they may occupy.

Empirical Review

Erik et al., (2006) have conducted the research on whether women are discriminated through sticky floor or glass ceiling effects in Sweden. They have found through their research that women in Sweden suffer more from sticky floor effects than glass ceilings. Their study also showed that women with small children face a largest gender penalty in careers. Gender penalty is larger for younger and older women and less for middle aged women. There was no any empirical support in their study that women have lesser career opportunities in the private sector than in public sector, relative to men.

Susan et al (1998) have focused on the work place gender discrimination rational bias theory. According to this theory, decision makers may choose to discriminate if they believe that their superiors or others having power over their careers expect or prefer it. The findings of their research showed that businessmen discriminated women and people at the top of the organization are most biased against women than people at the bottom. Their study has also confirmed that management support discrimination, though those discriminations were less than the findings of earlier research, reflecting increasing equal opportunity. It was also confirmed through their research that the discrimination is more because of external pressures than from internal.

Habib (2000) has studied the effects of Brick Wall and Glass ceiling in public administration of Bangladesh. His analysis has shown that women are discriminated in civil services of Bangladesh

from entry to the higher posts (Glass Ceiling). Social cultural factors are the principal stumbling blocks and build a wall for entry of woman into civil services. Their career path was hindered by the impediments of the systematic and attitudinal reasons. Government laws and regulations in this regard are proving ineffective. However, that discrimination was not for the women who came from upper class. This disparate treatment against women had implications for their morale, motivation and performance.

Uzma (2004) found out that identity is created through the society, environment and parents. It is a two-way process - how people view you and how you view yourself. Attitude of parents towards their children formulate their identity. Parents usually consider their daughters as weak, timid, and too vulnerable; they need to be protected by the male members of the society. Because of this reason females cannot suggest or protest. This is the first step of subjugation and suppression. According to her; even the educated females have the double identity – professional and private. Another finding of her research was that the income of the women is not considered as the main financial source for the family, but as supplementary to the income of their males. She also found that those results were not valid for the upper and advanced families, where complete freedom is given to their females.

Additionally, women have experienced harsh bias in the evaluation of the quality of their work. A 1993 study by Halpert asked undergraduate students in the United States to assess the work of either a pregnant or non-pregnant woman who was completing an evaluation related exercise (Halpert, 1993). Although the recorded performances were identical, the pregnant woman was stereotyped more negatively and discriminated against in comparison to her non-pregnant peer.

METHODOLOGY

This study used a humanistic approach to textual analysis while researching and writing this essay, compared to a behavioral approach, which would involve studying gender discrimination in workplaces. The drawing and interpretation of research findings and sense which is not a quantitative impact evaluation, was important in this context, which implies that qualitative and thematic analysis was most suitable in this study. This method doesn't need to have training the algorithm of analysis as the case for quantitative, so the findings could easily be captured. A qualitative textual evaluation method was used in this research. Textual analysis consists of review and interpretation of scripts and articles and their inferential context. As a tool of interpretation and significance, an observer is likely to misunderstand the original intent. Nevertheless, its reliability and adequacy has been reaffirmed, in particular when the researcher pays attention to text itself. In this regard, several scholars have suggested more interpretation of the texts and their targeted audience in view of the time and environment in which they were written

FINDINGS

Results show that 'Discrimination based on gender stereotypes & prejudices' contributes highest towards discriminatory problems faced by working females which includes sub factors like "promotion is done on favoritism" with factor leading to male colleagues getting jealous of the

females, lot of anxiety, tension & panic attack because of workplace problems & discrimination” with factor loading (Tiwari et al, 2018) The survey conducted in the summer before a recent wave of sexual misconduct allegations against prominent men in politics, the media and other industries – found that, among employed adults, women are about twice as likely as men (42% versus 22%) to say they have experienced at least one of eight specific forms of gender discrimination at work.

In terms of income: One-in-four working women (25%) say they have earned less than a man who was doing the same job; one-in-twenty working men (5%) say they have earned less than a female peer (Pew Research Center,2020). Women are roughly four times as likely as men to say they have been treated as if they were not competent because of their gender (23% of employed women versus 6% of men), and they are about three times as likely as men to say they have experienced repeated small slights at work because of their gender (16% versus 5%). While 15% of working women say they have received less support from senior leaders than a man who was doing the same job, only 7% of working men report having a similar experience. One-in-ten working women say they have been passed over for the most important assignments because of their gender, compared with 5% of men.

In regards to sexual harassment, it was found that while similar shares of women and men say sexual harassment is at least a small problem in their workplace (36% versus 35%), women are about three times as likely as men to have experienced it personally while at work (22% versus 7%). In regards to education, among employed women, the share saying they have experienced sexual harassment in the workplace is roughly similar across racial and ethnic, educational, generational and partisan lines (Stamarski and Son Hing, 2015). But when it comes to specific forms of workplace discrimination tested in the survey, there are significant differences among women that are rooted mainly in their level of education.

Women with a bachelor’s degree or more education report experiencing discrimination across a range of items at significantly higher rates than women with less education. And in some regards, the most highly educated women stand out. While 57% of working women with a postgraduate degree say they have experienced some form of gender discrimination at work, for example, the same is true for 40% of women with a bachelor’s degree and 39% of those who did not complete college.

Roughly three-in-ten working women with a postgraduate degree (29%) say they have experienced repeated small slights at work because of their gender, compared with 18% of those with a bachelor’s degree and 12% with less education. Similarly, working women with a postgraduate degree are much more likely than their less-educated counterparts to say they have received less support from senior leaders than a man doing the same job (27% of postgraduate women, compared with 11% of women with bachelor’s degrees and 13% of women with less education). The pattern is similar when it comes to being passed over for promotions and feeling isolated at work.

When it comes to wages, working women with a bachelor’s degree or more are much more likely than those with less education to say they have earned less than a man who performed the same job (Carter, 2018). Women with family incomes of \$100,000 or higher stand out here as well – 30% of them say they’ve earned less than a man who was doing comparable work compared with

roughly one-in-five women with lower incomes (21%). But overall, women with higher family incomes are about equally likely to have experienced at least one of these eight forms of gender-based discrimination at work.

There are differences by race and ethnicity as well. While roughly half of employed black women (53%) say they have experienced at least one type of gender discrimination at work, fewer white and Hispanic women say the same (40% for each group) (Parker and Funk, 2017). One area in particular where black women stand apart is in their reporting of having been passed over for the most important assignments because of their gender – 22% of employed black women say this has happened to them, compared with 8% of whites and 9% of Hispanics.

Women’s experiences with discrimination in the workplace also differ along party lines. Roughly half (48%) of working Democratic women and Democratic-leaning independents say they have experienced at least one form of gender discrimination at work, compared with a third of Republican and Republican-leaning women. These party differences hold up even after controlling for race (Horowitz et al, 2020).

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND POLICY IMPLICATION

In summary, gender discrimination is a recurring issue in the workplace as discussed above. It occurs in many forms such as when hiring, firing, or promoting someone because of their gender. Not hiring, firing, or promoting someone because of their gender. Further, a female works her way up to management finds out that a newly hired male manager (same position and duties) is getting paid more than she is despite equal qualifications. Additionally, a female employee gets a pay cut because she can’t put in as much overtime after just having had a baby, while a male employee cuts back on overtime for personal reasons with no changes to his pay. Gender discrimination also occur where female employees don’t get to add their husbands to their health insurance because it is assumed that the husband has his own healthcare benefits, while male employees can add their wives. Gender discrimination also occurs withholding job opportunities from individuals who identify as transsexual or homosexual. Analysis also showed that gender discrimination was inversely proportional with commitment and enthusiasm, i.e., because of discrimination, women showed less commitment and enthusiasm towards their job. Further, gender discrimination and stress level have a positive relationship.

RECOMMENDATIONS

First, organizations should review their recruiting processes. Specific things like the wording of a job description can affect who applies and who gets hired. While selecting certain words to convey a role or responsibility is often done with little intent towards gender, certain words can have connotations in the world beyond intention or lack thereof. It’s best to review job postings with an inquisitive eye before you make them live.

Secondly, whether it’s a brushed aside opinion or a bad joke at lunch, gender inequality, bias and microaggressions need to be called out when they occur. This helps to increase awareness on what

gender bias looks like and sounds like. This doesn't not mean berating colleagues or superiors. It can present an opportunity to teach someone else what is preferred treatment in the workplace. This doesn't mean it's an easy task. It's often awkward and uncomfortable for all involved, but the more it is called out and dissuaded, especially by managers and leadership, the more likely an organization is to eliminate gender bias in the workplace.

REFERENCES

- Carter, S. M. (2018, January 9). *In the US, unlike in Iceland, it's still OK to pay a woman less than a man—here's why*. CNBC. Retrieved 2021, from <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/01/09/in-the-us-unlike-iceland-its-still-ok-to-pay-women-less-heres-why.html>
- Erik, Bihagen., Marita Ohls. (2006). The glass ceiling-where is it? Women's and men's career prospects in the private vs. the public sector in Sweden 1979-2000. *The Sociological Review*, 54(1), 20-47.
- Habib, Zafarullah. (2000). Through the brick wall and the glass ceiling: women in the civil services in Bangladesh. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 7(3), 197-209.
- Halpert, J. (1993, November 21). Pregnancy as a Source of Bias in Performance Appraisals. Psychology Source. Retrieved November 14, 2013, from [https://www.ncsl.org/research/labor-and-employment/-gender-and-sex-discrimination.aspx](http://psychsource.bps.org.uk/details/Hentze,I.,%20%26%20Tyus,R.%20(2021).%20Sex%20and%20Gender%20Discrimination%20in%20the%20Workplace.%20National%20Conference%20of%20State%20Legislatures.%20Retrieved%202021,%20from%20https://www.ncsl.org/research/labor-and-employment/-gender-and-sex-discrimination.aspx)
- Hentze, I., & Tyus, R. (2021). *Sex and Gender Discrimination in the Workplace*. National Conference of State Legislatures. Retrieved 2021, from <https://www.ncsl.org/research/labor-and-employment/-gender-and-sex-discrimination.aspx>
- Horowitz, J. M., Parker, K., & Stepler, R. (2020, May 30). *Wide Partisan Gaps in U.S. Over How Far the Country Has Come on Gender Equality*. Pew Research Center's Social & Demographic Trends Project. Retrieved 2021, from <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2017/10/18/wide-partisan-gaps-in-u-s-over-how-far-the-country-has-come-on-gender-equality/>
- Parker, K., & Funk, C. (2017, December 14). *Gender discrimination comes in many forms for today's working women*. Pew Research Center. Retrieved 2021, from <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/12/14/gender-discrimination-comes-in-many-forms-for-todays-working-women/>
- Pew Research Center. (2020, May 30). *Chapter 4: Men and Women at Work*. Pew Research Center's Social & Demographic Trends Project. Retrieved 2021, from <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2013/12/11/chapter-4-men-and-women-at-work/>
- Plickert, G., & Sterling, J. (2017). Gender still matters: Effects of workplace discrimination on employment schedules of young professionals. *Laws*, 6(4), 28.
- Stamarski, C. S., & Son Hing, L. S. (2015). Gender inequalities in the workplace: the effects of organizational structures, processes, practices, and decision makers' sexism. *Frontiers in psychology*, 6, 1400.
- Susan, Trentham., Laurie, Larwood.(1998). Gender discrimination and the workplace: an examination of rational bias theory, Sex Roles. *A Journal of Research*, 38, 1-28.

- Tiwari, M., Mathur, G., & Awasthi, S. (2018). Gender-based discrimination faced by females at workplace: A perceptual study of working females. *Journal of Entrepreneurship Education*, 21(3), 1-7.
- Uzma Shoukat.(2004). Literacy and women's identity, Proceedings of the International Conference on Social Sciences: Endangered and Engendered, Fatima Jinnah Women University, Rawalpindi, Pakistan, 84-96.
- Zwiech, P. (2009). Discrimination against women in professional life in chosen pro-feminist theories. *Economics & Sociology*, 2(1), 96.