

IMPLICATIONS OF GENDER BIAS IN THE WORKPLACE

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Abstract

When all individuals at a particular workplace enjoy the same rewards, concessions and opportunities, irrespective of their gender, it could be said that that workplace implements the gender equality phenomena. For many years, in the past, and even in some parts of the world presently, it is most often seen that women are paid lesser and aren't presented with much opportunities to advance in their careers when compared to their male counterparts. On the contrary, men are also stripped off from flexible work arrangements and find it strenuous to access family-friendly policies. Gender differences at workplace are majorly rooted from social factors, that leverage the behaviors of men and women. However, it is a burning issue, especially in professions where the maximum number of workers are male, its amiable to overlook gender biases. When these biases prevail, the workplace becomes chaotic and lawsuits may emanate. It is a form of prejudice or discrimination which would serve one well, if rooted out from its base. That said, tracking these biases may become a challenge, particularly in a male-dominated society. This paper enlightens on the negative impact, gender bias lays at the remaining workforce of any organization, collected from secondary sources such as books, blogs published on the internet. It also highlights the forms of gender discrimination and the overall influence it has on the corporate functioning of its organization.

Keywords:workplace issues, gender discrimination, workplace bias,work conflict, glass ceiling

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1. Introduction

Gender differences are known to mostly stem from psychological and physical factors. Psychological factors such as a person's upbringing and physical factors like the strength or stamina an employee may possess to execute a particular operation or job.

Gender stereotypes also play a massive role in such discrimination. A common stereotypical belief that women belong at home to take care of the family and many other household chores whereas men are the typical bread-winners, whose job is to work outside of home, lead to gender discrimination at work. Women are often given employment in clerical or administrative sectors which are considerably low-paying. On the contrary, men are positioned in places where there seem prospects for career growth and advancements. Hence there is a greater need for gender equality at workplace. Both men and women should be given an equal opportunity for rewards, promotions, resources and lastly pay equity has to be preserved.

Literature Review

Peterson and Thea (2006) describe "there are so many ways of the gender biasness and discrimination in organizations due to the unfair actions of the employer; discrimination in job compensation package, hiring discrimination, favoritism related to job promotion, and biasness in wage setting for different type of job work."

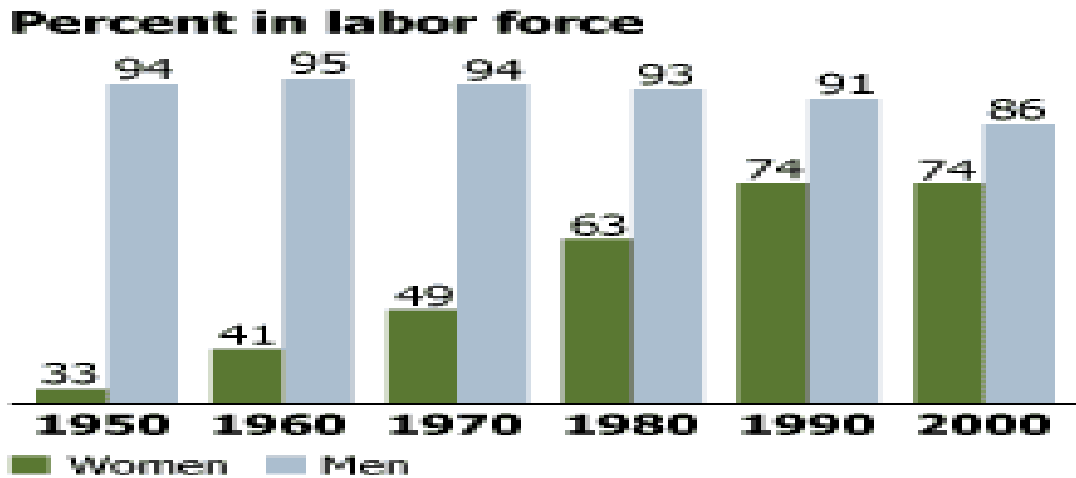
Elisabeth K. Kelan (2009) claimed "gender-quake is disturbing gender terms and relations immensely. It looks like the western well-developed countries are well aware this issue, however, are choosing not to consider addressing gender biasness and inequality among male & female employee." In almost every sector, women take up a minute share of the higher-level positions. White (1992) has recorded "a 1998 study found only three chief executive officers among the Fortune 1,000 were women, and only 1.7% of the chief operating officers, chief financial officers and executive vice presidents were women."

The problem is not that larger proportions of trained women are not available, women are not represented at highest ranks of companies and academia, because for some reason their rate of progression is halted somewhere along the way to the top. The salary picture for women is

consistently low when compared to men, in almost every industry, even when they first start their jobs. A common explanation for this wage difference between men and women is that “women choose professions that pay less, and they have less experience than men of the same age, because they take time off to raise children.”

Gender equality brings the following benefits to the workplace –

- a) **Attractive talent pool** – A workplace that does not display any form of bias towards its workers can attract the best talent from both the genders. Since women are gradually obtaining more higher degrees than men, being discriminative can lose such captivating talent to the competitors.
- b) **Minimizes expenses** – Employee turnover can cost a company 75% the amount of one employee’s annual wage. However, an organization that maintains equity in its work procedures and principles have lesser chances of turnover and the additional expenses associated with it, as employees feel privileged to be working for them.
- c) **Gender equality = Enhanced performance** – Gender equality is directly proportional to better performance for a company as diversity brings in varied solutions and perspectives to the issues an organization comes across. A more holistic approach is thus brought further, which upgrades the decision making.
- d) **Increased national productivity and competitiveness** – There has been found to be a vigorous connection between a country’s use of female talent and its competitiveness. A country that empowers women will lead to systematic and organized use of talent, minimizing the inequality in genders, resulting in profitability and growth. Over the course of time, a country’s competitiveness, among many other things, relies upon its ability to utilize the female talent effectively.
- e) **Inequality wastes resources** – Research says that about 58% of women in any country are university graduates. Practically, there are only 67% of women working compared to the 78% of men employed in paid white-collar jobs. This fact demonstrates that a wide range of female, educated workers’ educational qualifications are being wasted. Gender equality could avoid this to a large extent.

Figure - Labor Force Participation of Men and Women (aged 25-54) in U.S, 1950-2000

Source - Integrated Public Use Micro data Series (IPUMS), 2003.

Gender equality could be brought about by provision of equal pay for both men and women as well as entrée in to all fields and occupations, that involves leadership roles for both the genders. Prevalence of gender inequality could be tracked from the following symptoms –

- a) **Unequal pay** – Differences in pay, for the same amount of contributions made by both the genders, could cause some serious damage in the performance contributions of employees.
- b) **Questions asked in interviews** – There are subtle signs of unfair questions, relating to family planning, asked to women during interviews. Judging them, on the basis of the number of children they have or are planning to have, so as to craft a preconceived notion regarding their maternity leaves is out of limits and also illegal in some places.
- c) **Retrenching responsibilities** – Be it physical or mental work, one needs to allot equal amount of work to both men and women to avoid being partial to the softer lot.

2. Research Method

The data for this research has been collected from secondary sources through various blogs, published content on the internet.

3. Analysis

“Stereotypes can be extremely harmful because they can cause a person to mistreat others based on preconceived notions that are untrue.”(Danica Dodds, 2006). Research has indicated that most

people are unaware of how swiftly stereotyping influences their thinking and belief system. Typically, in Indian households, men are considered as the primary breadwinners for their families, which is the reason why a woman's pay is considered merely a supplement to the husband's salary, hence the most common stereotype prevailing in people's minds is that women do not need equal pay, as they are married. Another research has showed that women are posed with serious challenges towards their career growth, because of stereotypical views, leading to a decrease in their promotions for top level management.

Some of the common stereotypical beliefs suppressing women at workplace are "women are not aggressive enough", "women are not good at problem-solving", "women are just good at 'taking care', and are not cut out for 'taking charge'", "women are just good at raising children, and do not want long-term jobs", "women do not dedicate much time to jobs, after having children". It is most commonly observed and is called for that women take a break from work during and after pregnancy to nurse their children, later returning to their jobs, only to find out that they have been placed at a lower paying position, in spite of them adjusting their hours and responsibilities well into their schedules. Lastly, another common form of bias seen is the sexual harassment which women encounter, leading to job loss or forced resignation.

Figure – Proportion of women by management category in Australia, 2014-15



Source – Workplace Gender Equality Agency

4. Conclusion

As found out in the TNS Research Surveys, over 68% of women have experienced gender bias at workplace. There are bound to have negative impacts at the workplace such as diminished productivity, stereotypical views influencing promotions leading to loss of qualified labor, lack of confidence in women during interviews because of the personal questions regarding family planning responsibilities being asked. Also, doubts regarding self-worth may emanate among the employees, who may cause destruction towards their co-workers as a means to retaliate. Destruction could be loss of property, physical damage, tarnishing their reputation by spreading malicious rumors about them.

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