

Understanding the Role of Gender Bias in Shaping Workplace Cultures

Lena Johansson¹ & Dr. Erik Lindström²

¹ Lecturer, Department of Business and Economics, Stockholm University, Stockholm, Sweden.

² Senior Lecturer, Department of HR and Organizational Studies, Lund University, Lund, Sweden.

ABSTRACT

Gender equality in the workplace has been a major concern for almost all the organizations and countries. Even in most developed countries we cannot find complete gender equality in true sense.

This paper aims to discuss whether there is gender biasness in organizations or not? Gender biasness is considered as a major constraint towards the development process in any of the country and thus we have made an attempt to determine the root causes for gender gap that persists in our society. Also considering gender in the office is vital to encourage productive office environment and create a space that ensures both genders thrive. Jennifer Berdahl explains "Women tend to prefer egalitarian norms in work groups, whereas men favor hierarchical structures," in a study published in the journal *Group Dynamics: Theory, Research and Practice*.

We have tried to investigate the differences on certain parameters like perception towards work and colleagues, workplace environment, satisfaction levels, salaries etc.

Under the study, we have highlighted some basic causes of gender disparity against women including ignorance of female at higher positions, maternity leaves, lack of opportunities for promotion and so forth. We, therefore, have provided some policy implications for further improvement of the gender situation in the country

KEYWORDS: gender discrimination, gender gap, human resource practices, workplace environment and job satisfaction.

I. INTRODUCTION

Gender biases have been studied many times. We have observed quite often the discrimination between men and women both at domestic and professional ground. To what extent do they affect the society and the growth of the nation as a whole is a major issue of concern.

According to John Gray and Barbara Annis, authors of *Work With Me: The 8 Blind Spots Between Men and Women in Business*, innate differences between the genders lead to a number of challenges at the workplace. The effects of this type of bias on a company are often negative. It creates the environment of distrust and dissatisfaction among employees. However the impact of gender discrimination on an employee can be small or huge depending on that employee's reaction.

In this paper, we have discussed some basic causes of gender inequality on certain parameters like ignorance of female at higher positions, pay scale, maternity leaves, lack of opportunities for promotion and so forth. Gender discrimination has also been found to be directly influencing the work attitudes. It gives rise to dissatisfaction, lack of support from colleagues and superiors, negative emotions, biases perceptions and so on.

According to study conducted by International Labor Organization (ILO) January 2015, was conducted with employers in the private sector regarding the factors they consider during job interviews. The parameters considered are mentioned in given chart

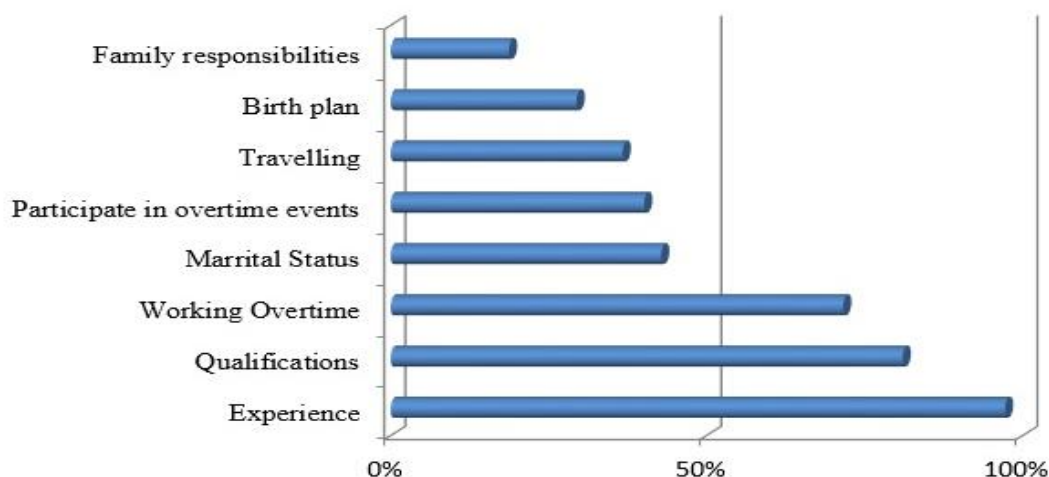


Table 1: Factors considered by employers during job interviews

Thus it was revealed that apart from academic qualifications and work experience – the two most important factors that affect recruiting decisions are applicants' availability to work outside of normal working hours and their marital status and their future plans to have children.

II. OBJECTIVE OF STUDY

- (i) To estimate gender biasness in the workplace.
- (ii) To find the determinants those cause gender gap in the workplace.
- (iii) To recommend some policy implications to reduce gender discrimination

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is descriptive in nature based on the secondary data. The data has been collected from various sources using net such as articles, blogs, magazines, journals and even experiences of various professionals including both the genders. With this discussion we concluded that still there are many organizations where gender discrimination do exists which must certainly be removed to encourage productive office environment and create a space that ensures both genders thrive.

IV. REVIEW LITERATURE

Gender inequality is the unequal treatment or perceptions of individuals wholly or partly due to their gender. It is a complex and common phenomenon in organizations that can be seen in organizational structures and practices. One dominant reason for this is the inequalities within human resources (HRs) practices (i.e., policies, decision-making, and their enactment) that affect the hiring, training, pay and promotion of women.

Though it's risky to generalize about gender differences at the workplace, it is worth considering the factors on the basis of which we can observe the difference between both the genders. These parameters are discussed below-

1. **Workplace environment**-Effective workplace environment have effect on worker's welfare, health, morale, efficiency, and productivity. Unbiased environment encourages good communication network that attracts, keep, and motivate its workforce for healthy living and improved productivity. Dr. William Pollack, Associate Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School and a consultant on gender in the workplace, said: "Women are conditioned by prior experiences to not act with as much confidence as men."
2. **Communication**-In a corporate environment, the success of the team is greatly determined by the effectiveness of a leader's communication skills. According to research, woman's tendency to be more empathetic than her male counterpart makes her a better listener and consequently a better communicator.
3. **Gender Pay Gap**- it exists because the demands of employee's work role interfere with the demands of their family role or vice versa. Thus Work- family conflict is major cause for the gender pay gap as women are more adversely affected by work-family conflict than men. It generates negative consequences of increasing employee stress, illness-related absence, and desire to turnover. According to a survey held in May 2016, the gender pay gap in India was 27%.

4. **Human Resource Practices-** Organizations can work for the betterment of women and thus eliminate gender difference by implementing HR policies such as paid maternity leave, work from home, flexible work arrangements like flexible schedules, telecommuting etc. to retain working mothers.
5. **Glass Ceiling-** it is the invisible barrier that exists in organizations keeping women and minorities away from rising upwards on the corporate ladder, regardless of their qualification and achievements.
6. **Sexual harassment-** many women are sexually harassed and underestimated at work while some are too afraid to come forward in case it jeopardises their job or some even leave the organization without bringing the matter into light because of reputation in the society.

Thus we find that there are a number of factors that affect working culture and gender discrimination in the organization and providing a favorable workplace environment will automatically improve productivity, safety and better morale among employees irrespective of gender.

V. CHANGING TRENDS IN ORGANIZATION IN CONEXT OF GENDER BIASNESS

Though there had been a time when gender inequality existed prominently in our society and at work place. But with changing scenario there has been a change in outlook too. Women are assigned higher authorities and designation and certain HR practices are redesigned and restructured keeping in mind the working mothers. Few of the changes are discussed below-

1. More number of females are gaining professional qualification and leading to employment.
2. HR practices are redesigned in favour of working females such as paid maternity leave, work from home and so on.
3. Family friendly policies such as flexible time, parental leave, and dependent care assistance, have also resulted in increased number of female professionals in organization.
4. Females are also considered for relocation in case they are getting married or spouse is working in other city.
5. Transport facilities are provided to females to commute to office from home and vice-versa by the organizations, specially working in night shifts in order to provide them safety and security.
6. Thus we see that with changing time, people perception is also changing towards female and more and more females are becoming self-dependent and with better HR policies and practices are contributing towards organization's productivity.

VI. DISCUSSIONS

Gender discrimination is a very old and complex phenomenon in our society. The major causes of women's dependency on men are illiteracy, lack of awareness, poor knowledge, skills and lack of opportunities to show their talent. Besides this, they also lack self-esteem and confidence. However with changing time, their conditions have improved along with society's perception towards them. They are no longer considered as a tool of accomplishing household chores but are also given opportunity to mark their presence in society by being literate, self dependent and employed.

During our study we found that there are certain parameters on to which men and women are treated differently in organization. Thus the scenario of gender discrimination do exists within the organizations. Women are comparatively not given due authority or designation as compared to men especially incase of working mothers because they are generally engaged in work- home conflict. This result in work stress, intra-personal and inter-personal conflict, decreased production, larger gender pay gap and increased employee turnover.

However with changing time, organizations approach towards employee has also changed and they are keener on adopting such HR practices and policies that reduces this gender discrimination. HR policies are framed with the intention of reducing work stress and to make working culture better and retaining working mothers.

VII. CONCLUSION

From the above study we can conclude that there has been gender discrimination at workplace since ages. But this fact too can't be denied that a lot has been done to place women at par with men. Providing a favorable work environment not only creates positive attitude among employees but also improves productivity, communication, enthusiasm and healthy workplace practices.

Gender biasness creates conflicts among employees and affects the working and existing corporate culture. To smoothen the working, develop positive environment, minimize gender discrimination and upgrade reputation of the organizations, many amendments are made in the HR policies. They are redesigned in such a way that they eliminate gender inequalities favoring organizational leadership, structure, strategy, culture and climate.

HR policies focus on various parameters such as flexible work timings, work from home, telecommuting, and part-time work. Other policies also include paid maternity leave, day care for infants at office etc. These policies reduce stress and improve the retention of working mothers in the organization.

Thus minimizing gender gap leads to employees enjoy what they do (job satisfaction), feel like they have a purpose (goal orientation), have pride in what they do (job attainment) and can reach their potential (self-actualization).

VIII. REFERENCES

- [1] World Bank, 2012, Integrating Gender into the World Bank's Work: A Strategy for Action
- [2] Welle B., Heilman M. E. (2005). "Formal and informal discrimination against women at work: the role of gender stereotypes," in Research in Social Issues in Management eds Steiner D., Gilliland S. W., Skarlicki D., editors. (Westport, CT: Information Age Publishers;) 23–40.
- [3] Martins L. L., Parsons C. K. (2007). Effects of gender diversity management on perceptions of organizational attractiveness: the role of individual differences in attitudes and beliefs. J. Appl.
- [4] Stroh L. K., Brett J. M., Reilly A. H. (1992). All the right stuff: a comparison of female and male managers' career progression. J. Appl. Psychol. 77 251–260. 10.1037/0021-9010.77.3.251 [Cross Ref]
- [5] Farida Faisal, 2011, Public Policy and Gender Mainstreaming Strategy: Redressing Gender Inequality
- [6] Roberson L., Galvin B. M., Charles A. C. (2007). When group identities matter: bias in performance appraisal. Acad. Manag. Ann. 1 617–650. 10.1080/078559818 [Cross Ref]
- [7] Schneyer K. L. (1998). Hooting: public and popular discourse about sex discrimination. Univ. Mich. J. Law Reform 31 551–636.
- [8] Karasek, R., & Theorell, T. (1990). Health work: Stress, productivity and the reconstruction of working life. New York: Basic Books