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Gender Inequality in the Workplace

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the fundamental issues of gender equality in the workplace. Gender inequality is omnipresent and cross-cultural, irrespective of geography or the nation's GDP. The paper thus seeks to explore the works of women in various occupations and the complaints they raise against the persistent wage gap, the so-called pay gap. There is a distribution of women about the spheres of their active engagement and working areas available, and men have managed to retain most of the 'good' spheres.

KEYWORDS: Gender difference, sexism, discrimination, women's rights, equality.

Introduction

The problem of gender inequality in society has its historical cultural and structural background and is manifested in all spheres of life including education, health care, law, and especially, labor. The scholarship explains the notion of 'gender inequality' as the unjust advantage health for one gender over another in most thorough such say patriarchal discrimination society. At the heart of gender inequality is the differential, which enables the suppression of women and other sexual minorities in favor of men. In Texas, for example, Ridgeway and Correll observe, 'genders constitute a dominant frame within communication relations and are used effectively to achieve specific advantages' reinforcing masculine structures, Ridgeway and Correll Embedding a very large number of remedies. This has been the position in the past. Vulnerable is to work is the history of the concepts of equality and very deep in the past centuries and this is why, despite the large efforts on equal base over the last century - gender equality has been a delusion for many in the world today and remains a dream.

Gender equality is also to be viewed as one of the fundamental human rights: all individuals should be treated without discrimination, with equal rights and obligations and granted equal opportunities. According to the UN, "Systemic gender inequality of male-female fixed roles is called Gender Equality: the state of the relationship between women and men, in which they enjoy the same rights, responsibilities and opportunities." Gender equality is not about making women and men alike, but rather women's and men's rights, responsibilities and opportunities will no longer hinge on the fact that one was born a boy or girl" (UN Women). While gender equality is understood as an individual right, its importance is more general; it is an essential precondition for building fair and tolerant societies. Gender inequality manifests itself in many ways, in the home, in the workplace, and even in the wider society.

As history has shown, these gender stereotypes would appear to be established and supported by circumstances in culture and religion that emphasized and propagated the idea of male superiority. From ancient times up to the Middle Ages and even to the Beginning of the 20th century, Scott maintains that women had very little to no engagement in any economic and political opportunities while being contained to being caregivers and mothers. It is these traditional roles that have led to the formation of stereotypes regarding the perceived capabilities and worth of women. Over time these stereotypes have been embedded in policies, organizational cultures and educational systems, engendering institutional practices that work against women.

As for any workplace, gender inequalities shouldered include that of wages, proportionate representation at the top management level, and discriminatory recruitment. Strategically, the existence of such inequalities, especially in employment between the sexes, was researched since the 1960s which gave birth to such an expression as a 'glass ceiling' in other words, a phrase for the unperceived obstruction of women to attain places in the corporate and political hierarchy, (Morrison et al). There are improvements though; a glass ceiling still exists for women especially women of colour who are discriminated against by gender and in this case race at the same time (Crenshaw).

Recent data highlights how far society still needs to go to achieve gender equality. The Sustainable Development Goals Report (2022) provides alarming statistics on the gender disparities that persist globally. Around 26% of women worldwide aged 15 and older have experienced physical or sexual abuse at least once in their lifetime, often at the hands of intimate partners.

Gender-based violence is not only a violation of women's human rights but also a direct result of the systemic power imbalances that privilege men over women. Moreover, in 2021, 45% of women in 13 surveyed countries reported that they or someone they know had been victims of violence since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic exacerbated many pre-existing inequalities, disproportionately affecting women by increasing their exposure to domestic violence and placing additional burdens on them as caregivers and essential workers (UN Women).

With three hundred sixty-six million girls forced into the practice, child marriage is perhaps the most widespread and insidious form of gender inequality. As a remnant of customary practices across societies, about twenty per cent of young women in 2021 were married before reaching the age of eighteen – something that draws criticism as women still struggle for a better standing in many parts of the world (Sustainable Development Goals Report 2022). Child marriage has been associated with cutting off formal schooling for female children resulting in skewed provision of equality in the society as chances for economic empowerment are taken away from them. It also puts those girls at increased risk of domestic violence and physical health issues due to teenage pregnancies.

The effects of gender disparity on the economy are also quite deep. According to a 2021 report by the World Economic Forum, Global Gender Gap Report, the need for gender balance is critical for the success of any economy. Still, the problem of gender-related economic activity and opportunity divide is one of the biggest with women's economic participation still lagging – they earn less than their male counterparts for the same job and are more unemployed (World Economic Forum). This economic exclusion is further aggravated by the fact that women continue to exercise unpaid activities, particularly caregiving and household work. Women globally carry out over 75% of all unpaid care work, which is not well captured in the economic analysis (International Labour Organization).

Gender inequality in the workplace is not just a peripheral issue; it is central to broader societal inequalities. In many industries, women face significant challenges in accessing leadership roles. According to a McKinsey report (2022), women hold only 28% of management positions globally. In regions such as Northern Africa and Southern Asia, the percentage of women in managerial roles drops to as low as 13% (McKinsey). This underrepresentation of women in leadership positions perpetuates the cycle of gender inequality, as decisions related to hiring, promotions, and pay are often made by male-dominated leadership teams.

Moreover, the wage gap between men and women remains a critical issue in the fight for gender equality. Women are typically paid less than men, even when controlling for factors such as education, experience, and hours worked. According to Forbes, women made an average of 17% less than men in 2022. This discrepancy is even more pronounced in certain industries; for example, men in the legal field make 59% more than women on average (Forbes). The gender pay gap not only affects women's financial independence but also has long-term consequences for their retirement savings and economic security. Over a 40-year career, a woman could lose more than \$400,000 in earnings compared to her male counterpart (Blau and Kahn).

Furthermore, gender inequality intersects with other forms of discrimination, such as racism, classism, and ableism. Black women, Indigenous women, and women of colour face additional barriers in the workplace, including lower pay, fewer opportunities for advancement, and higher rates of discrimination (Crenshaw). The concept of intersectionality, coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, highlights how different forms of discrimination intersect and compound the disadvantages faced by women who belong to multiple marginalized groups.

In conclusion, gender inequality is a multifaceted issue that manifests across various domains of life, with particularly severe consequences in the workplace. It is not only a violation of human rights but also an impediment to economic development and social justice. Achieving gender equality requires concerted efforts from policymakers, employers, and individuals to dismantle the structural barriers that perpetuate inequality. The fight for gender equality is far from over, but by addressing these systemic issues, society can move closer to a world where individuals of all genders have equal opportunities to succeed.

Stereotypes in the Workplace

Stereotypes in the workplace remain a pervasive issue. They shape how people perceive one another based on gender and social identities, leading to inaccurate and harmful assumptions. According to research by Williams and Dempsey (2014), "stereotypes about women's roles in the workplace hinder their professional advancement, perpetuating a cycle of inequality." Such stereotypes often lead to unequal pay, underrepresentation of women in leadership roles, and various forms of discrimination.

In the workplace, women frequently face interruptions during meetings, their contributions are undervalued, and decision-making often remains dominated by male colleagues. As noted by Heilman (2012), "Gender stereotypes continue to influence both the expectations placed on women and their ability to perform, particularly in male-dominated industries." Many women also report that the culture at work often mirrors a "boys' club" atmosphere where men control the decision-making process (McKinsey). Women are also more likely than men to feel like they are "walking a tightrope"—facing both high expectations and blame for issues beyond their control (Eagly and Carli).

These challenges are exacerbated by the lack of sponsors and mentors for women, especially those from minority backgrounds. "Mentorship is a critical factor in closing gender gaps in leadership," writes Ely and Meyerson (2000). Yet, many women are compelled to scale back their career ambitions due to family obligations. Workplaces often fail to provide adequate support for balancing professional and familial responsibilities.

Women in Leadership and the "Broken Rung"

The underrepresentation of women in leadership roles is both a cause and consequence of the stereotypes they face in the workplace. According to the World Economic Forum (2022), "women held only 28% of management positions globally in 2019." This disparity is more pronounced in regions such as Northern Africa and Southern Asia, where women occupy a mere 13% of leadership roles. Although there has been some progress since 2000, the increase in female representation in management has been slow.

The "broken rung" phenomenon describes how women are often passed over for promotion at the entry-level management stage, which significantly affects their ability to ascend to higher leadership positions (McKinsey). For every 100 men promoted to management, only 87 women are promoted, and the numbers are even lower for women of colour (McKinsey). "The broken rung is the single biggest obstacle women face on the path to leadership," McKinsey's "Women in the Workplace 2022" report concludes. The underrepresentation of women in leadership roles perpetuates the cycle of inequality, as decisions regarding promotions and pay are frequently made by male-dominated leadership teams.

Pay Gap

The gender pay gap refers to the average disparity in earnings between men and women. Women are typically paid less than men, even when they have the same job title, level of experience, and work hours (Blau and Kahn). The gender pay gap is a complex issue that results from various factors, including workplace discrimination, career interruptions due to motherhood, and occupational segregation.

In 2022, women earned an average of 17% less than their male counterparts (Forbes). In specific sectors, such as law, men make 59% more than women on average (Forbes). "The gender pay gap is not just a statistical phenomenon—it has real consequences for women's lifetime earnings and economic security" (Goldin). For example, a 20-year-old woman starting her career today is expected to earn \$407,760 less than a man over a 40-year career (Blau and Kahn). Despite progress, there is still an 11% pay gap between men and women with the same qualifications and roles (Forbes).

According to the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report (2021), "At the current rate of progress, it will take over 135 years to close the gender gap worldwide." Structural changes and policy interventions are necessary to close this gap. One notable issue is that "work traditionally performed by women is often undervalued and underpaid" (Folbre).

Summary and Conclusion

This paper explored the persistent issue of gender inequality in the workplace, focusing on how stereotypes, the broken rung in leadership pipelines, and the gender pay gap disadvantage women. While women have made significant strides in various sectors, they continue to face obstacles that limit their professional growth and earning potential. To address this issue, organizations must take deliberate actions to combat gender bias in hiring, promotions, and pay structures. As stated by McKinsey, "Companies must address these systemic issues if they are to close the gender gap in leadership and pay."

The challenge of overcoming gender inequality is substantial, but it is critical to achieving a fair and equitable workplace. Gender parity benefits not only women but also businesses, leading to improved performance, higher employee satisfaction, and better retention rates (Catalyst). Closing the gender gap will require continued effort from policymakers, businesses, and individuals alike.

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