

Gender Discrimination in the Workplace: A Study on Causes, Consequences and Way forward

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***Abstract:** Gender discrimination in the work place occurs almost everywhere in the world. It happens due to traditional belief, social and cultural structure and psychological perception. In consequences of these limited or negative perceptions female officials including the officials of the public sector are discriminated for which women are always challenged. Due to the challenge or barrier women's performance decline which ultimately affect the organization negatively. Many countries have taken various types of measures to remove this gender discrimination from the work place. Among those, gender plan or policy is significant to get a gender fair environment which in turn contributes to increase performance of the organization as well as women.*

Introduction

ILO defined gender discrimination as any distinction, exclusion or preference based on sex or gender values, norms or stereotypes which have the effect of nullifying or impairing equality of opportunity and treatment. Discrimination may be de jure, meaning that discrimination exists in law, or de facto, meaning that it exists in reality or in practice. In many cases de jure discrimination has declined but de facto discrimination persists (ILO, 2007). From Japan to United States, Gender discrimination exists as an interlinked problem. Women often face this problem in the workplace (Sen, 2001) and it is a continuous universal issue including new forms of "subtle" discrimination. "From recruitment to layoffs" and "from pay to fixing of job responsibilities", gender discrimination occurs (Nayab, 2010). However, both male and female should be equally treated and "should never be discriminated against because of their gender" in the workplace (Connell, 2006). Since, victims of gender discrimination in the workplace feel "unworthy," "demoralized" and "depressed", they cannot perform better in the workplace. Thus, it could be said that gender discrimination in the workplace, not only affects individual but the organization as well as the society are also affected. Moreover, this poor work culture is hindrance of "free flow of communications and teamwork" which is necessary for "smooth functioning of the organization"; otherwise, organization will lose productivity (Nayab, 2010). It should be more prioritized as an organization will be benefitted by assimilating more women which will lead to new perspectives and ways of solving problems and contribute to

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bring changes in "organizational processes", "culture" and "management style" (Hondeghem & Nelen 2000).

Powerful masculine culture exists in the management and a "cultural connection between power and masculinity" correlates (Connell, 2006:842). Moreover, as gender equality is now an extensively "time-honored goal" in public administration, for persuasion of this goal gender managements of the organization especially public organization are needed to be realized. Therefore, an "approach" is necessary which is "informed by modern research on gender and helpful for policy and practice" (Connell, 2006). Keeping it in mind, this article has tried to take an endeavor to realize perception of gender discrimination against female officials, to find out nature and consequence of gender discrimination and to know officials and organization's behavior towards gender issue in the workplace with expectation of having transparent idea for effective policy implications.

Perceptual Views of Gender Discrimination in the Workplace

Because of stereotype or traditional belief, still it is perceived that the outer world is for men where they will compete with "aggression and rationality" and the home is a women's world full of "tenderness and loyalty". Men feel they are the protector of women and on such grounds, they set aside women from jobs which do not suit them (McAlmunt, 2006). Therefore, this stereotype belief creates gender based occupational segregations and in result, "horizontal segregation"¹ or "vertical segregation"² is observed in the workplace. Top management require more controlled situations and commanding voices but women because of their socialization process would rather request than order which give them the trouble of mismatching "tender and tough personality of femininity/competence bind" (Jamieson, 1995). Our culture can also not tolerate and adjust to femininity and toughness in one personality (Oakley, 2000). Thus, social expectations and image creates a problem with female managers (Spender, 1980). While women communicate, they are conceived as less rational, more sensitive and more straight-forward. Men are more confident than women and it is considered a good quality

¹ Horizontal segregation: the tendency of men and women to be employed in different occupations (e.g. construction workers or teachers).

² Vertical segregation: the tendency of men and women to be employed in different positions within the same occupation or occupational group (e.g. the majority of school heads may be men while the majority of teachers are women). (Zambian Governance Foundation, 2010,p.9).

leadership but when women want to be confident, it is treated as "aggressive". However, "caring", "cooperating" and "connecting" are the characteristics of women which are often devalued in the workplace. "Masculinist culture (operating within a masculine framework)" dominates the workplace and gender difference generally underestimates the work of women (Peters, 2002). So, women being aliens' need to be proved themselves as leader with authoritativeness at the same time as women with tenderness and this complexity causes failure of women (Rudman, 1998). Therefore, women get experiences of lack of adjustment in the workplace, which create discrimination against them and in result they lost promotional opportunities linked to perceptions of merit in the corporate culture. They also face marginalization, isolation, tokenism, and treated 'differently' as a woman (Peters, 2002). Hence, in most countries, there is no legal barrier of women's access to professions but cultural biases against them still exist (ILO Public Service, 2006).

Women are inclined to attain lower status, less salary and lower authority, rather than giving orders they are habituated to carrying out orders (Zambian Governance Foundation, 2010). Thus, although women are entering more in the civil service, they may not ascend to top most decision making posts (McAlmot, 2006). Helena Dennison, chair of the City Women's Network, UK, said that women are also responsible for less inclination of seeing their wages rise and less confident about their ability to reach to decision making posts. She also said that the reason of this less inclination and undermining themselves are because of different upbringing between men and women. In turn, being affected by the "Cinderella Complex", woman still like to dream of having a prince in her life who will take care of her, even when she reach to the peak, ("Women's Workplace War," 2000). However, "occupational cultures" and "socialization" may teach men and women in a similar way that women are different and inferior (Michael and Pease, 2005). In fact, "gender patterns" we observe, originates from the society through "media and popular culture" and this "social construction of gender" are influenced in family and workplace (Peters, 2002).

Women in the public service face gender discriminations due to psychological perception of men's "privilege"³. Because of "invisible

³ Privilege: systematically conferred advantages individuals enjoy by virtue of their membership in dominant groups with access to resources and institutional power that are beyond the common advantages of marginalized citizens (Bailey 1998 in Michael and Pease 2005)).

privilege"⁴ some group of employees do not care about women's disadvantaged positions. "Normalized Privilege"⁵ is observed in "cultural and organizational settings of men's monopolization" of the top position of public service. In every aspect of organization such as position of offices, "power dressing," "work clothing" etc are associated between organizational power and masculinity. Managers need to be "task oriented" and "authoritative" which neutralize male dominance and marginalize women as it is believed that new knowledge and skill come to a masculine form which demands women's exclusion from professionalism of the public sector. Group of "entitlement Privilege"⁶ think existing inequalities are "legitimate" and "natural" (Michael & Pease, 2005).

Nature of Gender Discrimination in the Workplace

Wage gaps are a distinct form of gender discrimination between men and women employees in the job sector (Kyser, 2008; McAlmont, 2006; Zambian Governance Foundation, 2010). However, gender discriminations are found in three areas. First, "recruitment" where gender discrimination in terms of "stereotypical job description", "non-diverse selection committees" and "lack of hiring accountability" were observed. Most women do not want to apply for the jobs

Due to "lack of support for spouse employment", "gender insensitive interviewing practices", "limiting the number of women in specific occupation groups", and "lack of benefits" such as maternity leave, flexi time and flexi place etc. Second is "parity in carrier development

⁴ Invisible Privilege: Members of this privileged group are unaware of other's in access to the benefits they have and uninterested to admit of marginalized group. The men who are willing to agree that women are in disadvantaged position and discriminated against are not that much agreed of their comparative privilege (Michael and Pease, 2005).

⁵ Normalized Privilege: When the characteristics of dominant group become the basis for measuring success and failure then it is normalized privilege for that group. Powerful gendered construction of occupation is an example of such kind of privilege in the work place. Various occupations are assumed to be held and practiced by men and deviation from this is marked as 'other' (Michael and Pease, 2005). For example, resistance to entry of women into western Australia Police Service, some male police officer asserts that the public's mental image of a police officer is male?(Evelin and Harwood, 2003, in Michael and Pease, 2005).

⁶ Entitlement Privilege: Privileged groups have sense of entitlement to the privileges they enjoy. If it is denied to them they often shocked and anger. They thought that it is their right to be respected, acknowledged, protected and rewarded (Michael & Pease, 2005).

opportunities and compensation" where "subtle" and often "unconscious biases" negatively influence women's performance evaluation. In comparison to men, women are often not recognized or appreciated for their contributions or capabilities. Third is "retention" where retaining women employment is difficult. For example, family responsibility may create difficulties to the retention of female employees (Merill & Scherr, 2001). Women are discriminated in various ways, such as they are often underrepresented in the decision making process, they do not get equal opportunities of training and career advancement and they have to use male biased language in the workplace. Employers also discriminate against women in recruitment, being influenced by stereotype belief that women are unsuitable for certain jobs. However, work place policies are often found gender blind (Zambian Governance Foundation, 2010).

Sexual harassment is not only gender discrimination (Bosh, 2010; AWARE, 2008) but also an occupational hazard and a violation of human rights. It is unwelcomed, undignified and it undermines women in the workplace. It includes rape and verbal sexual harassment such as being addressed by unwelcome or offensive terms, forced listening of dirty jokes, insulting sounds. It also includes visual sexual harassment such as emails, messages and SMS which contain unwelcome words, unwelcome looks etc. and physical sexual harassment such as unwelcome touching (AWARE, 2008). Because of pregnancy or family responsibility many women in the work place fall prey to discriminatory practices like dismissals, missed promotions, posting to inferior jobs even after returning from pregnancy leave. However, gender discrimination is not always visible in the workplace; it can also be invisible like job segregation or workplace culture (Charlesworth, 2007; Sousa & Gauthier, 2008).

Many barriers against women take place in the public sector especially, denying higher management positions to women is one of the most important examples of gender discrimination against women in the public sector (DPSA, 2006; Commonwealth Secretariat, 1999). The Wall Street Journal (1986) in DPSA (2006) identified some factors of glass ceiling⁷ in public sector such as: employment rules, regulations and performance evaluation systems that are male biased and women cannot develop their

⁷ Glass Ceiling: An invisible and artificial barrier that militates against women's access to top decision-making and managerial positions, arise mainly from a persistent masculine bias in an organizational culture. The glass ceiling is a prime example of discrimination against women and it exists because:

skill because of lack of training opportunity. Family responsibilities of being mother and wife, and negative perceptions on women's leadership abilities are also major barriers for women to perform better and to reach higher management. According to the 1994 World Survey, three barriers were found that cause less presence of women in decision making levels in the public sectors. Those are: "predominantly male culture of management", "continuing current effects of past discrimination", "lack of recognition of women's actual and potential contribution to economic management" (DPSA, 2006). With reference of different studies, it has been observed that USA female police officers experience different types of gender issues in the workplace. It can be classified as internal barriers and external barriers against women in the workplace. Less important transfers, work place stress, unwanted sex jokes are considered as internal barriers. A conflict between work schedules and household schedules is an important example of external barrier. However, for this schedule mismatch, tokenism and negative evaluation often hampers the fate of women employees (Sousa & Gauthier, 2008). In the civil service of Guyana, numbers of women at lower positions are decreased as pay, status and levels are increased. Nevertheless, women might not dominate top management. Women in the civil service, due to unpaid and unvalued work of family care and family subsistence are over burdened in the working arena. Men can associate among themselves outside of work such as playing games, going to the gym or having drinks together. This grouping helps to advance their career while women render time to their family responsibilities and for this reason, women cannot work after office hours and in consequence, they cannot attain promotion and managerial positions. Moreover, because of maintaining male working time schedules, women get problems of adjustment in the workplace. Lack of bathroom/washroom facilities and day care facilities also affect women's concentration, productivity and performance. Spousal abuse is treated as private concern and is discouraged from being brought up in professional life, even though it affects productivity and performance of women (McAlmont, 2006). A common voice often heard that in the public sector equal opportunity already exists and "it doesn't matter whether somebody is a man or women as long as the person is qualified." However, it is observed that formal equality has been achieved but in practice, equality has not been achieved. Still in the public sector, direct discriminations such as wage gaps and vertical and horizontal job segregations prevail. Women hold more temporary and part time jobs than men and has an adverse effect on women's careers. More indirect

gender discriminations or external barriers persist now a day in the public sector. For example, women have to bear more child care responsibilities and they cannot take personal decisions independently because of societal relationships and norms. Organizational culture and sometime rules & regulations emphasize gender inequality in the public sector as internal barriers (Hondegheem & Nelen, 2000).

Consequence of Gender Discrimination in the workplace

Family responsibilities, childrearing and fewer promotional opportunities hamper many women's career development. Women's multiple roles at work and in the family cause them suffering from stress and fatigue (Zambian Governance Foundation, 2010). "If stressful conditions continue for many months or years, serious chronic illnesses can develop (WWEF, 1981)" Many organizations hire more men than women, by thinking that, women's physical condition and more social responsibility are against work culture and this negative mentality affects women's performance in the workplace. Gender discrimination affects not only women's performance but also affects performance of the organization (Bosh, 2010). Gender discrimination against women, affects work environment with "mistrust" "suspicious", "resentment", "hostility", "rivalry" and "formation of cliques" among the employees which is harmful for maintaining a good relationship. Good relationship among men and women employees in the workplace are required to build up teamwork in order to smooth functioning of the organization which ultimately increase productivity of the organization. Moreover, victim being discriminated feels 'unworthy' and may get depressed. This depression may also affect one's family and workplace or vice versa. Hence, gender discrimination is affecting individual, organization as well as society (Nayab, 2010).

Potential for Reducing Gender Discrimination in the Workplace

The Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) in preparation of "gender and diversity program" found that changes in some intervention areas of the workplace are necessary to maintain a gender fair environment. Those interventions areas are; "Formal Policies and Procedures": where a policy is necessary to include grade placement, pay and promotion, maternity and paternity benefits, unbiased performance evaluation and protection from sexual harassment. For balancing family and work life, policy should include maternity, paternity leave, spousal employment, marriage between staff, personal and work

responsibilities e.g. flexible work hours, flexible workplace, companion travel and communications to home especially for women since they are performing the major part of domestic responsibility. "Informal Work Norms and Practices": where to bring organizational effectiveness and efficiency, traditional masculine attributes of "individuality, rationality and independence" need to be balanced with women's attributes of "caring, connection and emotionality". In order to make this balanced work atmosphere, daily work practices, such as hours of work, structure and management of meetings, work planning processes, and means of staff communication need to be revised; keeping in mind that scheduled meeting after office work tends to serious problem especially to women and informal rather than formal networks help women release job stress. "Staff Knowledge and Skills": where manager, officers and all staff need to perceive gender issues as they affect staff meetings, recruitment interviews, performance evaluations, work planning, and conflict resolution. Women need support to develop leadership roles and management quality through training and mentoring. "Leadership": where government needs to promote women into senior and middle management positions and provide the support required for their success. For developing leadership quality among women, seniors need to do periodic assessment of gender issues with respect to progress, identify problems and strategic challenges that arise. For accelerating women leadership and gender balanced atmosphere, seniors/managers should also be rewarded (Merill & Scherr, 2001).

Finland prepared a plan for gender sensitive work environment. Some measurements recommended in that plan will be included such as: adjustment of job description, prioritizing minor group preparing application procedure and adjustment of work and family life will be included. In the plan, according to ability and inclination, women and men will be evenly divided in all professions. Every employer must promote equality irrespective of their gender in every aspect and with this view; issues are to be examined through recruitment and employment ratio of men and women. If women employee's ratio is less, initiative will be taken to increase and if possible "women's proportion in male-dominated jobs and men's proportion in female-dominated jobs" will be included. Career development and task rotation will be equal for both men and women employee. Education and training required for job will be considered to be equal. Nature of employment relationships will be examined. Working environment could be examined in terms of pay, fringe benefits, management, and reconciliation of work, family and

private life, use of working hour arrangements in support of employees, work conditions, social premises, sexual harassment and attitudes to gender equality (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, 2005).

A set of the case studies in Australia called "Harsh Reality 2" has been drawn from a file sued under "Federal Sex Discrimination Act 1984". In that set, 17 case studies detailed real life examples of sex based discrimination, pregnancy discrimination and sexual harassment in the workplace. Thus, some recommendations raised, such as "Pregnant and Productive: It's a right not a privilege to work while pregnant" which concerns urgent need for "education", "guidance" and "awareness raising programs around pregnancy and work" with beliefs that if rights and responsibilities are respected by all; working relationship will bring better results. Another recommendation is "Stretching Flexibility" which "examines the impact on women workers of demands to work increasingly flexible hours and changes to working time arrangements being negotiated in enterprise agreements." Other recommendation "Glass Ceilings and Sticky Floor"⁸ which states women are in position of lower grade and part time job with limited opportunity of training and advancement. Thus, both managerial and non managerial women staffs who are affected by "glass ceiling and sticky floor" need to be included in gender awareness programs and developments plans through examination of lateral and vertical carrier path (Workplace Issues, n.d.). Discrimination on the basis of sex was first addressed in the federal law of USA in the "Equal Pay Act of 1963". After being passed of that act, several other laws related to the rights of women have been enacted. Those are: "Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964", "The Civil Rights Act of 1991", "Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (Title IX)", "The Pregnancy Discrimination Act of 1978" and "The Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993" (CWA, Lambda Legal Defense Education Fund & NOW, n.d.). United Kingdom tried to adjust gender discrimination in the workplace through "Sex discrimination Act 1975", "Human Rights Act 1998" and "Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations" (Connolly, 2005).

However, congenial atmosphere by increasing "cultural awareness" is necessary where "Masculine and feminine" models can coexist and "operate in synergy" (Claes, 1999). Many organization transformed their

⁸ The "sticky floor? can be viewed as the opposite scenario of the "glass ceiling? when the gaps widen at the bottom of the wage distribution. Booth et al. (2003) defined it as a situation arising where otherwise identical men and women might be appointed to the same pay scale or rank, but the women are appointed at the bottom (Kee, 2005).

typical masculine structures and norms to flexible work environment. Thus, an emphasis on teamwork and positive employee development requires for both "typically feminine" and "typically masculine styles" (Hahn & Litwin, 1995).

Conclusion

From the study of perceptual view on gender discrimination in the workplace, it is observed that due to stereotype beliefs gender discriminatory nature of job segregations confine women in the society with some specific nature. Some false traditional beliefs about women's work efficiency are also embedded in the workplace which also creates gender discrimination in the workplace. For these traditional beliefs, when women enter into challenging and risky occupations sometimes are not welcomed by their male colleagues and may face a masculine culture which might be in turn related to various forms of gender discriminations in the work place.

Men being influenced by the socialization process and masculine work culture, think that women are not capable of doing all types of jobs and not capable of attaining higher posts or good leaders due to lack of some attributions. Therefore, they treat women employees as inferior in the workplace. On the other hand, for same socialization process, women become unaware of their disadvantaged position in the workplace. Even, they suffer from "Cinderella Complex" as they like to be taken care of by their solvent husbands in every aspect of their life and they are more interested or bound to take entire family responsibilities. This social dependence style of women on men provokes women to believe on their less confidence and to be felt inferior compared to men in the workplace. For this reason, though more women are entering into the job, they do not take their jobs seriously, so, attain mostly low paid, low status jobs and hold very few top ranking or decision making posts. Moreover, due to dependent grown up style and masculine work culture, women feel like 'alien' while they come to the outer world. Social and cultural structure also make them double burdened with family and work responsibility, in effect, they become over pressured, discomfort and isolated in the work place, therefore, they cannot show their full potential. Hence, being treated inferior and disrespected, women experience various types of inter linked gender issues in the workplace. It is distinctly articulated how privileged groups (male employees) in the public sector perceive or psychologically pursue their opportunities. In the public sector, it is observed that some male employees are unaware of the privileges they

are getting, so, they do not think of minor group's (women) disadvantaged position. Some male employees think organizational culture should be male dominated because of their natural advantaged positions in the society or some group think it is their right to be more privileged than women employees. Therefore, gender relationship due to negative perceptions on women reflects gender discrimination in the workplace and these negative perceptions are originated from stereotype or traditional beliefs, social and cultural restrictions and psychological thinking of men.

It is observed that in the workplace as well as in the public service both internal and external barriers women face. In case of internal barriers identified problem areas are: ?gender insensitive recruitment policy and In service discrimination such as: wage gap, performance evaluation, sexual harassment, pregnancy discrimination, less participation of women in decision making or less opportunity in leading, low paid job, attitudinal or verbal harassment, lack of proper work facilities and gender insensitive policies are mostly mentioned. In case of external barriers, identified problems are: ?Family responsibility and ?Spousal abuse. However, external and internal both types of barriers may dominate the public sector's gender issue. Since, all over the world, public sector holds major share of women's employment, so, gender inequality should not be a negligible issue in this sector. Because of gender discrimination women's health hazards geared up and their performance decline, so glass ceiling affects their carrier. Women, now a days are entering more in the job sector so if their performance is hampered because of gender issue, entire organization will be sufferer in terms of low output. In other words, gender fair environment in the workplace is necessary for individual and organizational well functioning which will ultimately lead to overall better performance of the organization. Therefore, effect of gender discrimination should not be ignored in the workplace.

It is further observed that specific measurements have been taken in various countries and in international organizations to change traditional masculine work culture by replacing with modern concepts of flexible work culture through melting masculine and feminine attributions where both men and women are assumed to be comfortable. Thus it is realized that a gender plan or policy including some effective measures, in both formal and informal areas, is necessary to maintain a gender fair environment in the workplace which will lead to increase performance of women as well as organization.

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