

Discrimination against Women in the Workplace

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Abstract. Although China has made great progress in women's equality, the awareness of gender equality continues to improve, Chinese contemporary environment has given women more job hunting and employment opportunities, but women still suffer from a lot of gender discrimination in job hunting and employment, resulting in female employment is seriously hindered the low employment rate. The influence of gender stereotypes and the unique physiological characteristics of women are the main reasons that make women suffer discrimination in job hunting and employment. The study highlights the persistent gender pay gap as the main discrimination women face in the job market. Women are often paid less than men, despite having the same educational background and qualifications. This pay inequality reflects a deep-seated gender bias against women. Biased hiring also contributes to discrimination against women in the workplace. Addressing these issues requires implementing policies that promote gender equality in employment, encouraging employers to adopt diversity and inclusion initiatives, and valuing women's rights. Educational programs and campaigns to promote a more inclusive work environment. By fostering a culture of gender equality, we can fully tap the potential of the female labor force, thereby improving social productivity and promoting economic growth. Discrimination against women in the workplace is a complex issue that requires concerted and multifaceted efforts from all sectors of society. By addressing the root causes of discrimination and taking positive measures to achieve fair employment in the workplace, we will provide an economic catalyst for the sustainable development of society.

Keywords: Discrimination; gender; gender stereotypes.

1. Introduction

Gender discrimination in the workplace is a pervasive problem that seriously impedes progress toward inclusive economic growth with gender equality. Despite breakthroughs in women's rights and increased awareness of gender bias, women still face various forms of discrimination in professional life. This paper aims to explore the challenges and consequences of gender discrimination, revealing women's experiences of discrimination in the workplace and its impact on society as a whole.

The workplace should be a space for everyone to thrive, contribute, and advance based on their skills, qualifications, and strengths. However, for many women, the prevalence of sexism makes this ideal difficult to achieve. Gender discrimination refers to the different treatment, prejudice, and unfair practices that women experience solely because of their gender. It manifests itself in a variety of forms, including but not limited to the gender pay gap, biased hiring and promotion practices, sexual harassment, and reproductive discrimination.

The gender pay gap is one of the most obvious manifestations of gender discrimination. Despite having the same qualifications and experience, women tend to earn less than men. This wage gap not only affects women's economic well-being, it also reflects entrenched gender biases and social norms that undervalue women's contributions to the workforce. This persistent gap not only perpetuates economic inequality but also impacts women's overall career trajectory and their ability to accumulate wealth and achieve financial independence.

Biased hiring and promotion practices are another important aspect of workplace sexism. Women often face preconceived notions about their abilities, commitment, and suitability for certain roles. These biases result in male applicants being given preference over equally or more qualified female applicants. As a result, women are often denied employment opportunities and have limited career

prospects. The "glass ceiling effect" refers specifically to the invisible barriers that prevent women from entering senior leadership positions in companies. This not only limits women's career advancement but also perpetuates gender inequality in decision-making processes and the distribution of power within companies.

Sexual harassment is a distressing reality for many women in the workplace. It includes unwanted sexual advances, comments, or actions that create a hostile or intimidating environment. Sexual harassment not only violates women's rights, but it also has a serious impact on their well-being, job satisfaction, and overall career trajectory. All sectors of society must develop clear policies and procedures to prevent and address sexual harassment, provide support and protection to victims, and foster a culture of respect and dignity.

Maternity discrimination is another hidden form of gender discrimination that women often face in the workplace [1]. Balancing work and family responsibilities can be challenging, and women can experience prejudice and discrimination when they are pregnant or on maternity leave. Reproductive discrimination can take the form of reduced job opportunities, limited career prospects, or even outright dismissal. Such discrimination not only affects women's career development but also perpetuates gender stereotypes and reinforces traditional gender roles. Implementing family-friendly policies, such as flexible working arrangements and parental leave, can support work-life balance and mitigate the negative effects of maternity discrimination.

In conclusion, gender discrimination in the workplace is a complex issue that requires a comprehensive effort by individuals, companies, and policymakers to address and eliminate. By understanding the challenges and consequences of gender discrimination, we can develop strategies and policies that promote gender equality and create diverse and inclusive work environments. Achieving gender equality in the workplace is not only a matter of social justice, but it is also a catalyst for sustainable economic development. By empowering women and eliminating discriminatory practices, we can build a more equitable and prosperous future for all.

The rest of this paper is divided into literature reviews and concluding remarks on the gender pay gap, biased hiring and promotion, and sexual harassment.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Definition of Gender Discrimination

Gender discrimination refers to unreasonable discrimination based on human biological sex and social sex. There are two main forms of sexism in the workplace - explicit and implicit. From the perspective of the universality of gender discrimination, all kinds of state-owned, private, joint venture, and foreign-funded enterprises have gender discrimination in employment and gender discrimination in promotion, and there is no significant difference in the degree of discrimination [2]. Women are greatly affected by gender discrimination in the workplace, which is mainly manifested in salary inequality, employment, and promotion difficulties, workplace sexual harassment, and reproductive discrimination.

2.2. Gender Pay Gap

The gender pay gap is an issue that has long plagued women in the workplace, reflecting society's deep-rooted gender bias against women and undervaluing their contributions. Despite our efforts to promote gender equality, women still earn less on average than men in almost all occupations and industries. This wage gap not only perpetuates economic inequality but also hinders women's career development and economic independence, affecting women's social development.

One of the main factors contributing to the wage gap between men and women is occupational segregation. Women tend to be concentrated in lower-paying industries and occupations, while men dominate in higher-paying fields. This occupational segregation is influenced by social expectations, stereotypes, and prejudices that steer women towards traditionally "female" roles and prevent them from pursuing careers in male-dominated fields [3]. As a result, women are overrepresented in sectors

such as education, health care, and social work, which tend to pay less than more male-represented sectors such as finance, technology, and engineering.

Even in the same occupations, women earn less on average than men. This can be attributed to a variety of factors, including but not limited to discriminatory pay practices, negotiation gaps, and unconscious bias. Research has shown that women are chronically subliminally influenced by society and are less likely than men to negotiate their pay, resulting in lower initial pay and subsequent wage increases. In addition, unconscious biases and stereotypes about women's abilities and commitment may influence employers' perceptions and decisions about pay. These biases can lead to lower pay packages for women and fewer opportunities for raises and promotions.

Another factor contributing to the gender pay gap is the impact of the "motherhood penalty" on women's earnings. The "motherhood penalty" refers to the negative impact of motherhood on women's wages and career advancement [4]. To fulfill their caring responsibilities, women often interrupt their careers or reduce their working hours, resulting in lower earnings and limited opportunities for advancement. Women are often asked about their marital status during the job search process, which has led many companies to reject female applicants [5]. In addition, prejudice and stereotyping of working mothers can lead to discriminatory treatment in the workplace, such as when such employees are more likely to be dismissed during downsizing.

Closing the gender pay gap requires a multi-pronged approach. First, companies must adopt transparent and fair pay practices. This includes conducting regular pay audits to identify and address any gender pay gaps. Pay transparency can also play a vital role in promoting fairness, as it gives employees a better understanding of how their pay compares to that of their colleagues and can help identify and correct any unjust pay discrepancies [6].

It is also crucial to promote gender equality in education and career guidance. Encourage girls to pursue science and engineering education to break down gender stereotypes and increase women's representation in high-paying fields. Providing guidance and support to women throughout their careers can also help them overcome barriers and facilitate their progress.

In addition, policies that support work-life balance, such as affordable childcare, flexible working arrangements, and parental leave, are critical to reducing the "mother penalty"[7]. These policies enable women to balance work and family responsibilities and help mitigate the negative impact of caregiving on women's earnings and career development.

The gender pay gap requires a comprehensive effort to address. It is not only a matter of economic justice, but also a reflection of social norms and biases that undervalue women's contributions. By promoting fair pay practices, breaking down occupational segregation, and implementing supportive policies, we can work to close the gender pay gap and create a more equitable and inclusive workplace for all.

2.3. Biased Hiring and Promotion

Biased hiring and promotion practices are a major cause of gender discrimination in the workplace. Women face preconceived notions and prejudices in the workplace that limit their access to employment opportunities and hinder their career advancement. These biases have long-term consequences not only for individual women but also for companies and society as a whole. In China, more than 60 percent of employees have experienced that recruitment companies only recruit or preferentially recruit men [8].

One of the main biases in recruitment is the influence of gender stereotypes. Employers may hold certain subjective assumptions about a woman's ability, commitment, and suitability for certain roles. These biases can affect the assessment and selection process, resulting in male applicants being given preference over equally or more qualified female applicants in the same context. For example, studies have shown that women are often perceived as less capable or less committed to their careers because of stereotypes about their caregiving responsibilities at home or because they lack ambition. As a result, women may face obstacles in getting job opportunities and may be overlooked for promotions.

Another biased hiring and promotion practice is the informal networks and relationships that exist within companies, often dominated by men. These networks and relationships may influence decision-making processes related to hiring and promotion. For example, this results in preferential treatment for male candidates who are part of networks, while women may be excluded or face difficulties accessing these networks [9]. This exclusion can limit women's visibility, mentoring opportunities, and access to critical information and resources needed to advance their careers.

Biased hiring and promotion practices can have far-reaching consequences. Women may face limited opportunities for career advancement, the so-called "glass ceiling effect"[10]. This invisible barrier prevents women from reaching senior leadership positions in companies. A lack of gender diversity in leadership not only hinders women's career advancement, it also perpetuates gender inequality in decision-making processes and the distribution of power within companies.

Biased hiring and promotion practices can also have an impact on company performance and innovation. Research consistently shows that diverse teams and leadership are associated with improved decision-making, creativity, and problem-solving. By excluding or restricting women from decision-making positions, companies miss out on the diverse perspectives and talents that women bring to the table, hampering innovation and limiting their ability to adapt to a changing business environment.

In addition, unconscious bias plays an important role in biased hiring and promotion practices. These biases are automatic, unintentional, and based on deeply held stereotypes and assumptions that the individual may not even be aware of. For example, research has shown that both men and women may hold biases that link leadership qualities to masculine traits, leading to the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions [9]. From resume screening to performance reviews, these unconscious biases affect decision-makers at all stages of the hiring and promotion process, perpetuating gender disparities.

Addressing biased hiring and promotions requires implementing policies and practices that promote diversity and inclusion. This includes developing clear and objective criteria for evaluating candidates, providing unconscious bias training for decision-makers, and implementing diversity quotas or targets to ensure fair representation. In addition, companies should actively work to create an inclusive culture that values and supports diversity, provide mentorship and sponsorship programs for women, and increase transparency and accountability in the hiring and promotion process.

In addition, individuals also have a role to play in challenging prejudice and promoting equality. This includes being aware of their own biases, advocating for fair and inclusive practices in the workplace, and supporting women's career development through mentoring and sponsorship.

2.4. Sexual Harassment in the Workplace

Sexual harassment in the workplace is a serious problem that hurts employees' mental health and career development. In 1976, a U.S. federal court recognized sexual harassment as sex discrimination for the first time. Sexual harassment takes many forms, including verbal harassment, non-verbal harassment, and physical harassment. Verbal harassment includes unwanted gender-based comments, parodies, sexist jokes, or provocative remarks. Non-verbal harassment can include unwanted gender innuendo, the display of pornographic images or objects, and intrusions into personal space. Physical harassment involves unwanted physical contact, touching, or sexual advances.

The impact of sexual harassment on victims is profound. Victims may experience mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, insomnia, and reduced self-esteem. These issues not only affect an individual's well-being and quality of life but can also negatively impact job performance and career advancement. Victims may feel depressed, helpless, and powerless, resulting in reduced motivation and commitment to work. In addition, sexual harassment can cause victims to feel unsafe and disrespected in the workplace, undermining trust and cooperative relationships among employees.

The existence of sexual harassment also hurts companies and society. First, sexual harassment can lead to employee turnover and high employee turnover rates. Victims may choose to quit their jobs or seek a safer and more respectful work environment, resulting in a brain drain from the company.

Second, sexual harassment can hurt a company's reputation. When sexual harassment comes to light, companies can face public pressure, reputational damage, and lawsuits. Sexual harassment also impedes diversity and inclusion in companies.

To address sexual harassment in the workplace, companies should take proactive measures. First, companies should establish clear anti-sexual harassment policies and ensure that all employees understand and adhere to them. These policies should explicitly prohibit sexual harassment and indicate ways in which victims can seek support and report sexual harassment. Second, companies should provide employee training to increase awareness and understanding of sexual harassment and provide skills and resources to address the problem. In addition, companies should establish effective complaint mechanisms to ensure that victims can safely report sexual harassment and protect their privacy and rights.

Individuals also have a responsibility to be involved in addressing sexual harassment. Colleagues should respect and support each other and not tolerate any form of sexual harassment. If you witness or hear sexual harassment, you should be brave enough to come forward, support the victim, and report the behavior. In addition, individuals can contribute to awareness raising and cultural change by participating in sexual harassment education and awareness campaigns.

3. Conclusion

Women are subjected to social expectations, stereotypes, and prejudices that lead to occupational segregation, preventing them from pursuing careers in male-dominated fields. In addition, social stereotypes weaken women's abilities, resulting in unequal pay for the same work. Women often lose many job opportunities because of the stereotype that they need to devote more energy to caring for their families. Second, the existence of informal, often male-dominated networks and connections within companies results in preferential treatment for male candidates who are part of the network, while women may be excluded or face difficulties accessing these networks, limiting women's visibility, mentorship opportunities, and access to critical information and resources needed for career advancement. In addition, the prevalence of sexual harassment also makes the employment situation of women grim.

Gender discrimination in the workplace makes women who are already vulnerable in the workplace constantly maliciously deprived of the opportunity to compete and develop, and in the long run will suffer physical and mental damage and fall into a bad cycle, which is not only a dilemma for women, but also a serious obstacle to the sustainable economic development of society.

Here are five potential ways to overcome gender discrimination in the workplace.

First, awareness and education. Raise employee and management awareness of gender equality and respect through education and training. Organizations can conduct gender equality training and provide relevant information and resources to promote understanding and respect among employees.

Second, develop and enforce fair policies. Organizations should develop and enforce fair employment policies to ensure that hiring, promotion, and compensation decisions are not influenced by gender discrimination. In addition, effective complaint mechanisms should be established so that employees can report and address gender discrimination.

Third, increase gender diversity: Organizations should actively promote gender diversity by recruiting and promoting more female employees to ensure a more equal and inclusive workplace. In addition, organizations can set up mentorship programs to provide support and development opportunities for female employees.

Fourth, build a culture that supports gender equality. Organizations should build a culture that supports gender equality, encourages employees to share experiences and perspectives, provides equal opportunities to speak, and ensures that all employees are treated with respect and equality. In addition, organizations can develop flexible work arrangements to help employees better balance work and family responsibilities.

Fifth, advocate and cooperate. Individuals and organizations can actively participate in events and organizations that promote gender equality and work with other organizations to advance the gender equality agenda.

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