

Behavioral Research on the Relationship Between Female Employee's Workplace Discrimination and Corporate Social Responsibility

Ruohan Chen¹, Yue Zhu^{2,*}

¹ School of architecture and urban planning, Huazhong university of science and technology, Wuhan, Hubei, 430000, China

² United World College Changshu China, Suzhou, Changshu, Jiangsu, 215500, China

* Corresponding Author Email: yzhu22@uwcchina.org

Abstract. Gender equality as an important social norm should be highly valued and strictly obeyed by the corporation. Nowadays, female employees are playing more and more important roles in the workplace environment. While more and more women are becoming the leaders of teams, members of committees, and CEOs, which show the infinite potential of female power, there are discrimination still exists based on gender. When female employees are seeking opportunities to get hired and promoted, the challenge they face is immeasurable. During the interview, female applicants are more frequently asked questions related to their marital and reproductive status. However, this is a type of gender bias due to women's reproductive roles. Moreover, there is much gender discrimination in the workplace, and it is suppressing female employees. Thus, the corporation needs to set a good example in society as the pioneer in creating a gender-friendly environment. The corporation should implement corporate social responsibility by providing humanistic care and useful sessions to try its best to eliminate gender inequality. The structure of this paper is to point out the challenge of female employees first, conduct in-depth research into the problems of gender discrimination, analyze why the problems exist, and finally provide the solution according to each problem.

Keywords: Gender Equality, Corporate Social Responsibility, Discrimination.

1. Introduction

As an important social principle, Gender equality should be taken seriously as a significant criterion of environmental construction for enterprises. These days, females play more and more irreplaceable roles in workplaces and provide their power in firm issues such as company culture building, team organizing, and researching for projects. However, females are still facing predicaments. Most female job seekers were asked about their marital status during the interview, and the women usually find it less possible to be successful in situations of job promotion, suffering from the stereotype, all of which shows the invisible discrimination for women.

Today female rights should be paid high attention to during the whole process of employment. As an important social subject, enterprises should also undertake social responsibilities while making profits and being responsible for the stockholders. Enterprises should add human rights protection and humanistic care to employees in the formulation process of employee welfare and promotion mechanisms. By incorporating employee development into the 'company's development considerations, the company sticks to the people-oriented concept and assumes the social responsibility of promoting social harmony. In recent years, more and more companies have taken measures to protect the interests of female groups in active gestures, and the theoretical research on protecting the fair interests of female groups in the workplace has also achieved more achievements.

In the research on the protection of 'women's rights and interests under the conditions of industrial and commercial employment, the main research directions include the investigation of the current dilemma of women in the workplace and its background and put forward the obligations of 'women's rights and interests' protection and related social responsibilities that enterprises should undertake based on the Marxist historical view and world view. At the same time, some researchers also choose to analyze the specific cases of the enterprise protection group. From three aspects of society, the

government, the enterprises, and the social organization, the scholar Chai has pointed out that to reach the goal of protecting the legal rights of female groups, the three parts should cooperate. The government should refine the laws and regulations, and the enterprises are supposed to form a female-friendly environment, which contains clarifying expectations for enterprises to respect human rights, increasing market pressure on enterprises to respect human rights, and playing an exemplary role by the government and state-owned enterprises [1].

As an important social subject, enterprises should assume social responsibilities. While achieving profitability, companies should include human rights protection and humanistic care for employees themselves in the formulation process of employee benefits, promotion mechanisms, etc. By incorporating employee development into company development considerations, the company adheres to the people-oriented concept and assumes the social responsibility of promoting social harmony. Today, more and more companies are paying attention to protecting the interests of women, and theoretical research on protecting the fair interests of women in the workplace has also achieved more results. Theoretical research points out the modern connotation of corporate social responsibility and proposes initiatives; at the same time, it points out the plight of contemporary women, the unique role of women in the workplace, and the benefits that a diverse workplace atmosphere brings to individual employees and the company itself. This paper mainly uses China National Knowledge Infrastructure as the literature search engine to integrate, summarize, and refine relevant cases and theoretical research from 2013 to 2023 and analyze the current theoretical research status, corporate implementation cases, and possible future development of corporate entities' care for women in the workplace direction is explained.

The theoretical research scope of this article includes the problems that women may face in the workplace and the role that women play in company construction. It also defines the social responsibilities that companies should bear and concerns about employee human rights and conducts theoretical research on the 'company's responsibility to care for female subjects combined with actual case studies. Finally, based on the analysis, a solution is proposed for enterprises to assume the social responsibility of caring for women in the workplace so that "Her Power" can play a more active role. It calls on companies to give women in the workplace the attention and respect they deserve and protect the work rights and interests of women in the workplace.

2. Case Description

Gender equality is an important principle for protecting the rights and interests of women around the world. Lots of countries regard gender equality as a basic national policy.

Significant results have been achieved in gender equality and the protection of 'women's rights and interests around the world.' 'Laws and regulations protect women's rights and interests. Relevant government organizations and non-governmental voluntary organizations also play an important role in helping women grow and protect themselves. However, with the development of the times, contemporary women are facing new problems in the work environment. According to data from ZHAOPIN 'LTD's "2023 China Women's Workplace Situation Survey Report, the problems faced by women in employment are concentrated in the employer's implicit discrimination caused by marriage and childbearing issues, the reduction of women's individual promotion opportunities and the impact of the workplace environment under the influence of traditional concepts [2]. Suppression of women, and many studies have also shown that issues such as sexual harassment that violate women's rights cannot be ignored.

At the same time, the scholar Wang's research also stated that there are problems with differentiated policy implementation in some regions regarding women's specific employment [3]. Due to differences in economic conditions, some underdeveloped areas are unable to provide women with effective employment policy guarantees in a timely manner. Their female employment support systems also need to be improved. However, due to the lack of authority of relevant social organizations, their employment protection scope for female employees is limited. The effect is

limited. In addition, women's awareness and the public's awareness of participation are also important sources of women's protective power. However, today's women's self-awareness activities have not yet completely gotten rid of the influence of traditional concepts, and overall social participation has yet to be developed.

3. Analysis on the Problem

3.1. Women's Reproductive Functions Led to Lower Expectations from Companies

Many studies have shown that women suffer more discrimination in the workplace because of their reproductive and family responsibilities in traditional social models. According to a McKinsey survey report, "61.2% of women were asked questions about marriage and childbearing such as 'whether they are married' and 'whether they have any plans to have children' when applying for jobs, while only 1/3 of men were asked the same questions" [4]. Whether voluntarily or not, women are given "family responsibilities" by social concepts. Women's physiological characteristics determine that women need more rest during special periods such as menstruation, pregnancy, and lactation. During this period, most women could not or relatively had less investment in corporate work. These specific circumstances have led many companies to consider the additional expenses brought by women when selecting employees, resulting in the bias that women have "high labor costs". Some companies even choose to illegally fire female employees during special periods, which has increased the number of women entering the workplace. How difficult it is to get a promotion. Whether it is the constraints of traditional concepts such as "should bear more family responsibilities" that women themselves are forced to give or the fact that companies ignore women's difficulties and blindly pursue the efficiency of employees to create benefits, it is unreasonable, lacks humanistic care, and is even illegal.

3.2. Bound by Traditional Concepts

Our country regards gender equality as a basic national policy and protects women's rights through legislation. However, the bad mentality of "preferring boys over girls" in today's society is still difficult to eradicate. The constraints and stereotypes on women in traditional thoughts such as "men are at home, and men are at home" and "virtuous and virtuous" have penetrated into many levels of society, subtly affecting women's personality cultivation and self-development. Many women are unable to realize their self-worth under the rules and regulations and are discriminated against and violated.

The influence of traditional gender concepts acts on the construction of femininity. The social environment often disciplines women to develop a "gentle" and "considerate" temperament, while temperaments such as self-confidence are not encouraged [5]. Most of the careers that women are encouraged to pursue are education or public officials. This phenomenon has largely limited women's career choices and career planning horizons, resulting in women's lack of stronger competitiveness in society. In addition, women's self-consciousness construction activities are also negatively affected by traditional thinking and oppressed by social gender inequality. Some women choose to accept the theory that men are stronger than women and become more dependent on men in their thoughts, causing society to strengthen further stereotypes and prejudices against women, thus forming a vicious cycle.

3.3. Women's Education Equality Issues

The issue of female educational equality is reflected in the lack of vocational education for women on the one hand and the discrimination faced by women in their own academic planning on the other. This educational inequality has a negative impact on the cultivation of women's individual abilities. Women lack corresponding career plans and are influenced by the belief that "women should study liberal arts" and "girls are not good at science", making it difficult for them to make more competitive academic choices. In addition, more attention should be paid to the fact that there are still a few areas where compulsory education for school-age girls has not yet been implemented.

3.4. Impact of Relevant Legal Systems

Relevant legal systems, such as the difference in maternity leave time between men and women and the difference in retirement time between men and women, also put women at a disadvantage when it comes to job hunting to a certain extent. National laws and regulations are intended to protect the rights and interests of women, but employers evaluate the cost of employing women because of relevant regulations and prefer to hire men. At the same time, there are also differences in policy implementation in some regions. Due to different economic development conditions in some regions, there is insufficient policy support for women's employment.

3.5. Social Issues of Corporate Social Responsibility and Women's Human Rights Protection

Corporate social responsibility is to undertake social obligations while achieving business goals proactively. As an important part of social harmony and the development of human rights, the protection of women's human rights should be included in the scope of social obligations that enterprises should bear. Our country has protected women's rights and interests through a series of methods. Enterprises should also effectively protect women through corporate regulations, salary and benefit systems, and anti-discrimination regulations. At the same time, they should also focus on strengthening the training and promotion of female employees.

4. Suggestions

4.1. Establishing a Support System or a Welfare Program

Due to the female employees' special reproductive functions, they need more rest when they are during their period or having a baby. Women shouldn't be limited by their reproductive functions and families, and they are supposed to have endless possibilities to achieve career aspirations. What's more, in the research conducted on the employees, the result shows that female employees are more dissatisfied with the work-life balance than male employees [6]. Due to this situation, the corporation can establish a support system or a welfare program to help the female employees find their pace while working to bring a better working experience and achieve higher efficiency. The support system can provide female employees with flexible working hours and remote work options without reducing the workload. The welfare program can provide more humanistic care to stressed female employees, including regular medical check-ups and mental counseling sessions. So female employees can balance their special functions or families between work perfectly. And to make the female employees feel the humanistic care of the corporation and prove themselves free from discrimination.

4.2. Eliminate Gender Discrimination

In the workplace, female employees usually receive discrimination. Their excellent performance in work always gets ignored because they are "women". However, these negative situations made the female employees survive when they were working; they bore more stress from the malicious intent of others. Research data shows that only 12% percent of female employees feel the promotion rates are the same between genders [7]. So, the corporation should promote the concept of gender equality in the workplace to break the traditional stereotype of female employees, including setting some training for employees in promoting the gender equality concept and providing an equal chance for female employees to compete and be promoted in the workplace. Building up transparent criteria for hiring or promotion is necessary as well. In this case, the corporation can easily prevent the employees from judging each other based only on gender. It is also beneficial for the employees to be respectful of each other. Moreover, it can help the corporation create a fair and positive competitive environment, ensure everyone has an equal chance, and let female employees show their talents and abilities.

4.3. Fulfill Education Vacancy and Leadership Experience

During their youth and school life, women receive more negative feedback when they want to study or work on something different or challenging because of gender stereotypes. Which is women aren't supposed to study, the gender, made them not as clever as men. The whole society's environment is suppressing women, so they can't chase their dreams like most men. To solve this problem, the corporation can provide more sponsorship, such as training sessions and career planning lessons, to let the female employees learn that they have incredible and endless possibilities and to build up the courage to achieve their career goals. Furthermore, the corporation should support women in taking leadership roles and make sure the teams are diverse and inclusive. To help the female employees break down the barriers and influence other people. Therefore, more female employees will get inspired by the female leader and gain more confidence in the workplace. These ways can fill the vacancy of education, and female employees won't be limited by gender and their own thoughts anymore. Also, the research shows that a higher percentage of women on the company board of directors can lead to more likely the company appearing in a series of the Most Admired Companies, the Most Ethical Companies, and the Best Companies to Work for Female can make a difference and show their possibilities [8]. Moreover, another research infers that female leaders in the workplace can prevent gender discrimination to a certain degree and can reinforce female power in the workplace [9].

4.4. Provide a Safe Platform and Implement Strict Policies

Although the policies of retirement age aim to gain more welfare for female employees, these laws can't help to eliminate the discrimination against female employees. It will eventually push more people to discriminate against females because of welfare. Also, government policies that prevent sexual harassment can't strongly help eliminate it at all. Most of the female employees face sexual harassment more than once. However, research shows that they often refuse to speak up because female employees are scared of retaliation and lack trust in the reporting system [10]. Despite the fact that the corporation can't help to change the policies, it can develop the rules and systems in the workplace to support female employees. For instance, the corporation can build an equal evaluation and collaboration bridge, a safe platform for people to exchange thoughts or experiences toward gender equality. So, the female employees can speak up bravely about the sexual harassment or the gender discrimination they face. Also, the corporation should have zero tolerance towards any gender stereotypes or sexual harassment. There should be a clear procedure for reporting complaints of sexual harassment or gender discrimination to solve and correct the problems and improve the corporation's working environment continuously. To let female employees have more trust in the corporation. The corporation should also provide courses to female employees to deal with unfair situations bravely or overcome mental issues due to unfair treatment.

5. Conclusion

In summary, the investigation of gender issues in the workplace is common in China. Women face more challenges than men because of the reproductive functions, traditional stereotypes, unbalanced education, and laws that are supposed to bring positive feedback. In addition, this paper examines the situation of female employees and points out the dilemma. Moreover, the suggestions aim to connect corporate social responsibility and promote gender equality in the workplace. The corporation can establish a support system and welfare program, eliminate gender discrimination, fill education vacancies and leadership experience, provide safe platforms, and implement strict policies to deal with the gender equality issue.

Research in the gender-equality field related to the workplace is necessary. With the awakening of women, female employees started to fight for their rights. The business value of this paper is to call for society to notice the terrible situation of female employees and address the gender equality issue. The goal of this paper is to provide a clear way for corporations to implement corporate social

responsibility, and it is useful for every corporation to improve women's status in the workplace and create a warm working environment. It not only benefits the female employees but also increases the reputation of the corporation and brings a better influence to help female employees.

However, some limitations exist in this paper as well. It is hard for a large amount of corporations to implement the suggestions above because there is no supervision. Also, other employees will not be satisfied if the corporation provides female employees with too much welfare. In this case, the corporation needs to implement the policies carefully. Moreover, too much welfare might also cause the negative impact of the female employee's status dropping, the same as the government policies that aim to gain more benefits for women.

Authors Contribution

All the authors contributed equally and their names were listed in alphabetical order.

References

- [1] Chai Xin. Industry and Commerce and Women's Human Rights: The Gender Equality Dimension of Corporate Social Responsibility. *Anti-Discrimination Review*, 2021 (00): 138-151.
- [2] Wang Mengfan. Research on the protection of Chinese women's employment rights and interests under the Marxist View of Women. Yangzhou university, 2022. DOI: 10.27441/d.cnki.gyzdu.2022.000708.
- [3] Bernardi, Richard A., and Veronica H. Threadgill. Women directors and corporate social responsibility. *EJBO: Electronic Journal of Business Ethics and Organizational Studies* (2011).
- [4] McKinsey & Company, Advancing Gender Equality in the Chinese Workplace, 2023.8, 2024.2, Diversity, equality and inclusion – McKinsey Greater China
- [5] Liu Tingting. The emergence and reproduction of gender discrimination in female employment: An Analysis based on the "constructivist" gender theory. *Reform and opening*, 2011 (02): 120-121. DOI: 10.16653/j.cnki.32-1034/f.2011.02.040.
- [6] Russell, Holly, Colleen Fogarty, Susan McDaniel, Elizabeth Naumburg, Anne Nofziger, Tziporah Rosenberg, Mechele Sanders, and Kevin Fiscella. Am I Making More of It Than I Should?": Reporting and Responding to Sexual Harassment. *Family medicine* 53, no. 6 (2021): 408-415.
- [7] Gitit Tomer, Stavra Xanthakos, Sandra Kim, Meenakshi Rao, Linda Book, Heather J Litman, Laurie N Fishman, 2015. Perceptions of Gender Equality in Work-Life Balance, Salary, Promotion, and Harassment. *Science and Public Policy*, Volume 43, Issue 3, June 2016, Pages 386–399. DOI: 10.1097/MPG.0000000000000637.
- [8] Landry, Erynne E., Richard A. Bernardi, and Susan M. Bosco. Recognition for sustained corporate social responsibility: Female directors make a difference. *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management* 23, no. 1 (2016): 27-36.
- [9] Claudio Lucifora & Daria Vigani. What if your boss is a woman? Evidence on gender discrimination at the workplace. *Review of Economics of the Household*, Springer, 2022, vol. 20 (2), pages 389-417, June. DOI: 10.1007/s11150-021-09562-x.
- [10] Mijanur Rahman, Moshiul Azam. Secure Complaint Management System against Women Harassment at Workplace Using Blockchain Technology. *International journal of electrical and computer engineering systems*, 2022, Vol. 13 No. 3, 2022.