

Gender Gap and Present State of Working Women in Corporate Arena: An Overview of Bangladesh Perspective

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Abstract

The landmark of this study is to illustrate the discriminate position of women in corporate sector and tries to unearth some challenges that women usually face in this world. The result shows that women are considered as the secondary workforce in corporate world. In spite of women's great contribution, they are still at low ranks and have to face many problems in their professional career. Gender-balance or women-friendly environment in corporate world is still a myth in our country. So the main objective of this study is to figure out the reason of the untenable position of women in this male dominant field and provide some suggestions to overcome the quandaries that may help to amplify women's participation in corporate sector in near future.

Keywords: Gender Gap, Patriarchal Society, Corporate Sector, Secondary Workforce, Glass ceiling, Women Empowerment.

Introduction

Millennia have passed but women exploitation is still a burning issue in our patriarchal society. Biased attitude and stereotype tradition of our male dominated culture are the main hindrance of women empowerment. Although voice had risen from GO-NGO [Government and Non Government Organization] level to ensure equal opportunity in working sector but virtually we see that these predicaments are enhancing day by day in our society. Even the sophisticated corporate sector is not out of its array.

Being a male dominant field, women usually face a lot of challenges in operating job, especially when they set to prove themselves. Combined with the general consequences of a patriarchal society, women in Bangladesh's corporate world are driven by some additional determinants — How can I get ahead as a woman? How do I manage my life at home alongside my career? How do I deal with the stereotype mentality of management? (Hassan, 2012). Sometimes women face discrimination only for gender stereotypes mentality of male dominated management of corporate company. In most of the cases management is not eager to give them top position or vital post even if they deserve. This is because; there is a common perception that women are less capable than men. Consequently it is quite difficult for women to establish their position in this prospective field.

Objective of the Study

In Bangladesh, we see lack of research on this significant topic. As a result, a lot of women become the victim of discrimination in this so-called sophisticated world. So the main objective of this study is to highlight the challenges women usually face in corporate arena and to provide some recommendations to overcome these.

Methodology

In order to attain the aforesaid objectives this article has used Qualitative method. We reviewed several pertinent articles from internet websites, relevant published research articles, books, newspaper as well as historical records of related agencies etc as a secondary source to find out the actual scenario of working women in corporate world. Beside this, primary data collection process had been continued for a period of three months from the field level study. Primary data is collected from different corporate institute by using inclusive interview method. In terms of applying methodology, a sample of 80 respondents was selected randomly from 20 organizations and tries to bring out a comprehensive analysis of this study. Interviews with the women were assisted by structured questionnaire and informal discussion with them. After data collection, sophisticated statistical software (SPSS) was used to analyze those.

Finding

In Bangladesh gender gap in corporate field is still a new-fangled issue of research. Our society usually considers corporate world to be a very sophisticated sector where men and women get the equal position. But the actual scenario is quite different. Although all employees are presumed to be treated equal in any sector of work, unfortunately this is not always the case in our corporate world. For example, employees have been excluded

from hiring or promotion not because they were unqualified, but simply based on their gender. In this world the working women have to face lots of professional and personal problems in their working situation which is mostly overlooked, excused or denied by their organizations. So the aim of this study is to provide an elaborate analysis on this disregarded issue.

Implications

We hope that this article will help the policy makers, managements of corporate world to understand the challenges of women and to introduce new policies and side by side change existing policies, rules, regulations that creates obstacle for women's empowerment in this world. It may also facilitate the researchers for future research in this field which will surely help women to stronger their position and resist unexpected dropout from corporate world.

Limitations of the study

We faced different barriers when we collected primary data from different corporate organizations. Some authorities (Managers) did not allow us to collect data from their organization in fear of affecting their reputation. Sometime women worker are not eager to share their experience. There is a preconceived idea amongst women that this type of discrimination is usual not only in society but also in their work place. We found that social stigma is the main reason of their introversion. Moreover discrimination in corporate world is not overt. It occurs in a very polished way. So it was very difficult for us to collect extensive data from this sector.

Definition of Corporate World and Gender Discrimination:

Corporate World

Corporate world is usually the environment in large companies. Some hotel chains would be included. It is an interesting world with a lot of politics and stress.

Another Definition

A fast paced busy network of companies in some domain

No margin of error

A very tight schedule for the day

Welcome to corporate world.¹

Gender Discrimination in this World

Gender discrimination occurs when: (1) an employee has been treated differently because of his or her gender, (2) an employee has been excluded from consideration or participation in an opportunity because of his or her gender or (3) an employee has been eliminated from certain activities because of his or her gender.²

Corporate world of Bangladesh:

We found the following arenas as the corporate sectors in Bangladesh.

1. Automobile companies such as Aftab Automobiles , Bangladesh Machine Tools Factory...)
2. Airlines companies (Best Air, Bismillah Airlines, GMG Airlines, Kuwait airways, Regent Airways...)
3. Media companies (ATN Bangla, Banglavisision, NTV, Prothom Alo....).
4. Financial companies (National Bank Limited, Agrani Bank, BRAC Bank, Trust Bank Limited, SIBL Bank, Credit Rating Information and Services Limited {CRISL}, Dhaka Bank Limited...)
5. Notable Pharmaceutical companies (Beximco Pharmaceuticals Ltd, Incepta Pharmaceuticals Limited, Square Pharmaceuticals Ltd, The ACME Laboratories Ltd...)
6. Telecommunications companies (Banglalink, Citycell, Grameenphone ,Robi, Teletalk...)
7. Notable Electronics companies (Grameen Shakti, Rahimafrooz...)
8. Shipbuilding companies (Ananda Shipyard and Shipways, Bangladesh Shipping Corporation, Khulna Shipyard Ltd, Western Marine Shipyard.....)³

Present State of Women in Corporate world: A Comparative Outline

Young's global government and public sector leader Uschi Schreiber said, "Fewer women reach the highest position in corporate sectors". We realized her saying when we studied

¹ <http://answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20080120221224AA5W7M4>

² http://www.allisontaylor.com/wrongful_termination/gender_discrimination.asp

³ <http://bangla.desh.mobi/corporate-world-of-bangladesh.aspx>

Corporate Gender Gap Report of World Economic Forums.

The World Economic Forum's 'Corporate Gender Gap Report 2010' is based on a survey of 600 of the heads of Human Resources at the world's largest employers. "The findings of The Corporate Gender Gap Report are an alarm bell on International Women's Day that the corporate world is not doing enough to achieve gender equality. While a certain set of companies in Scandinavia, the US and the UK are indeed leaders in integrating women, but the idea that most corporations have become gender-balanced or women-friendly is still a myth. That means, even today women in many reputed and well-known companies face challenges and discrimination only for their gender.

For example, Wal-Mart was charged with discrimination against its female employees in compensation, promotions and job assignments in violation of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VII). Moreover, Wal-Mart had for long been accused of not treating its female employees in a socially responsible manner. So it is quite clear that throughout the world, women face difficulties or challenges in this male dominant field.

Before going to in-depth analysis on Bangladesh perspective, to make our article more comprehensible and rational we ought to depict a comparative outline of women's position in corporate world. In a glance, we get a clear picture of women's position in corporate management of different countries from the following chart:

Chart: 1.1

Countries Name	Percentage of Women in Corporate Management
Canada	35.4%
USA	51.5%
England	12%
Norway	40%
Japan	24%
Turkey	26%
India	23%
Pakistan	20%

Source: The Global Gender Gap Report 2010, World Economic Forum.

In Canada, women comprised 35.4% of all management positions and 22.9% of all senior management positions in corporate world. In 2006, visible minority women made up only 7% of management positions. Although Canadian women's position has been solidifying in corporate world but it is not yet satisfactory.

In USA, women comprised 51.5% of management, professional and related positions while women made up 46.9% of the labor force. Surely it shows an upward trend of women's empowerment in this promising world.

In England, women currently made up 45% of the workforce, however, only 12% women comprise corporate executive positions. It's obviously a frustrating picture for the developed countries in Europe.

But we see a major exception **In Norway** where the percentage of women among boards of directors is above 40% for the majority of respondents. This is due to a government regulation that mandates a minimum of 40% of each gender on the boards of public companies

In Japan and Turkey, women only occupied 24% and 26% of the total workforce in corporate field respectively. That means a limited number of women work in this sector.

In third world countries like India and Pakistan a good number of women are now working at corporate world.

In India according to the data of the survey of World economic forum 2006, only 23% position is occupied by women in the corporate field. But the percentage has been increasing day by day. For example now, ICICI Bank, Axis Bank, HSBC Bank are all run by women.¹

In Pakistan in the same way women are explicitly working in a number of banks including Habib Bank, First women Bank, State Bank of Pakistan and other corporate companies. However, it cannot be overlooked that even today, working women in Pakistan face various problems by the opposite gender. Women are still considered as a dependent gender in their society.

But it is so exemplary that despite facing this discrimination, women are not lagging behind in any way as compared to their opposite gender. The last decades has witnessed an impressive rise of women as a potential workforce in corporate world. Now the working woman's future 'dreams' are not only obtaining independence but also advancing in their respective careers. They are working as board members, managers, senior officers, marketing officers etc in corporate field. Obviously it shows a prospective growth of women employment.

Woman's position in corporate world: Bangladesh Perspective

Now a day's Bangladeshi women have become more career oriented. Consequently Bangladesh has made a huge

¹ [The Global Gender Gap Report 2010, World Economic Forum.](http://www.weforum.org/issues/corporate-gender-gap)

<http://www.weforum.org/issues/corporate-gender-gap>

progress in women empowerment. A good number of women choose corporate sector for its lucrative salary, constructive atmosphere and for other facilities. Today women are working as bankers, telecom professionals, airways company's professionals, journalist etc or running their own ventures quite successfully. Hence it is clear that women are not lagging behind anymore, though they are facing hardships and challenges every day (Safeen, 2008).

Obviously it is no doubt an optimistic achievement. But at the same time it cannot be overlooked that even today in corporate world, our women face various problems only for gender differences. Actually our centuries old patriarchal society has created the formidable barriers for women to move forward in their respective profession. Women are considered as the inferior workforce in that sector. Biased attitude of management, non cooperation from male co-worker, inadequate maternity leave, no child care centre, inflexible working hour are the main quandaries to operate their job smoothly in this field.

Although women have a lot of potentiality to uphold leadership but managements of corporate world are not very eager to accept their attributes. The biggest barriers women face to access the leadership positions are general norms, masculine or patriarchal corporate culture and lack of role models (Jakobsh, 2004). In corporate world Women's position is just like a pyramid. Here huge portion of women are recruited at the base but very few manage to reach the top. This is not for their incapability but of course for the hindrance lying in this sector.

Moreover sometime corporate world do not create supportive environment for their female employee. For instance, The Bangladesh Bank data showed that only one bank has so far set up childcare unit but other banks are ignoring Bangladesh Bank circulars. In addition to that, 25 Banks had not arranged any transport facilities for the female staff and only 9 banks initiated arranging awareness training on gender issue (Uddin, 2013). So with these limitations; it is quite difficult for a woman to establish her position in this very world.

Despite all the hindrances, the situation is far better than the past decades. By facing hardship of life & job quite successfully, now they are more confident to challenge the world. Few years back working women only meant to teach at schools. But today the scenario has totally changed. Now huge portion of women are working in banks, telecommunications, airways, shipbuilding companies, media world and other corporate organizations. They have already began to show their efficiency by keeping pace with the male coworker and some of them have top the list.

Some common challenges faced by women in corporate world:

Now we shall discuss some common problems that women are usually facing in doing their job in corporate field.

Box: 1.1

- 1. Sexual Harassment.**
- 2. Promotion.**
- 3. Gender Stereotype.**
- 4. Pregnancy.**
- 5. The Glass Ceiling.**
- 6. Strong Leadership.**
- 7. Overt Discrimination.**
- 8. Heeding No Attention to Complain.**
- 9. Long Working Hour.**
- 10. Corporate Fashion.**
- 11. Reluctance to Designate in a Vital Post.**
- 12. Lack of Policy.**
- 13. Problems Come from Their Society and Family.**

The result shows that in corporate world women worker are treated as a deprived workforce, where women do a lot for their companies, are sometime subjected to inequity in performance assessments for the gender stereotyping role of their management. For example, a woman may be categorized by being asked discriminatory question in promotion board. Women who hold professional and leadership qualities, have found that despite stellar professional qualification and educational background, they are unable to advance through the "ranks" to next levels in the company, only for their gender. According to Allbusiness.com, "Gender bias can still be seen in the executive boardroom. Whereas almost all the managers are men, there is only one woman to every six men in senior positions" (Wairwright, 2012). There is a mindset of their management that women are less capable in doing complex task. This type of negative attitude towards women is actually called glass ceiling. Glass ceiling has been used as a metaphor of discrimination in this sophisticated world and it is an invisible barriers that prevent more than a few women from reaching the top levels of management.

This study also figures out a sensitive issue, that is pregnancy period harassment. In corporate world pregnancy period is really a tough time for a woman as she faces many harassment and ignorance from her male colleagues and management. The cooperation which she deserves at this time is sometime fully denied. Moreover

employers fear that pregnant women would not return to work in due time. Although our government has established a law of six month maternity leave, the Bangladesh Bank data showed that only 29 banks had so far given full maternity leave to the female staff (Uddin, 2013). In most of the cases it is seen that, after coming from this leave, management do not eager to give them the similar position which they hold before going pregnancy leave. It is matter of great regret that management is doing this very tacitly by showing some lame excuse against these women. For this point of view, they are unable to pursue any legal action against management.

Corporate fashion is one of the vital points in this sector. It is interesting to note that pre-notion, regarding the looks of a woman employee can also cause a wide-scale of problems. Some time Management put extra pleasure on their female employees for their costume and beautification. Their indirect intention is to draw client's attention by their female employee. For instance, employees who prefer wearing the latest outfit, with the right amount of makeup, get extra facilities from their management (Karim, 2012).

The most common problem faced by every woman in corporate world is long working hour. Our society considers that women are only responsible for domestic tasks and rearing children. Hence working women are bound to maintain balance with their office duty and household chores. But the long working hour has a negative impact on them; sometime they become imbalance due to this (Begum, 1990). Absence of flexi timing in corporate sector, hostile and uncooperative attitudes of male colleagues and management, usually create a great panic for them. Eventually sometime they are compelled to quit their job.

Furthermore, it is quite clear that lack of policies regarding mother's rights create problem for working mother. For example, an employee stated that she had a breast feeding baby and therefore had to go to her house during office hours to feed her baby. But the management didn't allow her to do so, as there are no rules and policies for this purpose. Although the bulk of the workers in corporate sector are women, but the organizations do not establish day care centers for the children of these working mother.¹

In spite of the barriers, the positive sides are that sexual harassment, pay discrepancy and overt discrimination are quite low in corporate field than other workplace.

Empirical Findings:

We have visited 20 leading organizations in corporate world and interviewed several female employees about their working environment, problems and challenges they usually face in their organization. The data are placed in the following table:

Table 1.1: Problems faced by women in Corporate World

Sl. No	Types of Problems	Number of respondents* (Total 80)	Percentage (%)
1.	Long working hour	78	98
2.	Absence of day care centre Facility.	75	94
3.	Facing discrimination in decision making	60	80
4.	Harassment during field work.	50	62
5.	Corporate fashion	50	62
6.	Non cooperation from Male worker.	45	56
7.	Problem arises in getting promotion.	42	52
8.	Absence of transport facility.	40	50
9.	Glass ceiling	30	38
10.	Heeding no attention to complain	30	38
11.	Lack of policy	26	32
12.	Maternity leave problem	25	31
13.	Overt Discrimination	03	3.75

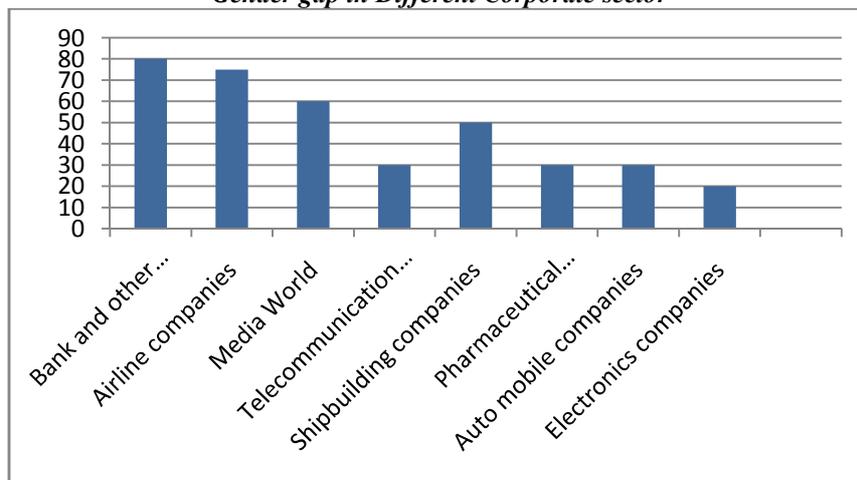
*Multiple Responses #Source: Authors, Field survey (2013-2014)

On our field study, we got some information which can be stated as significant points. The above table shows the importance of the points accordingly. The prolong working hour was their main objection. This became acute due to the absence of day care centers and transport facilities. Some also shared that sometime they faced sexual harassment in the time of field work. The matter turned to an awful position when the management remain apathetic even after complaining. While others criticized that, they were purposely refrained from decision making at the top corporate level planning by the management due to gender discrimination. On the contrary, we found some optimistic sides that are overt discrimination, pay discrepancy and sexual harassment are not so severe in this sector.

¹ women-at-the-workforce (<http://amaderkotha.com.bd/2012/09/30/>)

Graphical Presentation of Field Study: Graph 1.1

Gender gap in Different Corporate sector



Source: Authors, Field survey (2013-2014)

From our field study we discovered that gender gap does not persist in all corporate sectors at the same level. They may vary from high, mid to low. For instance, we found that banking sector is highly vulnerable in the view of gender discrimination. All the above mentioned problems exist in banks and airway companies. On the contrary, telecommunication sector and media world are highly praised for their better position. Many of the telecommunication companies avail transport and day care centre facilities for their female employees and provide them shifting duty to reduce their hassles. In media world, today the position of women is highly better in comparison to the past decade. Here women are doing well as a reporter, presenter or news caster. But in other sector women's percentage is so poor that we were unable to collect significant data.

Discussion

No doubt we live in a patriarchal society. Patriarchy is the system of male domination and female subordination in society, economy and culture. Discrimination itself is based on the patriarchal assumption that women's natural role is a domestic one and that she is therefore unsuited to many kind of economic work (Walby, 1996). Even our corporate sector is not out of the purview of this patriarchal concept.

Gender discrimination in corporate field leads to psychological and emotional disturbance, resulting in demoralization and descend in performance standards of women. Organizational productivity and performance affected by employee performance and employee performance affected by gender discrimination (Abbas, Waheed, Hameed, 2011). The effect of this on society is also vice versa. Eventually the socio-economic inequalities get widened and social cohesion and solidarity are eroded. And the result is wastage of human talent and resources.

It is upsetting that only 45% women are engaged as economy workforce in Bangladesh that means a trifle portion of women are working in corporate sector¹. For example, according to the latest Bangladesh Bank data, the country's scheduled banks only have 9 to 19.85 % female staff in different positions and only 11.15% women at senior management level. Moreover it is startling that the female board members are only 14.17% (Report DTI, 2012) at different corporate organizations.² So the ratio of male and female workers is hugely imbalanced not only at the managerial level but also every steps of work. Therefore the interests of female workers very often remain neglected in this field.

But it is a great hope that some positive steps have been taken by some foreign and local multinational corporate companies to encourage women significantly. For example now the foreign corporate companies think that female workers are more sincere to give efforts in their duties.

Association of Bankers, Bangladesh managing director Helal Ahmed Chowdhury told that many banks had recently increased the recruitment of female staffs at entry level (Uddin, 2013).

Actually increasing the representation of women on corporate sector is not singularly a women's issue — it is a gender issue, for both men and women, and a professional concern. It is often asserted that putting women in leadership positions can broaden a company's perspective on social welfare issues.³ If the corporate world is

¹ [UNICEF and BBS, multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MISC) 2006, Bangladesh 2007.]

² DTI (Department of Trade And Industry) Report 2012, 31 March.

³ (World Economic Forum). <http://www.newagebd.com/detail.php?date=2013-06-18&nid=53416#.UpnjxdlQmllu>

keen to utilize the potentiality of this powerful workforce appropriately, they have to be more cautious about exploitation, discrimination and other countless challenges faced by women in corporate world.

Recommendation and Conclusion:

So to overcome the above stated difficulties, we recommend the following advices to help the women in widening their scope in corporate world.

Management should eradicate their gender bias attitude. If they find that women are capable in doing job at top level position they should designate them to that position for the sake of organization's welfare. They should evaluate their female worker by their work, their ability and intelligence rather than their outlook. More over management should arrange leadership building program for women worker which will surely stimulate their skill to become a leader.

On the other side every woman has the right to feel safe in their own workplace. So to protect their right, they have to remove their mental stigma. If they face any discrimination, they should go through the right channel to ensure their rights without any hesitation. Beside this, they can visit the national Organization for Women's website and join its campaign for a women friendly workplace. They can also hold forums and rallies to raise awareness about women's issues in the workplace.

In Bangladesh gender- gap still exists in every sphere of life and women are deprived of their fundamental rights. Despite the equality of man-women ratio in Bangladesh, the importance and potentialities of women have been disregarded in socio-economic development till today. Women face infinite challenges in their workplace only for their gender. In corporate world it is difficult to determine whether gender discrimination has occurred or not because it is not always as overt as other desecration such as sexual harassment. So, sometimes we faced different types of difficulties to collect data of the actual scenario.

Nevertheless, I would like to say that this study tried to depict an overall position of women in this world. Furthermore, we also notice that the situations are changing day by day. Today women know better how to fight out these challenges. Now by keeping aside mental stigma and stereotype mentality, women are able to go forward with strong wills and confidence. In conclusion, we want to state that, it is the responsibility of GO's and NGO's to help women to face the challenges and ensure a framework to protect them from gender discrimination in this very world. No doubt, this will not only enrich the women empowerment but also our society and economy.

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