

Gender Discriminatory Practices in Organisations – Need for Social Work Intervention – A Conceptual Study

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Abstract

Gender inequality has been a historic worldwide phenomenon, a patriarchal invention based on gender assumptions, rooted in culture and gender norms, which promotes subordination and exploitation of woman. This shameful practice of discrimination against women is prevalent everywhere in the world and more so in Indian society. The real enemies behind gender stereotypes are ignorance, intolerance, and stagnant societies that resist change. Presence of gender disparities has been evidenced by many Global as well as national Indexes. According to UNDP's Gender Inequality Index-2014, India ranks at 127 out of 152 countries in the list, just above Afghanistan as far as SAARC countries are concerned. Woman faces discrimination at both home and workplace. Gender discrimination at workplace is an issue of serious concern, as it leads to gender segregation in the workplace in terms of benefits, hours, leave, wages, opportunities and promotions, etc. According to India's National Sample Survey, the proportion of working women in urban areas has increased from 11.9% in 2001 to 15.4% in 2011. But even in this, the fastest growing proportion is that of domestic housework. In The distribution of worker by Occupations and Gender in India 2011-12 survey, it was noticed that while 9.15% men were working in the positions of directors and chief executives, only 5.08% women were involved in the same. Achieving gender equality is important for workplaces not only because it is 'fair' and 'the right thing to do', but because it is also linked to a country's overall economic and social progress. This study aims at understanding the gender discrimination which exists at different levels and in different kinds at workplaces and conceptualizing effective social work intervention techniques and ideas to decrease the intensity of the problem.

1. INTRODUCTION

Discrimination refers to inequality. Gender discrimination refers to inequality between opposite sex, significantly towards the female always. 'Gender' is a socio-cultural term referring socially defined roles and behaviours assigned to 'males' and 'females' in a given society; whereas, the term 'sex' is a biological and physiological phenomenon which defines man and woman. In its social, historical and cultural aspects, gender is a function of power relationship between men and women where men are considered superior to women. Therefore, gender may be understood as a man-made concept, while 'sex' is natural or biological characteristics of human beings.

Women constitute half of the population of our nation, yet they are deprived of access to opportunities and resources in comparison to their male counterparts, due to their gender. These kind of male-driven societies evolve around gender stereotype, that men are superior. Many of these values have their roots in a thousand year old cultures, traditions, religious beliefs and rituals. Driven by these patriarchal values, women fears to challenge discrimination which denies their very birth rights, because of fear and respect for long-standing values.

There is an alarming rise in the rates of increasing gender discrimination at workplaces nowadays. Every now and then we come across reports related to gender discrimination at workplace. Researchers have also ratified this. Gender discrimination can take place in various forms in respect to unusual or unequal and harsh treatment of women as compared to men. The working conditions for women differ widely from what men are offered at workplaces. From women being overlooked for certain jobs on account of their gender to being offered inequitable wages and development paths, gender disparity presents itself in several ways in workplaces. Patriarchal binaries affect the very system we all function in, and a deep realization of this can be seen in the way it presents itself in the hierarchies established in corporate India.

World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index- 2014, gives 114th rank to India out of 142 countries. According to 'Wage Indicator' 2013 report, gender pay gap in India stands at 24.81% and this gap increases with age. UNDP's Gender Inequality Index- 2014, gives 127th rank to India out of 152 countries in which study conducted. **Female literacy** stands at 65.46% in 2011 as against 82.14% of male literacy. The above credential index's clearly defining the prevalence and the depth of the gender discrimination in India. One of the quotes by legendary scholar Bharata Ratna, Dr. B R Ambedkar, states that "I measure the progress of a community by the degree of progress which women have achieved." Highlight the very importance of achieving gender equality.

Gender equality which woman enjoys at workplace also defines the progressiveness of a nation or society. It's not possible to root out this problem in a day or two, since its roots are there in and interlinked with our culture, traditions, values and belief system. But, for sure with a constant and determined effort any society can reduce the intensity and gravity of the problem, which eventually led to the fall of discrimination one day. Social work profession, because of its wide knowledge base in Human behaviours and techniques in dealing with social problems, can lead and play significant role in addressing gender discrimination in a more effective and efficient way. The nature and the burden of the problem cannot be the same in every case, it ranges from individual level to organisational level, therefore proper coping mechanisms and intervention techniques are the need of the hour. This study aims at understanding the depth of the problem as well as to conceptualizing intervention ideas and techniques for the better handling of the problem.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Katie Scire, (2008) "Gender Discrimination in the workplace", talks about the „Glass ceiling“ effect. This means that a woman cannot reach up to the higher level of management or the higher level of her career through breaking the glass ceiling. This term came into existence in the 1980's. Cooper (2001) indicates that retaining talented women calls for a change in organisational culture. On average, women pay themselves less than men performing the same task, and they tend to undervalue their efforts relative to men (Lenney 1977; Callahan-Levy and Messe 1979; Major, McFarlin, and Gagnon 1984). Fortune (2007) states that women have made great strides but are still under represented at higher levels in organisations.

Brian Welle, Madeline E. Heilman(2005), ("Formal and Informal Discrimination against women at work") talks about the stereotypes that prohibit a female from being aggressive, tough and having a dominant nature. If they go against this prevailing culture they are often disapproved and face social penalties. Bartol K.M., Marin D.C and Kromkowski J.A (2003) found that gender norms influence the behaviour of females. They develop styles that will make their male counterparts comfortable.

Family and household duties can deplete energy, leading workers to exert less effort at work (Becker, 1985: 1991). However, marital and parental affiliations may have more marked effects on female employee's energy and effort at work, because they typically devote more time than men do to housework and child care (Bianchi, 2000; Bianchi, Milkie, Sayer, & Robinson 2000; Brannen, 2000).

Carl and Klunir (1999) indicate that there are five major factors of discriminatory practices –

- Perceptions and stereotypes
- Discrimination in the workplace
- Family related issues
- Networking
- Lack of available funds

Female literacy stands at 65.46% in 2011 as against 82.14% of male literacy. According to UNDP's Gender Inequality Index-2014, India ranks at 127 out of 152 countries, which considered for study. World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index- 2014, gives 114th rank to India out of 142 countries. According to 'WageIndicator' 2013 report, gender pay gap in India stands at 24.81% and this gap increases with age.

The above literature gives us an idea about the prevalence of Gender discrimination at workplace. With these review forms a backdrop, the researcher felt to conduct a study on, "Gender discriminatory practices in Organisations – need for Social work Intervention" – a Conceptual Analysis.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To study the prevalence and impact of Gender discrimination at workplace.
2. To understand the forms of Gender discrimination, prevalent at the different levels in an organisation.
3. To study the Applicability of Social work intervention methods to combat the problem and by thus attempting to conceptualize the coping mechanisms to reduce the severity of the problem.

3.1 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study is conceptual in nature. The scope of the study extends to workplaces, including Public, Private, NGO'S, business and educational sectors. The data was collected from the secondary sources including, credible Internet sources, websites, journals, magazines, books and research papers.

4. DISCUSSION

The researcher through the critical analysis of the secondary data available on the issue, have found out following findings pertaining to Gender discrimination. All the findings were drawn from credible sources and Index's. The problem of gender inequality, with no boundary encompasses all every sphere of our lives. Let's look in to the findings which range from broad social-cultural inequalities to the segregation and injustice happening to the women at their workplaces.

Gender inequality statistics related to broad socio-cultural phenomenon

- ❖ Education makes man capable to reach and utilize his/her full potential and by thus lead a happy and dignified life and when it comes to this foremost issue Indian women still lagging far behind their counterparts. According to 2011 census literacy rate of Indian women stands at 65.46%, compared to 82.14% of the men.
- ❖ According to UNDP's Gender Inequality Index (GII) - 2012, India stands at 132nd rank out of 148 countries in which study has been conducted.
- ❖ Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) –2012, of Organization for Economic co-operation and Development (OECD) puts India at 56th position out of 86 countries which are been considered for study.
- ❖ World Economic Forum's, Global Gender Gap Index – 2014, gives India overall 114th rank out of out of 142nd countries in which study has been taken place. The major four issues or areas, which are considered for the study are,
 - 1) Economic Participation and Opportunity.
 - 2) Educational Achievements.
 - 3) Health and Life Expectancy.
 - 4) Political Empowerment.
 India's position on these indicators is as follows,
 - 1) Economic Participation and Opportunity - 134th.
 - 2) Educational Achievements – 126th.
 - 3) Health and Life Expectancy – 141st.
 - 4) Political Empowerment – 15th.

The above figures clearly shows how India doing worst when it comes to Women empowerment and also shows the prevalence of Gender inequality in every sphere of life. The only area in which India is doing better with women empowerment is in providing political space for the women, other than this our women are still facing discrimination from the society which always gives preference to male. When we look in to some major aspects, which define and states quality life like , Education, Health, Participation, Equality of opportunity and Financial independency women still have to travel far way to reach men. Indian woman enjoys equal constitutional rights as to man, but in reality she is always side lined and segregated. Laws, which ensure and upholds equality of women were not enforced and exercised in best way. For example Indian law guarantees equal rights to woman in ancestral properties, but when we eye into the documents and records, we can see how the dominant and larger proportion of assets are owned and controlled by men. So, just bringing laws to uphold the rights of woman is just not enough to achieve equality. We need a comprehensive and holistic approach to confront this problem. Changing people's mindset through progressive thoughts, by the effective utilization of resources and mediums like Education, Television, Print media and Radio is most important.

Let's look into the very theme of our research work,

Gender inequality statistics related to Workplace discrimination

- ❖ UNDP - United Nation's Development Programme in its Human Development Index (HDI), gives India 131st rank out 188 countries considered for poll. According to the report, the labour force participation of women and men in country is 26.8% and 79.1% respectively.
- ❖ In "The Distribution of Worker" by "Occupations and Gender in India" - 2011-12 survey, it was noticed that while 9.15% men were working in the positions of directors and chief executives, only 5.08% women were involved in the same.
- ❖ One of the data from 2011-12, says that women in India earns only 65% of what men earns.
- ❖ Global Gender Gap report released by the World Economic Forum (WEF) in 2013, gives India of rank 105th on the Gender Gap Index (GGI) among 136 countries polled. India with ranking at 105th had an overall score of 0.6551, while Iceland, the nation that topped the list, had an overall score of 0.8731 (no gender gap would yield a score of 1.0).
- ❖ According to 'WageIndicator' 2013 report, gender pay gap in India stands at 24.81% and this gap increases with age

The above statistics indicates the large prevalence of gender discrimination at workplaces in India and abroad. The gender discrimination at workplaces associated with many issues like promotion, salary, authority, responsibilities, work nature and many other numerous things which segregates woman from achieving equal position and status to as of man. The term 'Glass Ceiling' best defines Gender discrimination as 'Invisible barriers which blocks the advancement of woman in their career even though they possess the talent and calibre to reach such advancement. Achieving gender equality is not only important to achieve socio-cultural progress, but also important to achieve overall economic progress of the nation by harnessing full potential of large women workforce available in the country.

Need of Social work Intervention into the problem

Organizations with the application of Social work knowledge, by using following techniques and methods can best address and combat the problem of Gender inequality.

At the organizational level,

1) Awareness programmes

Awareness programmes are best tools to promote and bring gender equality in workplaces. With right and effective programmes organizations can inculcate the very importance of gender equality by promoting how to respect and value fellow women.

2) Sensitivity programmes

Effective sensitivity programmes implants sense of responsibility and righteousness among workforce and by using these methods organizations can sensitize women workforce about their rights as well as men workforce to their responsibilities, which helps to achieve and maintain equality. Effective sensitization programmes makes women to sensitive to demand for their rightful status and positions.

3) Building a non-discriminatory workplace

Organizations in par with Social workers can best frame anti-discriminatory policies and practices. By constructing and maintaining effective coping mechanisms like anti-grievance cell & support cells and by keeping them alive and active, organizations can address the inequality in their very best ways.

4) Anti-discriminatory training programmes

Effective training programmes educate the workforce and induct sense of equality to maintain and promote gender balanced work environment.

5) Management Decision Making

Organizations by inculcating Social work values and through the assistance of social workers can frame the best gender neutral policies, which by anyway not hamper the growth of female workforce and guarantees equal growth opportunities to men and women.

At the Group and Individual level,

1) Forums and Interest Groups

By building forums and interest groups among workforce to take care of their mutual interests and to demand for their rightful worth and place by exercising tools like collective bargaining is more important in achieving Gender equality and it can be best possible by social work inputs and insights to such group activities.

2) Case study

Case studies helps to understand grievances and problems of individuals and by thus to design effective solutions to such problems, which promotes individual growth and comfort.

4. CONCLUSION

Gender inequality is a shame to human kind which denies the very basic rights of women and by thus hampers the progress of society by every way, which should be addressed and tackled to promote gender equality and woman empowerment to achieve a gender equity society, which ensures better quality of life each and every human folk. Social work with its knowledge in human behaviours and with its unique intervening techniques can play a dominant role in combating Gender inequality which by every way motto and aim of social work profession too.

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