

The Factors That Exacerbate Women'S Experience of Stigma in the Workplace Gender Discrimination and the Wage Gap in Developed Countries

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ABSTRACT

This essay reviews factors exacerbating women's experience of stigma in the workplace to explain the gender discrimination in Europe, which gives rise to a lasting wage gap. Firstly, various forms of gender discrimination are discussed based on previous research, and academic literature will be reviewed. Gender stigma in the workplace will be explored ranging from the motherhood penalty, low employment of females, especially child-bearing age to bias derived from traditional gender norms and politics. Secondly, career impedances such as 'Glass ceiling', 'sticky floor', and occupational discrimination are discussed from the economic perspective. This research review fills the absence of discussion around gender discrimination in developed countries, arguing that gender discrimination at workplaces stems from numerous factors at multiple levels, offering a legitimate foundation for policymakers to put further efforts to deal with the problem.

Keywords: Gender Discrimination, Stigma, Wage Gap, Developed countries.

1. INTRODUCTION

The wage gap between males and females is one of the most prominent issues relating to gender discrimination in the workplace. Blau and Khan [1] find that the gender wage gap was the subject of intensive investigation during the past several decades. However, it remains an area for active and innovative research. Overlooking the published data on the US gender wage gap, their graph shows that females earned a stable rate of roughly 60 percent of their male counterparts for a period of about 20 years, before a more recent increase. However, after the sharp increase, the weekly earnings ratio stalled at around 77 percent, still revealing a great difference between the earnings of males and females. Meanwhile, the ratio of annual earnings was even more discouraging, at a percentage of 71. Predicting from the graph, it will take at least another 20 years for males and females to earn the same amount of salary for the same qualifications, jobs, and working hours.

The origin of the wage gap could date back to thirteenth-century Europe, with data demonstrating that women earned only half of the unskilled men's earnings between the years 1300 to 1800, which is indicated by Pleijt and Zanden [2]. Additionally, Harlan and Berheide [3] note that females are rarely awarded managerial positions; even if they are, females would be treated differently than a male in the same position.

The aforementioned forms of gender discrimination in workplaces have caused mental health issues among females, including depression and other related issues. According to "Gender and Women's Mental Health" published by the World Health Organization, females are almost twice as likely to suffer from depression as men. One of the possible reasons for the depression could be the unfair treatment females face at work. Another source of stress comes from stereotypes faced by females in the workplace [4].

This review paper will analyze the phenomena of gender discrimination at work, including the motherhood penalty, low employment of females of child-bearing age, and traditional gender norms. It will also analyze economic factors that enhance gender stigma in the workplace, with an emphasis on the wage gap in Europe and developed countries.

1.1. Background and Theory

Gender discrimination, according to Sharyn Ann Lenhart [5], could be defined as “the types of gender bias that have a negative impact,” “the unequal rewards that men and women receive in the workplace or academic environment because of their gender or sex differences” [6], or “a process occurring in work or educational settings in which an individual is overtly or covertly limited access to an opportunity or a resource reluctantly and may face harassment for picking it” [7]. The term was first brought up by Pauline M. Leet, in comparison to racism. It is well documented that gender discrimination may arise from social norms or cultural customs. This suggests that across different cultures, norms or regions, the severity of structural stigma and gender discrimination may vary.

Structural stigma is the societal-level conditions, cultural norms, and institutional practices that constrain the opportunities, resources, and wellbeing of stigmatized populations by Hatzenbuehler and Link [8].

However, across different cultures, areas, or institutions, the experiences of stigma can be different. Take same-sex marriage as an example. In regions such as East Asia and under most of the religions, same-sex marriage is illegal and prohibited, and sometimes even perceived as transgressing moral standards. Meanwhile, in many of the countries in Europe, same-sex marriage is legal and accepted by society. It is partly similar for females who are being discriminated in workplaces. In some fast-developing metropolitans, females are being treated more equally than in some smaller cities and rural areas. With the improvement of legitimacy and politics, the wage gap between males and females is very likely to be smaller but still exists.

The cause of gender discrimination in workplaces may include the following three factors related to the social role theory [9]:

1. Women tend to take on more domestic tasks.
2. Women and men often have different occupational roles.
3. In occupations, women often have lower status.

These three patterns are not only the cause of gender discrimination but also gender stereotypes in workplaces, and their prominence differs across cultures and countries.

1.2. Research Gap

There are numerous topics surrounding research on gender discrimination, especially with a focus on the developing countries, inspired by examining the conventional social structure and cultural factors.

At the same time, the wage gap in developed countries may receive less attention from researchers. This literature review will analyze the reflection and experience of gender stigma for women in the workplace, focusing on the factors that exacerbate gender discrimination in developed countries. The paper will also discuss the wage gap in developed countries.

2. THE FACTORS ENHANCING GENDER DISCRIMINATION IN THE WORKPLACE

2.1. Motherhood penalty

Gender discrimination in workplaces may occur in different forms. The motherhood penalty is one of them, mainly expressed as mothers being hired less and receiving less salary at work. It is stated by *The New York Times* that “Mothers are less likely to be hired for jobs, to be perceived as competent at work or to be paid as much as their male colleagues with the same qualifications” [10].

Moreover, these variations persist even after controlling for elements like the working hours, the kinds of jobs they pick, and the salaries of their spouses. Therefore, the disparity is no longer from the phenomenon that mothers are less productive employees and fathers work harder when they turn out to be parents, but because employers anticipate them to.

However, alongside the motherhood penalty, there is a fatherhood bonus, where fathers “are more likely to be hired for than childless men and tend to be paid more after they have children” [10]. Although women and men show no difference in working competence when they become moms and dads, motherhood penalty and fatherhood bonus still exist.

2.2. Maternity Leave

Policies of maternity leave may be another cause of gender inequality in workplaces. It is implicated that when the affordability to hire women during childbearing age increases because of the cost of maternity leave or the lack of employees, the labour market’s demand for women will decrease. Meanwhile, the ‘statistical discrimination’ to hire fewer childbirth women is significant.

Although the conditions of maternity leaves differ in developed countries, the entitlements of maternity leave to protect females’ jobs are mechanisms in many

countries, which enforce employers to provide employees with the option of taking a leave for the period among childbirth and surrounding times by legislation.

The previous data researched in Britain indicated that women with children were paid less than women without children, the term 'family gap' is a result of the wage gap caused by maternity leave and less continuity of female employees [11].

The research also showed that in full-time jobs, women without children would have higher wages than mothers who broke their employment for children. This can be explored by another research taken in Canada [12], aiming to find the relationship between maternity leave and mother's employment. It shows that a certain number of mothers switch to new jobs, mostly part-time jobs when their children were young before they return to previous employment. However, although most mothers prefer backing to pre-birth employers, they would not be paid equally to men. Therefore, the low wages with flexibility from part-time jobs enhance the wage gap and family gap in these developed countries that have a compulsory mechanism to have maternity leave for childbirth.

2.3. Gender Norms and Politics

As the social role theory [9] the chapter mentioned before, in most culture systems, the female is regarded as the character that takes responsibility for domestic tasks, which also relates to further social role norms and values applied to gender.

Furthermore, Chung [13] mentioned the flexibility stigma as one of the reflections of gender discrimination, where women are perceived to be more likely to demand flexible working time because of the conventional gender norms that applied to females to take the responsibility for the domestic task.

Besides the motherhood penalty and maternity leave that enhances the experience of stigma for women in the workplace, the male-beneficial politics and gender norms contribute to the stigma of flexible working and gender discrimination as well. For example, the UK government has introduced a shared-parental leave in recent years. According to Lewis [14], this aims to reduce the disadvantages for mothers that they are often regarded as less productive in working because of their 'social role' to take care of children. Under the new policy, fathers will have the remaining statutory maternity leave from mothers to take care of children. Until 2015, it has been expanded that fathers are able to take up to 50 weeks of leave. However, the BBC reported that only 2-8% of fathers are eligible to have statutory maternity leave, which means females are still struggling to balance family and work, as under traditional gender norms.

Although the number of women who participate in the labour market is continuously increasing, many British people still consider mothers as the character who have most of the childcare responsibilities. The British Social Attitude Survey in 2012 illustrated that one-third of participants agreed that a mother should stay home when they have a child under school age, while only 5% of participants agreed that women should work full-time when there is a child under school age [15]. In fact, according to Eurostat, the majority of women with children are part-time workers in the UK instead of full-time.

Furthermore, this kind of conventional division of labour is related to the prevalence of the ideal worker culture in the UK that demands full-time workers with the longest working time in Europe. Therefore, women have lower status in the workspace.

3. ECONOMIC ANALYZE

3.1. Career impedance

The discrimination faced by women has direct economic consequences in terms of their comparative levels of wage and wealth. Two terms are often used to describe the economic impact: 'glass ceiling' and 'sticky floor'. Marilyn Loden came up with the phrase "glass ceiling" while making a speech as a panelist at the Women's Exposition in New York in 1978. As she mentioned, "The glass ceiling refers to invisible barriers that keep some people from advancing in the workplace" [16]. In response, the Glass Ceiling Commission was stated by the United States Congress in 1991 as a part of the Civil Rights Act. The United States Federal Glass Ceiling Commission then limits the vague scope of 'some people' Loden's definition to 'minorities and women' [14]. It also further defined the glass ceiling as a discriminatory barrier to "prevent women from rising to positions of power or responsibility and advancing to higher positions within an organization" [17].

Researchers have also studied data collected by the European Union Household Panel to contest gender pay gaps by dividing the wages distribution across ten countries in Europe. Then they found that the glass ceiling occurs more frequently at the top/senior management level than at middle and lower management levels [18]. A possible explanation is that as a woman moves up the hierarchy, the barriers to advancement become more prevalent [16]. Gender pay gaps are also bigger in some countries at the lowest end of the wage distribution, indicating the existence of sticky floors.

The negative impact of glass ceilings is unmistakable. It exists across a wide range of countries, limiting women's careers and promotions to managerial positions in an almost invisible way, with its essence lying in the

combination of all kinds of discrimination against women in management [19]. The bias caused by the glass ceiling is difficult to be observed since the government prohibits open discrimination and prejudice against women in Europe, while everyday discriminations reflected by micro-aggressions like facial subtle expressions are frequently not directly observable.

While some women are striving to break the glass ceiling, many others are trying to step off the “sticky floor”. Sticky floor refers to “low-paying, low-prestige, and most important, low-mobility jobs typically held by women. It is composed of the lowest-paying female-dominated occupational categories, such as paraprofessional and administrative support” [3]. Sharon Harlan, a director of research at the Center for Women and Government, says “it (sticky floor) is certainly a big problem, and it affects many more women than the glass ceiling” [3], since it can apply to women in all types of employment.

However, using harmonized data from the European Union Household Panel, researchers infer that “glass ceilings are more prevalent than sticky floors and that these prevail in the majority of our countries (within Europe)” [20], because the gender wage gap is much higher at the top than the lowest wage distribution.

To support the general impact of these two theories, researchers also studied data from the 2007 EU-SILC to find large unconditional wage gaps between men and women across different countries ranging from 0.370 ln-wage points in Cyprus to 0.032 ln-wage points in Belgium [19].

3.2. Occupational Discriminations

In terms of the gender-based occupational difference, the “division of labour” is an essential reflection of gender discrimination. According to Blau and Kahn [1], in the United States, the overall gender differences in years of work experience and the unequal access to education have decreased, as women acquired more space in the workplace during the 1990s and 2000s than in previous decades. In addition, women have had more opportunities for education in recent years in developed countries, absent of which the wage gap and workplace discrimination would have been even larger [1].

However, the gender wage gap and discrimination can result from gender differences in the makeup of occupations and industries. Goldin shows that the wage gap is closely related to occupational limitations [21].

The fact that there is a huge gap between males and females is prevailing over the world, while reasons for this are surprising. About 50% of the difference can be

explained by observable factors such as formal education, on-job training, work experience, and hours worked. Only 10-30% of the difference in earnings is due to different men’s and women’s occupations. The rest percentage cannot be explained by observable factors and are due to differences within occupations (inter-occupation discrimination) [21]. This residual part may in fact be explained by individual self-selection or due to discrimination. Chukhai proceeded with the review of main theories [22]: differences in preferences, comparative advantage theory [23], human capital theory [24], which explains gender difference in the workplace as labour market discrimination. Blau and Ferber consider that labour market discrimination exists when “two equally qualified individuals are treated differently solely on the basis of their sex” [25]. Thus, in accordance with the labour market.

One form of inequality is occupational segregation, which means women are prevented or excluded from being employed in certain jobs or levels. To eliminate all occupational segregation by gender, nearly half of the women in the labour force would have to change occupations.

Relative to intra-occupational discrimination (the distinction between occupations), inter-occupational wage discrimination is more important than in the UK, Canada, and Australia. The analyses based on the gender wage gap in the UK also pointed out that the intra-occupational differences are more essential and significant than the inequality concerning occupational distributions [26]. This suggests the expectation of future anti-discrimination law in workplaces should stay directed for the promotion of equalizing wage pay within occupations than the promotion of equality in gender across a variety of occupations for now.

Among previous researches that implied the disparate occupational differences in men and women in developed countries, it is argued that the erosion of gender occupation in the labour market is not only the conventional assumption on the productivity difference, but the traditional family roles.

4. CONCLUSION

To summarize, the main factors that contribute to the exacerbation of the stigma of females at work include the motherhood penalty and maternity leave. For the motherhood penalty, a woman receives less wage when she becomes a mother while a man gets a higher salary when he becomes a father, controlling for factors like types of job and working hours. Often, employers reduce wages of female employees only due to their own subjective opinion.

Moreover, employers sometimes refuse to hire female employees in the first place when thinking of having to still pay them during maternity leave. Secondly, male-

beneficial politics and gender norms are the resulting factors of gender discrimination at the workplace as well. Thirdly, from an economic perspective, the glass ceiling and sticky floor are also what can't be ignored. Glass ceilings keep females from gaining higher positions like managerial positions at work invisibly, which means the bias could not be easily seen because the discrimination is often expressed through micro-aggressions. As for sticky floors, it is even harder for females to step off and have more impact around the world.

Nevertheless, in Europe, glass ceilings have more influence than sticky floors when it comes to stigmatization in workplaces.

Lastly, when excluding factors like formal education, on-job training, working hours and types of jobs, the wage gap still appears to be a problem. Additionally, females must leave their original jobs due to occupation segregations in even worse situations.

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