



Research on Female Education Level and Gender Equality in the Workplace in China

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Abstract. As women's education levels have risen dramatically, human capital is no longer a reasonable explanation for today's "gender gap in the labor market," so researchers have been looking for more potential reasons. Gender equality is necessary for social progress; attracting and releasing more female workers into economic production will bring substantial economic dividends. This article uses the World Bank and the National Bureau of Statistics and finds secondary data. At the same time, women's education levels have increased overall, the employment and wage gap between men and women has decreased. That increased education levels positively affect gender equality in the workplace. However, at the same time, women's education levels are still insufficient, and inequality between men and women in the workplace is still significant. Government policy on promoting female education and same maternity leave for men and women, companies' reform on the system of employment and promotion, and changes on corporate culture could improve the current situation of women can't get enough educational resources during the study phase, suffer from hiring and promoting discrimination and wage inequality in the workplace.

Keywords: China · Female education level · Gender equality · Workplace

1 Introduction

1.1 Research Background

With feminist awareness becoming more and more common in China, a new generation of young Chinese women is more and more concerned about the topics such as gender equality and women's rights. According to the "Global Gender Gap Report 2020" released by the World Economic Forum [1], China has made significant progress in the female education area. 2019 China's female educational level score has increased to 0.973 (0.00 represents gender inequality between men and women, 1.00 represents gender equality between men and women), which means that the educational level of Chinese women has generally increased. According to another data, which is the "2019 China Women's Development Program (2011–2020) statistical monitoring report" released by the Chinese National Bureau of Statistics shows that: from 2010 to 2019, the percentage of female students at all educational levels have increased, and as the educational level

increases, the gender ratio becomes more balanced. The number of female students at the high school, undergraduate, and graduate levels exceeded male students in 2015, 2010, and 2019. The number of female students increased most significantly at the undergraduate level, from 620,000 to 940,000 [2]. This shows that women's right to higher education has been strengthened in recent years. According to the "2021 Chinese career women status report", the overall income of Chinese women in the workplace is 12% lower than that of men, and the actual salary is much lower than their expected value [3]. And with the improvement of education, the gap between expectations and reality is getting bigger and bigger. Women in the workplace are harder to get into the middle and senior positions and have lower promotion possibilities. These three data show that China has made considerable progress in promoting women's education level, but the current status of working women is still not good. Hence, this paper wants to find out the relationship and impact of female educational level on gender equality in the workplace to see how improving education level will help women achieve further equality in the workplace.

1.2 Literature Review

According to Parker and Funk's research, the primary forms of discrimination in the workplace are: earned less than a male doing the same job, treated as if they were not competent, experienced repeated and small slights at work, receiving less support from senior leaders than a male doing the same job, been passed over for the most critical assignments, felt isolated in the workplace, been denied a promotion and been turned down for a job [4]. And women with a bachelor's degree or more education report experiencing discrimination across a range of items at significantly higher rates than women with less education. Bussemakers, Oosterhout, Kraaykamp, and Spierings's study found the idea that the relationship between educational attainment and employment is stronger in countries where jobs in the service sector are relatively scarce [5]. This finding confirms the impact of labor market structures for employment dynamics, including the education–employment linkage, and higher-educated women generally seem more impervious to the labor market conditions. They found that female employment is lower in more conservative settings across the board. Among women who live under more conservative gender norms, education's impact on employment is stronger. Mukherjee found that parallels in women's experiences in the three Asian economies, Japan, China, and India, show gender inequalities in employment, even despite the progress made in the expansion of educational opportunities for women [6]. The persistent gender wage gap in each country bears testimony to this. Even though access to higher education does seem to help narrow the gap, the participation of highly educated females in the labor market is far from universal, validating the fact that there may indeed be a weak link between education and employment.

1.3 Research Gap

The present researches are basically about gender and education, education level, and employment. In contrast, this study would like to focus on the change in educational level and gender equality in the workplace from time to time and now from level to level.

And I would like to focus on the female education problem and gender equality problem of the workplace in China,

1.4 Research Framework

This article will first use the data of the female population by education level from 2011–2019 to analyze the change in female educational degree and distribution of each level. And then, the article will use the data of employment rate by gender from 2011–2020 to see the difference in male and female employment and changing trends. Next, the article will use the wage data by gender to analyze the gender wage gap. Then, the paper will use the distribution data of employed men and women in each education level of a specific year.

2 Method

This research will use the quantitative method, which gathers numerical data to be ranked, measured, or categorized through statistical analysis [7]. It assists with uncovering patterns or relationships and for making generalizations. This type of research is useful for finding how many, how much, how often, or to what extent.

The literature research/ analysis method involves sourcing numerical data from financial reports or counting word occurrences. This paper would like to use the secondary data from the Chinese National Bureau of Statistics and the World Bank to find the number and ratios of educated females and employed females and the number and ratios of different education level females.

3 Results

First of all, according to the data from the National Bureau of Statistics, this article calculated the ratio of females in each education level from 2011 to 2019 and plotted it in a line graph, as shown in Fig. 1 [8].

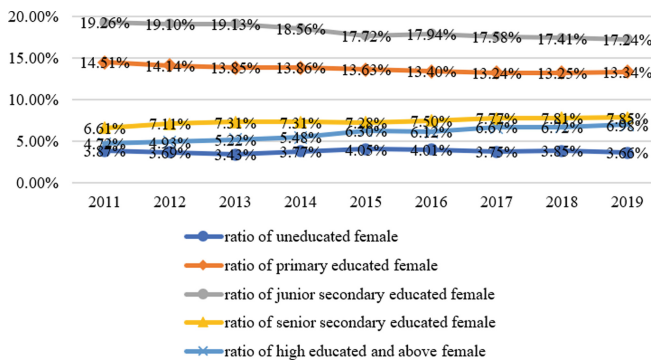


Fig. 1. Ratio of each education level female. (Source: National Bureau of Statistics)

The ratio of each education level female is calculated as the number of females at that education level divided by the whole population, which is the overall sample of that year. The samples of each year are all-around 1 million people. The data shows that from 2011 to 2019, the highest percentage of females have junior secondary education, it's showing a decreasing trend from 19.26% to 17.24% and has an average of 18.21%. The second highest line is the ratio of primary educated females, which shows a decreasing trend from 14.51% to 13.34% and has an average of 13.69%. The ratio of senior secondary educated females and highly educated and above females is the third and fourth highest. The two ratios both have an increasing trend from 2011 to 2019, and the averages are 7.39% and 5.9% accordingly. The lowest data is the ratio of uneducated females with an average of 3.79% and don't have an upward or downward trend during 2011 to 2019. Overall, the educational attainment of Chinese women has increased. The proportion of women with secondary and higher education has increased, and correspondingly, the proportion of women with only primary and junior education has decreased. However, it can be seen that the highest percentage of women have junior and primary education, over half of the women have only completed lower level education, China still has a long way from women having good education level.

When it comes to gender inequality, this article first considers the ratio of female to male labor force participation rate. The labor force participation rate is calculated by the number of people older than 15 employed or actively seeking employment divided by the number of non-institutionalized, civilian working-age people. The ratio of female to male labor force participation rate is calculated by dividing female labor force participation rate by male labor force participation rate and multiplying by 100. According to the source of the World Bank database from 2011–2020, as shown in Fig. 2, the average ratio from 2011–2020 is 82.78%, which means when 100 eligible men were employed, only 82 women have hired accordingly, showing an unequal situation of hiring men and women [9].

From 2011 to 2019, the ratio grew steadily from 81.74% to 83.95%, which means the difference in employment between men and women is improving. From 2019 to 2020, there is a drop from 83.95% to 83.01%, most likely due to the pandemic outbreak

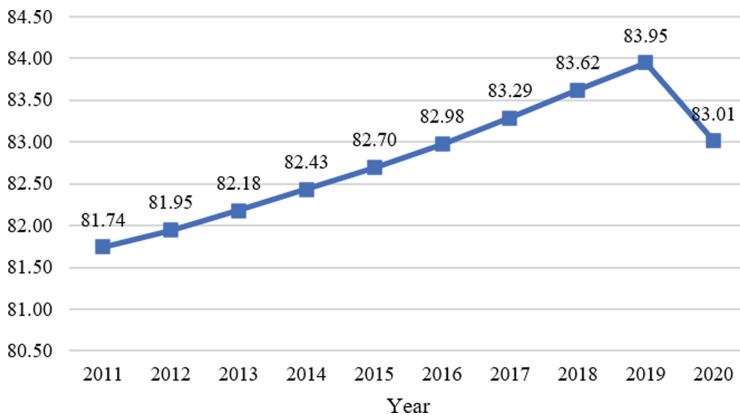


Fig. 2. Ratio of female to male labor force participation rate. (Source: World Bank)

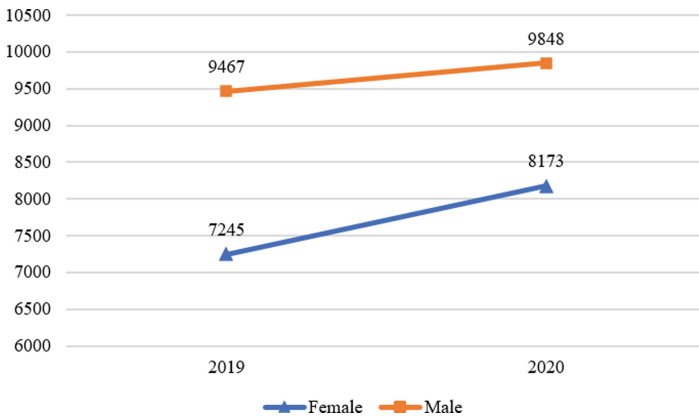


Fig. 3. Average monthly income among male and female respondents in China. (Source: Statista)

at the end of 2019. And it shows that pandemic has a more negative influence on female employment and are not suitable for the advancement of gender equality in the workplace. Secondly, the article considers the wage gap between men and women [10].

According to the average monthly income among male and female respondents in China in 2019 and 2020, as shown in Fig. 3, the average of males' monthly income is ¥1949 more than females, which shows a big inequality in income. The income difference by gender is smaller from 2019 to 2020, but this article cannot summarize a trend in the long run because of the lack of data.

According to the composition of educational attainment of employed persons by gender nationwide in 2017, as shown in Fig. 4, a higher proportion of women than men were employed at the level of no education and primary education. There are a higher proportion of men than women at the lower and upper secondary education level, and a slightly higher proportion of women than men at the higher education level [11]. This Figure shows that the proportion of male workers with primary education and never been to school-level education are lower than those education level females, indicating that a higher proportion of females than males do the lower-level jobs. Both male and female workers have the highest proportion of workers with junior secondary education levels. Females have a slight advantage in the proportion of workers with higher education.

According to the data above, the overall female educational level is improving. Gender inequality in the workplace is still serious, but the situation is also getting better, and education improvement could be one of the important reasons. Estimates of women's labor force and employment are generally lower than men's [10]. In some less developed and low-income areas of China, women often work unpaid on farms and in other family enterprises. In contrast, others work within and near the home and in professional and domestic activities during the day. In many high-income and developed regions, women increasingly pursue higher education, leading to more rewarding long-term careers. Overall, however, women continue to have unequal access to employment and the potential for fair retribution.

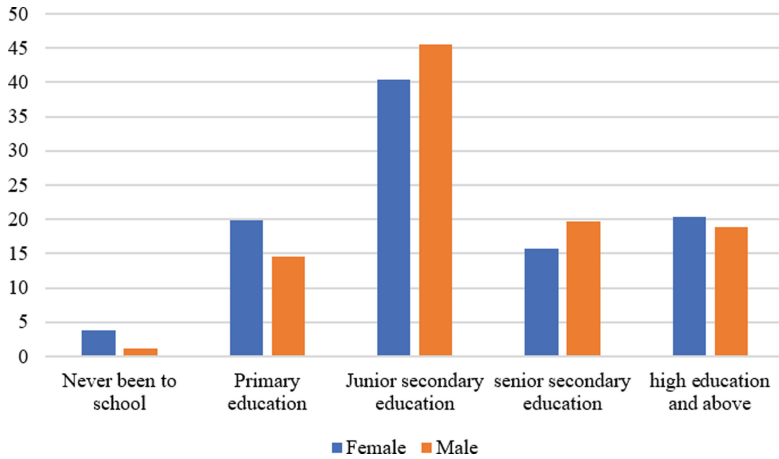


Fig. 4. Education attainment composition of the employed population, by sex, 2017 (%). (Source: National Bureau of Statistics)

4 Discussion

4.1 Reasons Analysis

One of the factors of gender inequality in the workplace is that women are not competitive in the labor market due to their lack of education. One of the reasons for women’s lack of education is that in some underdeveloped regions, preferring boys to girls still exists. Their parents ignore girls’ education, let them leave school early, and return to their families to do housework or be assigned to marry and become homemakers. These girls cannot get higher-level education, so they cannot be more competitive in the workplace or even don’t choose to work outside and earn a salary. Men with lower education can work in construction, extraction, smelting, and other jobs with relatively not bad income levels but do not require a high level of knowledge. At the same time, women’s options in related industries are much more limited than men’s, so education and qualifications are essential for women. The reality is that the number and proportion of women with low education are higher than men, so the situation is very tough for women in the workplace, especially for women with low education.

Fertility could be a barrier for women in the workplace. Many companies are less willing to hire and promote women because when women are pregnant, give birth, and after birth, their working hours would be lower than usual, and they become less productive. During the maternity leave, the company still needs to pay them salaries. In this case, women are it harder to be employed and promoted.

The gender stereotypes that still exist in people’s minds are also a significant barrier to gender equality in the workplace. Women, for example, are often perceived as having fewer leadership skills than men and are seen as more concerned with minutiae or more concerned with rivalry.

4.2 Optimization Measures

As the improvement of female education could positively affect gender equality in the workplace, it is necessary to implement some measures to ensure female education. It is also necessary to change the rules and perceptions in the workplace to try to eliminate gender inequality. On the one hand, society should help women get more human capital and skills training opportunities to help them meet the market demand for jobs. On the other hand, employers should be encouraged to provide diversified recruitment mechanisms (e.g., flexible employment hours) and build an inclusive workplace culture (e.g., reduce gender stereotypes and form objective perceptions and evaluations of women's professional abilities). Finally, family members should fully respect women's reproductive and career choices and encourage them to realize diversified life values.

Specifically, enterprises and society should promote equal employment in the following aspects.

For the lack of education for women in underdeveloped areas due to patriarchal attitudes, government workers in those regions need to do an in-depth and detailed survey to ensure that every woman can complete the nine years of compulsory education. In addition, lectures and other forms of educational activities can be conducted in these regions to promote the changes in people's patriarchal attitudes.

For the hiring and promotion, discrimination against women due to maternity issues. This article suggests that the government issue a policy that men should have equal maternity leave as women to solve this problem. In this way, men and women would have the same absent time in the workplace, so there won't be discrimination for women and let the company treat men and women more equally on the fertility problem. In addition, this is also an excellent way to increase the fertility rate.

In addition to the government's policies, companies should also reform their system to promote gender equality in the workplace. The company should set targets for hiring and promoting men and women [12]. For example, the proportion of female employees needs to meet a certain standard and continue to search for potential talents until having an equal number of male and female candidates for a position reaches gender balance. The leaders and human resources should leave the discriminative and prejudiced idea of "women do not have same talents and leadership that as men have", and provide equal opportunities for men and women. Leaders should work to change the company culture to eliminate gender stereotypes. This requires promoting gender-neutral flexible career paths and actively encouraging all employees to take advantage of these opportunities [13]. Also, the companies leaders need to expand the definition of "leadership", leadership does not necessarily be masculine leadership. Women need to let go of the deep-rooted masculine leadership concepts. Those concepts lack connection with women and are less efficient for today's world. Today's world needs leaders with a high sense of cooperation and have the ability to explore and realize women's value and potential in the flowing, decentralized, and less strict hierarchy system organization. The future of the workplace will require leadership that could be very different from now.

5 Conclusion

5.1 Summary Findings

This article finds that the general female educational level has been promoted in the past decade, positively correlating with the decreasing gender gap in employment. But female education still needs to move to a higher level, letting more women get more girls complete compulsory education and allowing more women access high education. There is still a big gap between men's and women's employment and wage in the workplace.

This article proposes suggestions and solutions from government, companies, and social perspectives that try to promote female education level and improve female hiring discrimination and barriers to get promotion in the workplace, providing more possibilities for the companies and women workers in the workplace.

5.2 Limitations and Future Studies

The limitations of this article are mainly from the data. There is a lack of data on gender equality in the workplace in China, especially on the gender wage gap. Therefore, this article cannot analyze male and female wages annually and get a trend in the long term. This article mainly uses secondary data and lacks using the primary data. Many factors can reflect gender inequality in the workplace. This paper focuses on using employment and wage gap to reflect inequality. Future research could search for more data on gender inequality in China or use the primary data from the interviews or surveys. It could also focus on discussing other aspects of gender inequality.

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