Working Women: Problems and Prospects-A Sociological Study on the Status of Women

Ms. Sugandha Kohli

Abstract

It has been seen that the status of women has been changing and women have attained remarkable success in what was once considered the "male domain" working world. Worldwide the number of women in the workforce has increased over the years with a corresponding increase in the number of highly educated women equipped with technical know-how. However, discrimination against women in the workplace is explicitly seen as few women are able to reach on the top in private sector. In the present paper an attempt has been made to study the various issues related to the women worker at workplace in private sector organisation.

Keywords: 1. Gender Discrimination, 2.Workplace inequality, 3.Occupational Segregation, 4.Gender Stereotypes

Introduction

The success of an organization depends upon its workforce and the coordination among its male and female workers. It has been seen that working women are no longer a rarity and are now accepted as an integral part of the work force. However, women have been challenged by inequality in the workforce. Until modern era, socio-cultural and legal practices, combined with religious and educational conventions, prohibited women's entry and participation in the workforce. Economic dependency upon men, poor socio-economic status of women, and women's lack of access to higher education have excluded women from well paid and high ranking occupations. But, now around the world there has been trend towards increased access for women to education and participation in the labor force. Women's share of the labor force has steadily increased in virtually all regions of the world, now approaches 50 percent mark in places such as the Scandinavian countries, the United States, Canada, the UK, and France. Despite the trend towards equalization of access to employment for women and men, there is persistent gender segregation in the workplace. Women are prevented from achieving complete gender parity at workforce and presence of glass ceiling is seen as very few women are able to reach on the top positions. It is still common to see headlines announcing the first woman to occupy some important post or other. Recently in 2016, Asako Suzuki has just been appointed as the first female board member at Honda, a Japanese carmaker. But such milestones may not be much of a guide to the opportunities being provided to women to have made progress in the private sector.

Women had been limited to menially paid and low status occupations and earned less than men for doing the same work. In the modern world, public perception of paid work has changed. Women have entered all arenas of the workforce but are still at disadvantage in comparison to men. The progress in the labor force remains limited and the 'top' jobs within industry, family business and the professions continue to be occupied by men. These views focus on how gendered practices in organizations are shaped by wider social, economic and cultural processes.

Some of the statistical data over the world shows as follow:

International Labour Organization Report(20115)	The number of women in middle and senior management positions has increased over the last 20 years but still women are underrepresented in top jobs. Only 5% of the CEO's of the world's largest corporations are women.
The Grand Thornton International Business Report(2016)	The number of women in middle and senior management positions has increased over the last 20 years but still women are

	underrepresented in top jobs. Only 5% of the CEO's of the world's largest corporations are women. In India, 16 per cent of senior roles are held my women.
Census 2011	The male workers constituted 39.79 percent of total population whereas the female workers were 25.51 per cent. The ratio of female workers in rural areas is 30.02 percent and in urban India is 15.44 percent. Census 2011 further revealed that work participation of women have increased from 12.11(1971) to 25.51(2011) but is far less than men
Catalyst Report(2015)	Indian women earn 56% of their male colleagues for performing the same work. Out of 323 total executive positions on Bombay Stock Exchange 100, only 8 are held by women. 54% of companies on BSE 100 have no women board members.

Objectives of the study

Followings are the objectives of the study.
1. To analyze barriers in occupational mobility of women.
2. To examine the various gender issues related to women at workplace.

Research methodology

The present study was based on secondary data collected from various sources which are as follows:
- Research paper of various authors related to research study.
- Reports of International Labour Organisation (ILO).
- Reports of Central Statistical Organisation (CSO).
- Reports of Global Gender by World Economic Forum.
- Census 2011.
- Grand Thornton International Business report.
- Various Books related to the research topic.
- Report of Monster India

The present study is only limited to the Private Sector Organizations and does not include Public and Government Sectors Organizations.

Barriers in the occupational mobility of women

Occupational mobility refers to the change in the position of an individual from one status to another. Women have to face numerous obstacles while climbing up the occupational ladder. Some of the barriers generally faced by the women at occupational hierarchy are defined as under:

Societal Barriers
- The barrier related to educational opportunity and attainment
- Barrier manifested in conscious and unconscious stereotyping prejudiced and bias related to gender, race and ethnicity
- Lack of support system

Internal Structural Barriers within the Direct Control of Business
- Out of reach recruitment practices that do not seek out or reach or recruit minorities or women
- Corporate climates that alienate and isolate minorities and women
- Pipeline Barriers that directly affect opportunity for advancement
- Initial placement and clustering in staff jobs or in highly technical and professional jobs that are not on the career track to the top

- Lack of mentoring
- Lack of management training
- Lack of opportunities for career development
- Special or different standards for performance evaluation
- Counterproductive behavior and harassment by colleagues
- Biased rating and testing system

Governmental Barriers
- Lack of vigorous, consistent monitoring and law enforcement
- Weaknesses in the formulation and collection of employment-related data which makes it difficult to ascertain the status of groups at the managerial level and to disaggregate the data
- Inadequate reporting and dissemination of information relevant to glass ceiling issues

Source: The federal glass ceiling commission report (1995)

work place gender discrimination of women in private sector organisation

After the Economics Reforms of 1991, private sector emerged as a main source of employment to the Indian workforce which constitutes of men and women workers these days. But, on the other hand, it has been observed that there is no parity and gender discrimination still exists. Some of the critical issues are explained as under:

Gender Discrimination in Recruitment Process
In the majority of private organizations, it has been commonly seen that discrimination in the hiring process is observed where men are hired first or hired instead of women. But in some of the private sectors, like private education sector, IT sector, food sector, medical Sector, Hospitality sector, Fashion and interior designing sector, women are mainly recruited, but the gender discrimination still exists here. Inspite of having majority, women in these sectors, women are still striving hard for their job security in these sectors.

Gender issues in training and development
Both formal and informal hiring procedures, unequal access to informal networks for learning about jobs and securing them, gender biases in criteria, and implicit stereotypical assumptions that men and women are better suited to perform different types of work endorse the inequality. The trainers also perceive that men and women are suited for different kinds of jobs. The place of training can be another issue for women as if it is being given at a far off place; it is difficult for women to undergo training. This is the reason their dropout rates of training are more. This down the lane hits badly their promotional chances.

Job Security
Private sector is based on hire and fire principle. There is less job security in private sector. All the more it is more difficult for women to get a job in the private sector and even if they are employed they experience less job security than their male peers. Further, it has also been highlighted from the various reports that survival of married as well as unmarried women in private sector is far more difficult due to gender biasness towards them. They have to do what the superior men have ordered them. Sometimes it hits their societal and family life so badly that they have to left or shift to other jobs.

Compensation gaps
It has been seen that there is gender inequality is strongly associated with economic inequality. There is disparity in income among men and women where men are paid more for similar kind of work. The Hindu (18 May, 2016) reported that gender pay gap is still wide in India (according to Monster India report). It released the monster salary index and found out that gender gap is still wide and is at 27%. According to report, some of the reasons behind gender pay gap could be the preference for male

employees, preference for promotion of male employees to supervisory positions and career breaks of women due to parenthood duties and socio cultural factors. As per Global Gender Report (2016) by World Economic forum, women around the world on average earn just over half of what men earn despite, on average, work for longer hours taking paid and unpaid work into account. International Labour Organization (2016) report titled 'Women at Work' examined data for up to 178 countries and also concluded that inequality between men and women persists across a wide spectrum of the global labour market. The report also showed that over the last two decades, significant progress made by women in education has not been translated into comparable improvements in their position at work. It estimated that globally, women still earn on an average 77 percent of what men earn and it will take 70 more years to close the gender gaps completely.

Promotional Avenues

It goes without saying that despite the existing legal provisions; women are often deprived of their basic rights and are given less promotions in comparison to their male counterpart. Advancement of women in management jobs has not kept pace with the correspondence increase in the number of working women. In some offices it is seen that women are harassed and subjected to discrimination and they fail to get promotion regardless of their academic credential in favour of men. It is often seen that most women take sabbaticals in their career post marriage and child birth which takes a toll on their career, placing them on the back foot. This stalls their career and they fail to be promoted. Thus, very few women have been promoted and made heads of the companies

Biasness

Women Managers are conspicuous by their minority in Indian Organizations. Women now try to seek and obtain the highest position in business. But Women are not given enough opportunities that would catapult them to the upper echelons. This is the reason there are only handful of women who have reached the top and breached the barrier. Biasness is found right from the entry level to income differentials and finally in getting promotions. Women as a gender are discriminated where as males are given more preferences and avenues.

Women security

The security of personnel is vital in the occupational setting. All the more, security is more pertinent for women in the private sector as the employees are expected to work overtime and even during night hours. The private sector takes the onus of providing security of women. They generally have their own cab facility which assures their safety. But it reduces job opportunity to the women workers in those areas where there are night shifts which create an employment gaps between male and women workers.

Gender stereotypes

Preconceived notion about women by males also leads to discrimination at the workplace. Gender stereotypes in the workplace, emerge from the assumption that women belong mainly to home. Assertive, confident, and dominant are just some of the characteristics associated with leadership, yet when we think of employees that have those traits, we generally tend to think of men. It is assumed that women cannot have eminent decision making jobs as they are inadequate for them. Gender stereotypes always play on the notion of women inequality to men. . This is the reason there are quite a few women in middle management, but very few female CEO's of top companies or female members of corporate boards (Hilary M. Lips, 2014). Gwen Moore (1988) study reveals that women who have managed to reach the highest corporate or political positions are isolated in comparison to the male counterparts and are best characterized as "outsiders on the inside."

Sexual Harassment at workplace

One form of gender based discrimination at work is sexual harassment, it includes unwelcome sexual advances that intimidate or bother an individual and the creation of a hostile work environment through sexual innuendos, teasing, and touching etc. Sexual harassment can be in the verbal, physical or written form. It can be embarrassing, humiliating and undermining. Organizations produce and reproduce these gender differences. For the protection of women, government has made a law (Sexual Harassment at workplace, 2013) where women are protected and stringent punishment is given to those who harass women. But, still inspite of law and order being there, the number of cases related to sexual harassments of women at workplace has been increasing day by day. Many studies shows the moral gaps and societal behaviour and women's weak perception to adapt the critical situations are the key reasons for the increasing cases of sexual harassment at work place.

Occupational segregation

Occupational segregation is seen almost everywhere. It refers to the fact that men and women are concentrated in different types of jobs, based on prevailing understandings of what is appropriate 'male' and 'female' work. Occupational segregation by gender is one of the main factors in the persistence of a wage gap between men and women. Despite some gains, women still remain under-represented at the top of the income distribution. Occupational segregations have both vertical and horizontal components. Vertical segregation refers to the tendency for women to be concentrated in jobs with little authority and hardly any room for advancement, while men occupy more powerful and influential positions. Horizontal segregation refers to the tendency for both men and women to occupy different categories of job. The reasons for the persistence of occupational segregation are rooted in a complex interplay between societal and personal gender stereotypes, discrimination by power-holders against out-groups, habits and social inertia-and the repeated impact of all these on individuals' choices and behaviours.

Job Stress

Job stress can be defined as the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources, or needs of the worker. Job stress can lead to poor health and even injury. Everyone is today's supercharged workplaces undergo stress. Yet, it has been seen that professional and executive women consistently experience more stress, anxiety and psychological distress than men .As Women have to bear dual role and shoulder more domestic responsibilities, this affects job performance and hence job stress.

Nepotism

Nepotism is defined as favoritism given to ones close relatives such as ones sibling or ones relative. It also leads to discrimination at the workplace as ones kin's and kith are given preference. As the private sector is still male dominated, they give more preferences to their acquaintances. Nepotism is witnessed right from the entry level when employees are recruited and also at the promotional level which results a further occupational gap between women to women workers.

Recommendations

On the basis of the present study, following recommendations has been made:
1) Organizations should fix the ratio for male and female employees. Equal chances to employees should be given irrespective of gender. The ultimate aim of every organization should be to promote organizational diversity which would lead to growth of an organization
2) Organizations should provide training to women workers at local level where experts can be invited. Women shall be provided full security during the training. Trainers should accept women as an equal counterpart to men and should not distinguish on the basis of gender.
3) There is a need to develop leadership qualities Organization has to develop leadership qualities in women executives by providing proper training, mentorship and learning environment to feel them

as a leader and have an opportunity to know what others have a view on their fitness to the leadership role.

4) HR policies should cater to the growing need of women employees' career growth, which needs to be formulated at various levels.

5) The promotions should be done on the bases of merit; quality should be more stressed during promotions. Gender gaps should not be considered during promotions. Adequate security should be provided to employees especially to women.

6) Organizations should ensure that they conduct de stressing sessions for their employees such as seminars, programmes to ensure their healthy environment.

7) Organizations should create an environment where women executives should get support from their leaders and the co-workers should also be encouraged.

8) Family has a major impact on women executives' career, but organization should mentor women executives and should support them. Organization should create a path
for those women who are willing to take a re-entry to their work life after the career break due to the family commitments.

9) There is a need for moral counseling as well as motivational seminars for reducing its gender gaps.

Conclusion

The study is significant in probing into status of women in the private sector and the suggestions which helps the management in promoting a level playing field. The study analyzed what factors hold women back from climbing on the top and the forms of discrimination women in the organizations have to face. The study found out that there has been ever-increasing thrust on employment among women .However the fact remains that even the professionally educated women are not reaping their share of benefits from the profound social, political and economic changes transforming the society. Why is it so? Why is there such an uneven distribution of male and female employees across the professions? Why is it that there are only few women at the top in all the professions? How do the professional women manage, a full time profession and family roles? What are their coping strategies? These are some of the issues the present study focused on.

References books

1) Beasley, Chris. (1999) What Is Feminism? An introduction to feminist theory, Australia: Sage Publications.

2) Biyani, Prakash. (2010) Indian Business Women ,Zero To Zenith, Bhopal: Indra Publishing House.

3) Chapman, Jane Roberts. (1976) Economic Independence for women-The foundation for equal

4) rights, London,Beverly Hills: Sage Publications.

5) Donnell, O' Carol. and Hall, Phillip. (1988) Getting Equal, Australia: Allen and Unwind Australian private limited .

6) Eugenia Date, Bah. (1998) Promoting Gender Equality at Work, Turning vision into reality for the twenty first century, London and New York: Zed Books ltd.

7) Giddens, Anthony. (2009) Sociology, New Delhi: Wiley India private limited.

8) Gottfried, Heidi. (2013) Gender,Work and Economy-Unpacking the Global Economy, Maiden,USA: Polity Press.

9) Gutek.A, Barbora. and Larwood, Laurie. (1987) Women's Career Development, London: Sage Publications.

10) Holborn. and Haralambos. (2008) Sociology Themes and Perspective, London: Harper Collins Publishers Limited.

11) M.Lips, Hilary (2014) Gender the basics, New York: Routledge publications.

12) Napasri, Kraisonswadi. (1989) Women Executives-A sociological study in role effectiveness, Jaipur: Rawat Publishers.

13) Political and Economic Planning. (1971) Women In Top Jobs, Ruskin House Museum street: George Allen and Unwind Limited.

14) Thompson, Denise. (2001) Radical Feminism Today, New Delhi: Sage Publications India.

Articles

1) Buddhapriya, S (2009), 'Work-Family Challenges and Their Impact on Career Decisions: A Study On Indian Women Professionals' Vikalpa: The Journal Of Decision Makers, 2009 34(1), Pp. 31-45.

2) Dee-Ann, Schwanke. (2013) 'Barriers for Women to Positions of Power: How Societal and Corporate Structures, Perceptions of Leadership and Discrimination Restrict Women's Advancement to Authority,' Earth Common Journal ,VOL. 3 NO. 2.

3) Jenny M, Hoobler,. Grace, Lemmon. Sandy J, Wayne. (2011), 'Women's underrepresentation in upper management:New insights on a persistent problem,' Organizational Dynamics 40, 151—156.

4) Marcus, Noland., Tyler, Moran. and Barbara, Kotschwar.(2016), 'Is Gender Diversity Profitable? Evidence from a Global Survey,' Peterson Institute for International Economics, Working Paper S e r i e s.

5) Shafiq, Farhat.(2014), 'Glass Ceiling Effect: A Focus on Pakistani Women,' International Journal of Science and Research (IJSR).

6) Bombuwela P. M., De Alwis A, Chamaru.(2013), 'Effects of Glass Ceiling on Women Career Development in Private Sector Organizations – Case of Sri Lanka,' Journal of Competitiveness, Vol. 5, Issue 2, pp. 3-19, June 2013.

7) Bansal, Monica. and Kathuria, Deepika.(2015), 'Women and the Corporate World,' International Journal of Research in IT & Management, Volume 5, Issue 12 (December, 2015).

8) Nandy,S. Bhaskar,A. and Ghosh,S.(2014), 'Corporate Glass Ceiling: An Impact on Indian Women Employees,' International Journal of Management and International Business Studies.Volume 4, Number 2 (2014), pp. 135-140 Research India Publications.

9) Sachdeva,G. (2015) 'Glass Ceiling Converted into Glass Transparency: A study on the Factors Making Women Executives Successful in the Indian Banking Sector,' Blue Ocean Research Journal Vol 3,No 4(2014) **.**

10) Meghna, Sabharwal. (2015) 'From Glass Ceiling to Glass Cliff: Women in Senior Executive Service,'Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory**.**

11) Tharadevi,K. and Sheriff, Aisha.(2015) 'Family Structure ,Family Support And Glass Ceiling',Zenith International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research; Volume:5,issue:4, First page : (52-58)

12) Mamta, Jha. (2015) 'Status of Women Workforce in Corporate Sector With Reference To Glass Ceiling and Income Disparity,' IOSR Journal of Business and Management; Volume 17, Issue 1.Ver. III (Jan. 2015), PP 25-27.

13) David A.Cotter, Joan M.Hermsen, Seth, Ovadia and Reeve Vanneman.(2001) 'the glass ceiling effect,'social forces, December 2001.

14) Adati, Aeran. (2014) 'Glass Ceiling: A Probable Speed-Breaker in the Production of Quality Management Professionals,'Indian Journal of Scientific research. 5(2): 175-179, 2014.

Theses

1) Chauhan Premlata(1994) 'Women In Top Jobs:A Sociological Study Of Professionals', Department of Sociology, Punjab University.

2) K.Bhupinder(1994), 'Women In Private Organization:Gender Biases And Prejudice In Their Employment',Department of Sociology, Punjab University.

3) Suryanarayan Shalini(2015), 'Glass ceiling for the women in the IT sector-a sociological study in Karnataka',Department of Sociology, University of Mysore.

4) Gumber Vandana(2015), 'Glass ceiling-A comparative study of women executives in multinational organizations', Department of Psychology,Dayanand Maharishi University.

5) Tharadevi.K(2015), 'Women executives and glass ceiling a case study of selected Indian companies',Department of Sociology,University of Mysore.

Reports and Newspapers

1) Global Gender Gap Report (2015) by World Economic forum, available online at reports.weforum.org on April 6, 2017]

2) 'Monster India Report' by The Hindu (18 may, 2016), page number 8, available online at www.thehindu.com [Accessed on April 8, 2017]

3) 'Women in the Workforce' (2015) report by The Catalyst, available online at. www.catalyst.org[Accessed on 16 April, 2017]

4) 'International Business Report' (2016) by The Grant Thornton, available at www.grantthornton.am [Accessed on 4 April,2017]

5) 'The federal glass ceiling commission report'(1995), available online at www.dol.gov [Accesssed on 13 April]

6) 'Women at work' report by International Labor Organization (2015), available online at www.ilo.org [Accessed on 12 April,2017