

Influence of Gender on Career Choice

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Abstract: Men and Women tend to have different views on the occupation they choose and want to choose. In this regard gender plays a wide role. Men are always expected to have better jobs and higher salary as compared to their female counterparts. But these gender roles are stereotypes that dictate the behaviours and actions of a person due to sex. Gender also influences individuals' career experiences. Women face unique barriers in the work place, which in turn shapes their work and organizational experiences. These barriers were not only found in India but also in some of the most developed countries which have high Human Development Index. Although a number of steps have been taken in this direction, many policies are formed but gender equality is yet to be achieved. The research paper aims at identifying the effect of gender on career choice and to what extent these choices differ among male and female and also the problems faced by both men and women in this direction. It's generally found that women face a number of problems from career choice, career adoption to career experiences. The paper also aims at finding solutions to such problems.

Keywords: Gender role, career, experience, occupation

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Introduction

Gender has always remained a social bar for women's progress. Although considerable gains have been made in this direction but there are miles to go. Gender influences a wide range of career related attitudes, behaviors and outcomes. These can be working environment, working experience, women's health and attitude, family life etc. Women are always considered different from men. They are generally seen as weak, compassionate, sacrificing and family loving whereas men are stronger and protective. Even while selecting a career women are expected to choose a field where they can manage their family and work efficiently, which often leads to women sacrificing their jobs for family.

From an early age boys and girls are treated differently. They are expected to play their role according to their genders. Where boys are considered to play with football, basketball etc. girls are supposed to play with dolls. Boys are expected to be more rambunctious and physically active, whereas girls are expected to be more sensitive and sociable.

Gender as Social Identity

The distinction between sex and gender identity is fundamental for understanding the career attainment of women. While sex is biologically determined, gender is a social construction, a product of socialization and experience (Unger 1979). Gender applies to those physiological attitudes and behaviours considered characteristics of one's sex, that is the term "gender" or "gender identity" is used for characteristics or traits that are socio culturally considered appropriate for males and females (Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin 1999, Unger 1979).

The importance of gender identity for career attainment, as distinct from sex, is underscored by Costa, Terraciano and MacCrae (2001), who noted there is more variance in traits within sex than across, suggesting the importance of gender identity rather than sex as a determinant of career.

Recent studies provide extensive empirical evidence of sex differences in personality traits consistent with an interpersonal circumflex perspective on masculinity and femininity. In a study with over 23,000 respondents from 26 cultures, Costa et. al(2001) reported that women were higher than man in warmth and agreeableness while men were higher than women in assertiveness and openness to ideas.

Similar to the findings for personality, evidence points to sex differences in job preferences and occupational interest consistent with an interpersonal circumflex perspective on masculinity and femininity (Olivia A. O'Neill and et.al).

According to research there is also evidence for gender bias hiring, promotion and funding decisions. Female academics are less likely to be hired or promoted than male academics, even with the same job experience and accomplishments (Steinpreis and et.al 1999). There are a number of studies that prove the similar results.

Gender and Career Choice

There are a number of complex issues that affect one's career choice. One of the most important factor being socialization. The process of socialization in one's life begins since infancy. A child comes in contact with family, relatives, friends and is made aware about his/her role as man or woman. Although such socialization experience influences both genders, it is presumed to have greater negative impact on girls because it tends to limit and restrict their options and achievements more so than boys.

A person's vocational interests and career choices are highly affected by these socializations experiences. These experiences are likely to have more impact on adolescents because they want to fit in with their peers. Studies show that both adolescent boys and adult men report greater interest in scientific, technical and mechanical pursuits. Whereas, adolescent girls and adult women indicate greater interest in social and artistic endeavors (M.E. Ward). It becomes difficult for both men and women to pursue decisions otherwise (like women pursuing wrestling or auto repair and men pursuing art or nursing) because of the societal expectations.

In fact the very basic material of socialization that is the textbooks, which are used from the pre-primary level depict gender stereotypical occupations. In most of the books mothers are shown as working at home, taking care of children and fathers go out for work. But the most important point here which arises is that these socialization experiences affects both men and women. A very simple question can be asked to prove the point is- What if a father wants to stay at home, do the household chores, take care of children while the mother wants to go out and work?

It is not surprising that men are generally encouraged to pursue careers in engineering, business and science, whereas women are encouraged to pursue career in social and helping occupations. It is also noteworthy that male typed careers tend to offer higher status and pay than female typed career, contributing to the observed gender inequities in pay.

Work encounter and Barriers

It is very commonly seen that what a person encounters at workplace is a result of one's gender. Women face distinctive barriers which influences their work and organizational experience. One of the most common barrier is women are often not given tasks that require developmental experiences. There are also instances of sex discrimination in hiring, women are often being overlooked for high-visibility or high skates job assignments and not being targeted for domestic or international relocation opportunities.

One of the ways where the work experience between women and men differ is that women are more likely to face the barriers and gaps in employment which slows down their progress. Despite larger work participation by women in work place, job segregation continue to persist.

Another reason for male-female differences in career choice relates to career related self- efficacy perceptions or beliefs in one's ability to be successful in a wide range of career pursuits. Women have less access to the types of experience necessary for developing strong beliefs in their abilities to master career related tasks in male dominated occupations and majors (science and math). Individuals develop career related self-efficacy through various experience (role models), verbal persuasion (encouragement from others) and actual experience (having opportunities to master tasks). Women tend to have less opportunity for these experiences and therefore tend to report lower career related self-efficacy than men (gender and careers website).

These lower self-expectations can lead to further occupational sex segregation, as individuals are less likely to pursue certain jobs and/or careers if they believe that they will not be successful. Interestingly, there are few consistent differences in actual ability between men and women and when differences are found, they tend to be small in magnitude (gender and careers website).

Some Other Challenges

Most of the women who set out with the expectation that they can manage children and career are often forced to modify these expectations and reevaluate these priorities that is to cut back on hobbies, friends and time alone. As choosing a career becomes a major life task at a young age, the influence of deeply embedded gender role socialization of men and women is so profound that there are marked differences in their career decision making processes.

It is a mindset of most employers that if a women is married she is economically supported. Thus, most often women are forced to negotiate and settle for lower salaries as compared to their male counterparts. In US, a research revealed that women earn 80 cents to a dollar for men. The case was even worse for minority women because they earned 65 cents to a dollar. It was heart breaking that even in most of the female dominated jobs men earned more than women.

Some of the studies even revealed that often high profile assignments were not given to women due to their problem of relocation and less time dedication even if they are capable to produce the similar results.

Less than 1 percent women of Fortune are listed in top 500 companies are CEOs. This clearly shows that women lack mentorship and are not encouraged or selected for leadership positions. This is because family and work are often in conflict for women.

Government Strategy towards Equality

Equality is enshrined in the constitution and it is the birth right of every human being to be treated the same. But the prevalence of gender differences is generally seen in every field. As gender equality is an international concept, governments of almost all the countries have taken serious measures in this direction. As we move towards India, the Indian Government have made a number of laws, women helpline number and various apps are designed that help women when in need. Some laws in this direction are (National Commission for Women website):

Maternity Benefit Act, 1961- This act regulates the employment of women and maternity benefits mandated by law. It states that a woman employee who has worked in an organization for a period of at least 80 days during the 12 months preceding the date of her expected delivery is entitled to receive maternity benefits, which includes maternity leave, nursing breaks, medical allowance, etc.

Equal Remuneration Act, 1976-This Act prevents discrimination in terms of remuneration. It provides for payment of equal recompense to men and women workers. It is necessary to know these and other laws in place to protect the interests of women. Only if you are aware of your rights can you fight against any injustice meted out to you at home, at the workplace, or in the society.

The Protection of Women for Domestic Violence Act, 2005- It is an Act to provide for more effective protection of the rights of women guaranteed under the Constitution who are victims of violence of any kind occurring within the family and formatters connected therewith or incidental thereto.

The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013- No woman shall be subjected to sexual harassment at any workplace is the basic essence of this law.

Also National Commission for Woman was formed under the National Commission for Women Act, 1990. It is a statutory body of the Government of India, established in January 1992. Lalitha Kumaramangalam was appointed its Chairperson in 2014. The NCW represents the rights of women in India and provides a voice for their issues and concerns. The National Commission for Women Act aims to improve the status of women and worked for their economic empowerment.

Gender Responsive Budgeting an Approach to Women Empowerment

Gender Responsive Budgeting does not mean creating separate budget for women nor does it mean spending exclusively on women. It means that government resources are so utilized that they empower women and create an equal environment for them. Although the concept of GBR is new, the first country to adopt this approach was Australia. It adopted the GBR approach in 1980 which was

followed by Beijing Convention in 1995. India adopted much later and National Commission for Women was formed in 2001. In Eleventh Five Year Plan Gender Budget was adopted for the first time (Mathur 2019). GBR is a holistic approach towards women empowerment which includes health and nutrition, water and sanitation, political participation, education, asset base, skills etc. The impact of GBR was also found to be impressive because according to Government of India the rate of domestic violence came down. It is also statistically proven that women safety has increased and spousal violence came down. The percentage of women in higher education has also increased. Enrolment at level has also increased. Women were found to be participating in diversified fields (Pandey 2019).

Changing Attitudes

It is important for both men and women to coordinate their work and family life. One possible solution can be that there should be separate timing of job for both spouses, so that they can spend quality time with their family and take care of their children. Many employers are now even providing parental leave to both the parents. However, it's still a tedious task for men to get child care leave easily due to existence of gender stereotyping and it is considered as unmasculine.

In one of the recent studies it was also found out that younger men are now placing more importance to family. They are seen to be supporting their working spouses and balance their job and family life well.

The relatively new role of househusbands has also emerged. Although the number of househusbands is few because the person is often looked down by family and friends. Also this case arises when the partners are very broad minded and the female counterpart is earning more than men. Bureau of Labour Statistics mentioned in one of the studies that around 39.3 percent of women were primary breadwinners in their family. The number is continuously increasing, which is heartwarming and if the similar pace continues soon gender stereotyping will be talked as past tense.

Jobs that were traditionally exclusively available for men are now open to women as well. National Commission for Women revealed that in 2009, women made up nearly half (44.7percent) of workers in management and professional occupations. Most of the couples were also seen to jointly own a business or startup so that they can manage both business and family.

Suggestions

Developing talents and skills is every women's dream which is a key to successful career. Therefore career management along with family life is must to achieve better results. The government is working in this direction by organizing capacity building workshops, although their number and frequency shall be increased.

There shall be women's cell in every department and very office whether be government or private. This cell should look after their women employees and should also help them to manage their time according to their family.

Part time jobs can also help a great deal in this direction. They provide time flexibility, thus women can easily tend to home and children and as well as their career.

Changing the mindset is the most important solution in this direction. The myth of patriarchal society should be changed because what a women can do men can never.

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