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GENDER DISCRIMINATION AT WORKPLACE AND MENTAL HEALTH
OF WOMEN: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

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ABSTRACT:

Discrimination is a social phenomenon in which factors such as gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, and race are used to make distinction towards people. Women face gender discrimination in everyday life as well as at workplace in various parts of the world. Gender discrimination has various forms such as gender pay gap, lack of career progress for women, gender stereotyping for executive roles, and sexual harassment. Gender discrimination at workplace leads towards mental health problems (stress, anxiety, depression) in women. This research aims to establish cause-and-effect relationship between gender discrimination and mental health problems of women particularly in United Kingdom with the help of systematic literature review. Legislation history of United Kingdom related to gender discrimination and gender equality is also presented in the research. Findings of the research provide sufficient evidence about the presence of gender discrimination at workplaces in United Kingdom.

INTRODUCTION

Discrimination is a societal occurrence in which a distinction towards someone is made based on the social class, ethnicity, race, religion and sexual orientation. Amount of discrimination is dependent upon the factors such as race or sexual orientation. In many countries discrimination because of ethnicity might be more common than other countries and likewise, some countries may have more widespread discrimination based on gender than any other type of discrimination. Females form more than fifty percent of the world population and are often subjected to discrimination due to phenomenon of gender which is constructed socially rather than biologically (Who.int, 2019). Gender discrimination is reported every so often at workplace in United Kingdom alongside other first and third world countries. Results of gender discrimination at work may consist lack of motivation among the employees, low efficiency, and low productivity. This results in overall low output rate than the

organization which has considerably low or non-existent rate of gender discrimination.

Moreover, psychological health problems are more prevalent among women according to 2019 WHO report on gender and mental disorders. Gender is crucial factor of mental health and mental disorder. Disparity in power level and control over socio-economic factors for example status, treatment and social positions is determined by gender. This control and power in turn determines their exposure and susceptibility towards particular mental health risks. Women have less power and control over the above mentioned factors at work and therefore are susceptible to mental health issues as a result of gender discrimination. A serious health problem is common mental disorders including anxiety, depression and somatic complaints. Around 1 in 3 people are affected by these disorders and women predominate in them. Unipolar depression is twice as common in women and according to World Health Organization is foreseen to be the second leading cause of global health issues by 2020 (Who.int, 2018).

Additionally, contemporary business organizations depend upon human resource department for the optimum human productivity and best possible workplace atmosphere within the company. Human resource is a vital element of businesses in United Kingdom. Females consist an important part of the human resources and therefore can affect the overall presentation of the company (Jacobsen, 2007). According to academic research papers and general surveys, mental health problems are common at workplace because of gender discrimination. Numerous factors can be categorized under the umbrella of gender discrimination such as disproportionate number of women at the position of power, discrimination in hiring and promotion process, discrimination against pregnant females and single mothers, and sexual harassment at workplace.

OBJECTIVE

Primary objective of this research is to offer credible evidence from previous literature about the link between mental health issues and gender discrimination at workplace among females in United Kingdom. Earlier literature has indicated that there is a connection between discrimination and mental health problems at the workplace. For example, ethnic minorities of United Kingdom are facing mental disorders due to racial discrimination. Nonetheless, gender discrimination is a less discovered area in association with emotional health problems. Moreover, this paper will try to describe different kinds of gender discrimination for example sexual harassment and role stereotyping. Effect of gender discrimination on various age groups of females will be explored as well. Another related aim is the acknowledgement of mental health issues with more reliable and in-depth research which will pave a way towards proper actions taken by organizations to lessen the mental health problems within the workplace. It will be helpful in creating a more comprehensive and pressure free work environment.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Women are a critical part of the business industry in United Kingdom. According to a research, female employment rate was 71.4% in 2018 which is

highest since the records began in 1970. After the economic downturn of 2008, 1.2 million more women are working full-time. The number of women working full-time has increased over the last five years (Powell, 2019). In short, women are important pillar of the employment sector of United Kingdom. However, majority of the women face discrimination due to their gender. Male colleagues as well as employers can be the source of discrimination at workplace. There are many kinds of gender discrimination for example sexual harassment, wage difference of different genders, and gender inequality. Gender discrimination can be due to many factors including longstanding company policies, cultural norms, and sexist views. This type of behavior causes problems for women and in many cases leads towards serious consequences including mental health issues. Emotional well-being of employees is important for the success of organization. However, gender discrimination is a serious hindrance towards achieving inclusive and equitable workplace environment. It is important to pay attention to problems faced by women at workplace which cause mental health issues. Government has taken measures to safeguard the rights of working women over the period of last five decades. A more prominent legislation includes Equality Act 2010 which ensures the equal pay of women at workplace. However, there are still many problems within the business world of United Kingdom due to gender discrimination.

SIGNIFICANCE

The research paper aims to signify the importance of mental well-being of working women in United Kingdom. For progressive workplace environment it is important to provide equal opportunities to both men and women. Employees should be recognized through the lens of their skill set and knowledge rather than their gender. The research aims to provide theoretical evidence that gender discrimination is a severe issue and its consequences are impacting the output of businesses. The research will provide theoretical proof that women at workplace face mental health issues due to gender discrimination in the United Kingdom. However, there is a gap in the academic research in this area. More attention needs to be paid to this issue so that employers are able to take steps towards creating a workplace environment which is equitable and inclusive. Such environment will promote creativity and increase motivation level of employees which in turn will lead towards a successful business industry in the United Kingdom. Finally, this can set example for international business community and can be of global importance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Gender Discrimination

Gender discrimination at workplace is a consequence of different factors and some of those important factors include gender pay gap, lack of career progress for women, multiple roles with less salary, gender stereotyping for higher managerial positions in the business organizations, sexual harassment, and job insecurity. These factors are prevalent in the business industry of United Kingdom. Previous research evidence shows that systematic research has been done on the above mentioned factors related to gender discrimination at workplace. Following are different forms of gender discrimination common at workplace.

Gender Pay Gap

Gender pay gap is one of the prominent issues even in the twenty-first century free-market economy. A measure of the difference between the earnings of men and women is known as gender pay gap (Debra Leaker, 2008). According to a research report by the office for National Statistics of United Kingdom, since the introduction of the Equal Pay Act in 1975, the gender pay gap of full time employees has narrowed. However, the gender pay gap still exists and varies depending upon the circumstances for example size of the company, type of occupation and number of dependent children. These factors are significant contributors to the gender pay gap in the United Kingdom (Debra Leaker, 2008). According to a report published on BrightHR in 2019, the legislation about gender pay gap came into effect on April 6th 2017 in United Kingdom. Any organization with 250 or more employees is required to publish gender pay gap data each year.

Lack of Career Progress for Women

Lack of career progress for women is another factor contributing towards gender discrimination. According to a research regarding the career progress of MBA level qualified females, after graduation women in United Kingdom lag behind their male counterparts in terms of their career profiles. Women in UK face more inflexible career barriers mostly in the forms of deep rooted prejudice and negative attitudes (Simpson, Sturges, Woods, Altman, 2004). Another research provides evidence for the career progress of young women. According to the research, young women managers outpace their male counterparts in career progression, hence suggesting a relation between seniority and age of the person. Therefore, the glass ceiling in the organizational hierarchy might be considered as “time bound” instead of “gender bound”. It suggests that careers of young women and older women have fundamental differences, and glass ceiling only affects the senior positions (Simpson, Altman, 2000). A research on women’s career in twenty first century found that women’s careers are affected by their family, social and workplace environment.

Gender Stereotyping for Leadership Positions

Gender discrimination is hindrance to the progress of women up in the management hierarchy of an organization. According to FTSE 100 list of 2018, there are only 7 female CEOs which means only 7% of CEOs are females (Statista, 2019). Women are considered less compatible contrary to their male counterparts for higher managerial positions in the organizations. It impacts the motivation level of women working at lower levels and makes it twice harder for women to get the same position as men.

Sexual Harassment at Workplace

Sexual Harassment is a major issue faced by women at workplace. It leads towards severe mental trauma and most of the times either cases of sexual harassment are not reported or women have to leave their jobs. According to Young Women’s Trust, almost 23% of women of age between 16 and 30 have been sexually harassed at work however, only 8% have reported it. Reasons for not reporting include fear of losing the job, being provided with fewer hours at workplace, and unavailability of the proper channels through which complaints on sexual harassment are filed and processed (Youngwomenstrust.org, 2018).

According to another survey, 52% of young women reported that they faced mental health issues due to the gender discrimination and sexual harassment at workplace. Same survey reported that 42% of young men reported sexual discrimination as reason for their mental health problems at workplace. Women face gender discrimination at workplace more often than men and face more serious consequences of it (Siddique, 2018).

Gender Inequality at Workplace

Despite the progressive efforts over the span of decades, there is a great deal of inequality at workplaces across United Kingdom. An organization which practices gender equality treats men and women as same. Gender equality can be influenced by many factors including personal attitudes, longstanding company culture, or confusion about current laws (BrightHR, 2019). Gender equality requires equal treatment of men and women in following ways:

- Equal pay and benefits for comparable role
- Equal opportunities for promotion and progression
- Equal consideration of needs

Gender Equality and Laws

Gender is a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010 (Section 13) of United Kingdom. Many laws have been passed over the decades including Sex Discrimination Act 1975 and Employment Rights Act 1996. The primary legislation now remains under the Equality Act of 2010. This Act will be further discussed in the paper in detail.

Gender Discrimination and Mental Health of Women

Gender discrimination can lead towards different types of mental health problems in women. Gender discrimination generates inequity for socioeconomic conditions of household which affects the physical and mental health of women. Socioeconomic inequalities can lead towards anxiety and depression in women which affects their personal as well as work life (Moss, 2002). According to the literature evidence review done in 2005, data was collected from major databases of United Kingdom and results indicated that women reported higher levels of stress as compared to men at workplace. However, there was no conclusive evidence regarding the role of gender discrimination in the workplace stress (Gyllensten & Palmer, 2005).

Gender Stereotyping: Cause of Stress for Women

In the following years further research has been done on this subject and evidence proves that there is a cause-and-effect relationship between gender discrimination and workplace stress. Research on gender inequality shows the importance of different factors like structural, cultural and interactional influences on workplace stress. General attitude to some extent is biased towards females at workplace in United Kingdom and social behaviors of colleagues, bosses and subordinates contribute towards workplace stress (Zeher, 2011).

Anxiety, Depression, and Gender Discrimination

Most common mental disorders are considered anxiety and depression. It is perceived that these disorders are prevalent among women with higher

percentage compared to men. A research done by Weich, Sloggett and Lewis tested the hypothesis about gender and mental disorders. They aimed to provide the explanation for the gender difference for mental disorders. Differences between men and women in social role occupancy, age and socio-economic status are the factors which were considered as variables for the research purpose. A cross-sectional survey of more than eight thousand adults between the age of 16 and 74 was carried out living in the private households in United Kingdom. Dependent variable assessed through General Health Questionnaire was “Prevalence of common mental disorders”. Results of the research found that women occupying the most social roles had the highest prevalence of common mental health issues. The research concluded that common mental disorders and gender differences are not explained by social role occupancy or the number of roles occupied (Weich, Sloggett, Lewis, 2018). Findings of this research do not provide a substantial evidence for the link between mental health issues and gender differences. However, research does not solely focus on the gender discrimination at workplace, instead different social roles of men and women are considered.

Another research about depression and gender differences done by Piccinelli and Wilkinson tried to explain the relationship between mental health issues with focus on depression and gender differences. Method adopted for the research was critical review of previous literature. Research considered that with only some exceptions, risk of depressive disorder is higher in women than men. It begins at mid-puberty and persists throughout adult life. Results found that depressive disorders vary with gender differences and have genuine link with gender. Social roles and behaviors impact the level of depression in males and females. Similarly, psychological attributes, childhood experiences, bad experiences of sociocultural roles have impact on the mental health. On the other hand, genetic and biological factors have few or almost no impact on the gendered mental health problems. Research concluded that determinants of different genders in mental health issues are not clearly established yet (Piccinelli, Wilkinson, 2018).

The literature review suggests that gender discrimination is a prevalent problem in the twenty first century business environment. Different forms of gender discrimination have been analyzed over the years and some of the prominent ones include gender pay gap, sexual harassment at workplace, low promotion rate among women, and less chance for women to get higher leadership positions compared to men. Literature also suggests that mental health problems are more prevalent in women than men and additionally, women are more susceptible to any mental disorder than men. All of this research was related to the business industry of United Kingdom.

LEGISLATIONS IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

Equal Pay Act of 1970

There was no legislation related to equal pay until 1970. United Kingdom Parliament passed Equal Pay Act in 1970 and it was followed by the passage of similar act in the United States. This act ensured the implementation of different laws resulting in equal rights for employment and treatment of women at workplace in United Kingdom. Existing employment contracts of women were modified in order to make them equitable to those of men in the business

environment. This Act required equal value for all women in the workplace as long as job descriptions of women were related to jobs held by men. However, these differences should not be of practical importance in the workplace. Equal Pay Act was fully legislated on December 29, 1975. An important point to consider is that although this legislation encompassed equal pay for women, it didn't include any proposal for equal pay for minorities. It is important to consider because minorities have a much larger pay gap than women in the United Kingdom (United Kingdom Parliament, 2019).

Sex Discrimination Act of 1975

The Sex Discrimination Act of 1975 was an amendment to the Equal Pay Act of 1970. Its purpose was to create laws for prevention of direct and indirect discrimination against women at workplace. It was mentioned in various law provisions, which defined discrimination against women at workplace. It explained discrimination as being defined by certain considerations within the scope of employment. It could include situations in which men had advantages over women in terms of treatment. It consisted a statute which suggested that discrimination incorporated women not being treated equally to men as long as the number of women who were in such conditions are considerably lower than the number of men as well as in such cases where they were in larger number than the men (United Kingdom Parliament, 2019).

Equal Value Regulations of 1983

Equal Value Regulations of 1983 were another substantial amendment of the Equal Pay Act of 1970. The original Equal Pay Act was a major step for the civil rights movement of women in the United Kingdom in the 1970s. It instituted conditions of employment, which stated that women in the workplace must be paid the same as the men as long as their work could be compared to that of men in the workplace. However, the term "like work" within the document caused some difficulties for women who sought equal pay. The term only specifies that employment pay held by women is comparable to those of men according to their job description and not the standard definition of such work. Employers often took liberties in their compliance with the act's original intent. These regulations passed in 1983 changed this by standardizing women's pay as being comparable to pay over various types of employment (United Kingdom Parliament, 2019).

The Employment Equality Regulations of 2003

These regulations were created to protect individuals from victimization and harassment due to their sexual orientation by defining the statutes surrounding employment contracts in the United Kingdom. These regulations were enacted on December 1, 2003. They provided guidelines that gave details on how such contracts may be decided. Regulations also provide protection for individuals from sexual discrimination by their employers in the workplace. It has numerous sections that specify the terms of discrimination in many areas of employment in the United Kingdom and also prohibit discrimination against the procurement of goods, facilities, education, and public services (United Kingdom Parliament, 2019).

Equality Act of 2006

The Equality Act was passed in January 2007 and was created to provide equity in all areas of employment and services in the United Kingdom. It speaks about outlawing discrimination on the basis of religion or belief and also against discrimination in provision of services due to sexual orientation as well as promoting equity in gender roles in the workplace. The act also proposed the creation of the Equality and Human Rights Commission, which replaced the Commission for Racial Equality and the Equal Opportunities Commission and the Disability Rights Commission (United Kingdom Parliament, 2019).

Equality Act of 2007

The Equality Act of 2007 offers further legislation to exclude discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation in the procurement of facilities, goods, education, and public services. It also provides requirements by which standards of discrimination may be addressed and a proclamation of unlawful action may be brought before a court of law (United Kingdom Parliament, 2019).

Equality Act of 2010

Equality Act of 2010 provides law on equal pay in the “equality of terms” provisions. This Act gives right to equal pay for equal work between men and women. This includes equality in pay and all other contractual terms within the same employment. The Act ensures that women’s contractual terms are no less favorable than men’s (Equalityhumanrights.com, 2019). Following provisions are part of the Act:

‘Equality of terms’ Provisions

All aspects of contractual pay and benefits package are covered by the ‘equality of terms’ provisions including:

- Basic pay
- Non-discretionary bonuses
- Overtime rates and allowances
- Performance-related benefits
- Severance and redundancy pay
- Access to pension schemes
- Benefits under pension schemes
- Company cars
- Sick pay
- Hours of work
- Fringe benefits such as travel allowances

Right to equal pay

The right of women and men to receive equal pay for equal work applies to following:

- All employees, whether on full-time, part time, casual or temporary contracts, regardless of length of service
- Other workers (for example self-employed) whose contracts require personal performance of the work
- Employment carried out within Great Britain or where there is a sufficiently close link between the employment relationship and United Kingdom

Equal pay in the same employment

A woman can claim equal pay for with a man working in the following situations:

- Working for the same employer at the same workplace
- Working for the same employer but at the different workplace where terms and conditions applied are common. For example another branch of the same organization
- Working for an associated employer. For example employer's parent organization

It is important to note that European Union law also allows a woman to compare herself to a man who is not working under the same employer but where difference in pay can be rectified by the "single source" who has the power to do so. For example pay differences due to sector-wide collective agreement (Equalityhumanrights.com, 2019).

A Comparator

A woman needs to be able to compare her pay to a man doing equal work (a comparator) to claim equal pay. A woman can choose one or more comparators to compare her work with. Moreover, a comparator does not have to give his consent to being named in claim of equal pay. Also, employer cannot influence the choice of comparator for woman.

A woman can select comparator by:

- Using her personal experience and knowledge of the work done by her male colleagues
- Seeking advice from her trade union representative
- Using information gained by going through her employer's internal grievance procedure
- Applying to the employment tribunal for the disclosure of information regarding comparators

The comparator can be:

- Someone she is working with at the present time
- Her predecessor in the job
- Someone she used to work with in the same employment prior to a TUPE transfer to the current employer

Furthermore, a woman can compare her terms of contract with the equivalent terms in her comparator's contract. If the woman's equal pay claim is successful, it will result in her pay being raised to the same level as her comparator and she can be awarded back pay up to maximum of six years. There will be no reduction in the benefits and pay of comparator (Equalityhumanrights.com, 2019).

Equal Work

The compactor may be doing the same job as woman or he may be doing a different job. A woman can claim equal pay for equal work with a comparator doing work that is:

- Like work: this type of work includes similar tasks requiring similar skills and any differences in the work are not of practical importance
- Work rated as equivalent: This type of work is rated under a fair job evaluation scheme as being of equal value in terms of its demand in the market

- Work of equal value: This type of work is not similar and has not been rated as equivalent, but is of equal value in terms of different factors such as effort, skill set, and decision making

GAP IN THE CURRENT LITERATURE

A gap exists in the current literature evidence regarding gender discrimination and mental health issues. When gender discrimination at workplace is linked with mental health issues in women, academic research does not provide a substantial evidence for the relationship. In United Kingdom, workplace mental health issues caused by gender pay gap, sexual harassment, prejudice and other forms of gender discrimination is not supported by a well-established academic research. The gap in this area provides with a chance to carry out academic research in the United Kingdom business industry. Only few research publications with a large sample have tried to establish a relationship between genders and mental health disorders. Primary research methods are not commonly used for the research in this area and dataset used is either through national data collection agencies or private data collection companies. There is a need for the primary research using qualitative techniques to better understand and explain the relationship between the gender discrimination and mental health issues at workplace. Primary research is needed in this area to get more substantial evidence regarding the link of gender stereotyping and mental health problems at workplace.

DISCUSSION AND LIMITATIONS

DISCUSSION

The literature presented in the paper has broad implications and consequences for organizations. It can be applied to healthcare, education, business, services and other public and private sector organizations. All these organizations pay great importance to human resource management because policies created by HR determine the health of organization in the long-run. Equal opportunity at work place is important towards this end. Elimination of all kinds of discrimination will help in the promotion of prolific environment which will promote team work and efficiency. If organizations fail to follow the equity principles, then it can cause psychological health risks along with other issues in employees. Gender, race, ethnicity, color and other kinds of discrimination at workplace will hamper the progress of public and private organizations. Promotion of fairness is essential for the success of product and service industry in United Kingdom. Findings of this research can be applied to organizations with large and small human capital equally. Results show that gender discrimination still exists in the organizations. Many factors emphasized by the article include private ownership of businesses, gender pay gap and employment rates. Men have more recompenses than women in the economy in many areas and it leads towards stress and depression in female population with higher percentage than men. When these values are projected on the national level, they show that there is still need for more pragmatic policies to be adopted by business organizations. The research also suggests the importance of well-being of older women. Their well-being is closely linked with the workplace environment. It is necessary to focus on refining the conditions at work. Elimination of gender discrimination is huge milestone towards improving

these workplace conditions. Discrimination along with other factors adversely marks the health of women and particularly older women. Employers should consider the consequences as older women continue to grow in percentage at workplace due to various social and personal pressures. Workplace conditions are closely connected with the health of women. Productivity of the organization is directly linked with the motivation of employees. Moreover, motivation level of employees is closely associated to their well-being. Therefore, it is important for employers to focus on the betterment of female employees as well as male employees.

LIMITATIONS

There are always certain barriers and impediments related to academic research. There were some limitations while doing research for this paper. First and most important barrier was unavailability of sufficient secondary data. As mentioned previously in the literature review, there is a gap in the academic work on the topic of gender discrimination. So, finding the useful data sources was tedious process. There is another limitation which is related to the preconceived notions of authors. Previous work by authors used in this article consisted of both primary and secondary data. Personal bias of researchers may impact the outcomes of research in some cases which can lead towards different conclusions.

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