

Role of women in today's society and the inequality in genders

Rameen Masood 

Student, Istanbul Arel University, Türkiye, e-mail: rameenmasood12@gmail.com

Abstract

The main method used was a survey which around 350 working women from multiple countries including Pakistan, Turkey, and Lebanon responded to, regarding different aspects of their professional ideologies and observations. Extensive secondary research was employed to explore the issues of role of women in society, sexual harassment faced by women in their homes and workplaces, and the magnitude of gender inequality in developing versus developed countries. The main findings concluded that gender inequality is a long-standing hurdle in the path of women. It exists at all levels in the society and is not limited to a single culture or country. The gender inequality is not the only barrier faced by women in their journeys; however, it may pave way for other obstacles like sexual harassment. The measures presently taken to combat the negative impacts of gender inequality on women are inadequate and require more thought and better implementation for them to prove fruitful in eradicating the issue.

Keywords: Role of Women, Gender Inequality, Sexual Harassment, Growth Opportunities, Female Leadership

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Corresponding Author/ Sorumlu Yazar:
Rameen Masood
E-mail: rameenmasood12@gmail.com



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1. INTRODUCTION

In contemporary society, achieving gender equality has emerged as a central objective in the pursuit of social justice and societal progress. Despite substantial advancements towards this cause, a persistent and deeply entrenched obstacle continues to impede women's progress in their professional pursuits: the inequality that exists from centuries (Susan,2022). This term encompasses the intangible yet formidable barriers that hinder women's growth and mobility and restrict their access to their limited positions in societies. Over the course of history, women have encountered numerous challenges that restrict their opportunities and prevent them from enjoying the same privileges as their male counterparts in similar positions. The gender inequality serves as a symbol of these imperceptible obstacles that perpetuate gender disparities and hinder women's advancement in various societies, sectors, and countries (Albrecht, 2022). This essay aims to delve into the concept of gender inequalities, explore its implications for women in their lives, and unravel the multifaceted challenges it poses. By analysing the underlying causes and consequences of this phenomenon and proposing potential strategies for reducing these gender inequalities, we can deepen our understanding of gender inequality and actively contribute to the creation of inclusive and equitable environments for women.

2. OBSTACLES FACED BY WOMEN

The obstacles encountered by women in their life journeys have persisted throughout history, transcending time and cultural boundaries. Whether in the realms of finance, marketing, human resources, or procurement, women often find themselves navigating through deeply male-dominated environments. This systemic gender disparity can be attributed to a complex interplay of social, cultural, and institutional factors. The concept of the gender inequality is symbolic of the invisible barriers that limit women's growth and mobility, and it manifests differently across countries and businesses all over the world. Despite significant promotion of diversity in companies, as well as legislation for equal opportunities for women and men, it

must be noted that women still remain largely in the minority in decision-making positions. This observation reflects the phenomenon of gender inequality that constitutes vertical discrimination within societies against women (James,2021). Although gender inequality has generated research interest, some authors have pointed out that theoretical models have made little attempt to develop an understanding of this phenomenon and its implications. However, despite these initiatives and the increasing number of qualified and trained women, it is clear that they are still largely underrepresented in the decision-making process in most sectors (Powell,2021). Indeed, despite the current enthusiasm for diversity in companies and regulations for equal opportunities for both genders (e.g., the anti-discrimination law of May 10, 2007, and by extension, the gender law), the numbers have not changed much in the last decade. Women constitute fewer leadership positions. In 2018, women occupied 16% of positions on the executive committees of large Belgian companies:2 better than ten years ago, when the rate hovered between 9 and 10%, but still low compared to the overall employment rate of women and their share of the population of university graduates (60%).

3. DEVELOPED VERSUS DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

Nevertheless, women in developed countries find it comparatively easier to work in corporations relative to those in developing countries. This is accounted for by various reasons as developing nations, in particular, present unique challenges that exacerbate gender inequities. For example, in countries like India and Pakistan, deeply rooted societal norms and limited access to education perpetuates gender disparities in the workplace or work culture and society overall from the very start. This implies that, in a developed country like the US, women find it easier to go out, look for a job, and start working, because their society accepts women as part of its workforce (Vroman,2021). That being said, every country has a different level of gender inequality.

A cardinal factor that affects the density of gender inequality is a country's policies. China

is a fitting example of this fact. When the Chinese government developed and implemented its One-Child policy, Chinese women were able to join the workforce in large numbers, because their responsibilities at home were reduced (Anders,2022).

4. METHODOLOGY AND FINDINGS

The methodology that was used to understand the extent of inequality faced by women in the society was surveys. Surveys are the best method to use when trying to collect qualitative data because the researcher is able to collect detailed data in a time-efficient manner. The survey consisted of 10 questions. It was limited to this number of questions because participants often feel they are unable to fill longer surveys. The survey also consisted of closed ended questions so that the responses of the participants could be easily interpreted while analysing the findings. The respondents could tick yes or no only as an answer. The survey was given to 350 women who were all working different jobs.

The survey consisted of the following questions:

Q1. Do you think there is gender inequality in your country?

Q2. Do you feel that women are given the same work opportunities as men?

Q3. Do you think stereotypes formed against women play a role in increasing gender inequality in the society?

Q4. Do you think the role of women should be limited to taking care of their families?

Q5. Do you think the gender of a person should decide whether they get a promotion at work or not?

Q6. At your workplace, are women treated equally as compared by their male co-workers?

Q7. Do you think women are given the same promotional opportunities as men?

Q8. Are there more men at a higher position in your company as compared to women?

Q9. Do you think men are better suited to be CEOs?

Q10. Do you think women in developed countries

are treated better than women in developing countries?

The findings of the surveys were very interesting with similar answers from most of the participants. Majority (65%) of the participants believed that a gender inequality existed in their country. 60% of the respondents believed that women were not given equal opportunities. 68% believed that stereotypes against women do play a role in increasing gender inequality. 80% answered no to women being restricted only to taking care of their families. 78% believed that women were not treated equally and were not given higher positions in the office and 85% believed that women in developed countries were treated better than women in developing countries.

5. DOMESTIC RESPONSIBILITIES OF WOMEN

In sharp contrast to this, a family, on average, has more than three children in each household in the rural areas of many developing countries. This increases the domestic responsibilities of the women who marry into these families, ultimately reducing the number of women in the workforce. Similarly, the values instilled in people in some scarcely developed third world countries hold them back from viewing women as an equal part of their workforce. It is important to acknowledge that despite advancements, gender inequalities continue to persist within corporations in developed countries as well. However, this observation does indicate that proactive measures have been implemented to mitigate the prevalence and impact of such barriers (Morgen et al, 2022).

Moving on, developing countries face the unfortunate reality of limited awareness surrounding gender inequality, resulting in minimal progress being made within corporate settings to address the gender gap. This stark contrast can also be attributed to disparities in educational opportunities between developed and developing nations. The level of education attained by women in a given country directly influences their awareness of gender inequalities, and conversely, their lack

of awareness perpetuates sexism. Therefore, it has become evident that recognizing the issue of gender inequality is an essential prerequisite for devising effective measures to dismantle this ever-existing phenomenon (Morgen et al., 2022).

5.1. Gender Inequality As a Major Hurdle

Apart from the gender inequality, women face multifaceted hurdles in their professional lives. Sexual harassment, a pervasive issue plaguing workplace, poses a significant barrier to women's career advancement and growth in society. Sexual harassment in the workplace and in the regular lives of women remains a distressing reality for countless women, undermining their rights, dignity, and professional aspirations. Studies consistently highlight the alarming frequency of sexual harassment incidents in workplaces and in societies overall (Richardson, 2020). According to a report by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), nearly 75% of women have experienced some form of workplace harassment, with a significant portion of these cases involving sexual harassment. Additionally, a survey conducted by the International Labour Organization (ILO) revealed that approximately 32% of women worldwide have experienced workplace sexual harassment. Human Rights watchdog reports that in Pakistan, 68% women are sexually harassed. Still, many of them remain silent and reluctant to lodge formal or informal complaints of their disturbing experiences because of the fear of losing job, shame, stigmatization on women's repute and not wanting their families to know about the issue. In Nepal, research on sexual harassment in the workplace revealed that the problem is highly prevalent in workplaces, as 53.84 per cent of women workers reported that they have faced the issue of sexual harassment in their workplaces. In Japan, a study conducted by the Ministry of Labour found that out of 2254 women respondents, two third were subject to some form of sexually harassment. Caran et al. (2010) has conducted research to find out the existence of sexual harassment (SA) among professors in a public university in Brazil. 40.7% of the participants admitted being victims of SA at work, while 59.3% knew a fellow who had

suffered SA and 70.4% stated that it is a common problem in the Institution. Women tend to face sexual harassment in every aspect of their life, whether its professional or private.

5.2. Harassment of Women in Workplaces

It is important to identify the link between gender inequality and their role in societies and at the workplace. As far as the harassment of women at workplace in the developed world is concerned, two third of the complainants alleged that their harasser was in a superior position to them, reflecting a traditional sexual harassment profile of a superior/subordinate relationship. Anita Hill, a prominent advocate, remarked, "Sexual harassment is about power. It's about power in the workplace, power in your home. It's about power." This quote underscores the power dynamics at play and the urgent need for systemic changes that challenge and dismantle oppressive structures. On the one hand, it is an oversimplification to say that having more women in higher-level positions would stamp out all sexual harassment problems, but on the other, it is hard to deny that if more women are in supervisory, managerial, and executive jobs at a company, it is more likely to be proactive about addressing the problem and holding harassers accountable. The sexual harassment faced by women in their private lives can be resolved only by attributing the same level of power to men and women (Edin, 2022).

The persistence of gender inequality in terms of opportunities and representation further impedes female progress. One reason why men tend to advance more quickly in the corporate world compared to women is the presence of gender discrimination, which is fueled by unfounded stereotypes that view women as too "feminine" (Branson, 2006). Researchers have faced challenges in drawing definitive conclusions due to the limited representation of women in top positions. For instance, in Fortune 500 companies, only 14.8% of board seats were held by women (Catalyst, 2007). Even in countries like Australia, Canada, Japan, and Europe, the presence of female directors is scarce. The percentages of female directors in these countries range from as low as 0.4% to

10.6% (Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency [EOWA], 2006; European Professional Women's Network [EPWN], 2004).

6. STUDIES CONDUCTED ON OBSTACLES FACED BY WOMEN

Recent studies have delved into new areas of investigation. For instance, cross-sectional evidence collected by Baxter and Wright (2017) highlights the importance of tailored surveys that target working women who have experienced repeated promotion denials. Such research endeavours aim to gather accurate data and generate insights into the prevalence and impact of the gender inequality faced by women. The promotion denials reflect a broader systemic issue of gender bias and discrimination, limiting women's professional growth and reinforcing the inequalities that exist. Studies conducted by Anders Bjorklund (2018) in the US show that, on average, men had a higher chance of promotion than women at all levels of the hierarchy, denoting gender inequality at multiple stages in the corporation. During this study, a sample comprising women was asked about the negative effects of gender inequality on their professional lives, and predictably, 80% of them had similar answers. In a study by Edin & Richardsson (2017), where the age, experience level, and the quality of work done by the employees were controlled by researchers, it was discovered that men were promoted to higher levels while women were discriminated against throughout the hierarchical levels and every level of society.

Ferre and Purkayastha (2019) demonstrated that the way in which institutional structures and social environments are built ensures the persistence of women's inferiority at jobs and in societies in general. Men are awarded privileges solely because of their gender. According to Dana M. Britton and Christine L. Williams (2020), women are faced with systematic obstacles at every level of the organizational hierarchy and face difficulties in every aspect of their lives. These barriers can take the form of an inherent gender bias that manifests itself in a variety of ways i.e., rarely getting promoted during promotional processes. Prejudice and gender oppression ingrained in men constitutes two

of the main reasons behind gender inequalities in many societies. Gender bias engenders an inferior position for women. As a consequence, they become more susceptible to other adversities like sexual harassment that violates their rights. Meanwhile, the prevalent mindset among people fails to advocate, or even attempt, the equal treatment of women.

Men are given dominance in both workplaces and societal roles. When male managers are instructed to make hiring decisions, especially promotion decisions, they tend to focus on many irrelevant aspects such as the ill-founded belief that women leave the organization upon or during pregnancy (Denton & Zeytinoglu, 2022). The skill set of the woman, her dedication, and her loyal service to the company are regularly overlooked. Instead, the negatives garner the focus of these supervisors when promotion decisions are taken (Zane, 2021). In most of the cases, men were promoted to positions of senior authority when the decision was up to male managers. This panel, consisting of male managers who sit at top positions in every firm, exceedingly reinforces the gender inequality (Kirchmeyer, 2020).

6.1. Role of Men in Causing Gender Inequality

Both senior and junior male managers hold the belief that women lack the competence to effectively balance their familial and professional responsibilities. They assume that when faced with a choice between pursuing their career aspirations or prioritizing their families, women would opt for the latter (Zane, 2021). These generalizations create a significant barrier in breaking through the gender inequalities and ensuring that women have equal access to the career opportunities deserve and work hard to earn.

To weaken this gender inequality and promote gender equity in the workplace, it is crucial to address and eliminate preconceived misconceptions. It requires challenging the notion that women's commitment to their families undermines their professional abilities. Research and evidence have consistently shown that women are capable of successfully

managing both their personal and professional lives. Moreover, it is important to foster a work culture that supports and accommodates the diverse responsibilities and aspirations of all employees, regardless of their gender. This includes implementing family-friendly policies, flexible work arrangements, and providing support systems that allow individuals to strike a balance between their work and personal commitments. The role of women in societies should be given the due importance it deserves.

The barriers women face when they are promoted to managerial positions are counted amongst the less destructive obstacles in their work-lives in comparison to others such as sexual harassment which harms their self-esteem and their prestige in both professional and personal spheres. The impact of gender inequalities extends beyond the limitations of promotions; women also face other challenges which violate their rights as employees. James et al. (2019) proposed categorizing different forms of gender inequalities, such as pay gender inequalities, managerial promotion inequalities, and prestige gender inequalities, to better understand their causes and effects.

6.2. The Labeling Culture And Its Implications

Let us have a look at the formidable impact of the gender inequality in the corporate sector where it continues to thrive as a pervasive phenomenon. According to a report published by Catalyst, a leading non-profit organization focused on workplace equality, women hold only 29% of senior management positions globally. This stark underrepresentation of women at top leadership levels highlights the persistent existence of the gender inequality (Catalyst, 2021). Research conducted by Eagly and Carli (2007) reveals that gender stereotypes and biased perceptions contribute to the gender inequality. Stereotypes associating men with leadership qualities and women with communal traits create unconscious biases, influencing the evaluation and promotion processes within organizations. These biases perpetuate the gender inequality by impeding women's progress towards executive roles fuelled by various causes like the labelling culture across organisations. The

labelling culture often results in the assignment of negative attributes to women who challenge traditional gender norms by aspiring leadership roles. Women who exhibit assertiveness, confidence, and ambition may be labelled as "bossy," "aggressive," or "difficult to work with," while their male counterparts displaying the same behaviours are seen as competent and driven. This gender-based perceptions creates a double standard, undermining women's credibility and hindering their chances of career and professional advancement.

The impact of the labelling culture goes beyond individual experiences. It permeates the organizational culture, shaping norms and expectations around gender roles and leadership. As a result, even well-intentioned policies and initiatives aimed at promoting diversity and inclusion may fall short if the underlying toxic culture is not addressed. Women in leadership positions have to adopt a leadership style that is compatible with the company's traditionally male-dominated culture (Mayer, 2022). They feel forced to adopt directing methods that will be met with appreciation from their male managers and senior male executives. As a result, they are unable to adopt the leadership style that they are most comfortable with, inhibiting them from working in a manner which is the most fulfilling to themselves (Oakley, 2021). The independence of women as managers is challenged because they are restrained from being true to themselves and their teams as leaders.

7. ADVANTAGES OF DIVERSE LEADERSHIP

Studies have shown that diverse leadership teams yield significant benefits for organizations. A report by McKinsey & Company indicates that companies in the top quartile for gender diversity on executive teams are 25% more likely to have above-average profitability than those in the bottom quartile (Hunt, Layton, & Prince, 2015). This data emphasizes the business imperative of reducing gender inequality and fostering gender equality within corporate leadership and the society.

The gender inequality in politics remains a stubborn challenge for women around the world, restricting their advancement to the highest echelons of political power and leadership. A closer look at the facts and figures reveals the extent of the gender inequality and the uphill battle women face in the realm of politics. One striking fact is the underrepresentation of women in political leadership positions. According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union's data from September 2021, women constituted only 23.7% of national parliamentarians worldwide. This glaring disparity extends to heads of state or government, where women remain a minority. Such substantial underrepresentation highlights the ongoing struggle women encounter in accessing and assuming influential political roles. Decision makers in the political arena form their decisions based on the subconscious premise that there should be a higher percentage of men than women on every platform; this constitutes an incumbency advantage or inertia towards women (Welsh, 2020). The justification offered by these decision-makers is that it seems unreasonable to select women in a field where women have been historically absent (Purcell, 2022). Politics is yet another career domain where disparity among the two genders is crystal clear to anyone who is even mildly inclined towards these matters (Lynn, 2021). The role of Chief Staff Officer is bestowed upon women as a reward for their years of loyalty to a political candidate. They are not offered the same opportunities in terms of the position that they autonomously aspire to achieve. In contrast, men benefit considerably from this gender disparity, making their way up the political ladder astoundingly quicker (Wirth, 2022). Estimates suggest that achieving gender parity in political leadership globally could take another 50 to 100 years at the current rate. These figures underscore the urgent need for concerted efforts to dismantle the gender inequality, promote gender equality, challenge biases, and create inclusive political environments that empower women to participate fully in the political spheres.

7.1. Gender Stereotypes And Their Implications

The growth of gender inequality is fuelled by implicit bias and unconscious gender stereotypes. This bias hampers the recruitment process, creating an unfair hiring system for women (Purcell, MacArthur, and Samblanet, 2010). To gain a comprehensive understanding of the extent of the gender inequality effect, recent studies have examined not only the gender ratios and percentages of women at different hierarchical levels but also the gender pay gap within organizations (Jones et al., 2021). Shockingly, even in companies that exhibit relatively equitable gender representation, substantial pay disparities exist, highlighting the deep-rooted nature of gender inequality in the workplace. HR departments' attempts to design gender-neutral selection processes often fall short, contributing to the perpetuation of the gender disparities that exist (Kleinberg & Raghavan, 2019). Legislations concerning equal pay exist in a lot of countries, but they are not effectively executed in practice (Frankforter, 2019). Whether they are teaching jobs or corporate jobs, men are paid more than women without consideration of any other factor than gender (Linney, 2018). Anti-sex discrimination laws have also been formulated in various countries, but their implementation has been excruciatingly slow, while women continue to be heavily discriminated against, especially in the corporate sector. These laws and regulations will not do much to reduce gender inequality if they are not administered properly, and soon (Borg & Gall, 2017).

While it is important to acknowledge the structural barriers that contribute to the gender inequality, it is equally essential to recognize that fellow female workers can inadvertently reinforce these inhibitions. Internalized biases and misogynistic stereotypes perpetuated by women themselves can impede their professional advancement. This phenomenon, known as the "queen bee syndrome," reveals a complex dynamic within workplaces.

7.2. The Role of Mentoring

Research indicates that women in leadership positions may be less likely to mentor or support other women, hindering their progress. A study published in the Harvard Business Review in 2008 found that women in senior positions were more reluctant than their male counterparts to mentor or advocate for other women. This behaviour can stem from the scarcity mindset, where women perceive limited opportunities for advancement and see other women as competitors rather than collaborators.

Sheryl Sandberg, Facebook's COO and founder of the "Lean In" movement, pointed out in her book, "Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead," that women sometimes hold themselves back by not supporting each other. She writes, "Too often, women become envious or resentful of their female colleagues because they perceive them as competitors." This phenomenon is not solely anecdotal; studies corroborate its existence. The 2020 Women in the Workplace report, conducted by LeanIn.Org and McKinsey & Company, revealed that women are less likely to receive advice from senior leaders or have opportunities for career advancement compared to their male counterparts. This disparity can be partially attributed to the lack of support and sponsorship from fellow female workers.

However, it is crucial to avoid generalizations and recognize that this behaviour is not universally characteristic of all women in the workforce. Many of them actively champion and support their female colleagues, challenging the gender disparity with power. These women understand the importance of collaboration, networking, and uplifting one another to collectively overcome systemic barriers burdening them for centuries.

Prominent figures have spoken out about the significance of female solidarity in dismantling the gender inequality. Madeleine Albright, the first female U.S. Secretary of State, once stated, "There is a special place in hell for women who don't help other women." Albright's quote emphasizes the responsibility of women to support and empower one another to reduce inequality based on gender and achieve equality.

8. STEPS THAT CAN BE TAKEN TO REDUCE GENDER INEQUALITY

In order to reduce gender inequality, it is important to first recognise the factors that contribute to its persistence. Following are the most prominent factors that play a key role in increasing gender inequality:

- ***Implicit Bias in Evaluation and Promotion:*** Implicit biases, often unconscious, affect decision-making processes and hinder women's advancement. Research conducted by Yale University revealed that both male and female evaluators are more likely to associate men with leadership potential and higher competence, leading to unfair evaluations and promotion decisions. This bias increases the gender inequality by overlooking women's qualifications and potential.
- ***Lack of Flexible Work Arrangements:*** The absence of flexible work arrangements can pose a significant challenge for women in their career progression. Many of them juggle multiple responsibilities, including caregiving and household tasks. Without flexible schedules or remote work options, it becomes challenging for women to achieve a work-life balance, leading to a stalled career progression.
- ***Male-Dominated Networking and Sponsorship:*** Networking and sponsorship are crucial for career advancement. Many industries and organizations still constitute male-dominated networks and sponsorship structures. Men are more likely to have access to influential networks and senior mentors who can complement their careers. This disparity in networking limits women's visibility and access to rewarding relationships, adversely impacting their advancement opportunities.
- ***Stereotype Threat:*** Stereotype threat refers to the fear of confirming negative stereotypes associated with one's social group. Women may experience stereotype threat in male-dominated fields, leading to reduced confidence and performance. A study published in the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology found that women's performance in quantitative tasks

declined when reminded of gender stereotypes. This phenomenon hampers women's ability to thrive and be recognized for their skills, ultimately reinforcing the gender inequality.

- **Maternal Bias and Maternity Penalties:** Maternal bias as a form of gender bias affects women who become mothers. Research has shown that women experience reduced perceived competence and commitment to their careers after having children. It often leads to "maternity penalties" in the form of decreased promotion prospects, lower salaries, and limited access to intellectually stimulating assignments. The perception that motherhood compromises commitment and availability create additional barriers for women's growth.

- **Institutional Barriers and Organizational Culture:** Structural and cultural barriers within organizations contribute to gender inequality. Limited availability of family-friendly policies, such as affordable childcare or parental leave, can hinder women's career progression. Additionally, organizational cultures that prioritize long hours and a "face-time" mentality disadvantage women who seek work-life balance or alternative approaches to leadership.

- **Unconscious Bias Training Insufficiency:** While unconscious bias training is increasingly adopted by organizations, its impact may be limited without comprehensive implementation. A study published in the Journal of Experimental Social Psychology showed that brief unconscious bias training programs had minimal long-term effects on reducing biases. Organizations need to invest in sustained and comprehensive training efforts to address biases effectively.

- **Gendered Communication Styles:** Gendered communication styles and expectations can negatively impact women's progression. Research has shown that assertive communication styles, typically associated with leadership, are more readily accepted by men, while women are often expected to exhibit communal and nurturing behaviours. This discrepancy can lead to women's ideas being overlooked or undervalued, limiting their visibility and influence within organizations.

- **Lack of Sponsorship:** While mentorship provides guidance and advice, sponsorship involves influential individuals advocating for an individual's career advancement. Women often face a shortage of sponsors who actively champion their professional growth. A study by the Center for Talent Innovation found that women were 54% less likely than men to have a sponsor, which can substantially impede their access to critical opportunities and visibility within the organization.

- **Gendered Performance Evaluation Criteria:** Performance evaluation criteria that are gendered or biased can also hinder women's progress. Research has indicated that traditional evaluation metrics may not fully capture the leadership skills and qualities that women bring to the table. Gender-neutral performance assessment frameworks that account for a diverse range of leadership styles and competencies are needed to mitigate this bias.

- **Lack of Access to Stretch Assignments:** Stretch assignments or high-profile projects are vital for career growth, skill development, and visibility. However, women may face minimal access to these opportunities due to bias, perceived risk-aversion, or traditional gender roles. The Center for American Progress reported that women are less likely than men to be given challenging assignments that can showcase their abilities and pave the way for career advancement.

- **Limited Boardroom Diversity:** The composition of corporate boards has a significant impact on organizational decision-making and culture. Research has consistently shown that diverse boards, including gender diversity, lead to improved performance and innovation. However, women's representation on boards remains low in many companies. The 2020 Women on Boards Gender Diversity Index revealed that women held only 22.6% of board seats in Fortune 1000 companies. The lack of diverse perspectives at the highest level of authority increases the gender inequality and hampers gender equality in leadership.

- **Digital Gender Divide:** The digital gender divide refers to the disparities in access, usage, and skills related to digital technologies between men and women. In today's digital age, technological proficiency is increasingly crucial for career advancement. However, women regularly face barriers such as limited access to technology, stereotypes that discourage their interest in STEM fields, and biases that hinder their progression in high-tech roles. Bridging the digital gender divide is essential to ensure more equal opportunities for all genders in emerging industries and digital-centric workplaces.

- **Unconscious Bias in Artificial Intelligence (AI) Systems:** As AI technology becomes more popular in various aspects of organizations, the presence of unconscious biases in AI systems can increase the gender disparity. AI algorithms trained on biased data can perpetuate discriminatory practices in recruitment, performance evaluation, and promotion decisions. For instance, if historical data reflects biased gender patterns, AI systems may unintentionally reproduce those biases, leading to unequal treatment of women. Addressing and mitigating unconscious biases in AI systems is therefore crucial to ensure fair and equitable opportunities for career advancement.

- **Online Harassment and Cyberbullying:** The rise of online platforms and social media has opened new avenues for professional networking and communication. However, women are disproportionately affected by online harassment and cyberbullying, which can have significant repercussions on their professional lives. Research by the Pew Research Center has shown that women experience higher rates of online harassment, including sexist and misogynistic attacks. Such harassment may erode women's confidence, impede their participation in online professional spaces, and limit professional opportunities for them.

9. CONCLUSION

Taking it all into account, it is reasonable to assert that the issue of the gender inequality remains a significant and persistent challenge for women. Cross-sectional evidence collected by researchers globally has proven quite useful because it has

laid foundation for further research in the future. Baxter and Wright (2017) remarked that accurate data on the gender disparity phenomenon can be collected only if the right people are asked the right questions at the right time. Another conundrum explored by Hibbs & Locking (2021) when surveying women on this topic was the possibility of a mightier gender inequality at the upper levels of hierarchy than the lower, and that if this is the case, is this phenomenon consistent throughout developed and developing countries? An interesting question that arises here is: are men aware of the ascending gender discrepancy and the unfair distribution of promotional opportunities? Such questions form basis for further research. All in all, the problem of gender inequality can be resolved only when this phenomenon is recognized by both men and women across the globe. Despite progress in various aspects of gender equality, women continue to face obstacles that hinder their progressive mobility and limit their access to top leadership positions. The gender inequality, often defined as the barriers that prevent women from reaching the highest echelons of power and authority, is just one among several hurdles that women encounter in professional environments.

Numerous studies conducted worldwide have shed light on this issue, revealing that even in countries like Sweden, often perceived as having relatively higher gender equality, there is pervasive discrimination against women when it comes to their placement in senior roles within businesses. The Scandinavian countries, known for their progressive policies and commitment to gender equality, have made significant strides in reducing gender gaps in various areas. However, the gender discrepancy has not vanished, indicating that there are deeper-rooted systemic factors at play that need to be addressed.

This realization has sparked increasing attention to the subject, leading to ongoing studies and research aimed at understanding and addressing the gender inequality more effectively. Researchers, policymakers, and organizations are working together to unravel the complexities of this issue, examining its causes and consequences, and proposing

strategies for breaking this barrier. The recognition of the disparity in gender as an ever-increasing problem has also been amplified by women themselves due to negative conditioning and internalized misogyny, who are now more conscious than ever of its existence and are experiencing its adverse effects to an alarmingly high extent.

Noteworthy findings from various studies indicate that even when controlling for variables like age and race between both genders, the gender discrepancy remains intact due to insufficient measures taken to address it systematically. While individual efforts and initiatives have made a difference for some women, comprehensive and coordinated action is necessary to dismantle the structural and cultural barriers that perpetuate gender disparities in the workplace.

To address inequality and decrease its negative impacts, it is crucial to identify and mitigate the underlying causes both internally within organizations and externally within society as a whole. Implementing diversity-enhancing policies at all levels emerges as a viable corrective measure. Organizations need to adopt proactive strategies that go beyond tokenism and foster a culture of inclusion and equal opportunity for all.

One key aspect of this approach is the implementation of policies that promote diversity and inclusion within organizations. This can include targeted recruitment efforts aimed at attracting and hiring qualified female candidates, as well as the establishment of mentoring programs that provide guidance and support to women as they navigate their professional journeys.

Addressing this issue requires more than just internal organizational efforts. It necessitates a broader societal transformation to challenge deeply ingrained prejudice and norms that perpetuate gender inequality. This includes initiatives to promote gender equality in education, media representation, and cultural narratives. By challenging traditional gender roles and expectations, we can create an

environment that encourages women to aspire leadership positions and provides them with the necessary support to succeed.

In addition, creating a culture that values and celebrates gender diversity is crucial in dismantling the biases that contribute to the gender disparity effect. Organizations must foster an environment where gender equality is not only respected but actively promoted. This can be achieved by challenging preconceived notions, promoting inclusive behaviours and attitudes among employees, and providing training and awareness programs to address unconscious biases.

Furthermore, organizations should prioritize the development and advancement of women leaders through targeted leadership development programs, networking opportunities, and sponsorship initiatives. By recognizing and valuing the unique perspectives and contributions of women, organizations can create a more equitable and inclusive workplace that makes all members better off.

To conclude the discussion, the gender inequality remains a mighty barrier for women, even in countries with a reputation for gender equality. That being said, by implementing proactive measures to address the underlying causes and promoting inclusion, organizations can pave the way for women to break through these barriers. It is essential for corporations to recognize the potential of women in leadership positions and to provide the necessary support system for them to thrive. Only by collectively working towards gender parity can we create a truly equitable and healthy society that fosters the talents and contributions of every individual, regardless of race, gender, or ethnicity. Implementing diversity-enhancing policies at all levels emerges as a viable corrective measure (Purcell, 2019). This includes strategies such as targeted recruitment efforts, mentoring programs, and flexible work arrangements (Carter & Silva, 2023). The result of these efforts, if appropriately and adequately implemented, will emerge in form of a better and fairer world.

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