

The Social Status of Working Women: Progress and Challenges

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Abstract: The troubles and tribulations confronted by working women continue to be significantly apparent, notwithstanding the advancement in gender equality over the preceding few decades. A part of diversity management is working to achieve gender equality and create a comfortable working environment for women. However, in many organizations, gender biases and stereotypes frequently occur, consciously or unconsciously, regardless of whether women take on leadership roles. This article explores the multi-layered stumbling blocks that hinder women's social status and professional improvement in the workforce. Key challenges comprise persistent workplace discrimination and pestering, the continuing gender pay gap, and the teething troubles in balancing work and family life due to societal outlooks and inadequate sustenance systems. Furthermore, traditional gender customs and the glass ceiling effect contribute to the under-representation of women in leadership roles. By examining these issues, this article highlights the ongoing need for comprehensive policies and cultural shifts that support gender equality, aiming to improve the social and professional status of working women across all sectors.

Keywords: Progress, Challenges, Working women, Gender, Status.

INTRODUCTION

Though the social status of working women has undergone significant transformations over the past few decades, challenges remain in achieving-complete gender parity. Economists have a particular interest in the implications of time use for consumption and living standards. This article explores the chronological background, status, and prospects for women at work, focusing on social perceptions, economic contributions, and the persistent barriers that need to be tackled. (Folbre, 2009).

Working women have made substantial strides in the professional world, yet significant challenges that

hinder their social status and overall equality continue to be faced by them. These challenges have been deeply rooted in historical gender norms, societal expectations, and systemic inequalities across various cultures and industries. In other words, even though women disproportionately enter lower-paid, female-dominated occupations, this decision is shaped by discrimination, societal norms, and other forces beyond women's control. The primary obstacles that working women face today, focusing on workplace discrimination, the gender pay gap, work-life balance, and societal expectations, are scrutinized in this article. (Gould, 2016)

Historical Context

Historically, women's participation in the workforce has been found limited and often confined to roles deemed appropriate by societal norms, such as teaching, nursing, or domestic work. The rise of industrialization in the 19th and early 20th centuries shifted these norms, but they had to wait till the mid-20th century for significant progress. A decisive role was played in advocating for equal rights, including access to a broader range of professions and equal pay, by the feminist movements of the 1960s and 1970s. (Goldin, 1990).

This pioneering work traces the transformation of "women's work" into wage labor in the United States, identifying the social, economic, and ideological forces that have shaped our expectations of what women do. Based on the personal experience of individual American women set against the backdrop of American society, Alice Kessler-Harris examines the effects of class, ethnic and racial patterns as well as changing perceptions of wage work for women and the relationship between wage-earning and family roles. (Kessler-Harris, 2003)

Current Social Status:

Today, women's participation in the workforce is higher than ever, with women occupying roles across all sectors, from politics and business to science and technology. Despite these progresses, women time and again face social stigma, particularly in male-dominated fields. Moreover, they are still expected to balance professional responsibilities with traditional roles as caregivers, a double burden that can impede their career progression and mental health. (Sandberg, 2013).

How does this inequality persist? Integrating research from sociology, social cognition and psychology, and organizational behavior framed by Gender identifies the general processes through which gender as a principle of inequality rewrites itself into new social and economic organization forms. Cecilia Ridgeway argues that people confront uncertain circumstances with gender beliefs that are more traditional. (Ridgeway, 2011).

Economic Contributions:

Working women indeed contribute significantly to the global economy. Studies have shown that increasing female involvement in the labour market can enhance economic growth. However, the gender pay gap remains a substantial issue to be solved, with women earning, on an average basis, less than their male counterparts. This disparity is intensified by factors such as work-related segregation, undervaluation of "women's work," and discrimination. (Babcock & Laschever, 2009).

Recent research on gender differences in earnings and occupations has produced discouraging findings. The ratio of female to male earnings among full-time workers was roughly constant from the 1950s to the early 1980s, and the segregation of occupations by sex is substantial. It has declined only slightly across the last century. The female-to-male earnings ratio has only risen since the early 1980s. One might have hoped and expected economic progress to have narrowed down the differences in earnings and occupations. (Goldin, 1990). Additionally, data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics indicates that women's labor force participation increased from

33.9% in 1950 to 51.5% in 1980, reflecting broader economic and social changes.

Barriers and Challenges:

Despite progress, several obstructions continue to hamper the social status of working women. These include workplace discrimination, sexual harassment, and the glass ceiling effect, by which women's advancement to top leadership positions turns out to be limited. Moreover, societal expectations around gender roles continue to place women at a disadvantage, particularly in cultures where traditional norms are powerfully entrenched. (Cotter, Hermsen, Ovardia & Vanneman, 2001).

Workplace Discrimination and Harassment:

Workplace discrimination is one of the most pervasive challenges affecting the social status of working women. Despite laws and policies aimed at promoting gender equality, biases that limit their opportunities for advancement are often encountered by women. These biases are manifested in various forms, such as unequal access to promotions, exclusion from essential networks, and the prevalence of gender stereotypes that undermine women's capabilities. (Acker, 1990). Additionally, sexual harassment remains a significant issue, contributing to a hostile work environment and further diminishing women's status in the workplace. (Fitzgerald & Shullman, 1993).

When Linda Babcock asked why so many male graduate students were teaching their courses and most female students were assigned as assistants, her dean said: "More men ask. The women don't ask." It turns out that whether they want higher salaries or more help at home, women often find it hard to ask. Sometimes, it is not known to them that change is possible. Sometimes, they fear that a relationship may be damaged by asking such matters. Sometimes, they do not ask because they have learnt that society can react negatively to women asserting their needs and desires. (Babcock & Laschever, 2009).

The sexual harassment of women in the workplace has only recently been the focus of sustained research in occupational behavior. Over the last decade and particularly the past year-interest in this topic has been

accelerated dramatically, yielding a body of research that casts considerable light on what is known and what is yet to be learned concerning this pernicious barrier to women's career development. The present paper presents an overview of this study to recognize methodological problems and substantive lacunae; we begin by reviewing the two major themes in the research to date: prevalent figures and perceptions and attributions. We then examine two emerging areas of interest (victim responses and organizational factors) and identify several critical topics noticeable by their absence. Following an overview of the explanatory models proposed for sexual harassment, we briefly discuss the importance of multilevel analysis and interdisciplinary research for understanding and alleviating this critical social issue. (Fitzgerald & Shullman, 1993).

The Gender Pay Gap:

The gender pay gap is a clear indicator of the systemic inequality that continues to affect working women. Despite efforts to achieve pay equity, women, on average, still earn less than men for equal work. This gap is influenced by factors such as occupational segregation, where women are overrepresented in lower-paying industries and underrepresented in high-paying fields like technology and finance. (International Labor Organization, 2023). Additionally, women are less likely to negotiate their salaries and more likely to face penalties for doing so, further exacerbating the disparity. (Babcock & Laschever, 2003).

Although human capital factors are now relatively unimportant, women's workforce interruptions and shorter hours remain significant in high-skilled occupations, possibly due to compensating differentials. Gender differences in occupations and industries, as well as differences in gender roles and the gender division of labor, remain essential, and research based on experimental evidence strongly suggests that discrimination cannot be discounted. Psychological attributes or lack of cognitive skills comprise one of the newer explanations for gender differences in outcomes. Our effort to assess the quantitative evidence on the importance of these factors suggests that they account for a small to moderate portion of the gender pay gap, considerably

smaller than, say, occupation and industry effects. However, they contribute to these differences modestly.

Women have entered the labor market in unprecedented numbers, yet these critically needed workers still earn less than men and have fewer opportunities for a better pay scale. This study traces the evolution of the female labor force in America, addressing the issue of gender distinction in the workplace and refuting the notion that women's employment advances were a response to social revolution rather than long-run economic progress.

The patterns of occupational segregation by gender over an extended period. Jacobs' research contributes to understanding how gender disparities in the workforce have evolved, highlighting the persistence of occupational segregation despite societal advancements. Jacobs' findings reveal that, although there has been some progress toward gender integration in various occupations, significant levels of segregation remain. This enduring segregation contributes to persistent gender wage gaps and reinforces traditional gender roles within the labor market. (Jacobs, 1989).

Work-Life Balance:

Harmonizing professional responsibilities with individual life is a significant challenge for numerous working women. Societal expectations often place the burden of caregiving and household duties disproportionately on women, even when they work 24x7 jobs. This twofold burden can lead to stress, fatigue, and deterioration in mental health, ultimately upsetting women's performance and prospects at work. Moreover, the lack of supportive policies, such as paid family leave and affordable childcare, further complicates the ability of women to balance work and family life.

An essential resource for any working woman, 'What Works for Women at Work' is an all-inclusive and insightful guide for becoming skilled at office politics as a woman. Authored by Joan C. Williams, one of the nation's most-cited experts on women and work, and her offspring, writer Rachel Dempsey, this exceptional book offers a multi-generational perspective into the realities of today's workplace. Often, women receive

messages that they have only themselves to blame for failing to get ahead—negotiate further! Stop being such a wimp! Stop being such a witch! What Works for Women at Work tells women - it's not at all their fault. (Williams & Dempsey, 2014).

Societal Expectations and Gender Norms:

Traditional gender standards and societal expectations continue to play a substantial role in shaping the social status of working women. These norms often decree that women should prioritize family over career, leading to stigmatization when they pursue professional accomplishment. (Hochschild, & Machung, 2012). Women in leadership positions may face disapproval for not conforming to these expectations, which can disturb their reputation and social standing. Furthermore, in many cultures, working women are still perceived as less critical earners, which diminishes their contributions and reinforces gender inequalities. (Kabeer, 2008).

We sought to determine the feedback to men and women who have achieved success working on either a male or a female gender-typed job to replicate earlier findings about reactions to women and contrast those with what we assumed would be parallel but different responses to men. We expected that whereas women would be penalized by being cast as more interpersonally hostile and less likeable, men would be reprimanded by being cast as more indecisive and less respected. We furthermore expected that whether successful women and men would be penalized would depend on the sex type of the job at which they had succeeded, with penalties occurring only in circumstances in which success is considered indicative of norm violation. Lastly, because the censure is likely to be directed at individuals who are assumed to violate gender norms, we expected that successful employees would be found differentially desirable as bosses depending upon the perceived gender fit of the job. When success was gender-inconsistent, we expected men and women to be seen as less appropriate as bosses.

The "glass ceiling" refers to the invisible walls preventing women from reaching top leadership positions within establishments. While more women are entering the workforce and achieving mid-level management roles, their representation at the decision-

making level remains unreasonably low. Factors contributing to the glass ceiling include prejudiced promotion practices, lack of mentorship prospects, and the perception that women lack the wherewithal necessary for leadership, such as assertiveness and decisiveness. (Morrison, White, & Velsor, 1987).

Eagly and Carli acknowledge that women are still significantly underrepresented in the top leadership positions across all sectors. Substantial barriers to women's advancement into these leadership positions still exist. However, despite these apparent and covert barriers, some women still find a way to the top. (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

Alternative clarifications are also offered and evaluated, such as differences between female leadership styles and the type of leadership style expected at the top of organizations, feminist explanations for the underrepresentation of women in top management positions, and the probability that the most talented women in business often elude corporate life in favor of entrepreneurial careers.

Future Prospects:

There is a rising recognition of the need for policies supporting gender fairness in the workplace. It consists of promoting paid family leave, affordable childcare, and initiatives to close the gender pay gap. Additionally, altering societal approaches towards gender roles and promoting multiplicity and inclusion in the workplace is critical to improving the social status of employed women. (World Economic Forum)

When economists speak of the "gender gap" these days, they typically refer to methodical differences in the consequences that men and women achieve in the labor market. These changes are seen in the percentages of men and women in the labor force, the types of occupations they select, and their relative incomes or hourly wages. These economic gender gaps, salient issues during the women's movement in the 1960s and 1970s, have been of interest to economists at least since the 1890s. (Godin, 1990).

Conclusion:

Legislative procedures, organizational reforms, and societal shifts gradually address working women's

challenges. Policies that stimulate equal pay, workplace flexibility, and parental leave are progressively implemented across industries, reflecting a growing obligation to gender equality. The rise of women in leadership roles, driven by global movements advocating for women's rights, points out a positive trajectory towards breaking the glass ceiling. (Blau, & Kahn, 2017).

Moreover, advancements in technology and education equip women with the skills necessary to excel in emerging fields, further plummeting gender disparities in the workforce. Cultural norms are also evolving, with greater acceptance of shared domestic responsibilities and recognition of the value women take along to the workplace. (Perez, 2019).

While momentous progress has been made, it is essential to acknowledge that the voyage towards complete equality is ongoing. Continuous efforts, including targeted policies, public awareness campaigns, and the dismantling of entrenched biases, are indispensable to ensure that the challenges faced by working women become a thing of the past. The best way to achieve gender equality is to recognize and develop everyone's talent and potential equally. (Kabeer, 2016). This happens when leadership is balanced between men and women, allowing men to learn from women's leadership styles just as women have traditionally learned from men's. As we build on these successes, the vision of a world where women and men have equal opportunities to thrive professionally and personally becomes increasingly attainable. (Premuzic & Gallop 2020).

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