

CHAPTER: 09

GENDERED WORKSPACES: CONCEPTUALIZING THE PERSISTENT INEQUITIES FACED BY CONTEMPORARY WOMEN EMPLOYEES

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ABSTRACT

*Women in the workforce continue to face systemic barriers despite advancements in gender equality. This paper explores the challenges modern-day women encounter, including gender pay gaps, workplace discrimination, career interruptions, and intersectional disadvantages. Through a review of recent literature, this study examines organizational policies, leadership approaches, and societal shifts that impact women's professional experiences. The paper concludes with recommendations for fostering gender equity in workplaces. Women confront a number of phases in their life, such as being born as a girl child, marrying, and then becoming a mother. A woman's difficulties at every phase of her life are difficult to classify, whether she is a girl child, a wife, or a mother. Nowadays, women want the same chances as men, and the biggest obstacle they face is figuring out how to reconcile their professional and personal lives. Some of the most significant challenges working women face on the job include gender bias, unequal remuneration, mental and physical harassment, and inadequate leave. In addition to all these things, women are expected to fulfil almost all of the responsibilities of being a family member. These responsibilities include the duties associated with being a mother and a wife and the duties associated with maintaining a household and going about daily life. The primary objective of this paper is to concentrate on the significant areas and complications that working women confront in the contemporary day and present a psychological perspective of the concerns, challenges, and role that society plays in these areas. **Keywords:** Gender equity, workplace discrimination, leadership, intersectionality, career progression.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The participation of women in the workforce has increased significantly over the past few decades, yet gender-based challenges persist. Despite policy advancements and corporate diversity initiatives, women continue to experience wage disparities, limited career advancement opportunities, workplace harassment, and systemic biases. The McKinsey Women in the Workplace 2025 report highlights that women in India face a "broken rung" phenomenon, where their representation drops

sharply at the first step up to managerial roles. This structural barrier limits career progression and contributes to gender inequities in leadership positions.

Moreover, intersectionality plays a crucial role in shaping women's workforce experiences. Women from marginalized communities, including those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and racial minorities, encounter compounded challenges. The McKinsey 2024 report emphasizes that women of color and those with disabilities face additional biases that hinder their career growth. These disparities highlight the need for targeted interventions to ensure equitable opportunities for all women.

Workplace culture and organizational policies significantly impact women's career trajectories. Research from **The Hindu Business Line** reveals that **women hold only 17% of C-suite positions and 20% of board roles in India's formal private sector**. This underrepresentation underscores the necessity for inclusive leadership, mentorship programs, and flexible work arrangements to support women's professional growth.

This paper aims to provide a conceptual analysis of these challenges, supported by recent literature, and propose strategies for creating inclusive work environments. By examining systemic barriers, intersectional disadvantages, and organizational policies, this study seeks to contribute to ongoing discussions on gender equity in the workforce.

2. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

- To analyse the systemic barriers affecting women's career progression
- To understand how different personal and social factors impact women's work experiences and career growth.
- To propose actionable strategies for fostering gender equity in the workforce

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Gender Pay Gap & Career Progression

Recent studies highlight persistent wage disparities between men and women across industries. Research by Saiman (2023) emphasizes that women continue to earn less than men despite holding similar qualifications and experience. The study attributes this gap to occupational segregation, negotiation biases, and career interruptions due to caregiving responsibilities.

3.2 Workplace Harassment & Discrimination

Workplace harassment remains a significant concern for women. A study by Barati et al. (2021) identifies mental harassment, sexual harassment, and workplace discrimination as major barriers to

women's career progression. The research suggests that organizations must implement strict anti-harassment policies and safe reporting mechanisms to ensure a secure work environment.

3.3 Intersectionality & Workforce Diversity

Women from marginalized communities face compounded challenges due to race, socioeconomic status, and disability. Mahida & Chauhan (2023) discuss how **intersectionality** plays a crucial role in shaping women's workforce experiences. Their study highlights that women of colour and those from lower-income backgrounds often encounter additional biases that hinder their career growth.

3.4 Work-Life Balance & Organizational Support

Balancing professional and personal responsibilities is a major challenge for working women. Mahida & Chauhan (2023) argue that work-life balance is one of the most pressing issues for women employees in the 21st century. Their research suggests that flexible work arrangements, supportive leadership, and mentorship programs can significantly improve women's career longevity and satisfaction.

3.5 Trends in Women's Employment

A study by Balbhim & Chougule (2021) examines the evolving trends in women's employment in India. The research highlights that women are increasingly occupying leadership roles, yet societal expectations continue to place additional burdens on them. The study calls for a fundamental shift in workplace attitudes to support gender equity.

3.6 Working Women – Challenges of Work and Life

According to Sandeep (2017), women whose status and roles traditionally were well defined and fixed in the society have undergone far reaching changes. Today women have made a mark in fields that were unknown to her earlier. Women of the current generation have received higher education which has resulted in significant improvements in the economic status of the families (Sandeep, 2017). Mathew and Panchanathan (2011) observed that earlier the female working population in India was mainly employed in subordinate jobs, however due to higher education and globalisation; women have made careers at par with men. Today, increasing number of women are working and sharing the financial responsibilities of their family. However, being a professional woman, she is playing multiple roles or role of a fourfold status or role sequences (Sandeep, 2017). These roles can be better described as that of a 'daughter', 'wife', 'housewife' and 'mother'.

In a study done by Singh (2013) stated that women have started making their mark in sectors like human resources, services and manufacturing. She observed that sectors like service, tertiary and

government organisations saw a minimal increase in female labour force participation. Thompson (2000) posed some of the challenges of working women with respect to striking work life balance. He surveyed that woman expressed their desire of exhibiting good work ethics and their contribution to the world. Edley (2001) stated the multiple roles played by woman both at work and home affect women physically, emotionally and psychologically. Despite having rapid economic growth, women's participation in the labour market has been declining significantly over the years (Nigam, 2013).

4. SYSTEMIC BARRIERS IN THE WORKFORCE

4.1 Gender Pay Gap

Despite efforts to bridge wage disparities, women continue to earn less than men across industries. Factors such as occupational segregation, negotiation biases, and maternity-related career interruptions contribute to this gap.

4.2 Workplace Harassment

Harassment, both verbal and physical, remains a significant issue. Organizations must implement strict policies and reporting mechanisms to ensure a safe work environment.

4.3 Intersectionality in Workforce Challenges

Women from diverse backgrounds experience unique challenges. For instance, women of color often face additional biases that hinder their career progression.

4.4 Leadership & Organizational Policies

Ethical leadership and inclusive HR policies play a crucial role in addressing gender inequities. Companies that prioritize diversity and inclusion tend to have higher employee satisfaction and retention rates.

5. CHALLENGES FACED BY WOMEN IN THE WORKPLACE

5.1 Gender Biases

From the very beginning phase, gender biases already begin to emerge. It is difficult to embrace that women also possess the capabilities necessary to work alongside males. Women are considered fragile and capable of withstanding less stress at work since the culture promotes male supremacy in all large, significant, and trying jobs, which are considered more suitable for less strenuous employment. In many areas, including education access, pay equality, and career advancement, women's potential and competence have been grossly undervalued. In many households, a woman's total compensations, regardless of whether or not she is employed, are given to her spouse, father by marriage, or an older member of the family. As a consequence, her level of

autonomy is constrained as a result of the compensations given to these individuals. Despite having a job, a woman is still dependent on another person.

5.2 Work-Life Balance

Maintaining a healthy balance between their personal and professional lives is extremely difficult for working women. She is responsible for meeting all of the family's needs, especially those of the children. The pursuit of a career and other professional objectives by women is still regarded as unimportant. The lack of emotional and moral support for working women in the majority of households can be challenging. In order for women to maintain their positions, they must comply with an extensive list of formal requirements and deadlines. Due to their dual responsibilities, working women are under immense pressure to perform exceptionally well in all aspects of their daily lives.

5.3 Mental and Physical Harassment

Women often perceive that they need to do better than their male coworkers to advance their careers in business, which motivates their leader to raise the bar for both quality and production. The pressure that this kind of disease puts on women is significant. Short maternity leave is another factor contributing to the stress experienced by working mothers since they are expected to care for their children while also meeting the professional goals set for them. In addition, working women have feelings of insecurity due to their working environment. Due to the promotions and advancements made available to them, female subordinates frequently find themselves in a position where their male superiors make sexual favour requests of them. The male employers claim that they have performed some act of kindness or received an additional blessing for which they are entitled to be repaid with an extremely high level of respect from the female employees. In the business world, women are frequently made to feel helpless and defenceless, which leads male co-workers and superiors to believe they can exploit their female employees and subordinates.

5.4 Lack of Equality and Opportunity

In terms of pay, opportunities, and interactions, women are not accorded the same respect as men. Numerous studies reveal that women are paid significantly less than men who possess the same skills and experience. However, the issue is that women also have less access to significant strategic opportunities that can produce massive results, rapid growth, and high visibility—all of which are necessary to be taken into consideration for promotion. Instead, they are given more low-visibility, back-office prevention work that, even if they perform well, will only keep them stagnant. Women also have less access to influential leaders and decision-makers as mentors and sponsors, which will further disadvantage them in comparison to men. Many businesses still value traits associated with men, such as dominance, aggressiveness, and command. Women who try to behave in those ways

occasionally feel out of character and experience the "double-bind" effect, in which they are perceived as less likeable, which stunts their development.

5.5 Lack of Personnel Space

If professional women want to experience independence and advancement in their lives, they must balance the demands of their families and their careers. The situation causes women to get anxious. They try to increase their functioning power for their work, which causes them to struggle when they can relax. They gradually develop a sense of bewilderment and helplessness since nobody can assist and support them. They may have the impression that they are isolated, consequently, they have to deal with many emotional and mental troubles. Depression and other serious mood disorders are two common mental health problems that affect working women. Sleeping disorders are another common mental health problem. They report a significant dearth of available faculty space. They are unable to deal with the issues that they create for themselves. They have the impression that they cannot discuss their thoughts with anyone since they know nobody will understand them. Due to the mental strain they are experiencing, they are faced with just two options: either give up the work or accept the setback as an inevitable part of their life while it continues to function normally.

6. ISSUES

1. One of the most significant challenges working mothers face is a lack of proper maternity leave, which has a bad effect on their personal and work lives
2. Lack of family support is one of the challenges that working women confront. It is still often accepted that women should do all of the housework. They believe that staying late at work harms a woman's ability to perform well and develop in her career. Thus, they discourage women from doing so.
3. Lack of security is another obstacle working women face in the workplace. Women at work are more likely to become victims of various crimes while on the job because they are not provided with the same level of security as men.
4. Inequality in pay is yet another issue that should concern working women. It has often been brought to everyone's attention that female workers are paid less than male workers. Even though women outperform men in terms of productivity, many workplaces still have a pay gap between the sexes. Because of this, they experience hopelessness and a lack of motivation, which also affect their work life.
5. Due to the competing demands of their various jobs, working mothers cannot dedicate enough time to their children's extracurricular activities and school functions. As consequence of this, women experience stress as well.

6. Even though she is completely devoted to her work, their jobs continue to be regarded as secondary within the family and society. In today's culture, it is commonly believed that a woman's primary responsibility is to look after her own family, particularly her children. People are discouraged from improving their careers as a result of this
7. A working woman must get permission from her husband and family before going on a business trip or training.
8. Women are also responsible for preparing for their children.

7. FUTURE DIRECTIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

To foster gender equity in the workforce, organizations should:

- Implement transparent pay structures to eliminate wage disparities.
- Strengthen anti-harassment policies and provide safe reporting channels.
- Promote inclusive leadership that supports diverse talent.
- Offer flexible work arrangements to accommodate caregiving responsibilities.
- Encourage mentorship programs to support women's career growth.

8. CONCLUSION

While progress has been made, modern-day women in the workforce continue to face systemic challenges. Addressing these inequities requires a collective effort from policymakers, organizations, and society. By implementing inclusive policies and fostering ethical leadership, workplaces can create environments where women thrive.

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