

Gender Discrimination Curbs the Opportunity of Women to Excel

SK JANE ALAM
sjalam088@gmail.com

1 ABSTRACT

Gender Discrimination has always been a hot topic in every discussion. The primary focus in economics has always been the growth and development of the economy. However we often tend to neglect seeing the development of women which implicitly affects holistic growth. Gender discrimination being a social issue originates from certain microlevel beliefs. The stereotype belief on women possessed by households, society, employers often questions the abilities of a woman in executing certain tasks. Difference in traits between men and women creates barriers to women in every stage of their career influencing their decision making. Superimposition of do's and don't by society snatches the freedom of women to make their own choices.

2 INTRODUCTION

Despite various campaigns on feminism and various policies like “Beti bachao..beti padhao”, women are still struggling to build a significant place for them in this son-preferred society even in the 21st century. These biases among men and women have worsened so much that right after birth, gender largely determines the fate and future lifestyle of a kid. Women have always been victims to this discrimination through the ages and continue to face the same even today in different forms. Both men and women have their equal share of human rights. But still women are deprived of their rights and freedom. Keeping this ageless issue the base of our term paper, we will discuss what all are the behavioural traits at the societal level that still keep the

discrimination strong and intact despite the monumental endeavours taken by government, NGOs, various other women centric organisations and many self-help groups in empowering women. A very peculiar behaviour that drew our attention and motivated us to write this paper is there is a significant gap between women enrolment in higher education and their participation in the labour market. The question that arises is why are women so unlikely to work despite having both capabilities and opportunities? In some under-developed regions we often witness an intergenerational conversation between the women of the families addressing the younger one to be the privileged one for getting all the basic treatments, especially a quality education at an ease for which the elders had to fight for. Intra-house discrimination among kids on the basis of gender has reduced a lot in the middle and the upper sections of society. Our concern in this paper are the girls of these sections who are provided with all the basic amenities like quality education and healthcare in an adequate way but still get underrepresented in certain job profiles. A very low participation of women has been seen in STEM (Science, technology, engineering, and management) fields. For example, though women representation in the physical sciences improved during the time period of 2001-2010, women still account for only 22 percent of these disciplines in 2010 (Armstrong and Jovanovic, 2015; NSF, 2013). Even in medical disciplines, where, as of 2018, the number of women enrolled in medical schools exceeded men for the first time, there is still a persistent underrepresentation of women at senior academic or leadership positions that we cannot explain by a time lag between degree completion and career trajectory. Therefore we go further on the issue of why women are more underrepresented in some scientific, engineering, and medical disciplines than others.

3 METHODOLOGY

This study is descriptive in nature and tries to find out the beliefs at the micro level that cause hindrances in women's development. As a research method, emphasis is given on content analysis and it takes a form of descriptive research. Most of our term paper consists of Literature Reviews. Moreover we try to focus on both the household perspective and the employer's perspective in order to find how there exists an employment gap based on gender.

4 MOTIVATION

Women’s decisions to not enter the labour market or to drop out of it at an early age despite acquiring the skills and education to sustain oneself in middle and high income jobs, are influenced to a huge extent by the prevailing social attitudes and practices as well as the lack of economic incentives and policy interventions to help bring about gender equality. This motivated us to study the entrenched structural causes of gender inequalities and develop an understanding of the patriarchal power at play in order to systematically address the problem. We suspect that a number of behavioural traits are behind this issue, which include but are not limited to the following: Stereotypes- Certain qualities, some seemingly benign (like “women are nurturing”) and some overtly hostile (like “women are irrational”) are perceived to be associated particularly with women, so women are discouraged from entering the labour force and instead are expected to take care of the family and employ more time and effort to household work compared to men. Information avoidance- People weigh and interpret evidence in a fashion that supports what they are motivated to believe about what a woman ought to do with her life. For example, even if they have evidence that women are excelling in a certain male-dominant career field, they might still think it’s a bad idea for a woman to pursue that career path. This happens because they are not focussing their attention on this information and are prone to denigrate the quality of evidence that contradicts their beliefs. Motivated reasoning and cognitive dissonance- Models of motivated reasoning state that people choose not only their actions but also their beliefs, since their overall utility is higher when there is greater congruence between actions and beliefs. In our context, it might happen that women are not participating in the job-market or settling for jobs that are below their capacities; but they are choosing their beliefs in a way that reinforces their choice of actions and hence there is little or no belief-updating.

5 LITERATURE REVIEW

5.1 BARRIERS FACED AT THE HOUSEHOLD LEVEL

Whenever the question is of the well being of the family, it is women who need to sacrifice or compromise her choices. This is not a new practice, since

the later vedic age it was seen that women’s jewelries were the last resort to save her family from the financial crisis. However this concept still holds in this generation too, with the addition of giving up a job for the benefit of the family. Therefore it is not surprising to witness that even after completing more years of schooling than men, women make educational choices that translate into lower expected labor market earnings. However, If women are lagging behind men not because of labor market discrimination but because of the different choices they make, it is key to understand why they are making such different choices. According to, Bronstein and Farnsworth, 1998; MacNell et al., 2014; Milkman et al., 2015; Moss-Racusin et al., 2012; Settles et al., 2006; Urry, 2015 women may experience implicit bias and structural barriers at every career stage, including at critical junctures such as consideration for graduate school admission, recruitment into a laboratory for graduate research, consideration for postdoctoral positions, recruitment to fill tenure-track faculty positions, and evaluation for promotion in rank.

5.2 Household beliefs

These biases arise from Gender Stereotypes. Economics mainly views gender stereotypes as a manifestation of statistical discrimination (Phelps 1972, Arrow 1973, Aigner and Cain1977) In statistical discrimination models, men and women are treated differently due to imperfect information. Gender stereotypes in these models are rational beliefs about a group member (a woman or a man) based on the aggregate distribution of a trait or skill in the gender group. They are beliefs, shared by men and women, about what men and women should or ought to do. Unlike, social psychology stresses that gender stereotypes are not only descriptive but also prescriptive. According to Akerlof and Kranton(2000), this prescriptive nature of Gender Stereotype results in gender identity norms where men and women modify their beliefs on their capabilities based on their gender. Moreover, the prescriptive nature of gender stereotypes also naturally derives from a shared education, with views about gender roles and gender skills passed on from parents to their male and female offspring. Parents, explicitly or implicitly, “gender talk” to their children by emphasizing gender categories and teaching what are appropriate and inappropriate behaviors for boys and girls (Endendijk et al. 2014). A paper by Brenøe 2018 shows that this transmission of stereotypes about gender roles appears more prominent in families with mixed-sex children, suggesting that having an opposite-sex sibling increases exposure

to gender- stereotypical socialization in the home. The prescriptive nature of gender stereotypes explains why women provide more unpaid care. The gender identity norms compel women to think they are good at caring and nursing tasks. As stated by Babcock,Recalde, and Vesterlund 2017, providing this care or engaging in those tasks might still be utility maximizing if it allows the individual to comply with the gender identity norms: “being a housewife is just as fulfilling as working for pay” or “a working mother can establish just as warm and secure a relationship with her children as a mother who does not work.” Employment of women can further magnify unequal gender relations by reinforcing dutiful roles of a wife or a daughter, the control of women’s earnings by male relatives, or continued social disapproval and violence against women who do not behave in accordance with patriarchal norms. These create disincentives for women to participate in the labour force. Again, Amartya Sen came up with the capability approach which argues that the ability for policies to improve well-being should be evaluated not just on the basis of “functionings” (achieved status, e.g., material standard of living, having a good job, being healthy) but also on the basis of “capabilities” (i.e., opportunities for such achievements). People should have the freedom to choose from many different combinations of “functionings.” The fact that people do not perceive that they lack that freedom, or the fact that they adapt to misery, does not mean that there is no need for corrective policy, even if revealed preferences do not seem to call for such correction. As powerfully stated in Nussbaum(2001, p. 42), “Even when women appear to be satisfied with such customs, we should probe more deeply. If someone who has no property rights under the law, who has had no formal education, who has no legal right of divorce, who will very likely be beaten if she seeks employment outside the home, says that she endorses traditions of modesty, purity, and self-abnegation, it is not clear that we should consider this the last word on the matter. . . . Women’s development groups typically encounter resistance initially,because women are afraid that change will make things worse.”

5.3 Barriers in the educational choice and choice of career

Women at different stages of their lives face barriers that keep on updating their beliefs and their choices. With the support of the gender identity

norm the very first barrier they face is in choosing their educational choices. The stereotype that women are poorer in maths discourages them to opt for STEM fields. As a result there has always been underrepresentation of women in these fields, adding to this is the conventional belief of the family members. Career in STEM fields always showed a very low representation of women. Their belief of task over there being herculean, presence of sexual harrasments and discrimination, irregularity in shifts discourage them to pursue.

6 BARRIERS CAUSED BY FIRMS

Traits such as assertiveness, confidence, boldness, risk-taking, independence, and self-promotion are valued, rewarded, and seen as standards while hiring (Diekman and Steinberg, 2013). Stereotypically “masculine traits” (e.g., assertiveness, ambition, and competitiveness) and “feminine traits” (e.g., warmth, supportiveness, and collegiality) are exhibited by both women and men. However, differences in these traits lead to gender bias in the labour market, which takes the following forms.

6.1 Recruitment Bias

Employer’s belief of men and women having different traits is reflected while recruiting employees. For example, an experimental study was held by Carli et al. (2016) where participants were asked to list traits they associate with scientists and with men and women irrespective of profession, the traits identified for scientists and men overlapped to a greater extent than did the traits identified for scientists and women. In support of this finding, (Banchefsky et al., 2016) stated nonscientists are less likely to believe a woman is a scientist if she has a feminine (rather than masculine) appearance. This biased belief results in a connection of masculinity with jobs in STEM fields. Another study by Sarsons et.al (2019) talks about the primary consideration of a physician’s choice is the surgeon quality. However this quality is often influenced by gender identity. The finding says that physicians use information about individual female, and not male, surgeons to update their beliefs about other female surgeons in the same specialty. However, it has been noticed that a physician’s gender doesn’t matter while making this choice. In addition, physicians use their experience with one woman to infer the ability

of other female surgeons. After a bad experience with one female surgeon, physicians become less likely to refer to other female surgeons in the same specialty.

6.2 Discrimination in wages

Even today, there is a considerable gender gap in pay that would decrease and might become nil if some firms did not have an incentive to disproportionately reward individuals who worked long hours and worked particular hours. Most of the studies involving the gender wage gap produced estimates of an “explained” and a “residual” portion. The “residual” is seen as “wage discrimination” as it is defined by the difference in earnings between observationally identical males and females. The explained portion of the gender wage gap has decreased over time because human capital investments like years of education and labour market experience between men and women have converged. However, the residual portion of the gap increased compared to the explained portion. An explanation for this increase by Claudia Goldin (2014) involves an application of personnel economics that relies on labor market equilibrium with compensating differentials and endogenous job design. The pay gap depends on how firms reward individuals who have different levels of desire for amenities that are various aspects of workplace flexibility. This concept incorporates the number of hours that have to be worked as well as the particular hours worked, being “on call,” providing “facetime,” being around for clients, group meetings etc. Focusing on certain occupations provides further thoughts on how to equalize earnings by gender. Some occupations exhibit linearity of earnings with respect to time worked while others exhibit nonlinearity (convexity). Research shows that the gender gap is high when there is nonlinearity and lower in case of linearity. This happens because of differences in job flexibility and continuity across occupations. Having young children (less than two years old) reduces participation for all college graduate women. Certain occupations impose heavy penalties on employees who want fewer hours and more flexible employment. The lower remuneration might lead to shifts to an entirely different occupation or to a different position within an occupational hierarchy or dropping out of the labor force altogether. Occupations like business and law show a nonlinear (convex) relationship of total earnings with respect to hours or to the flexibility of hours. Corporate and financial sectors also impose heavy penalties on deviation from the norm. In comparison with these occupations,

people in technology and science have far more time flexibility, fewer client and worker contacts, fewer working relationships with others, more independence in determining tasks, and more specific projects with less discretion over them. Each of these characteristics produce a more linear relationship between hours and earnings and the greater linearity produces a lower residual difference in earnings by sex.

7 CONCLUSION

Over the past fifty years, there has been steady progress with respect to efforts that mainstream gender in standard economic decision-making. Attention to gender equality and empowerment of women is important for implementing effective development policies. Various initiatives have resulted in the development of new ways to measure economic activity which include household systems of production and distribution. Policies are being implemented that enhance the health and education of women and promote women's labor force participation. However, still a lot needs to be done. The efficacy of macroeconomic policies should be measured in such a way that takes into account the unpaid economic activities and labor in the household sector. Development processes should incorporate a framework for reallocating resources, providing socialized support for care and promoting the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men. Having a vision for change along with a will to make it happen can surely bring about social transformation.