

MULTIPLE AND DIVERSE SOCIAL INEQUALITIES BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN IN THE GREEK WORKPLACE ENVIRONMENT

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the concept of gender inequality in the modern workplace, using significant theoretical approaches. Using the concept of Social Role Theory by Eagly (1980), it identifies how societies program gender roles which, in turn, affect gendered behaviour and occupational choices. Blumberg's Gender Stratification Theory (1984) outlines how male dominance is institutionalized. The research will also discuss the 'double bind' problem of females in male-dominated occupations and the 'glass ceiling effect' which allows few females to reach top positions. The research design of this research uses qualitative research. The data used in this research has been collected by conducting semi-structured interviews on ten females in the workplace with more than fifteen years of professional experience. The research uses Thematic Analysis. Findings indicate the continued existence of stereotypes, bias, and structural barriers that impede the career advancement of women. Organizational culture transformation, bias elimination, or effective equality policies to address bias will be supported by the imperatives of international literature that contend it is pivotal to succeed in organizational design and make gender an irrelevant factor of workplace success.

Keywords: Gender, Leadership, Workplace

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Theoretical Background - Attitudes, Stereotypes and Cultural Differences in the Workplace

Gender inequality in the workplace is a multidimensional social phenomenon, which has been of particular concern to social science, psychology and business practices for many decades. In recent years, it has become clear that this is a complex issue, which is not limited to economic differentiation, such as the wage gap, but concerns deeper social and cultural mindsets,

attitudes and invisible barriers that directly affect the participation and development of women in the workplace.

Stereotypes are the collective, documented patterns of beliefs, frequently oversimplified, that are typically attributed to all men or women, whereas attitudes are the thought and assessment patterns that people develop about other social groups. These stereotypes perpetuate traditional roles in the workplace, by portraying men as more aggressive, decisive, and capable of leadership, while women are seen as more nurturing, supportive, and less capable of such roles (Galsanjigmed & Sekiguchi, 2023).

One of the primary theoretical stances, Social Role Theory (Eagly, 1987), contends that these disparate behaviours and career decisions stem from early socialization and role-learning. According to Eagly, segregation and unequal functioning, in the work place, are caused by stereotypes about "feminine" and "masculine" roles. For example, traditionalist stereotypes often place men in leadership positions and women in support positions, creating obstacles to women's careers.

In addition, Rae Lesser Blumberg's Gender Stratification Theory (1984) examines the structural and institutional aspects of inequality, emphasizing the role of gender as a critical determinant in the distribution of power and resources, illustrating that inequality is not merely a consequence of individual traits or decisions, but rather an institutionally entrenched condition with unique social and economic attributes.

An important tool, for explaining the gender bias experienced by women in leadership positions, is the Role Congruity Theory of Eagly and Karau (1987). The theory highlights the discrepancy between gender stereotypes and the required characteristics of a role, which often rejects or devalues women when they attempt to assume leadership positions. The phenomenon of the "double bind" describes the trap in which women often have to be simultaneously "sufficient" but not "too strict" or "aggressive", while something similar does not happen with men.

Another critical concept is the "glass ceiling" phenomenon, which identifies the invisible obstacles that organizational structures and cultural perceptions pose to women's rise to senior management and leadership levels. Although the "glass ceiling" has been documented internationally for decades, it continues to exist as a complex combination of political, social and individual obstacles. Furthermore, the relatively new phenomenon of the "glass cliff" describes the tendency to promote women to leadership positions, especially in times of crisis, when the chances of failure are increased, which burdens the image of women's ability to lead and can reproduce stereotypes (Baxter & Wright, 2000).

Cultural differences also play a decisive role in shaping gender inequalities. Under traditions with asserted traditional norms and patriarchal organizations, typical for Greece in most aspects, gender roles and expectations are more rigid, and social pressure following up in turn plays a significant role in affecting women's chances within the labour market. On the contrary, in more progressive environments and organizations, where equality is actively promoted, obstacles are reduced.

Finally, unconscious bias is one of the most difficult obstacles to address, as it stems from unconscious perceptions and stereotypes that shape hiring, evaluations, and promotions, leading to new forms of inequality despite apparent efforts for equality (Blau & Kahn, 2017). For this reason, systemic interventions and education to raise awareness of such biases are essential.

1.2 Research Significance

In the past decades, gender inequality in the workplace has been the focus of rigorous scientific inquiry, resulting in a substantial body of literature that integrates theoretical frameworks and empirical evidence. The foundations were laid with Eagly's (1987) Social Role Theory, which states that stereotypes of masculinity and femininity develop in society via an individual's experiences of socialization, creating divergent levels of occupational preference, skills, and leadership styles from both men's and women's perspectives.

In addition, Gender Stratification Theory according to Blumberg (1984) focuses on the structural foundation of inequality. Gender has been identified as a key variable of power within the social system, given its relevance in establishing structural inequality on the foundation of responsibility or reward, irrespective of other variables. The "glass ceiling" was a term established in the 1980s. The glass ceiling can be defined as invisible barriers which do not allow females to rise into the higher levels of the management or leadership cadres despite their qualifications (Catalyst, 2023).

In recent years, research has turned to more "subtle" and less visible forms of inequality, such as unconscious bias, which, according to meta-analyses, critically affects the processes of recruitment, evaluation and promotion (Blau & Kahn, 2017). This results in the perpetuation of inequalities even in organizations that declare a commitment to equality. At the same time, the glass cliff phenomenon describes the tendency for women to be promoted to leadership roles in times of crisis, making them more vulnerable to failure (McKinsey & Company, 2023).

The research on the processing of social representation, established by Moscovici (1963), verifies how the collective attitudes of stereotypes, and representations of gender exert an influence on both individual understandings and organizational decision-making. Social representations around female leadership determine the way women are perceived in the workplace, even when their skills and qualifications are equal (Moscovici & Buschini, 2021). More recent studies emphasize that changing these 11 dominant representations is crucial for advancing gender equality at the organizational level (Prost, Piermattéo & Monaco, 2022).

International literature also refers to the positive relationship of gender diversity with innovation and business outcomes. Firms that lack the participation of females in their leadership teams above 30% experience enhanced profit margins and organizational culture (Catalyst, 2023). Gender equality, thus, not only represents a societal need, but it also serves as an investment.

It is worth noting that, although internationally the relevant studies are extensive, in the Greek literature the empirical data on the forms and causes of gender inequality in the workplace remain limited. However, the data reveal the existence of the issue, as the average annual gross income of women in Greece in 2022 was €17,361, which is a percentage of 26.4% less than

that of men (€21,947), according to ELSTAT data (2022). Moreover, the unemployment rate of women in 2023 was 14.3%, in contrast to the unemployment rate of men (8.5%), placing Greece first in the list of countries of the European Union concerning gender inequality on the issue of employment (INE-GSEE, 2024). The current research shall address this gap.

The matter of gender inequities in the workplace has been extensively explored by international literature on various aspects, including the wage gap, exclusion from posts of responsibility, and stereotypes (Blau & Kahn, 2017). Still, despite the existence of international studies, research, and practices, there is no in-depth examination on the specific obstacles that women experience in the Greek workplace. The current research seeks exactly that.

What the current literature lacks, which this research will fill, is the emphasis on experiential data that comes from a qualitative analysis of both semi-structured interviews, focusing on the internal experience of women as individuals, as society's subjects, as well as professionals. What this research will do differently than the current quantitative literature on this issue within Greece is offer a more nuanced insight into the dynamics of how inequality is perpetuated within our society. This research will also contribute to the ongoing discussion on the issue of gender equality in current literature.

1.3 Objectives and Research Hypotheses

The importance of this research is based on its efforts to ensure that it presents an in-depth insight into the dynamics of inequality in terms of gender in the workplace environment in Greece, with priority given to experiences in terms of challenges and strategies used by females. The research will also document proposals and solutions.

The research questions include:

What forms and causes of gender inequality are identified in the workplace?

What obstacles do women consider critical to their professional development, and to what extent do they differ from men?

What are the strategies they develop to address the challenges and overcome inequalities?

What solutions are proposed to combat inequalities, taking into account the specificities of the Greek work environment?

In addition, it is worth noting that this research focuses on inequality not merely as a problem concerning the individual, but it also deals with it as a problem concerning society, a cultural issue. The reason this research aims to cover all those aspects is its intention to provide an effective framework regarding interventions concerning inequality according to the needs of Greek society.

The qualitative method using semi-structured interviews allows for the emergence of authentic, multidimensional and experiential narratives of women, elements that are often not recorded in quantitative studies. Among other things, this approach highlights the internal perspective

and individual differences that contribute to the complexity of the phenomenon of gender inequality.

Thus, this research aims to bridge the theoretical framework with practical needs, proposing policy directions and changes that can promote sustainable gender equality at the Greek workplace level.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Sample

The population of this research is comprised of females only, since exploring the experience of gender inequality from the female perspective was one of the key research aims. There was a total of 10 females chosen through the purposive sampling technique, which often focuses on deliberate sampling of individuals fulfilling specific criteria, known as informants, capable of offering rich information on the particular phenomenon (Robson, 2007). This method allows for focusing on a population with specific characteristics and high experiential knowledge.

The participants were aged 40 to 50 years and had at least 15 years of active work experience in various professional sectors, both from the public and the private sectors. The selection through the professional and social network of the researcher and the constant adherence to inclusion and exclusion criteria provided a sample with sufficient diversity in sector and professional level.

The inclusion criteria were:

Women aged 40-50.

Actively employed with at least 15 years of experience.

Employment in the public or private sector.

Willing to participate sincerely and actively.

Individuals under 18 years of age, not actively employed in the last 5 years or unemployed, as well as individuals who did not wish to participate in a confirmed and honest manner, were excluded.

The following are the basic demographic characteristics of the sample:

Demographic Characteristic	Information
Gender	10 women
Age Average	45 years (range 40-50)
Years of work experience	At least 15 years
Work sector	Public (4), Private (6)
Professional sectors	Technology, Education, Health, Management, Law, Marketing etc.

There was access to the population of interest through existing professional contact networks. This helped in candid participation as well as ensuring the quality of responses while fulfilling all the ethics. The first step was accessing the population of interest through professional networks.

2.2 Research Design

This is qualitative research with a correlational research design, with the main tool being the use of semi-structured interviews. The research is not experimental or semi-experimental, as it does not seek to control variables with parametric methods, but to explore the correlations between experiences and perceptions regarding gender inequalities.

The independent variable is gender and the relevant social and professional conditions (jobs, management levels), while the dependent variable is experiences of discrimination, perceptions of stereotypes and strategies for managing inequalities.

2.3 Research Material

The main tool was an original semi-structured interview guide, divided into two parts. The first contains demographic data such as age, gender, profession, sector, years of experience and management level. While the second part is structured with main open-ended questions aiming to explore experiences, challenges and ways of managing inequalities.

The main interview questions were:

1. Have you experienced being underestimated in the workplace due to your gender?

How did you deal with this situation?

2. What strategies do you use to overcome gender bias in professional environments?

3. What do you consider to be the most important obstacle for women in your industry?

4. Have you faced particular challenges in your career due to gender stereotypes?

How did you respond to them?

5. Have you ever negotiated a salary or promotion?

6. Can you recall a time when you had to stand up for your rights or the rights of other women at work?

7. Have you noticed gender differences in the way ideas or contributions are given credit in meetings?

8. What has been your experience with expectations of a balanced work and personal life for men and women in your workplace?

9. Have you noticed differences in the way senior positions are distributed between men and women in your organization?

10. How do you think organizational culture affects gender equality in leadership positions?

11. What strategies do you think are most effective for overcoming the “glass ceiling” for women in your field?

The interviews were recorded with a digital device and then fully transcribed. Notes were taken during the interviews for non-verbal expressions and overall dynamics. Qualitative analysis software was used for the analysis, which facilitated the management and coding of the data. In addition, open communication procedures and validity checks were completed with the participants reviewing the topics.

2.4 Research Process

The process began after the approval of the Ethics Committee for the correctness of the design and ensuring compliance with ethical rules. The approach to the participants was based on representativeness criteria, selecting adult women aged 40-50 years old coming from different companies in the public and private sectors, with a diverse work background.

The initial communication took place via email and telephone, during which all the basic information about the subject and purpose of the research was provided. The information of the participants was completed with a relevant form that presented the title, purpose, the details of the researchers, the participation process, as well as the possible benefits or risks, while ensuring anonymity and confidentiality.

At the same time, the participants were given time to study the form and ask any questions. This was followed by the signing of the information and consent form, which clearly stated the voluntary participation and the right to withdraw at any time. The signature was given before the start of each interview. The interviews were conducted in an appropriate and accessible environment, adapted to the needs of the participants, so that they felt comfortable. A predefined interview guide was used, while the responses were accurately recorded via audio recording. The transcribed files are kept on a secure USB stick, in a space with limited access exclusively to the researcher. After the completion of the interviews, a de-briefing discussion was held, where the participants confirmed the collected data, expressed any comments or clarifications and were informed about the next steps of the research. The careful execution of this procedure ensured the ethical conduct of the study and the high quality of the data.

2.5 Ethics and Conduct Issues

The study strictly complies with all the ethics and conduct guidelines that apply in human participant research. Special emphasis is placed on ensuring the anonymity, confidential nature, and privacy of the data collected in this research.

All participants received complete information on the aims of the research, the procedure, as well as risks and benefits of the research itself, using a specific information form. The

participation was completely voluntary, though the possibility of withdrawing from the research at any moment, without needing to give reasons or meet any conditions, was stressed.

The research was approved by the appropriate Ethics and Conduct Committee of the learning institution, thus following international guidelines on the protection of human subjects.

The issue of data protection was tackled by implementing stringent measures in line with the GDPR Regulation (EU 2016/679). Data was kept in a secure environment. The data was used only by this research, with proper anonymization of all data in a way that it was not possible to identify a single individual. Participants in this research could request explanations concerning the research stages.

2.6 Research Analysis

The data were analysed through thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), combined with interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA), which captures both common patterns and individual deviations in the participants' experiences.

The analysis included: transcription, coding, theme development, double coding (intercoder reliability) and member checking to validate accuracy.

Moreover, in order to increase the reliability and accuracy of the findings, a quantitative approach was undertaken simultaneously with the qualitative data analysis, by using the percentage (%) of the references relative to each unit of subject. The recording of the data on how often the key findings occurred in the transcriptions led to a deeper insight into the level of occurrence of particular experiences or perceptions. Hence, the research methodology comprised both key findings of a qualitative nature, as well as quantitative data, which contribute significant value in terms of adding accuracy in the reporting of the findings. The research methodology combines both qualitative data findings on the key issue of gender inequality in the Greek workplace.

3.0 RESULTS

The analysis of qualitative data collected through interviews with women from various professional sectors highlighted a series of critical thematic units that describe the experience of social inequalities and challenges in the workplace based on gender. These thematic units emerged through a careful thematic analysis, which delved into the responses and feelings of the participants and reflects the complexity and dimension of gender inequalities in the modern professional environment. Below are presented the results of the research as they were revealed through the systematic study of the research material, from which the key over-themes and thematic units emerged that reflect the multiple and diverse social inequalities between men and women in the workplace.

Table 1: Thematic Units that emerged from the thematic analysis and percentage of frequency of reference

Thematic Category	Example Excerpt	Frequency Percentage (%)
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1. Undermining & Gender-Based Social Exclusion	“Several times... an idea of mine wasn’t acknowledged until a man said it...”	90
2. Barriers & Stereotypes in Career Development	“It’s difficult to ensure equal opportunities... women are seen as less tough...”	85
3. Recognition and Reward	“Women’s ideas are ignored or attributed elsewhere, while men receive the credit...”	80
4. Work–Family Balance & Social Expectations	“Women feel much greater pressure to cope with both professional and family life...”	75
5. Empowerment Strategies & Organizational Culture	“I rely on data, build support networks, and promote transparency in promotions...”	70

1. Undervaluation and gender-based social exclusion

Experience of undervaluation on the basis of gender is a common theme running across the majority of the responses. The denial or disregard of ideas or contributions of females is common, which can only then be recognised or rewarded when it is attributed to or voiced by the male gender. The marginalisation of females on the basis of gender undervaluation will occur.

As stated by a computer engineer:

“Several times... an idea of mine was not recognized until a man said it...”

2. Barriers and stereotypes to career advancement

The feeling of a “glass ceiling” and stereotypes associated with a supposed limitation of abilities or harshness act as significant brakes on women’s development. Suspicion of decision-making and underestimation of potential deprive women of opportunities for promotion and leadership roles.

One human resources director noted:

“It is difficult to provide equal opportunities... women are seen as less harsh in decision-making...”

3. Recognition and unequal reward

The finding that ideas and efforts of females tend to be suppressed or ascribed to the male gender reveals an aspect of gender inequality. The lack of balanced recognition of females in professional gatherings and office talks hurts females' professional confidence.

One architect stated:

“Men get credit even when they repeat women’s ideas.”

4. Work-life balance and social expectations

Women strongly report the double pressure to meet both the demands of work and family or social obligations. The unequal distribution of these social roles works cumulatively and aggravatingly, often leading to mental and physical fatigue.

An IT engineer describes:

“Women feel multiple pressures, to cope with family and career...”

5. Empowerment strategies and organizational culture

The participants recognized the essence of managing inequalities through specific strategies such as the use of objective data, participation in support networks and mentoring, active advocacy and, above all, the need for organizational changes that promote equality and transparency in processes.

According to a human resources manager:

“I use data and have built strong alliances with colleagues who appreciate my value.”

And a fashion magazine director added:

“Organizational culture is crucial. Without real commitment, little changes.”

From this analysis, it becomes clear that the issue of equality of the sexes in the workplace is not an issue of linearity or one-dimensionality, whereby there is an ongoing intersection of various social perceptions and organizational dynamics. The aforementioned units of meaning make it significant to consider approaches of both documentation as well as organizational policies.

Table 2: Typical interview excerpts by topic

Thematic Category	Characteristic Excerpts
1. Undermining & Gender-Based Social Exclusion	- “An idea of mine wasn’t acknowledged until it was voiced by a man.” (Software Engineer) - “In a legal case, a client asked to speak to ‘the person in charge,’ not recognizing me.” (Lawyer) - “Taxi passengers are often surprised that I’m a woman driver.” (Taxi Driver)
2. Career Barriers & Stereotypes	- “Women are seen as less ‘tough’ when making decisions.” (HR Director) - “Women often struggle to attract funding.” (Entrepreneur) - “Our endurance and ability in demanding situations are frequently questioned.” (Athlete)
3. Recognition & Unequal Reward	- “Men get credit even when they repeat women’s ideas.” (Architect) - “In meetings, women’s ideas are ignored or attributed elsewhere.” (Software Engineer) - “Men

	receive more credit for their contributions.” (Lawyer)
4. Work–Life Balance & Social Expectations	- “Women experience double pressure from family and work.” (Software Engineer) - “Many times I had to choose between career and family.” (Banker) - “Men often don’t carry the same family responsibilities we do.” (Taxi Driver)
5. Empowerment Strategies & Organizational Culture	- “I use data and build support networks.” (HR Director) - “Organizational culture is crucial for equality.” (Fashion Executive) - “We support each other through mentoring and networks.” (Lawyer)

4.0 DISCUSSION

4.1 Summary of Results

The issue of this research was exploring the various social inequalities experienced by women in the workplace. The research was performed by carrying out a thematic analysis of ten interviews that highlighted the following five main themes: 1. Gender inequality of value and exclusion from society, 2. Barriers of professional development and gender stereotypes, 3. Lack of balanced reward of values for the contributions of females in society, 4. Challenges of work-life balance among females with increased values of society’s expectations, and 5. Empowerment approaches and the role of organizational values.

The participants reported continuous experiences of undervaluation, where their ideas or abilities are overlooked or attributed elsewhere, especially to male colleagues. The stereotypes that burden their position as less “tough” or less capable, as well as the stagnation they experience in higher positions, are found to limit their professional development. At the same time, the unequal distribution of family and social responsibilities and the extortionate demands either burden women mentally and physically or force them to sacrifice one field for the benefit of another. However, the analysis also highlights the power of women to resist through specific strategies, such as preparation with documented evidence, the development of support networks, education, persistence and assertiveness. Furthermore, the critical importance of an effective and fair organizational culture for real equality is emphasized.

4.2 Comparison of Results with Previous Studies

In this research, the principle of methodological triangulation was applied, given that the research data was both qualitatively and quantitatively analysed, aiming at gaining the highest possible level of accuracy in the data (Bryman, 2016). More specifically, it can be stated that apart from the highly accurate data classification following a detailed thematic data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), quantitative data research was also performed by employing percentages (%) of the rate of occurrence of the corresponding thematic concepts. As it has been pointed out by Creswell (2014), by employing both qualitative and quantitative data approaches, it is feasible to gain a more accurate global interpretation of the phenomenon in question. Moreover, by implementing a mixed data research methodology, it is feasible to take

into consideration the international standards of research of socially-heightened phenomena (Creswell, 2014-Bryman, 2016).

The findings of this qualitative study highlight several similarities and consequences in relation to previous research efforts that investigated gender inequalities in the workplace, thus strengthening the theoretical structure of the field while at the same time offering empirical observations that enrich existing knowledge.

Devaluation and social exclusion

The prolonged devaluation of female contribution observed in the interviews is also encountered as a persistent theme in research conducted in a European and international context. More specifically, research by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound, 2020) has shown that stereotypes that nullify women's contribution to technical and leadership roles are strongly prevalent, causing social exclusion and limited participation in important decisions. The experience of ignoring ideas recorded in this study is consistent with these findings.

Stereotypes and the "glass ceiling"

The difficulty for women to rise to leadership positions is widely documented in the literature and is related to social stereotypes of weakness, lack of decisiveness or cruelty. Research such as that of Eagly & Carli (2007) has concluded that social roles and gender-related prejudices create barriers to professional advancement, elements that were also detected in the present study.

Stereotypes about female inefficiency in management, such as those reported by participants regarding the underestimation of their "toughness", confirm corresponding research observations (Heilman, 2012). At the same time, the inability to access financing by female entrepreneurs, as reported by participants, is linked to broader socio-economic barriers that continue to limit equality.

Recognition and Reward

The uneven distribution of recognition of achievements and ideas in professional environments documents the existence of "gender double standards" described by occupational psychology and sociology (Carter & Silva, 2010). The present

study highlights that the awarding of credit often goes to male colleagues, even when the female contribution was stronger or innovative, a phenomenon described in similar terms by other studies.

Work-life balance and social expectations

The intense pressure experienced by women to simultaneously fulfil professional and family roles is in line with the "double burden" theory (Hochschild, 1989), which describes the overload of women with multiple roles that men do not experience to the same extent.

Furthermore, recent national surveys (National Statistical Service, 2022) confirm this inequality, which acts as an inhibitor to professional progress.

Empowerment strategies and organizational culture

Findings supporting mentors' role in mentoring programs, networking, as well as organizational structural changes in organizational culture relate to international policies on a framework or strategies supporting the engagement of women. Findings relate to proposals by international organizations such as the European Commission (2021), which indicate the need for a framework supporting the engagement of women.

However, simultaneously appearing allusions to personal strategies of hardiness, documentation, or collective networking seem to resonate with an observation from research that it's more enabling of females if the environment acknowledges and encourages teamwork or collective succor (Ragins & Kram, 2007).

4.3 Research Limitations

The current research has its own limitations which tend to affect how it can be generalized. For this research, the first limitations refer to the small population of ten women of different backgrounds, sectors, and age groups.

Moreover, the research design itself is qualitative, which relies on subjective stories or experiences, leading to the possibility of biased research or interpretations. Convenience sampling is another sampling design that could pose a risk of common characteristics or perspectives among those sampled.

Finally, while it is true that interviews can be analysed in depth, the fact that there is not complementary quantitative data or monitoring of various factors does not make it possible to chart the documented level of phenomena.

4.4 Reflection and Suggestions

Reflection

The research has indicated the immense complexity of gender inequality in the workplace, where there is an intertwining of various parameters of society, culture, and the workplace. The research has demonstrated that there is immense diversity in the experiences of the research participants, which often complement each other. This is an indication that there is an intense need for a holistic approach in research on the matter.

The data gathering and analysis process was a learning experience, in which the role of sensitivity and respect in dealing with personal experiences was emphasized, which can often reveal not only deep-seated disappointment but also sources of strength and hope. However, it was also a moment of insight into the difficulties which the research itself faces concerning subjectivity.

Proposals

Based on the findings derived from this analysis, among others that correlate with literature, the following steps will be taken in combating gender inequality in the workplace.

1. Enhancing the organizational culture of equality

Organisations must formulate policies which focus on promoting transparency and equity in all matters related to recruitment, assessment, development, and reward, so that an environment of equality of respect for both genders can be created.

2. Mentoring or Support Programs' Implementation

The establishment of information, support and guidance networks for working women contributes significantly to empowerment, increasing self-confidence and developing skills critical for their professional development.

3. Training and awareness-raising

Programs of educational awareness of issues concerning gender or stereotypes launched among all employees (men as well as women) can help create a more equal working environment.

4. Encourage Work-life Balance

The use of flexible working hours, parental leave policies, childcare provision, among other approaches, benefits both females and males as it provides an enabling environment to meet both work and home responsibilities.

5. Systematic monitoring and evaluation

Organisations as well as appropriate authorities ought to implement measures that will ensure monitoring of the application of policies on equality with the intention of improving on a continuous basis.

6. Role of Experiences and Role Models

The use of role models or examples of success among females in the media³⁰ and within organizations is a key determinant of attitudes that make more females take up the position of leadership.

7. Intersectoral and collaborative approach

The issue of gender inequality can be addressed by collaboration involving both the public and private sectors.

The application of these proposals will ensure that there is an equal workplace environment, whereby women will enjoy development opportunities equal to those of men, thus leading to the growth of society and the economy as well.

5.0 CONCLUSION

This study highlighted the complex and multi-layered social inequalities that women face in the workplace, focusing on their experiences and the way in which these inequalities manifest themselves on a daily basis. Through the thematic analysis, five main themes emerged that describe both the obstacles and the possibilities for addressing them.

First, the devaluation that many women experiences, as well as the forms of exclusion that are often caused by stereotypes of social roles, act as an inhibitor to their professional development and the ability to emerge as equals. The experience of non-recognition of their work and ideas, combined with the constant pressure to prove their worth, creates a constant feeling of injustice and psychological strain.

Furthermore, it is confirmed that stereotypes regarding women's "resilience", "toughness" and "ability" act as barriers to access to high management and executive positions — a phenomenon known as the "glass ceiling". The lack of female role models at the highest hierarchical levels intensifies the restriction of women to secondary or non-strategic roles.

At the same time, the unequal distribution of social and family obligations was highlighted, resulting in women experiencing increased pressure to balance work and personal life. This phenomenon reinforces the need for flexible work policies and changes in the culture of organizations, in order to minimize the double burden.

On the positive side of the picture, the participants pointed out strategies that strengthen the position of women, such as the use of objective evidence, the search for support networks and the active assertion of rights. The importance of an organizational culture with an emphasis on transparency and equality is demonstrated as a central conclusion.

Importantly, the literature found that the issue of equality between men and women in the workplace does not end with individual efforts on the part of women. The issue requires holistic approaches which, in this case, should not only focus on women, but also on male colleagues, the entire organizational management, as well as organizational policies.

Continuing this dialogue and considering gender dimensions in an integrated manner are prerequisites for sustainable and equitable development in all workplaces, promoting a society with fewer barriers and more opportunities for all.

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