



# Women At Workplace: Challenges And Biases

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Unbelievable, but true of the 7.8 billion inhabitants on this planet earth, women are far more in number than their male counterparts. Ironically, these numbers are not in their favour and women worldwide enjoy only a fragment of the rights of men. The workplace has never been equal for men and women. From time immemorial women have been treated as second class citizens, men were assumed to be the breadwinners while the women were assigned the role of homemaker and caregiver. This arrangement gave rise to gender inequality by generalizing gender roles and stereotypes between men and women. The last few decades have witnessed a significant change with a large number of women coming out of their sphere of domestic life and entering the public domain, joining the workplace by breaking the barriers that prevented them from seeking employment.

The Industrial Revolution marks an important era of women's empowerment. A large growth was seen in the 20th century by women in work force in the industrialised nations. It was seen as a boon to Industrial society with women contributing to hiring national income as a measure in GDP as well as decreasing labour cost by increasing labour supply. Women account for 47.7 % of the global workforce, with Canada having the highest female labour force participation rate of 61.3% whereas women in the US hold 50.04% of jobs. Women in India account for only 19.9% of the total labour even though India's economy is growing with an increase in GDP and the working-age population is expected to reach 800 billion by 2050. Women in Canada comprise 61.3% of the workforce nevertheless they earn 28% less than men, which is ever-widening although women are both better and educated than men, with most of the Canadian universities having more than half of the graduates being women and 35% of those with MBA degrees. In the Indian scenario, despite the growth rate of 20.3% , there is low labour force participation. Given the Indian context, it is the result of restrictive cultural norms regarding women's work, the gender wage gap, lack of safety policies and flexible work hours. Besides recent job stagnation, unemployability aggravated by COVID-19 kept women out of work.

## Challenges Women Face At Workplace

For the working woman of the 21st century, the workplace is full of challenges on a day-to-day basis that concern physical and mental well-being to maintain a fine balance between work and home. Predominantly working women face challenges both at the workplace and at home. To name a few like, gender bias, mental and physical harassment, unequal pay, insufficient maternity leave, balancing between family duties and fulfilling the responsibilities of motherhood. According to the ILO Gall up report, women prefer work to which men agree. However, there are challenges they have to face being a woman. Various surveys conducted

globally across countries and territories concluded that to maintain a balance between work and family is one of the top most problems faced by working women.

Women in the developed and emerging economies feel that balancing work and family is the greatest challenge faced by them. At the same time, affordable and reliable care for children and elder care commitments pose a bigger challenge in developing economies. According to ILO, women are less likely to be able to spend long hours, more likely to take leave for child care and sick leave for family reasons and take career breaks to attend to the children.

### Gender Bias

Gender bias is the tendency to prefer one gender over another. It is often referred to as preferential treatment men receive against women based on their sex.

It is very prevalent in the workplace when it comes to recruiting, hiring or retaining employees. Men are given preference over women. Even the choice of words and language has gendered associations. We use words like confident, decisive, strong and outspoken for men to differ female candidates. Gender bias could be seen in the field of education also. In the workplace, it could also mean men earn more and have more opportunities and retain higher job titles than women. Women continue to remain under pressure at every level, starting from entry-level jobs to C-suite roles.

### Preoccupied notion

Men perceive women in positions of power in the workplace as a threat to their masculinity and behave more assertively to compensate. A person who works in the office expects to be judged or supervised by a male boss or an employer. In a male-dominated society, people would not agree with the fact that a woman can also handle an office job better than men.

### Harassment At Workplace

Harassment in the workplace also emerges as one of the challenges women at the workplace face. In a study conducted by Thomson Reuters Foundation, 140 nations showed harassment at the workplace as one of the challenges. It can range from verbal abuse, such as shouting, intimidation, physical assault and the most common is sexual, which includes showing pornographic images, unwelcome physical contact and using sex in return for promotion. According to this report, one-third of women admitted to having experienced harassment both physical and mental, to which 60% did not report it. The study also said 29% of women face harassment at work but one stark fact that came to light was that 53% of Indian women reported harassment at the workplace.

### Physical Security

Physical security is one of the important considerations for women to work and to reach work, particularly for shift works and night duties. As many incidents were reported worldwide where inadequate security and night shift has led to sexual exploitation, molestation and rapes.

### Gender Pay Gap

The pay gap is also one of the concerns women all over the world face. Countries like France, Germany and the United States lead the list despite World Economic forum data indicating that these countries have narrowed the pay gap and G20 nations like Canada, Brazil, Austria and Britain ranked as the biggest workplace worry. Women are denied a promotion pay raise or training opportunity that is given to people of another gender.

## Lack Of Access To Higher Education

Women's lack of access to higher education had effectively excluded them from the practice of well paid and high-status occupations. Entry of women in high positions like law, medicine and engineering in most of the countries due to women being denied entry to Universities and qualification for decorating, for example, Cambridge University only fully validated degrees for women late in 1947 automatic opposition acrimonious debate published in an article in archived November 7, 2007, at the way back machine women were largely limited to locate a status occupation for most of the nineteenth and twentieth century they were paid less while doing the same work as men with the coming of the 20th century and the shift of labour market to the office for which does not attract heavy work brought in more opportunities for women to acquire higher education that leads to better compensated long term career growth and loss tricks short term job wherein western European country the nature of the women's employment participation remain market different from that of men.

## Work Stress

The majority of women suffer from stress caused by role conflict or multiple roles of managing in the workplace along with family and children to fulfil social responsibilities. The multitasking efforts of women to increase stress have become a by-product for her. Lack of family support is another challenge women face. Working late in the office is often resisted by the family, causing a hindrance in their promotion. On the home front, the pandemic aggravated their challenges with an increase in unpaid care undertaken by women in worldwide lockdown. It was women who took most of the responsibility for the childcare to home school when schools were shut down.

The economic recovery and economic growth depend on the active participation of women along with men in the workforce. The pandemic has given us new lessons and the world will see women from a new perspective and work towards major changes in the welfare of women unless the major change in our ideology is gender. The pandemic serves as a reminder of the structured inequalities that women face when it comes to participation in the workforce.

Women have been trying to break away from norms and standards set by society. They have been marching for equal rights and fighting for their rightful place in the world. The #MeToo movement has begun to smash down centuries of patriarchy, but we still have a long way to go, especially in the corporate sector.

Many organizations coming up with hybrid approaches to return to work life, it is still not clear whether this approach will lead to gender equality. Flexible working hours and a shift to work from home will open more opportunities for women at work.

The world talks about progress, equality and creating an environment where everyone is treated equally but this stops when it comes to women. It's time we shatter toxic masculinity and make people acknowledge feminism's goal to reduce gender gaps and achieve political, economic, personal and social gender equality. It's time that instead of looking at feminism with hatred and contempt, the male chauvinistic world comes out of their prefixed notions of virility and work together for a better world with a reduced gender gap, political, economic and social gender equality.

*"because we all have stories to tell and projects we need financed. Don't talk to us about it at the parties tonight. Invite us into your office in a couple days or you can come to ours, whichever suits you best, and we can tell you all about them"*

These words by American actress, Francis Mc Dormand when she accepted the Oscar award for the best actress on 5th March 2018, gave a clear message that women have ideas and to put those ideas in practice, all

they need is a seat at the table. This message is restricted not only to the film industry but to all women equally across the world. It also focuses more on bringing equality in leadership roles.

If we treat everybody equally all these notions could be vanished. The best thing one can do for women in workplace is to treat them as you treat any human being with respect, dignity and equality.

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