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Breaking the glass ceiling: Analyzing gender stereotypes and bias in contemporary work environments

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Article Info

Abstract

The issue of gender equality in employment has given rise to numerous policies in advanced industrial countries, all aimed at tackling gender discrimination regarding recruitment, salary and promotion. However, these policies have tremendously failed to make much of a headway to address a crucial issue at hand. And it has been observed that varying degree of workplace discriminations are handed out to women because of their gender. Yet gender inequalities in the workplace persist. The purpose of this study is to understand, analyses and evaluate the gender bias at workplace/ organizations. Moreover, the study makes a novel attempt to understand as why despite of the initiatives and interventions, the issues is yet to get resolved. The current study adopts a descriptive approach to exhibit the various discriminations meted out to women at the workplace. The study has extensive drawn from secondary sources of literature and an attempt has been made to provide a thorough insight on the issue of gender stereotypes and how it results in discrimination of women. The study is unique in a sense as despite multiple initiatives and policies still the issues loom large. Hence, the study makes a holistic attempt to understand as the root cause of the problem. Despite numerous policies women are facing discrimination at the workplace. The major reasons for the same is the mindset of the society which will take some time change. Moreover, one of the major findings is that women are still lacking the respect in the society.

Keywords: Gender, Women, Organizations, Discrimination, Bias, Workplace

1. Introduction

Stereotypes, while not inherently categorizable as universally detrimental or unfavorable to societal dynamics, serve as a means through which we engage with and comprehend our surroundings, thereby providing us with a modicum of insight. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that these cognitive shortcuts can potentially obscure our discernment and inadvertently guide us towards decisions that perpetuate inequitable behaviors and foster instances of egregious discrimination within our social fabric (Chang & Milkman, 2020) [16].

At the global scale, it is noteworthy that women comprise approximately 50 percent of the populace, yet their remuneration remains significantly lower in comparison to their male counterparts (Balabantaray *et al*., 2023) [5, 9]. Only an insignificant percentage of women have attained the position of CEOs and are board members (Meier, Mastracci, & Wilson, 2006; Heilman, Manzi & Braun, 2015; Braun *et al*., 2017; Kunze & Miller, 2017; Madsen & Andrade, 2018) [43, 31, 15, 38, 42]. The glass ceiling approach prohibits women from attaining positions in the top management (Kunze & Miller, 2017; Huang *et al*., 2019) [38, 33].

In the patriarchal structure, women are a vulnerable category who have been discriminated against in various cultures. Moreover, the biased practices in employment further limits the chances of women for fair opportunities in the employment sector (Ahmad & Naseer, 2015; Koch, D'Mello, & Sackett, 2015; Files *et al*., 2017; Begeny, Ryan, Moss-Racusin, & Ravetz, 2020; Balabantaray, 2022) [1, 35, 26, 11]. The gender bias creates substantial hurdle in attaining gender equity at the workplace. The gendered biases working in the organizational structures give rise to substantial inequalities (Chang & Milkman, 2020; Verniers & Vala, 2018; Sahoo & balaban, 2022; Sahoo & Sahoo, 2022; Gaddam & Rao, 2023) [16, 64, 56, 58, 27].

The extensive gender bias also manufactures large degree of disparities in promotion and payment of wages (England 2010; Kunze & Miller, 2017; Rivera & Tilcsik, 2019) [24, 38, 54]. There have been higher instances of gender bias in the public sector as compared to the private sector (Ahmad & Naseer, 2015) [1].

In the context of labor dynamics, it has been observed that individuals tend to exhibit a propensity towards granting higher preferences to male workers, deeming them more deserving compared to their female counterparts, even when both possess identical skill sets and qualifications (Heilman, 2001; Quadlin, 2018; Rivera & Tilcsik, 2019) [30, 51, 54]. In the realm of occupational experiences, it has been observed that women tend to exhibit a comparatively diminished level of job satisfaction and a decreased duration of career engagement (Metz, 2011; Sahoo & Jena, 2023) [45, 57] even receive less recognition (Treviño, Gomez-Mejia, Balkin, & Mixon, 2015) [63], as compared to that of men. The workplace has witnessed notable progress in terms of women's achievements, highlighting their remarkable dedication. Nevertheless, it is disheartening to observe the disproportionately low presence of women in fields traditionally dominated by men (Heilman, Manzi & Braun, 2015) [31].

In recent times, there has been a noticeable surge in the participation of women within the formal labor market, resulting in a discernible rise in their representation across various professional sectors (Lekchiri *et al*., 2019) [40]. The primary objective of the paper is to evaluate the extent, degree and nature of gender bias in workplace (organizations). Moreover, the paper seeks to understand the gendered stereotypes as a social construction and the consequences of the same.

1.1. Background

Gender stereotyping is a phenomenon that involves attributing certain attributes, characteristics, or roles to an individual based solely on their membership in the social group of either women or men (Balabantaray & Singh, 2022) [3, 4, 6, 7, 8]. Within the realm of workplace dynamics, one encounters a multitude of manifestations of gender-based stereotyping, wherein a prevailing bias towards men is discernible. From an early stage of development, children are often subjected to gender-stereotyped depictions of individuals, which instill in them the inclination to associate women with familial and domestic responsibilities, while men are linked to professional pursuits and leadership roles. In the realm of societal perceptions, it is often observed that individuals of the male gender tend to be commonly linked with qualities such as competence, agency, and an inherent suitability for assuming positions of leadership. However, it is worth considering that women have often been subject to societal stereotypes that portray them as emotional, nurturing, and fragile in nature. The perpetuation of such stereotypical cognitive patterns prompts us to contemplate the association of men with scientific pursuits, surgical vocations, and executive positions, while women are often linked to nursing, homemaking, and teaching roles (Chang & Milkman, 2020) [16].

The pervasive manifestation of women's marginalization in its most extreme form significantly hinders the advancement and growth of any prospective nation. The contribution of women to the decision-making process is of utmost importance due to its inherent significance. Therefore, it is imperative to prioritize women in diverse sectors to guarantee efficient service delivery and promote their representation in top management positions (Festing *et al*., 2015) [25]. Essentially the work culture should provide a conducive atmosphere for all to have career growth and the system needs to be fair without any kind of discrimination (Huang *et al*., 2019) [33]. However, multiple studies have reported as how female managers are subjected to negative stereotypes while selection (Pinto, Patanakul & Pinto, 2017) [50].

1.2. Statement of the Problem

The manifestations of workplace discrimination and gender bias exhibit a range of characteristics, including variations in explicitness, hostility, and intentionality (Jahnke *et al*., 2019; Lekchiri *et al*., 2019) [34, 40]. According to Raghuram (2008) [52], The prevailing observation suggests that male-dominated environments exhibit a conspicuous disregard for the experiences of women. Despite the presence of empirical evidence indicating the influential role of gender biases in perpetuating the underrepresentation of women in the domains of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), interventions aimed at augmenting gender bias literacy pertaining to these fields remain relatively scarce (Pietri *et al*., 2016) [49]. On a global scale, it is imperative to acknowledge that a staggering number of approximately 2.7 billion women face legal restrictions that curtail their ability to pursue a wide range of occupational opportunities, thereby limiting their choices in comparison to their male counterparts (Nishtha, 2019).

Previous scholarly investigations have effectively demonstrated that female candidates are subjected to considerable bias during the selection and hiring procedures (Elsesser and Lever, 2011; Bendick and Nunes, 2012; Pinto, Patankul & Pinto, 2017) [23, 12, 50]. Women are often restricted to marginalized jobs (Kurniawan, Nurhaeni & Habsari, 2018) [39]. Despite the concerted efforts made by numerous nations to implement gender mainstreaming initiatives, it is evident that a notable and enduring bias persists within the workplace when it comes to matters pertaining to gender (Kurniawan, Nurhaeni & Habsari, 2018) [39]. Even existence of gender bias while making an assessment of the performance prohibits women from achieving senior management positions.

Gender inequality within organizations is a multifaceted phenomenon that manifests itself in various aspects of organizational structures, processes, and practices (Balabantaray & Samal, 2022) [3, 4, 6, 7, 8]. Gender inequalities within human resources (HR) practices are observed to be particularly detrimental for women. The influence of human resource practices, encompassing policies, decision-making processes, and their implementation, has a significant impact on the recruitment, training, compensation, and advancement opportunities for women. (Stamarski & Son Hing, 2015) [61]. Workplace discrimination, as a significant factor, plays a contributory role in the establishment and perpetuation of women's comparatively lower socioeconomic status. Significantly, the prevalence of discrimination against women can be primarily attributed to the implementation of human resources (HR) policies and the decision-making processes within HR departments. Moreover, it is worth noting that when employees engage in interactions with organizational decision makers within the context of human resource practices, or when they are informed about the results of human resource-related decisions, they may encounter instances of personal discrimination manifested

through the expression of sexist remarks. The intersection of objective factors such as reduced remuneration, diminished social standing, and limited professional prospects, alongside the subjective encounters of societal marginalization, collectively contribute to the psychological and physiological strain experienced by women. These stressors exert an influence on both their mental and physical well-being.

1.3. Conceptualising Women Empowerment

The notion of women's empowerment is a complex and multidimensional construct that encompasses a range of societal, economic, political, and cultural aspects. Its fundamental objective is to foster an environment wherein women are afforded equitable rights, opportunities, and the capacity to exercise agency within the fabric of society. The process entails the reconfiguration of societal systems, cultural expectations, and individual mindsets that have historically perpetuated the marginalization and disadvantage of women. The promotion of gender equality and empowerment necessitates the establishment of a framework wherein women are endowed with equivalent legal rights and opportunities as their male counterparts (Samal, 2021) [59]. The aforementioned aspects encompass the provision of educational opportunities, opportunities for gainful employment, access to adequate healthcare services, the ability to own property, and active involvement in decision-making procedures.

Education and knowledge are fundamental factors that contribute significantly to the empowerment of women. The acquisition of quality education by women serves as a catalyst for the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and critical thinking capabilities (Balabantaray & Singh, 2022) [3, 4, 6, 7, 8]. This, in turn, empowers them to exercise agency in decision-making processes, actively engage in diverse fields, and question prevailing social constructs. Economic empowerment refers to the process of facilitating women's agency in managing their economic resources and attaining financial autonomy. The attainment of this objective can be facilitated by implementing policies that promote equitable compensation for comparable labor, ensuring equitable access to financial resources and investment opportunities, fostering an environment conducive to entrepreneurial endeavors, and providing comprehensive vocational training programs.

The concept of women's empowerment encompasses various dimensions, one of which pertains to their health and well-being (Balabantaray & Singh, 2022) [3, 4, 6, 7, 8]. This entails recognizing and safeguarding women's reproductive health rights, facilitating their access to comprehensive healthcare services, and striving to mitigate the occurrence of maternal mortality. In addition, it encompasses the imperative of tackling gender-based violence and advocating for the provision of mental health support. Political participation encompasses the multifaceted endeavor of empowering women within the political sphere, with a specific focus on augmenting their representation and involvement in various decision-making entities, governmental institutions, and policy formulation procedures. The inclusion of women's perspectives and needs in the formulation of policies is crucial for ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the societal dynamics that impact their lives.

The process of social and cultural change involves the examination and transformation of deeply ingrained cultural norms and societal attitudes that contribute to the persistence of gender inequality. This critical endeavor lies at the core of women's empowerment. This entails the promotion of gender sensitivity, the deconstruction of stereotypes, and the fostering of male ally ship within the context. The concept of agency and voice pertains to the capacity of empowered women to exercise autonomy in making choices and decisions that have a direct impact on their individual lives. Individuals possess the necessary self-assurance and accessible means to articulate their viewpoints, champion their entitlements, and actively participate in the advancement of communal progress.

1.4. Status of Women in India: A historical Analysis

During the medieval period, a notable phenomenon emerged wherein various empires and kingdoms ascended, each exerting distinct levels of impact on the societal standing of women. In certain social contexts, it is noteworthy to observe that a subset of women, specifically those affiliated with royal lineages, persisted in maintaining positions of authority. In the context of the 13th century Delhi Sultanate, it is noteworthy to mention the ascension of Razia Sultana as the first female ruler. The evolution of societal norms frequently resulted in a shift towards conservatism, leading to the imposition of limitations on women's freedom of movement and self-determination. The practice of purdah, which involves the seclusion of women from public view, has garnered significant attention and recognition within specific segments of society.

The Colonial Period, spanning from the 17th to the mid-20th century, represents a significant era in the sociocultural landscape. This epoch is characterized by the establishment and expansion of colonial powers across various regions of the world. During this time, dominant societies exerted their influence and control. The advent of the colonial era in India ushered in a series of profound transformations within the fabric of Indian society, wherein the influence of the British colonial power exerted a discernible impact on the intricate dynamics of gender relations.

The historical endeavors of missionaries and colonial authorities were driven by a desire to enhance women's educational opportunities and tackle pertinent social concerns, including child marriage and sati, the ritualistic self-immolation of widows on their husbands' funeral pyres. The sociocultural milieu of the 19th and early 20th centuries witnessed a surge in social reform movements, wherein notable figures like Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar emerged as prominent advocates for the advancement of women's rights and education.

The period following India's independence in 1947 marks a significant turning point in the nation's history. This era, commonly referred to as the post-independence era, is characterized by a multitude of social, political and economic components. Legal reforms have been introduced with the aim of enhancing women's rights, encompassing significant legislations such as the Dowry Prohibition Act (1961), the Maternity Benefits Act (1961), and the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (2005). The Indian government has implemented a range of programs and policies aimed at fostering women's education, health, and economic empowerment. Notably, the "Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao" campaign stands out as one of these initiatives.

In the present era, commonly referred to as contemporary times, there exists a complex social landscape that warrants sociological examination. Despite the implementation of

legal and policy reforms, it is evident that persistent challenges continue to exist within the given context. The persistence of gender-based violence, the prevalence of dowry-related issues, the existence of unequal pay, and the limited representation of women in political and corporate spheres are ongoing challenges that significantly impact the lives of women.

Grassroots movements and women's organizations actively promote the principles of gender equality and empowerment within society. Women have made significant strides in diverse domains, encompassing the realms of politics, sports, academia, and business. The multifaceted nature of women's status in India is intricately shaped by a range of factors including geographical location, religious affiliation, caste dynamics, and socioeconomic disparities. Despite notable advancements, the attainment of gender equality and the empowerment of women in various domains of Indian society remain unfinished tasks.

1.5. Challenges and Barriers faced by Women

Women tend to face subjugation, discrimination, barriers and challenges all through their life starting right from employment to progression and promotion to higher positions in the organisation (Grogan, 2019) [29]. Women have to prove themselves more than men do (Williams, Korn & Mihaylo, 2020) [65]. Despite the notable advancements made in gender equality endeavors, women persistently encounter a multitude of obstacles and constraints within the realm of the workplace (Balabantaray, 2023) [5, 9]. The aforementioned challenges frequently stem from deeply ingrained societal norms, the prevailing cultures within organizations, and the pervasive presence of structural inequalities. The contemporary workplace presents a multitude of challenges and barriers that women encounter in their professional endeavors. These obstacles, rooted in social structures and gender dynamics, impede women's progress and hinder their ability to achieve equality and success in the workplace. It is imperative to shed light on these key challenges in order to foster a deeper understanding of the complexities surrounding gender inequality in professional settings.

Gender bias and stereotyping are pervasive social phenomena that have significant implications for various aspects of society, including the workplace (Balabantaray, 2023) [5, 9]. Stereotypes pertaining to women's roles and abilities can exert a profound influence on the processes of hiring, promotions, and performance evaluations. These stereotypes, often deeply ingrained within societal norms and expectations, can create biases that favor or disadvantage individuals based on their gender. Consequently, such biases can perpetuate gender inequalities and hinder the advancement of women in professional settings. The perception of women as being less competent or suitable for leadership roles can have a significant impact on their ability to advance in their careers.

The phenomenon of the gender pay gap continues to endure across various industries and nations. Gender disparities persist in the labor market, with women experiencing an average wage gap when compared to their male counterparts, even when performing similar job roles (Kumar & Moharaj, 2023) [36, 37]. This discrepancy in earnings not only perpetuates long-standing financial inequalities but also hinders women's ability to achieve economic empowerment. The phenomenon commonly referred to as the "glass ceiling"

and the accompanying "leadership gap" pertains to the persistent underrepresentation of women in high-ranking leadership positions and board memberships. The concept of the glass ceiling pertains to intangible obstacles that impede the upward mobility of women in attaining prominent leadership roles, thereby constraining their capacity to exert influence and participate in the process of making critical decisions.

It has been observed that women frequently encounter discreet manifestations of discriminatory behavior, commonly referred to as microaggressions. These subtle acts have the potential to erode their self-assurance and feelings of inclusion within societal structures. In addition, it is important to acknowledge that workplace harassment, particularly instances of sexual harassment, engenders an environment characterized by hostility. This pervasive issue carries significant implications for individuals' psychological well-being and their professional trajectories. The dearth of representation and scarcity of role models can pose challenges for aspiring women in envisioning their own career trajectories, as the absence of visible women in leadership positions becomes a significant factor. The absence of individuals who serve as exemplars can have a profound impact on an individual's sense of self-assurance and impede their advancement within their chosen occupation.

In a society characterized by male dominance, women often encounter a sense of isolation, encountering various challenges such as encountering resistance towards their ideas and grappling with difficulties in being acknowledged or respected (Kumar & Moharaj, 2023) [36, 37]. The presence of this particular environment has the potential to hinder the process of collaboration and impede the generation of innovative ideas. The phenomenon known as Double Burden Syndrome refers to the societal expectation placed upon women to simultaneously fulfill traditional caregiving roles while also maintaining their professional responsibilities. The phenomenon of the double burden, wherein individuals are confronted with simultaneous responsibilities in both their personal and professional lives, has been observed to have significant implications. One notable consequence is the heightened levels of stress experienced by individuals grappling with this dual role. Furthermore, the allocation of time and energy towards fulfilling domestic obligations can potentially impede one's progress in terms of career advancement and professional growth.

2. Review of Literature
2.1. Women in Workplace:

It has been witnessed that there is a significant difference between the actual number of women in the workforce and the number of women in the leadership position. This disparity is a classic depiction of the extreme inequality existing at the institutional level. This disparity speaks volumes about the everyday struggle of women along with the longstanding inconveniences and difficulties they face in everyday life. Usually in the professional sectors women and their deliverables are valued as lower than that of men although they contribute the same or even in some cases more than that of men (Lekchiri, 2019) [40]. In the Western societies which are characterised by an advanced culture, the status of women is relatively better; however, women tend to face tremendous difficulties in conservative cultures. They are vulnerable to significant gender bias (Conway-Long, 2002)

and have to face unfavourable work effects and psychological consequences (Basford *et al*., 2014; Bosson *et al*., 2010) [10, 14]. Hence, the focus should not be only on the Western women as it tends to turn a blind eye and usually ignores the experiences of common women belonging to other cultures (Lekchiri, 2019) [40]. Even though women tend to outstand men in the educational attainment, but end getting jobs with low incomes (Nishtha, 2019).

2.2. Women and Gender Roles
The traditional roles and societal positions of men and women continue to have an impact on how they interact and approach social situations. Traditional roles for women are characterized by the "homemaker" stereotype (Eagly *et al*., 2020) [22], where women are expected to stay at home, raise children and primarily fill the roles of mother and wife. A holistic understanding of the gender expressions would reveal that central characteristics associated with females are kindness, soft approach, tender, sensitive, submissiveness, feminine, empathy and gentility (Heilman, Manzi & Braun, 2015; Rosette *et al*., 2016) [31, 55]. On the contrary, the roles of the males are expected to be quite opposite to the ones just mentioned above. They are expected to be strong, muscular, masculine, rough, loud and practical. They are expected to be the "breadwinners", expected to work, support their family financially and not be controlled by emotion (Eagly *et al*., 2020) [22] and they are expected to display characteristics like strength, intelligence and dominance (Rosette *et al*., 2016) [55].

2.3. Women and Gender Stereotypes
Stereotypes are a structured set of beliefs about the attributes of a group of people that are ascribed to individuals categorized as a member of that group (Heilman, Manzi & Braun (2015) [31]. Stereotyping beliefs about women promote gender bias in the workplace. Although these beliefs are 'functional, automatic, unintentional, and accurate in an aggregate', these lead to the completion of an inaccurate work evaluation demonstrating a generalization instead of individual's actual qualities (Devine 1989; Goodwin *et al*., 2000; Macrae *et al*., 1994) [20, 28, 41].

3. Theoretical Framework
Gender stereotypes encompass preconceived notions and beliefs pertaining to the characteristics, behaviors, roles, and attributes that are commonly associated with individuals, predicated upon their gender. Stereotypes frequently serve to perpetuate established social norms and expectations, exerting a significant influence on the manner in which individuals perceive, engage with, and assess one another. The examination of gender stereotypes encompasses a range of theoretical frameworks that derive insights from diverse academic disciplines, such as psychology, sociology, and communication studies.

3.1. Social Cognitive theory
Albert Bandura is credited with developing the Social Cognitive Theory, which is a psychological framework that describes how people learn from their surroundings by observing others, imitating those around them, and engaging in cognitive processes. It places an emphasis on cognitive factors, personal experiences, and social interactions as important contributors to the formation of behavior, attitudes, and beliefs. This notion is frequently applied to a variety of

fields, such as education, communication, and the process of changing people's behaviors. According to social cognitive theory, individuals pick up new behaviors and attitudes through observing others, imitating those behaviors, and being rewarded for their efforts. Learning occurs when an individual is presented with cultural and social clues such as those found in media portrayals (Balabantaray *et al*., 2022) [3, 4, 6, 7, 8], the effects of family and friends, and interactions with peers. The observation of gendered roles and behaviors in a variety of settings leads to the development of gender stereotypes. The way in which individuals view themselves and others is therefore influenced by these stereotypes, which in turn has an effect on the individuals' job choices, aspirations, and interactions within the workplace.

3.2. Social Role Theory
The Social Role Theory is a sociological and psychological framework that was proposed by Alice Eagly and Wendy Wood. Its goal is to explain the causes and implications of gender differences and inequalities by looking at the division of labor and duties between genders within communities. This theory proposes that the societal roles that are allocated to men and women have an effect on the actions, attitudes, and opportunities available to them, which eventually leads to the formation of gender stereotypes and expectations.

According to the social role hypothesis, gender disparities are a product of the societal roles and expectations placed on different sexes. The persistent representation of women and men in particular roles contributes to the perpetuation of stereotypes, which originate from historical and cultural divisions of labor and are further strengthened by these divisions. Occupational preferences and ideas about who makes a good leader might be influenced by gender stereotypes. The common perception of women as being more inclined to cooperate and care for others acts as a barrier to their advancement in roles that are typically associated with agency and leadership.

4. Methods
A systematic review of the literature was conducted to extract information for the study. Primarily, google scholar was used as a database to collect the literature. Recent studies were given primary importance to ensure the relevance of the topic. Various keywords/phrases such as "Women and workplace", "Discrimination of women at workplace", "Women at work", "Gender stereotypes", "Challenges and problems faced by women in organizations", "Subjugation of women", Equal pay for equal work", "Women and Society", "Glass ceiling", used for searching relevant literature. Since the study focused only on women, relevant literature highlighting the problems of women at workplace was only considered. A descriptive approach was followed to understand the experiences of women and their reactions to situations are presented in the following section.

5. Findings and Discussions
Research studies have corroborated the fact that females are paid significantly less as compared to their male counterparts. Moreover, it is also witnessed that the wage gap is further widened in the private sector. It can be inferred that the public sector at least makes an attempt in adopting an equitable approach in payment of the wages irrespective of the gender; however, the private sector tremendously and vociferously perpetuates the same (Ahmad & Naseer, 2015) [1]. Multiple

research studies have established the fact that women tend to work for longer hours as compared to their male counterparts; however, when it comes to payment of the incentives for the same, the issue becomes quite critical in nature (Ahmad & Naseer, 2015) [1]. Even it is witnessed that in terms of economic rewards in the organizational sector it is the women who paid significantly less as compared to that of men.

Persistent discrimination at the workplace gives a real negative impression to the victim (Rahman, 2019) [53]. From the previous sections, it is amply clear that women are by and large discriminated at the workplace. Discrimination and harassment at the workplace lead to negative impact on health, job efficiency and family dynamics (Jahnke *et al.*, 2019) [34]. Women's difficulties have always been unique. Black and poor women fight for survival and dignity as white women fight for the right to work, simultaneously balancing their duties as mothers, wives, and housewives (Teixeira *et al.*, 2021) [62].

The dearth of mentorship and sponsorship is a prevalent issue faced by women, resulting in limited avenues for professional guidance and access to advantageous career prospects. In order to effectively tackle these challenges, it is imperative to adopt a comprehensive approach that encompasses various dimensions. This entails implementing alterations in organizational policies, fostering cultural transformations, and instigating broader shifts within society. The establishment of inclusive and equitable work environments, the execution of diversity and inclusion strategies, the provision of mentorship and training initiatives, and the promotion of consciousness regarding gender bias are fundamental measures in addressing these obstacles and cultivating the advancement of women's professional achievements.

The concept of work-life balance poses a significant challenge for women, as they navigate the delicate equilibrium between their professional obligations and familial responsibilities. This challenge is further exacerbated by the absence of adequate support systems, such as insufficient provisions for maternity leave, limited availability of childcare facilities, and a dearth of flexible work arrangements. The aforementioned phenomenon has the potential to exert a significant influence on the trajectory of one's professional advancement, thereby engendering heightened levels of psychological strain and exhaustion. Maternity discrimination, a pervasive issue within contemporary society, manifests as a form of bias or prejudice experienced by women upon entering pregnancy or availing themselves of maternity leave. Individuals may exhibit apprehension due to potential adverse consequences on their professional trajectories, such as hindered career progression, missed opportunities for advancement, or encounters with inequitable treatment upon reintegration into the workforce.

There has been an extensive biased behaviors for women not from the immediate superiors but also from the contemporaries at the organizations in which women are working in (Ahmad & Naseer, 2015) [1]. Women in the select male-dominated culture repeatedly operated in environments that do not satisfy the basics for them to succeed on the job due to deeply-rooted gender-biased organizational cultures. There are insufficient organizational mechanisms to support women in these types of environments, which leaves them fighting to find the proper coping mechanisms to persevere and resist. Nonetheless, women in male-dominated work environments can resist and combat the gender-bias if they have the proper personal and organizational support, in addition to a clear vision and motivation to succeed on the job despite the barriers faced (Lekchiri *et al.*, 2019) [40].

Unconscious biases, characterized by the automatic and unintentional activation of stereotypes or attitudes, has been observed to exert an influence on various decision-making processes within organizations, such as those pertaining to hiring, promotions, and assignments. The presence of these biases within societal structures has the potential to create a systematic disadvantage for women, thereby constraining their access to various opportunities. The establishment and maintenance of professional networks are of paramount importance for individuals seeking career advancement. However, women may encounter certain obstacles when it comes to cultivating relationships and gaining access to professional networks, particularly within industries that are predominantly male-dominated.

Conclusion

Gender stereotypes are pervasive in society and have the potential to influence individuals both consciously and unconsciously. Within our societal framework, there exists a notable prevalence of occurrences wherein certain individuals exhibit a propensity to abstain from engaging in collaborative endeavors with women, as well as a proclivity to refrain from incorporating women within the hierarchical composition of an organization. Nevertheless, there exists a distinct group of individuals who deliberately opt against incorporating women into the labor force owing to their deeply ingrained conviction that women are more inclined than men to prioritize familial and child-rearing responsibilities over their professional pursuits.

In the modern era, still the gender bias exists in various organizations (Kurniawan, Nurhaeni & Habsari, 2018) [39]. Societal and government changes can help level the playing field (Allen *et al.*, 2016; Moharaj & Rout, 2021) [2, 48]. Evidences suggests that promotion of women is less as compared to that of men especially for the higher ranks in any organisation. This essentially refers to the glass ceiling approach the invisible barrier which exists in almost all organizations and contributes to severe underrepresentation of women among the top management positions (Kunze & Miller, 2017) [38]. In the contemporary era, the business is entering into a cut throat competitions, hence the organizations cannot miss out on the contributions of the expert women.

Even though 76 years have passed since independence, the state of affairs relating to that of women has not increased significantly and vociferously (Dalei *et al.*, 2021) [19]. It would be fallacious to say that the Empowerment of women has not happened, but it would not be wrong to state that the rate and pace at which the gender empowerment should have happened, has not happened in real sense. The rate is really slow and the process is highly questionable in terms of various strategies, implementation and the innovative practices adopted to ensure women empowerment. Training and development must include the element of unconscious gender bias to help women leaders overcome invisible barriers and recognize such bias in themselves and in their organizations (Madsen & Andrade, 2018) [42].

By actively engaging in a critical examination and restructuring of decision-making procedures that may give rise to gender biases, it is possible to diminish the occurrence

of errors that undermine the efficacy, competitiveness, and equity of organizations. (Balabantaray & Samal, 2022; Chang and Milkman, 2020) [3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 16].

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