

WOMAN AT WORKPLACE: PRINCESS AND THE PREJUDICE

Dr. Ghazal Khuwaja*

Saima Akhtar†

Dr. Misbah Bibi Qureshi‡

Syed Faisal Hyder Shah§

ABSTRACT

A woman has always been an instrument for the other gender in all kinds of social affairs. Earlier, her consent was completely missing declaring 'her' powerless in front of 'him'. The reason was her lack of awareness and exposure to the outer world that kept her behind the scenes and, even after contributing more than what she could, she had been subjected to the multiplicity of psychological and physical abuses. Unless she belonged to some elite family, she was the last thing in the world to care about. This write up sheds light on how gender discrimination has evolved over time especially in the business milieu, women transforming from less valued domestic species to vital faction well-equipped with a strategic mind-set to fit in any level of organisation from clerical to the top executive positions and capable enough to compete with the opposite gender. Highlighting certain stereotypes, misconceptions and prejudices about women, it is also discussed that how today's women can and do cope with these accusations acknowledging their powers and uniqueness. As a help from formal platforms to address gender baseness, some examples of discrimination related acts and laws in various countries are also mentioned here.

Keywords: Workplace, women empowerment, harassment, prejudice

* Assistant Professor, Department of Public Administration, University of Karachi.

† Assistant Professor, Department of Public Administration, University of Karachi.

‡ Assistant Professor, Institute of Gender Studies, University of Sindh, Jamshoro.

§ Lecturer, Department of Social Work, University of Sindh, Jamshoro

INTRODUCTION

It has always been a fact that the man of the house is solely responsible for breadwinning but an espousing fact also always existed which is that not all women can sit back idle and wait for something as a free offering for their livelihood. Women find the way out of their house somehow or at least from their domestic responsibilities to make some extra money for their household or self-sustenance. Women have been an important element in the business world being a multi-tasker as well as a sharing partner in the house. There are factions in every society who disgust the idea of working women and believe strictly in their role as a homemaker. Then, there are other groups who encourage or in fact sometimes pressurise their women to work and contribute to the domestic budget with or without their own consent. Sometimes circumstances also leave no option for this gender other than stepping out and becoming the sole earner for the household.

The Women of Yesterday and Today

Whatever the milieu, whatever the class or status, whatever the age or the set of responsibilities, the ladies have proven to be second to none in any arena of life and struggle. As Dr. John Gray (1992) through his famous book *Men are from Mars and Women are from Venus* declares that men and women are two different species like an orange and an apple, with their own sets of qualities and abilities and cannot be compared for what they are. They must understand each other to move on together but they cannot be like each other. They have different roles to play, possess different mind sets to look at the world around, to deal with the people and situations, to solve problems or simply to live. They are like two aliens from two different worlds sent on this third place to find, like and live with each other, without any other choice (though men and women from the modern countries have created and legalised a new choice to live with the same gender).

History is full of case studies on gender biased dealings; women have always been treated as a second class citizen in most societies around the world. At work, men maintain their supremacy just like being the superior gender at home, they cannot accept and do not dare to let the feminine leadership to flourish and take over man's chauvinism. For this belief to be proven true all the time many misconceptions about women workers are also prevailing in the corporate world like:

- women are made to stay home and raise the family only
- they are not serious about jobs
- they are physically weak and psychologically sensitive individuals
- they are not objective oriented
- they lack business acumen
- they are prone to get exploited by anyone, anywhere
- And so on and so forth

Regardless what the world (man) says, women have proven themselves time and again in every walk of life. But at the same time the problems often faced by women at workplace remain intact if not at one organisation but at many others. Problems like:¹

- Sexual harassment (physical and mental)
- Gender based discrimination in work acknowledgement
- Salary discrimination
- Providing jobs not same as promised or offered initially
- Withholding promotions based on gender
- Negligence at work
- Over-worked and under-paid in comparison to men
- Underestimated for their skills and abilities
- Oppressed to keep off from competing men
- Treated as less competent and ill-determined workers
- Hired just to decorate the environment
- And so on and so forth

Over the decades, women have tried to change the picture but still they are stereotypically portrayed as being at a disadvantage in the corporate world (Baron, 2010). Some myths and realities are as follows:

- Men behave rationally while women are emotional;
- Men are assertive while women are passive;
- Men are competitive while women prefer collaborative approach;
- Men tend to set high goals while women set lower goals;
- Men are less accommodating while women make more concessions;
- Men focus on outcomes while women believe in building and maintaining relationships;
- Men tend to have cognitive dissonance after their decision of accepting the very first offer while women feel relieved and satisfied in such situations.

It is the psychological pressures in the work environment that turn the stereotypes into reality as women become conscious and anxious about themselves and thus trigger self-fulfilling prophecy of expecting less and getting less. For women to reverse the common notions about them, they must acknowledge the stereotype and try to overcome it by becoming bold and assertive with a good control over their feelings. To protect and put confidence in women, many societies and institutions have enacted laws and policies that have been quite successful in non-bureaucratic systems especially.

Some Examples of Legalised Safety Measures in Different Countries:

India

- *The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act 2013*²

Ghana

- *Women's and Girl Child Ministry*³
- *Domestic Violence and Victim's Support Unit (DOVVSU) formerly Women and Juvenile Unit (WAJU)*⁴

El Salvador

- *Article No. 165 (Law in Criminal Code) addressing sexual harassment*⁵

Spain

- *Law on "Effective Equality between Women and Men" 2007*⁶
- *Article 14 of the Spanish Constitution (1978)** testifies the fundamental right of equality and non-discrimination on grounds of sex to prevent sexual harassment and related, at work place*⁷

International Labor Organization (ILO)**

- *Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention (No. 111) 1960*⁸

UNWOMEN**

- *Women empowerment principles*⁹

Although almost all cultures and societies have laws to protect, but development and consistent following of reliable mechanisms for condemnation and legal responsiveness will help to curb the conflicts. Beside that our today's woman has already brought a paradigm shift by taking the reign of her life in her own hands in many factions of the global society. She has proved to the other

**Constitution of Spain: Part I, Fundamental rights and duties, Chapter Two, Rights and Liberties, Article 14, Spaniards are equal before the law and may not in any way be discriminated against on account of birth, race, sex, religion, opinion or any other personal or social condition or circumstance.

**According to ILO, sexual harassment is a violation of fundamental rights of the workers leading to health and security problems and discrimination

**The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

gender that she can do wonders only if others will have confidence and trust in her as she is a born manager.

Gone are the days when woman was scared, as today she knows what and who she is and how she has to let everyone comprehend her space and place. Be it the cozy environment of home, professional work milieu, demanding strategic management decision making, field of fashion or education, physically straining sports arena, deadly war front, matters of state, or the alien dark skies in cosmos, she has proven her value as a worthwhile human being throughout the globe.

What makes her Strong Today?

Her attitude! In psychology, attitude has three components: 1) *Cognitive*, a mental approach to explore about something (what it is), 2) *Affective*, explaining the feel-good factor about something, (do I like it or not) and 3) *Behavioural*, deciding about the action to be taken (should I do it or not) (Katz & Stotland; 1959). The intellectuals say that this CAB approach of attitude (Gallistel, 2002) guides us in becoming what we want to as attitude leads to action. Even in the worst situations our attitude is something we can always control and the soft feelings can be easily converted into the hard results. When we control our attitude we influence how our body responds and performs.

Because attitude is the single most important factor in achieving success, our today's women has learnt to orchestrate her attitude and her achievements. Now she is much aware of what she has to study, which field she must choose, which career suits her, what are her health and diet standards, which man she should marry (interesting yet still somewhat disputed), how to plan the family, how to meet all the needs of everyone concerned including herself, in short, how to live her life at fullest. Her winning attitude towards life buffers her against all odds and even against various adverse

health effects and depression. Her optimism makes her tough and lets her get going when the going gets tough on her.

History has provided a long list of names of ladies who have shown their mettle and made their marks in their own part of the world. Majorly the last few decades presented an infinite list in comparison to a few names in last few centuries. Just naming a few women of the new age, Eleanor Roosevelt, Valentina Tereshkova, Margaret Mead, Margaret Thatcher, Indira Gandhi, Martina Navratilova, Fatima Jinnah, Mother Teresa, Lady Diana, Khalida Zia, Benazir Bhutto, Hillary Clinton, Oprah Winfrey, Dr. Ruth Pfau, Asma Jahangir, Bilquis Edhi, Musharraf Hai, and Musarrat Misbah are some ladies well known for their hard work and who have earned the ultimate benefit of their positive attitude. Other ladies that make up a never-ending list can be found unanimously at quite dominating positions in various domains including the corporate sector, social work, and the government.

What are the stimuli for her strength and success with new attitude? After God gifted disposition, it is her surroundings that polish her; the lifestyle offered to her that made her recognize the hidden treasures and to channelize them to make the world a better place for humanity. Her sound upbringing, proper education, uniform affection, undiscriminating opportunities, empowered decision making, and freedom to move ahead according to her will. Her refinement by the environment is the key that makes the difference and has made the difference between yesterday's and today's woman.

It is natural for her to think beyond herself and take care of others. She is born with the magic of togetherness and affection. And when this magic crosses the boundaries of a household to the community, nation and the whole world, it speaks louder than ever and collects applauds and praises for her. Only if given a chance she proves herself in any and every walk of life.

Women are Smart Performers and Great Leaders:

Researchers and analysts have done a great deal of work in understanding and optimized utilization of the skill-sets and abilities of women in every field, including the household. The facts show that women *are* different from men but not less than men in abilities and results. They do think, feel, behave and cope up with situations in different way but results are equally good as achieved by smart men.

For example as *leaders*, women are more empathic, persuasive, better listeners, and more willing to consider others' point of view. While men as leaders show more higher level of resilience and thoroughness than female leaders. Naturally women are able to express their feelings better than men because they can access their emotions by switching quickly from the verbal left brain to the emotional right brain. The stereotype about female leadership is changing and men are also becoming more accommodating to accept the other gender to take up the lead roles. Earlier thought about directorial approach is altering as more and more females are entering the top cadres of management and the pace is getting faster. It was accustomed that only masculine attributes like competitiveness, task-orientation, and willingness to take risks were fortes to be in leadership position successfully. But now high need for achievement and power, assertiveness, self-reliance, risk taking and similar behaviours and qualities establish the effective leadership equally for men and women. However, women are inclined to be transformational leaders benefiting from their grip on skills like reliance on expertise, charisma and interpersonal skills, while men leaders are more directive in nature (Lewis, 2007).

Some internationally renowned companies who flourished under female leadership in twentieth century include: Hewlett-Packard, Avon, Xerox, eBay, Mary Kay Cosmetics, Harpo Group of Companies. Our local business scenario is also heavily affected with the trend of women entrepreneurs and top executives flooding all

kinds of industries. The fact behind, female managers need every chance to succeed by acquiring the titles, status, and recognition appropriate to the position—as well as sufficient time to be effective (Deresky, 2013).

Prejudice vs. Powers of Women Workers:

Women as employees bring many advantages to the work environment and business as a whole. They create a culture of understanding and teamwork as feminine nature prefers to relate to others rather than to compete. Traditionally, women were allowed for clerical jobs only, with the assumption that they would leave to raise family and even if return, would part-time work mostly. Thus, employers never used to make much effort to train women for upper level positions, leaving least chances for them to move upward for supervisory or managerial positions. The only likelihood had been the limited short-term upward mobility through the managerial ranks.

Women are generally tagged as misfit in the business world for certain (presumed) aspects. Like:

- Family is priority for women, not the work. They are non-serious about their jobs and would skip work or even leave it for their family.
- Self-respect and self-defence are difficult qualities for women to possess so they do not belong to the world outside their homes. They are fragile and emotional beings and must stay hidden and protected.
- They have multiple responsibilities to perform before they enter the professional domain and they can't skip those domestic duties. They can do many things at a time but that is also only possible when they are doing what they are born for and good at, household.
- They are only good for certain industries and jobs, especially manufacturing and clerical tasks. They are not

suitable especially for those jobs that demand mobility and negotiations e.g. sales and marketing.

- Because women are not made to work in the commercial realm, they do not deserve to be compensated as men. They are not as efficient and strategic as men so must not be paid like men.
- Women are hired to decorate the office and have some attraction for male employees and clients.
- Etc.

Fortunately, women have taken all this criticism and negativities very positively and have converted all the so-called weaknesses into their strengths and have tried their best to create the missing balance between the masculine and feminine energies in the corporate world too (Jimenez, 2012). Just like the *Yin-Yang* as universal principle representing respectively feminine energy that keep forces smooth and flowing and masculine energy that get things accomplished.^{§§} They believe strongly that they are unique and must not be compared with men for their powers and prowess. Women of the modern times have made the world think broader and smarter accepting the natural diversity of the systems and their evolutionary character and amending existing organisational structures to accommodate the other gender whole-heartedly and profiting from their unique powers.

Women at workplace:

- *Bring different skill Set*—women, being different from men intellectually and behaviourally, bring a different skill set to the management approach. Some qualities that differentiate them from men include: more compassion, better listening, affection, interpersonal skills, multi-tasking, accommodating, responsiveness, team-building, etc.

^{§§} A Chinese philosophy, Yin and Yang concepts describe how apparently opposite or contrary forces are actually complementary, interconnected and interdependent and give rise to each other.

- *Are more educated than men today*—permission for education but not to work freely have given another edge to the women. These days percentage of women graduating from high schools and universities is out-numbering male graduates. Another reason being that men are more adventurers as they wish to work sooner and earn better and faster, while women concentrate on their education and well-equip themselves with the science of business world.
- *Naturally possess team building skill*—because women are supposed to keep the family together as a one unit and naturally this responsibility becomes an expertise for them at work as well. Being good listeners and persuasive in nature, women are able to build and uphold teams for synergistic results.
- *Have better understanding of social responsibility*—being caring at core, women are better at understanding the needs of all the stakeholders, be it the employees, employers, suppliers, customers, competitors or the society at large. They can better fathom the magnitude of social needs and value it by initiating responses at industrial level. Also, this quality makes women especially suitable for welfare organisations.
- *Are more efficient*—being more responsible, women are considered as more efficient than men in general. Their multi-tasking ability and numerous responsibilities on their shoulders make them perform faster and achieve more making them better than men. Generally observed, men like to shun work somehow by being diverted by friends, social networking, visual distractions, etc.
- *Are more focused/targeted*—women are perceived to be more focused and targeted because they have to achieve more in less time due to extraordinary responsibilities they have, home, family, kids, household, relatives, neighbourhood, education, job, team members, boss, personal care, etc. thus, they focus, target, finish and move to the next duty.

- *Are more responsible*—even the nature is called as ‘mother nature’. Women are caring at core; they take responsibility because they know they have to do it.
- *Are confident*— successes stories of women from around the world, familial support and social and legal protection have put a new spirit in this gender to be determined and ambitious about winning awards wherever they can put their feet in. she is very much empowered today.

CONCLUSION

All these claims I have made here do not mean that today’s woman is at her zenith of success. This is the best of the times but still she has a long way to go, she still has to fight on many fronts for her rights, her liberty, her honour, her family, her career, even for her life. Unfortunately, in spite of living in this age of developments, every now and then we hear about women being victims of domestic violence, honour killing, workplace harassment, human trafficking, watta satta marriages^{***}, vani,⁺⁺⁺ and not to forget effects of the Hudood Law (1979)⁺⁺⁺ that punishes rape victims (women) instead of the rapists (the men). On regular basis news comes about minor girls given in compensation for murders, women buried alive or stoned to death only on the doubt of adultery, etc.

Our society must rise above all this and understand the true place of a woman in our lives. She, as a daughter, as a sister, as a wife, and above all as a mother, exists to protect everyone from all the evils but unluckily she herself is unprotected. Here, her self-

^{***}Watta satta, meaning give-take, is a form of bride exchange traditional practice common in Pakistan and Afghanistan. It involves simultaneous marriage of a brother and sister pair from two households, or uncle-niece pairs, or cousin pairs.

⁺⁺⁺ Vani, a cultural custom found in parts of Pakistan, is a form of forced child marriage as part of punishment for a crime committed by her male relatives. Decision is made by Jirga, a council of tribal elders.

⁺⁺⁺ Controversial set of ordinance in Pakistan; <http://cii.gov.pk/publications/h.report.pdf>

confidence and self-trust combined with her emotional intelligence and positive attitude build her as a woman of substance, ready to defeat anyone and anything standing in her way. Women are required to be emotionally fine-tuned to live their life easily and happily. I believe that a woman's emotions are her biggest treasure if she is given her space and is well groomed, or are her worse enemy if taken as her weakness, and she is also convinced.

According to an old adage, behind every successful man there is a woman. It signifies that a woman can really do wonders in others' lives only if her own life is wonderful. Today's globalization and media developments are effective impetus for today's women to know and get a hold on their will powers, control their emotions, have a positive attitude and show the world how worthy they are for any realm of life. They are strong and proficient enough to take care of their homes as well as corporate affairs diligently.

FOOTNOTE

¹ www.empowerwomen.org

² <http://wcd.nic.in/wcdact/womenactsex.pdf>

³ <http://www.ghana.gov.gh/index.php/2012-02-08-08-18-09/ministries/129-ministries/255-ministry-of-gender-children-and-social-protection>

⁴ <http://www.hracghana.org/index.php/about-hrac/bringing-rights-to-life/human-rights-situation-in-ghana>

⁵ <https://www.oas.org/en/iachr/women/docs/pdf/WOMEN%20MESOAMERICA%20ENG.pdf>

⁶ https://www.academia.edu/206702/Spanish_Act_for_Effective_Equality_of_Men_and_Women

⁷ <http://www.tribunalconstitucional.es/es/constitucion/Paginas/ConstitucionIngles.aspx>

⁸ www.ilo.org

⁹ <http://www.unwomen.org/en/partnerships/businesses-and-foundations/womens-empowerment-principles>

REFERENCES

- Baron, E.A. 2010, *The Book of Management: The Ten Essential Skills for Achieving High Performance*, Dorling Kindersley Ltd., Great Britain.
- Deresky, H. 2013, *International Management: Managing Across Borders and Cultures*, 8th edn, Prentice Hall Inc.
- Gallistel, R. (ed) 2002, *Stevens' Handbook of experimental Psychology, learning, Motivation, and Emotion*. 3rd edn, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., New York.
- Gray, J. 1992, *Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus*, Harper Collins, USA.
- Jimenez, L. 2012, *Dont Mess with the Princess: How a Woman Makes it In a Man's World*. Audioink.
- Katz, D., & Stokmnd, E. A. 1959, Preliminary Statement to a Theory of Attitude Structure and change. In S. Koch (Ed.), *Psychology: A study of a science*. Vol. 3. New York: McGraw-Hill, Pg. 423-475.
- Lewis, P.S. 2007, *Challenges for Tomorrow's Leaders*, 5th edn, Thompson SouthWestern, USA.