

# WOMEN DISCRIMINATION IN HRM PRACTICES: A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

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## ABSTRACT

*From the past few decades, researchers all over the globe have showed increased research attention in management literature towards the discrimination at workplace. The research has revealed that human resource management practices play a critical role in shaping the extent of discrimination that occurs within an organisation as they influence the access that women employees have to opportunities within the workplace viz- training, fair performance appraisals, career advancement, equal rewards and developmental assignments. Therefore, in order to change the employment conditions of women and make equitable workplace opportunities available to them, various international labour standard legislations have been passed from time to time viz - ILO convention on discrimination in employment & occupation 1958, UN convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against the women, the Equal Pay Act of 1963 (EPA); the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VII) and amendment Act in 1991, Rehabilitation Act of 1973; Title II of the Genetic Information Non-discrimination Act of 2008 (GINA). Despite these large-scale efforts to eradicate discrimination experienced by women at workplace, it has been witnessed that such practice continues to exist even today whether covert or overt and is visible in the form of following viz-less career advancement opportunities, their biased appraisals, fewer training and developmental opportunities, less compensation and fewer challenging tasks. Moreover, research has revealed that gender stereotypic beliefs and traditional and cultural practices exist in our societies even today and have its spill over effects across the workplaces as well. Thus, it can be concluded that even in today's competitive environment women experience discrimination at workplaces throughout the globe and are deprived of various opportunities as available to men. Therefore, in the light of above, the present study aims to review the extant literature available worldwide on women discrimination in HRM Practices in order to have a clear understanding of the extent of said concept. Furthermore, the present review is done by classifying, summarizing and synthesizing the previous studies relating to the following HRM Practices viz- compensation, career advancement, performance appraisals, training and task assignment in proper chronological order and the necessary gaps are identified which provides the scope for future research in the said phenomenon.*

**Keywords:** Cultural practices, Gender stereotypic belief, Human Capital, HRM practices, Women Discrimination.

## 1. Introduction

Women are the crucial component in the socio-economic development of any nation. The sustainable development of every nation requires the promotion of gender equality of men and women. It has been found that in societies where women are deprived of various workplace opportunities, development is bound to be a major challenge. Therefore, in order to overcome such challenge, various legislations have been passed across the globe from time to time viz-ILO convention on discrimination in employment & occupation 1958, UN convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against the women, the Equal Pay Act of 1963 (EPA); the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VII) and amendment Act in 1991, Rehabilitation Act of 1973; Title II of the Genetic Information Non-discrimination Act of 2008 (GINA) which represent the significant milestones in history where efforts were taken worldwide to ensure the equality of women at workplace. Despite these large-scale efforts taken worldwide to eradicate the discrimination of women at workplaces, it has been found that such practice continues to exist even today. Moreover, the extant literature available has revealed that gender stereotypic belief lays the cultural foundation for discrimination at workplaces as this notion is still deeply embedded in our societies and has its spill over effects across the workplaces as well (Gutek et al., 1996; Lens, 2003; Roscigno et al., 2007). In addition to it, the research has revealed that organisational policies and practices are influenced by the socially and culturally mandated structures which question the women's abilities, capabilities and suitability for organisational work (Gutek et al., 1996; Ensher et al., 2001; Downes et al., 2014). Research has also revealed that even when the participation of women in labour force increased, but still long-standing stereotypes and cultural practices continue to dominate the workplaces and therefore result into blocking of various workplace opportunities for them viz- training, career advancement, holding jobs with higher responsibility (Lens, 2003; Roscigno et al., 2007). Research has also witnessed that employers hold a belief that female employees give more priority to their family commitments and show negligent attitude towards their work. That is why, they are being deprived from the various workplace opportunities as available to men viz- career advancement, training, challenging task assignments (Hoschschild, 1989; Bielby, 1992).

From time to time, evidence have been found that women face gender biased work environments whether covert or overt not only in developing nations, but also in the developed nations as well which is visible in the form of following viz- less career advancement opportunities, biased performance appraisals, fewer training and developmental opportunities, less compensation and fewer challenging tasks (Sacket et al., 1991; Ohlott et al., 1994; Trueman and Baroudi, 1994; Broad bridge, 1998; Arulampalam et al., 2007; Pater et al., 2010; Diaz and Sanchez, 2011; Adhikari, 2014; Tlaiss & Dirani, 2015; Sneha, 2016; Khuong and Chi, 2017). Moreover, the World Economic Forum has recently released its report in the month of December 2018 that has ranked almost 149 countries on the parameters of gender equality at workplace in which India has been ranked 142 out of 149. The report has also concluded that though the world has closed almost 68% of the gender gap at workplace, but even in today's competitive environment, gender equality at workplace is a far-fetched dream across the world and it would take further 202 more years for the women to witness complete parity at workplace. Therefore, on the basis of the evidences found it is to be concluded that women discrimination in HRM Practices still prevail at workplaces worldwide resulting into incongruence between what is stated by law and the actual treatment of women at workplace.

## 2. Objective

The main purpose of the present review study is to systematically and chronologically summarize, analyse and synthesize an extant body of literature pertaining to the discrimination in the following HRM Practices viz- compensation, career advancement, performance appraisal, training and task assignment so as to have a clear and deeper understanding of the extent of discrimination experienced by female employees in connection with above mentioned HRM Practices.

## 3. Methodology

The literature review method is a relevant and distinguished form of research for summarizing, analysing and synthesizing an extant body of literature regarding a certain phenomenon (Chermack and Passmore, 2005; Torraco, 2005). The current literature review provides an outline of women discrimination in the following HRM Practices viz- compensation, career advancement, performance appraisal, training and task assignment. It is done by summarizing, analysing and synthesizing an extant body of literature pertaining to discrimination in the above mentioned HRM practices. Furthermore, the relevant literature available has been reviewed and expressed clearly and systematically which helps in understanding the extent of the said phenomenon and the necessary gaps are identified which provides the scope for future research.

## 4. Overview of Literature

This section provides a review of the extant literature available at both international and national level on women discrimination in the following HRM Practices viz- compensation, career advancement, performance appraisals, training and task assignment.

### 4.1 Women Discrimination in HRM Practices

Women discrimination at workplace has received considerable attention from the researcher's all over the globe. Researchers have defined it as the practice when employment decisions about the women viz- selection, training, appraisals, promotion, reward allocation, task assignment etc are based on their gender rather than on their productivity, performance or qualification (Neiva and Gutek, 1980; Blanchard and Crosby, 1989). Research revealed that women are discriminated in HRM Practices because their employers hold a belief that they give more priority to their family commitments and show negligent attitude towards their work (Hoschschild, 1989; Bielby, 1992). It has been witnessed that women face gender biased work environments whether covert or overt not only in developing nations, but also in the developed nations as well. The research reports that even when the participation of women in labour force increased, but it has been witnessed that long standing stereotypes and cultural practices continue to dominate our societies even today and has its spill over effects across the workplaces as well (Lens, 2003; Roscigno et al., 2007). Moreover, the research revealed that organisational policies and practices are deeply influenced by the socially and culturally mandated structures which question the women's abilities, capabilities and suitability for organisational work and thus result into unconscious bias against them in the following HRM Practices viz- compensation, training, career advancement, appraisals and task assignment (Sacket et al., 1991; Ohlott et al., 1994; Trueman and Baroudi, 1994; Broadbridge, 1998; Arulampalam et al., 2007; Shankar, 2008; Pater et al., 2010; Diaz and Sanchez, 2011; Adhikari,

2014; Tlaiss&Dirani, 2015; Sneha, 2016; Khuong and Chi, 2017). In addition to it, Channar et al (2011) conducted a study among employees of public and private health and education sector of Hyderabad and Jamshoro districts. The results of which revealed that females are more discriminated in private sectors than public sector. Furthermore, the extant review of various studies has been done at both national and international levels which have investigated the discrimination experienced by female employees in the following HRM Practices viz- compensation, career advancement, performance appraisals, challenging task assignment, and training. These are discussed below:

#### **4.1.1 Studies Related to Discrimination in Compensation**

Research studies conducted across the different sectors at both international and national workplace contexts have reported that women employees are underpaid as compared to their male counterparts because organisational policies and practices are often influenced by gender stereotypic belief which consider women folk as less competent than their male counterparts. Therefore, they are not given same pay as received by male employees even if they share equal burden of work. These studies are illustrated below:

- Arulampalam et al (2007) conducted a study relating to analysing the gender pay gap across different sectors viz- public and private sectors. The results of which revealed that gender pay gap exists and female employees are underpaid than their male counterparts.
- Another study relating to pay discrimination was conducted by Farooq and Suleiman (2009), which revealed that women employees are underpaid as compared to their male counterparts, because there are stereotypes which believe that women do not possess the ability as men do and therefore, they do not deserve same pay as received by their male counterparts.
- Syed, Sheikh and Herain (2010) conducted a study among the female employees working at manufacturing sector, the results of which revealed that they are discriminated on pay and receive less pay than male workers.
- Another study was done by Diaz and Sanchez (2011) across the different European countries viz- France, Germany, Italy, Spain and UK, the results of which revealed that women were discriminated in pay even if they possessed the same human capital, knowledge and experience as men do.
- Within the Indian workplace context, Adhikari (2014) conducted a research on five IT companies of Lucknow, which reported that women employees are under-paid and get less rewards than male employees.

#### **4.1.2. Studies Related to Discrimination in Career Advancement**

Research across the globe reported that stereotypes are commonly proposed explanations for the female employees experiencing discrimination in their career advancement. Various studies have been reviewed at both international and national level in connection with the discrimination in above HRM Practice. These are discussed below:

- Broad Bridge (1998) reported that although the number of women employees in middle management positions had increased, but women are still under represented in senior management positions.

- Barsha (2007) conducted a study among the female employees of different age groups working in the private organisations of Pokhara (Nepal), the results of which revealed that women employees did not perceive discrimination in career advancement and indeed had considered that male behaviour towards them was positive. Thus, the results were in contradiction with respect to the other studies supporting discrimination in career advancement.
- Within the Indian workplace context, Shankar (2008) reported in his study that women professionals were mostly concentrated at the entry and intermediate levels, rather than flocking at upper ranks.
- Jain and Mukherjee (2010) have witnessed in their study that gender stereotypes influence the evaluation of women employees at workplaces and deprive them from promotion opportunities.
- Tlaiss and Kauser (2010) witnessed that women managers describe their working environments as characterized by the presence of negative perceptions and stereotypes about women's professional abilities and commitment to work and thus they face discrimination in moving to the top ladders of the organisation.
- Women employees perceive discrimination in their career advancement in an organisation's hierarchy (Appelbaum et al., 2011).
- Qaisar, Abdul and Aamer (2011), witnessed in their study conducted among two telecom organisations of Pakistan viz- government and private that women employees are discriminated in career advancement.
- Nick (2012) reported that female employees at lower and middle level positions faced more barriers in their career advancement than female workforce at higher level positions.
- Another study was conducted by Gberevbie et al (2014) among the academic staff of Nigerian Government Universities in Lagos State, which reports that it is the gender stereotyping, cultural beliefs, and male counterpart's behaviour that creates hindrances for the women in moving to the higher positions.
- Downes et al., (2014) conducted a study among different sectors of USA, the results of which revealed that female employees experience discrimination in moving to the higher positions of the organisation.
- Within the workplace context of India, Sneha (2016) witnessed that female nursing staff employed among public and private hospitals in India experience discrimination in career advancement.
- Khuong and Chi, (2017) reported that female executives in the Vietnamese Corporations face discrimination in their career advancement.

#### **4.1.3. Studies Related to Discrimination in Performance Appraisal**

Research studies reports that organisational policies and practices are influenced by the socially and culturally mandated structures which influence the performance ratings of the women workforce. It has been found that gender- stereotypic beliefs creep into the working environments across the globe which question the women's abilities and capabilities and thus result into biased performance evaluations against them. These studies are illustrated below:

- Dobbins, Cardy and Truxillo (1988) reported that performance of male and female employees are evaluated differently at workplaces. Furthermore, they have revealed in their study that the

organisations which are influenced by the traditional stereotypes about the women, appraise their true performance less accurately than those organisations which do not hold such beliefs.

- Sackett et al., 1991 reports in their study that performances of female employees are evaluated differently than male employees. They have analysed the actual performance evaluation data, which shows that women are systematically rated as performing less well than men even after controlling for ability and experience, and that the biased performance evaluations are greater in male gender-typed jobs.
- Another study was done by Trueman and Baroudi (1994), which reports that work done by female employees are evaluated less than male employees even if they possess the same level of education and work experience.
- Within the workplace context of India, evidence has been found that women executives working in banks experience bias in performance appraisals when their performance is evaluated by male (Manisha and Reena, 2016).

#### **4.1.4. Studies Related to Discrimination in Training**

Researchers across the globe reported that women experience discrimination in training opportunities. In this connection various studies have been reviewed which are discussed below:

- Booth (1991) reported in his study that, even when there were no differences in human capital or the job-related qualifications, women employees were less likely to be selected for company training programs than male employees.
- Green (1991) has also found that young American women suffered considerable discrimination in training than men in the workplace context of United States of America.
- Lynch (1992) has revealed in his study that gender differences apply mainly to only certain types of training, for example men are more likely to receive on the job training and apprenticeship opportunities than women. While on the other hand, women receive more off the job training opportunities than male employees.
- Lillard and Tan (1992) revealed that a smaller fraction of career women gets company training as compared to their cohort of young or mature men.
- Green and Zanchi (1997) witnessed contradictory results in the workplace context of United Kingdom with respect to studies supporting discrimination in training, as it was found that there exists the convergence between the training opportunity trends for male and female employees.
- Another study was done by Knoke and Ishio (1998), the results of which revealed that even after controlling for the differences in the human capital, occupation, industry; American women still face discrimination in training opportunities as compared to men.
- Huang (1999) reported that in the non-western context of Taiwan, the female managers employed in high-tech firms witnessed slight disadvantage over male employees in obtaining training.
- Furthermore, Estevez-Abe (2005) revealed in his study that investments in on the job training are biased against the women because of the belief that they experience career interruptions due to various

reasons viz- marriage, motherhood, family responsibilities which reduce the organisations return on such investments. As a result, they are excluded from on-the-job training.

- Anne Gronlund (2011) has conducted research on the data collected from the Swedish Level of Living Survey of the year 2000. The results of which revealed that women get less on the job training than men even after controlling various factors viz- human capital and occupational segregation
- Within the Indian workplace context, Ramya and Raghurama (2014) conducted a study on the basis of secondary data among the banking sector, which reported that women employees working in banks experience discrimination in training and are denied training opportunities with the belief that they will not be interested in joining such programmes.
- Tlaiss and Dirani (2015) have examined that woman managers in Lebanon experienced paucity of professional training and have illustrated that gender biased culture influence their learning at workplace.

#### **4.1.5. Discrimination in Challenging Task Assignment**

Research studies conducted across the different nations reported that women are devoid of challenging tasks because the notion of gender stereotyping is strongly embedded in organisational policies and practices which consider women unfit for holding challenging assignments. These studies are illustrated below:

- Van Velsor and Hughes (1990) have conducted an interview of the female employees which indicated that they had fewer developmental assignments than men.
- Ohlott et al., (1994) reported in a study conducted among a sample of professionals, supervisors, middle managers and upper level managers that women employees had fewer challenging tasks than male counterparts.
- Lyness and Thompson (1997) reported contradictory results with respect to the studies supporting discrimination in challenging task assignment as they have revealed that no gender differences exist among the sample of male and female executives and they both possess same developmental assignments.
- Benschop and Doorward, (1998) conducted a comparative case study among bank employees, the results of which indicated that men performed more developmental tasks than women did.
- Pater et al., (2010) conducted a study among the middle level employees working in Pharmaceutical Company of Amsterdam regarding challenging task assignment by supervisors. The results of which revealed that gender stereotypic belief influences the supervisor's decision regarding the challenging task assignment and therefore, women employees are assigned fewer challenging tasks than men.

### **5. Conclusions and Future Research**

After reviewing the extant body of literature, it is to be concluded that equality of women at workplace is still a far- fetched dream and it would take further more centuries to close such gender gap at workplace completely. In addition to it, the following gaps have been identified during the review of literature pertaining to the following HRM Practices viz- compensation, career advancement, performance appraisals, training and challenging task assignment which provides the scope for future research. These gaps are mentioned below:



- While conducting the review of previous studies with respect to discrimination in career advancement, Barsha (2007) had reported contradictory results revealing that female employees working across the private sector organisations of Pokhara (Nepal) did not perceive discrimination in career advancement. Therefore, there is a scope to conduct the further research in order to find out whether the results will support the previous studies or will contradict with them as revealed by Barsha (2007).
- During literature review of previous studies relating to discrimination in training opportunities, Lynch (1992) reported that women face discrimination in certain types of training only, for example they receive less on- the- job training than men, but have more access to off the job training opportunities than them. Similarly, Estevez- Abe (2005) reported that women are excluded from on-the-job training because of the belief that they experience career interruptions due to various reasons viz- marriage, motherhood, family responsibilities which reduce the organisations return on such investments. Furthermore, a study done by Green and Zanchi (1997) in United Kingdom's reported contradictory results with respect to the studies supporting discrimination in training and revealed that there exists the convergence between the training opportunity trends for male and female employees. Therefore, taking into consideration the above-mentioned studies, there is the need to further investigate in this area.
- During the review, it was also found that Lyness and Thompson (1997) reported contradictory results with respect to studies supporting discrimination experienced by women employees in challenging task assignment and revealed that both male and female executives had same developmental assignments. Therefore, it provides the scope to conduct further research in this area.
- During the review of literature, it was found that no empirical study has been conducted worldwide till date which has simultaneously incorporated the following HRM Practices in one research model viz- compensation, training, performance appraisal, career advancement and challenging task assignment. This can provide insight to the future researchers to fill this gap by incorporating together all the above mentioned HRM Practices in one research model.
- It was also found during the literature review that female employees experience more discrimination in private sector than public sector (Channar et al., 2011). Therefore, keeping in view the evidence presented, the future researchers should conduct further study in order to re-examine this issue as well.
- During the review of literature, it was also found that female employees holding senior level positions at workplace experienced more discrimination in their career advancement than females working at middle and lower level positions (Broad bridge, 1998). But, on the other hand a study done by Nick (2012) reported that women in lower and middle level positions experienced more discrimination in moving to the higher levels than females at senior positions. Therefore, taking into consideration the contradictory results, there is a need to investigate the issue further.
- Furthermore, it was also found during the review of extant literature that within the workplace context of India, there is the dearth of research in connection with the discrimination in following HRM Practices viz- compensation, career advancement, performance appraisals, task assignment and training. Therefore, the present review provides the scope for future researchers to fill this gap by investigating fully the extent of discrimination experienced by female employees in the above mentioned HRM Practices.



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