

The Gender Discrimination in the Workplace: A Study in China

¹Tian Jin yang

²Suparerk Sooksmarn

Master of Business Administration, Kasetsart University

Email: ivy.jinyangtian@gmail.com

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Abstract

The problem of gender discrimination in the workplace in China has been widely concerned by scholars in recent years. This paper teases out the research literature on the gender discrimination in the workplace in the last two decades, summarizes the main manifestations, causes and countermeasures of the workplace sexual discrimination, and finally points out further research directions.

Keywords: Gender discrimination, Female, Workplace

Introduction

China has experienced two decades of rapid social, political and economic changes. The rapid economic development has weakened the protection of the state power for women, leading to a worsen situation of gender discrimination in the workplace. With the increase in gender discrimination in China's labor force, the problem has become the research hotspot.

The Overview of Women in the Workplace in China

At the end of 2000, the proportion of employed urban women whose age were between 18 to 64 was 87.0%, which was 6.6% lower than that of men. The employment rate of women aged 18 to 49 in urban areas was 72%, and it reduced an proportion of 16.2% from 1990. (All-China Women's Federation, National Bureau of Statistics, 2000).

From the data of the sixth National Census, in 2010, regardless of age, education level, and household registration, the urban unemployment rate of women was higher than men, and women's urban labor force participation rate was much lower than men (Zhang Chewei & Wu Yaowu, 2013). The following tables provides data in detail. (Table 1, Table 2, Table 3 below, all the data from the sixth National Census)

Table 1: Unemployment rate (UR), Employment rate (ER) and Labor force participation rate (LPR)–Compared by age and gender.

Age	Total			Male			Female		
	UR	LPR	ER	UR	LPR	ER	UR	LPR	ER
15~19	22.66	35.19	27.22	26.26	33.62	24.79	19.46	36.72	29.58
20~24	13.00	80.43	69.97	12.89	82.13	71.54	13.10	78.78	68.46
25~29	7.79	88.32	81.44	6.57	96.65	90.30	9.24	80.06	72.66
30~34	6.46	88.72	82.98	5.56	96.78	91.40	7.58	80.39	74.29
35~39	7.23	89.09	82.64	6.41	96.34	90.17	8.26	81.51	74.77
40~44	7.83	86.80	80.00	6.97	95.57	88.92	8.96	77.53	70.58
45~49	6.00	78.60	73.88	5.79	92.97	87.59	6.32	63.83	59.80
50~54	3.47	60.24	58.15	4.33	80.81	77.31	1.61	39.01	38.38
55~59	2.27	42.28	41.32	2.77	62.28	60.56	0.89	22.55	22.35
60~64	0.75	21.61	21.45	0.59	29.84	29.66	1.10	13.43	13.28
65+	1.09	9.20	9.10	0.96	13.67	13.54	1.43	5.12	5.04
Total	8.21	67.67	62.12	7.49	76.07	70.37	9.13	59.25	53.84

*From Table 1, it shown that ER of women is lower than men in all ages group.

Table 2: Unemployment rate (UR), Employment rate (ER) and Labor force participation rate (LP)–Compared by education and gender.

	Total			Male			Female		
	UR	LPR	ER	UR	LPR	ER	UR	LPR	ER
illiteracy	2.28	24.98	24.41	1.87	41.12	40.35	2.49	20.64	20.12
Literacy class	1.51	34.89	34.37	1.74	45.88	45.08	1.38	30.83	30.41
Primary school	4.15	60.42	57.91	4.37	69.89	66.84	3.91	52.59	50.53
Middle school	9.77	75.88	68.46	8.74	83.78	76.46	11.19	67.16	59.64
High school	11.67	69.47	61.36	10.15	74.22	66.69	13.83	63.68	54.87
Secondary Sch.	9.20	66.49	60.37	8.95	69.60	63.37	9.45	63.69	57.67
Junior college	4.43	79.63	76.10	3.68	80.93	77.95	5.51	77.84	73.55
Undergraduate	1.97	62.30	61.07	1.86	64.05	62.86	2.19	58.99	57.70
Graduate	1.06	68.94	68.21	0.26	68.73	68.55	2.66	69.37	67.53
Total	8.21	67.67	62.12	7.49	76.07	70.37	9.13	59.25	53.84

*From Table 2, it shown that ER of women is lower than men from all education level.

Table 3: Unemployment rate (UR), Employment rate (ER) and Labor force participation rate (LPR) – Compared by household registration and gender.

	Total			Male			Female		
	UR	LPR	ER	UR	LPR	ER	UR	LPR	ER
Rural household	3.31	75.98	73.46	2.97	85.92	83.37	3.74	66.51	64.02
Urban hou...	11.96	62.41	54.95	10.83	70.10	62.50	13.46	54.45	47.12
Total	8.17	67.71	62.18	7.45	76.12	70.44	9.09	59.28	53.89

*From Table 3, it shown that ER of women is lower than men in all area.

According to the data of China Labor Statistics Yearbook 2015, the employment rate of females in China was lower than that of males in 2014. The proportion of employed urban female only accounted for 38.1% of the

total employment, which was significantly lower than that of males and lower than the female natural population ratio (48.48%). At the end of 2016, the number of female employed persons in the country reached 336.9 million, accounting for 44.8%, which was 10.4% lower than that of men (Wang Huixuan, 2018).

In general, the workplace gender discrimination in China is mainly manifested as 1). High recruit standard, 2). Low wage income, 3). Few development opportunities, 4). High rate of job layoffs and 5). Difficulty in re-employment. And, many scholars believed that the gender differential retirement age system in China makes women prematurely withdraw from the labor market, which also constitutes the discrimination against women in the labor market.

1. The Higher Recruit Standard to Female

According to the survey conducted by the Ministry of Labor and Social Security on 62 designated cities in August 2001, 67% of employers proposed the gender standard, or explicitly stated the additional recruit standard, if the women promise that she won't be pregnant during the employment period, she will be considered preferentially (Huang Juan, 2006).

The investigation named "The Demand Behavior of the Employer to college students" researched by Renmin University of China in August 2003, it was found that paying the same wage, the ratio of "employer is willing to recruit male college students" and "employer is willing to recruit female college students" is 16.33:1 (Zhang Kangsi, 2009).

According to the Development of the Chinese Labor Market Report 2016, the first employment rate of male college students is 10% higher than that of female college students, which indicates that female college students are facing a severe employment situation (Qin Jie, 2019)

And from the survey published by the Shanghai Women's Federation, 55.8% of female believe that they have suffered gender discrimination in the job hunting process, and 63.7% of female and 47.6% of male believe that employers are "very discrimination" or "somewhat discrimination" against female (Wang Huixuan, 2018).

2. The Lower Wage Income for Female

According to relevant data from Shanghai, the ratio of male to female income in 2005 was 1:0.65, and the ratio was 1:0.73 in 2000 (Zhang Kangsi, 2009). Wang Meiyan had empirically proved that 93.35% of the wage difference between Chinese men and women in the same industry from unexplained factors such as discrimination (Wang Meiyan, 2005). From Tables 4 and 5, we can more clearly see the wage difference between the gender.

In addition, among the leaders at all levels and various professional and technical people, the proportion of female income to the income of males was only 57.9% (Zhang Kangsi, 2009).

Table 4: The average annual income(?) – Compared by gender and occupation.

(Data from “the Gender Analysis of Informal Employment in China”, by Tanlin & Lijunfeng, 2003)

Occupation	Annual income of man(¥)	Annual income of women(¥)	Income ratio(w/m)
Manufacturing	11 265 81	5 460 05	48 47
Retailing	9 391 91	6 592 19	70 19
Social services	9 122 82	5 509 26	60 39
Equipment maintenance	9 208 11	6 833 33	74 21
Merchandising	13 269 78	7 523 88	56 70
Cooking	7 160 00	5 133 04	71 69
Restaurant services	8 997 06	4 848 19	53 89
Clothing industry	11 710 00	4 256 65	36 35

*From Table 4, it shown that women get lower income.

Table 5: The average annual income (?) – Compared by gender and education.

(Data from the Second Sample Survey of Chinese Women’s Social Status in 2000)

Education years	Average annual income	
	Man	Women
<6	5213.62	2681.87
6—9	6469.28	4554.23
9—12	9019.94	6585
12—16	13257.24	9430.32
>16	12948.34	10455.61

*From Table 5, it shown that women’s income is lower in all education levels.

Ten years later, the gender pay gap remains significant. According to the Development of the Chinese Labor Market Report 2016, the average monthly income of women is 3,896 rmb, the average monthly income of men is 4,351 rmb, so the average monthly income of women is 495 yuan less than that of men (Qin Jie, 2019).

3. The Fewer Opportunities for Female to Move Up in High Positions

In the intellectual transformation career, the proportion of female employment is only 50% of that of men. Especially, women in leadership positions accounted for only 11.8%, and the ratio of male to female was nearly 9:1. According to the sample survey provided by Beijing Marriage and Family Research Institute, the ratio of women to men in “job promotion” is 1:5 (Zheng Zhengai & Sun Xuemei, 2005).

In the public institutions and management departments, men accounted for 77.3% and women only 22.7%. And in scientific research, men accounted for 63% and women accounted for 37%. Incredibly, among

these women in science, only 30% of them are really in scientific research positions, and only 2% of women are engaged in technology (Zhang Kangsi, 2009).

It's obvious that the opportunities for women in China to enter the management, especially to enter the senior management, are much fewer than men's. The higher the position, the fewer opportunities for women, that is, women are difficult to break through the "glass ceiling" – there are vertical gender segregation in the workplace (Huang Lin, 2005). See Table 6 in details.

Table 6: Male and Female Amount in Different Positions.

(Data from the Third Sample Survey of Chinese Women's Social Status in 2000)

Positions	Male	Female
Leader	132	29
Middle management	243	124
Lower management	287	268
Staff	1427	1839
Others	26	52

*From Table 6, it shown that female are fewer than male in leader/management positions.

According to the Chinese Women's Workplace Survey in 2019, the proportion of men in senior management is 81.3%, and that of women is only 18.7%. The gender gap is still serious (Qin Jie, 2019).

4. Female Has Higher Job Layoffs Rate and Lower Re-employment Rate Than Male

According to the results of "the Second Sample Survey of Chinese Women's Social Status in 2000", 56.2% of the laid-off and unemployed workers are women, which accounted for a much higher proportion than their 37.8% of the total employed population; however, the women's re-employment rate is 21% lower than men's (Huang Juan, 2006). And the survey also showed, at the end of 2000, only 39% of urban women were laid off and re-employed, this ratio was 24.9% lower than men. From the survey for workers of state-owned enterprises, 49.7% of laid-off female workers believed that they suffered gender discrimination in the re-employment process, which is 18.9% higher than laid-off men. In 2007, there were 2.3 million laid-off women workers, and they suffered "hidden discrimination" in the labor market (Zhang Ying, 2007).

From the survey made by the all China Federation of Trade Unions (ACTU) at the end of 2016, women accounted for 59.2% of laid-off workers, while men accounted for only 40.8%.

It is not difficult to see from the large amount of data above that women in China are seriously discriminated against in the labor market. Many scholars have put forward different opinions on the causes of this discrimination. The research tried to tease out in the following part.

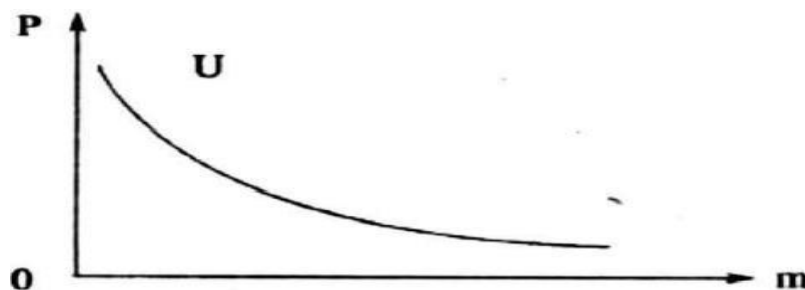
The Causes Analysis

There are many reasons for the discrimination against women in the workplace in China. Some scholars attributed the factors affecting women's employment to 1). social factors, 2). cultural factors, 3). economic factors and 4). political factors (Guo Xiuyun, 2005). Xu Zhanghui believed that the root cause of gender discrimination in the workplace lies in the extreme opposition between the social significance of women's physiological values and the interests of unit economics (Xu Zhanghui, 2006).

Zhang Kangsi and others pointed out that the causes of gender discrimination in the workplace include 1). economic efficiency factors, such as comparative advantage, fertility and related costs and compensatory wage differences; and 2). non-economic efficiency factors, such as cultural customs & personal biases, statistical discrimination and policies & regulations (Zhang Kangsi, 2009)

From the perspective of Economics, Zhao Li analyzed that the root reason of the discrimination is the natural attachment cost of women relative to men's extra expenditure (the fertility costs, vocational training costs and welfare costs are mainly included). Assumed that the objective function represents the maximization utility of the employer: $\max U=U(P, m)$. And in this function, U represents the utility of the employer, P represents the amount of profit, and m represents the proportion of the male employee, then it is shown in Figure 1. The steeper the indifference curve, the higher the degree of discrimination against women by employers (Zhao Li, 2010).

Figure 1: The Employer Discrimination Function Curve



Zhang Ying (2007) analyzed from the questionnaire that the emergence of gender discrimination in workplace is because of women themselves, that is, 50.73% of women would like to choose to avoid employment, when the reality and ideals are different, and they don't have enough courage to face the non-ideal work. There are also deep social reason for the gender discrimination, namely, "negative evaluation of female labor value" and "female physiological factors", these factors account for 83.44%.

In addition, many scholars attributed gender segregation to the important factor which caused discrimination in women's wage income. And the causes to the gender segregation were the women's low education investment, few opportunities of on-the-job training and insufficient investment in health security (Zhang Kangsi, 2009).

A great deal of studies haven been done by scholars of different disciplines in different societies around the world over the in-depth backgrounds of discriminations against women with employment, occupational selection, remuneration and promotion. And Zhai Xuemei summarized that four factors could be discerned that are

found to be influential upon women: 1). the social stereotype of sex-related role and the social policies; 2). physiological and psychological pressures upon women caused by work and family conflicts; 3). organizational institutions and cultures, and the recognition and evaluation of female managers' competence and performance; 4). women's personal desires, incentives, ability and their own understanding of values in relation to career and family (Zhai Xuemei, 2017)

To sum up the above literature, the main causes are classified into two aspects: 1). External factors and 2). Personal factors.

First, the external factors can be divided into economic factors and social&cultural factors. As mentioned above, economic factors are mainly related to economic efficiency, and the social & cultural factors are mainly include culture, custom and system (Zhao Youbao, 2009; Zhao Li, 2010; Zhai xuemei, 2017). The personal factors is about women themselves, including women's personal choices and so on (Zhang Ying, 2007; Zhai Xuemei, 2017).

Counter Measures

Scholars have put forward different views on alleviating gender discrimination in China's workplace.

(1) Improving and Amplifying Relevant Laws and Regulations

Most scholars believed that improving the relevant laws and regulations is an important measure. For example, a study pointed that the anti-gender discrimination organizations should be set up for workers, and also the punishment for gender discrimination by employers should be increased (Zhang Ying, 2007).

And there is almost no one successful suit in China heretofore, which shows the limitation in the law of gender equality in employment. The researcher considered that Chinese government should improve and amplify the China's legal remedy system and lawsuit system of anti-employment discrimination (Fang Jinhua, 2008).

China has adopted the Outline for the Development of Chinese Women (2011-2020), it has improved public policies, laws and regulations that guarantee women's rights in labor market. However, the legal protection of the rights of equal employment remains only in principles and lacks the clear and specific concept of employment discrimination. This lead to the difficulty for women to find suitable provisions to protect themselves when they encounter employment inequities. Therefore, we should determine the standards for "discrimination" at first. After the standards are determined, the Anti-Employment Discrimination Law should be formulated and promulgated as soon as possible (Qin Jie, 2019)

(2) Helping Women To Develop Their Own Knowledge and Ability

From the women's individual level, the study shown that strengthening the training, improving the education and comprehensive quality of women, can improve the competitiveness of women in the workplace (Zhao Youbao, 2009).

(3) Building the Social and Cultural Environment Favorable to Female Worker

In this part, the scholars put forward that the social should encourage and guide women to find jobs or start businesses (Zhao Youbao, 2009). And socialization of the female fertility costs and reduction of female housework will also promote the female employment (Yong Zhengai & Sun Xuemei, 2015).

Summary

This paper teased out the research literature on gender discrimination in the workplace in the last two decades. And to understand Chinese gender discrimination in the workplace and their research development by reviewing the literature.

Over the past two decades, China has undergone social, political and economic changes. The introduction of equal opportunity legislation, the changing nature of the labour market, and so many good changes happened. However, the progress of women's rights is tiny. Discrimination in employment regulations and policies, women's lower level of education, the public perception of women leaders, and how women are portrayed in the media are just some of the barriers women managers face...

All the studies showed, although China's economy is progressing, Chinese people's thinking has not progressed, and the status of women has not promoted, neither. People should pay attention to this problem.

Recommendations

From the above analysis, we can easily find out that the views held by scholars and related research results are not consistent about the differential treatment of women in the labor market in China. For example, they had different opinions about "what is the reasonable difference of women" and "what is the discrimination against women".

Therefore, the author believes that clearly and accurately defining the concepts and standards of "gender discrimination in the workplace" and formulating practical solutions in the present is the direction for further research.

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