



A study on the impact of gender on the career of Sri Lankan women

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Abstract

In spite of the fact that every person is made up of similar biological factors at birth, a person will be assigned as either male or female on the basis of physiological characteristics such as genes and chromosome composition. However, in addition to the physical and psychogenic variations, there is a wide difference between females and males despite the evolution of humankind.

Women and men both have been engaged in diverse jobs ever since. However, in comparison to females, majority of the professions have been undertaken by the males in the society. When the ratio of men and women in Sri Lanka by 2020 was approximately 100 to 92.12 employment rates of men and women were 65.7% and 34.3% accordingly¹. Assimilation of the aforesaid position, it is evident that the rate of female employment is low. Accordingly, the main objective of this research was to investigate whether women are discriminated against in the profession in which they are employed due to being female, despite the relatively low level of female employment.

A sample of 280 has been drawn from men and women residing in Maharagama Colombo District, involved in private and government sectors covering seven fields. The sample has been selected through random sampling to assure the transparency and validity. Interviews, questionnaire have been availed for the collection of data.

Therefore, the research has been conducted to examine the treatment towards women engaged in private and public sectors under seven career fields with respect to selection, promotions, relationship with the heads, salary, training opportunities, decision making with regard to her employment, Job satisfaction and many societal factors.

Keywords: woman, employment, men, society, job

Introduction

Sociology of gender has become an individual's intellectual attention in the present world today. Nonetheless, according to the theories presented by prominent figures, it is necessary to examine it from the biological, social and psychological features.

Gender can be defined as either female or male on the basis of the reproduction function. Men and women are born with different physiological characteristics. While it is not possible to determine gender before birth there are different notions prevailing in the society describing the sexual identity based on social and cultural differences as opposed to the biological aspect.

The word sociology of gender was initially used in psychiatry. Feminine and masculinity concepts are central in sociology of gender; it also entails the gender roles played by a man and woman. In addition, a famous British sociologist named Ann Oakley stated her idea on sociology of gender back in 1970's.

In sociology of psychology, it is identified that every society has strong, brave and emotionless men. It is a widely held view, in most of the societies, that females are weak and males are strong; females are recognised as second grade civilians. In addition, most of them hold the perception that there are discrepancies between male and females in terms of behaviour and social responsibilities.

In consonance with present world population, there is an increase in the number of female births. Furthermore, improvement in the efficiency of organizations is as a result of the employment of females. While, women, who are considered as greatest creation by the Mother Nature, are involved in household chores irrespective of education level (i.e. literate or illiterate) men are given with the responsibility of earning income for the family.

However, this situation has changed up to a certain extent at present, instances such as economic security, access to higher education and attempt to give independence to women can be named as few. Parallel to men, women, presently, are employed in administrative, educational, security, health and financial fields. Notwithstanding this change in the present world, it is an obvious fact that females are subject to experience difficulties and coercion in their work life. Therefore, it is imperative to examine the psychosocial aspects of this dimension.

Literature Review

In order to study psychological aspect and how sociology of gender impacts women's work life, it is imperative to examine the prior research studies for the examination of different angles.

Place of women in Sri Lankan Society by H.M.A Herath has mentioned the status of women's work clearly and distinctly. Mr. H.M.A Herath works in administration section at university Sri Jayewardenepura.

In his book, he explains that even though sociology of gender does not make a significant impact on women's employment in different career fields, patriarchal society and many other adverse factors have raised harmful situations. He further shows how myths in a society can be a barrier for the progress of women in their career fields. It is not astounding to see women being subject to mistreatment in a society in which female births are devalued as opposed to male births (male births are considered as a joyous event). Often, people are on the view that being born as a girl is a karma or a bad deed done in previous life.

Nonetheless, to be born as a male in the next life, it is a widely held belief that girls should collect "pin" in this life. This belief is deeply rooted in Sri Lankan conservative societies. For that reason, even though equal rights are given to males and females in the constitution, it is just a facade. A little girl may be born in a village with same rights as boys, but ironically she will be brought up in an environment in which her wings are cut off. In university settings, even though majority of the student population is females, they hardly get the opportunity to be the president of student council. The ratio of student population is 60% of females to 40% of males. Nonetheless, lecturers in the department consist of males mostly. Throughout the higher education history in Sri Lanka only handful of females have been appointed as vice chancellors and deans. If someone claims that there is no impact of sociology of gender in science and higher education fields it would be a witticism.

Pilar M. Mutud's study on gender differences in stress and coping styles examines this theme in a sample of 2,816 people between 18 and 65 year's old. The sample consists of 1566 women and 1250 men from different sociodemographic features. The results indicated that women scored significantly higher than men in terms of chronic stress and daily stressors. Although there was no difference in the number of life events, women's life events were found negative and less controllable in comparison with men. Moreover, it was found that there were different lists based on the gender. In women's listing they mentioned family and health related events frequently more than men, whereas men listed finance, work-related stress, relationship and finance. In the areas of emotional and avoidance coping styles women scored significantly higher than men and lower detachment coping and rational. It was found that men to have more emotional inhibition compared to women. In terms of somatic symptoms and psychological stress women were reported to have high score in contrast to men. In a summary, the overall of the study reveals that women experience more stress than men and coping styles are mostly emotional based.

Se Eun Chun along with her colleagues Ju Hyun Lee, Ju Eun Lee, Seung Min Kathy Lee, Jungtae Leem and Hyunho Kim conducted a qualitative study on Impact of gender on the career development of female traditional Korean medicine doctors in 2018. The sample of this study included female traditional Korean medicine doctors and licenced specialists. The focus of the study was to examine the impact of gender and expected gender roles on the career development of young female traditional Korean medicine (KM) doctors. Semi-structured interviews was conducted to examine job performance, previous career choices, employment, and future career path from the perspective of gender. The results of the study indicated that at the beginning female Korean medicine doctors were not aware of the effect of gender on their career decisions, however, postgraduate and during the employment female doctors faced direct discrimination or gender discrimination in the selection area of specialization and treatment; they were preferred to work in dermatology and paediatric departments rather than musculoskeletal health problems related department. After entering the workforce, they found that their gender significantly affected patients-doctor relationship and life events such as childbirth and pregnancy require temporary career break. Moreover, female Korean medicine doctors were subject to stereotypical gender roles at home and in workplace as well as becoming the main nurture of their children.

Hayfaa Tlaiss and Saleema Kauser conducted a study on the impact of gender, family and work on the career advancement of Lebanese women managers in 2011.

Focus of this study was to examine the impact of gender, work and family factors on Lebanese female managers' career development. Face to face in-depth interviews were conducted with 32 female managers to collect the data.

The results indicated that gender based factors were not obstacles for the career advancements. The female participants in the study used different terms, found in existing literature, to describe the impact of family, gender and work on the career progression. They did not perceive the family responsibilities as a burden to their career progression. In addition, their personality traits, management aspirations, education level, work experience and family factors were not found as obstacles to their careers.

This study gives an insight into relationships and interconnection between Arab society, women and their managerial careers.

The purpose of study named exploring the moderating effect of gender in the relationship between individuals' aspirations and career success among engineers in Peru, which was conducted by Simon L. Dolan, Alberto Bejarano and Lima, was to analyse the relationship between individuals' aspirations and career success among engineers and whether this would change according to the gender. Therefore, the hypothesis of this study was that "a significant change occurs in accordance with the gender". The sample of this study was 1011 engineering graduates of a renowned Peru university in the years between 1998 -2005. Female graduates constituted only 4% of the sample.

Findings of this study revealed that there was a positive relationship between individuals' aspirations and career success among males as opposed to the females. Females sought secure in their career in comparison to males. In

addition, their success is more prone towards achieving work-family balance. Apart from work-life balance there were female engineers who sought for work stability and these results were in line with the prior research studies conducted in other countries.

Objective of the Study

In the present society, females and males are equally employed yet, how sociology of gender impacts on women's work life is a concern which is worthy to be examined. The study has also examined whether they have subjected to mental pressure due to their career.

Research Methodology

Selection of Sample

A sample of 140 consisting 70 males and 70 female residing in Maharagam has been selected through random sampling to conduct the study.

Data Collection

Interviews and questionnaire have been conducted on the selected sample. In addition, incidents pertaining to sociology of gender and women's work life have been examined through different channels.

Discussion

How sociology of gender impact women's work life has been analysed through seven different angles.

The concept of sociology of gender is decisive factor for recruitment of women to a job. The results indicated that 63% of the participants were in agreement with the fact that there was a significant impact of sociology of gender for female recruitment. Only 37% of the participants were in disagreement with the aforementioned statement. The breakdown of the 63% of the participants, who agreed with the discrimination, in terms of career fields are as follows

- Admin sector 6%
- Education sector 7%
- Health sector 10%
- Labour sector 10%
- Private sector 10%
- Security sector 14%
- Other sectors 6%

In consideration of the aforementioned results, it shows that the concept of sociology of gender is prevalent in Sri Lankan Society and it has impacted on majority of the women in the country for the recruitment process. In the present day of Sri Lanka, the recruitment rate of women for some jobs are reported to be low. The positions such as international jobs ambassadors, ministers, executive positions are custom officers can be named as few of examples.

The next focus was to examine whether there was any discrepancy in salary according to the gender. The responses obtained from the participants revealed that 43% of the participants were on the view that there was a form dissimilarity for salary, whereas 57% of the participants reported as opposed to that. In the analysis of the data drawn from the participants, a highlighted fact is that although there is no discrepancy in the salaries among public sector, there is a minor discrepancy in executive level employees' salaries. The private sector employed participants reported the same. The number of female and male participants who were on the view of the existence of salary discrepancy was 30 and 10 respectively whereas the number of female and male participants who disagreed with the view of the existence of salary discrepancy was 40 and 60 accordingly. A special feature derived from the responses of the participants is that majority of the males believes that there is no disparity. Even though there was no salary inconsistencies on the basis of the sociology of gender, females employed in labour sectors and other sectors reported having variances.

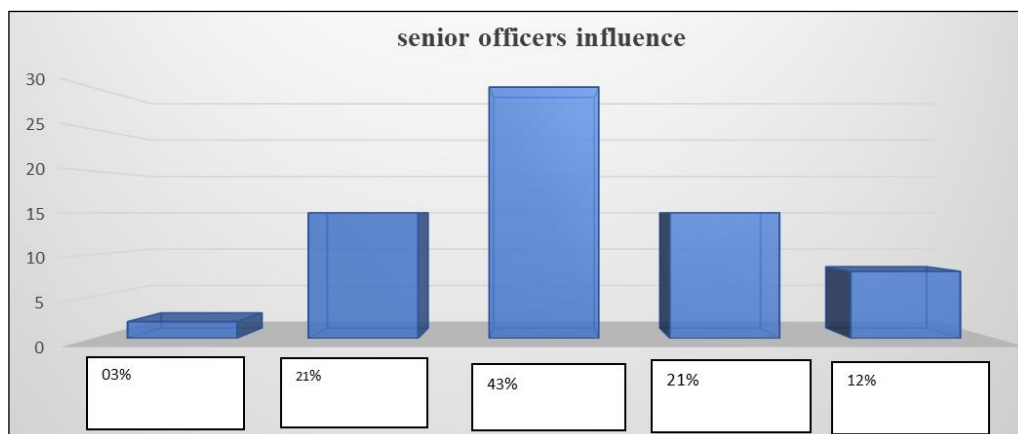


Fig 1

In the analysis of the impact of senior officers on women's work-life, it was revealed that 21% of the respondents reported that senior officers influenced women regarding their work-life, whereas 43% of them were in a moderate position. There was only 3% of the respondents who were extremely agree with it. Hence, we can conclude that majority of them believe that there exists an impact of senior officers on women in respect of work-life up to a certain degree.

To support the said statement, respondents revealed in the eyes of society women are perceived as weak. Despite the situations where women are subject to the influence of them, they try to tolerate the coercion due to the fear of losing their job. Hence, they conceal such incidents. Nonetheless, women at work contribute to the organisation development and improve work-related skills more than men but they often do not get the praise they deserve.

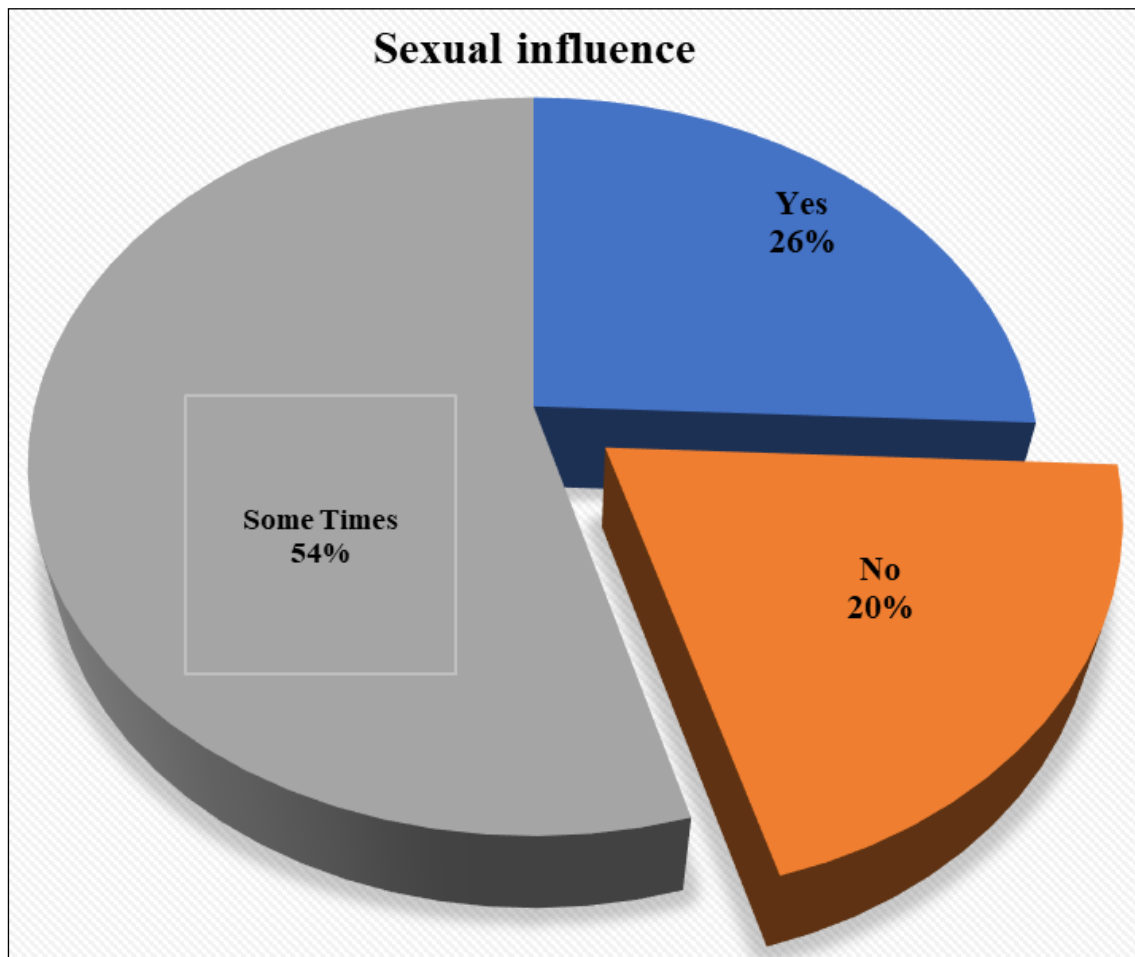


Fig 2

In terms of the promotion at work for women, the focus was to examine whether there was sexual overture to women by senior officers. The analysis disclosed that 26% of the respondents were in agreement with the statement. Even though it reveals that sexual advances are prevalent at work for promotions, through this 26% of proportion if further proves that; 20% of the respondents, however, doesn't seem to agree with it. In the in-depth analysis of private and public sectors separately, the existence of sexual advances in the public sector could be seen, whereas there was a tendency for development of such incidents in private sector. If women are subject to sexual advances by senior officers for unawareness, employment needs, or any other factors this is huge a downside in our society.

In the matter of whether there is any gender based discrimination in providing opportunities for training and skill development, 77% of the respondents disagreed with having such discrimination, only 23% of them reported in contrast to that. Respondents employed in administrative and private sectors revealed there was no gender based discrimination for providing seminar, sessions, and training. However, it was not the same in security section. The reason for which they provided was the discrepancy in the physical endurance of males and females. Therefore, they stressed out the need to have separate training for females in security sector. In addition, labour sector and private sector were also on same view as security sector. Even though there are training opportunities abroad for women in administrative and health sectors compared to men, there are only few opportunities available for them. There were instances where women were purposely not considered for some training opportunities.

56% of the respondents reported that there was a significant impact of their respective partner on decision making with respect to work life. Due to this influence, married women cannot take decisions independently. The partners of women, who are employed in different sectors, are on the belief that in the process of their engagement in the job women neglect their duties and responsibilities that they have towards family. There are certain occasions which require women to be present at work and unable to get a leave as a result. The situations include department trips, night duty, emergency situations and activities. In events like this, married women often face their husbands' retaliation. Most of the women reported high job dissatisfaction due to being caged for taking decisions on their work life.

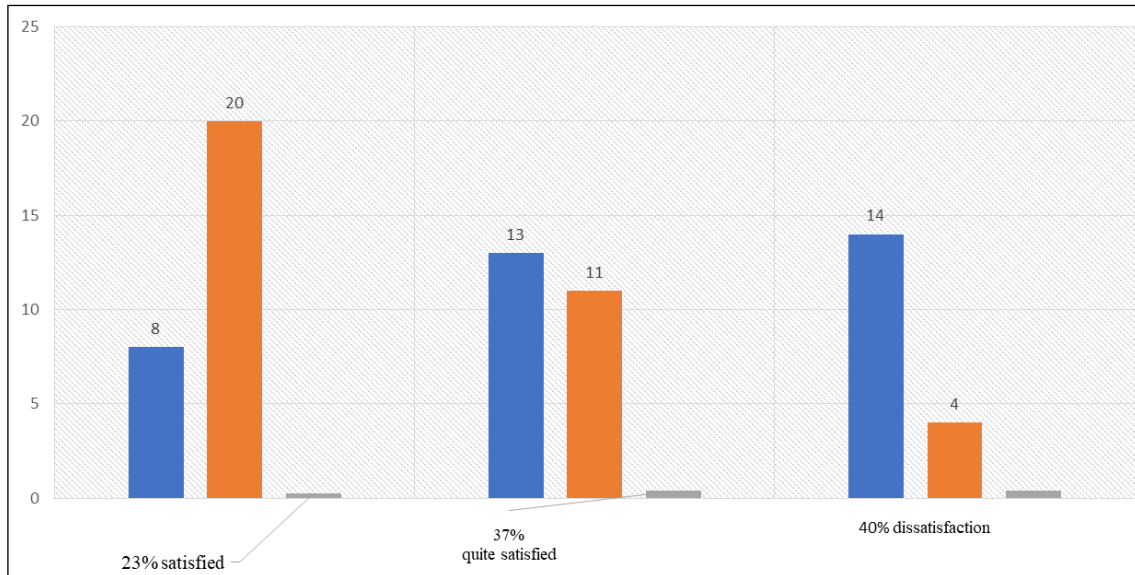


Fig 3

Welfare is important to any person at job to achieve job satisfaction. According the responds given by the participants 23% of them were satisfied with their job, whereas 40% of the respondents reported having job dissatisfaction. In the breakdown of job satisfied proportion, 40 males and 16 females reported job satisfaction. It is evident that there is a low number of females having job satisfaction, making them the majority of participants, who are dissatisfied with their jobs.

Most of the women are employed in their respective career without any job satisfaction. In contrast to unmarried women, married women face many Problems related to kids, family, home, health during their tenure. Most of Asian countries, including Sri Lanka, with the marriage, women are taken for granted in respect to family responsibilities. Therefore, women will need to balance both work and family on their own. Women are not excused from these responsibilities though they are employed. Hence, it is not possible to expect job satisfaction among women.

Conclusion

Discrimination at work which is on the basis of sociology of gender is not the only situation that women face. The Asian countries like Sri Lanka consists of values, mores, myths, and conservative ideas which impact on women's life. It is still evident in the modern society of Sri Lanka. Women's work like just another instance. In the present day of Sri Lanka, majority of staff in the areas of planning, technology and administration is males. The majority of the population employed in semi-professionals, attendant positions, or low level positions in production sector is women. Even though there are disparities in salaries, women are engaged in the activities that increase values to the economy. Furthermore, women do not have the liberty to take their own decision regarding their careers. Society does not provide opportunities for women to take higher positions in production or administration field in contrast to men. Women rarely get these opportunities and those opportunities are not easily accessible to women. They have to make sacrifices to grab the opportunity. Hence, females experience many challenges unlike men on the basis of the sociology of gender.

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