

Women at Work Place: Their Perception and Relationships with Males

For decades, the status of women in the workplace has been debated everywhere from the boardroom to the courtroom. According to the Indian constitution, sexual harassment infringes the fundamental right of a woman to gender equality under Article 14 and her right to life and live with dignity under Article 21. Working women are sometimes subjected to bias because of sex, in spite of numerous laws and regulations that prohibit employment discrimination targeting women. It is quite pertinent that globalization has accelerated the way for women to enter the field of employment but the problems of humiliation, harassment and exploitation of women have become more widespread with globalization. The present paper attempts to find out the factors which have affected women's decision for working outside their homes and the kind of relationships women share with males at workplace. Further, an attempt has been made to explore working women's perception about their status at workplace.

Keywords: Work Place, Perception, Discrimination

Introduction

The world of work is changing, often drastically, due to the move towards a global economy characterized by greater openness or liberalization of markets, free or greater mobility of financial capital and people, and rapid distribution of products, information, technology, and consumption patterns. Typical of this process of globalization is the increased flexibility, casualization and informalization of employment and an expansion of typical and precarious jobs. World-wide regular full-time wage employment has given way to a broad range of irregular forms of labour that are not covered by standard labour legislation, such as outsourcing, contract labour, home work, part-time work and self-employment in the informal sector. The rise of these jobs has been part of the business response to the changing market conditions and increased competition with a view to respond quickly to volatile demand and supply of capital. Labour costs are cut by reducing the number of 'core workers' and relying on irregular forms of employment in order to avoid labour surplus during economic downturns and paying for fringe benefits associated with decent work.

While providing new opportunities for economic growth, these changes have generated major challenges and rekindled concerns about the unfavourable global employment situation. Among the groups most affected are the young, the old and the less skilled, and, there is a 'bias against women in all these categories' (ILO, 2001).

Techno- social changes, which were accelerated in the Indian society, particularly after independence, not only provided opportunities for women to get modern education, but also opened up new avenues of gainful employment outside their homes. The rising cost of living, the perception of high standard of life, the new vocational training received in educational institutions and availability of jobs due to privatization of economy have created willingness on the part of women of middle and upper classes to seek gainful employment. The educated women of middle and upper classes started occupying white collar jobs whereas the uneducated rural women and women of weaker sections continued in the manual types of work. Such a situation not only brought the women into greater contacts with men at odd hours but also created barriers in their progress. These barriers come in the form of gender stereotypes regarding abilities, social attitudes about the proper place of women, in group exclusionary attitudes and practices on the part of women. Cultural beliefs that men are more socially valued and more competent than women at most things, as well as specific assumptions that men are better at some



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Asian Resonance

particular tasks (e.g., math, mechanical tasks) while women are better at others (e.g., nurturing tasks) are found widely (Michael Conway et al., 2009). For appropriate performance of a role a particular setting is required, which is, congenial and helpful and facilitates the role incumbent to perform the role effectively and efficiently (Nadel, 1957).

Women are employed in a narrower range of occupations than men. In occupations where women are concentrated, such as teaching, they are usually in lower hierarchical positions. They dominate in clerical and secretarial jobs and in low-end occupations such as shop assistants, waitresses, maids, hair dressers, dress makers, teachers and nurses. Women are often seen in the lower categories of the job hierarchy. Discrimination exists not only in terms of wages, but also in terms of access to employment. The data from Center for American Progress and Elle Magazine, Bryce Covert (2013), revealed that nearly 30% of women report experiencing discrimination at work place. Women recognized that much of this discrimination hits them in their wallets. Thirty-one percent think they would be paid more if they were male. Often women are found concentrated in occupations where the wage rates, as well as working conditions are poor and substandard. Low levels of skill on entry, lack of access to on the job training, employment histories punctuated by time spent, bearing and raising children, time off to care for family members and the assumption that men are the primary earners all contribute to the implicit assumption that women should be paid less than men.

Discrimination at work place is an expression of male power over women. Although number of women have started working outside their homes, but they are not given respect by male superordinates, colleagues as well as subordinates at workplace. Women have been socially conditioned from an early age to be passive, meek and tolerant whereas men are socialized to be authoritative and aggressive towards women. These social / cultural constraints do not allow men to be subordinate to women and follow the orders of a female superordinate. There are men who still consider women's place is to be at home. A recent study suggests that men from traditional set-ups - where the husband is the breadwinner, and the wife stays at home - are more likely to carry a negative attitude towards working women (Desai, 2013). Society and personal influences what we are taught as children in regards to roles of females and males overflow into the workplace. Men are taught that they are stronger and should be the leaders. This behaviour flows into the work setting. Men have traditionally held organizational power and supervisory positions whereas women are not allowed to rise in their professional life. They are likely to be employed in subordinate positions. Women feel they are invisible, isolated and irrelevant within an organization while men see them as sex objects. When obscenities are common in the work place women are three times more likely to be treated as sex objects and be directly sexually harassed than in

environments where profanity is not tolerated and when sexual joking is common, sexual harassment is three to seven times more likely to occur (Boland, 2002). Men with power positions at workplace feel that they have the authority to harass women. Women feel excluded from power and socially isolated at workplace. This imbalance of power leads to exploitation of women at workplace. Further, Patriarchy also plays an important role in the Indian society. Women are to obey the orders of men. They are perceived as an object of enjoyment by men. They are first treated as women at workplace then treated as a worker. A Report "Discrimination against Women in the Workforce and the Workplace" by Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men (2005) revealed that women are not only discriminated against for economic reasons – they are mainly discriminated against because of stereotyping and misguided preconceptions of women's roles and abilities, commitment and leadership style. Women working in highly sexualized fields face more problems at their workplace. Those who work in male-dominated workplaces or who assume masculine occupations report more harassment than those who perform jobs associated with women's work (Gruber, 1998). In the male dominated workplace, a woman's gender is a salient feature because of her singularity and distinctiveness. In a society where violence against women, both subtle and direct, is borne out of the patriarchal values operating in society, force women's conformity to gendered roles.

Relationships With Males At Workplace

According to Goffman (1961), the nature of interactions is influenced by social definitions, values and norms. How an individual should behave towards the subordinates, colleagues and superordinates is determined by the conventions and formal definitions of the organization in which she is working. It is perhaps in this context that Hinde (1979) reminds us that relationships can never be fully understood in isolation from the social context. The type of relationships the individual has with their subordinates will be completely different from that with their colleagues and superiors. The type of group relationships, which emerge and develop between the female colleagues, may not have the same content and quality of relationships when the colleague group is heterosexual. Social definitions may debar the women to develop close personal relationships with the superiors, which may be the desired thing for the males.

At workplace, women have to deal with male colleagues, superordinates as well as subordinates. They face different kinds of problems at workplace. Rani (1976), Kapur (1974) focused on the "role conflict" in working women. An attempt has been made in the study to find out the relationships that working women have with their colleagues, superordinates and subordinates at workplace.

Relations With Colleagues

The members of a colleague group have almost the same status. They interact with each other as equals. They cooperate for their own as well as for

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the goals of the organization in which they work. As the members of a colleague group are almost equal to each other, they are expected to plan their actions together and for the attainment of goals they are required to co-ordinate their activities.

Maintaining relations with male colleagues is a big problem. Those of equal status may be jealous of women if they are successful as they threaten their position. Theoretically, a woman worker in a work place is equal to any male worker in identical position with regard to powers and privileges as well as performance and prerogatives. However, in actual practice, this may be blurred by the prevailing notions about women. If society considers women as inferior to men, her position in the workplace will be influenced by this prejudice no matter what her legal rights and actual capabilities are. In other words her claim to equality greatly depends upon how the colleagues at the workplace treat her.

Relations With Superordinates

The nature of human interactions is influenced by social definitions as well as by the positions the interacting persons occupy. The women employees' relationship with male superordinates is very important. Miller (1998) has labeled the top authority individuals as a 'highly-conscious' group. The top authority individuals are not only self-conscious but conscious of their 'self importance'. Their ethnocentrism leads them to believe that they have special gifts and attributes not generally shared by the commoners. It is perhaps for this reason that they keep a distance from their subordinates. Men at the top of the supervisory structure are vested with the right of decision making and commanding. It is therefore, but natural that they develop a bossy personality configuration. It is the duty of women employees to receive orders from their superordinates and execute them as per rules. The treatment they get from their superiors is an indicator of the pattern of discrimination or otherwise, shown to them. Getting due respect or treatment may be considered as an indicator of men's recognition of their capacity for equal work.

Relations With Subordinates

An individual is expected to play his /her role keeping in view the position he / she is holding in society. However, the expectations differ from one cultural context to another. During working hours the high authority individuals are expected to keep a permissible distance from their subordinates. However, there is a general apprehension that if the superordinates become friendly with the subordinates they would neither be able to get the work done from their subordinates nor could they exercise authority over them. It is, therefore, demanded that the superordinates should maintain a reasonable distance from their subordinates. When the women are in the position of superordinate, how readily her orders are accepted and appreciated by male subordinates is a question that needs addressal. Subordinates may not be readily disposed to accept the authority of women in superior positions. In that case women do not get a fair deal from their subordinates.

Theoretical Framework

A variety of theories have been developed to explain the discrimination faced by women at work place. For the present paper Power Theory has been applied which emphasizes that the structure of organizational hierarchy invests power in certain individuals over others, power that can, in and of itself, lead to abuse. Men have traditionally held the organizational power inherent in management and supervisory positions, whereas women are likely to be employed in subordinate positions. It is this imbalance of power that leads to sexual imposition on women; in other words, men harass women because they have the opportunity and means to do so. The theory presents the expression of male power over women that sustain patriarchal relations. It is used to remind women of their vulnerability and subjugated status.

Power theory, although difficult to test directly, is consistent with the empirical data and accounts fairly convincingly for the means and facilitating conditions of discrimination.

In a society where violence against women, both subtle and direct, is borne out of the patriarchal values operating in society, force women's conformity to gendered roles. These patriarchal values and attitudes of both men and women pose the greatest challenge in resolution and prevention of violence against women.

Objectives

The present paper focuses on the three objectives, viz.

1. To uncover the factors that has affected women's decision for working outside their homes.
2. To find out the kind of relationships women have with males (superordinates, colleagues and subordinates) at workplace.
3. To explore working women's perception about their status at workplace.

Methodology

The study was conducted at Union Territory of Chandigarh. For the present study, a purposive sample of 200 women working in the private sector (organized and unorganized) were studied and women working in different occupational groups were covered. Doctors, Administrative Officers, Journalists, Actresses, Nurses, Clerks, Receptionists, Sweepers working in Hospitals, Hotels and various Private Offices, Construction Workers, Factory Workers and Waitresses in Hotels and Restaurants etc. were included in the study. The research design for the study was exploratory in nature.

An interview schedule was constructed to collect the core data for the present study. Information on the socio-economic background of the respondents was also collected. Further, women were given eight statements to get information about perception regarding their status at work place.

Results

To understand the nature of the social grouping as well as the quality of interrelationship that exists among the members, it is essential to understand their demographic background.

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Majority of the women in the sample were in the age group of 25-35 years and 47.0 percent were found married as dual earner couple is an emergent phenomenon. Similarly for widows, separated and divorced women economic necessity forces them to work outside home to make their living and most of the women in the study i.e. 113 belonged to upper caste.

The educational background of the respondents indicate that 35.0 percent respondents were Post-Graduate & above and 33.5 percent were Graduate. The educated women as compared to uneducated women are more aware of their rights; they can fight for their rights at workplace. Education helps in widening the perspective and exposes the individual to the world of opportunities and alternatives. Different studies have indicated that majority of the working women get employment in middle level of occupations (Parthasarathy, 1990). Very few women are able to reach the top of the ladder due to many hurdles. Distribution of the data in the present study also highlights that 46.5 percent women were concentrated in the middle level occupations. The data clearly reveals the dominance of nuclear family in the sample. The nuclear families maintain more open and healthy interaction between its members. It is assumed that respondents would also be discussing about their problems with family members.

Table 1
Background characteristics of the respondents

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Age (Years)		
Below 25	35	17.5
25 - 35	117	58.5
35 - 45	45	22.5
Above 45	3	1.5
Marital status		
Never married	76	38.0
Married	94	47.0
Once married	30	15.0
Caste		
Upper	113	56.5
Intermediate	49	24.5
Low	38	19.0
Education		
Illiterate	38	19.0
Up to high school	25	12.5
Graduate	67	33.5
Post Graduate & above	70	35
Occupation		
Upper	66	33.0
Middle	93	46.5
Lower	41	20.5
Income		
Low	41	20.5
Middle	91	45.5
High	68	34.0
Family type		
Nuclear	146	73.0
Joint / Extended	54	27.0

In the present study, it was found that when women start working at an early age, it is mainly due to economic necessity. Researchers have indicated

that economic necessity results in exploitation at workplace. Park (2007) revealed that women aged 19 to 40 years old were forced to have sex under threat of being sacked.

As time is changing, the notion for women going out to work is also changing. The results have indicated that a large number of working women in the present study belonged to dual earner household. Women have started working outside their homes for various reasons. In the present study, it is very important to know that why women have started working outside the home. What are the reasons, which forced women to go out of their homes? Rani (1976) cited three reasons that motivated women to seek jobs outside their traditional roles: economic monetary gain, social role enhancement and personal reasons. Women of middle class are compelled, in the changed economic conditions, to enter into jobs to earn their livelihood. Also, a large number of married women take up work as their husband's incomes are no longer adequate to meet the needs of the family. Apart from economic necessities, there are other reasons for employment of women. These reasons relate to the desire for economic independence, utilization of individual talent, trying to secure equality of status and utilizing time and energy in order to reduce monotony and boredom from domestic life.

Table 2
Reasons for Working

Reasons	Frequen cy	Percent
Necessity	83	41.5
Economic independence	40	20.0
Personal development	24	12.0
Miscellaneous	53	26.5
Total	200	100.0

For the purpose of analysis, the reasons of undertaking a job were divided into four categories. The data revealed that 41.5 percent of the respondents started working because of the economic necessity. The necessity referred to no source of income, loss of the breadwinner or the meager economic resources to support the family. 26.5 percent of the respondents started working for fun sake, time pass. They were not interested in any career but got job. These cases had accepted the job, as they had no specific preferences in their mind. 20.0 percent of the respondents started working to get the economic independence. They wanted to be economically independent irrespective of the job contents for the attributes of their occupational role. 12.0 percent of the respondents started working for their own personal development. As they were interested in a career and got job, in these cases it was the personal growth which was important. The data revealed that majority of the respondents started working outside the homes because of their economic needs. A few respondents started working for other reasons such as economic independence, personal development etc. Hemlatha and Suryanarayana (1983) in their study reported that 62.0 percent were working for economic reasons, i.e. to support the family, to supplement the family income and to

Asian Resonance

contribute to raising family standards of living. Parikh and Garg (1987) mentioned that the economic dimension is very significant. Many Women had taken up jobs for economic security.

Before understanding the relationships of women with the males at workplace, it is important to know the number of colleagues, superordinates and subordinates, the working women have. Table 3 presents the distribution of number of colleagues, superordinates and subordinates at work place.

Table 3 Number of colleagues, superordinates and subordinates at workplace

Number of males	Colleagues	Superordinates	Subordinates
1-2	38 19%	51 25.5%	32 16.6%
2-5	34 17%	37 18.5%	37 19.2%
5+	128 64%	112 56%	124 64.2%
Total	200	200	193

* 7 respondents did not have subordinates.

It was observed that 64.0 percent, 56.0 percent and 64.2 percent of the respondents had more than 5 colleagues, superordinates and subordinates, respectively. It showed that majority of the women were engaged in prestigious occupations. All the respondents had male colleagues and superordinates. But there were seven respondents who did not have any male subordinates, since these respondents were engaged in lower occupations. The subordinates of other respondents of lower occupations were taken on the basis, who were earning low income than the respondents.

Further, an attempt was made to understand the relationships of women with their male colleagues, superordinates and subordinates at workplace.

Table 4 Relationships with colleagues, superordinates and subordinates at workplace

Relationships	Colleagues	Superordinates	Subordinates
Cordial	35	29	26
Normal	63	38	47
Uncordial	102	133	120
Total	200	200	193

* 7 respondents did not have subordinates.

Since one of the objectives of the study was to find out the kind of relationships women have with males at work place, it was found that maximum number of women had uncordial relations with male colleagues, superordinates and subordinates i.e. 102 with colleagues, 133 with superordinates and 120 with subordinates followed by normal relations i.e. 63 with colleagues, 38 with superordinates and 47 with subordinates. Further, it was found that very few respondents had cordial relations i.e. 35 with colleagues, 29 with superordinates and 26 with subordinates. The results clearly show the presence of patriarchy and power relations at workplace.

Perception Of Women About Their Status At Workplace

An attempt has been made to study the kind of treatment these women get at their workplace by their male colleagues, superordinates and subordinates. Respondents were given eight statements to measure their perception about their status at work place. The objective was to find out how working women rate their relationships with men at workplace. Male domination and ill treatment as second class citizens are common problems, the majority of Indian working women face. Another area in which women are at a disadvantaged in the workplace is through discrimination. Discrimination can be an uncomfortable situation for the women involved. There are two types of discrimination, indirect and direct, each affects women in a different way. Indirect discrimination might be a woman being overlooked for a promotion, direct discrimination may include a woman being discharged from her employment because she is pregnant, or being excluded from after work group events. Another problem that women face is when men express their resentment and try to reassert control when they view women as economic competitors. Sexual harassment is closely linked to sex discrimination. Sexual discrimination forces women into lower paying jobs, and sexual harassment helps keep them there. One thing is clear, whether the problem is sexual harassment or sexual discrimination the problem continues to exist in the workplace, reminding women of their vulnerability and creating tension that make their jobs more difficult. In a study done it has been indicated that 90 percent of women are harassed by their superior, 7 percent by fellow workers and 3 percent by subordinates (Zaitun, 2001).

Cleveland and Kurst (1993) posited that sexual harassment of workers by their colleagues is the most prevalent form of harassment, yet in these situations formal power or authority differences are not present. However, there are still societal differences due to the value given to the male role and may attempt to gain power or devalue women through subtle forms of sexual harassment such as gender harassment. The fact that women workers are also harassed by fellow workers and subordinates highlights that it is not just power in the workplace that is at play. Gender subordinates of women in society also mean that even women in positions of power can be seen and treated as 'second' by equal or lower ranking workers.

Working women in India constitute an important segment of our society. They have taken up work outside home both in formal as well as in informal sector and have proved their skill and worth almost in all the sphere of work. Yet cultural and structural constraints have hindered their path of progress. The notion of gender discrimination as perpetuated by patriarchy prohibits them to come at par with their male counterparts at workplace. Keeping this in mind, working women's perception about their status vis-à-vis their colleagues, superordinates and subordinates was evaluated.

Table 5 Perception of women about their status with male colleagues, superordinates and subordinates

Perception	Colleagues			Superordinates			Subordinates		
	Yes	No	Un- decided	Yes	No	Un- decided	Yes	No	Un- decided
Males treat as their equals	92 46%	98 49%	10 5%	97 48.5%	94 47%	9 4.5%	45 23.3%	140 72.5%	8 4.2%
Males treat you more intelligent	23 11.5%	168 84%	9 4.5%	33 16.5%	160 80%	7 3.5%	34 17.6%	146 75.6%	13 6.8%
Males treat you inferior	113 56.5%	77 38.5%	10 5%	105 52.5%	90 45%	5 2.5%	120 62.1%	63 32.6%	10 5.18%
Males feel you get good salary but perform less	96 48%	90 45%	14 7%	102 51.0%	94 47.0%	4 2%	160 82.9%	26 13.4%	7 3.7%
Males feel you can perform your duties of your own.	99 49.5%	93 46.5%	8 4%	100 50%	92 46%	8 4%	19 9.8%	162 83.9%	12 6.3%
Males treat you as show piece in workplace	97 48.5%	99 49.5%	4 2%	124 62%	64 32%	12 6%	102 52.8%	87 45%	4 2.1%
Males feel you are of easy moral	100 50%	94 47%	6 3%	124 62%	64 32%	12 6%	89 46.2%	98 50.7%	6 3.1%
Males feel you get promotions because of being females	92 46%	102 51%	6 3%	88 44%	110 55%	6 3%	160 82.9%	29 15%	4 2.1%

* For colleagues N is 200, for superordinates N is 200, for subordinates N is 193, since 7 respondents did not have subordinates

Majority of the respondents i.e. 72.5 percent felt that their subordinates feel that women are not equal to men. They reported that these men did not feel comfortable taking orders from female bosses. It is but natural that when a woman is not considered equal by males at workplace, then she can't be treated as more intelligent to males at workplace. Majority of the women felt that they were not treated as more intelligent to males at workplace, whether it was colleagues, superordinates or subordinates. There were 56.5 percent, 52.5 percent and 62.1 percent of the respondents who reported that they were treated inferior to males at workplace by their colleagues, superordinates or subordinates respectively. In Patriarchal society, like ours different prejudices against women exist. In spite of their capabilities, they are not treated good workers. It was also observed in the present study. Half of the respondents reported that their male colleagues and superordinates felt that females were poor performers. 82.9 percent of the respondents reported that their subordinates treated them as poor performers; 51.0 percent of the respondents reported that their superordinates and 48.0 percent mentioned that their colleagues felt that females were getting more salary than their performance. There were 162 respondents who were of the opinion that men in a subordinate position felt that females could never perform their duties of their own. 49.5 percent of the respondents reported that their colleagues and similar number of respondents mentioned that their superordinates felt that females could never perform their duties of their own. 62.0 percent reported that

they were treated as show piece and of easy moral at the workplace by their male superordinates. Such results endorse the findings of Zaitun, (2001) who advocated that it is the superordinates who exploit female subordinates. Approximately 83.0 percent respondents held the view that their male subordinates did not pay them respect and misbehaved with them just because they were women. They held the notion that females get promotions because they flaunt their sexuality. Such results endorse the findings of Cleveland and Kurst (1993).

Summary and Conclusion

Such results clearly indicate that working women are not given respect and status at the workplace which their male counterparts enjoy. Men doubt their capabilities as good worker. Men are not ready to accept females in superordinate positions. There was not much difference in the attitudes of male colleagues, superordinates and subordinates. These men view the female workers first as women and then as co-workers. The tendency of male employees to treat females at workplace as an object of sexuality results in discrimination and inequality. Working women are subjected to bias because of sex, in spite of numerous laws and regulations that prohibit employment discrimination targeting women. Further, Power Theory has been found quite capable in the present context. Findings indicated that employment has not changed the status of women at workplace in the eyes of women respondents. Caplow (1973) reported that women's authority in workplace is still resented by men. This resistance comes out of a feeling that women are inferior and as such cannot perform their jobs as efficiently as men. The present paper supports the influence of workplace power and gender relations for the

Asian Resonance

existence and perpetuation of problems faced by women at workplace.

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