

A Literature Review on Women in Management in Asian Countries: Does Gender Matter?

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ABSTRACT

The discrimination of women in the workplace is a real problem. Despite national and international organizations having made huge strides against it and implementation of United Nations Women's Treaty, apparently, nothing much has changed in the direction of eliminating it. This study aimed to find out if gender equality in terms of women representation and/or participation in the corporate world, politics, higher education management and labor workforce is practiced. Likewise, it aimed to find out the causes of inequality, if there exists. This research is essentially qualitative since it uses narrative review to assess, summarize, and interpret the results from a broad spectrum of related studies. Only 65 studies were included in the review, out of 122 studies read. The results reveal that glass ceiling and inadequate government regulations and lack of implementation of existing policies in women's leadership hinder women to forge ahead in the realm of management. This study concludes that gender inequality exists globally despite substantial national and international measures being taken against it. Breaking the glass ceiling and fine tune the mindset of the population in favor of gender equality are highly recommended.

Keywords — Social Science, glass ceiling, cultural fit, qualitative research design, narrative review, Philippines

INTRODUCTION

Gender disparity in the workplace has, for more than a decade, been one of common knowledge. It is evident in the percentage of participation of women in the business world. According to Carter and Silva (2010), 3% of Fortune 500 CEO's and less than 15% of worldwide corporate executives at top companies is represented by women. This diminutive participation of women in the workplace has been unpleasant for women who want to advance in the world of business, customarily ruled by men. However, there's hope that in due time, this situation will change. After all, women comprise 40% of the global labor pool and keep on growing in certain countries. Moreover, women are obtaining advanced professional degrees in record numbers, and surprisingly surpassing men in some areas (Carter & Silva, 2010).

At present, women take comfort in having freedom and power than ever before. However, they are still disadvantaged when compared to men in virtually all aspects of life. Women are deprived of equal access to health care, education, capital, and decision-making powers in the social, political and business sectors (Negash, 2010). According to the United Nations (2010), men are credited with performing three quarters of all economic activities in developing countries, although women actually take 53% of the work.

This scenario is evident in various fields of endeavors. Despite laws on gender equality, still, this inequality exists. Although countries all over the world try to embrace this gender equality effort, in the real world, this law is not yet significantly accepted and applied.

Being a woman of principles and advocate of fair and just dealings with every human being, this investigator sought to find out if different studies on gender equality in the realm of management have similar or contradictory results. Moreover, it sought to determine what impedes women to advance in the world of management in the corporate world, politics, and higher education. The study involved a number of primary studies and researches, including articles on gender equality/inequality in the field of management in Asian countries, specifically Southeast Asia.

Parentetically, the Research and Development Services and Gender and Development Center of the Laguna State Polytechnic University promote studies that focus on gender equality, it being a priority policy of the Philippine Government. In other words, these studies are aligned with the vision and mission of the University.

FRAMEWORK

Undoubtedly, this study is of great importance to the promotion of gender equality. This qualitative research is a narrative review. It is descriptive in nature since it involves the assessment, organization, and interpretation of the results of different studies. Additionally, this study sought to find out if laws on gender equality and women empowerment are being implemented.

This study proceeded from the principles of gender equality which means equal rights and opportunities for women and men in laws and policies, and equal access to resources and services within families, communities, and society at large (World Economic Forum, 2014). This condition of gender equality is an aspiration of women all over the world. However, until now, reports on women discrimination and women deprivation of rights and privileges still exist. Policies and laws on gender equality seem subdued in some countries.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study was undertaken to review, assess, and summarize the results/findings of researches and studies pertaining to women participation in management in the corporate world, political affairs, higher education, and labor workforce; and find out if gender equality is observed and practiced based in the workplace, seen against the norms set forth in laws and policies.

METHODOLOGY

This study is a qualitative analysis using a narrative review research design. A narrative review simply summarizes varied primary studies from which conclusions may be drawn into holistic and/or comprehensive interpretation contributed by the reviewer's own experience, existing theories and models (Campbell Collaboration, 2001; Kirkevoid, 1997).

The results of a narrative review are of a qualitative rather than a quantitative meaning. Narrative reviews are best suitable for comprehensive topics (Collins & Fauser, 2005). Narrative reviews should make the search criteria and the criteria for inclusion explicit (Educational Research Review, "n.d.") The study is limited to the review, analysis, and summary of the specific studies thus selected.

The researcher read these studies and articles, mainly done by different authors in Southeast Asian countries. The researcher identified first the studies to

be reviewed through web searches. Articles were also included after the screening of the records. The studies and articles were those on gender equality and/or inequality in management.

Through web searches, 155 studies including reports and articles were found and screened by the researcher. Out of 155, duplicates and not so related studies and articles were removed.

Assessment of the remaining records was done to identify the studies that are eligible for the review. The criteria set by the researcher are as follows:

- Respondents of the study should be generally women in the corporate world, higher education management, political leadership affairs and labor workforce participation.
- Methods used to gather the data and pertinent information are similar or of the same mode of procedures. This method could be a survey or data from the company's databases, reports from Government and/or international organizations such as International Labor Relations (ILO), United Nations (UN), and UN Women.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Women representation in the corporate world

It was found that women representation in management positions in the corporate world is still very low (Chu & Ramstad, 2012; ILO Report, 2015). Women's representation as chair in the executive board is particularly low. Furthermore, at a global level, very few women can reach the position of CEO (ILO, 2015). Glass ceiling and sticky floors remain most impenetrable in the largest corporations which are primarily dominated by the high and mighty men (Morley, 2013). Also, women remain severely under-represented in the highest decision-making positions in the private sector (Dawson, Kersly & Natella, 2014) as compared to that in the government, judiciary and civil service.

Over time, there was a slim increase and progress in the representation and/or participation of women (ILO, 2015). There are now countries considering greater women representation in executive boards and adoption of gender quotas in the top management levels (Crisostomo, 2015).

Political Participation

Globally, politics is still under the control of men. Patriarchal social structures and gender stereotypes, among other reasons, deter women from entering the

public sphere of political participation (UN Women, 2015). Resistance from male colleagues, discrimination arising from such resistance (e.g., Bangladesh), inadequate knowledge of women regarding financial issues, poverty, and dependence on men hinder women from exploring avenues like those in politics (Hega, 2003; Valente & Moreno, 2014). This is common and quite apparent in most South Asian countries.

Higher Education Management

Men still hold top leadership positions in key educational committees but women's share increases in more peripheral committees and advisory councils for institutions related to women's affair. Women have enough share of positions that shows equality in terms of participation and leadership perspective (Usui, Suzana & Kageyama, 2003).

Despite diminutive representation of women in the top positions in universities and higher institutions in several countries such as India, Cambodia, and Malaysia (Asmah, 1993), women representation in the highest levels of educational leadership is gradually increasing. Stereotyping, culture, domestic attitude and home-loving trait of women hinder to advancement in the sphere of educational leadership (Cheaupalakit, 2014).

Women in the Labor Workforce

Despite policies and laws on gender equality, women still contend with discrimination and deprivation. Gender pay gap, under-representation in higher management positions and slow and/or scarce women advancement in the field of work is quite apparent (ILO, 2013). What seems more deplorable is the incidence of violence against women in the workplace, at home, and even in the society at large (Irish Aid, 2015).

No less than then US Secretary State Hillary Clinton (2012) believes that women are a vital source of economic growth, and their continuing deprivation and discrimination still exist all over the world, particularly, in some countries in Asia and some neighboring countries. However, countries like the Philippines, Singapore, Jamaica, Japan, among others, are now giving women equal opportunities to advance in the labor force (Phil. Commission on Women, 2014).

Gender inequality still prevails, and percentage of women participation is still low. Women continue to participate in labor market on unequal terms with men (Asian Development Bank, 2015). Globally, women are paid less than men. This is likely due to women, by and large, preferring to be mere wage workers and

engaging in low-productivity activities with less mobility to the formal sector, coupled with the view that women as just economic dependents (UNDP, 2014). Despite some advancements over the last 50 years, women spend more time doing unpaid housework, while men spend more time on leisure each day (UN Women, 2010).

Women in higher education management

In countries like Cambodia, India, Indonesia, and Malaysia, the promotion and recognition of women to fill top positions in management is still minimal (Omar, 1993; Usui, Suzana & Kageyama, 2003). Diminutive representation of women in the higher education management still exists. In Japan, despite an increase in women's share in holding managerial positions, only secondary committees and advisory councils are given to women. Top positions are held by men (Morley, 2013). Likewise, in some countries like Australia, China (Hong Kong), Malaysia, and Vietnam, women are still under-represented in the highest posts in educational administration and management. This is probably due to distributive, cognitive, and epistemic injustice in the realm of higher education management (Cheaupalakit, 2014; Le, 2011).

However, in the case of Brunei Darussalam, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam, there is an increase in the women's share of seats in higher positions (Tai, 2011). This is probably due to gender equality promotion, acceptance and adoption of women empowerment in these countries. Moreover, Singapore and the Philippines recognize and generally accept the ability of women to assume leadership roles in the field of higher education management (Tai, 2011; Gooch, 2012).

Gender disparity and barriers to women advancement still prevail. Apparently, the glass ceiling syndrome is still dominant impediment to women's growth and promotion in the field of higher education management (UN Women, 2013).

Political Participation

Political affairs of the state have always been dominated by men. None or hardly any woman gains a seat in the parliament(s) (UN Women, 2015). Politics, in the thinking of many, is only for the high and mighty men of society. To date, this thinking prevails, against the backdrop of little women's participation in government seats (UN Gender Equality, 2014). Women are still under-represented ranging from the local to global political positions (Hega, 2003, Valente & Moreno, 2014).

Some countries including China, Japan, India, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, South Korea, and the Philippines appear to have still a very limited number of women in political leadership and political participation (Surbakti, 2014; Islam & Dubey, 2015). One factor that hindered women to participate in politics is due to structural impediments like discriminatory laws and institutions.

Politics appears to be still an elite-male dominated landscape where men and women do not enjoy the same access to resources. Also, lack of economic power deprives women of the right and opportunities—additional to the glass ceiling and glass cliff factors that yield imbalance in the overall male-female distribution of power and decision-making positions (Hega, 2003, European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), 2015).

This inequitable situation appears unmitigated due to inadequate government regulations and lack of adequate implementation of existing policies. However, there are few countries that significantly implement and observe such regulations and policies (Masuda, 2012, Rajaratnam, 2010).

By and large, the studies reveal an obvious fact—even though the constitutions of countries all over the world guarantee equality and women empowerment, there is still a perpetuating patriarchal set-up that hinders women from making significant strategic decisions, thus, ensuring their servitude especially in male-dominated cultures (UNDP, 2013).

1. Women in the labor workforce

It cannot be denied that women when given more work, economies grow. An increase in the participation of female in the labor force—or a reduction in the gap between men's and women's labor force participation—results in fast-moving economic growth (UN Women, 2015). Many countries all over the world have given women opportunities to participate in the labor workforce. To date, women participation in the labor workforce is continuously increasing. However, compared to men, there is still low women participation in the labor force.

Some country-specific findings appear noteworthy:

The Philippines is one country that shows an increase, albeit still minimal, in the Labor Participation Rate (LFPR) for females at 49% (from 49.7% in 2012) and a decrease for males from 78.3% to 78.1% in 2012. The number of employed Filipinos in October 2013 was estimated to be 37.7 million. Female employment was estimated at 14.8 million, compared to 22.9 million of the male (Philippine Commission on Women, 2014).

More specific findings follow:

- Showing a slight increase of women employed in the labor market, but women participation still lags behind that of men.
- *Irish Aid 2015* reported that women work two-thirds of the world's working hours, and earn only 10% of the world's income. Men still outnumber women in paid employment, in business and political life.
- In Bahrain, women's labor participation rates are still very low, i.e., between 10%-15% of the total labor force. Bahrain is one of the lowest countries in terms of women participation in the workforce (during the conduct of the study, 1993). At present, however, Bahrain is gaining governmental support for women's empowerment and gender equality in the sphere of a labor market (Economic Research Center, 2015).
- In India, women participation in the labor force ranks 111, out of 131 countries with available data. Decline in the employment opportunities for women is likely due to the scarcity of job, cultural attitudes and social norms about women in the workplace (ILO Report, 2015).
- Despite the overarching diversity in Indonesia, women's access and permanency in the labor force remain problematic due to early marriage and motherhood which are considered the primary responsibilities of women (ILO Report, 2015). Moreover, cultural norms, lack of skills, mobility constraints and scarcity of resources appear to be added obstacles for women to become truly economically empowered (Garcia, Greenley, Martin-Onraët & Pollack, 2015).
- In the case of Thailand and Vietnam, women are still under-represented in the labor force. Traditional stereotypes, i.e., men as leaders and women as followers, deprive women of employment opportunities (Hansatit, 2014, ASIALIFE, 2014). However, nowadays, there appears an increasing number of women entering industry sector, but there appears a decline in the agricultural sector. Issues with field of study hinder Thai women to develop their leadership skills at all levels. On the other hand, in Vietnam, women make up a large part of the Vietnamese workforce, although gender pay gap between men and women exists. Men receive higher pay than women for the same nature or weight of work (Munro, 2012).
- In the case of Japan and South Korea, an increase in the labor force participation of women is evident. Women in Taiwan stand out in terms of employment, which likely due to the women's likelihood to continue

their jobs upon marriage or childbearing (Yu, 2015; Kim, 2013; Azmat, Petrongolo, Ganelli, Booth, Nolen & Sosa, n.d.).

- In Turkey, women's labor participation is rising year by year. However, under one-third of the total of women take part in the labor market. Moreover, women are employed in positions that require fewer qualifications or don't provide social security (Mustafa, 2013).

CONCLUSIONS

Gender inequality and women deprivation still exist in the corporate world, political affairs of the state, higher education management, and labor workforce. Women are under-represented and under-rated in terms of leadership, seats in the parliamentary and higher education positions, as well as denied equal access to employment and permanency in the labor workforce.

Glass ceiling, sticky floor and glass cliff factors impede women to advance in the world of politics, leadership, education management and employment sectors. Moreover, "cultural fit" and masculine leadership factors are also variables that hold women back to grow and progress. Patriarchal social culture appears to be at the core of this inequitable condition. Gender inequality still pervades globally, despite substantial national and international measures to balance the same.

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