

An Overview of the Career Development of Female Leaders in the Face of Gender Discrimination in China

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Abstract: Independent, confident and competent women in the workplace have become an essential and luminous component of social life. But behind the landscape, women at work are also facing unprecedented pressure, particularly in China, where women's employment rate stands at 73%. As a result of long-term gender discrimination, women are incessantly in disadvantaged position at work and are often treated unfairly. The research on the career development of female leaders under gender discrimination is summarised and evaluated based on the analytical framework of "influencing factors - development dilemma - outcome impact". Firstly, the analysis of the available literature on the determinants of discrimination against women leaders is grouped into three perspectives: social environment, traditional culture and individual women; secondly, the existing studies on the development dilemma of discrimination against women leaders are reviewed and interpreted from four perspectives: market hiring, workplace pay, workplace promotion and gender segregation; finally, the impact of discrimination against women leaders on women themselves, the social soft environment and the development and performance of the industry is evaluated. In addition, based on an analysis of the existing literature, it is concluded that the results of gender discrimination in the workplace environment for female leaders affect their future career development, as well as a prospective research direction for the future career development of female leaders.

Keywords: female leadership, gender discrimination, gender bias, career development

1. Introduction

Gender discrimination has been a major social research issue in workplace leadership. With the modification of social organization and the refinement and diversification of the division of labour in industry fields, the social status and occupational value of women are progressively taken into account and valued, and they are emerging into management positions in certain industries [1]. In the real workplace, even if the gender is not explicitly required in the job advertisement, HR will still give preference to men in the actual selection process of CVs under the same conditions. From a global perspective, women in leadership are still underrepresented, in spite of the fact that women's educational attainment levels and economic participation have increased over the past few years. The literal meaning of 'leadership' in an organisational context contains a strong notion of masculinity [2]. Lucifora et al. investigate the link between female leadership, work organisation practices and perceived gender discrimination within companies [3]. Glick & Fiske's theory of gender bias suggests

that there are two different types of gender bias, hostile and benign, which are known as contradictory gender bias [4]. Based on this, the author systematically reviews the relevant literature on key issues, identifies the factors influencing discrimination against women leaders in the workplace, the developmental dilemmas and the impact on outcomes, reviews the literature and proposes future research directions, so as to provide a comprehensive and systematic review and outlook on this phenomenon.

In the case of China, where approximately 40% of the workforce is female, the proportion of women in senior leadership positions and senior staff remains stagnant, and these discriminations are often detrimental to women seeking positions of authority. Recently the data shows that the older the female managers are, the more contradictory they feel in the relationship between family and career, with 30-35 and 40-45 being the two intervals with larger proportions [5]. Among them, women have experienced workplace injustice accounted for more than 90%, nearly twice as many as men in the workplace. Besides, 61.1% of women in the job search were asked about marriage and childbirth, the proportion of data is much higher than 21.5% of men; 51.1% of women said that age affects the workplace prospects is also significantly higher than men (28.8%); when different gender groups were asked whether marriage and childbirth affect the workplace prospects, 46.9% of women agree with this view, while only 11.4% of men agree. Secondly, women have encountered “workplace PUA due to gender”, “encountered gender discrimination”, “unhappy with promotion and salary increase due to gender” and “encountered sexual harassment”. The data of the four aspects of “experienced sexual harassment” is significantly higher than the data of men. Then, nearly half of the men have not experienced any of the above injustices in the workplace, while only 5.1% of the women face the same problem (refer to Figure 1). When asked about the biggest obstacle to promotion, 44.9% of women said “the company provides limited promotion opportunities”, which is higher than other factors. In second place was “gender discrimination”, accounting for 25.5%, significantly higher than the 11.2% of men, and it is worth mentioning that the percentage of women who “passively lose promotion opportunities because they are at the stage of marriage and childbirth” was 23.2%, also significantly higher than men (10.7%). It is worth mentioning that the percentage of women who “lost promotion opportunities due to marriage and childbirth” is 23.2%, which is also significantly higher than men (10.7%). It can be seen that gender and marriage are the two major obstacles to women’s promotion compared to men (refer to Figure 2) [5]. Despite the upward trend in women’s enrolment in postgraduate science, in that respect is still a clear gender gap at the upper echelons of the academic community (a phenomenon called hierarchy) [6,7].

Injustices experienced by people of different genders in the workplace

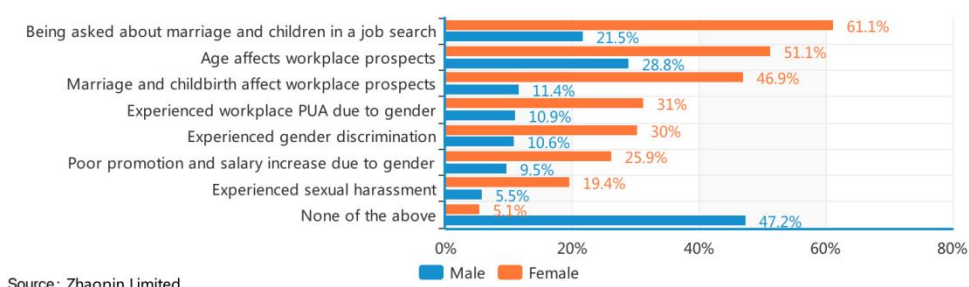


Figure 1: Injustices experienced by people of different genders in the workplace [5].

Gender-specific barriers to advancement in the workplace

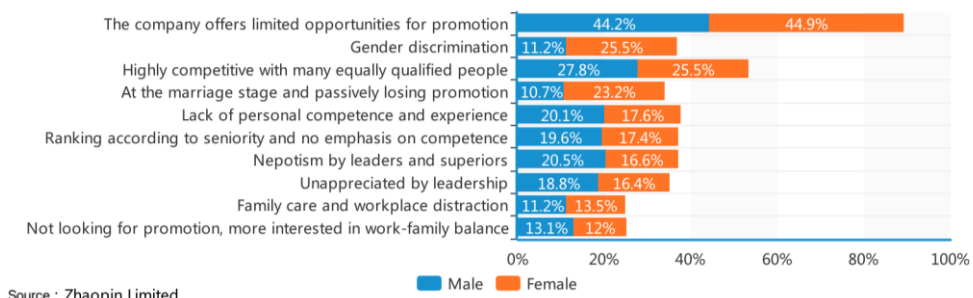


Figure 2: Gender-specific barriers to advancement in the workplace [5].

The issue of gender-based discrimination on the premises has been longstanding and several times stirred up controversy in the court of public opinion. The issue of discrimination against women leaders is a hot topic of research. However, the summary of existing research results still needs to be improved, and most of the existing literature reviews focus on reviewing the development paths of female leaders, lacking analysis of the specific impact of gender discrimination on women. Therefore, this paper is based on the English databases such as Web of science, IEEE and EBSCO, and the Chinese databases such as China Knowledge Network and Wanfang Database, with the combination of “female leadership”, “female leadership gender bias” and “female leadership gender discrimination”. “women’s leadership discriminates on the basis of gender” and “gender disparity in female leadership” were used as title terms, keywords or abstracts to conduct a literature search (limited to peer-researched papers), and 34 papers were manually screened between 2018 and 2023.

2. Factors Influencing Discrimination Against Women Leaders

Women leaders often suffer from the contradiction between their identity as women and their identity as leaders. It is a common belief in the popular environment that women’s involvement in management activities is strongly condemned by their families or society [8]. This is because women leaders are influenced by a variety of factors in the workplace, including the social environment, traditional culture, and the individual woman, so the researcher will use these three perspectives to show how each factor affects the career development of women leaders.

2.1. Social Environment Perspective

Due to the influence of traditional Chinese ideology and spiritual culture at the social level, traditional ideas still dominate the gender consciousness of society and the image of the ideal woman is branded with traditional ideas. At the same time, external perceptions and attitudes towards women also influence the way in which female leaders judge their own abilities and stand out at management level. From the perspective of substantive equity, men and women are not equal in terms of career starting point equity, social role expectations, social division of labour and collaboration, distribution of social rights and especially the workplace environment, which indirectly affects the number and proportion of female leaders [9]. Specifically, male employees may be systematically favoured by management for promotion or salary increases when they are as productive as female employees, even if management does not mean to discriminate in this way [10]. The researcher emphasises that the widespread scepticism and misconceptions about the level of work of women leaders in society, including the stereotypical social role expectations of women as “good wives and mothers” and the mental pressure from spouses who do not want women to outperform them in their career

development, create a “glass The “ceiling” effect has become a “roadblock” to the promotion of women leaders, hindering their career development [9].

2.2. Traditional Cultural Perspectives

In traditional Chinese culture, families generally view the situation of women pursuing career development through biased “glasses”. The division of labour within the family is often characterised by a “male dominated by the outside and female dominated by the inside”, the public expectation of women’s career development roles in a patriarchal society is that “work well rather than marry well”, and the general sense of male superiority in modern society is reflected in such cultural dress as “men are strong and women are weak” and “machismo”. The cultural dress of “men are strong and women are weak” and “machismo” is still prevalent today [9]. According to Gao Ying, the bias of traditional thinking and the deep-rooted gender inequality in reality are the major causes of the negative labelling of female leaders. The negative labelling of female leaders can greatly dampen their motivation to pursue their careers and affect their determination and drive to work [11]. Chen Yuling believes that when people talk about leadership, they naturally associate it with men. Women are expected to take care of their families and children more than their jobs, and if women are leaders they are considered to be undermining their gender identity and are criticised and punished for this [8]. In her analysis of Dalian, Liaoning Province, Liu Guiling argued that gender differences in human capital and the low recognition and acceptance of women’s leadership skills, as well as the complex socio-cultural issues behind them, are the main factors contributing to gender discrimination in the promotion of foreign companies in Dalian [12]. In terms of the time invested by female managers in the workplace, Liu Hui argues that women face role conflict, role tension phenomena and the dilemma of challenging old perceptions in terms of their biological and managerial roles [13].

2.3. Gender Stratified Perspective

Under the influence of traditional attitudes, society expects women to be “good wives and mothers” and is influenced to varying degrees by external stereotypes about their own leadership skills. However, when there is a conflict between family and work roles, women will not hesitate to choose the family role and be a good wife and mother. If there is a problem with the family and children and the woman is not doing her best, the woman will often feel guilty and, because of this psychological pressure, few women are able to maintain a good work-life balance. As a result, women’s careers are often interrupted by their families and children, and they may even abandon their social roles [14].

In addition to complex and diverse social and cultural factors, the main factors that make gender discrimination a problem for women leaders’ professional development include personal factors such as physical characteristics, mindsets, psychological misconceptions and personality traits. The inherent physical and other differences between women and men make it more difficult for female leaders to do the same work as male leaders.

3. The Development Dilemma of Discrimination Against Women Leaders

3.1. Market Employment Perspective

Women leaders in the workplace are limited in their ability to seek employment in a wide range of industries due to gender factors. The literal meaning of “leadership” in an organisational context is heavily masculinized [2]. Previous research has suggested that gender bias consists of two different types, namely hostile and benevolent, which are known as ambivalent gender bias [4]. Gender bias in employment is a perception that is judged on the basis of irrelevant gender factors in employment. Gender bias in hiring is mainly reflected in whether or not to hire and what kind of position one takes

after hiring [15]. The literal meaning of ‘leadership’ in an organisational context contains a strong notion of masculinity [2]. The research study found a link between female leadership, work organisation practices and perceived sexism within the company [3]. In the workplace, the existence of gender bias and discrimination has forced some female leaders to change and display characteristics and styles similar to those of men in order to conform to traditional leadership images. The inability of women to be placed in comparable positions at entry and in jobs at a lower level than their own careers amounts to an unfair placement within the organisation, in line with the definition of occupational gender segregation. Through the use of set and biological conditions, men are assisted and motivated to take precedence, thus hindering the growth of female managers. Bossler et al. investigate whether the gender composition of managers in German institutions is country-dependent and whether the number of female managers hired depends on the past recruitment decisions of the institution [16].

3.2. Workplace Pay Perspective

The most significant and direct impact on women in terms of socio-economic status is gender discrimination in pay. As a result, research on gender differences in pay is more widespread. According to research published by Milgrom, there are two types of differences in pay for equal work: on the one hand, it means that men are paid more than women for doing exactly the same work. On the other hand, it refers to a situation where the work assigned to men is not really difficult or demanding, but not suitable for women, but the work assigned to women is less difficult and, therefore, less well paid [17]. This gender imbalance can lead to a range of psychological and behavioural problems for female employees. Since career advancement is positively correlated with wage growth, gender differences in career advancement are likewise a major factor in the creation of gender differences in wages [15].

3.3. Perspectives on Workplace Advancement

While China has had one of the highest rates of female labour force participation and professional and technical staff in the world for many years, there are many problems with workplace equity in China, for example, women are generally faced with the dilemma of not being promoted and not being able to make the most of their abilities. On the one hand, the British scholar Tom Spiller summarises this dilemma for women at the place of employment as the “Paula Principle”, which stipulates that “the majority of women will remain in positions where they are unable to make the most of their abilities”. Gorman Gorman suggests that gender stereotyping of selection criteria and same-sex preferences of decision makers can exacerbate gender inequality in recruitment [18]. Equity in workplace promotion is an area of considerable research and cultural traditions, stereotypes and biased evaluation mechanisms all contributing to the status quo. This negative stereotype of women can impede their capacity to be chosen for leadership and even higher positions.

3.4. A Gender Segregated Perspective

In the workplace, there is a major gender shift in the placement of staff in how people are placed in various managerial positions. In most workplace positions, managers prefer to assign men to the responsibility for law enforcement on the ground, external communication and visiting jobs, while female have responsibility for internal management and logistics businesses, which is a more conventional job assignment [15]. Researcher used a paired questionnaire to find that subordinates tended to overestimate the masculinity of leaders compared to their self-rated gender identity; and that subordinates rated male leaders as significantly more masculine than feminine, whereas there was no significant difference between the two when evaluating female leaders, but male minions had

valued leaders as more masculine than female minions [19]. Ayalew et al. found that subjects were 10% less likely to pursue the same advice from a female leader than from a similar male leader [20]. On the one hand, consider that men are stronger and tend to handle all aspects of relationships better, and on the other hand consider that women are more attentive and disciplined and mostly manage the logistical aspects of the business in an organised manner.

4. The Impact of Discrimination on Female Leaders

4.1. The Impact of Discrimination Against Women Leaders on Women Themselves

Gender discrimination against women leaders in industry is detrimental to their career development and conversely can have a negative impact on themselves. When women are in leadership positions in organisations, even with high levels of leadership talent and job competence, they are considered exceptional cases and are not universal or representative [1]. To some extent, this can indirectly affect the strong willingness of most female leaders to take the initiative to obtain career advancement and development [21]. Women become progressively less competitive than men, which means that female leaders may adopt strategies to avoid head-to-head competition. Alan Xiong et al. have shown that female leaders differ from male leaders in three main types of decision-making preferences [22]. The fact that female executives do not perform as well as men in a competitive workplace environment is not through their own lack of ability, but can make them more resistant to competition itself, often more risk averse, and although they avoid higher levels of debt and the use of financial leverage to some extent and have a robust, cautious decision-making style, they can therefore lack commitment to innovation and make female leaders less motivated to work. In addition, some women have to make plans to postpone marriage to meet the demands of time, energy and opportunity requirements for their own leadership growth and maturation. In addition, finding a balance between employment and family has always been an ordeal of wisdom for women as well as a criterion for their leadership. If they are not treated carefully, their errors are amplified and they are thus marked as unfit for further advancement [1].

4.2. The Impact of Discrimination Against Female Leaders on the Soft Social Environment

In the overall social context, discrimination in the labour market also has an indirect impact on the number and proportion of women in managerial positions. Specifically, when male and female staff have the same productivity, male staff may be considered for promotion or salary increase by the systematic preference of management, but there is no malice in the source of such discrimination by management [2]. In addition, the growth of female supervisors is influenced by cadre policies and the social climate, but also by their unique growth patterns. In terms of the life cycle of female managers' career development, there are differences in the optimal age of career for female leaders at different levels, with the higher the level, the higher the leadership qualities required, and the relatively older their age of appointment. In addition to this, the negative prediction of hostile gender bias for organisational employees was evaluated for the CPM effectiveness of male and female leaders, and the positive prediction of benevolent gender bias was clarified for the CPM effectiveness of male and female leaders; hostile sexist prejudice has had a higher negative impact on women than on men, and benevolent sexist prejudice has been more beneficial to men than to women [23].

4.3. The Impact of Discrimination Against Female Leaders on Industry Development and Performance

The “queen bee” type of female leaders are often found in the workplace, and Alan Xiong et al. suggest that if leaders are as competitive and risk-averse as men, hiring female executives will not

lead to sound management and improved performance. Scholars have found that there is a gender pay gap for directors in listed companies, with female directors receiving significantly lower total and annual pay increases than male directors, but that female director participation in governance can effectively curb the gender pay gap for directors [24]. An analysis of the study under the influence of family role conflict and labour skill structure on female leaders' perceptions of gender discrimination concluded that post-see behaviour had a negative impact on subordinates' job satisfaction, but was also moderated by the use of motivational language and factors such as emotional intelligence and sense of humour [25]. A considerable performance gap was also observed between male and female managers - shops with male managers had 34.4% higher sales than those with female managers [16]. There is substantial qualitative research evidence that the presence of more senior women can make weaving is more welcoming and accessible to female researchers and leadership, and is known to significantly increase the re-employment and career development of female junior researchers.

5. Conclusion

In recent years, more and more scholars have analysed the career development of women leaders under gender discrimination based on their different perspectives, and a large number of important research results have emerged. However, the existing studies are still inadequate in terms of the career development dilemmas of women leaders. The impact of the relationship between gender and management level on employee leadership perception in the Chinese context requires in-depth analysis and research on how female senior managers should jointly activate personal moral traits, target effectiveness, and multifaceted talent traits for typical leadership prototypes.

Based on the literature review above, the following three areas should be considered in the future to deepen the study of discrimination against women leaders. First, at the organisational level, organisations should create more opportunities and conditions for women's development. In the future, organisations should develop evaluation mechanisms to improve employee motivation strategies and give women leaders more opportunities for sustainable development, and performance appraisals of women leaders should also focus more on innovation in organisational culture. Future research should further focus on the development of female managers as a driver for their own profitability and sustainability, and to create positive signals of equal development and a positive organisational culture for women in business, with a research lineage analysis aimed at alleviating the entrepreneurial motivation and willingness of female leaders.

Secondly, at the national level, the government should create a more favourable policy environment for women's development and strengthen conscious leadership and talent development. There is a lack of research on the relationship between the implementation of specific policies to protect women leaders from gender discrimination and changes in their career development. Therefore, the establishment and implementation of gender-balanced provisions for leadership in the face of gender discrimination should be further explored. On this basis, it is also possible to systematically analyse the question of whether the various influencing factors in a given context may promote or inhibit the career development of women leaders.

Finally, at the societal level, society is building a more favourable public opinion environment for women's development. The results of gender discrimination against women leaders influence the future choice of women leaders' career development under gender discrimination in society. While existing studies have mostly used quantitative methods to evaluate the career development of women leaders, future research should continue to improve the existing qualitative indicator system and focus on the integration and supplementation of qualitative and quantitative evaluation methods. At the same time, in the future, the research can try to enlarge people's vision to the big picture of society's protection of women's legitimate rights and interests, and consider building a harmonious social platform for outstanding women. This study focuses on analysing the influencing factors,

development dilemmas and outcome impacts of female leaders in their future career development, in the hope that in the future it will help to design human resource development measures and cultivation mechanisms that are more conducive to the emergence of outstanding women, overcome the objective limitations of the analysis, fully combine qualitative and quantitative research methods, and analyse typical data and methodological countermeasures for its research content, so that more This will enable more women to play a more important role in their respective fields.

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