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Conference Paper

Obstacles in Career Development for Women Employees in the Republic of North Macedonia

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Abstract

One of the main challenges that human resource management has been faced with during the last couple of decades is beyond any doubt the issue of women's careers, both in the public and private sector. Although these issues are widely studied in the developed world, in countries such as North Macedonia, they have surfaced only lately. This can be addressed to changes in the number of educated women, changes in mentality, treatment of young mothers and many similar issues.

However, anywhere in the world women are in between trying to build successful careers and personal life. As an English expression says, women are in fact trying to "climb ladders in heels" and this makes everything twice as difficult and hard to find balance between life and work. The paper is based on a study with 120 women from North Macedonia most of them working in Tetovo and Skopje, in different kind of sectors. The main objective of the paper is to identify where women struggle mostly and why do they have obstacles in developing careers.

Keywords: emancipation of women, career development, economic growth and development, Law of Labor Relations

1. Literature review

The issue of women's career development has been an important topic to discuss over the last decade. In several European countries, women have been involved in various jobs for more than three decades. However, different European countries have had different female employment rates. Taking an example of the year 1992, when Spain has only 32.3% employed women versus 66.2% male, which is the lowest percentage of all European countries for that year. On the other hand, that same year, Sweden had a higher percentage of employed women, respectively 76.1%. Among the factors that play a role in the employment rate of women, the most important is the level of education, which undoubtedly strongly determines the percentage of employed women. Other important factors are marriage, children etc. In the developed countries, the education factor is no longer important because it is very rare that an educated woman does not have a job, whereas in transition countries not necessarily the level of education increases the opportunity for education.

Women in developing countries such as North Macedonia are often unemployed because of family reasons. Here, besides the insufficient salaries, the mentality has a big influence. For the sake of truth, even in the most developed countries with a very advanced mentality, women encounter various difficulties in finding a balance between career and family.

Different researchers have chosen to talk about women's career and their employment opportunities and they have come up with different results. A survey conducted in India with 200 women shows that the majority of women employed are 25 to 35 years old, 83% of the research participants are married and only 75.5 have children. Employed women in the public sector are more satisfied than those in the private sector. 9.5% of women in research would have accepted any type of work just not to be unemployed and only 7% of them are brave to talk to the managers if they want a job promotion. She also mentions that women who work do not get the respect from their male colleagues in the workplace.

In case of employed-married women, they are not allowed from family members to go for business tour. Gender discrimination is another problem faced by women in case of pay. In some companies, women employees are paid less salary than men are. Even women professional are in high position in their office, they have to return from office in correct time, cook, clean and look after their family affairs. This makes them more stress and leads to some health problems. Another most difficult problem faced by working women who have small children is they forced to leave their child in daycare or in hands house cleaner on whom they have little faith. This creates more tension in them and less concentrate on their work. Although working women hired house cleaner to do their household work they have to give more pay. Women that work are not able to attend family function due to lack of leave and also not able to give proper care to family members. This research is to find out more challenges faced by working women. (Shiva, 2013).

Kurian Dolly and Kumar Saleel (2014) put the main focus on discrimination of women at work by analyzing the status of the employed woman in India.

This study provides a brief review of the prevalence and consequence that women face, work–family conflicts, economic precariousness, social constrains, gender discrimination, sexual harassment, occupational health and psychosocial problems relating to their work and outlines social policy implications for research, legislation, and primary prevention. (Saleel & Dolly, 2014).

On the other hand, according to Varsha Sumari (2014), the most important problems facing women are due to psychological stress, jealousy, rivalry, rumors, etc. Other problems in the workplace include lack of support for childcare, insufficient pay according to qualifications etc. Moreover, 80% of women responded that financial independence gives them more respect in society. Being an independent woman is a very elementary element as it enjoys a high reputation in society. While only 20% of women disagreed with this by giving attention to the character of women.

While, according to the Sanghamitra Buddhapriya (2009), regarding work and family challenges women face difficulties in their careers because they are the only one taking care of the family. Responsibilities for children also affect women's ability to professionalize and advance.

A high percentage of 54% of women are unable to use their full potential due to family responsibilities and only 4% disagree with this.

The research reveals the expectations of the women professionals in terms of the support that organizations can provide to help them in achieving better work-life balance and advance in their career. A significant percentage of respondents have shown their strong preference for provisions like flexible working hours, childcare facilitates and emergency care for children and elders, support for non-work commitment, wellness, and personal development programmers. Half of the women professionals agree that “flexibility in work location” (working from home telecommuting) can be taken up as an additional support provision.

The requirement for all these work-life provisions are felt more at the middle and junior level rather than at the senior level. (Buddhapriya S. 2009).

2. Description of study

The paper aims to highlight the deterrent elements of women's career development in North Macedonia. This study was undertaken in the private and public sector, including women working in different institutions such as Universities, banks, hospitals and private companies. The survey was conducted through a questionnaire consisted of 20 questions, of which eight are with the LIKERT scale while in the other questions there is also additional space for the answer.

The questionnaire was prepared electronically and distributed to over 50 women employed in different institutions. The same ones have distributed the link further to other women in their circle in the working environment. The questionnaire was anonymous in order to reach the sincerest answers.

The main objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To study the benefits and disadvantages of the working women
2. To know about women's opportunity in career
3. To know about their knowledge about their rights at working environment

The paper is based on the following hypotheses:

H0: Women in North Macedonia struggle mostly and have obstacles in developing careers

H1: Women in North Macedonia struggle mostly and have obstacles in developing careers

The study is focused only on the employed women and the number of respondents is not very large. Maybe by including the unemployed (but educated) women would be helpful in achieving results from another aspect.

3. Results

The fact that women are out of the workforce market in their productive ages is an upsetting fact in terms of both women and the country's economy. Indeed, housewives make certain contributions to the family and economy by dealing with products that the family buys from outside and "home-based" works such as child and elderly care in the developed countries. However, being home-based makes them dependent on the father, spouse, or even a teenage child, prevents women from gaining their economic freedom and strengthening their social status. Another important issue that has become a common problem for all countries in recent years is the protection of the environment. (Oruc, 2015).

Regarding the age of women who have answered the questionnaire, 35 of them are 20-30 of age, 42 are 30-40 and 43 of them are over 40 years old. This result shows an indicator of the difficulties of being employed at an early age, though the fact that the elderly is the majority in this research means that 10-15 years ago it was easier to get a job than it is now.

The chart below presents responses to the sector where women participating in research are employed. Most of them are employed in the public sector, followed closely by the private sector and with a small percentage of self-employed. The questionnaire shows that people usually feel safer in the public sector than in the private sector.

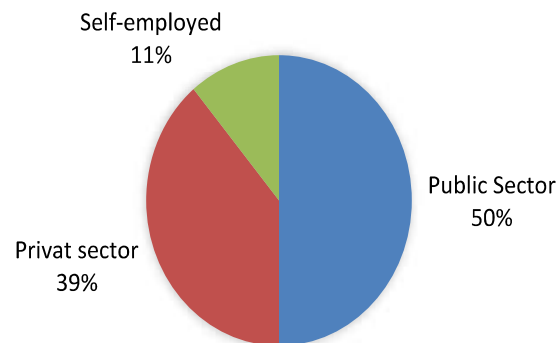


Figure 1. Sectors where the respondents are employed

One of the main reasons for this gender inequity is that we are tied to old habits.

Historically, C-suite roles are held by men and in certain industries, such as tech or manufacturing, the discrepancy is even more obvious. Think, for example, an engineering position. Traditionally, there have always been more male job applicants for a position like this, so naturally these male candidates are hired and eventually promoted to managerial roles.

Even if now things have changed and more women choose to study engineering and web development, it is still tough for them to enter this male-dominant area. In addition, when they enter, they come across a dead end. For men, the career path seems pre-determined; their (male) managers have already showed the way. (Pavlou, 2019).

With a noteworthy difference, we can see that there is gender inequality in the labor market in the Republic of North Macedonia, according to the following table:

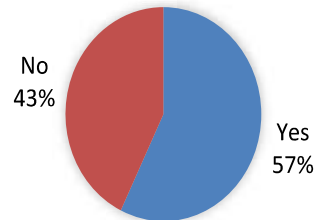


Figure 2. Gender inequality in the workplace

It is not enough only to be an employed woman. Many women aspire to occupy key positions in a company but they are not easily offered job promotions. The processed data tell us about a very low percentage of women in decision-making, which deprives them in some way to reach the peaks.

Women's traits, behaviors and attitudes are said to make them inappropriate or deficient as managers because of such factors as their alleged fear of success or their unwillingness to take risks. Women are seen as possessing personal attributes and behavioral patterns less suited to managerial and leadership roles than those of their male counterparts. (Costa & Gianecchini, 2007).

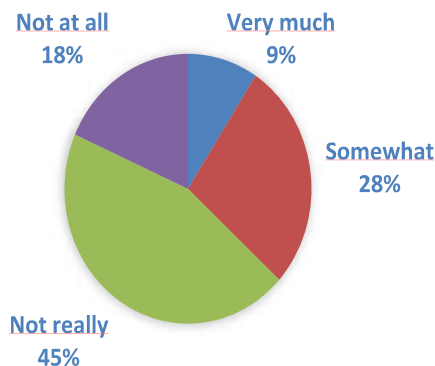


Figure 3. Women's participation in decision making

Regarding the circumstances that affect de-motivation at work, colleagues are the least likely to present themselves as an obstacle. During the analysis of the responses women employed in the private sector were the one who had chosen the boss and the managers as a reason of de-motivation. The financial factor takes the lead because of low wages where only 28 % of women have a salary of over 500 Euros, while most of them stand at the minimum monthly payment rate, which is not in the right proportion with the growth of economic standards in our country.

- Colleagues (8%)
- The boss or Managers (16%)
- Gossips and false slander (10%)
- Overtime work (19%)
- Lack of encouragement (12%)
- Lack of independence and creativity expression (9%)
- Fixed salaries or low benefits (26%)

The most important question of this research is about the barriers that women have in employment due to fertility. Normally, as assumed, the answers confirm that the reproductive aspect is the main obstacle for women in the career. This is especially the case with private companies where employers prefer to hire women who have children since women who are younger and have at least two or three children will complicate job performance in some way by being few times on maternity leave. In the developed countries, it is not the same and this does not prevent them from employing women even in important positions.

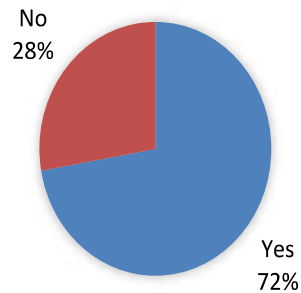


Figure 4. Relationship between women's work and fertility

One of the questions in the survey had to do with mobbing as an existing problem in the work environment. According to the survey, this phenomenon is expressed in a significant percentage at the workplace. About 43 percent of women have said that there are ways of mobbing in our country such as libel, ignorance, unfounded criticism and even sexual harassment. This even can affect women's decisions to leave the workplace and head to another country where they think that this phenomenon on does not exist.

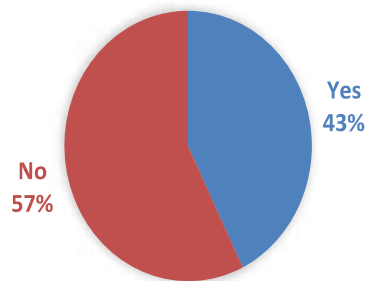


Figure 5. Are you suffering from workplace mobbing?

As to what factors have an impact on the lack of sexual harassment, the largest percentage falls on distrust in the justice system, fear of losing the job and mentality. This one is also a very important topic even for women rights and safety of women in everyday life. As for reporting and overcoming experiences of sexual harassment, stalking, and violence, here is a list prepared by OSC-LED survey on violence against women:

- Shame, including shame associated with certain types of violence and with divorce.
- Financial reasons, including concerns that the woman would not be able to support herself and her children financially and would not receive support from her family.
- Lack of trust in institutions: women did not expect an effective response from the police or feared that they would not believe.
- Lack of awareness of specialist services: women did not know where else they could go to get help.
- Fear of retribution on the part of perpetrator: women were afraid that the violence could escalate (OSCE,2019).

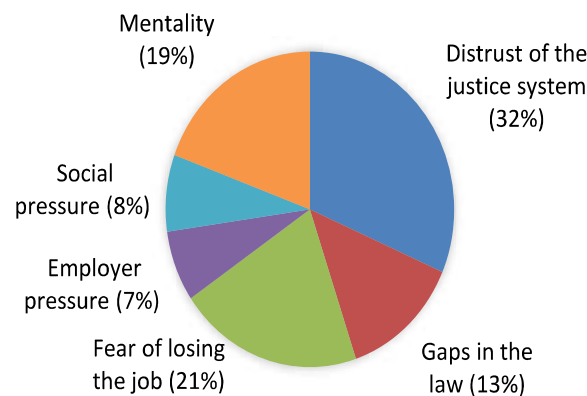


Figure 6. Which factors affect not denouncing mobbing in the work place

What emerges from this questionnaire is that in achieving gender equality, we need to concentrate on increasing the number of women among employees, managerial positions, and

politics, as well as increasing their level of education by involving women in receiving actively participates in various training, internships, and seminars. It is necessary to provide support to women's networks and business associations and women's monitoring activities to improve financial services for women who establish and develop their private businesses.

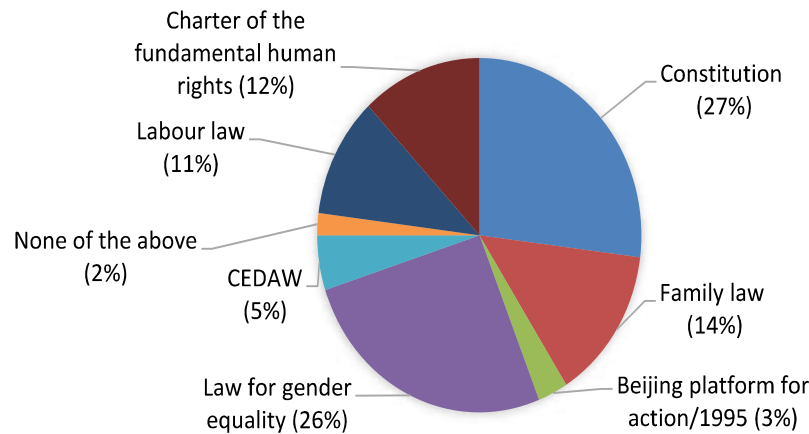


Figure 7. Concerning women human rights, which of these laws you are informed more about

Conclusions

Solving the problems that women face during building careers is impossible. However, what is more important is the support of families and partners when women have to work on their careers. The children belong to both parents and the sacrifice should be two-sided. Before women try to set up organizations for supporting their rights as women, they should better of start from their homes.

Having self-esteem and self-confidence in their qualities is one the primary things to start a career. Of course, it is very hard to manage a balance between having a family and building a career but with hard work, good will and support from the closest people, women can achieve to “climb the ladders with heels” without any doubt.

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