

Gender Equality in Employment Perquisites with Reference to Sweden, GCC and India

Meera Rajeev Kumar¹ and Aksa Sam²

¹Assistant Professor, ²Research Scholar, Department of Public Administration, Madras Christian College, Tamil Nadu, India

Email: ¹meerajeev@mcc.edu.in, ²aksasamt@gmail.com

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1137-1849>

Received: 25-08-2021; Accepted: 17-07-2022

ABSTRACT

The scope of social policy today is extensive. With the changing global scenario, there is a rediscovery of “social” in it. Indubitably, there is a gender perspective on social policy globally. The world Economic Forum states that there are only six countries in the world (Belgium, Denmark, France, Latvia, Luxembourg and Sweden) where women have equal work rights to men. It is noted that the situation in different countries varies when it comes to the working benefits of different genders whether for native or expatriate workers in those places. Though there are rooms to enjoy attractive income and favourable working conditions such as job security, generous retirement plan, and other welfare benefits, there are still various factors that might lead to gender-based differences or gender discrimination in the unique labour market context of the GCC countries. The scenario is distinct in many Scandinavian nations like Sweden. Those countries are often considered the role model for gender equal work allowances. When it comes to India there is still disparity and difference in many areas despite the social security system the country offers in its policies. This paper aims at a descriptive and qualitative study on the causes, consequences and conclusion of the gender disparity in employee allowances in these nations. The study would imply a simple random method of interrogation to examine gender differences empirically within the labour market of the mentioned nations. The economic benefits of a gender-equal nation in the framing of social policy will be emphasized and focused on.

Keywords: Gender equal, Employment allowance, GCC countries, Scandinavian nations, Economy

“Gender equality is not only a right thing to do, but it is the smart thing to do”.

Man being a social animal, there are social problems too in the society which need to be addressed through social policies. Social problems are thus significant to making society aware of the prevailing problems, their causes, effects and the methods to resolve those. Social life

and social needs are updating every second. Hence, social policy is an inclusive discipline. It is an index to address the clashes, conflicts and differences that exist in society. Owing to this social policy definitely has its role to play in the gender inequality that is prevalent in society.

Gender inequality today is a matter concerning social and political life, from families to nations. Thus, its consequences range from private to societal levels. Though there is visible progress in this matter, it is often slow. Even today for many companies' a gender-equal employment environment remains an aspiration alone. This paper will throw its light on the gendering that exists in employment perks, especially with reference to India, GCC nations and Sweden. Providing a gender-equal atmosphere is not about considering everyone identical, it means the difference they have is not considered as an opportunity to deny their access to the benefits that they deserve.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND THEORY

This study was guided by the research questions such as Does gender equality have an impact on the economy? Developed nations or developing nations possess more gender-equal employment system? What people have to say on this aspect? To understand more on the matter an online survey was conducted using google form among different people from Sweden, GCC and India. The study also included interactions with various subjects to know about their point of view on this aspect. On the basis of their responses analysis have been made to arrive at conclusions.

Conflict theory proposed by Karl Marx focuses on the perpetual conflict that exists in society due to the competition to acquire the limited resources available. The theory suggests that there exists conflict between different social groups to attain wealth and power. Since the theory speaks about the conflict between groups in society, this can be considered to resemble the conflict between genders too as each gender is a group in the society. The patriarchal culture in most societies have cultivated that habit of power craving and being dominant in the minds of men.¹ Another factor is that the theoretical perspective to gender inequality can be generally divided into biological, socialization and cognitive. The biological theorists claim that inequality is purely based on biological differences. The socialization theorists on this matter say gender segmentation in every aspect is a result of the segregated treatment that the society is conditioned to since ages. The cognitive theory scientists indicate man's deliberate way of behaviour to concur with what is already in their mind.

¹<https://courses.lumenlearning.com/cochise-sociology-os/chapter/the-conflict-perspective>

DISCUSSION

The scenario of gender inequality is different in different parts of the world. When the borders divide the earth into different countries and continents, there is even a shift in various social aspects of these nations. Though the women in the middle east GCC nations are provided, protection from harassment the societal status and freedom they get are very less. These nations tend to have strict laws against physical abuse specifically against native women, but the employment freedom and benefits really are not sufficing. The situation in the west, in the Nordic region, gender equality in all aspects of life is their hallmark. The Nordic countries act as leaders in this respect. When spotting the light towards south in India, again the situation is varied. Though the country exhibits a better social security system, gender inequality exists in various aspects including the employment allowances.

Sweden

Sweden geographically belongs to the Nordic region along with other nations like Denmark, Norway, Finland, Iceland, The Faroe Islands, Greenland and Aland. These countries have very high index of gender equality. According to the latest EU gender equality index Sweden comes out as number one in gender equality, scoring 74.3% as compared to the EU average of 54%.² Even without a quota legislation, their voluntary initiatives strive to bring an economic equality by providing equal responsibilities and possibilities to men and women. In labor market of this country women have almost the same employment rate as men.

The importance Swedish society gives to family structure and family law reflects on the aspects of employment too. The non-discrimination regulation that is prevalent in Sweden is the Discrimination Act (DA), it is a single non-discrimination act. DA covers seven grounds of discrimination including gender. The country is working on its gender pay gap action plans too. Since the nation has its focus on reconciliation of family and professional life, there are reforms to promote undivided parental leave and also to strengthen the public elder care and child care provisions. Parental benefits are paid during 480 days for each child and the scheme is extremely flexible in that it is possible to take partial benefits/ leave during a considerable number of days until the child is 12 years of age.³ An important factor is that these benefits are unsegmented in Sweden. Here women make up more than 40% of company boards. In Sweden the discrimination act demands enterprises with 25 employees or more to draft GPG action plans every three years.

²The policy on gender equality in Sweden, Directorate general for internal policies p. 5

³Ibid p.6

Sweden's investment in a gender equal workforce have actually made the nation more prosperous and economically gaining from politics to businesses, there is a more undivided distribution of power, influences and resources in this region, this is called 'The Nordic Gender Effect'. This culture of the nation contributes to the UN's 2030 agenda for sustainable development. The institution of individual taxation instead of joint taxation formed a stronger financial aid for married women so that they can join the labor force. Nordic women have higher employment rates than women in any other countries.⁴ The fight and movements against Macho culture is another way of augmenting gender equality in the employment area. Despite, the strong thrive and efforts to set up gender equality in nation, there are also instances and indications of gender inequality that still persist.

The Gulf Cooperation Council

GCC is the political and economic alliance of six middle eastern countries. Including Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the UAE, Qatar, Bahrain and Oman. The participation by women of GCC in the labor market has always been found as low though slow changes are seen in recent times. GCC nations have a shortage of labor which is why we see large number of foreign workers there. But here too employers prefer to have males over females and hence the female workforce in these countries remain least in the world with less than 20%. Among the female employees, a greater number are those Asian migrants who work as domestic servants. In UAE, the labor laws demand equal pay for same positions. A larger number of the female expatriates are those who have come along with their spouse or parents under a family visa. When the human capital quality of women is less, it does not make advancement in the economy of the nation. Women here are seemed to give more significance to family commitments than work commitments as they are forced to reconcile their family and professional life while most of the men don't. There is progress in the educational attainments of women in these nations now. The number of women who get hold of higher degrees are increasing slowly, but this does not contribute to an increase in the labor force they make because of various religious and cultural restrictions. Though these Arab nations tend to support gender equality in education, they do not promote gender equality in employment. Thus, the economic participation of women is less in GCC countries. On the primary interrogations I have made as part of this study, I observed there are people in GCC nations who say there is a pay difference to men and women filling the same posts. The economists like Garry Becker opine that the prejudiced or incompetent employer perspectives shape the discrimination in the labor market. When the employers adopt policies to hire men over women even if they have equal qualifications, over time women will be forced to do the jobs

⁴<https://www.gu.se/sites/default/files/2020-05/The-nordic-gender-effect-at-work.pdf>, p. 18

that are unattractive to men or those with lower wages and employment conditions. Another factor to be noted is that there is already segmentation in the labor policies concerning both native workers and expatriate workers. So, this is applicable to native and expatriate women employees segmenting them. The rigid and conservative family formation system that exist in these nations restrict employment freedom to women. Considerable changes are however being seen in recent times in these Arab nations.

India

India has a well promising social security system in theory while that is not the case practically. The primary study made among Indians prove that a majority of the Indian women feel there is gendering with relation to employment. While there is maternity leave and other benefits being granted for women, men are not given such leaves. When it comes to job positions, very less percentage of women hold work in finance, businesses or even construction fields.

The India wage report prepared by the International Labor Organization (ILO) in 2018, states that there exist wage inequality and it is a hinderance to achieving decent work conditions. In India, there are laws governing pay differences. The equal remuneration Act, 1976 of India says no differentiation should be made to men and women who perform same work. Recently code of wages has been implemented in 2019. Though India shows changes of growth in its GDP at times, the contribution of female labor force to the same is less. In many Indian families wife's income is in general regarded as disposable income and merely a supplement, referred as 'lipstick money'. Article 39(d) of the Indian Constitution advocates equal pay for equal work for both men and women. Equality of opportunity is also another provision of the constitution. There are also legal provisions that demand representation of women in the board of certain class of companies.

Compared to 96% of men labor force women comprises just 27% according to what different studies report. Indeed, the participation of educated, capable women in the workforce makes for a strong economic argument: The International Monetary Fund (IMF) finds that India's GDP will increase by as 27% if women participated in the economy at the same rate as men.⁵ The importance given to a responsibility sharing family system is less in India. Many times, here they do not consider family managing as a mutual sharing due to the various socio-cultural constraints. This is the reason why women spend a lot more time on unpaid work than men. Majority of Indian females work in sectors like education, textiles, health and Social Work. However, regulations and measures are taken to improve a gender equal working environment.

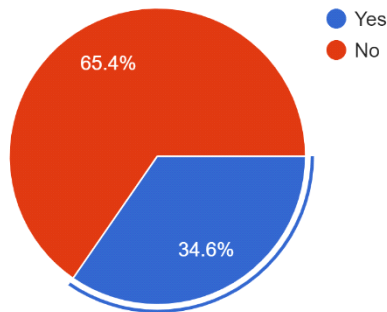
⁵<https://www.orfonline.org/research/rewriting-the-rules-women-and-work-in-india-47584/>

FINDINGS

Given further below are the graphical representations for some of the findings derived from the questionnaire given to a sample population of fifty people altogether from these three countries for the study.

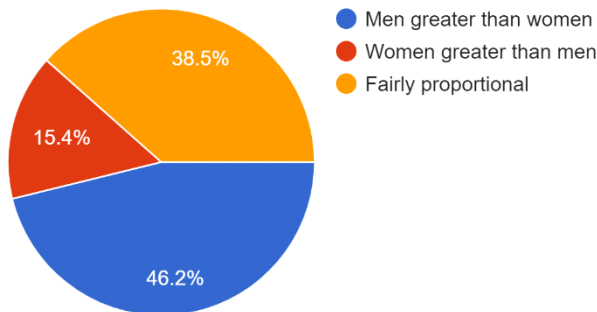
1. Difference in pay scale to same category of jobs for men and women

It is evident from the above graphical representation that 34.6% of the population which approximates to half, tell that there exists difference in pay scale for same positions. The fact they work in same post is to be noted here because, this is very unfair even if in a small percentage.



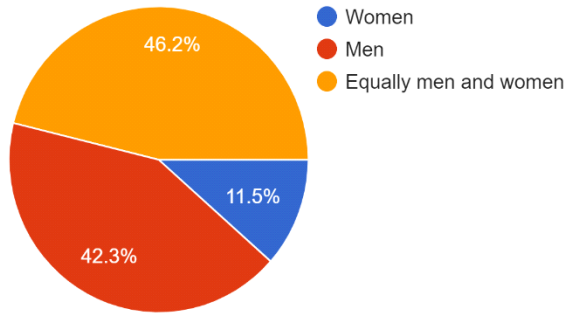
2. The proportion of men to women employees

The data clearly shows majority of the companies have men employees over women. This is a clear indication of how proportional representation fails in most of the firms.



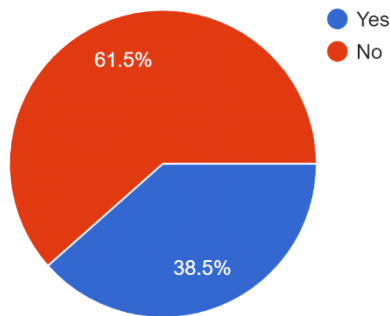
3. Higher positions are held by

While very few, that is only 11.3% of the total population says that women hold higher positions in their firm, the drastic difference to this in the case of men is depicted here. But the fact that many people have opined for a fairly proportional participation, it is hope giving.



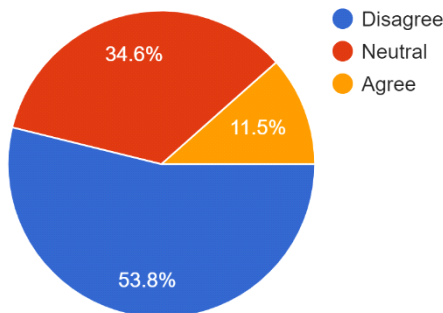
4. Gendering in the perks allowed to employees

Here, a majority have opined that gendering do not exist in the perks allowed to employees while the other part of the population which is not so less say there exists gendering. This can also be considered as the opinion of a population who always do not want to open up and agree about the segmentation that is prevalent.



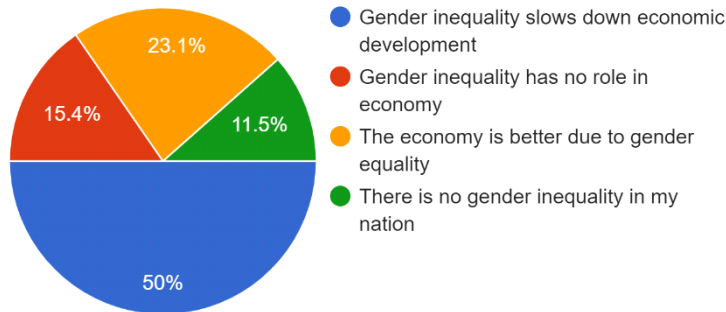
5. Women hold more higher-grade jobs compared to men generally

The above data clearly shows more than half of the population say men hold higher grade jobs in their firms, where as the representation of women is very less just about 11%.



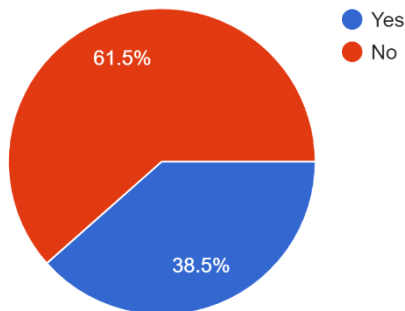
6. Opinion about gender equality and economic development

Exactly half of the population the researcher interacted with opine that gender inequality is a factor in slowing down the economy. The least of this group could only say there is no gender inequality in their nation, which shows how significant is the matter of gendering and its effects.



7. Both husband and wife are working

The above graph comprises the whole idea of this study. It is evident that out of the total population, a majority 61.5% said only one person is working at their home. This clearly shows the extent to which most of the women are dependent on their male counterparts for livelihood.



Inference

The findings of the study fall in alignment with the theory associated. According to the idea of Karl Marx, no group in the society is ready to surrender before the other. The theory is applicable in the case of gender inequality too. Social problems are a result of dominant groups mistreating the lower groups. This is in the case of gender discrimination too. The strive for balance of power between the groups is what must be advocated. Fredrich Engels compared the family structure to the relationship between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat suggesting

that women had less power than men in the household because they were dependent on them for wages.⁶ In the context of gendering, this conflict is well understood when men try to take their power and privilege over the women who is submissive. During the course of study, the researcher also found out that the reluctance of dominant group in accepting the fact there is discrimination, adds to the strife. Many times, men are not ready to discuss on these aspects and they underestimate any kind of discussion that happen. It brings out a picture where the dominant group trying to negate the fact that conflict prevails in the society. From the interactions with different people in Sweden, GCC and India it is interesting to know diverse perspectives and opinions on this matter. While there are people mostly men who are not interested to discuss about gender inequality it is reaffirming that they do not want to lose their dominance. It is evident from the results and the conversations that developing nations lag behind in gender equality compared to developed nations.

CONCLUSION

While there are several factors that hamper the gender equality in employment environment, slow progress is seen in different nations. The advancement of technology, education and the thought process of people contributes significantly to this change. Enabling a gender equal employment environment can prosper the economy of the nations too. Gender equality must be made a practice from home itself. Family matter and family law should be given more importance in developing nations like India. Prejudiced mindset of employers should be avoided. Make laws of equality stricter as in case of other laws. Fair selection of employees should be practiced based on skills. Skills should be given priority after which the desires of people. Employer's prejudiced mindset should not be a hinderance to skillful and ambitious candidates. Keep a space open to rationally discuss about what roles each gender can do based on their ability and interest. Innovative methods should be extracted from the citizens itself to prosper the nation as gender equality is directly proportional to the economic growth and happy living of a nation.

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How to cite this article: Rajeev Kumar, M., & Sam, A. (2020). Gender equality in employment perquisites with reference to Sweden, GCC and India. *SOCRATES*, 8(2), 93–102. Retrieved from <https://www.socratesjournal.com/index.php/SOCRATES/article/view/467>