

THE ORGANIZATIONAL FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE GENDER GAP IN QATAR WORKFORCE

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ABSTRACT

The access to equal opportunities for women in the labor market is still a significant challenge in both developing and developed nations. This paper sought to identify the organizational factors that contribute to gender gap within the Qatar workforce. The paper employed a systematic review and sourced data from past studies that meet the objectives of the study. The findings of the study indicate that gender gaps can be attributed to discriminatory HR policies utilized by Qatari companies that affect the delegation of duties, termination of employment, training opportunities, promotion and hiring of women. Also, the contradiction of putting cultural, religious and stereotypical restrictions on the female population at the same time wanting them to succeed economically is apparent throughout Qatar. The Qatari government and businesses should embrace equality to enable the progress made in education be transferred into the labour market.

Keywords: Gender Gap, Population, Employment, Workforce, Workplace

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The society is deeply ingrained in the patriarchal attitudes and beliefs whereby men are perceived to be the “movers and shakers” in the professional domains. They are the Chief finance officers (CFOs), Chief operations officer (COOs) and chief executive officers (CEO). Thus, they take part in the organizational decision-making process (Ziman, 2013). Such ideas were true in the 1950s, but modern society is experiencing interesting trends where both men and women have equal capability to move an organization to success. According to Golkowska (2017), women are making significant strides in the business world particularly the workplace and the ratio of women to men in the workplace is increasingly evening out. This has been occasioned by the fight for equal right and the ever-increasing level of education of women giving them equal opportunities to access the labor market (Felder & Vuollo, 2008). Nonetheless, it has been noted that some factors impend the progress of women. Such factors contribute to

discrimination of women, unequal pay, enormous gender gaps and inequality in the modern workplace (Ziman, 2013).

In Qatar, women are likely to pursue higher education as compared to the men, but they continue to be still behind due to underrepresentation in the economic sectors. As an economy that relies on natural resources (gas and oil reserves), Qatar has made it possible for people and families to thrive without women working (Felder & Vuollo, 2008). The government offers generous welfare systems that ensure free education and healthcare for its citizens. Furthermore, every citizen who has a steady income qualifies for mortgages and land benefits (Asghar, Bengali & Shahzad, 2017). The population is legally offered preferential hiring in public as well as the private sectors via the Qatarization process (Golkowska, 2017). Moreover, government workforce which forms 84 percent of the labor force receives higher wages for unskilled work, job security, retirement benefits and unemployment security (DeBoer, Ater & Kranov, 2017).

While there are some improvements in bridging the gender gap in employment over the years, such growth has been sluggish. Based on the recent statistics of 2016, 68 percent of the workforce involves men while women take up 35 percent (Asghar, Bengali & Shahzad, 2017). Since 2010, this number seems not to have changed. While the number of women and men is almost equal in Qatar, the women represent only one-third of the entire employees within the governmental sectors and less than 0.8 percent in the private sectors (DeBoer, Ater & Kranov, 2017). Despite this, the women outnumber men in a ratio of two to one in higher learning institutions. While the data obtained by Asghar, Bengali, and Shahzad (2017) does not specify the attendance by nationality in universities, it has been found that more than three-quarters of students who were enrolled in the Qatar universities in 2014-2015 were women.

DeBoer and Ater Kranov (2017) argue that it is challenging within an oil-based economy for the women to secure a job because oil booms diminish export-oriented jobs and create work within the service industry. Thus, when women cannot find a job in the service industry, they can easily be pushed out of the labor market. Notwithstanding the market forces, some organizational factors have heightened the gender gap in the workforce (Asghar, Bengali & Shahzad, 2017). The gender gap is widening due to discriminatory policies that can enhance stress, harassment, poor mental health, bad reputation to companies, increased turnover and decreased prosperity of the economy.

1.1 Aim and objectives

This investigation seeks to examine the factors contributing to gender gap in the Qatari workforce. Based on this aim, the study is guided by the following objectives:

- To establish the extent of the gender gap in Qatar workforce
- To determine the factors contributing to the gender gap in Qatar.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Gender gaps in relation to access to economic opportunities is an increasingly debated and researched issue throughout the universe. This has been attributed to the keenness of various universal actors toward bridging gender gaps and enhancing gender equality (Stamarski & Son Hing, 2015). Precisely, gender equality is a millennium development goal and a human right as well. Therefore, measures are being advanced aimed at allowing women to play their vital role in sustainable development and improving their social status (Fiske, 2018). Disparities regarding access to employment opportunities is a significant issue since it comprises economic, physiological and social implications. According to Keiran (2017), gender research has evolved from normative to empirical exploration in recent decades. Fiske (2018) considers gender gap as a socio-structural problem and that factors responsible for gender gaps are multifaceted and complex. Gender gap and inequalities take various forms. The most common involves different earning between males and females who undertake the same job (Keiran, 2017). Even where organizations ensure equity in compensation, some other subtler forms of gender gaps are evident including men getting plum assignments, promotion and women not being hired even when they are qualified.

Empirical studies examining factors contributing to gender gaps in the workplace have examined personal aspects, policy and organizational aspects and individual aspects (Sipe et al., 2016). Some researchers have identified the root cause of gender gaps within the labor market as the personal attributes associated with the labor supply (Stamarski & Son Hing, 2015). On the other hand, other studies have examined the gender gaps using organizational lenses. For instance, employing data compiled by the Korean Labour Institute, Johns (2013) explored the influence of company size, flexible work arrangements and labor unions on gender gaps in association to employment and wages. Similarly, Stier and Yaish (2014) investigated the effect of company age, maternity protection, company size, number of hours worked on gender discrimination in employment, training opportunities and promotion. Dipboye and Colella (2013) examined the organizational variables as well as demographic factors in relation to gender equality within the workplace as well as the presumed extent of gender equality arising within organizations with a greater number of female employees. According to Fiske (2018), countries that pursue gender-based policies can significantly minimize gender gaps in the workforce. For instance, work-family balance policies can minimize the childcare burden placed on women workers and give female employees time to raise their kids and return to work.

Schultz (2018) examines how gender wage gap, as well as welfare policies (welfare budget, maternity leave and childcare facility in the workplace), enhance gender gaps within the workplace. Accordingly, the length of paid leave, part-time work, and childcare subsidies can substantially enhance women participation in the labor market. However, Dipboye and Colella (2013) negate these findings arguing that childcare leave and welfare do not increase gender equality in the workplace. Another area that has been found to boost gender gaps in the workforce involves human resource practices including HR policies and HR decision-making (Miner & Cortina, 2016). HR codifies policies and practices for personnel performance, resource planning, functions of people and employee relations (Keiran, 2017). The HR policies which are inherently biased against a certain gender regardless of job-related skills, performance, competence, and capabilities can foster institutional discrimination.

According to Sipe et al. (2016), institutional discrimination can occur from the recruitment, hiring, role assignment, pay, performance assessment, termination of employment, promotion and training. Performance evaluation is used to determine rewards (compensation), punishment (termination) and opportunities (roles assignment and promotion). Accordingly, gender gaps are formalized in organizations when the HR criteria utilized favors one gender over the others. A meta-analysis by Schultz (2018) found that during the hiring process, female candidates are evaluated negatively and are not as much likely to be recommended for employment than the males. Moreover, women are more likely to receive lesser opportunities at work causing underrepresentation in leadership and management roles within organizations.

3.0 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The exploration was guided by the Ambivalent Sexism Framework that suggests that the benevolent and hostile sexism components complement one another and reinforce the traditional gender roles limiting women from participating equally in the labor market. Unlike some studies that have employed negative or hostile outlooks toward females to predict workforce discrimination, this study extends the analysis by drawing on ambivalent sexism theory that entails benevolent (the paternalistic attitudes towards women) and hostile sexism (antagonistic attitude to females) (Glick & Fiske, 2011). According to the Ambivalent Sexism framework, sexism has two elements (hostile and benevolent sexism). Hostile sexism involves the overtly negative stereotyping and evaluations about a gender such as women being incompetent as well as inferior to the males. On the other hand, the benevolent sexism entails assessments of gender that might look subjectively positive, but in actual sense, they are damaging the person and result in gender inequality (Chen, Fiske & Lee, 2009). For instance, benevolent sexism can involve the assumption that women need protection from men. According to Glick and Fiske (2011), the benevolent and hostile sexism components complement each other and reinforce the traditional

gender roles. The two preserve the patriarchal social structures that perceive females as subordinates of males. Furthermore, the two types of sexism share the assumption that females are inferior and should be restricted to lower social status (Fraser, Osborne & Sibley, 2015).

Hostile sexism involves misogyny or hatred for women by men expressed through unconcealed negative evaluations of women. Examples of hostile sexism can include perceptions that women are incompetent, overly emotional, sexually manipulative and unintelligent (Hideg & Ferris, 2016). According to Glick and Fiske (2011), people with hostile sexism are likely to evaluate women or one gender negatively and offer them fewer or lower employment opportunities and recommendations. They believe that women threaten men in the workplace and need to stay at home (Chen, Fiske & Lee, 2009).

Regarding benevolent sexism, the evaluation of gender can seem positive. Examples of benevolent sexism include the respect of women as wives, child caretakers and mothers' roles as well as the romanticizing of females as objects of heterosexual affection. Furthermore, benevolent sexism posits that men have a responsibility of protecting the women. While at the surface benevolent sexism does not seem to harm the women, such beliefs are increasingly corrosive to gender equality and can restrict women in seeking social, personal, economic, political and professional opportunities (Hideg & Ferris, 2016). This can be credited to: a) women are weaker and should be protected; b) females should not deviate from the conventional gender roles including child caretakers and mothers; and c) women are respected by males for their sexual purity and availability (Fraser, Osborne & Sibley, 2015). It is possible that due to such beliefs, women are discriminated and relegated to the pink ghetto resulting in the gender gaps evident in Qatar's workforce. Additionally, since women are linked to lower status and the males a higher status, they can receive a backlash from pursuing high roles such as management and leadership.

4.0 DATA AND METHODS

This study adopted a systematic review as a research methodology and tool to establish the drivers of gender gap within the Qatar workforce. Systematic review involves a research that assists in collecting, summarising and synthesizing findings from past explorations in a methodological and meaningful manner. Gough Thomas and Oliver (2012) argue that the research approach is an applicable method in social sciences in synthesizing evidence to answers questions concerning the causes of a problem (etiology) or regarding people's experience. Systematic reviews are especially resourceful in forming a conclusion concerning a subject matter from past studies that could be challenging to achieve. Accordingly, to Booth, Sutton, and Papaioannou (2016), the approach endeavors to minimize bias with an overall intent of

generating scientific summaries.

4.1 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The selection and inclusion process of articles followed a precise process. First, the study included peer-reviewed journals that have undergone rigorous review to assure quality. This enriched reliability and validity of the exploration. Only studies with empirical analysis including those using mixed methods, qualitative and quantitative methods were included. Furthermore, the study included studies that examine gender gap in Qatar workforce.

4.2 Article search and selection

The main search terms or phrases used in selecting the article include “gender gap” and “Qatar workforce.” Journal articles were searched in EBSCOhost, Wiley, SAGE, Science Direct, JSTOR and ProQuest. The selection of gender gap studies involved screening of studies that examine gender gap in Qatar workforce. A total of 102 articles were initially found including studies examining gender gap directly and indirectly. Nevertheless, after an extensive review using the inclusion criteria, only 12 articles were chosen for inclusion.

Subsequently, each article underwent thorough examination and summarization based on 11 subtitles: year of publications, region/country, method, study population, data source, the title of the article, research questions/hypotheses, variables, theoretical framework, findings and conclusion. Guided by the emerging themes from gender gaps in the workforce, the articles were grouped and analyzed together with other similar studies. The three recurring themes included discriminatory human resource policy (hiring, promotion, and access to higher level roles), unequal payment and stereotyping (patriarchal beliefs).

5. FINDINGS

5.1 Gender Gaps in Qatar Workforce

Qatar is ranked highly in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) with the participation of women in the employment being above the universal average. The high rate of women entering the workforce has been attributed to the high number of women attaining an academic degree. In 2001, the government of Qatar instituted the Civil Service Act that created a legal framework protecting the rights of women in the workforce (James-Hawkins, Qutteina & Yount, 2017). Based on 2014 statistics, 32,000 women were employed showing an upward trend than 2011 when the number was less by 7,000 (Mitchell et al., 2015). A quarter of the employed women work in the construction industry, 45% in natural and social science and 27% in the IT sector.

The majority of Qatari females work in the public sector. The Qatari women are expected to put on traditional clothing comprising a Shayla and Abaya which does not show their appearance (Mitchell et al., 2015). Thus, the number of Qatar women working is still below the developed nations as depicted by figure 1.

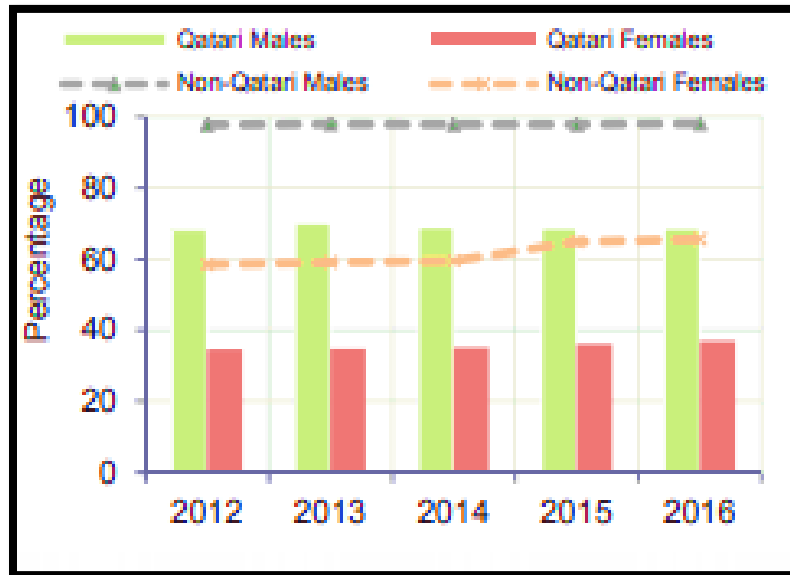


Figure 1: Gender Gaps in Qatar employment

Source: (James-Hawkins, Qutteina & Yount, 2017)

68 percent of the workers are men while women take up 34 percent. Out of a total of 2.055 million persons who are economically active in Qatar, men take up a large share and women are only 273,000. 96.1 percent of the men populace participated in the Qatari labor against 58.5 percent of females as shown in figure 2.

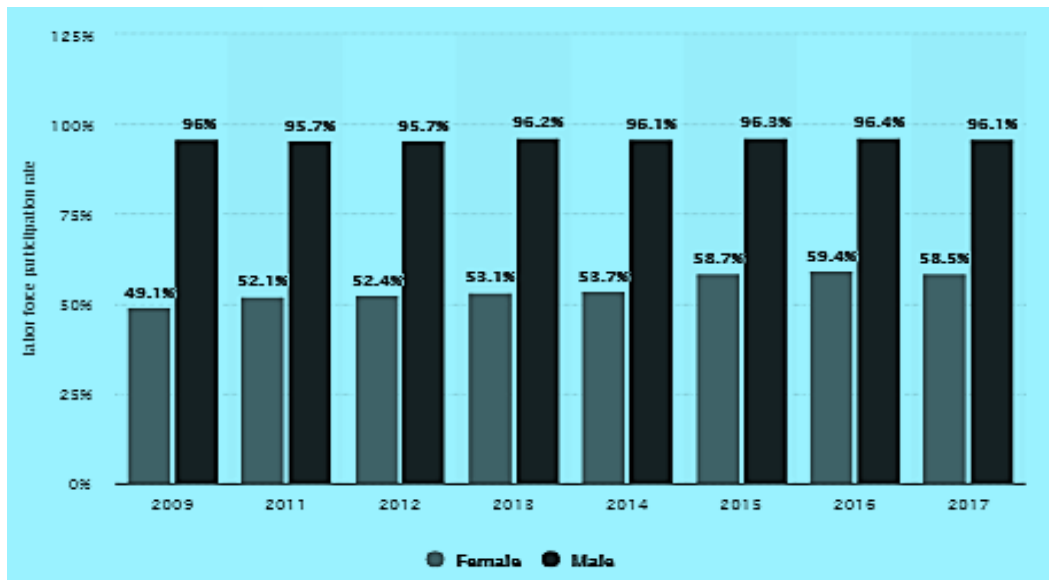


Figure 2: Labour Force Participation of Qatari Populace

Source: (Statista, 2018)

Among the biggest obstacles to employment include a low number of job opportunities, family obligations and poor adeptness in English language (Joseph, 2018). Additionally, societal beliefs negatively influence job openings for women since some populations consider it improper for the females to work in the hospitality industry such as hotel workers and actresses. James-Hawkins, Qutteina and Yount (2017) attribute gender gaps to cultural factors as well as religious factors.

5.2 Factors contributing to gender gap in Qatar

Three themes emerged from the study that contributes to gender gaps in the Qatari workforce: unequal payment, stereotyping and discriminatory HR policies.

5.2.1 Discriminatory Human Resource policies

While Qatar prohibits discrimination based on gender, it still permeates in the workforce. Employers and HR departments sometimes base their decisions solely on gender, they also formulate and apply workplace policies in a biased manner (Al-Attayah & Nasser, 2014). The criteria for evaluating employees' performance is skewed and benefit men than women. Alshare and Sewailem (2018) found that men and women are not offered equal opportunities in hiring and advancement (promotion). Thus, zero tolerance for gender discrimination has not been achieved. Similarly, Satterfield (2015) revealed that Qatari human resource policies are

inherently biased against women notwithstanding their job-related performance, capabilities, knowledge and skills. Discrimination permeates from the assignment of roles, termination of employment, training opportunities, promotion and hiring. For instance, Al-Attiyah and Nasser (2014) noted that Qatari men are more likely to secure jobs in the construction industry and IT industries as compared to women.

According to Lari (2016), women are treated differently based on medical leave, pregnancy and family responsibilities. The fact that most organizations do not offer childcare facilities has been argued to be discrimination against childrearing mothers. Also, women do not rise to high ranks in management and leadership to influence decision-making processes. Alshare and Sewailem (2018) observe that most organizations in Qatar feel that men are more qualified for leadership roles than women. Job ladders are divided by gender, and the job segregation that is seen during the entry-level position will be strengthened as the workers move up (Jacobson, 2015). Additionally, women lack specific experiences that are not offered within their job ladders making them unqualified to advance up the ladder (Al-Tamimi, 2016). Moreover, women receive biased performance assessments on male-tasks which amplify workplace discrimination and limit them from climbing the ladder.

5.2.2 Stereotyping

Gender stereotyping is enhancing gender gaps in the Qatar workforce by creating normative ethics for behavior which induce condemnation and social penalties when they are dishonored. Furthermore, gender stereotyping is increasingly strengthened by cultural and religious norms (Al-Tamimi, 2016). In Qatar, women and men have varying roles, and the interactions between the two genders are very rare. The patriarchal beliefs instituted by the forefather still pervade Qatari workforce with the public sphere being perceived as exclusively for men while women are confined to the household to act like mothers and wives (Harkness, 2012). The stereotyping is further advanced by spatial practices in clothing where women should cover their body and their face by putting on a headscarf (hijab). Also, since the females are perceived as the bearers of the family honour, their movement outside the homestead are increasingly restricted or controlled (Satterfield, 2015). In education, there is a strict division between males and females, and when entering the workforce, gender divisions still prevail.

In the workforce, the stereotypical order shapes the expectations of the employers and employees regarding whether a woman or a man is the better fit for a specific job. Golkowska (2017) found that women are more likely to be employed in the public sector, education, social affairs and health. In contrast, men take higher positions and can work in the construction and IT sectors (Walker, 2016). Even for foreign women in Qatari, they are hired as teachers, clerical workers,

nannies, maids and nurses. While 88 percent of Qatari women pursue higher education, 44 percent argue that they have not secured employment due to cultural reasons (Al-Tamimi, 2016; Walker, 2016). Additionally, Walker (2016) found that Qatari women still occupy specific segments of the labor markets hence they seek a narrow range of opportunities that are considered traditionally to be fit for them (such as teaching) or highly prestigious jobs like medicine (Stasz et al., 2007). Some occupations are believed inappropriate or less desirable for the females. For instance, Golkowska (2017) discovered that there are fewer women from Qatar working as lawyers, hospitality employee and flight attendants. Moreover, while the number of females studying chemical engineering is high, most women choose not to pursue their careers after realizing that employment in the petrochemical, construction and petroleum sectors need frequent visits to sites and working in a male-dominated environment. Similarly, Toumi (2010) found that while the females outnumber males as political science students in both Georgetown University and Qatar University, they occupy a minimal number of important positions in politics.

5.2.3 Unequal payment

Wages in Qatar have been found to advance gender gaps in the labor force. While the wages were almost at par for men and women in 2001, the gender pay gap has been growing since 2011. According to Harkness (2012), the pay gap grew astoundingly by 22.7 percent in 2011. Women, including non-Qatar and Qatari women are impacted by this disparity with most of them being paid between 25 and 50 percent lesser than men despite them working similar hours and sometimes more (Lari, 2016). Al Muftah (2010) attributes the growing gender pay gap in the Gulf region particularly in Qatar to the social allowances offered to men as the household heads: travel allotment and housing allowances that female workers do not receive.

There are several interconnected elements that cause gender pay gap in Qatar. Jacobson (2015) argues that the immediate separation between men and women in roles. Also, the underestimation of the work done by women can be blamed for underpayment. Al Muftah (2010) notes that women's capability is estimated differently from that of men. Additionally, jobs requiring comparable experience, capability and competence tend to underpay women.

6. CONCLUSION

Gender gap in the labor market is one of the pressing issues in the universe today. Despite progress being made throughout the universe to achieve gender equality in the workplace, women are noticeably unlikely as compared to men to partake in the labor force and once in the workforce, the female population is less likely to secure jobs. This study intended to establish the organizational factors that contribute to gender gap in the Qatar workforce. The increased

enrolment of women in education and attaining degrees does not predict workforce participation. Findings suggest that discriminatory human resource policies, unequal payment and stereotyping are some of the organizational factors deterring gender equity in the workforce. Discriminatory human resource policies affect women's assignment to roles, termination of employment, training opportunities, promotion and hiring. Stereotyping largely enhanced by religious and cultural norms in Qatar obstruct the tolerance of women's involvement in the workforce. The society prefers certain jobs for women especially social and education sectors as well as health. Patriarchal beliefs established many years ago are used to determine jobs that are best for men and women with women sometimes being confined to the household. This is in line with the Ambivalent Sexism framework where women are perceived to be fit as mothers, wives and child caretakers. Moreover, gender pay gaps are evident with women being paid lesser by 25 to 50 percent as compared to men workers. It is time for the policymakers to rethink and devise more comprehensive strategies that allow women to participate equally in the labor force. This can ensure they achieve the important economic role including social and human development.

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