

Breaking the Glass Walls: Discrimination and Challenges

Women Face at Work

“Women don’t make more than men in any occupation that I could find,” said Lina Moe, the lead author of a study on gender pay inequity by the Center for New York City Affairs.¹ Despite some advancements, workplace gender biases persist, with women facing barriers that hinder professional growth and equality. In 2012, the employment rates among women reached 60% in half of the G20 nations (some of the world’s largest economies).² However, sizable gender employment gaps still exist. For example, the women’s employment rate is 10% lower than men’s in 15 of the G20 countries³, and the pay gap between men and women is 20% worldwide.⁴ In the G20 countries, women represent only 25% of business owners, and their average earnings are 60% lower than men’s.⁵ Instead, women are overrepresented in traditionally low-paid sectors like welfare, education, and administrative jobs.⁶

In addition to employment disparity, women often face gender discrimination, which can lead to mental and physical health challenges. A 2018 study found that exposure to gender discrimination in the workplace is linked to adverse mental health, while exposure to sexual harassment is correlated with compromised physical health.⁷ While many initiatives have been introduced to address gender inequality in the workplace, they often rely on the experiences of white, middle-class, and/or straight women. Thus, these initiatives fail to consider the intersectional barriers that women of color face.⁸ For example, Black women often

¹ Winnie Hu, “Pay Gap for Women in New York City Is Unchanged Since 2007, Study Says,” *New York Times*, November 1, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/11/01/nyregion/pay-gap-women-nyc.html>.

² “Achieving stronger growth by promoting a more gender- balanced economy”, OECD, (paper presented for G20 Labour and Employment Ministerial Meeting Melbourne, Australia, September 10 –11, 2014), 3.

³ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁴ Michelle K. Ryan, “Addressing workplace gender inequality: Using the evidence to avoid common pitfalls,” *British Journal of Social Psychology* 62, no.1 (November 2022): 1.

⁵ “Achieving stronger growth by promoting a more gender- balanced economy”, OECD, (paper presented for G20 Labour and Employment Ministerial Meeting Melbourne, Australia, September 10 –11, 2014), 5.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁷ Catherine E. Harnois and João L. Bastos, “Discrimination, Harassment, and Gendered Health Inequalities: Do Perceptions of Workplace Mistreatment Contribute to the Gender Gap in Self-reported Health?,” *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 59, no.2 (2018): 295.

⁸ Michelle K. Ryan, “Addressing workplace gender inequality: Using the evidence to avoid common pitfalls,” *British Journal of Social Psychology* 62 (November 2022): 2.

report experiencing both racism and sexism, and they primarily find understanding and support among other Black women.⁹

Some policies have been implemented to promote more female leaders, as findings indicate that female supervisors are less likely to have gender prejudice.¹⁰

However, meeting the “diversity quota” does not eliminate gender biases because it is more important to know the context in which women are promoted.¹¹ Many women are promoted to roles with a high risk of failure when the businesses encounter downturn or crisis. Once they fail in their positions, women are held responsible and disciplined. In 2011, Jill Abramson, *The New York Times*’ first female executive, was fired and removed from the paper’s masthead. Abramson was let go because she was deemed too “pushy” instead of “empathetic” for a female leader, as per the paper’s expectations at that time.¹² This phenomenon is referred to as a “glass cliff” and it distorts women’s representation as leaders, reinforcing stereotypes that women are not suited to leadership.¹³ The “glass cliff” shows the importance of looking beyond the numbers of women in leadership positions. Instead, tackling the system of gender inequality ingrained in our organizational frameworks and broader societal structures can truly help women succeed in the workplace.

⁹ J. Camille Hall, Joyce E. Everette, and Johnnie Hamilton- Mason, “Black women talk about workplace stress and how they cope,” *Journal of Black Studies* 43, no.2 (2012): 221.

¹⁰ Claudio Lucifora and Daria Vigani, “What if your boss is a woman? Evidence on gender discrimination at the workplace,” *Rev Econ Household* 20 (May 2021): 402.

¹¹ Michelle K. Ryan, “Addressing workplace gender inequality: Using the evidence to avoid common pitfalls,” *British Journal of Social Psychology* 62 (November 2022): 2.

¹² Amy Diehl and Leanne M. Dzubinski, *Glass Walls: shattering the six gender bias barriers still holding women back at work* (Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2023), 31.

¹³ *Ibid.*,31.