

The Cause and Impact of Gender Inequality in South Korea Workplaces

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Abstract:

As a country with a rapidly developing economy, South Korea has made remarkable achievements in many fields, but there are still many challenges when it comes to gender equality in the workplace. Gender inequality not only violates the principles of equity and justice, but also seriously hinders the overall development of society and economy. This study uses a qualitative study method to focus on gender inequality in the Korean workplace. This study finds that gender roles and stereotypes in traditional culture, the workplace culture that values seniority and hierarchy, and the limited enforcement and coverage of the legal system are one of the main factors contributing to gender inequality in South Korea. The effects of gender inequality in the Korean workplace are also multifaceted. First, it limits women's career development and economic independence, preventing them from enjoying equal treatment with men in terms of employment, promotion and pay. Second, gender inequality also exacerbates conflicts and tensions within the family, resulting in greater pressure on them to balance work and family.

Keywords: Gender inequality; South Korea; workplace.

1. Introduction

Gender inequality remains a pervasive global problem that permeates all aspects of society, including the workplace. Despite rapid economic growth and technological progress, South Korea is still grappling with a significant gender gap, especially in the labor force, where men earn up to 30 percent more than women [1,2]. This paper aims to delve into the multifaceted causes and impacts of gender inequality in South Korean workplaces, exploring the complexities that perpetuate such disparities and the far-reaching consequences they entail.

One prominent factor contributing to gender inequality

in South Korea is the deep-rooted influence of traditional gender roles and Confucian values. For instance, the case of the technology industry highlights how societal expectations can perpetuate disparities. Despite South Korea's status as a global hub for tech innovation, women are significantly underrepresented in leadership positions within the sector. A case study of a major tech company in South Korea revealed that only a fraction of its senior executives were women, reflecting a broader trend of occupational segregation and limited opportunities for advancement [3].

Another cause lies in institutional barriers and corporate practices that inadvertently reinforce gender

stereotypes. A case in point is the prevalence of inflexible work arrangements, which disproportionately affect women due to their responsibility for caregiving and domestic duties. The case of a major financial institution in Seoul, where women reported difficulties in balancing work and family commitments due to rigid working hours, underscores the need for more gender-sensitive policies [4].

Legal frameworks, too, have been criticized for their inadequacies in addressing gender inequality. While South Korea has enacted several laws aimed at promoting gender equality, such as the Gender Equality Employment Act, enforcement remains a challenge. A case study of a female employee who faced discrimination in the workplace and struggled to secure redress through legal channels exemplifies the gaps in legal protection and the need for stronger implementation mechanisms [5].

2. The Cause of Gender Inequality in South Korea Workplaces

2.1 Gender Roles and Stereotypes in Traditional Culture

Korea is deeply influenced by Confucian culture, and the concept of “male superiority over female superiority” in Confucianism has penetrated into every aspect of Korean social life, forming a kind of latent consciousness and thinking pattern. Under this concept, men are usually expected to play the role of breadwinner and protector of the family, while women are often labeled as “gentle”, “submissive”, “dependent”, etc., and are more expected to be responsible for domestic affairs and child rearing. This makes it difficult for many women to balance family and work in the workplace. Even when women choose to enter the workforce, they often have to take on more domestic responsibilities, such as caring for children and the elderly. The pressure of this dual role makes it difficult for women to fully develop their abilities in the workplace and limits their career development. These stereotypes not only limit women’s behavioral choices, but can also lead to sexism in the workplace. In the process of hiring and promotion, employers may underestimate women’s abilities and value because of stereotypes, thus giving them fewer opportunities and resources.

This division of gender roles means that men are often seen as the more competent and competitive party in the workplace, while women may face more restrictions and biases.

2.2 The Workplace Culture that Values Seniority

ty and Hierarchy

In the Korean workplace, seniority is regarded as an important criterion to evaluate the ability and value of employees. New employees, especially young women, often face more challenges and restrictions due to their junior experience. It may take them longer to gain experience and move up the ranks, and in the process, they may encounter all kinds of unfair treatment and prejudice. In addition, due to the “male-dominated” concept prevalent in Korean society, male employees tend to have more advantages in accumulating seniority [6]. They have easier access to important work assignments and projects, which can lead to faster career advancement and salary advancement. In contrast, female employees may face more restrictions and obstacles to achieving the same status and treatment as men in the workplace.

The hierarchy in the Korean workplace is also very strict, and there are clear boundaries and differences between employees of different positions and seniority. This hierarchy is not only reflected in salary and benefits, but also in job opportunities, promotion opportunities and voice. In a hierarchical workplace culture, top managers often hold more power and resources, while lower-level employees are in a relatively weak position. Because female employees tend to be at lower positions and seniority levels in the workplace, they may be more vulnerable to discrimination and exclusion by senior managers. Such discrimination and exclusion are not only reflected in job opportunities and promotion opportunities, but may also be reflected in daily work communication and interaction.

2.3 The Limited Enforcement and Coverage of the Legal System

South Korea has enacted a series of laws and regulations to promote gender equality, such as the Law on Equal Employment between Men and Women and on Supporting the Harmonious Development of Work and Family. These laws aim to eliminate gender discrimination in the workplace and protect the legal rights and interests of female employees. However, despite the existence of these laws, there are still certain limitations in their enforcement and coverage [7].

First of all, enforcement of South Korean laws is not strong enough, although the law clearly provides for the prohibition of gender discrimination, but in the actual implementation process, due to various reasons (such as limited enforcement resources, imperfect regulatory mechanisms, etc.), these laws are often difficult to be effectively enforced. This has led to some employers being able to evade the law and continue to engage in sexist practices. Secondly, South Korea’s complaint and relief

mechanisms are not smooth, and female employees often face complaints and relief mechanisms when they suffer gender discrimination. They may not know how to protect their rights and interests through legal channels, or even if a lawsuit is filed, it may be difficult to obtain a fair verdict due to insufficient evidence, complicated procedures, and other reasons. The scope of the Korean legal system is also limited, and South Korea's anti-discrimination laws may contain exemptions for certain industries and jobs. These exemptions may leave some female employees at risk of gender discrimination in certain fields. As the social and workplace environment changes, some emerging issues (such as online gender discrimination, remote work gender differences, etc.) may not yet be included in the scope of legal protection [8]. This leaves female employees without clear legal support and protection when faced with these issues.

3. The Impact of Gender Inequality in South Korea Workplaces

3.1 Limits women's career development and economic independence

Gender inequality in the workplace in South Korea poses significant limits to women's career advancement and economic independence. In the Korean workplace, women often face unequal opportunities for advancement. The traditional gender division of labor causes women to suffer prejudice and discrimination in career promotion, which makes their promotion speed and promotion opportunities much lower than that of men. According to the survey, the proportion of women in senior management positions and boards in South Korea is far lower than that of men, which directly reflects the problem of gender inequality in the workplace [9].

Women are also often limited in their career choices. Some industries and positions are considered more suitable for men, while women are steered or restricted to certain occupations that are traditionally seen as "feminine". This limitation not only affects women's career paths, but also limits their diversity and possibilities in the workplace.

In addition, workplace harassment and gender discrimination also frequently occur in the workplace. These bad behaviors not only damage women's professional reputation and mental health, but also further limit their professional development.

Gender inequality also leads to a significant pay gap between men and women in South Korea. Women are often paid less for the same jobs, making them more financially

dependent on men or their families. According to The Economist Weekly's annual Glass Ceiling Index, South Korea's gender pay gap is 35%, the largest in the OECD. This pay gap limits women's economic independence and autonomy. South Korean women also generally face pressure to have children, which often negatively affects their career and economic situation. Many women are worried that having children will affect their work and career development, so they choose to delay or abandon their childbearing plans. However, even if they choose to have children, they often face pressure from society and the workplace to return to the workforce as soon as possible after having children.

3.2 Exacerbates Conflicts and Tensions within the Family

The impact of gender inequality in the workplace in South Korea is not limited to the occupational and economic levels, but also profoundly aggravates conflicts and tensions within the family. Traditional cultures have clear expectations about the roles of men and women in the family. Men are expected to take on the role of breadwinner, while women are more expected to take on household and childcare responsibilities. However, in the case of gender inequality in the workplace, women often need to make difficult choices between career and family, which makes it difficult for them to meet the dual expectations of family and society, thus aggravating contradictions and tensions within the family [10]. Gender inequality also leads to a significant pay gap between men and women in the workplace, with women often facing higher financial pressures. When women do not receive equal pay and promotion opportunities in the workplace, they contribute relatively less economically, which can lead to more economic pressure within the family falling on men. This unequal sharing of economic pressure is likely to lead to conflicts and disputes between couples.

In South Korea, childcare is often seen as a woman's most important responsibility. However, as women's participation in the workplace has increased, so has their demand for childcare responsibilities. However, due to gender inequality in the workplace, it may be difficult for women to find a balance between career and childcare, which leads to more childcare responsibilities falling on women, and also causes more psychological stress and mental illnesses such as depression [11].

Gender inequality in the workplace also exacerbates conflicts about gender roles within the family. With the improvement of women's education level and professional ability, they have questioned and challenged the traditional concept of gender role. However, men may still cling to

traditional notions of gender roles and believe that women should take on more responsibilities at home. This conflict of ideas is easy to lead to disputes and contradictions between husband and wife.

4. Limitations

Although this study found the causes and effects of gender inequality in the workplace in South Korea, there are still some limitations. First, South Korea's cultural differences are complex. South Korea's unique Confucian culture, family values, and social structure have a profound impact on workplace gender inequality, but these factors are difficult to measure in simple metrics. Gender role stereotypes and gender biases are deeply ingrained in Korean society, and these non-explicit factors are difficult to fully capture through direct observation. As a country with profound historical and cultural tradition, South Korea's gender inequality has significant cultural characteristics. However, the existing research may lack in-depth investigation and analysis of the Korean cultural background, resulting in insufficient cultural sensitivity of the research results. This not only limits the explanatory power of research, but can also mislead policy making and practical interventions. Second, South Korea's policy implementation and effect have a lag. There is a time lag between policy formulation and implementation in South Korea, and the effect of policies often takes a long time to show, and some policies may fail to effectively alleviate gender inequality due to poor implementation or lack of supporting measures, which may lead to the inaccurate assessment of the impact of gender inequality policies in this study. Finally, the perspective of this study may have limitations. Current studies on gender inequality tend to adopt a single theoretical perspective (such as gender theory, gender role theory, etc.), which may lead to an overly one-sided understanding of gender inequality. The lack of integration and dialogue between different theoretical perspectives limits the depth and breadth of research.

5. Implications

The study of gender inequality in the workplace in South Korea not only has profound academic value, but also has important practical significance for social and economic development, policy formulation and enterprise practice in South Korea. First, this study can enrich the theoretical system of gender studies. By deeply exploring the causes and effects of gender inequality in the workplace in South Korea, this study can enrich and promote the theoretical system of gender studies and provide new perspectives and ideas for research in relevant fields. The issue of gen-

der inequality involves sociology, economics, management and other disciplines. The research also contributes to the promotion of interdisciplinary exchanges and cooperation, and promotes the integration and development of related disciplinary fields. Second, this research can promote economic growth, eliminate gender inequality in the workplace, and help women participate more fully in economic activities, improving labor productivity and economic growth potential. Gender equality is also an important sign of social progress. By studying gender inequality in the Korean workplace, targeted solutions can be proposed to promote gender equality and improve the overall level of social well-being. Finally, this study can guide the enterprise reform and provide directional guidance for the enterprise reform. By understanding the impact of gender inequality on corporate development, enterprises can adjust organizational structure, optimize human resource management strategies, and improve employees' job satisfaction and loyalty. Achieving gender equality helps companies attract and retain top talent, increase workforce diversity and innovate. This is of great significance for enterprises to maintain competitive advantage in the fierce market competition.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the examination of gender inequality in South Korea's workplaces has revealed a complex and multifaceted issue that is deeply embedded in the country's social, cultural, and economic structures. The causes of this inequality are diverse and interconnected, ranging from institutional barriers and cultural norms to individual biases and societal attitudes. Our analysis has highlighted several key factors contributing to gender inequality in the workplace, including unequal access to education and training, gender stereotypes and role expectations, lack of flexible work arrangements, and gender-based discrimination in hiring, promotion, and pay. These factors interact and reinforce each other, creating a systemic disadvantage for women in the labor market. The impacts of gender inequality in South Korea's workplaces are far-reaching and detrimental. Not only do they limit women's economic opportunities and potential, but they also hinder the country's overall economic growth and competitiveness. Furthermore, gender inequality reinforces harmful societal norms and attitudes, perpetuating a cycle of disadvantage that affects both men and women. Despite these challenges, there are also signs of progress and hope. The South Korean government has implemented a range of policies and programs aimed at improving gender equality in the workplace, including laws prohibiting discrimination, measures to increase women's engagement in leadership

roles, and support for the balance between work and personal life. Additionally, many businesses are recognizing the benefits of gender diversity and are taking steps to create more open and cooperative work environments.

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