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GENDER DISCRIMINATION IN RETAIL SHOPS' PERSONNEL: THE CASE OF GENERAL DEALER SHOPS AT MURAMBINDA GROWTH POINT, BUHERA, ZIMBABWE

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the factors that contribute to gender discrimination in retail shops, focusing on general dealer shops at Murambinda Growth point in Buhera, Zimbabwe. Despite the fact that policy makers continue to grapple with possible strategies to promote and advance progress towards equal opportunities for women, gender discrimination in retail shops still exists. Recent research also shows that workplace discrimination continues to be an impediment to gender equality. Women, who bear the disproportionate burden of the world's poverty, continue to face systematic discrimination in areas of employment, healthcare and education. This discrimination is quite significant in increasing poverty levels among women as it makes it more difficult for women to sustain livelihoods. It is from that premise that the study sought to find out why, after all the advances that have been made in women's education and in breaking the corporate glass ceiling, is the situation of women unchanging? Using the descriptive survey design, the study examined the possible limitations on female labour market participation. The study established that there are a number of factors that contribute to the discrimination of women in working environments, chief among them being patriarchy, religion, culture and socialisation. Over and above all, the study recommends that all efforts targeted at addressing gender discrimination in the workplace must take into consideration the fact that gender roles are socially constructed and they are heavily influenced by the above mentioned factors.

Keywords: Gender, Gender discrimination, Patriarchy, Retail shops, Socialisation patriarchy.

INTRODUCTION

In many countries gender based discriminatory practices have grown to be a major concern for human resource management. The gender factor has, to a large extent, and affected the way men

and women get access to certain posts in organization which has given room to the vast inequalities in the labour market. This in turn, produces and reinforces inequalities between individuals and social groups in income, living standards, power, and overall level of development. Societal beliefs, norms and values create an environment that cushions thereby perpetuating gender based discriminatory practices that manifest in the retail industry with general dealer shops being no exception. Feminists have long theorized the importance of gender discrimination in women's occupational outcomes (Reskin, 1988). Recent research has shown that workplace discrimination continues to be an impediment to gender equality (Gorman, 2005). However; few studies have explored how gender discrimination contributes to gender inequality in retail shops. This study therefore, seeks to bring us closer to this understanding by exploring women's experiences in the retail industry, focusing on general dealer shops. The study focuses on the processes that lead to unequal outcomes for men and women and goes on to uncover how discrimination unfolds in actual work settings.

Zimbabwe as a state which support, international anti discriminatory initiatives, signed and ratified international conventions and declarations that promote gender equality and equity. As a signatory, the nation of Zimbabwe is expected to come up with policies and measures that promote gender equality in all its dealings. Some of the conventions that Zimbabwe signed and ratified include ,The United Nations International Declaration of Human Rights (1948), The Convention on Economic , Social and Cultural Rights (1966) , The Convention On the Elimination of All Forms Of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, 1979), Beijing Declaration and Platform for United Nations. (1995), SADC Declaration on Gender and Development and its Addendum on the Prevention and Eradication of Violence Against United Nations. (1997), the Millennium Development Goals. (2000) and the African Union Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa (2004). In all these efforts there is an evident national commitment to the pursuance of gender equality in all spheres of development (Maruzani and Mawere, 2012).

In the process many policies were put in place to advance gender equality. After Beijing, the Gender Affirmative Action Policy of 1999 was developed, the reduction of university entry points for females in areas like law, medicine and engineering, the quota policy in politics and the National Gender Policy of 2004 are illustrative. These policies target the elimination of all negative economic and political policies, cultural and religious practices that impede equality and equity of sexes (National Gender Policy Zimbabwe., 2004). The gender policy gives government ministries and departments the mandate to design strategies that target the reduction of gender disparities in their areas of influence. In line with that, the Public Services Commission sent a circular referenced G/46/200 dated 30 April 2004 to all government ministries requesting input as to how best gender balance could be attained in their respective ministries and departments (Chibaya *et al.*, 2009). The aim of Government and its partners such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) was the achievement of a 52% female representation in Parliament and other institutions

by year 2000. However, there appears to be little impact in practice. Gender inequality and inequity persist in all sectors. To prove that inequality based on gender is alive and well in Zimbabwe, in 2004 the country was ranked 5 out of 9 selected SADC countries according to SADC Human Development Report and her gender empowerment measure was at 0.359. In 2009 it was ranked 72 out of 102 in the 2009 Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI). In 2011, the Human Development Index for Zimbabwe was at 0.376, placing the country at 173 out of 187 countries. For the Gender Inequality Index, Zimbabwe received a score of 0.583, placing the country at 118 out of 146 countries with data. In 2011, the World Economic Forum ranked Zimbabwe 88 out of 135 countries in its 2011 Global Gender Gap Report, with a score of 0.6607 where 0 represents inequality and 1 represents equality (SIGI, 2011). Although there are no legal barriers prohibiting women from participating in the public and the political spheres, the number of women in politics and decision making positions has continued to present a challenge for government and other stakeholders.

Justification

Zimbabwe gained independence as a nation in 1980. The country's recent history has been marked by political turmoil, with a rigged election in 2002 receiving international condemnation. Considerable levels of violence surrounded the 2008 election (Central Intelligence Agency, 2011). Evidence of vote tampering again led to international condemnation. The country has faced a wide range of economic problems leading to widespread poverty (Central Intelligence Agency, 2011). From these and other factors, The World Bank classifies Zimbabwe as a low income country (World Bank n.d.)

Despite the fact that Zimbabwe ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women in 1991, Article 23 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex and marital status and this Article of the constitution also provides for affirmative action to achieve substantive equality, the situation on the ground is far from this reality. The situation of women still needs attention.

Women's status in Zimbabwe has been significantly affected by the economic problems facing the country as well as the persistence of discriminatory practices. The country has introduced policy and legal measures to promote gender equality including a National Gender Policy and specific domestic violence legislation (CEDAW, 2010). Although Zimbabwe has achieved gender parity in primary school education, there remains a gender gap in secondary and tertiary education enrolments. Further, women trail behind men on measures of economic empowerment, such as labour force participation, wage equality and representation in senior positions (World Economic Forum, 2010). A key barrier to gender equality is the discrimination stemming from the dual system of law, where customary laws continue to disadvantage women, particularly in the family (Thabethe, 2009). The study focused on the retail industry because it is a known fact that the retail business is a critical ingredient in the sustainable development of developing economies. Restow

(1960) is of the view that the promotion of infant industries was one of the major drives behind the industrialization in Europe. It was also the improvement in small to medium enterprises' productivity that led to the remarkable economic growth in Asian countries. There is a growing realisation of the importance of corporations in the promotion and demotion of a country's economy. Realising the importance of a corporation's performance has made researchers to be interested in every aspect which influences the performance of any corporation (Khan *et al.*, 2012). The study focused on gender discrimination for it is one of the aspects that can ultimately affect the position of the national economy. To add to that, it is a well known fact that retail business has taken center stage in social and economic development in many nations (UNDP., 2000). In countries like China and India the retail business has led to economic expansion which in turn has led to employment creation, poverty reduction, expansion of the domestic market and widening of the tax base (Balassa, 1972). The participation of women in the retail industry is a critical pointer to the national economic status of women and a reflection of the extent to which women are benefitting from the national economic reforms (Maruzani *et al.*, 2012). **Top of Form**

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Gender Discrimination

Gender discrimination refers to the practice of granting or denying rights or privileges to a person based on their gender. This kind of discrimination leads to unfair treatment directed to individual or a group on the basis of their gender which denies them their rights, opportunities or resources (Chauraya and Mugodzwa, 2012). In some societies gender discrimination is a long standing practice and it is acceptable to both genders. Gender discrimination is closely related to gender stereotypes and sexism which often is a barrier to developing harmonious working environment. This kind of discrimination manifests in the form of sexist language, sexual harassment or

discrimination on the job. At times gender discrimination is not as overt as other violations such as sexual harassment but it affects the workers' morale especially those discriminated upon. (Bose, 2011). A recent study by US Bureau of Labour shows that women working 41 to 44 hours a week earn 84.6% of what their male counterparts do. The statistics become more dismal with increase in hours of work. Women who work more than 60 hours a week were found to earn only about 78.3% of what men in the same category earned. (Bose, 2011) Outright refusal of employment on the basis of gender is just but one of the most blatant forms of exploitation of the right of each individual to work. However the scenario is more complex than this. Many a times women are refused rights to overtime work at odd hours which maybe more rewarding than ordinary hours' work, right to maternity leave whilst on training as the case with Reserve Bank Of Zimbabwe female trainees are not allowed official maternity leave, same with female trainees with O.K. Zimbabwe. Overlooking their performance while considering employees for promotion is another type of employment discrimination that is based on gender. (Bose, 2011). This is often done on the assumption that women are not capable of handling stressful situations and tend to be emotionally influenced when it comes to taking decisions as high ranking personnel in the corporate sector (Bose, 2011).

On hiring, many firms prefer men to women employees though most often they don't divulge this attitude when they advertise for the job opening. This is mainly done in the pretext that the health care requirements and social responsibilities of a woman are different from that of a man and this is often viewed as a hurdle against her performance at workplace (Bose, 2011). However, Zimbabwean Labour Relations Act, the Equal Pay Regulations and the Sexual Discrimination Removal Act do not allow for such kind of employment discrimination. For example, a retailer may prefer to hire young married men at the expense of young married women taking into consideration the 'other' caring commitments that are expected from young mothers. This tantamounts to gender discrimination at workplace accountable to Zimbabwean laws. What fuels such sentiments is the fact that a woman's role in the society has always been as that of the caregiver in the family and a working woman does not get any leeward in this responsibility (Bose, 2011). Other than these common forms, sexual harassment has also been covered within the gamut of gender discrimination at workplace. This discrimination is harmful since it affects the economic outcomes of equally productive workers. The effect may be direct or indirect but it is a well known factor that gender discrimination is the main source of inequality in the labour market.

Population and Data Collection Procedure

Murambinda Growth Point is approximately 140 kilometers southwest of the eastern city of Mutare. It is on the highway from the town of Chivhu to Mutare. The term growth point refers to centers that have been set aside and are subsidized by government to develop as urban centers in predominantly rural settings. These centers are expected to establish urban residential areas, small to medium enterprises and light industry. This growth point was purposively selected as it is one of

the fast growing growth points earmarked for town status among other growth points such as Gokwe, Gutu Mupandawana, Ngundu and Birchnough Bridge .A sample of 50 general dealer shops was selected randomly from a population of 80 registered general dealer shops at Murambinda Growth Point in Buhera District.

Of the selected general dealer shops, owners of the shops or their representatives were purposively selected. The simple random sampling strategy was used for selecting two participants from each shop. .The study ended up with a sample of 150 participants. The consent form assured participants that they were free from any kind of harm or victimization on the job. The data for the study was collected using self administered questionnaires. To increase the return rate the researcher personally handed out the questionnaires to each individual. This generated a total of 150 usable questionnaires. The response rate was 100% since questionnaires were completed in the absence of the researcher and the researcher picked completed instrumentation the day after.

Data Presentation

Table-1. Types of general dealer shops in the study.

General dealer type	Frequency	Percentage %
Entertainment	2	4
Construction	5	10
Photography	3	6
Clothing/fashion	10	20
Catering	10	20
Farming	5	10
Engineering	5	10
Microfinance	2	4
Décor	3	6
Stationery suppliers	2	4
Arts and culture	3	6
Total	50	100

The table above shows that a variety of retail activities are taking place at Murambinda Growth point .In most rural setups retail business has been popular in clothing/fashion(20%) and catering (20%) .Retail in photography (6%), microfinance (6%) and décor (6%) which used to be popular in urban areas is also making inroads into growth points.

Table-2. Shop ownership by gender

Ownership	Frequency	Percentage
Male	40	80
Female	7	14
Joint	3	6
Total	50	100

Males own 80% compared to women who own 14% of the selected shops. In a rural set up, patriarchal tendencies that are entrenched in government administrative systems, culture and religion influence access and control of resources between males and females leading to gender imbalances in shop ownership. In a majority of cases the joint ownership may also be an indirect reference to male ownership of the enterprise.

Table-3. Employee academic qualification

Academic qualification	Number of males	Number of females
Masters degree	-	-
Higher diploma	10	-
Diploma	9	19
First degree	11	10
A” level	5	15
O” level	12	31
Below “O” level	8	20
Total	55	95

Educational attainment is closely related to gender and position held by males and females in the labour markets. Patriarchal tendencies in the Zimbabwean society tend to favour boys education. The low qualification that women possess stand as a good cause to discriminate against females which makes it difficult for them to access to high paying jobs.

Table-4. Positions held by gender

Position	Males	Females
Manager	11	5
Supervisor	20	30
Assistant	34	50
Total	65	85

In the study there were 50 women compared to 32 males in the position of assistant. As we go up the organizational hierarchy women reduce in numbers. On managerial positions there were 11 males compared to 5 females.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Findings from the study show that gender discrimination in general dealer shops exists just as it does in every workplace but it is accepted by all stakeholders as various explanations are given to justify it. This is in line with observations made by [Welle and Heilman \(2011\)](#) that women in high level positions in corporations believe that social exclusion is a barrier to women’s career investment. Socialisation and lack of education makes women to assume personal responsibility for receiving fewer organizational resources than their male counterparts which leads to the unfair treatment of women at the workplace

In the following section the study discussed responses from both females and males in an attempt to establish the reasons for gender differences in the retail business.

Female responses;

- Because of the domestic duties, I can not compete equally with men at the workplace
- The guidelines I get from my religion allow men to be in control
- It is natural for men to be leaders everywhere even at the workplace
- Most successful businesses are owned by men, so let men lead in business
- Its family business so my husband is head and the children and I are simply helpers
- The way I was brought up makes me to accept men as leaders in business

Male responses;

- Biologically women can not stand the challenges of managing an enterprise
- The issue of equality is a political move to get female votes
- Gender equity and equality can never be practical
- It is natural, men are the leaders and we have the brains

The statements above indicated that women at Murambinda are guided by patriarchal tendencies even at the workplace. The reason given by most of the women is lack of academic qualifications, domestic duties and prohibitive religious guidelines. Men maintained their patriarchal stance, they were appreciative of women when they occupy low paying jobs and men get better positions that will allow them to take care of the women and the children. The response which made reference to the way women are brought up is a clear reference to the socialisation process that girls are exposed to. Through manipulation, verbal appellations and canalization girls and boys end up in very different positions in society. This process makes the private sphere as ideal for women in comparison to men who are expected to be dominant in the public sphere. While progress against sexism over the past few decades can be commended, the sad truth is that sexism and sexual discrimination at the workplace still persist. Much of the discrimination in retail shops is related to the overcrowding model of [Bergmann \(1974\)](#) when references is made to a situation when women 'crowd' into certain occupations, which depress their wages. Most of the factors that bring in the overcrowding tendencies include gender socialization, individual decision or labour market discrimination. Gender socialisation has taught women femininity and that affects women's choices when they join the labour market. In most cases women prefer the female dominated sectors.

According to [Bergmann \(1974\)](#) model, when the demand in the female dominated sector is less than the supply of women, an overcrowded situations is created. Table 3 illustrates this phenomenon clearly. Workplace discrimination is not over but it is at times subtle that an ordinary eye may not be able to notice it. This is mainly attributed to the efforts that the nation has put in place for the achievement of gender equality and equity. Various laws and policies have been put in place and campaigns and workshops have been organized to educate everyone about those laws and policies yet discrimination in the workplace still exists. Using the information from table 3

academic qualification influence the jobs that women will do in organisations. Becker (1971) model attributes this discrimination to the longer hours that women spend on house work which lower the efforts that they put into labour market jobs compared to men. This on its own affects women's choices in the labour markets. On the other hand, on employing female employees a number of prejudices are put into consideration. Males may not be interested in introducing women to the traditionally male occupations. Women though protected by law and policy, are resisted for the purpose of maintaining the 'male' identity and the prestige of the occupation (Arkerloof and Kranton, 2000).

Stereotypes

Both prescriptive and descriptive stereotypes can undermine objective decision making within organisations. These stereotypes operate in such a way that guide often inappropriately, key organizational decisions, which further explain why we see gender inequality in the work place and why many organisations continue to struggle to create a workplace that is equally inclusive of both men and women (Welle and Heilman 2011). There are certain attributes that are associated with males and females that shape the way we view employee's skills and attitudes (Bobbitt, 2011). Men more than women are thought to harbor agentic traits, such as being decisive and task oriented (Welle and Heilman 2011). Women more so than men are thought to harbor communal attributes such as nurturance and relationship orientation (Heilman *et al.*, 1988). When the gender stereotypes of the individual fit with the gender type of the job, they are thought to have what it takes to perform well. When there is a lack of fit, negative expectations result. The individual is thought to lack the essential skills therefore expected to be less effective (Welle and Heilman 2011).

The matching process works against women and in favour of men in employment settings that potentially have the most to offer. The jobs that confer the most power are almost well compensated and to which large numbers of both men and women aspire. Organisational leadership positions for example are overwhelmingly populated by men (Catalyst., 2002), but the successful occupants of these positions are often described as classically masculine ways (Welle and Heilman 2011). The role of a manager, around the globe is viewed as more closely aligned with the characteristics ascribed to men than women (Schein, 1973). Because of the perceived lack of fit between what women are like and the traits presumed to be necessary for success at many of the most prestigious jobs and occupations, women are viewed as less favourably than their male colleagues (Welle and Heilman 2011). Stereotypes thus preclude the accurate assessment of men's and women's capabilities to do the job (Martell *et al.*, 1998). This sets the stage for bias in selection, placement and performance evaluation. These expectations provide the fuel for the disparate treatment of men and women at the workplace (Welle and Heilman 2011).

Patriarchy, Religion and Culture

Patriarchy is a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women (Walby, 1990). Patriarchy is based on the system of power relations which are hierarchical and unequal where men control women's production, reproduction and sexuality. It imposes masculinity and femininity character stereotypes in society which strengthen the iniquitous power relations between men and women (Suranjita 2000). This is evident in the study when women made reference to domestic duties and the thinking that it is natural for men to be leaders in society. Sentiments from female participants show that the ideology of motherhood restricts women's mobility in the workplace. Patriarchy works in such a way that it burdens women with responsibilities to nurture and rear children (Heywood, 2003). In the study male participants made reference to biological roles that hinder women from participating in the public sphere on equal footing with men. Patriarchy blurs the distinction between sex and gender to the assumption that all socio-economic and political distinctions between men and women are rooted in biology or anatomy (Heywood, 2003). This creates the false assumption in women that femininity is associated with powerlessness, inability and irrationality which are qualities that do not make a good leader in business. Men who possess these traits are even favoured by the social dominance theory, so they are dominant and they benefit from the disproportionate amount of negative social values imposed upon women (Sidanius and Viniegas, 2000). This makes women to benefit less from economic activities because they occupy lower level positions. In table three above fifty females compared to thirty four males are in the position of shop assistant.

There is a general association of top positions with masculine values of competition, individualism, emotional aloofness and instrumental rationality (Martin, 1984). These patriarchal values are fundamental in determining the tasks that women will do in a business enterprise. This then manifests as gender discrimination in favour of men. Practically all religions and most cultures in the world are patriarchal. This means that these institutions have biased ideas with women being relegated to a much lower levels than men. Creation stories from most religions give women as people who were created by God from men, that is, women were created as an after thought. In line with this thinking most religions have always discriminated against women and continue to do so in their teachings. In such a religious setting the choices of women in the labour market become so limited. Residents of Murambinda Growth Point have choice over Pentecostal, Mainline and White garment churches. The doctrine that women are taught in the churches finds its way into the workplace. The idea of women dependence on men, subordination and respect for males is a popular teaching that characterise these religious groups. Women are given the example of Sarah in the bible who on being called by Abraham her husband answered to him as "Lord". Men take advantage of the religious background to discriminate against women in the workplace. Religion and culture are very dynamic concepts that work together under patriarchy to disadvantage women even in the workplace

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study sought to investigate the prevalence of gender discrimination in the retail industry focusing on general dealer shops at Murambinda Growth Point in Buhera District of the Manicaland Province in Zimbabwe. The findings showed that gender discriminatory practices in the retail business are strongly associated with women's low academic and professional qualifications, their personal preferences and patriarchal prejudices that are rampant in the labor market. At the end of the day women occupy very low positions in most organisations which in turn affect their economic and societal status. Workplace gender discrimination is not only harmful to the professional growth of an individual but it also limits the growth of the business enterprise.

The study recommends that girls must be socialized and motivated to achieve more than what the society had defined as feminine. This can be done by overcoming the division of labour between home and the workplace. Women need to challenge the segregation between 'productive' labour and 'reproductive' labour in the home. Challenging this separation is also a challenge to dominant structures within the sphere of 'production' which is based on the exploitation of women's labour in the family. Women need to change their attitudes and increase their assertiveness, overcome submissiveness, learn new skills on the job and build their own confidence and ability [Martin \(1984\)](#). Using guidelines from policies like the national gender policy, organisations must put in place realistic measures to achieve gender equality and equity in their organisation. This can only be achieved through gender sensitive budgeting at all levels ([Maruzani et al., 2012](#)) Girls' education and experiences in primary socialisation must be changed to promote their skills and self esteem ([Martin, 1984](#)).

It is also recommended that government and the industry of commerce develop strong partnerships to raise awareness about the role and contribution of women and men in the economic development of the nation. All efforts targeted at addressing gender discrimination in the workplace must take into consideration the fact that gender roles are socially constructed and they are heavily influenced by societal norms, religion and socialisation among other factors. While the study is in total agreement with the fact that there is need to advance gender equality in all spheres of society, great care must be taken to include men. Further research is, however, needed to establish the challenges that third world women face in entering male dominated occupations.

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