

Chapter 5

Power and Gender: A Comparative Cross-Cultural Study of Working Women

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ABSTRACT

The chapter seeks to explore the roots of gender inequality through the personal experiences of working women in senior positions which are extracted from their stories about their families, societies, and organizations. To conduct the research, Hofstede's cultural dimensions were employed as a tool to determine the national culture which has direct influence on organizational culture which dominates the workplace and influences immensely every sphere of women's activities in the workplace. In this research, consideration is given to cultural aspects through data gathered from educated Iranian, Malay, and Turkish female employees illustrating their organizational life.

INTRODUCTION

This qualitative research seeks to study gender equality and working women in senior positions by applying cultural dimensions in assessing and comparing women's career selection in the light of the very idea of organizational culture as well as national culture. The research seeks to explore how organizational culture is influenced by the society and national culture, as well as the government's gender policies about women's status. Hofstede's cultural dimensions are employed as a tool to determine similarities and differences of national culture as well as organizational culture, as well as how culture influences women's career selection within their organizations. Apart from similarities and differences and the analysis of obstacles and barriers to the advancement of the women in the workplace, the paper discusses the unwritten rules attached to family members, people in one organization, and society as a whole together by "values", "beliefs", and "shared basic assumptions" (Schein, 1985). Moreover, it explores how national culture and organizational culture deeply influence almost every sphere of working women's personal choices.

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In this research, consideration is given to cultural aspects through data gathered from educated female employees holding senior positions, illustrating their organizational lives through their experiences and perspectives in the form of interviews. Those interviews were then transcribed and elaborated their stories about their family, society, and organization.

Finally, the paper analyzed, compared, and contrasted the ways that women in these majority Muslim countries have selected to work, change, and challenge the visible and invisible cultural and discriminatory laws and unfair gender policies that influence the organizational culture. The research questions are what major challenges do Iranian females have in common with Turkish and Malaysian? And what are the factors that constrain women's access to high managerial positions or senior levels in the workplace?

Reviewing journal articles, books, and other related reports, along with the transcripts generated by interviews, the researcher has delved into the challenges women faced in pursuing their path to managerial positions in a male-dominated traditional society. Among primary data through the stories of women collected by interviewing, some themes were generated which indicate the challenges women face in changing certain norms, customs, and discriminatory laws. Women in all these societies expected to have both their traditional roles as mothers and wives as well as responsibility toward their work, whereas in most organizations they were supposed to behave like men. This duality of roles makes them work hard to show their abilities and skills to pave the way toward their career advancement.

One of the contributions of this study to the body of knowledge is that organizational culture would be utilized in the workplaces as a tool to change obstacles which hinders the progress of the women in the context of organization. Therefore, founders of the firms, or leaders are the most important people to assist to change women's status which have pictured in this study. Similarly, by structuring a kind of values and beliefs within the frame of organizational culture they would be able to narrow the existing gender gap to some extent.

This chapter includes a brief historical overview of women's status in three Muslim countries. The methodology of this paper is a qualitative approach and data is collected by in-depth semi-structured interview. Then, the paper explores women's stories about their families, societies and organizations along with their attitudes toward the workplace. The final part deals with the discussion and findings of this research about women's status in relation to cultural influence. Similarly, the research indicates the significance of findings that the lack of government policies allows gender inequality to grow wider, as well as some cultural issues. Therefore, a new plan is required to advance women career toward senior positions; also, government policies together with constructing efficient organizational culture are required to eliminate the existing gender gaps.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In the last two decades the world has witnessed more gender equality in the workplace than ever due to greater awareness of reducing poverty and boosting economic development by female participation in the workforce. Today, the number of women participating both in education and work is higher than ever, however global reports reveal that despite the fact that tremendous efforts have been made and implemented by governments and employers to narrow the gender gap in the workplace, there remain considerable room for improvement both globally and regionally (International Labor Organization [ILO], 2017).

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