

Gender Discrimination in Real Hiring Process

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Abstract: This study investigates the prevalence of gender discrimination in the recruitment process in the real world. The main objective of this study is to determine the existence and extent of gender bias against females in the recruitment process, especially when compared to males. Through a field experiment, this study analyzed the application results collected from 100 fictitious male and female employee resumes submitted to 50 real estate companies in Shanghai. The presence and degree of gender discrimination were determined by comparing the application results of different resumes. Particular attention was paid to the feedback received by virtual women who indicated family intentions in their resumes. Through rigorous analysis, it was determined that female employees, especially those who indicated family plans, received significantly fewer responses than male applicants, regardless of whether the male applicants indicated family plans. Based on these findings, it is clear that gender disparities are evident during the hiring process in basic-level positions such as those in the real estate industry. These results highlight the need to ensure equal opportunities and equity for female employees in the recruitment process.

Keywords: Gender discrimination, Hiring process, Real Estates Company, Women at Work

1. Introduction

In today's dynamic and rapidly evolving world, where information and media are integral to daily lives, the term "gender discrimination" has risen to prominence. Gender discrimination refers to the unfair treatments and denial of rights based on gender, stemming from societal expectations and predefined gender roles, resulting in unequal treatment in various facets of life [1]. With the widespread information, women have increasingly utilized social media platforms to voice their concerns, protest social inequalities, and advocate for women's rights. The principal goal is to create a society where men and women can enjoy equal opportunities, rights, and responsibilities. Gender equality is achieved when both genders are able to exert power and influence on equal terms. However, despite concerted efforts, the gender gap persists across the globe. Despite remarkable progress in certain areas, no country—regardless of its wealth or poverty—has achieved true gender equality. Women and girls often encounter discrimination in areas such as healthcare, education, family dynamics, and the labor market, which severely impedes their freedom. Among these challenges, workplace gender discrimination stands out as particularly significant. According to the reports from the BLS (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics), over the past decade, more than 50 percent of women have participated in the labor force, and around 85 percent of them will become mothers during their careers [2]. Even with the presence of laws aimed at ending gender discrimination [3], thousands of

women employees continue to face discrimination every year, particularly in relation to their pregnancies [4]. This issue is especially prevalent in low-paying jobs, where women employees are often discriminated against due to their plans to have children. “It was the worst thing I have ever experienced in my life,” shared Ms. Hayes, a female victim of such discrimination [5]. A recent investigation by the International Labor Organization revealed that the global employment rate for women is approximately 47 percent. In comparison, men’s employment rate is 72 percent, highlighting a huge gap of 25 percent [6]. This disparity raises moral concerns, as the freedom to work with dignity, protection, and fairness is crucial to human welfare. Ensuring that women have access to this fundamental right is an important objective. From an economic perspective, reducing gender gaps in labor force participation can significantly enhance worldwide GDP [6]. Regions with the widest gender gaps can witness massive economic growth. In contrast, many developed countries can witness an overall increase in their annual GDP—a particularly significant outcome during periods of stagnant economic growth [6].

The question arises: Why does gender discrimination in the workplace matter? Why should people start to reckon with this problem? First, to first, gender equality can contribute to economic development. It is suggested that sustainable economic improvement relies on eliminating discrimination against women and providing equal access to education and employment opportunities [7]. Additionally, gender discrimination against women employees with birth plans often forces the mothers to be in an extreme situation, which is to not have a baby or to not get employed. This predicament places an unfair burden on women, compelling them to choose between personal aspirations and family life. Furthermore, even if pregnant employees manage to secure employment, research indicates that many employees refuse to make even minor accommodations, such as allowing them to rest more during their pregnancies. In instances where employees do not admit it, they would risk termination. Consequently, pregnant employees may neglect their This may cause the pregnant workers to ignore their own physical needs and continue to work under challenging conditions, potentially leading to negative health outcomes [8].

This study investigates whether women are subject to gender discrimination in the labor market due to their family plans. To achieve this objective, a field experiment was designed, creating fictitious resumes for male and female candidates, with some indicating recent family intentions and others not. These resumes were then dispatched to various Real Estate companies in Shanghai. Feedback received was analyzed to determine if female employees face greater discrimination for expressing family plans compared to their male counterparts. The significance of this research lies in its potential to unearth persistent gender inequalities within society.

Recognizing a problem is the initial step towards resolution, ensuring remedies are appropriately targeted. This research aims to initiate the steps required to eliminate workplace gender disparity, fostering a more equitable society. It is a fundamental belief that women, as a collective, should receive equal workplace rights as men.

2. Method

2.1. Procedure

The experiment was conducted as a field study instead of online tests. This is because online tests might not capture the nuances of real-world hiring processes. Online environments allow participants to craft responses aimed at self-presentation rather than expressing authentic sentiments. For instance, participants might be inclined to mask discriminatory tendencies to appear unbiased. In contrast, real-life settings might reveal more candid behaviors since it is harder for them to hide their real feelings and actions. To ensure this authenticity, it was paramount that participants were unaware they were part of a study to prevent any performance biases.

The study focused on real estate sales roles. This profession was selected because it's perceived as an entry-level job that the general populace doesn't typically associate with gender biases. Professions with known gender discrimination preconceptions, such as construction work, were excluded. The research was conducted in Shanghai, China, chosen for its abundance of real estate companies.

The approach involved distributing 100 resumes for fictitious workers - half for women and half for men. A unique element was introduced in each resume: a section highlighting the applicant's family planning intentions within the next five years. This inclusion aimed to assess if prospective family plans influenced hiring decisions. While recognizing that this addition might make a resume appear somewhat artificial, it was deemed necessary for its directness in conveying the desired information to HR personnel.

To control for other potential confounding variables, an effort was made to standardize the basic information across all resumes. All candidates were portrayed as fresh graduates aged between 23 and 25. Heights were standardized with women between 155cm to 175cm and men between 165cm to 185cm. This normalization aimed to minimize potential biases based on height and age. Every candidate's educational background was a college degree, and all were single without children. To prevent the resumes from appearing conspicuously similar, two distinct resumes were sent to each of the 50 real estate companies in Shanghai. This strategy aimed to preserve the integrity and validity of the experimental setup.

3. Measurement

Days after the resumes were dispatched, feedback started arriving from the companies regarding the candidates' employment status. Subsequently, the number of callbacks for male and female candidates was analyzed. If more men received callbacks than women, it could indicate a potential gender bias in the hiring processes of Shanghai's real estate firms. Furthermore, to validate the hypothesis regarding the impact of family planning on employment opportunities, feedback from female employees was categorized based on the presence or absence of a family plan statement. The number of callbacks for women who desire a family was compared to those who didn't. If the number of callbacks for women without a family plan exceeds those for women with a family plan, it suggests that gender discrimination related to fertility exists during the hiring process of real estate companies in China and vice versa.

4. Results

The primary hypothesis posited that, among all resumes dispatched, male candidates would receive a higher call-back rate than female candidates. The results aligned with this hypothesis, showing male candidates receiving 40 call-backs while female candidates received 34. This suggests a presence of gender discrimination in the hiring process. The secondary hypothesis suggested that female candidates who indicated no family planning in recent years would have a higher call-back rate than those who did not. The data supported this, revealing that resumes highlighting no recent family planning intentions received more call-backs, pointing to discrimination against fertility in the labor market. When considering the 50 resumes from male candidates, those indicating no family planning in recent years also had more call-backs, further evidencing fertility-based discrimination. However, when juxtaposed against the pronounced fertility discrimination faced by women, it becomes evident that men are less impacted by family planning indications. The findings suggest pronounced gender and fertility discrimination in the hiring practices of Real estate companies in Shanghai.

5. Conclusion

First, it was hypothesized that a primary reason human resources (HR) departments may hesitate to hire female candidates with family plans is linked to maternity leave [2]. During pregnancy, many women opt for maternity leave, which can be extended, potentially disrupting the workflow and slowing progress within the company. Moreover, legal stipulations mandate companies to continue providing pay to employees on maternity leave despite not actively working during this period, resulting in no immediate productivity benefit to the company [9]. Conversely, female employees not intending to have children within the next five years might offer more consistent work commitment, eliminating potential breaks for maternity leave. Given these factors, from a perspective of maximizing company productivity and income, it appears reasonable for HR to prefer female candidates without immediate family plans.

Secondly, the study indicates that women with children or those during pregnancy often experience heightened feelings of anxiety and irritability [10]. Such moods can sometimes permeate the workplace, potentially slowing work progress and even affecting colleagues. In contrast, women without children or those not planning on having children tend to maintain a more stable mood, allowing for concentrated focus on tasks. Moreover, research indicates that approximately 43 percent of women depart from their jobs post-childbirth, primarily due to child-rearing responsibilities [11].

The last interpretation suggests that societal norms may influence perceptions of women as less capable of performing tasks than men. Historically, societal roles have designated men as breadwinners and women as caregivers, leading to the belief that women might be less competent in labor-intensive roles. Such biases could prevent women employees from being given opportunities to prove their capabilities [12]. An explanation for why men indicating a family plan are less affected than women might be that men typically do not take extended paternity leave. Statistically, they are less likely than women to take days off after childbirth. Research indicates, “The average time university-educated moms spend with their children is 120 minutes daily in America. The average amount of time university-educated dads spend with their children is just 85 minutes a day”, suggesting that men often continue working even after becoming fathers, potentially offering more consistent profit for employers [3]. Additionally, there’s a trend showing men often become parents later in life. A Stanford University report notes that “the average age of fatherhood has increased by three-and-a-half years in the past 44 years, up to 30.9 years from 27.4 years old [13].” Hence, HR personnel might implicitly assume that younger male candidates are less likely to have immediate family plans, even if not explicitly mentioned on their resumes.

How can one actively combat gender discrimination in the workplace and advocate for women’s equal rights? Jes Osrow, the Co-Founder and COO (chief operating officer) of The Rise Journey, offered insight: “Gender discrimination will continue to happen without ongoing work to build policies, practices, and legal repercussions for when it does happen. Without an ongoing collaborative presence by all women (not just some women), rights in the workplace will be repressed. This isn’t just about the discrimination we can see, but also about what we feel, what pressures us to quit our jobs when pandemics or other world and economic issues arise. It is about taking a holistic view of discrimination and oppression in the workplace.” [14].

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