

Promoting Gender Equity in the Workspace: An Analysis of Gender Disparity, Societal Support and Systematic Solutions

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Abstract: Gender equity is a long-standing global goal within the workplace, yet disparity persists, particularly in terms of pay gap. This research aims to comprehensively analyze gender disparities in the US workplace. Despite the progress in granting women rights in other areas, such as voting rights, a significant wage gap still shows the ongoing gender disparity in the workplace. Through literature review, data collection and analysis on the current circumstances of wage gap in the US workplace, we identified several significant factors that could lead to further disparity, explored potential role of social discrimination behind these observations, and ultimately outlined a more systematic approach to addressing the prevailing gender inequality. By implementing these solutions, the gender disparity within the workplace can be substantially reduced.

Keywords: Gender equity, Workplace disparity, Pay gap, Mine industry

1. Introduction

Gender equity has emerged as a prominent global objective over the last century. It encompasses the belief that men and women should have equal rights and opportunities across diverse domains without being subjected to gender stereotypes or discriminatory bias. Embracing this value will foster a more inclusive society where all genders are unhindered in their pursuit of societal participation and career development. However, there is still room for improvement to make this a reality. For example, based on the evidence of the gender pay gap of 2017, women engaged in full-time and year-round jobs received 80% of what their male counterparts were paid on average, indicative of a 20 percent wage disparity [1].

In this article, an extensive investigation into the realm of gender equity is conducted, identifying multiple concerns through the multifaceted lenses of economics, social dynamics, and cultural influences. Initially, by examining various economic factors, including the pay gap, promotion disparities, and traditional gender roles, we elucidate the gender inequalities women face in the workplace. Subsequent in-depth investigations into women's situation in society and cultural contexts further unveil the challenges that women are facing. Moreover, a case study focusing on women's role within the mining industry offers a glimpse into women's circumstances in traditionally male-dominated sectors. To conclude, the paper summarizes the current issues and challenges women face in the workplace and proposes systematic solutions to address these issues and improve the conditions for female workers.

2. Quantitative Overview of Gender Disparity

Since 1960, the gender pay gap has been steadily decreasing due to higher participation of women in education and the workforce, along with a slowdown in men's wage increase [2]. After 2000, however, this trend began to slow down due to the emergence of more subtle and unnoticed barriers in society. Now, the overall situation of gender disparity in wages remains stagnant across diverse industries [3]. On a positive note, women have been playing more pivotal roles in the family than before, not only because of changes in family structure but also the increasing dependency on women's wages [1]. As more women become the primary income source in the family, there is a higher chance for them to remain in the workplace during adverse economic environments.

The gender pay gap serves as an indicator of women's economic standing. With a smaller gender pay gap, economic development could be promoted by encouraging more female workers to join the workforce. With more equality in the workplace, there can be a higher work participation rate, drawing more women into the workforce. Lower gender disparity can also increase economic activities: some women will be more engaged and committed to the work, which can boost overall workplace productivity; closing the wage gap will also allow women, who are significant consumers in most economies, to purchase more. This, in turn, amplifies overall demand and fosters business growth.

Many factors contribute to the change in the gender pay gap, which highly correlates with gender disparity. We will examine some significant ones below.

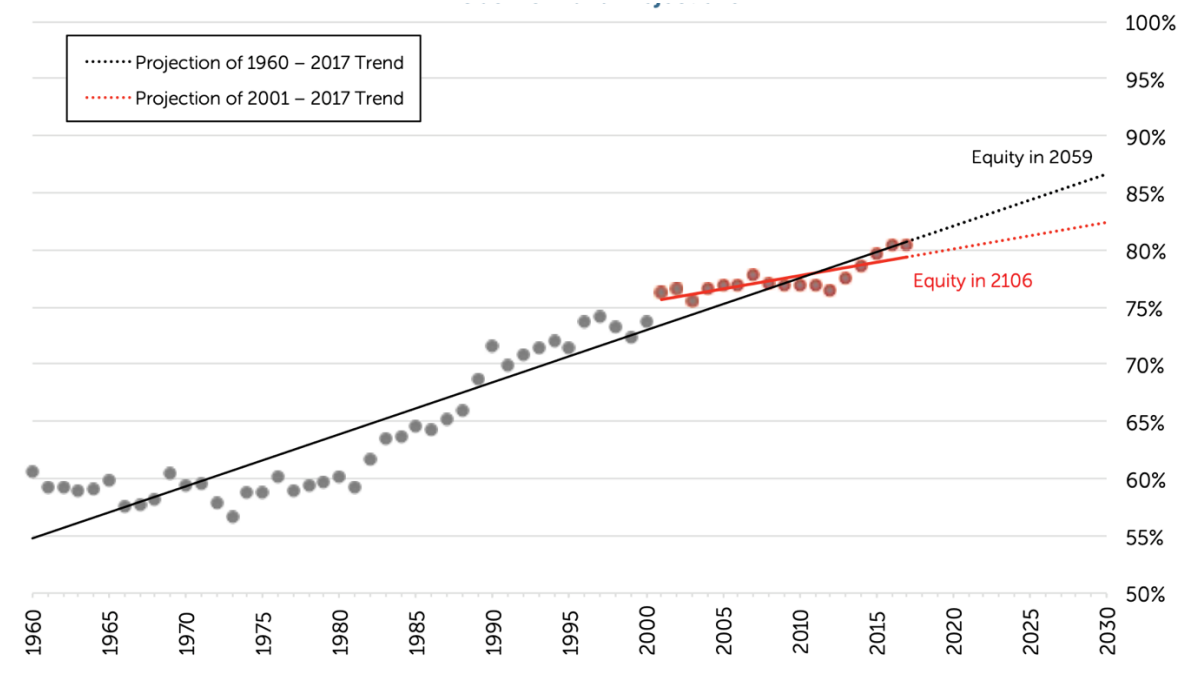


Figure 1: Women's Median Annual Full-time Year Round Earnings as a Percentage of Men's from 1960 to 2017 and Projections [1].

2.1. Demographics

By revealing the pay gap via three demographic perspectives, including race, age, and disability, this study highlights the persistent disparities within our society.

Across all demographic backgrounds, females consistently have experienced the challenges posed by the gender pay gap. Within the same ethnic group, despite receiving comparable treatment from

their families, and schools, and sharing similar social backgrounds, women find themselves consistently seeing lower pay levels compared to their male peers, ranging from 9% to 22%. Notably, white individuals, not Hispanic or Latino, experience the most pronounced gender pay gap, reaching 22% in 2019 among six ethnic groups, as shown in Figure 2. This disparity has remained unchanged since 2017. Due to the high inequality of annual earnings between women and men, women often find it difficult to pursue financial independence and perpetuate reliance on men. This dynamic is particularly accentuated in traditional Asian cultures: women often lose their agency in the family and are forced to quit their jobs upon the arrival of a new birth or sickness of elderlies. In such scenarios, gender inequality will become increasingly problematic.

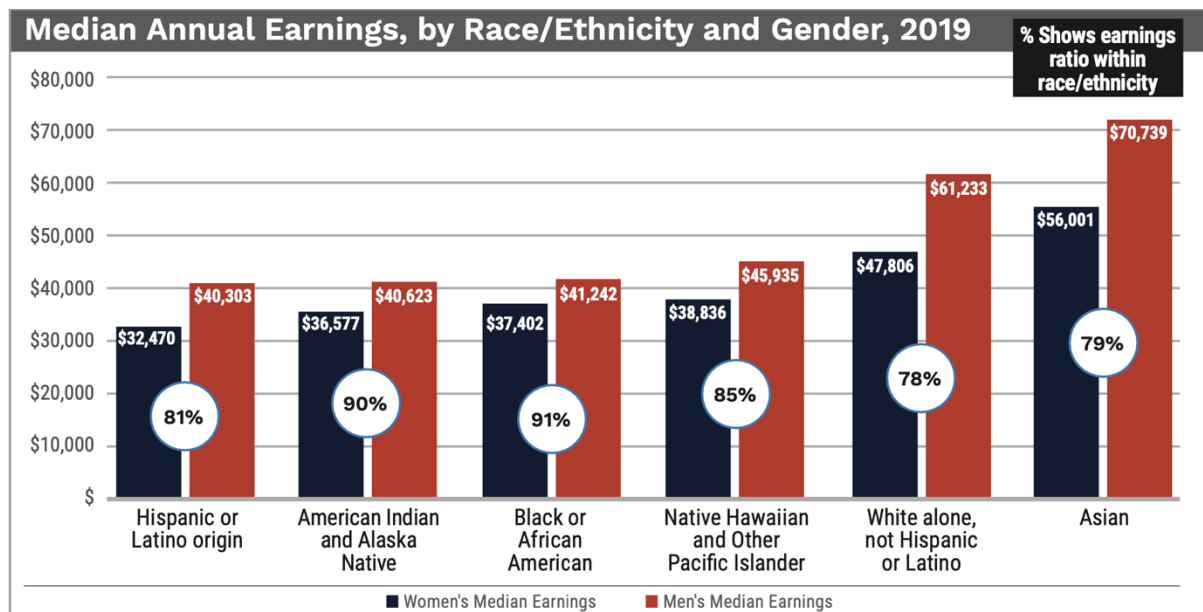


Figure 2: Median Annual Earnings by Race/Ethnicity and Gender in 2019 [4].

Examining from the perspective of age reveals similar pattern. Across different age buckets, the inequality in pay gaps worsens as the age increases. Figure 3 depicts the median weekly earnings by gender and age in 2017. It reveals a consistent trend of decreasing percentages of women's earnings compared to men's, indicating a widening gender gap. Among these full-time workers, the wage increases as their age increases before reaching 65 years old. It is also worth noting that, there is a more significant increase in men's wages compared to women's after age 35.

Consequently, a greater pay gap exists between women and men, further exacerbating workplace gender inequality. This issue can be ascribed to the evolution of women's roles concomitant with aging. After marriage and childbirth, most women shift their attention to family and other responsibilities. This reduces their possibility of promotion and career advancement. Even for some who can balance personal life and work equally, there is still a significant uncertainty of either leaving the workspace or going to positions that offer more flexible working hours. Inadequate social support can be part of the reason. For example, the yearly cost of attending a daycare center ranged from \$7,461 to \$15,417, placing a considerable burden on families [5]. Conversely, if the female stays home, the cost of having infant care will be saved along with other costs, including house cleaning, taking care of family members, or attending family-related events, which makes more sense to a lot of families. In summation, there is a pay gap within different age groups, which worsens in high-age groups.

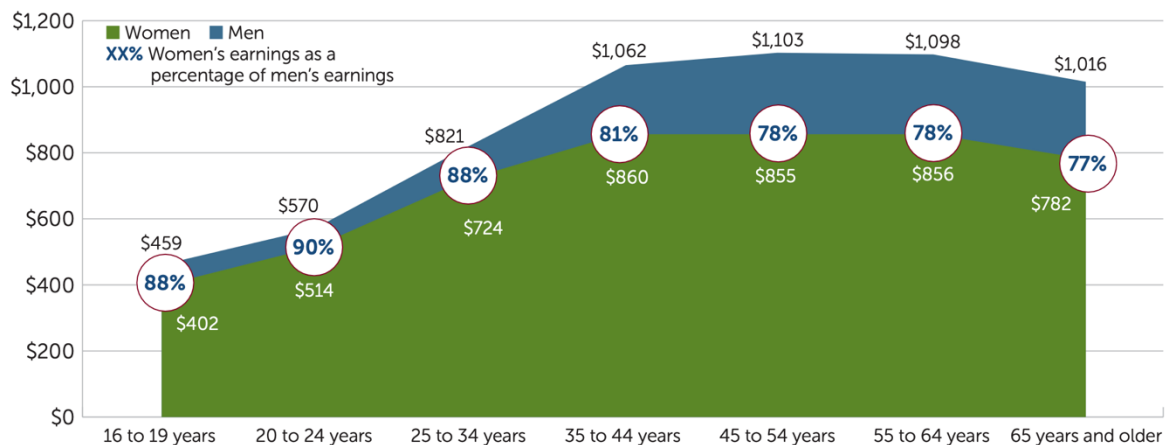


Figure 3: Median Weekly Earnings by Gender and Age in 2017 [1]

In addition to the broader gender pay gap, disparities pervade within subgroups, such as gay men, lesbians, and bisexual workers. These individuals face varying levels of discrimination, affecting their income and benefits. Specifically, straight men earn more compared to gay men; lesbians earn less compared to straight women [6]. Beyond wages, some within these subgroups may also be in a disadvantageous position compared to the straight men, such as losing the "fatherhood bonus." Besides, based on the fact that lesbians tend to avoid the "motherhood penalty" due to a lower likelihood of having children [1], there is a high possibility of discrimination and avoidance of women who wish to have children. In summary, people's income varies with their gender identity and sexual orientation, which highly violates people's right and create inequality.

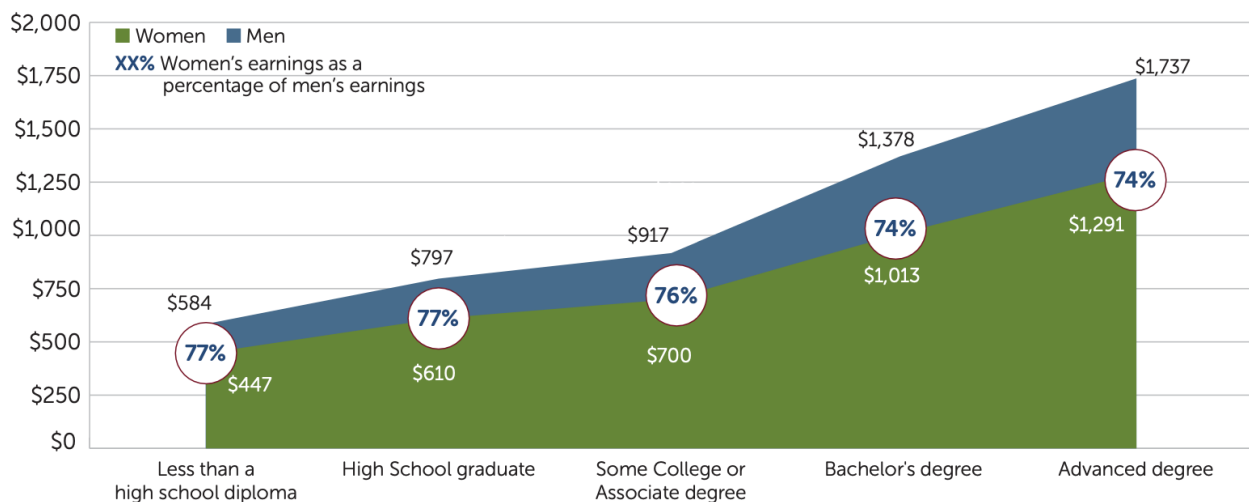


Figure 4: Median Weekly Earnings by Level of Education and Gender in 2017 [1]

2.2. Education

As expected, higher levels of education generally lead to higher incomes. For instance, workers aged 25 with a high school diploma earn 25% more than those without one [7]. In contrast, Figure 4 reveals an unsettling trend: as education levels increase, the gender wage gap widens. There is a 23% difference between men's wages and women's wages for full-time workers with and less than a high school diploma. As they earn a higher or better degree, the difference in wage starts to increase from

23% to 26%. In other words, even with the same educational backgrounds, women consistently earn less than their male counterparts, emphasizing the systematic nature of workplace inequality.

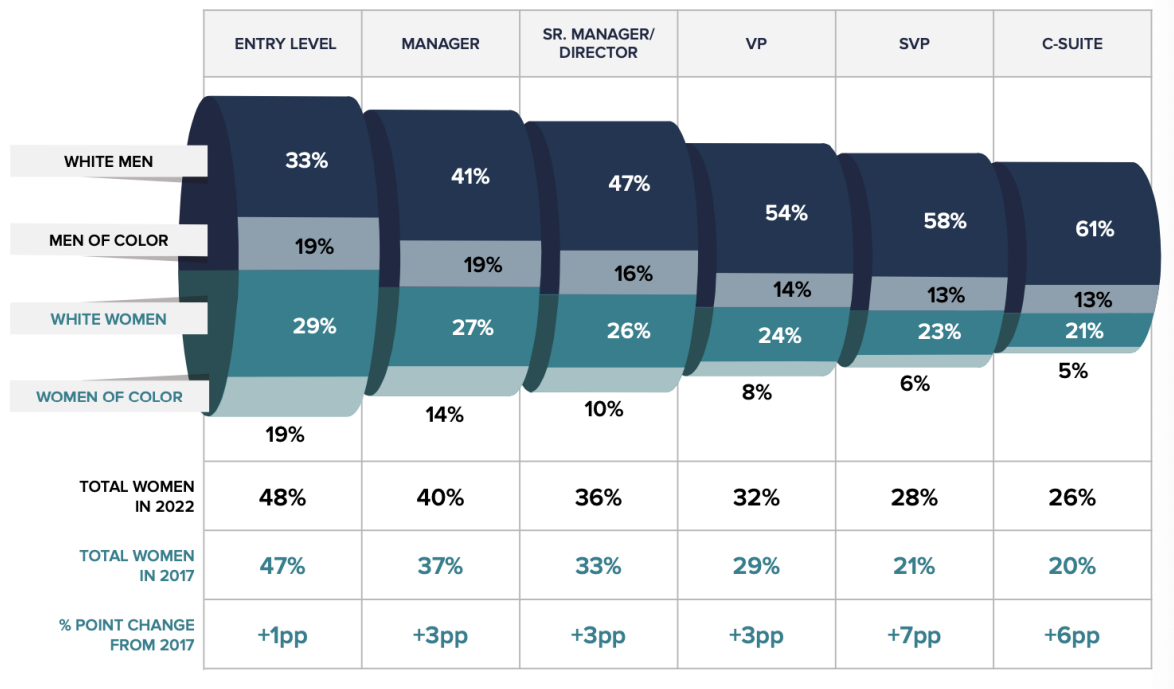


Figure 5: Positions in Corporate pipeline by gender and race [1]

In the workplace, the ratio of women decreases as they move up the corporate hierarchy due to a high quitting rate after the senior manager/director level, and this could have a profound, long-term impact. As stated, there is a strong correlation between education and job positions and between positions and earnings. With a higher education, women can obtain a higher position in the company, leading them to earn higher. Increased earnings, in turn, afford them elevated living standards and pay off their college loan sooner. However, a persistent issue remains: women earn less than men in equivalent positions with similar educational backgrounds. If women with a college degree have college loans and make 26% less than their male peers with similar backgrounds, women will need to take longer to pay back the loans. Also, their chances of being promoted to senior positions are also slimmer, according to Figure 5. In the long run, they will gain independence or provide better education to their children later. This can trap women and their children in this cycle, as shown in Figure 6. Even though some can overcome these challenges, there is still a pay gap for those in higher positions. The situation will be even worse for women of color, which decreased from 19% in entry-level to only 5% in the C suite. In comparison, men of color are only reduced by 6% in Figure 5.

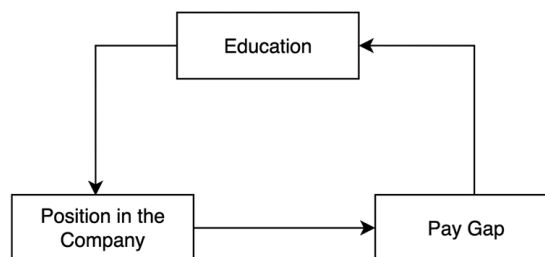


Figure 6: Inequality gender trap (drawn by the author)

3. The Role of Social Discrimination and Expectations

Social discrimination, as another important factor, contributes to the pay gap. In earlier times, women were primarily employed in low-paying jobs such as teachers and nurses, resulting in a low proportion of women participating in the workforce. Now, the percentage of women's participation in the workforce is 56.8 percent in 2022 nationwide [8]. Profoundly speaking, there has been a tremendous increase in women's participation in jobs. Nevertheless, despite this significant surge in women's participation in the job market, a substantial wage gap persists, and there continues to be a scarcity of women in leadership roles in the business world. What is behind this problem seems to be the social discrimination towards women.

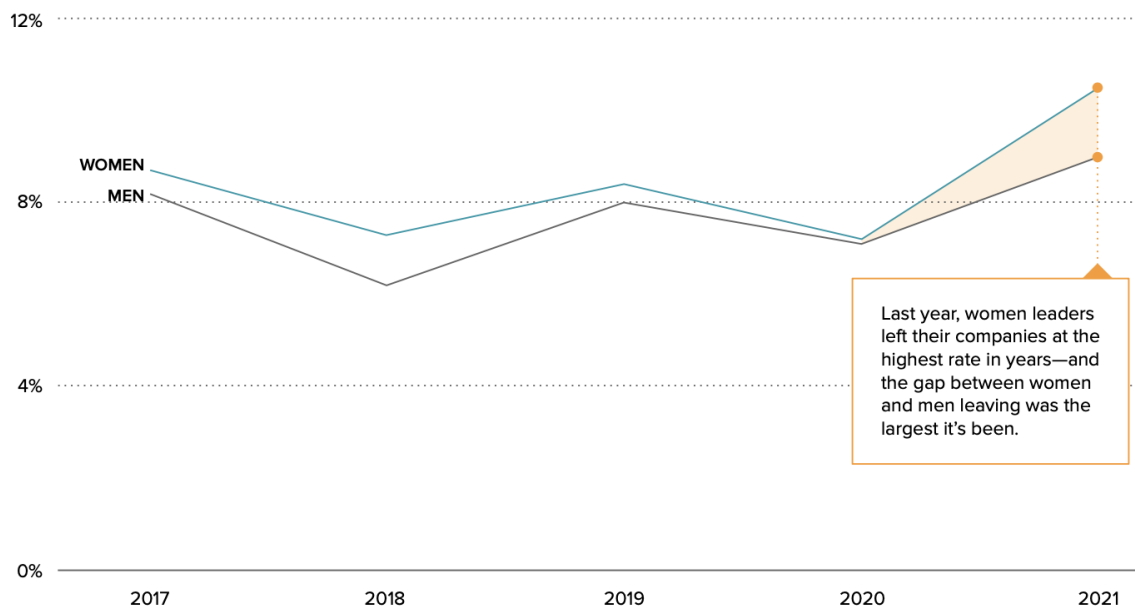


Figure 7: Leaders Leaving the Companies by Gender from 2017 to 2021[9]

Figure 5 illustrates a stark reality: a significantly lower number of women occupy C-suite positions compared to men. Additionally, this figure highlights a substantial decrease in the percentage of women in higher positions relative to men, indicating a higher rate of women leaving their jobs as their career progress. This trend of women leaders exiting their roles at a higher rate than men reached its peak in 2021, as shown in Figure 7. One major factor for this data is that women face more formidable challenges than men [9]. This is particularly evident in the promotion, where only 87 women and 82 women of color are promoted for every 100 men promoted [9]. This is a very depressing fact. In addition, in the workplace, women leaders often face more unfriendly environment than men. For example, 37% of the women leaders experienced a colleague receiving recognition for their idea, which is 10% higher than male leaders [9]. Women are also 12% more likely to be burned out than men. With more challenges and obstacles, women have less chance to show their ability and be promoted. Consequently, they are more likely to exit the workforce than their male counterparts. With the consideration of race, women of color, especially black women, face more challenges than others.

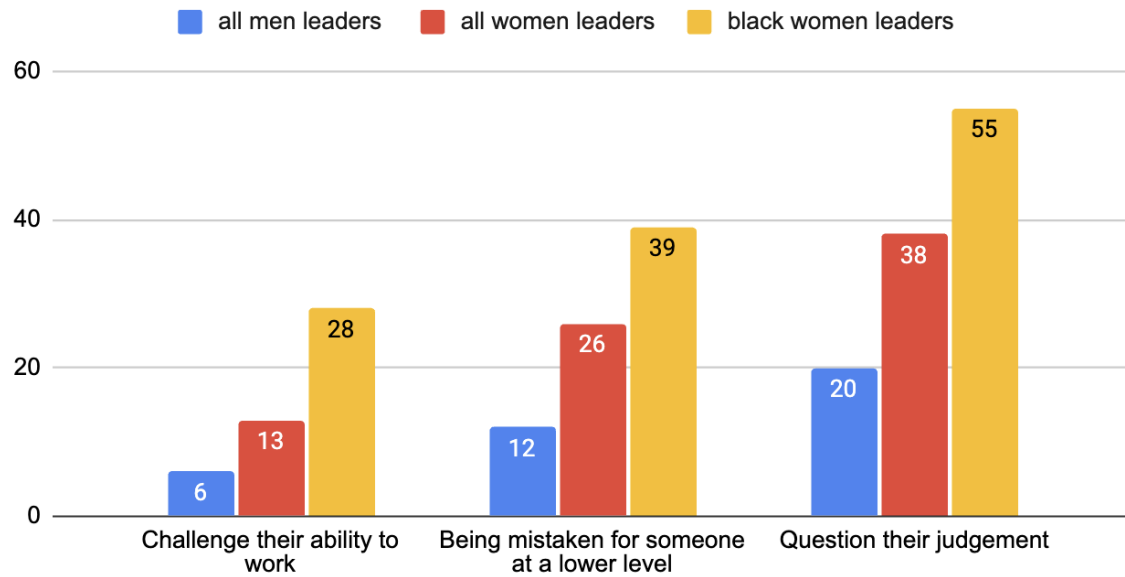


Figure 8: Percentage of leaders who experienced microaggressions by type and race in 2021[9]

4. Systematic Disadvantages in the Workplace: Case Study in Mining Industry

In the US mining industry, where women are underrepresented, female workers only comprise 8% to 17% of the total workforce [8]. Similar to other industries, women receive limited chances and opportunities for promotions and career growth [8]. As a result, they are more likely to leave the workplace compared to men due to the presence of barriers and constraints. Besides, in most countries, the law explicitly prohibits women from working in the field of underground mining, potentially because of women's physical working ability, and hazardous nature of work. Besides, due to superstitions and cultural reasons, women are not encouraged to do underground work. In the long run, this has reinforced the perception of miners as exclusively male, deepening this stereotype in both culture and society. These stereotypes and biases place additional pressures on women and contribute to their higher attrition rates from the workplace. Consequently, the mining industry increasingly employs patriarchal language and terminology when referring to miners.

As previously mentioned, there are fewer women in managerial positions in the mining industry, a pattern consistent with other sectors [8]. Approximately 44% of women leave the industry at the entry level due to limited opportunities for promotion and a lack of gender equality. Additionally, family responsibilities, such as childcare, contribute to women leaving the workplace. Therefore, it is essential to promote women into more senior roles actively.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, with literature review and data collections on the current circumstance of inequality in the US workplace, there is a significant inequality between gender in workplace. To address the gender inequality, a few possible solutions are recommended.

5.1. Family Friendly Policies

Since one of the main reasons for women to leave the workplace, as stated, is family responsibility, a policy that can help to balance their work and family will promote more equity of gender in the

workplace. Reducing family pressures for women will make them less likely to sacrifice their jobs for their families or vice versa.

One primary service the policy should include is childcare benefits. One of the essential benefits that should all be given is maternity leave for both parents. When an employee needs to give birth, a significant amount days of maternity leave should be given without reducing other benefits or opportunities for promotion. This maternity leave should be given to men, women, and LGBT groups. Another promise the employer should make is that they cannot discharge anyone who is pregnant without any appropriate reasons. Offering subsidy by the government to the company to support the childcare benefits would be another option.

Considering companies' financial resources, some childcare benefits should be provided if this company is large or considered an oligopoly. One service that should be provided is daycare centers. Some large companies, including Google, Apple, etc., offer daycare centers free or at a very low cost on their main site to reduce employers' pressure on caring for babies. For example, In Mountain View, Google has four daycare centers [10]. With these daycare centers, parents can balance their work and family. Besides, they can also reduce the cost of daycare, which reduces the possibility of women leaving the workplace. With affordable cost of daycare centers, women do not need to sacrifice their jobs to take care of their babies. The leaving rate for women would be reduced. In addition, these companies can provide subsidies to these families when a new baby is coming. With this subsidy, these families will have less pressure to give birth and use this money to send their children to daycare or childcare services. As a result, they can balance their time with work and family. Mothers' Rooms can also be provided for some middle and large companies. With such a policy, more respect is given to mothers. By supporting mothers mentally, mothers will be more likely to stay at work, especially under high pressure.

5.2. Connecting with NGOs

Employers could also connect with NGOs to provide technical support to women. These large companies should be required to cooperate with these NGOs that work on gender equity in the workplace. During this process, these large companies can donate money to these NGOs, which can be further used to raise societal awareness. Also, these NGOs can provide training courses to the companies to educate them about gender equity and the application of this. In these training courses, lessons on women's roles, ways to respect women, and ways to provide gender equality in workplace. With this kind of training course, people are educated to know how to respect women and treat them the same as all other genders. Besides, the awareness of gender equity will be raised, which can be a chance to provide equal opportunities to women during promotion or career growth. A few suggested NGOs include WiM, UNDP, IWIM and etc [11]. This is a win-win situation for the companies and NGOs. If the company provides funds to these NGOs, they will have a very positive reputation towards the public, which will promote their market power and their influence on the market. For NGOs, they can make use of these funds in their research and other services.

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