

# Empowering Women: Working Towards Equality in the Workplace



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**W**omen today play a more significant role in the developed world. With an increase in the number of women in leadership positions, the corporate world has greatly benefitted as this has been shown to increase organisational effectiveness. It is estimated that when companies have three or more women in senior management positions, they score higher in all dimensions of organisational effectiveness.<sup>1</sup>

In March 2013, the Chief Executive Officer of Facebook, Sheryl Sandberg, preached her gospel of "leaning in" to female lawmakers in California, saying that having more women in the government was the key to advancing gender equality.<sup>2</sup> In her first published book, *Lean In: Women, Work And The Will To Lead*, she looked at the death of women leaders in the corporate world. She said true equality was long overdue and that this could only be achieved if women rose to the top positions in every government and every industry. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (1985-2012), there was a gradual increase in the percentage of women employed in selected occupations, such as pharmacists, financial and purchasing managers, lawyers, architects, engineers and economists.<sup>3</sup>

Gender Equality is a "hot" topic in the market as people challenge the availability of seats for women in managerial and leadership position. This paper will discuss gender equality at the workplace and how we can work together to achieve this.

The results of a survey recently released by Elephant In The Valley<sup>4</sup> grabbed the headlines with its shocking numbers:

- 60% of women in Tech reported unwanted sexual advances and 1 in 3 feared for their personal safety because of work-related circumstances.

- 60% who reported sexual harassment were dissatisfied with the course of action taken.
- 66% of women felt excluded from key social or networking opportunities because of their gender.
- 87% of women experienced demeaning comments from the male colleagues.

We wonder why this is still happening as there are many articles on the importance of women speaking up. It is so easy to feel angry at the statistics. To help the younger generation be more socially evolved, we have to work together to achieve gender equality.

What is Gender Equality? According to the Cambridge Business English Dictionary, "Gender Equality does not imply that women and men are the same, but rather that they have equal value and should be accorded equal treatment".<sup>5</sup> In the context defined by Wikipedia, "Gender Equality is the view that both men and women should receive equal treatment and not be discriminated against based on their gender".

Women and men should not only be given equal access to resources and equal opportunities, but they should also benefit from this equality. Both genders should be free to develop their personal abilities and to make choices without the limitations set by stereotyping, rigid gender roles and prejudices. Gender equality means that the different behaviour, aspirations and needs of women and men

<sup>1</sup> McKinsey & Company, Women Matter 2014. "GCC Women in Leadership - From The First To The Norm." pg.6.

<sup>2</sup> Melanie Mason. "Sheryl Sandberg brings 'Lean In' message to California's women lawmakers." *Los Angeles Times*, (21st August 2013) Web 28th March 2016 < <http://articles.latimes.com/2013/aug/21/local/la-me-pc-sheryl-sandberg-women-courus-20130821> >

<sup>3</sup> Current Population Survey, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. <[https://www.dol.gov/web/stats/Women\\_Percentage\\_total\\_occupations\\_85\\_12\\_pathm](https://www.dol.gov/web/stats/Women_Percentage_total_occupations_85_12_pathm)>

<sup>4</sup> Elephant in the Valley was a collaborative effort between seven women in Silicon Valley with backgrounds including Venture Capital, Academia, Entrepreneurship, Product Marketing and Marketing Research. It collects feedbacks via online survey. <http://elephantinthevalley.com/>

<sup>5</sup> Cambridge Dictionary Online. <<http://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/gender-equality>>

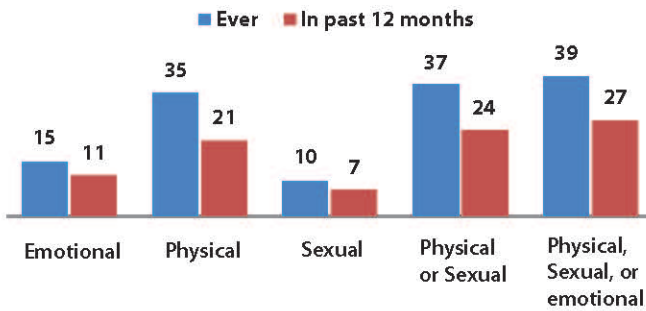


Figure 1: Percentage of currently married women age 15-49 who had ever experienced domestic violence (and in the past 12 months), according to type of violence, NFHS-3, India

are considered, valued and favoured equally. It does not mean that women and men have to become the same, but only that their rights, responsibilities and opportunities do not depend on whether they are born male or female.<sup>6</sup>

A business trip to India in 2012 really opened my eyes to the issue of Gender Equality. In India, only 43% of women were employed compared with 87% of men (age group 15-49) in 2006. Most of these women worked in agriculture and only 7% were employed in professional, technical or managerial occupations.<sup>7</sup> The discriminatory attitude towards women has existed for generations and it affects the lives of both genders.

In India, a significant percentage of women (currently married and aged 15-49) have experience emotional, physical and sexual violence by their husbands. Figure 1 shows not only the high prevalence of different forms of violence, particularly physical violence, but it also suggests that the majority of these women who had been abused by their husbands, continue to suffer abuse.<sup>8</sup> Although India's Constitution grants men and women equal rights, gender disparity still remains.<sup>9</sup> At the workplace, employees are predominantly men while women take on subsidiary or unimportant roles. Women also feel excluded from social/networking opportunities and, regardless of their positions, are often reduced to taking notes in meetings. There is also less opportunity for women to voice up.

For decades, we have struggled to achieve true gender equality in the workplace. Statistics from the International Labor Organization show that women continue to participate in labour markets on an unequal basis with men.<sup>10</sup> In 2013, the male employment to population was 72.2%, while that for females was 47.1%.<sup>11</sup>

In 2015, only half the world's women of working-age were employed, compared to 77% of men in the same

age group.<sup>12</sup> To move forward, women and men have to accept that we are different and that we need to work together to achieve true gender equality. Men play an important role as a supportive family member, colleague or employer while encouraging women to aspire to leadership, to sit at the table, to seek challenges and to lean in to their careers.

Both men and women need encouragement and respect for their efforts. There is no equal opportunity unless everyone receives the encouragement that makes seizing those opportunities possible.<sup>13</sup> Empowering women and promoting gender equality is crucial to accelerating sustainable development. Ending all forms of discrimination against women and girls is not only a basic human right, but it also has a multiplier effect across all other areas of development.<sup>14</sup>

I applaud Sandberg's messages, especially those in which she strongly urged that "women shall support women", meaning that the more women help each other, the better and faster they would achieve equity goals. Positive support from women may not be a favour from women personally but it will help achieve equality.<sup>15</sup> Women are the minority; men are the majority at the table. It is crucial that more women be empowered to speak up, especially those who may not have felt they had a voice before. The teamwork comes when there is a mutual goal to achieve. Do not underestimate the power of change when more women lean in. An increase in female leadership will lead to fairer treatment for all women. Be more grateful and open minded. We should expect professional behaviour and even kindness from everyone.

Provide training to employees and management personnel on gender equality. Educate everyone on both the obvious and the subtle discriminations taking place in the corporate world. It is essential that they identify and prevent such discrimination. Provide employees with quality, on-site child care facilities for both female and male employees.

Publicise the efforts being made to promote gender equality. Be a role model; recognise and reward capable women as part of promoting gender equality. Finally, establish a company policy that promotes gender equality in the workplace. Empowering women and girls is not only the right thing to do but it is also smart economics and a vital step towards ending poverty and boosting shared prosperity.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>6</sup> International Labour Office, Geneva. "ABC Of Women Worker's Rights And Gender Equality", 2nd edition, 2007, p.48. <[http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---gender/documents/publication/wcms\\_087314.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---gender/documents/publication/wcms_087314.pdf)>

<sup>7</sup> Ministry of Health and Family Welfare Government of India. "Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in India" <<https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/OD57/OD57.pdf>>

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. pg 96.

<sup>9</sup> Wikipedia. Web 13 April 2016 <[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gender\\_discrimination\\_in\\_India](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gender_discrimination_in_India)>

<sup>10</sup> International Labour Organization (2014). "Global Employment Trends 2014: Risk of a jobless recovery?" pg. 19. <[http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---decomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms\\_233953.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---decomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_233953.pdf)>

<sup>11</sup> Best The News, 2016. "The Gender Gap At Davos, And The World." <http://bestthenews.com/article/gender-gap-davos-and-world-thu-01212016-0111.html>

<sup>12</sup> Makers, 2015. "21 Facts You Never Knew About International Gender Inequality" <<http://www.makers.com/blog/21-facts-you-never-knew-about-international-gender-inequality>>

<sup>13</sup> Sheryl Sandberg and Nell Scovell. "Lean In- Women, Work, and The Will To Lead." WH Allen, pg 161, 2013.

<sup>14</sup> UNDP. "Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)" 2015. <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sdgooverview/post-2015-development-agenda/goal-5.html>

<sup>15</sup> Sheryl Sandberg and Nell Scovell. "Lean In- Women, Work, and The Will To Lead." WH Allen, pg 166, 2013.

<sup>16</sup> The World Bank. World. "Bank Group: Gender Equality Is Key to Achieving the MDGs" <http://www.worldbank.org/mdgs/gender.html>

Be proactive about welcoming women to the workplace. Make flexibility and work-life balance a part of the wider company culture. Companies should truly embrace gender equality by promoting diversity on a professional and talent basis. State clearly the criteria for hiring. Monitor and evaluate salary scales and promotions on a regular basis to ensure equal treatment. Companies can also offer a broad range of options by practising flexibility at the workplace for employees who are parents. Hold events such as awareness day for gender equality. This way, women will learn more about their company's commitment and become more proactive in sharing, understanding and acting together to make parity a reality. Use the power of networking as networking, mentoring and coaching opportunities can help women build confidence and develop their careers.

Women must work together if they want employers to treat them fairly, based on merit. When they are knowledgeable, passionate and organised, women can collectively dispel the myths used to rationalise gender differences. Women have an obligation to help the women who come after them. Change will not happen without women persevering in their professional lives to end gender imbalances in the workplace.<sup>17</sup> Be bold and proactively lean in to take the challenge of participating in the economic and global foundation. Policy makers and business leaders should act now to boost the participation, salary and advancement of women in education and in the workforce. The results will be faster, with more inclusive growth. Women's Rights are not only human rights but they are also a key determinant of economic prosperity.

According to Jacobs Group (Australia) Pty Ltd, to broaden diversity in the workplace, the leadership needs to develop, promote and advance inclusive leadership and management across the organisation. This way, developing and maintaining gender equality will be seen as everyone's responsibility and leaders and managers should be routinely held accountable, evaluated and rewarded.<sup>18</sup> ■

<sup>17</sup> Cheryl Lynn Kelsey, "Gender Inequality: Empowering Women," *Journal of Legal Issues and Cases in Business*, Vol. 11th April 2016. <<http://www.abric.com/manuscripts/131765.pdf>>

<sup>18</sup> Workplace Gender Equality Agency, "Workplace Gender And Equality Strategy Project Final Report" [https://www.wgea.gov.au/sites/default/files/GE\\_Report\\_Final.pdf](https://www.wgea.gov.au/sites/default/files/GE_Report_Final.pdf)

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