Gender Equality in Leadership: A Public Policy Failure?

Syeda Nuzhat E Ibrat

University of Adelaide, Adelaide, Australia

Abstract

The role of government policies in achieving gender equality in leadership is increasingly being questioned. Scholars argue public policies often fail to overcome such adversities because of lack of understanding of the 'sexual politics' within organizations where gender is 'relational, contested and always political'. The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to determine the effectiveness of Australian policies with regard to promoting more women into key managerial/executive personnel positions. The paper involves a cross-country review of literatures regarding the interrelationship between public policy interface and the gender order of a society. It has also utilised unrefined primary data gleaned from interviews with Australian working women aged between 25 and 45. The findings suggest gender equality legislation and work/life balance policies are not proving effective in developing more gender equal dual earner/carer household model. Moreover, equal opportunity is yet to be universal. The consequences, thus, are a thicker glass-ceiling, wider gender pay gap and slipping or stagnant growth of female participation in leadership roles. The paper argues that persistent stereotypical gender division of labour as well as societal attitude towards 'legitimate differences' between men and women; and a lack of long term comprehensive policy initiative are primarily to blame. Therefore, the paper advocates for policy reforms in which gender, not just women, is mainstreamed through the promotion of both men and women as ideal workers and carers.

Introduction

Equality legislation, many argue, has today become counter-productive. This legislation has shown little impact on the division of labour by gender in homes and in workplaces (Broomhill & Sharp, 2005; Catherine Hakim, 2008; Himmelweit, 2009; Lewis & Giullari, 2005). Consequences are a thicker glass-ceiling, a wider gender pay gap and 'slipping' or 'stagnant' growth of female participation in leadership roles (Connell, 2006; CPSU, 2008; EOWA, 2010; Kee, 2006; Summers, 2003, 2013). This attracts the attention of scholars and policy makers, who wonder why, since there are a significant number of policies and legislative initiatives by the government targeting leadership equality in Australian workplaces, modern Australian women still now lag behind in top managerial/ executive positions in both public and private organisations?

The public sector in Australia is a good example of such discrepancies. There, occupational sex segregation is so universal that the employment relations policies are clearly failing to influence women's participation patterns in this sector. The encouraging news is women have outnumbered men in overall participation in this sector, as 57% government employees are females. However, their participation is highly concentrated in relatively junior classifications (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012). While equal opportunity and family-friendly work

arrangements are two important norms in the Australian Public Service, it does not reflect in the gender composition in its leadership positions; as only 37.1% of the Senior Executive Service of it is comprised by female executives (ABS, 2012). Moreover, many of these female public servants are found to work part times, or contract based jobs. A clear division of work roles by gender is also present in this sector. Female employees work mostly in the service and care providing departments and in education. Their presence in departments like-finance, technology and planning is still very limited (Andrews & Bourke, 2011; M. Baird & Charlesworth, 2010; Connell, 2006; EOWA, 2010)

The growth of women's representation in leadership roles is very sluggish too. The Australian Census of Women in Leadership (2008) has indicated the growth of women in leadership role is indeed 'stagnant' or 'slipping'. This report shows in the Australian Stock Exchange listed 200 companies, women held only 8.3% of board directorships, 10.7% of executive managerial positions and only 2% of positions as chairs. Thus, in the CEO levels there are more than 49 men to every one woman. Interestingly, the number of companies with no women executive manager has risen sharply to 45.5% in 2008 from 39.5% in 2006 (EOWA, 2010). In last ten years while women participation in board directorship with the government has risen, in the key managerial/executive personnel (KMP) positions the change is very indistinctive. Although there are more women in the pipeline for senior executive roles, more men have been securing such roles (Andrews & Bourke, 2011). It demonstrates pipeline for senior executive/managerial positions with the government is still narrower for women and thus, is proving to be difficult to channel more women through it (ABS, 2012; Rodgers-Healey, 2013).

Therefore, lack of women in highly paid executive/managerial roles has created unprecedented pay inequalities for women. In Australia, the gender pay gap is not only persistent but actually is widening (CPSU, 2008; McGraw, 2011; Summers, 2013). In 2008, women's average weekly earnings were 84 cents for every dollar earned by men whereas they earned 87 cents in 2004 (CPSU, 2008). In 2013, after 5 years, Australian women earn only 83.5 cents (Summers, 2013). Therefore, gender pay gap has permanently stuck around 17.5% depending on average weekly ordinary full-time earnings; however, on some other measures the gap is wider (Summers, 2013).

This overall scenario demands a reinvestigation on Australian policies in relation to their effectiveness in establishing equal opportunities and family-friendly work environment for women. This paper, therefore, aims to examine: whether the equality legislation and the family-friendly policies have become backlash for gender equality in Australia? If so, why? And what can be done immediately to deal with the situation?

1. Literature Review

A considerable number of literatures have claimed that women's care giving role is still now the primary obstacle for their career progress, as combining parenthood and successful careers still now hold serious challenges for them (Andrews & Bourke, 2011; M. Baird, 2011; M. Baird & Charlesworth, 2010; Bourke & Andrews, 2011; Connell, 2006; EOWA, 2010; Kochanowski, 2010; B. Pocock, 2003; Waldfogel, 1998). To ease off the load particularly when their children are young, many of these women work part time for a large part of their working lives. According to the Parental Leave in Australia Survey, 70% of the full time female employees following a baby's birth return to a part time position in Australia (Broomhill & Sharp, 2012). Even many of them leave their jobs or take career breaks. Such interrupted, non-linear career path usually makes female employees less likely to climb up to the senior leadership positions in any organisation (Whitehouse et al., 2007 as cited in M. Baird, 2011; Baxter & Chesters, 2011).

However, these claims become debatable when researchers have found evidences that women are discriminated at the very beginning of their careers when they generally have no family responsibilities or children and are equally enthusiastic for career progression. For instance- in New South Wales, in the year 2008 the male law graduates in their starting salaries were paid grossly seven thousand dollars more than their female counterparts (Summers, 2013). It is even more disgraceful that the current overall graduate gender pay gap in Australia is 9.1 per cent. Australian men with a bachelor degree or higher and with children can expect to earn 3.3 million dollars over their working lives, which is nearly double of the amount that women can expect (i.e. 1.8 million dollars) (Summers, 2013).

Numerous studies have argued that workplace gender discrimination is still persistent in Australia which make career progression of female employees challenging and in many instances sheer impossible (Cassells, 2010; Connell, 2006; CPSU, 2008; Gundlach & Sammartino, 2013; Hoobler, Wayne, & Lemmon, 2009; Nutley & Mudd, 2005; Still, 1997). Kochanowski (2010) has observed most of the researches dealing with gender inequality especially in managerial positions have considered glass ceiling as the primary reason for such discrepancy (Kochanowski, 2010). In 2008, a report by the CPSU has identified that glass-ceiling is clearly visible in Australian public organizations. They have conducted a review of wages and job classifications across four key government agencies in Australia, namely- Medicare, Centrelink, Australian Taxation office and the Department of Defence. Notably, 52% of all female employees of the APS work in these four agencies. However they have found:

• A substantial pay gap between agencies that are female dominated and those that are male dominated is evident
• Highly feminised agencies tend to be service delivery agencies such as Medicare and Centrelink
• In all agencies, regardless of pay level, women tend to be clustered at the lower end of all classification scale. (CPSU, 2008)

A number of studies also have suggested a direct link between family-friendly policies and the existence of a thicker glass-ceiling in organizations. The study done by the International Labour Office has identified, although the Nordic countries are internationally reputed for their gender equality policy provisions; these countries have the highest degree of sex segregation in occupations among all the OECD countries. For last couple of decades, Sweden has actively pursued gender equality legislations and has employed the so called best successful work/family balance policies in the world. However, women are more likely to reach top management in the USA than in Sweden, because of the effect of a thicker glass-ceiling, which they argue is the direct consequence of the family-friendly policies of Sweden (Hakim, 2008). These policies generally provide working mothers the opportunity to stick around certain levels (usually mid-executive levels) of the organizational hierarchy. These levels of work roles seem to be comfortable for them to combine works and caring responsibilities with the supports of work/life balance arrangements from the organisation (Albrecht et al (2003), Hakim (2004), Henrekson and Dreber (2005) as cited in Hakim, 2008).

Lately it is argued that while policies related to women and work have improved the work/life situations for a number of working mothers, they actually have failed to establish a more equal dual earner's and carer's household model in Australian society. Therefore scholars assume that it is a new kind of discrimination against women (AHRC, 2010; Baxter & Chesters, 2011; Broomhill & Sharp, 2005; Chesterman, Ross-Smith, & Peters, 2004; Kee, 2006; Vardon, 2010). This is because now a day women have to be responsible for both the paid and unpaid works more than ever before. In 1997, Australian women were engaged in almost twice as much domestic and caring work as men; on average 33 hours a week of house work, child care and shopping compared to men's 17 hours a week. After ten years, when their paid work participation has increased significantly, their unpaid household work has also been increased on an average five minutes. By combining the unpaid and paid work Australian women are shouldering a greater 'total labor share' than men and therefore, are often in the state of juggling or in a 'squeeze' (B. Pocock, 2005b; Barbara Pocock, 2006).

Female employees are, therefore, accountable for 'the state of the house and the welfare of the children' and also for 'managing the relationship' between the household and the workplace. The 2010 AWALI (the Australian Work and Life Index) report has found 61% working female respondents often or always felt rushed or time pressed and almost 70% working mothers reported they are always juggling between their dual responsibilities in homes and at work places (B. Pocock, Skinner, & Pisaniello, 2010).

Many of these working women take an 'adaptive strategy' by working part times to have a better balance (M. Baird & Charlesworth, 2010; C. Hakim, 2003; Higgins, Duxbury, & Johnson, 2000; Walsh, 1999; Webber & Williams, 2007). At first instance, it seems part time working is an easy way out for them when their children are young. Because with lower working hours they are able to look after their children better and also, they do not lose their financial independence. However, several studies have discovered part-time working not only makes women disadvantageous when it comes to career progression but also causes severe

career disruptions and pay imparity. It actually does not have any significant impact on female employee's work/life balance, rather it actually reinforces gender inequalities in families (ABS, 2007; Connell, 2005; Higgins, et al., 2000; Jhonstone, Lucke, & Lee, 2011; B. Pocock, 2005a; Vlasblom & Schippers, 2006; Warren, 2004; Webber & Williams, 2007). Because of working part times whole domestic and caring responsibilities automatically are burdened on women, as they get more time out of paid works. As a result, part-time wives usually have extensive 'total workloads', poor time schedules and less or no leisure times comparing to their husbands and to the other full time working or stay at home wives (Webber & Williams, 2007). Hence, working part-times do not reduce a woman's overall working hours (Craig, 2007) but it reduces her lifetime earnings (Booth and Wood (2006); Chalmers and Hill (2007) as cited in Leahy, 2011).

In recent times the number of married women and mothers have increased significantly in the Australian workforce, however, the ideology of breadwinning as special male responsibility is still continuing with a slight change of viewing mothers in dual earner families as secondary earners (Broomhill & Sharp, 2005; Reeves, 2008). The reason can be women's over dependency on part-time working (M. Baird, 2011; M. Baird & Charlesworth, 2010; Broomhill & Sharp, 2005). Even if the mothers work the same responsible and salaried jobs as the fathers, when it comes to domestic and/or care liabilities the husbands always have choices. Those husbands are termed as 'really good husbands' who are likely to ease off the loads of their wives (Connell, 2005). It reflects that the ancient societal norm of seeing women as the primary care givers still persistent in this society.

In Australia, a range of family- friendly entitlements, such as: flexible work hours, carer's leave, unpaid leave, shorter working hours, part time work, job sharing and more informal arrangements, such as: working from home, variable work hours etc. are available for parents with dependent children. However, studies have found these benefits are mostly used by the female employees with dependents (Marian Baird, Whelan, & Page, 2009; Broomhill & Sharp, 2012; Catherine Hakim, 2008). Only mothers who do most of the child care take such benefits by risking their careers and by sacrificing their wages. Most of the working fathers do not claim family-friendly work benefits as they think these are very bad career moves. The other important reason is purely monetary; as in Australia the 18 weeks Paid Parental Leave (PPL) is set at the federal minimum wage of $589.38 per week which is not a wage replacement and thus, is not likely to be used by men (Marian Baird, et al., 2009; Broomhill & Sharp, 2012; Leahy, 2011)

Nevertheless, there is a growing trend of fathers using the 'carer leave' provisions in some developed societies , even in Australia (Broomhill & Sharp, 2012). Scholars have identified in most of the cases they do not use it for caring purposes at all (Baxter & Chesters, 2011; Catherine Hakim, 2008; Himmelweit, 2008, 2009). They often use such leaves for achieving higher educational qualifications, or to start a business, or to use it for holiday purposes (Catherine Hakim, 2008). Apart from this even if men get involved in child care they rarely do it on their own. Most of the time mothers are present to assist them or is always nearby (Brennan, 2007; Craig, 2007).

To identify the best suitable policy principles scholars have provided conflicting ideas. Some scholars suggest to make the policies work towards establishing equitable gender order in the society, they need to be successful in bringing men into unpaid work spheres (Broomhill & Sharp, 2012; Sharp, Broomhill, & Elton, 2012). However, Hakim (2008) suggests social policies have to be gender neutral so that men and women both get the scope to exert their choices of work concentration. In her opinion, policies should not decide who to do which work and how much (Catherine Hakim, 2008).

By reviewing recent and relevant scholarly literatures this study has come to the point that gender policies in the Australian society have yet to be well understood in terms of its implication on gender order and women in leadership context. Therefore, the study has identified four broad measures to understand the gender policy implications, namely:

- Take up rate by men and women
- Use of it by men and women
- Impact on income, work motivation, and career prospects of men and women
- Impact on gender relations of men and women.

Previous research also have revealed that policy implication necessarily depends on the national ideological framework of it as because policies actually reflect the social norms and values (Brennan, 2007; Catherine Hakim, 2008; Himmelweit, 2007, 2008; Sharp, Franzway, Mills, & Gill, 2011). Therefore, this study finds that by measuring the policy impact it is important to understand the national ideologies behind formulating and implementing such policies. To do so, three questions it finds interesting to be answered:

- Are women perceived as only workers or carers? Or have been viewed as individuals with both aspirations?
- Who is considered to be the primary responsible for child care, the individual or the family or the society?
- How individuals actually make their decisions regarding career and family and the combination of both? (Leahy, 2011; Leahy & Doughney, 2006)

This paper assumes that strategically formulated policies and effective implementation of them can be the medium for social change towards equality. Again, social context of a particular nation is the basis for national ideologies and policy frameworks for that nation. Therefore, gender context in the society and the gender equality policy framework is inter-related and inter-dependent. To analyse the inter-relationships of public policy interface with the gender order of Australian society this paper has developed a conceptual framework outlining the contributing factors and the measures of policy impacts in it. The main purpose of this conceptual framework is to give direction for data collection and analysis for this paper.

1.1 Conceptual Framework
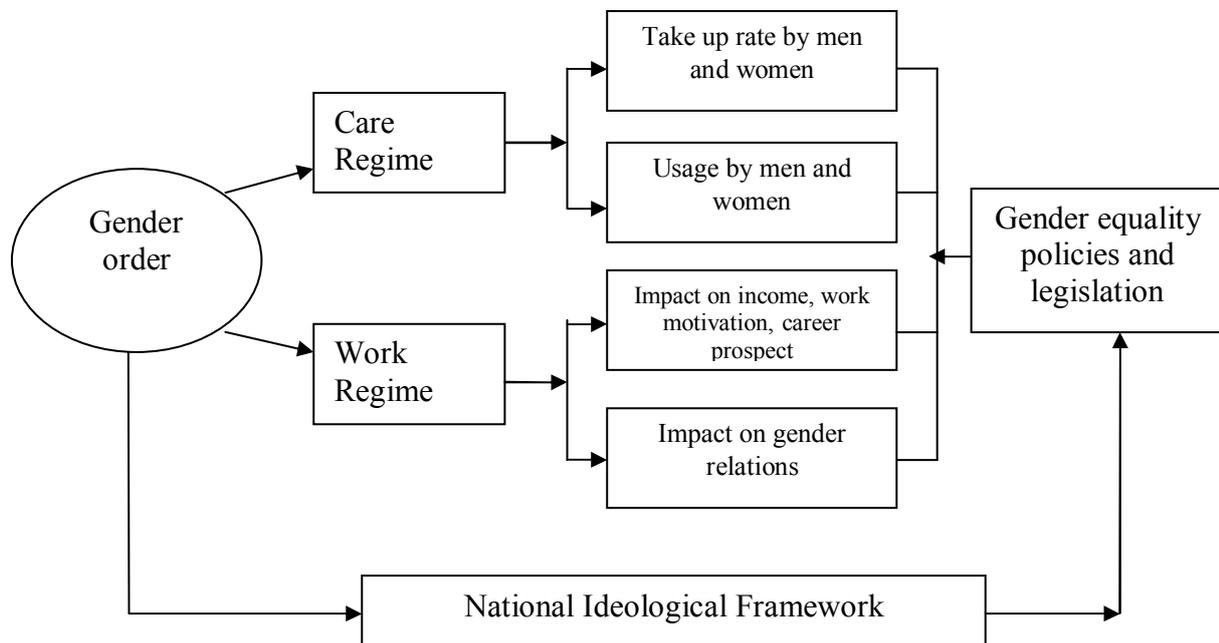
This framework outlines that public policies work to shape the gender norms and gender relations in a society to influence its gender context of it. However, the gender order of the society which constitutes the care and work regimes actually influences the four main measures of the gender policy implications; in one hand, directly by controlling individual perceptions and experiences, in other hand, by influencing the national ideologies to impact the policy outcomes.

2. Method

This paper has utilised unrefined data from a broader research project which has been undertaken by the researcher at the University of Adelaide as a part of her Master's thesis in 2013. By using a significant portion of data and information gleaned from 4 pilot and 8 main interviews with female public servants in South Australia, who are aged from 25 to 45, the researcher has attempted to answer the key research question of this paper.

A significant portion of the interview questionnaire has involved questions which are closely related to the components of the conceptual framework of this paper. These questions are designed to investigate into two main things: Firstly, how effective the family-friendly policies are to ease off female employee's work/life experience and to support them in their career progress up to the top managerial levels? Secondly, what factors are still prevalent in the workplaces which create obstacles for career advancement of female employees that the current policies are failing to address?

The paper admits that the sample is too small for generalisation. Again, all the participants in this study are female public servants, therefore, are not representative of the total labour force of Australia. However, previous studies have suggested the impacts of gender equality policies are best understood in such work atmosphere where family-friendly work benefits are available and regular (Connell, 2006; Dulk & Groeneveld, 2012). Owing to this, this paper identifies that Australian Public Service is a good match for this study as it is renowned for its equal opportunity mandate and family-friendly work provisions.

3. Findings

Take up rates and usages of family-friendly policy benefits

All of the participants in this study use family-friendly work benefits or have used these supports at least once in their work lives.

Two findings are important here:
One, reducing work hours is the most popular choice among female employees when they have young children,
Two, with the child's birth most of their partners (fathers) tend to increase the work hours or have worked over times to maintain the financial stability of the family;

Therefore, it indicates that the family-friendly policy supports are mostly used by female workers for the purpose of caring, whereas, male employees still now do not take these advantages to cherish their fatherhood if not the family is quite stable financially. It also suggests that still now women are primarily responsible for child care and for managing between work and care.

It provides evidence that usage and availability of family-friendly benefits predominantly depends on the mentality and personality of managers in every organisation. One of the participants complain that if managers do not have proper knowledge or training on the employee entitlements they are generally not willing to provide such benefits to their team members. And most of the time managers do not know the policies and provisions well enough. Two of the participants who are managers themselves have acknowledged that they never have got any training on such policy provisions; rather they actually follow what their managers or previous managers do.

Also, organisational culture is important here. One of the participants has shared that when she used to work in the disability department it was relatively easy to seek flexi-time or other leave arrangements when needed. But after joining in the financial service of her current department which is predominantly a male dominated workplace, she finds it becomes difficult for her to ask for flexible arrangements even after having leave entitlements and provisions for it; because it is not a common culture here.

Impacts on income, work motivation and career prospects

An interesting finding of this study is, none of these modern Australian women see family responsibilities as career obstacle, or they neither expose motherhood as their preferred identity nor present 'mothering' or 'familial role' as inhibitor to other life aspirations, such as- ambitious careers. However, after child-birth many of them have experienced changes in their career prospects as well as in career aspirations. For example- one of the participants have shared, 'I do not feel as much welcomed or driven as like before'. She suggests, discrimination and inequality grounded in stereotypical gender norms have become invisible at most of the workplaces today, but that does not mean it has been entirely eroded. Career interruptions due to child birth still now causes more serious career penalties to women, comparing to other types of career breaks such as: career interruptions for health issues or education purpose. It is 'emotionally draining' for these women to face difficulties to return to work after child related career breaks when most of them have found they are not expected to return at the same work levels where they left.

One of the participant have shared that after returning from maternity leave when she wanted to work part-times her manager has moved her sidewise to a new role keeping the salary level same as per the Public Service Act. But after a while she has realised the new role is not appropriate for her knowledge, experience and qualification and also, it does not provide any scope for career development or career progression. She feels like she has been parked somewhere, which is frustrating and demotivating. In her words, '*one thing I really fear for myself, is that while I am parked as I am at the moment with no real prospects, I worry that I am being de-skilled because my managers do not think about me when training opportunities come up. Also, in the media world, things change quickly, but if you are not working in it, you can start to miss out on developing new skills*'.

A very interesting comment from another public servant is, '*all through school and university we tell young women they can achieve as much as anybody else, that they can compete, they can achieve, and we recruit young women through our graduate programs. The brightest young women who progress and show management potential may think they have a rosy future until such time as they realise they have to work full-time to be a manager. So what does this mean if they want to have children, or already have them? As a society, we need families to have children to create the next generation of workers and taxpayers, experts etc., but women who are future leaders in our public service are not free to choose. Do they choose career progression or children, or do they feel pressured to return to work full-time when they really wanted to be part-time for a while*'.

After doing part time work for a while, it is the toughest thing as participants have expressed, to return to full time positions. The reasons are: there are limited career scopes for part time workers, and also because of child care reasons their mobility gets restricted. Therefore, most of the time these women have to do whatever jobs are available for them and often these are contract based short term roles, not permanent and not linked to the organizational career ladder. The most horrifying thing about these jobs as the participants have identified is that

they do not have job protection or job security. And those working mothers who wish to return to workforce to employ their full concentration and expertise often fall for the trap and chose to work these un-secured contract based jobs. The findings suggest these women suffer the most to have got the pace for career growth when they are striving to manage their mothering jobs and survival. In this regard, one of the participants has commented, '*as if women are guilty as because the nature has given them the responsibility to carry babies; as if there is something wrong of wanting babies and careers at the same time!*'.

One of the participants who worked in a managerial role for the state government of Australia for eight years shared that she has always worked contract based roles. Her application for permanent positions had never been successful, although she did all the necessary trainings and her track records were always good. Because of lack of job opportunities she had to take a second, supporting job to ensure income security security. A similar thing is shared by another participant who complains not only lack of promotion opportunities but also for toxic work environment many well-deserving and qualified women burn out from the managerial roles in the public service.

The participants who are in the pipeline for senior executive roles have expressed that highly demanding top executive jobs often do not appeal them because of its less favourable work/life outcomes. Even when they see female managers they feel 'horrible' thinking of their work/life situation. It indicates two things: *one,* suitable opportunities are often unavailable to women who have care responsibilities but want to progress; *two,* the work motivation of female employees primarily depends on the work/life balance outcomes of the job. The researcher has also found, increased hours or workloads at work is related to more negative perceptions of work/life balance to these women. One of the participants have commented, '*if I have a sick child at home I will never able to stay late at work or can give my full concentration, no matter how important my job role is*'. Therefore, before advancing further in their careers they wish to make sure they will be able to reconcile their works and family lives in a way that will preserve the greater interests of their families and the well-being of their children. Therefore, the work motivation for women are often related to flexibility and control over own time other than monetary benefits or power and prestige associated to top positions.

Impacts on gender relations between men and women

According to one of the participants in this study, there are not much legitimate differences in the work places between male and female workers until the women get married and have got babies. However, another participant has commented, '*I have never felt that I have been treated differently because I am a female, rather I often feel everybody has become a way too much careful these days regarding gender discrimination and unfair treatments, which is intimidating to me because I always feel guarded*'. Participants have shared that in many instances, they have experienced the management becomes over-cautious when to deal with female employees and female matters, especially when they become mothers or decide to have babies. A special attention is often given; whether they are mothers or pregnant or

willing to be pregnant or not, which actually burden women to see themselves as distinct entities than men in the workplaces. As if they are in need of special considerations always. It actually reinforces gender differences in the workplaces; perhaps, it is an open invitation for discrimination and inequality for female workers.

All of these participants do agree that gender based discriminations and inequalities have become invisible these days. None of the participants has shown any concern about gender discrimination or sexual harassment either in workplaces or in homes. They suggest gender based discrimination is no more a fashion today. Moreover, most of them actually think men and women both now a day have become progressive and equal. However, a few of them also have shown hesitation to accept that the society has become entirely gender neutral these days. Perhaps, they suggest society is now more 'gender-cautious', which is often 'unnatural', 'endangering' and/or 'phony' to them.

When to ask about domestic work share, the study has got overwhelming responses. All of these women are quite happy with the arrangements between them and their partners regarding domestic work share. However, an in-depth discussion later reveals that most of the hard jobs like- cleaning, car washing, lawn mow, grocery shopping etc. are mostly done by the male partners and comparatively softer and in-house jobs like- cooking, tiding, child care etc. are done by the female partners. In terms of child-care activities, most of these women advice that they are primarily responsible for it; their partners assist them if they ask them to do so.

4. Discussion

'One of the great mistakes is to judge policies and programs by their intentions rather than their results' - Milton Friedman

The aim of this paper is to examine whether the equality legislation in Australia are proving effective in bringing equality in workplaces by achieving equal participation of men and women in the leadership roles. One of the major purposes in this regard is to identify the persistent issues and factors which still now influence women's career progression and their work motivation, as women are the ones who continued to lag behind in leadership or policy-making roles since they have participated in the workforce. The findings suggest the gender equality legislation and family-friendly policies are proving useful for female workers in combining family and work; however, are not effectively working to support them in career progression. The main reason as this study has identified is the persistent stereotypical societal norms and values which still now influence the organisational culture and women's career prospects in it. Therefore, in many instances these social policies actually are reinforcing gender inequalities both in the workplaces and in the households because of lack of understanding of the current gender norms and individual perceptions regarding gender relations in the society.

All four measures for women at work policy implications suggest that their influence is different on male and female workers. And female workers are more dependent on such supports as because they are still the primary care givers to their families and therefore, are the primarily responsible for managing between their work roles and familial roles. Providing access to family-friendly entitlements, therefore, has improved female employee's work experience, job satisfaction and work/life balance circumstance, however, has not ensured income protection and job security for them.

This study has identified two main reasons for men to be reluctant of using the family-friendly benefits from their employers. *First*, the societal norms, while women get career penalties for dividing their attention between family and work, men usually get far worse career consequences if they decide to devote few years to raise their child (by taking flexible work hours or career breaks). This is because; the society has 'zero tolerance for such work/life balance' for men. It perceives 'real men' do not need such balances (Jeffares, D. as cited in Bishop, 2010; Gautam, 2012). *Second*, the organisational norms, these norms are popularly known as the ideal working norms. These norms within the organisation require employees to work full times, continuously, whenever needed with long hours and with less or minimal interruptions from family commitments (Baxter & Chesters, 2011; Hakim, 2008; Sharp, Franzway, Mills, & Gill, 2011). Employees who lack such attributes are commonly perceived as drifters and therefore, are unsuitable for top ranked jobs. Undoubtedly for the managerial and executive positions ideal working norms and proven career tracks are highly employed no matter it is in the public or private sector (Bourke & Andrews, 2011b; Chesterman, et al., 2004). Therefore, male employees who aspires prestigious and powerful executive jobs do not want to risk their careers by taking family-friendly work benefits.

Although female employees these days do not see workplace discrimination based on gender is a very common norm, scholars suggest that 'invisibility of gendered dominance' or 'denial of gender in organization' is actually one of the elements of sexual politics in organizations which very competently keep women away from the power struggle and ultimately from the influential leadership stream (Sharp, Franzway, Mills, & Gill, 2011). Organisational culture and the management ethics still are found to be very important in influencing the effectiveness of the workplace relation policies in any organisation. Equal opportunity for all is guaranteed by policies but in practice it actually depends on the will and wish of the employers. This study finds lack of opportunity is still now a big concern for highly qualified female employees. Sue Vardon (2010) who was a Chief Executive in the Agencies of the Commonwealth and the State Government of Australia for 23 years has described the current phenomena as 'pushing peanuts uphill'. By revealing her own experience, she has suggested that without creating opportunities or suitable work atmospheres continuously blaming women for not pushing harder for career advancement is similar to 'workplace domestic violence'(Vardon, 2010).

Senior executives often complain that 'it is so lonely up there', and often daunting because of poor work/life balance. They suggest it can be a reason for not many women to be attracted to such positions (Summers, 2003). This is also supported by the findings of this study. Most of

the participants have expressed that they do have aspiration for senior executive roles but at the same time they fear of being in these roles by seeing their work loads and job designs. For working in these top managerial, policy-making roles they find that a unique lifestyle is required. This kind of lifestyle is easier for male employees to adopt as they always have supports from their families. However, to adopt such lifestyle is difficult for women, particularly for those women who have dependents and a lack of support from the families.

One of the key findings of the study is that women these days increasingly do not advocate care responsibilities or their familial roles as their main career obstacle; rather equal opportunity and job security are now their major concerns. It is because women now a day are as qualified as men are. But when they take babies and divide their concentration between care and work for a few number of years they find that their qualifications and experience started to be taken very lightly by the employers comparing to men when they want to return on full pace. Therefore, women face a new sort of gender discrimination when they become mothers.

Recent evidences show young Australian women today increasingly are having the tendency to negotiate between family relationships and/or the decision of having babies with career success. They are choosing to lead a 'modern lifestyle' in which they delay motherhood, obtain further educational qualifications, work mostly full times and pursue careers (Probert and McDonald (1999), Warner-Smith and Imbruglia (2001) as cited in Johnstone & Lee, 2009). Although this advancement strategy is generally defined as an 'idiosyncratic' type (Ezzedeen & Ritchey, 2009), Hakim (2006) suggests this is increasingly becoming the popular choice among the new generation women (Hakim, 2006). The reason is women these days find that the decision of having babies is the life changing one. Hence, this study has identified that the family-friendly policies and the equality legislation are not proving adequate to make their choices any easier.

The consequence of failed policies is severe on societies. Hewlett (2002) in her research on senior executive women in USA has discovered that the higher the achievements of women in career the higher the chances they do not have family lives, for example- 49% of ultra-achieving career women (earning more than $100,000) ages 41-55 are childless, and 33% of high achieving career women (earning $55,000-$66,000) ages 41-55 are childless; 57% are unmarried; by contrast, the more successful a man is, the more likely he has a spouse and children, for example- Only 19% of ultra-achieving men are childless and 17% unmarried (Hewlett, 2002). Similar evidences are not rare in Europe as well (Hakim, 2006). Australian society is also experiencing a drop in its fertility rates. More and more modern women are deliberately deciding not to have children, for instance- approximately 24% Australian women will never have children, among them 17 % due to wishful choice or life circumstances (Summers, 2003; Wheeler, 2005). The younger the women are the more positive they likely to be regarding prosperous careers and independent lifestyles, whereas the growing tendency is to put the possibility of having babies in the very end of their 'life to do lists' (Summers, 2003).

This paper advocates for an immediate attention to Australian social policies regarding women at work. If the choices are continued to be restrained for women, they will either decide to stop taking babies or will make themselves not to take careers very seriously. If women are not in career track and do not make equal representation in leadership roles there is a little hope to achieve a gender equal society structure, as lack of women in such roles will produce policies bias to masculinity and discriminative to women.

Conclusion

In conclusion, although recent debates argue about the effectiveness of family-friendly provisions and gender equality legislation on achieving equal opportunities for women and their job security, it is clear from the findings of this paper that availability of these entitlements actually provides women positive perceptions regarding work/life balance and also, gives them motivation for sticking with their career goals and aspirations. However, presence and availability of these entitlements do not mean that the workplace is gender neutral or equal opportunities have been ensured. It is easily understandable from the research findings these policies are not proving sufficient to influence the gender order of the society to promote a more equal dual earners, most importantly, dual carers household model. The reason is men are not equally influenced by such policies.

A very recent policy attempt by the government of abolishing the 'baby bonus' and putting more emphasis on family tax benefits and child care assistance and rebates implies that the national ideology behind women at work wish women to work full time instead of being stay at home mothers when their children are young. It can be a good attempt for establishing a dual earners household model, but, it necessarily does not imply that dual carer's household model is achievable; if not the societal outlook has changed.

As the society is not entirely gender equal and as equal opportunities yet to be universal, this paper argues that gender neutral policies are not appropriate to work in Australia. Gender difference is still pervasive and nurtured by social norms and values here. The national policy ideology also identifies Australian women only instrumentally; either as workers or as carers not as full rounded individuals (Leahy, 2011). In such context, the voice of women is still now unheard. to give women the choice for preferred lifestyle and make the choice easy , this paper advocates for policy reforms where an universal caregiver parity has to be established by integrating care work and paid work into 'a single social insurance system' (Leahy, 2011). Only then it will produce a fairer distribution of all forms of works across the society.

As from the findings of this study it is easily identifiable that the ideal working norms are a main barrier for the career progress of women up to top managerial levels. Therefore, this paper suggests for further research on the job design principles in Australian organisations to make them fair and female-friendly.

Acknowledgement

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