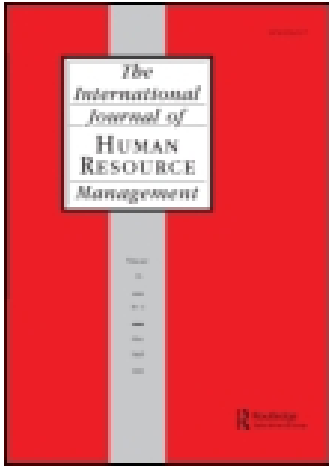


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M. P. Michailidis ^a , R. N. Morphitou ^b & I. Theophylatou ^c

^a Management & MIS Department , Business School, University of Nicosia , Nicosia , Cyprus

^b Department of Marketing , Business School, University of Nicosia , Nicosia , Cyprus

^c Medical School, University of Nicosia , Nicosia , Cyprus

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Women at work equality versus inequality: barriers for advancing in the workplace

M.P. Michailidis^{a*}, R.N. Morphetou^b and I. Theophylatou^c

^aManagement & MIS Department, Business School, University of Nicosia, Nicosia, Cyprus;

^bDepartment of Marketing, Business School, University of Nicosia, Nicosia, Cyprus;

^cMedical School, University of Nicosia, Nicosia, Cyprus

This study aimed at identifying the factors that working women in Cyprus are faced with which lead to experience discrimination, examining possible barriers that affect women's advancement and identifying organizational practices that assist them in achieving work–life balance. The data were collected by the distribution of a questionnaire, which was on a voluntary, anonymous and confidential basis and targeted women of four different occupational levels. Several barriers were identified, preventing them from advancement such as stereotypes, conflicting work and family obligations, lack of women role models and low levels of self-confidence. This research enhances women's awareness of the existence of gender discrimination at work and the barriers in their career advancement. It highlights the creation of company programs such as mentoring programs, refresher courses, flexible work hours and on-site childcare, which could help women in developing and advancing their careers as well as achieving work–life balance.

Keywords: Cypriot working women; gender inequality; organizational practices; working women; workplace discrimination

1. Introduction

Women in our days choose to get educated and pursue careers. To do this most of them have to learn to deal with dual roles; the role of the employee and the role of mother/wife. The majority of them have managed to move from working at the traditionally female occupations (such as teachers and nurses) to male-dominated areas such as managers and engineers (Atwater and van Fleet 1997; Chater and Gaster 1995; Krambia-Kapardi 2006). Furthermore, gender equality is a fundamental principle for democratic countries; women and men should participate as equals in the social, cultural and economic life. Even though improvements have been made, gender equality is still not achieved as men and women are not represented and are not treated equally in the workplace. Unfortunately, the increasing number of working women did not bring equal career advancement opportunities. Gender issues in the workplace arise from differences in the way men and women are treated. Women are not treated by the organizations the same way as men do, something that holds women back from advancing the managerial ladder. It is a fact that women are underrepresented in top managerial positions compared with women holding lower and mid-level management positions (Mihail 2006).

*Corresponding author. Email: michailidis.m@unic.ac.cy

Women face numerous obstacles for their career advancement and often, well-educated women, with many years of experience are not promoted at the same rate as their male co-workers of the same occupational level. Women have to work twice as hard as their male colleagues to achieve recognition (Wirth 2001). According to Eagly and Carli (2007), Hymowitz (2005), Wirth (2001), Rhode (2003), Duehr and Bono (2006), Hymowitz (2005) and Dimakis, Krambia-Kapardi and Savva (2006), some of the controversial issues that women face in the workplace are gender discrimination, glass ceiling, stereotypes, work–life balance, lack of mentoring, conflicting roles and pay inequality. These are considered barriers that prevent women from obtaining work equality and furthermore achieving top managerial positions.

1.1. Gender discrimination

According to Wirth (2001), a large number of women enter the workforce at similar levels as their male counterparts; however, their careers progress more slowly than their male colleagues. Quite often they are more qualified than their male counterparts but have to work harder and perform much better to obtain top positions.

The discrimination acts toward women can take various forms; they are often treated unfairly at the recruiting and promotion processes and the remuneration policies. In addition, there is a general perception that women are not committed to work as they have or will have family and children (Hymowitz 2005). Furthermore, since this study took place in Cyprus it is worth mentioning that the Cyprus Government has always been interested in promoting equality among men and women and social and economic actions were implemented. The efforts began at the end of the 1970s, as part of the Strategic Development Plans, and aimed at the creation of legal framework that prevents gender discrimination, support work–family balance and enhance the socioeconomic life of women living and working in Cyprus. In an effort to harmonize with the European Union the Equal Treatment of Men and Women in Employment and Vocational Training Law, No. 205(I)/2002 was implemented by the Cyprus Democracy.

1.2. Stereotypes

Stereotypes are based solely on perceptions and ‘gender stereotypes influence beliefs, behaviors and self-concepts at both conscious and unconscious levels’ (Rhode 2003, p. 7). Perceptions that women’s place is in the house taking care of her husband and children has been haunting women for many centuries. In recent years, companies are recruiting an increasing numbers of women but unfortunately most of them are not promoted as they should and are left at lower and middle level ranks (Ntermanakis, as cited by Mihail 2006). Schein, Mueller, Lituchy and Liu (1996) reported the existence of a psychological barrier for women’s advancement; the ‘think manager–think male’ perception. According to Nichols (1994), the belief is that managerial positions require masculine characteristics and so women are not cut out for this type of job. A research conducted in Cyprus regarding the perceptions of young people in Cyprus (Intercollege’s Research Center 2007) gives several positive outcomes related to relatively low levels of genders stereotypes. Of the people asked, 73.4% disagreed with the statement that women should stay at home while men should be the sole money providers. Another important point is that 58.9% believe that men and women can be equally good managers, and that women should receive the same rewards with their male counterparts (81.1%). A recent study by Duehr and Bono (2006) reported that ‘stereotypes about women may be changing’. Male

managers seem to be characterizing women as less passive and submissive and more confident, ambitious, analytical and assertive. Male managers have simply learned that they are expected to view men and women similarly at work. Women are also being stereotyped because they become mothers. Hymowitz (2005) mentioned that one of the reasons why women are not taken seriously in the workplace is because at some point in their career they will have children and they will not be as devoted to work as they should and they will not be willing to work those long hours needed.

1.3. Glass ceiling

The number of women working at managerial positions is growing. Even though the number of women in lower and mid-level management positions is greater than ever, the percentage of women holding top managerial positions is disproportionately low (Atwater and van Fleet 1997). Women seem to be banned from executive positions due to the 'glass ceiling' effect, which describes the invisible artificial barriers, created by attitudinal and organizational prejudices, which block women from top executive positions (Wirth 2001). According to Wirth (2001), women, although they are well educated, are pushed into a narrow range of occupations, where there is less responsibility, lower pay and few opportunities for advancement. Some of them manage to climb the corporate ladder and achieve middle level positions but the invisible barriers prevent them from attaining top managerial jobs. Toussiant (2010) described the history of the glass ceiling in America. As it talks about how women were constantly facing discrimination from male-dominated society. This is accomplished by discussing how everything from various court cases to the ERA would have an impact upon these views.

Krambia-Kapardi (2006) examined the existence of the 'glass ceiling' effect in Cyprus by looking at women's participation in committees and the opportunities for being promoted in executive positions, the research states that although women participate in various committees, the percentage participating is limited and there has been no significant improvement the past 6 years. To describe the current situation in Cyprus the writer states that 'there is no glass ceiling in participating committees, but a concrete wall and it takes a lot of effort to break through that wall'. When it comes to the existence of glass ceiling in executive positions, women hold 12% of these positions in the private sector and 37% in the public sector.

Researchers tried to identify the barriers that prevent women from advancing to higher managerial positions. Some of the barriers mentioned were lack of self-confidence, avoiding risk taking because of fear of failure and setting low goals (Krambia-Kapardi 2006). Another term relevant to the glass ceiling is the 'maternal wall', which refers to the barriers that women face when they get pregnant as male co-workers and managers assume that once a woman has a baby she will not be committed to her career (Swiss 1996).

1.4. Balancing work and family

Women today have multiple roles and are torn between demanding careers and intensive family lives. These conflicting roles require a great amount of time and energy, and quite often women do not know how to deal with this issue.

'Work-life balance is a state where an individual manages real or potential conflict between different demands on his or her time and energy in a way that satisfies his or her needs for well-being and self-fulfillment' (Clutterbuck 2003, p. 8). The elements that

influence this type of conflict, according to Parasuraman and Simmers (2001), is the employee's gender, type of employment (self-employed or organizational employed), work role characteristics and pressures (such as how much autonomy is available in the workplace, time flexibility, level of job involvement and time commitment to the work itself) and family role characteristics and pressures (such as parental demands, level of family involvement and time commitment to family). Gladen (2007) discussed how women have more challenges in being able to balance their work and personal life. Where, the majority of women will have: a sense of guilt, scheduling conflicts and adjusting to two different worlds. Moreover, to help working women, companies can implement various family-friendly policies, which can make it much easier for them to combine paid jobs with family work. This can be achieved by offering flexible working hours (permanent or temporary), working from home and the creation of childcare facilities in work. Organizations also need to ensure that employees who seek temporary working accommodations do not pay a permanent price (Rhode 2003).

1.5. Mentoring/role models/networking

The lack of mentoring, social networking and role models are making advancement of working women harder. Women very frequently are not given high visibility assignments or challenging tasks. Also, frequently they are excluded from marketing and social events that result in professional opportunities. Furthermore, they are not helped in their career progression, therefore they are far away from leadership positions (Nossel and Westfall, as cited by Rhode 2003).

1.5.1. Mentoring

Mentoring programs aim at helping participants become successful in the workplace. A mentor gives advices for the unspoken company's rules, provides information for company policies and decision making, give recommendations on how to avoid explosive situations, and information about who is aligned to whom. Furthermore, a mentor provides career and psychosocial support to enhance mentee/protégé's-junior colleague, professional and personal development (Swiss 1996; Apospori et al. 2006). To be more effective, mentoring should be incorporated with training and development and succession planning. Thompson (2010) highlights how mentoring programs can help women to address the various issues of inequality in the workplace. The problem is that the majority of employers do not offer any kind of mentoring programs to female employees. As only 28% of women are reporting that their employers have some kind of mentoring program, out of this number 52% of women felt that their employers lacked transparency and understanding when addressing this issue (Thompson 2010).

Furthermore, barriers women come across when searching for mentors are that male mentor's are reluctance to take on the mentoring role, this might be due to fear that the relationship might be misinterpreted. Also, the scarcity of female mentors makes it more difficult for women to have access to a mentor (Apospori et al. 2006).

1.5.2. Role models

'Role models are often said to be key to the successful development of young aspiring managers' (Singh, Vinnicombe and James 2006, p. 67). According to Shapiro et al. (as cited by Singh et al. 2006), role models are individuals whose style, action and traits are

imitated by others. It is also believed that role models are important for all female employees regardless level and age, but special attention must be given to newly employed females (Swiss 1996). Unfortunately, the small number of women holding executive position limits the number of role models for young female employees.

1.5.3. *Networking*

Networking is viewed by Vinnicombe and Colwill (1995) as cited by Singh et al. (2006) as the 'banding together' of individuals who think alike, for satisfying their contact, friendship and support needs. Furthermore, Forret and Dougherty (2004) elaborated on the issue of networking and stated that these are attempts made by people to develop relationships with individuals who have the potential to assist them work- or careerwise. Furthermore, Allison (2007) and Singh et al. (2006) refer to networking in terms of the differences of the approaches men and women use. Men are on a 'mission' when attending a business networking event, trying to meet people who will help them for professional advancement, whereas women believe that this approach is 'pushy' and prefer attending workshops or conferences where they can share ideas and use networking for social support.

1.6. *Pay gap*

Gender pay inequality is consistently and widely observed. Various social and economic causes contribute to the long-established gender pay gap, and much effort has been made to explain the reasons for the discriminatory wage disparities.

The article titled, *Its Time for Working Women to Earn Equal Pay* (2007), talks about the vast disparities that are occurring as far as pay and compensation are concerned. Where, women will earn significantly less in comparison with their male counterparts for the same amount of work. According to a study that was conducted by the WAGE Now Project, they found that the vast disparities in pay equality are between \$750 thousand and \$2 million over the course of lifetime (*Its Time for Working Women to Earn Equal Pay* 2007). Wallace (2010) discusses the issues that women will face in the workplace from: the glass ceiling to overall issues of discrimination. In most industries, this means that women are earning \$.80 cents for every dollar that is made by men. This information is important, because it can be used to corroborate other sources about issues of the glass ceiling and equal pay in the workplace. Wage discrimination as Joshi and Paci (1998) explained means that one group is paid systematically less than others with 'equal productivity-related characteristics'. The remuneration disparities between the two sexes have been ascribed to the narrow number of women holding top managerial levels of organizations, which means they are rewarded with higher pay rates (Alkadry and Tower 2006). The article that was written by Childress (2010) talks about: how various legislation has been created to deal with the issue of inequality in the workplace (the Glass Ceiling Commission). As they were created as part of the *Civil Rights Act of 1991* and was designed to deal with the issue of discrimination in the workplace. However, the commission was never successful, because there was not any kind of agreement among members about how to effectively tackle this issue. This is important because it highlights the underlying challenges that are constantly being faced when trying to establish some kind of procedures for addressing gender inequality. As a result, the information from this source is useful, because it is showing how various regulatory failures have contributed to situations of inequality existing.

The Cyprus government enforced The Equal Remuneration of Men and Women in Employment and Vocational Training Law, No. 177(I)/2002 to ensure the equal remuneration of both sexes for work of equal value. The Equal Remuneration of Men and Women in Employment states that men and women employees receive the same level of financial or non-financial rewards, for the same type of work or for work of equal value. Polachek and Xiang (2006) analyzed data from 40 countries, including Cyprus, between the years 1970 and 2002 on how the gender wage gap varies in relation to the fertility rate, the age gap between the husband and wife, and the female educational achievements. The information collected indicated that the fact the women have the main responsibility for the household and the children, as a result female employees have less job experience and training. On the other hand, men are the main money winners of the family and thus working for more years, with no career breaks and thus more experience and opportunities for vocational training. All these lead to gender pay gap. Despite the fact that various efforts are being made by governments to achieve wage equality, gender pay gap still exist since women are paid less than men for comparable positions (Rhode 1997; Sallop and Kirby 2007). Even though women have equivalent skills to men, nevertheless they are not paid with the same pay rate. Researches believe that perhaps the choice of career might be a reason for the gender pay gap. Alkadry and Tower (2006) reported that even though women have started overcoming some of the barriers for advancing to higher positions, wage disparities still persist and as a result women are rewarded with less money in comparison to their male colleagues.

2. Methodology

2.1. Purpose of the study

This study aimed at: (1) identifying the factors that working women in Cyprus are faced with which lead to experience discrimination; (2) examining possible barriers that affect women's advancement; and (3) identifying organizational practices that assist them in achieving work–life balance.

2.2. The questionnaire

The data were collected by the distribution of a six-page questionnaire, which was on a voluntary, anonymous and confidential basis and targeted four occupational levels: below first line, first line, middle and high-level management women, employees of organizations in Cyprus. The questionnaire was prepared by the researchers and was divided into two sections. Section A covered the demographic data of women participating in the research and in Section B the questions referred to women's personal experiences, opinions or thoughts related to the workplace.

2.2.1. Section A: biographical information

In this section, the participants' had to respond to questions related to: age, marital status, number of children, educational level, work position, employment sector, type of organization, job title and number of years in the current job.

2.2.2. Section B was composed of five parts, which are described below:

Part I had eight 'yes' or 'no' questions, here, the participants had to respond to questions related to experiencing any form of work discrimination, gender discrimination,

discrimination during hiring, promotion or career advancement opportunities, and discrimination related to financial and non-financial rewards between men and women.

Part II had four questions; here, the respondents were asked whether gender is a factor that can limit promotions, compensations, access to clients and access to training. The replies were based on a Likert-type scale of 1–3 (I do not know, Not much and Very much).

Part III had five questions asking women's opinion on several statements regarding the way women and men are treated in their organizations, such as equal treatment among men and women, equal opportunities for advancement, childbearing and career commitment. The participants had the option of choosing one of the following Likert-type scale responses: I strongly agree, I tend to agree, Undecided, I tend to disagree and I strongly disagree.

Part IV had a set of 21 statements, which asked the participants to rate on a Likert-type scale from 1 to 5 various possible barriers that prevent women's career advancement. In addition, there was one question asking the participants to add any other factors that were not mentioned in the previous statements but were considered as a barrier for women's advancement. The 21st question was an open-ended question on other organizational practices that were not mentioned in the 20 statements.

Part V had nine questions asking women to rate the importance of various organizational practices that can help women's career advancement and development. For rating the first eight questions in this part, the Likert-type scale was used with the following scale: Not helpful, Slightly helpful, Quite helpful and Very helpful. One question asked the participants to add other organizational practices that could be useful to women's career advancement and development.

2.3. Statistical analysis

The statistical analysis was prepared with the use of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The statistical tabulations included descriptive statistics and crosstabs aimed at examining the statistical significance of a comparison between women's occupational level and (a) questions related to equal treatment (Part III) and also (b) questions related to organizational practices which would assist the participants in developing and advancing women's careers (Part IV).

2.4. Sample

The questionnaires were distributed randomly to 250 women working in various private, public and semi-public companies. The distribution and collection of the questionnaires was done either through the Human Resources/Personnel Departments. A total of 154 questionnaires were used for the study, giving a response rate of 62%.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Biographical data

3.1.1. Section A

This research concentrated on 154 women respondents, ages 22–57. From the sample 61.7% of the participants were married and 59.1% had children.

Regarding the educational level of the participants 22.7% were high school graduates; 20.1% had a college diploma; 24.7% had a Bachelor's degree; 30.5% had a Master's

degree; and only 1.9% had a Doctoral degree. Of the sample, 47.4% stated that their position at work was in the first line managerial level and 15.6% belonged to the middle management level; 5.2% held top management positions, while the rest 31.8% held positions below first line management. The results showed that the majority of women are trapped between the first and middle line managerial levels. Only 8 out of 154 women who participated in the research had top management positions, a number which is not very positive for the career advancement opportunities of women.

3.1.2. Section B

3.1.2.1. *Part I.* Here, the participants responded to questions related to work discrimination. In the question whether they experienced any form of discrimination in the workplace because they were female, 87.7% replied that they had not experienced any form of discrimination; 89.6% replied that they had not felt that they had missed a promotion or their promotion had been delayed because of their gender; 81.8% stated that male co-workers of similar duties did not receive higher salary than them; and 86.4% replied that they had not experienced differential treatment in the recruiting process because of their gender. Interestingly though, one of the comments made for this question was that at a job interview a participant was asked whether she was engaged to be married or was planning to get engaged soon. Her answer was negative and after she was hired she learned that women with children were rejected as they would not be as 'committed' as they should be. Furthermore, 80.5% stated that they had not experienced any differential treatment in career prospects; 90.3% replied that male and female employees of the same managerial level receive the same monetary rewards. Continuing on, 87.7% of the participants do not think that women receive less non-financial rewards than their male colleagues. Lastly, 81.2% of the participants do not believe that at some point of their career they were not appointed for a job because of their gender.

Some discrimination acts that women had experienced and were mentioned in the open-ended questions are

- 'Women receive lower pay than men'.
- 'Males are treated with more respect'.
- 'Another man took my position because I was a woman'.
- 'Negative attitudes by male colleagues toward women'.
- 'I was not assigned on an important project because of my gender'.
- 'I was told that having a baby would affect my job and I was not hired'.

3.1.2.2. *Part II.* Here, the participants responded to questions related to their gender as a limiting factor in workplace. As regards promotions, 69.5% responded that gender does limit (but at the not much level) promotions. Furthermore, regarding compensation, 67.5% replied that their gender does limit the compensation (but at the not much level). In addition, as far as access to clients is concerned, 71.4% believe that gender does limit access to clients (but at the not much level). Lastly, in examining access to training and development programs, once again the majority, 73.4% feels that gender is an element that limits access to training (but at the not much level).

3.1.2.3. *Part III.* In this part, the participants were asked to rate their degree of agreement on several statements. In the statement whether women in managerial positions are as

capable as men at similar positions, the majority of the participants (97.4%, 150 women) think that women managers are as capable as male managers. Furthermore, when asked whether women and men are treated equally in their organization, 79.9% of the participants have not felt that they were treated differently at the workplace due to their gender.

In addition, when asked whether at the company where they work, women and men are given equal opportunities for advancement to higher positions, 77.3% believed that women receive the same opportunities for advancement in the organization they work for. Furthermore, in the statement on whether women have to perform better than their male colleagues to be promoted to the same position, 42.2% feel that for a woman to be promoted she must work twice as hard as a man would. Lastly, when looking at childbearing, on the statement 'once a woman has a child, she is considered to be less committed to her career', half of the respondents (50.7%) agree that there is a perception that working mothers are not committed to their careers as they should be.

3.1.2.4. Part IV. This part the participants had to rate on a Likert-type scale from 1 to 5 various possible barriers that prevent women's career advancement. The questions measuring the extent to which 'women's low level of self-confidence' is a barrier to their career advancement, 69.5% of the participants agreed with the statement that the low level of self-confidence women have is a barrier to their career advancement.

When questioned about the extent of 'working hours facilitate parenting' and if they are considered a barrier to women's career advancement, the replies received indicated that women would want to have flexible working hours that will assist them with their childcare obligations, specifically, 68.2% think that working hours do not facilitate parenting. Moreover, when examining the extent of 'absence of equal career development opportunities for women', and whether it is considered a barrier to women's career advancement, 55.2% consider the absence of equal career development opportunities for women as a barrier for their advancement in the workplace. In addition, the statement 'to what extent insufficient women role models in higher organizational levels, is a barrier to women's career advancement', 56.5% of the participants stated that having female role models in higher organizational levels would help them develop; therefore, the non-existence of those role models is a barrier for their career development. To the statement 'to what extent, a non-supportive spouse, is a barrier to women's career advancement' appears that having a supporting spouse is a factor that can be very helpful for working women as 68.2% of the participants feel that not having assistance at home from their partner would be a barrier for their career.

When asked about 'company's lack of commitment to gender advancement' is a barrier to women's career advancement, 57.8% of the respondents believe that the failure of an organization to be committed to gender advancement is a barrier for their career development. Further on, when asked about the extent to which 'male domination in senior organizational positions' is a barrier to women's career advancement, 63.7% of the participants consider that senior organizational positions are dominated by male employees something that prevents women from advancing to higher positions. In addition, when asked about the extent 'company's lack of ability to implement and enforce anti-discriminatory and equality legislation' is a barrier to women's career advancement, 62.3% of the respondents feel that companies do not implement anti-discriminatory legislation and this is a barrier for their career advancement. Also, when asked about the 'tendency for organizations to assign male employees on high visibility projects' and whether this is a barrier to women's career advancement, 120 of the participants (a percentage of 78%)

believe that male employees are assigned on high visibility projects leaving female employees behind and such a practice sets barriers for women's advancement. The statement looking at the extent to which 'perceptions that women may eventually leave work once they have a family' is a barrier to women's career advancement, 61.7% agreed that the perception that women may eventually leave work once they have a family is a barrier for their career as this affects the way women are treated in the workplace and reduce the opportunities given to them. Continuing on, looking at the statement examining the extent to which 'women's conflicting roles between work and family' is a barrier to women's career advancement? It appears that the conflicting roles between work and family are considered by the majority of the participants (62.3%) as a barrier for their career advancement.

When asked to rate the extent to which 'women's responsibilities for childcare' is a barrier to women's career advancement, 66.2% agreed that since women have the sole responsibility of childcare, this is a barrier for their career advancement. Also, when asked to rate the extent to which 'career breaks for childbearing, child raising and other family obligations' is a barrier to women's career advancement, 66.9% believed that career breaks for childbearing and child raising are a barrier for women's advancement.

Furthermore, when measuring the extent to which 'perceptions that men make better managers than women' is a barrier to women's career advancement, 63.7% of the participants stated agreed. In the question asking women to state whether they believe at the existence of the glass ceiling, 54.6% stated that they did experience these invisible banners which are a barrier for their advancement, 16.2% do not believe at the existence of those barriers, whilst 29.2% were undecided. And when asked to state to what extent 'stereotypes regarding women's roles in society' is a barrier to women's career advancement, 53.9% believe that stereotypes about women is a barrier for them as often women are considered weak, sensitive and that they should not be working.

Other barriers that prevent women's advancement in the workplace and were not mentioned in the questions above were the following:

- 'Women are judged by their appearance'.
- 'Face and body is what they look at'.
- 'Lack of acquaintances in comparison to male acquaintances'.

3.1.2.5. *Part V.* In this part, there were several questions asking women to rate how important various organizational practices were considered in helping women in their career advancement and development. One was on 'mentorship programs', 70.8% stated that it would be helpful for their advancement if they received mentoring. Further on, the question related to 'managerial programs which identify and develop women's potential', 86.3% of the participants reported finding managerial programs that would identify and develop women's potential as helpful. As far as 'programs that would help women balance their work and family lives', 93.5% believe that they would be helped by programs that provide assistance to women on how to balance work and family lives. These results show that women feel that they cannot balance work and family obligations and perhaps they need some assistance on how to achieve it. The question related to 'on-site childcare facilities', participants replied almost unanimously (93.5%) that it would be very helpful to them if their children could attend an on-site childcare facility. In addition, as far as 'refresher courses when re-entering the workforce', the majority of the participants (78.6%) agreed that it would be very helpful if women received refreshing courses when

re-entering the workforce after a career break. The question 'offering flexible working hours' is considered as an important factor for the advancement and development of women as 93.5% agreed that it would be helpful if they could arrange the hours they would be working according to the obligations they have at home. Continuing on as far as the question on 'women role models in the highest levels of the organization', 85.1% agreed that having women role models in the highest levels of the organization would be very helpful for the careers. Lastly, 100% of the respondents showed agreement on the statement, 'helping women to broaden their professional experiences'. This unanimity indicates that women do not feel that they receive help from the companies they are working and consider it to be a huge barrier for their career development.

The participants were asked to add any other organizational practices that were not mentioned but are considered important for working women. The comments made were the following:

'Educating and always giving upgraded information to young women through organized seminars and events'.

'Allowing work to be done at home, this will give work opportunities to women with families'.

3.1.2.6. *Part VI.* An analysis of the test of significance – Crosstabs was also performed. This tried to examine the differences between the following: Current position at work: (1) just below first line management, (2) first line management, (3) middle management and (4) top management and:

Part (A), five questions, which referred to the degree of agreement on a five-point Likert-type scale, as far as the: work capability of women compared with men; equal treatment of men and women in the workplace; equal opportunities for advancement; women's performance and promotions; and family commitment once women have children and

Part (B), eight questions, which referred to the degree of helpfulness of several organizational practices which contribute to their career advancement, looking at: mentorship programs; managerial programs that help women identify and develop their potential; programs that would help them balance work and family; the on-site childcare facilities; refreshers courses for the comeback; flexible working hours; women role models in the highest levels of organizations; and programs helping women to broaden their professional experience.

Concerning Part (A) there were significant differences when examining Chi-square at the 0.01 level of significance with the following three questions: The question, 'I believe that women in managerial positions are as capable as men at similar positions', indicated significant differences between the categories below first line management, first line management, middle management and top management. Women belonging to below first line management category, first line management and middle management tend to agree or strongly agree with the statement (97.7%, 98.6% and 100%, respectively). On the other hand, the percentage of women holding top managerial positions and agreeing with the statement is 75%, while 12.5% is undecided and 12.5% tend to disagree. In general 2.5% of all categories are either undecided or they disagree, and 97.4% agreeing. On the question, which stated 'Women and men are treated equally in the organization', showed significant differences at the 0.10 levels among the categories below first line

management, first line management, middle management and top management. It appears that women in top management and below first line management positions (75% and 44.9%) strongly agree with the statement. However, the percentage of women in middle management strongly agreeing is very low only 20.8%, but a higher percentage agreeing (45.8%) however, with a total of 33.3% disagreeing and strongly disagreeing, or undecided with the statement and 12.2% of the below first line management are undecided. Overall 20.1% of all categories are either undecided or they disagree, and 79.9% agreeing. Next question requested the opinion of the respondents on the statement 'At the company where I work women and men are given equal opportunities for advancement to higher positions'. Women holding top managerial positions believe that the company they are working for is giving both sexes equal opportunities for career advancement since 62.5% strongly agree and 37.5% tend to agree. This picture is not the same for the other managerial levels. Women in below first line managerial level agreeing is 81.6% while the remaining 16.4% is undecided. The first line managers have somehow similar percentages with 75.3% agreeing with the statement, and 13.7% were undecided. For the middle management respondents the results were the following: 56.7% agreed, 4.2% are undecided while 29.2% do not believe that there is equal treatment between men and women in the organization they are working.

In Part B of the questionnaire, there were significant differences when examining Chi-square at the 0.10 levels of significance, the question concerning the programs which identify and develop women's potential, here a total of 87.7% of below first line management, 90.4% of first line management, 70.8% of middle management and 87.5% of top management reported that such programs are useful. However, a very small percentage of 8.3% of below first line management, 42.9% of first line management, 38.5% of middle management 55.6% reported that programs which identify and develop women's potential are quite helpful. Two open-ended questions allowed the participants to express themselves on other barriers that women face in their development and advancement in the workplace and also other organizational practices not addressed in the questionnaires. It is true that the majority of the sample did not answer those two questions; only 10% of the participants filled in those questions. Looking for other barriers that women face in their work life, the first barrier mentioned by several participants was that women are stereotyped and are judged only by their looks, appearance and body. Other comments were that women do not belong in social networks, sports clubs like men do, and this affects their careers. In addition, when looking at other organizational practices that might be helpful for women's career advancement, there were suggestions like work from home which needs to be encouraged, and courses that help young women increase their self-confidence, assertiveness training and how to promote and protect their work rights. The last one is very important because many women do not have equal access to their rights because some of these rights are based on 'male breadwinner model' and do not consider the fact that females mostly carry the burden of having to bring together family and professional life.

4. Discussion

During the past few years, there has been a global effort to eliminate gender discrimination; but we still have a long way to go and a lot of perceptions need to change along the way (Bartram 2005). Women around the globe are being discriminated against in the workplace, they are not rewarded on equal terms as men and do not receive the necessary aids for career advancement. Thus, the purpose of this study was to identify the factors that

working women in Cyprus are faced with which lead them to experience discrimination; also to examine possible barriers that affect women's advancement; and finally identify organizational practices that assist them in achieving work–life balance.

The findings confirm that women enter a company in large numbers, as supporting staff, a minority of them reaches the middle-level management, while a very small number of female managers achieves an executive position (Wirth 2001). Only 8 out of 154 women who participated in the research had top management positions, a number which is not very positive for career advancement opportunities of women.

A conclusion that could be drawn, with caution though, is that perhaps women in Cyprus do face a glass ceiling while climbing the corporate ladder, which does not allow them to advance to top management. These findings agree with the EMPATHY-EDGE research, carried out in 2003–2006 by the European Union, which reported that 104 out of 156 women had never directly experienced workplace discrimination, even though the majority of those women had experienced some kind of career advancement barrier.

Nevertheless, gender discrimination is a global phenomenon and it was not expected to receive such a large percentage of women disagreeing with its existence in Cyprus. The results indicated that for the majority of the Cypriot women, marriage and children did not appear as a big obstacle for developing their careers. Similar to these findings were the results of a research for female Greek entrepreneurs by Sarri and Trihopoulou (2005), reporting that the majority of the participants were married and had children. The writers continued by saying that women had achieved in finding a way to 'develop abilities, skills and competencies' that help them balance their careers and family obligations.

However, in this study it has been demonstrated that women have some difficulty in balancing work and family obligations. In addition, lack of company programs that help women balance work and family obligations 93.5% of the respondents stated that organizational programs would greatly help women balance work and family obligations. Perhaps, the reason why women are gathered in lower organizational hierarchy levels is their low level of self-confidence that prevents them from advancing. 'Company's lack of commitment to gender advancement' and 'lack of ability to implement and enforce anti-discriminatory and equality legislation' received high agreement ratings. Companies should implement regulations that help the minorities receive the opportunities they deserve. If a company fails to do so then the minorities are not treated equally. Once again these factors have an effect on the reason why women are not represented equally at the executive positions of a company.

The results were impressive as a large number of women would want to be assisted by organizational programs. In particular, 'mentoring programs', 'managerial programs which identify and develop women's potential', 'programs that would help women balance their work and family lives', 'on-site childcare facilities', 'refresher courses when re-entering the workforce', 'offering flexible working hours', 'women role models in the highest levels of the organization', 'helping women to broaden their professional experiences' received high ratings and are considered as important for them and their advancement.

The lack of women role models, the lack of mentoring and the commitment women have toward their families were identified by Catalyst and the Conference of Board Europe (Catalyst 2002) as important barriers for women's career, globally. The eclipse of these barriers by offering programs assisting working women is an important step for the development and advancement of women in Cyprus.

From the responses of the above study, it could be concluded that modern Cypriot women do wish to pursue a career and have a family at the same time. Since most women

still have primary responsibility for childcare and dependents, it is logical that they identify issues related to family and the home as issues, which affect their career development. Furthermore, gender attitudes have been changing throughout history, however, women all over the world are still being rejected during the hiring process, not promoted in higher positions, continue getting unequal pay and frequently faced with invisible barriers which block them from reaching top organizational positions. The roots of this inequality have been proven to be deep and appear to be very difficult to prove and even harder to remedy. Achieving equal rights for equal positions is huge, enormous step efforts and a global concern.

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