

# ORGANIZATION BARRIERS AND SOCIAL JUSTICE ANALYSIS OF PROFESSIONAL WOMEN IN THE WORKPLACE

Akinola George Dosunmu<sup>\*</sup>, Mpho Dichaba<sup>\*\*</sup>

<sup>\*</sup> Corresponding author, University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa

Contact details: Department of Adult Continuing and Community Education, University of South Africa, PO Box 392, Preller Street, Muckleneuk Ridge, 0003 City of Tshwane, South Africa

<sup>\*\*</sup> University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa



## Abstract

**How to cite this paper:** Dosunmu, A. G., & Dichaba, M. (2023). Organization barriers and social justice analysis of professional women in the workplace. *Corporate Governance and Organizational Behavior Review*, 7(2), 15–25.  
<https://doi.org/10.22495/cgobrv7i2p2>

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**ISSN Online:** 2521-1889

**ISSN Print:** 2521-1870

**Received:** 28.06.2022

**Accepted:** 13.03.2023

**JEL Classification:** J700, 710, 780

**DOI:** 10.22495/cgobrv7i2p2

The gender gap still poses a setback for women to advance their careers (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2015). Gender equality for working women and the issue of organization governance have continuously been debated as a social reality in the workplace. However, the discourse of equality and equity in the study of women and organizations often focuses on fairness in the sub-Saharan regions. The inability to adequately theorise women's opportunities within the organization setting and from social justice perspective is problematic. Thus, discrimination based on gender in the workplace is deeply organizational and social if studied from the perspective of fairness and justice. Therefore, this paper problematizes the importance of gender equality from an organizational governance perspective and argues that the lack of mentoring and discrimination based on gender affects women working in a corporate organization in South Africa.

**Keywords:** Women, Social Justice, Work, Gender, Workplace, Governance

**Authors' individual contribution:** Conceptualization — A.G.D. and M.D.; Methodology — A.G.D. and M.D.; Validation — A.G.D. and M.D.; Formal Analysis — A.G.D. and M.D.; Resources — A.G.D. and M.D.; Data Curation — A.G.D. and M.D.; Writing — Original Draft — A.G.D. and M.D.; Writing — Review & Editing — A.G.D. and M.D.; Supervision — A.G.D. and M.D.; Project Administration — A.G.D. and M.D.

**Declaration of conflicting interests:** The Authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Globally, the women labour force's participation rate is lower than men's (World Economic Forum, 2017). The gender gap in the different regions varies in terms of the participation rate for women, which thus are gradually declining but not well represented enough in the labour market (International Labour Organisation [ILO], 2017). Job quality remains a challenge and paramount because women are currently increasingly found in paid work, but still, they continue to perform caring responsibilities, and household chores, this predisposition in the labour market contributes to an array of inequalities in the workforce. Women are found to be contributing

more as family workers and are overrepresented among the unemployed, thus reflecting gender stereotypes and remaining segregated in occupations and sectors that are gender-biased in society (McGinn & Oh, 2017). In other words, the majority of women hold informal, temporary, low-paid, and non-standard work. These are organizational and governance problems. It appears organization policy is overturning national laws on equity and this aspect of governance needs investigation.

Research illustrates that women's education impacts the socioeconomic development of society (Batool & Batool, 2018). Increasing women's schooling improves participation rates and equal chances of opportunities in the workforce. Women

are significant in societal growth based on their dual roles. Working women struggle to accomplish success in different sectors such as corporate industry and higher education, especially in sub-Saharan African regions, for instance, in Europe and Latin America, gender gaps are not as wide as in other regions of the world (Moodley et al., 2019). Before the current employment trends, opportunities for women are a challenge, particularly in high technology occupations, while in the past, women lagged in some of these occupations, which ought to promise growth for their future careers.

Furthermore, these problems attribute to how women can find pathways into technology jobs. Essentially, employers are usually gender-biased in the employment process; due to women's gender personalities, this adversely affects women in the workforce. Persistent occupational segregation was historically explained as "thinking male rather than female" because of cultural pressure that positions women in specific occupations in society (Wong & Charles, 2020). Meanwhile, women have not been favoured by culture, especially in Africa, and in terms of work equality because of dominant patriarchal ideologies, which thus continue to affect women's occupational placement. The politicization of employment in Africa is a huge factor that determines women's employment for a particular work (Ilesanmi, 2018). However, other regions of the world, such as Europe and Latin America, have different histories and experiences for women who have equal rights as men based on their employment legislation that promotes equal opportunities for all irrespective of gender (Bando, 2019). How different countries are managing their organizational culture to respond to fair justice for all especially women are an important aspect of organizational issues.

The developmental growth for women in terms of work opportunities in other parts of the world such as Europe is on the increase nowadays even in Latin America, South America, and Asia but the setback is the case in the Middle East and Africa (Ortiz-Ospina & Tzvetkova, 2017). Recently, the affirmative action agenda for gender equality and justice has been influencing women's representation in the workforce through rising numbers, whereas women have successfully attained managerial positions. The agitation for women's inclusion in different sectors previously dominated by men, such as science and technology, creates opportunities for women to vie for work through government actions, non-governmental organizations, and gender advocacy bodies. Despite slight progress in the workplace, the gender gap to some extent impinges on women to get top positions (Gipson et al., 2017). Though the gap is wide in the political and economic structure, there is rapid progress. It is believed that recently the condition of work has been far better for women than before (Bond, 2022). The politics of the workplace seems not to favour women that are not part of decision-making roles. What this means for governance is important for research.

However, gaps in the education sectors between sexes are closed in most countries, but in the world of work, there seem to be egregious gaps between women and men (Evans et al., 2021). In other words, in paid work, men's earnings are

likely higher, which continues to generate inequality between the sexes; thus, it is considered a vexing gap occurring in the workplace. In the world of work, women's representations continue to vary across countries but China has the highest numbers of women in the workforce; women make up 49% of China's population while 46% are found in the labour force. This is much higher than in countries in the western world and African regions (ILO, 2016). In the whole Asian continent and other regions of the world, China promotes gender equality for women.

The labour market shows some slight advancement, but the career development of women continues to face significant obstacles in terms of work cultures, lack of role models, and traditional undervaluation of feminine skills. These impediments of sectoral segregation in the workplace prevent women from accessing equal opportunities, particularly significant opportunities that are in line with their progress in achieving economic, political, and social success (Rankin & Caccamise, 2017). However, the substantive achievement in the context of equality between men and women in all sectors are key issue to bridging the gender gaps, as this is a driving force towards achieving the global progress of equal gender opportunities (Meinck & Brese, 2019). Therefore, the agenda for sustainable development goals (SDG) for gender equality reaffirmed the importance of women's and girls' development in terms of empowerment, especially in Africa, where disparity continues to be a menace (UN Women, 2018). In other words, the SDG's plans are to purposefully transform the agenda through initiatives, particularly for women, to promote decent work for all irrespective of gender, with productive and full access to equal employment, and sustainable economic growth and reduced inequality and poverty.

However, some of the new trends in this context of agitation for equality for women in recent times are discussed to ameliorate the lingering issues that have affected women and work opportunities as a focal point of interest to be considered in this situation.

Therefore, the structure of the paper includes an introduction, followed by the literature review and theoretical framework and justice analysis, tensions in the workplace, policy implications research methodology, result, and conclusion. The literature review in Section 2 analyzed the unequal representations of women in the workforce, especially in the sub-Saharan regions of Africa where women are confined to jobs that are uncompetitive for personal career development. It demonstrates how discrimination against women and segregation in the workforce shows policy problems and affects the efforts of women to aspire to their career paths. These are critical and major issues that have in the past and continue to affect the career development of women in the corporate sector. The gender affirmative policy to some extent has transformed the ideology of segregation in the workforce but has yet to change the reality of injustice for women in the workplace. However, the theoretical framework provides an analytical lens to understand the social identity, and the status of women's work experiences in terms of intersectionality and interconnectivity of

the privileges of being oppressed in a work environment, especially for black women whose race has denied opportunities to context oppression in the workforce. Section 3 is based on semi-systematic reviews of literature related to gender unequal representations in the workplace. Section 4 discusses the possible tensions of the workplace inhospitably for women to build their careers, particularly for categories of ambitious women. Section 5 argues about the policy context framework merely addresses the organizational practices but rather deals with inequality sources. Section 6 of the study highlights the result in terms of the barriers that affect the career development of women in the workplace. The conclusion, Section 7, demonstrates what is in the literature but different in terms of restructuring of workplace ideology of segregation in South Africa.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In sub-Saharan Africa, women continue to experience employment challenges (Alon et al., 2022). Research shows that women perform most unpaid care and household work but work fewer hours in paid employment. However, finding decent jobs in the workforce continues to create huge challenges for African women while inequality persists between men and women across a wide field of the labour market. Working women in sub-Saharan Africa are mostly self-employed, and a high proportion of them contributes to family work (Hundera et al., 2019). The gender gap in informal employment sectors continues to exist across the African regions. The literature cited that women are engaged two and half times more than men in unpaid household work (Ghosh, 2021). The northern African regions have the highest unemployment gender gap with unemployed young men which are far fewer than young women, which is double that of the men (Krafft & Rizk, 2021). However, in the last three decades, there has been a change in labour force participation of women with rates in Africa increasing by a small percentage. This increase might be due to the absence of insufficient alternative income from persistent poverty and social protection that may likely not allow women to drop out of the workforce (Thimmappa et al., 2021). More women are compelled to work in the uncompetitive sectors because of limited opportunities for training and further education. In other words, more women in Africa were forced to work because of limited opportunities to further education.

The idea of a gendered organization is a substructure that is present and operating directly to the workplace circumstances that are yet to be unacknowledged despite different sexes interacting in a workspace biased of unparallel power-sharing (Johnson, 2022). Organizational indicators of hierarchies which thus are entrenched and reinforced through a routine that is often categorized as an organizational process in terms of the job description, wages, performance indicators, and division of labour are considered unfair to women who desire to develop their careers (Tiron-Tudor & Faragalla, 2022). Moreover, systemic intersections of class and sexuality in the workplace create unnecessary regimes of inequality among

others. The argument behind organizational structures is seen as workplace interaction experience being coproduced in terms of employees' relatively differential experiences of categorization into different groups, especially for women who are usually minorities and are scarce in occupations that are gendered in terms of numerical inappropriate of their representations (Biswas et al., 2021). This explains the dimensions of invisible genders in the workplace.

Thus, female employees tend not to be favoured in organizations based on policies that are formally anti-discriminatory which thus might not prevent gender biases (Kroll et al., 2021). It is argued that women may continue to encounter invisible barriers at the workplace such as the maternal wall, leaky pipelines, sticky floors, and discrimination which thus is the most popular and widely used term to describe workplace structural situations (Schultheiss, 2021). However, these invisible organization barriers are usually originated from everyday practices, expectations, and organizational cultures that inadvertently unfavourable to women. Such situations can affect a system that values individual performance.

An intersectional theoretical framework is considered in explaining the interconnectivity of the workplace environment, identity, and social justice for women who have historically been deprived of equal opportunity regarding their gender status as it affects their work experiences (Amorim-Maia et al., 2022). However, the social categories of women have been determined by different facets of the claim of the intersectionality of their identity interactions in complex and distinct ways, especially being characterized by either oppression or privileges (Wilson et al., 2019). Intersectionality has been argued as a term used to describe the form of discrimination experienced by women, especially black women, in the workplace or society to mean that individual identity in the form of interaction is not only held in isolation but with one another (Brassel et al., 2020).

In other words, national awareness has been captivated by the application of intersectionality in a larger scheme rooted as an ideological paradigm and impartial tool of critical theory to explain the gender identity of the oppressed-women (Weir, 2021). The expression of intersection theory has been tied to the manifestations of critical social theories, which are mainly connected to feminist theory as a current discourse of women's social status in society. However, it was argued that there is a strong connection established to understand intersectionality that makes and attempts to make broader claims about social existence, the identity of women, privilege, and oppression (Nichols & Stahl, 2019). This viewpoint means to explain that there are spectrums of interlocking functions of identity that recognize discrimination, privileges, power, and disadvantages used against women in their life path. Feminists argued that there is a system of oppression in a predominant way which thus explains that there are claims in terms of women's lives tied to multiple constructs of oppression of intersecting systems (Belle, 2020). However, this claim turns to critical theory from where the intersectional framework emerged.

The notions of the critical and intersectional theory are historically deeply rooted in the social and cultural conditions of certain groups, particularly women, through ideological lines (Núñez et al., 2020). The ideology of authority in this context was developed through the broad knowledge area of Karl Marx's ideas to eliminate oppression and promote social justice for groups that are deprived of their human rights equally irrespective of their sexes (Dover, 2019). This notion falls within the purview of women being oppressed and discriminated against in terms of equality and social justice in education and work.

The theories of critical social thinking emphasize and analyze societal issues such as inequality among women and attempt to explain and understand the causes of disparity and structural domination through the lens of social conditions and power that reified and created the problems (Collins, 2019). Therefore, critical theories such as feminist theory and critical pedagogy analyzed oppression in the context of the isolation of women but emphasized the facilitation of human equity and emancipation.

The unbreakable connection between intersectionality and critical scholarship labels is seen as oppression (Coaston, 2019). According to the intersectional and critical perspectives, race, gender, biological sex, age, and class are considered categories without moral distinctions but as intersectional parts of a web of oppression and privileges (Belkin & White, 2020). However, feminist scholars argued that categories of intersectionality and critical parts such as anti-poverty activism, discrimination, pro-choice activism, and segregation are all legitimate and considered as a praxis of social justice to dismantle and overturn all forms of oppression, especially against women (Coleman, 2019).

Thus, the critical perspectives unpack the oppression of subordinate groups, people of colour, women, and individuals being oppressed by the rich and men through the ideology of the structures of hegemony (Nickels & Leach, 2021). On the other hand, the intersectional perspective has decentred and revolutionized all forms of oppression, social context, and structural hegemonies of power relationships through critical scholarships and enforcing the agenda of social justice for equality, particularly for women who have been victims of gender inequality (Haynes et al., 2020).

Women across the regions of the world for so many years have faced suffering and other challenges that deprived them of opportunities to compete with the other gender group—men. Women are viewed as second-class in all aspects of life. The arguments of superiority have long been portrayed in the past but continue to exist in our society relegating women to being incapable of succeeding in life (Carter et al., 2019). These actions exclude women from different social activities, which thus reflect how society perceives the importance of boys' education compared to that of girls, particularly in sub-Saharan African regions, with a slight difference in the case of other countries of the world. The question of gender inequality has brought social injustices into society, considering the important roles women could have performed and how they could have contributed to societal development (Shinbrot et al., 2019). Many women

across the regions of the world have struggled to occupy positions such as ministers, chief executive officers (CEOs), and even the president of some countries. Therefore, considering women as not having the required skills to contribute to social development and improve their life situation is a mistake.

Furthermore, social relationships between men and women in terms of equality and equity are considered an agenda to depict social justice for both sexes without any form of oppression on the part of women (Hasan & Khan, 2022). This ideology has shifted slightly from the past as many countries have prioritized this scheme to bridge the gender gaps. The advocacy for gender equality by feminist scholars continues to agitate for change by way of campaigning and struggling to eliminate any kind of discrimination and injustice against women (Mady, 2022). Hence, the analysis of social justice explains the relevance of women's representations in different areas of the social economy as a push factor for awareness to support women irrespective of their social background and status to create opportunities for them in key sectors and to enable more women to vie for higher positions on an equal footing with men (Coe et al., 2019).

### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To understand this issue in the South African context, the paper adopts the semi-systematic review approach to describe issues of workplace inequality in the country. Critical reviews of related works of literature on the topic were sourced and reviewed to determine and understand the change that may have transformed the workplace culture which thus in the past has neglected women in positions of power. Methodologically, reviews related to gender equity and fairness in industry or/and corporation were critiqued to reframe traditional approaches and to accommodate new ideas of inclusivity of women in leadership positions in terms of equal representation. Thus, exploring the tensions of gender inequality regarding access to equal employment opportunities in the workforce. The integrative review methodology approach is suitable for the same research because it allows the same process of methods of synthesizing the literature and critiquing the topic to understand what new knowledge that will emerge from the topic.

### 4. RESPONSES TO ORGANIZATIONAL BARRIERS IN THE WORKPLACE

The workplace has been plagued for many decades by gender inequality in the global economy (Hideg & Krstic, 2020). This global issue has created tensions in the workforce and continues to persist as a result of not recognizing the important roles of women as an integral part of the economy. However, essential factors such as enlightened ideas, improved decision-making, perspectives, and skills to address and harness opportunities and new scopes in terms of global issues have been lost in this context.

Due to persistent forms of gender inequalities arising in the workforce, the workplace has been considered inhospitable, particularly for women who

desire to build a career (Longman et al., 2018). For instance, some of the negative barriers affecting women in the workplace, such as discrimination, determine the low earning potential for women and lack of access to other workplace opportunities, which thus clearly shows that there are wage gender gaps (Petrongolo & Ronchi, 2020). Leadership positions in the workplace show a dearth of women at the top executive hierarchy, especially for women who are career-driven but the reality is that it takes longer for women to advance to the peak of their careers (Sánchez & Lehnert, 2019). Usually, the low socioeconomic status of women in the workplace is pre-determined by the level of discrimination against women, which is considered the major contributing factor to their underrepresentation (Bader et al., 2018). Some of these gender-based factors acting against women in many organizations and workplaces are attributed to the policies related to human resources and decision-making, especially in organizations that men largely dominate. In other words, it has been argued that women continue to find it difficult to be committed to organizations and ultimately perform on their job due to subjective experiences such as physical health and stigmatization, which therefore affects women's mental, psychological, and physical stress (Summers et al., 2018) and their satisfaction on the job.

Institutional discrimination is considered a major factor leading to gender inequality in the workplace, particularly through human resources policies (Bader et al., 2018). Some of the organizational policies, as it impinges on women in the workplace, are attributed to the process of promotions, employee selection, and performance evaluations. However, personal discrimination usually occurs in the workplace, particularly in decisions related to women's matters in terms of human resource enactment which in different cases are sometimes biased as some of these enactments are tied to human resource policies as related to decision making.

Researchers argue that aside from personal discrimination in the workplace, class sexism, and unfriendly acts through organizational decisions creating discriminatory practices are one of the mechanisms used to disadvantage women through human resource policies, considered sexist forms of attitude in the organization negatively affecting women (Adejogbe & Adejogbe, 2018). This act forms negative stereotypes and paternalistic views against women in the workplace. However, in human resource practices, sexism in the workplace is defined as a distinctive way of gender discrimination.

The process of structural, organizational practices involving human resources policy, leadership, strategy, culture, structure, and company climate are interrelated and may contribute to gender discrimination in the workplace (Heilman & Caleo, 2018). Arguably each of these elements that cause gender inequalities in the workplace can perpetuate institutional discrimination in the organization that might lead to a form of discrimination in enactment, human resource policies, and decision-making. Institutional discrimination is inherently attributed to bias, especially against women, to relegate them to certain levels in the workplace irrespective of their skills,

job-related knowledge, performance, and abilities (Pitot et al., 2021). For instance, all forms of institutional discrimination against women in the workplace can occur in each type of organizational policy, right from the selection and recruitment process of employees. It becomes endemic in the organization, especially affecting women through their role assignments, promotions, training, performance evaluations, and pay. Despite women's efforts to be at par with men, workplace politics affects their representation at the pinnacle ranks.

Similarly, workplace policies seem not to favour women in certain conditions such as performance evaluations that are used as pre-determining factors to reward employees in terms of role assignment, promotions, compensation, and termination related to punishments (Rivera & Tilcsik, 2019). On the other hand, one of the indices used in the workplace to reward and measure employees is the performance metric. To "save time", it is common to determine employees' presence in the office as a yardstick to know who spent more time in the office than others. This approach is unfavourable to women because of their double roles as caregivers and workers. However, the work flexibility arrangement often uses time by women more than men and continues to create challenges for women, and thus the policies of performance evaluation in the workplace can contribute to discrimination against women (Fuller & Hirsh, 2019).

Organizational policies surrounding opportunities and promotions for women's advancement are concern areas used to determine the formal job ladder, which hinders promotion opportunities for women in the workplace (Calinaud et al., 2020). However, the job ladder tends to be divided by job segregation and gender. This strengthens the movement of employees through the specific ladder without having the opportunity to cross through the advancement lines. Therefore, women are more likely to have experiences related to a job that does not provide access to job ladders, thus making them unqualified for advancement.

Women's under-representation at work compared to men leads to the creation of fewer opportunities for them in leadership and higher management positions in the organization (Huang et al., 2019). Research reveals that women are given fewer opportunities for training and challenging roles that might assist them to progress in their careers (Al-Asfour et al., 2017). For instance, women in mid-level and managerial positions are considered to have less advanced tasks and challenges that can lead to promotion. In other words, women in male-dominated fields in the workplace are less likely to be given leadership assignments. They are in unfavourable positions to be considered for the roles that are challenging, particularly the ones that assist employees — the women — to gain skills useful to them to allow them to excel in their career path (Born et al., 2018).

However, women are likely to experience less status, less upward advancement, and insufficient access to information if they belong to gender-segregated networks (Tinsley & Ely, 2018). The workplace challenges can be attributed to not having women representation in high-ranking

positions, which makes it more difficult for women to find female mentors. Thus, the workplace structure is expected to be aware of gender inequalities to support ambitious women and provide them with opportunities to reach the top echelon in the workplace (Bourabain, 2021).

Consequently, workplace practices, organizational culture, and processes are complex phenomena that can be seen as furthering gender inequality. Therefore, some of these practices of harmful inequalities are endemic within the human resources of an organization (Amis et al., 2020). These practices of decisions making and policies affect the promotion, pay, hiring, and training of women. The precondition for gender equality in any society is more than just an organizational goal; but aims to meet the challenges of building good governance, promoting sustainable societal development, and reducing poverty.

Recently, gender discrimination has gradually been faced in developed and developing societies, but it is not universally true because the gender gaps are still wide in some countries, especially in the sub-Saharan African regions (Alozie & Akpan-Obong, 2017). However, organizational policies in recent times have changed practices within the human resources department in terms of structures, decision-making levels, practices, and processes in areas of sexism (Le et al., 2021). Workplace cultures have slightly changed in some organizations through a multifaceted approach. However, not all the elements in the model adopted by different organizations are used in this context because some still focus on only one factor that promotes gender inequality.

Many researchers have argued that different approaches have been initiated to reduce gender discrimination in the workplace by focusing on friendly family policies, diversity initiatives, other processes, practices, organizational structures, and human resources decision-makers (Azmat & Boring, 2020). This approach means that the innovation of such initiatives is changing the workplace's composition aimed at developing how an organization includes policies to retain, recruit, and focus on groups of employees underrepresented in the workplace — women in particular. In other words, affirmative action in the form of diversity initiatives that have been implemented usually monitors and tracks candidates that are qualified in different groups of employees consisting of both men and women and candidates that are hired and promoted.

It is interesting to note that some organizations have altered their hiring process and practices to increase gender diversity in the workplace. This is done by sourcing gender proactively, diverse interviews, an inclusive gender-diverse workplace, learning from exit interviews, and better job descriptions promoting gender equality and fair compensation practices (Mun & Jung, 2018). However, strict adherence in terms of workplace offences and effective policies against harassment, bullying, and racism are components of the ongoing initiatives to stop gender inequality in the workplace.

Further to the argument discrimination and harassment against women, either mentally or physically at the workplace, are considered to affect organizational productivity due to excluding women

from certain decisions and responsibilities (Ayub & Adegboyege, 2020). Certain organizations have deemed it fit as part of corporate responsibility to keenly oversee and monitor issues of harassment and ensure strict rules are incorporated in their policies as strong measures to deal with any form of gender inequality in the workplace (Cheung et al., 2018).

## 5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS OF ORGANIZATIONAL DECISIONS

The literature on organizational culture found similar results regarding barriers to career advancement. According to Alsharif (2018), corporate culture is a fundamental reason for the absence of women from management and leadership positions. Walker (2020) thinks that “attitudes”, that is, discrimination and “bias” on the part of the dominant group (white males), are the cause of the differential treatment of individuals in terms of access to work positions and rewards, and women do report more discrimination in male-dominated firms than in female-dominated firm. These arguments are supported by Szydio and Grześ-Bukłaho (2020), who suggests that traditional and historical beliefs and attitudes held by organizational members mean that women are not viewed as leaders. They also suggest that structural issues, which include internal business, societal, governmental, and organizational factors impede the career progress of women.

Amis et al. (2018) argue that changes in organizational practices merely address the symptoms, rather than dealing effectively with the underlying sources of inequality. They propose the following steps toward entrenching change: recognition of the existence of a gender inequality problem; identification of the causes by establishing which policies and practices in the organization undermine effectiveness; and experimentation with options for replacing redundant practices with ones more effective for all employees. This approach, therefore, seeks to eliminate ineffective policies and practices, rather than masking them by only dealing with the symptoms.

Lekchiri and Kamm (2020) notes that a male-dominated culture is an obstacle to women's progression to higher positions, as women frequently find it difficult to enter the “old-boys club”. Leaders play an important role in eliminating discriminatory behaviour through different processes; for example, the establishment of various informal and formal rules. The combination of these rules creates a unique culture that shapes the attitudes and experiences of those involved.

A masculine organizational culture, therefore, comprises the norms and hidden assumptions, and organizational practices that promote various forms of communication, approaches and organizational values, self-perception, as well as definitions of achievement and effective management, all of which are stereotypically male (Campuzano, 2019). Organizational cultures are, therefore, often defined as power-oriented cultures rather than people-oriented cultures; power and achievement cultures rather than support and role cultures; or logical goal cultures rather than human relations

cultures. The masculine dimension can be summed up as self-sufficiency, the promotion of independence, hierarchical relations, competition, task orientation, and the establishment of authority and position. The feminine dimension, however, is explained as balancing life's activities, participation, collaboration, and promotion of the relational self (Wood et al., 2020). The majority of senior top positions are still held by males and it might, therefore, be argued that organizational cultures are expected to continue to be dominated by masculine norms and values (Berdahl et al., 2018).

## 6. RESULTS

To put this study in the perspective of the South African work situation, the results of research conducted on women regarding barriers that affect their career advancement in South Africa reveal important organizational and governance problems. These realities were sourced through a survey approach with similar participants in a corporate organization and were validated through a pretest context to understand the perception of women in lower management positions who are singles with at least a diploma qualification in terms of workplace hindrances that might affect pose barriers to their career progression. The descriptive table (Table 1) shows several organizational barriers that are impeding career progress and the advancement of professional women.

**Table 1.** Organizational barriers affecting the career advancement of the respondents

<i>Institutional barriers</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Women belief	19	14.28
Sexual harassment	6	4.51
Discrimination against women	30	22.56
Lack of mentoring	41	30.83
Prevention by male	13	9.77
No. formal qualifications.	20	15.04
No. response	4	3.01
Total	133	100

Table 1 is based on the research conducted by the authors and it provides information related to the institutional barrier for junior women workers in the researched organization. The data was sourced from the findings of research conducted in 2015. The research examines how junior and middle management professional career women advance their careers in a telecommunication organization in South Africa. It considers organizational barriers that may be affecting the career advancement of the respondents. The organizational barrier is operationalized and captured as "institutional barriers" in terms of women's beliefs, sexual harassment, discrimination against women, lack of mentoring, prevention by males, and no formal qualifications. The table shows the great majority of women indicating that they lacked mentoring and have experienced discrimination. This table at a glance provides useful information to articulate arguments in the literature regarding discrimination and mentoring problem for women which ultimately affected their career progression. There is quite a similarity based on what the literature suggests and the outcome of this research. The results reveal that the two most

significant barriers to the career progress of women include discrimination against women and a lack of mentoring.

The perceptions of the respondents as depicted in Table 1 are endorsed by numerous researchers such as Baron and Bielby (1985) and Abdelzaher and Abdelzaher (2019). These researchers argue that the institutional barriers affecting women in corporate settings often include the practices, norms, and traditions of the dominant gender group and the implementation of policies that are to the disadvantage of women and benefit their male counterparts in the workplace environment. It is feasible that the key factors in the lack of advancement of women, such as gendered barriers, are not of their own making but rather the result of prevailing norms, traditions, and practices in the workplace environment.

In addition, Table 1 revealed that 20 (15.04%) respondents believed that a lack of formal qualifications was part of the barrier affecting their career development in the organization.

Meanwhile, 19 (14.29%) respondents agreed that the notion that women are not suited to be managers is a factor affecting the career progress of women career, 6 (4.51%) cited sexual harassment and 30 (22.56%) referred to discrimination against women as organizational barriers affecting the lack of progress in their careers. In addition, 41 (30.83%) respondents believed that a lack of access to mentoring was affecting their career progress and 13 (9.77%) believed prevention on the part of male managers was affecting their career progress.

The result shows the need to address gender inequality and gender gap issues at the workplace in line with the agenda for SDG to include more women in the workforce. Recently, gender equality has been prioritized in organizations in terms of understanding the complexities of inequality existing in the workplace. Organizations, including non-governmental organizations, in their efforts, continue to agitate for gender equality and focus on an area that is important to provide opportunities for women. Some of these efforts are first to promote affirmative action to track occupational segregation, and secondly to support the agenda for sustainable development for 2030 in the form of transformative and integrated framework measures. Thirdly, actions are taken to promote women's ventures into more entrepreneurial businesses and encourage policies that will reduce barriers against women. Fourthly, the initiatives aim to promote equal opportunities by closing the wage-gender gap and eliminating discrimination.

In line with the SDG, gender equality is an achievable mission to meet up with as a precondition for and an essential realization of sustainable development that does not exclude anyone and ensure that all women have decent jobs that guarantee their future careers. Affirmative action policies include important measures in terms of representation, quotas or goals, and set targets managed by employers, trade unions, companies, and organizations. This initiative requires an agenda for continuous implementation to support women's representation in all sectors. This initiative will allow them to have the opportunity to partake in business decision-making. The policies of inclusion are part of the global initiatives to provide access to quality

education and training programmes to encourage women in particular to participate in work fields of study that are non-stereotypical (Unterhalter, 2019). In other words, reducing occupational and sectoral segregation promotes educational systems that can train more women to become prominent in professional disciplines such as mathematics, engineering, and technology by gaining adequate skills.

Policymakers should closely monitor gender gap development to initiate measures that will limit the continual gender inequalities in our societies. In this paper, some of the trends identified included unequal opportunities for education, work representation, and social justice for women who have been victims of social injustice in the past. These discriminatory practices are slightly reduced in some countries but not all. However, researchers have suggested that women are steadily closing up the gaps, and gender differences can be counteracted by a policy change.

## 7. CONCLUSION

The disparity in the workplace in terms of gender inequality in organizations was explored to understand the factors responsible for the imbalance and discrimination against women. However, the discourses about women's underrepresentation in the workplace are related to social justice. Awareness of the issue has been reckoned with in the context of unfairly managing opportunities for women who were excluded and denied equal chances to access managerial positions in the past. Basically, women were oppressed in nearly all sectors based on their gender status, which thus continues to create challenges for them to compete with men in the workplace. Many arguments have revealed that there are still tensions of inequality persisting in organizations but fair changes happening to workplace policies and structures, especially in the developed world, to support the inclusion of women in decision-making. Consequently, organizations' human resources

practices are gradually being improved to restructure some of the workplace barriers that were affecting women's careers in the past and present in terms of pay, hiring, promotion, and training. Organizations have considered sexism as a reciprocal policy. They have been taking measures to deal with gender inequality in the workplace, but some elements of hostility continue to affect women's ability to attain top positions in terms of organizational structures. Therefore, a critical focus on organizational processes and practices is essential.

The idea of governance and policy restructuring reformation in the organization is a question of more opportunities for career women to develop. Therefore, the workplace ideology of segregation and discrimination needs to be reframed to inclusion and diversity irrespective of gender and status. The structural and cultural patterns of thinking about a male in the organization need a paradigm shift to think of the female gender being represented in the decision-making of the organization. Undoubtedly, inequality seems to prevail in some sectors of the economy but creating access for women for positions will transform workplace philosophy.

However, this study is limited to understanding that the workplace culture in terms of equality and social justice for career women in South Africa is deeply structural and problematic. Extracts from different articles including empirical evidence from a study conducted in 2015 related to the study were reviewed to understand the organizational current situations in terms of work conditions and governance issues regarding how women navigate to the leadership position in an organization. This limitation suggests the complexity of aligning labour policy and organizational culture in South Africa. Therefore, the governance approach to limit unnecessary injustice for black women requires a further partnership among relevant stakeholders where deliberation will focus on reimagining gender discrimination in the workplace.

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