

Gender in construction industry sociology essay



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Interviews are conducted with males and females already in the construction industry and those who are studying towards a career in construction. There are numerous factors that discourage women from pursuing careers in construction. The male dominant nature of the industry is a pivotal factor that deters women from entering the industry; women therefore have fewer role models and lack of confidence in their future prospects in industry. The need to emphasise the implementation of the Gender Equity Act specifically focused on the construction industry, in order to address this lack of parity. The outcome provides a learning curve for both males and females and will assist in understanding the reasons and factors that cause women not to be interested in construction as a career.

Access to these findings needs to be widely publicised.

Keywords:

Barriers, Construction industry, Gender, Woman

1 Introduction

The construction industry has been for years been perceived to be a mens world. Slowly the face of the engineering industry is changing and we are seeing more women entering it. This paper is focusing on the changing facet of the industry and how it has impacted on women. The predominant image of construction is that of a male-dominated industry requiring brute strength and tolerance for outdoor conditions, inclement weather and bad language. Reconciling this image with women's participation in the construction industry is problematic. However, there are early signs of a cultural shift in

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the industry. This paper presents an empirical review of women's roles within the industry and the ways in which people make sense of their working experience when traditional gender roles are challenged. Based on qualitative research, the study found that men in the industry regarded as the gatekeepers are now finding ways to respond to and make sense of a changing workplace, and the realities that women are now actively encouraged to participate, legally protected against discrimination and more highly represented in non-traditional areas of the construction industry.

Through interviews conducted with males and females already in construction industry and those who are studying towards a career in construction, it is clear that there is still few numbers of women in the construction industry.

Women are also findings ways as apprentices and trades people to position themselves within this new environment. They identify ways of working that are more likely to ensure a smooth experience for themselves. While the stimulus for the changing face of the workplace is the notion of gender equality, the responses are not gender neutral. All players are trying to negotiate ways to integrate each other into a new environment in a manner which allows them to comfortably reconcile issues of gender. There are numerous factors that discourage women from pursuing careers in construction. The male dominant nature of the industry is a pivotal factor that deters women from entering the industry; women therefore have fewer role models and lack of confidence in their future prospects in industry. Most of man in construction industry still believes that involving women in this industry is not a good idea, as they say that women are not strong enough to

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handle all construction challenges e. g. Manual hard labour. There is a need to emphasise the implementation of the gender equity act specifically focused on the construction industry, in order to address this lack of parity. Workshop that will talk about involvement of woman in construction industry, change of mentality of female and male in construction industry. We should be cognisant of the fact that the fewer women there are in the industry, the fewer women there are to look up to and thus inform the career choices of potential female entrants. It is therefore my suggestion that a platform be provided to enable successful women to act as model exemplars and beacons of inspiration. In order to augment the mentoring and role modelling process, women need to establish both professional and personal networks

2 Literature Review

Construction has for a long time been deemed as an industry unsuitable for women, this notion is still being perpetuated today (Dainty, Bagilhole and Neale et al, 2001). Managerially, it needs to be stated that there is some degree of support. However, this was found to be highly variable between differing individuals, company departments, work sites and organisations.

The problem of undervalued female in terms of their lack of experience and saying that they do not have power to handle the construction work load need to be changed. Blocking them from fulfil their carriers and in construction industry Managerially, it needs to be stated that there is some degree of support. However, this was found to be highly variable between differing individuals, company departments, work sites and organisations.

The qualitative data revealed some evidence of a glass ceiling (whereby women can see but not attain higher level jobs and are blocked from career progression; Gurjao, 2006), with one respondent contentiously claiming that they had experienced regional variations in the SA.

Role models have frequently been identified as key to the development of young aspiring professionals (Singh et al, 2006). While it has been established that mentors are always in close proximity to the protge in that they are part and parcel of an interactive relationship with the individual; role models are largely unacquainted with the observer and as such have not personally approved or rendered the observational processes as permissible by the individual observing. As a result role models may be close or distant to the observer. (Singh et al, 2006). Women pursuing careers in the construction industry vigorously seek the industry culture as a result of being socialised into the culture, stemming from the system of education they have been exposed to (Bennet, Davidson & Gale, 1999). In a study performed by (Agapiou, 2002) it was discovered that from an early age men have the perception that sufficient strength is a birth right which they have been afforded because women are not made or be expected to work with heavy equipment. One of the female participants in Agapious (2002) study mentioned how her colleagues will continuously joke about her place being in the kitchen and not out on site, an ideology entrenched into the minds of boys at a young age. These are barriers which are initiated in early socialisation and are further perpetuated throughout industry related training and industry job recruitment (Fielden et al, 2001). They are aggravated by an industry that remains entrenched in a culture that

undercuts the value of female participation and continues to foster a male only image (ibid). Role modelling and mentoring schemes have been introduced into the construction industry as an initiative to enhance the status quo of the underrepresentation of women in the industry, one such example of this Women as Role Models (Bennet et al, 1999).

The table bellow proves and gives better understanding of what are barriers facing women in the construction industry (Le Jeune, 2008). It also gives us background by other authors that these barriers started long time ago.

BARRIERS FACING WOMEN IN THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY: SOURCE: LE JEUNE, 2008; TG59 CONFERENCE

3 Research Methodology

All respondents in both the focus groups and the semi-structured questionnaires were asked to identify their age grouping and their profession categorisation.

Respondents were also asked to provide information on how long they had worked in the construction industry, to outline the top two barriers that they had faced in staying or progressing and any other additional personal or professional barriers that they had faced (or are facing) in being a woman in the industry sector. Additional questions were also asked regarding what type of training they would find useful in the future and whether they had any suggestions for training or support that would help women enter, stay or progress within the construction industry. The questionnaires were handed in at the end of each workshop had taken place. All research findings were

analysed in an ongoing process and themes were identified via usage of keyword analysis in a series of Word documents. Both the literature and empirical data has been analysed in an ongoing basis, to which the findings have become emergent regarding the issues and identified themes, which will be both illustrated and discussed later in this paper.

The quantitative data findings from the questionnaires outline the age and broad profession category of the women trainee delegates. The research also indicates a very complex picture of the potential for the growth of women in the SA construction industry based upon the range of their age groupings and profession. It also indicates that the majority of women in the construction industry are in their 25-35 year age group, with a smaller number being present in the 36-45 year age group.

It should be stated that the numbers of women in our study were too small to be statistically significant and that the cohort may also have been affected by the nature and type of the soft skills training on offer. However, it was of interest to note the apparent bell shape distributions of age ranges that seem to have occurred in our trainee and support group cohort; although a much larger number of women would need to be studied to ascertain the validity or reliability of these findings.

4 Findings and Discussion

Where? Questions Who? Number of respondents Common answers

DUT & Varsity College Why it is rare to find female in construction industry and what is the cause of it? Female Students 21 Its a mans industry.

Female are not will to work longer hours.

They don't want harassment from man.

Male Students 17 They are not tough enough.

They expect special attention.

They think that its a mans world.

Construction Industry Head Office Female 5 Man undervalued them. Not willing to work longer hours.

Some man still believes that female is not supposed to be working hard.

Men believe that its their culture that only men are supposed to do the ruling not female.

Male 11 They dont have construction experience.

They can not handle the construction pressure.

Most managers they still dont believe in them.

Construction Industry Site Based Female 8 Its not easy to work surrounded by mans.

They dont like the work environment.

They dont want to be undervalued by man.

Not enough roll model for them to inspire

Male 20 Men believe that its their culture that only men are supposed to do the ruling not female.

They come and run away because of hard work.

Personal protective clothing (PPE) is the problem to them.

Men are always looking at them and they feel uncomfortable.

Where? Questions Who? Number of correspondence Common answers

DUT & Varsity College Are the females ready to be part of construction industry? , Answer need to be supported Female Students 21 Yes. We see more numbers of the females in the construction courses.

Male Students 17 No. They join construction industry because of the belief that it pays well, so they only want money.

Construction Industry Head Office Female 5 No. they just want to prove a point that they can do what men think they can do best.

Yes.

Male 11

Construction Industry Site Based Female 8

Male 20

5 Conclusion and Further Research

The lack of visibility of successful women in construction has shown to perpetuate a self fulfilling prophecy whereby fewer women are dissuaded from viewing a career in construction as viable. Isolation of women in construction means that women are unable to establish and access support networks and guidance in career advancement. It is highlighted that the fewer women there are in the industry, the fewer women there are to look up to and thus inform the career choices of potential female entrants. It is therefore suggested that a platform be provided to enable successful women to act as model exemplars and beacons of inspiration. In order to augment the mentoring and role modelling process, women need to establish both professional and personal networks. Only time and further analysis will tell. For its part, the authors will be further analysing the role of a bottom up process and future papers will report upon the research findings and outcomes that have been achieved.

Through the research of this paper, the author has proved that there is stronger instigator of positive changes to organisational cultures and the barriers that women face.

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