

Women participation in us public sector government

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Research on the male-female balance in numbers, power and opportunities in the government and public sector has included several works and research that highlight the dwindling and adverse ratios in female/male working proportions, status and conditions in the US over the decades, which is also observed as a worldwide trend. This is in line with the traditional bias against the female worker that has characterized the world employment scenario for the last several years. Notable works that throw light in this regard are that of Mary E. Guy's *Three Steps Forward, Two Steps Backward: The Status of Women's Integration into Public Management* (1993). Guy wrote, " When tracing women's integration into public management, we see a pattern of rapid progress in the middle and late 1970s, followed by a period of quiescence in the mid-1980s. The late 1980 and early 1990s, however, are showing enhanced progress again. " Still, " women occupy the lower rungs on the agency ladders and men occupy the upper rungs," she wrote.

Research and data collected in later years by 2 various agencies such as the US Department of Labor, the Census Bureau, and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission have corroborated similar viewpoints. Table I below clearly displays the trend of female/male composition in federal employment. As compared to 1997 there is a minor increase in female employment from 41. 65% in 1997 to 43. 6% in 2006. The positions in which women workers have a strong influence on their earnings, facilities, and careergrowth opportunities. Women in managerial positions have greater job flexibility as compared to those in lower service jobs. In some states and departments in the US, employment in managerial 3 positions varies by race

and ethnicity, however much anti-discriminatory policies may have been put in place. Amongst women, only 25% of managerial positions were occupied by American African women while white women held 41% of such positions. Overall, women earn 85.5% of what men earn.

A majority of women still continue to work in traditionally women's occupations. In this regard recently released Census data collected by the Institute for Women's Policy Research clearly indicated that the workplace payment gap between women and men is gradually getting bad as compared to earlier times. Between 2003 and 2006 the median annual earnings for women workers in government reduced by 0.6% at \$ 35000 while that for men was almost unchanged at \$ 44000. However, the overall situation has improved since 1960, when the average American woman earned 60 cents against every dollar earned by the American male. Presently the situation has improved to a woman earning about 85 cents against a dollar earned by a man. It can be seen that the status of women has improved in general and particularly in the federal government as also evidenced by census figures. Major contributors to this have been the gradual changes made in law, social and business practices. Moreover, the US economy has grown more than five times since then whereby more 4 opportunities for women have been created. Jobs have also shifted from physical tasks to cognitive and caliber related functions thus opening wider avenues for women.

Measured by 1960 standards the overall status of the American woman has improved considerably, but they have not got their due proportional share in

as much as the economy has grown. In this context an additional observation is the fact that women and most minorities in the US as also in most parts of the world represent a higher percentage of employees at lower levels in any department or undertaking of the government while being absolutely underrepresented at the higher end of the ladder, implying that a very small percentage of women make it to the top positions of the government and public sector undertakings. It can be seen that in 1997 there were 21.17% of women occupying the senior positions while in 2006 the position improved marginally only to 26.19%. The Federal workforce has for decades reflected patterns that show disproportionately high numbers of women in lower ranks in the public sector and government departments. Similarly, there is a lot of disproportion in the number of women occupying higher positions. In 2005, only 6.2% of federally employed women were occupying positions ranked as upper-middle management positions. Comparatively, male representation was as much as four times higher with 28% of all males employed in the upper level of GS-13 and above. This is often referred to as the glass ceiling concept and has become an important tool to understand the working environment particularly in the American working context.

Significantly the Civil Rights Act of 1991 established the Federal Glass Ceiling Commission which was entrusted the task of assessing the barriers that hindered the advancement of women to top-ranking decision making positions. It also set into motion measures that would hinder such discrimination. Discrimination issues based on gender have long been a subject of debate at various forums internationally and was strongly taken

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up in the Equal Pay Act of 1963 and in the Civil Rights Act of 1964. However, it was soon realized by the mid-1980s that although massive changes took place in the demographic, social, and legal aspects of the US society, such discrimination on the basis of gender continued to exist. Hymowitz and Schellhardt used the term glass ceiling to describe this discrimination in 1986. The few women who managed to rise due to their caliber were also blocked by barriers of strongly embedded discrimination practices that continued to exist and they consequently could not break through the glass ceiling. 7 One particular aspect of gender disparity in lowering the status of women workers is the strong pattern in the disparity of pay and benefits as figured from the data available from US Federal salary data for positions primarily occupied by females. Figures available from the Department of Labor show that in 2005 the hourly earnings of women were only 76.5% as compared to men. It is primarily for this reason that women have started to opt-out of bureaucratic employment towards entrepreneurship and other part-time work. In light of these stark revelations, the Federal government has taken steps to remove the imbalance in gender employment by attempting to make equal opportunity a possibility for women. All government departments have been asked to devise a strategy and adopt policies to remove the glass ceiling that has been pulling back women from rising higher in their careers and to award them with senior management and decision making positions.

A strong measure of gender inequality is the salary levels that differentiate the positions occupied by males and females. Data proves that on average males earn more than females in the federal government. The average

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salary for male managers in FY 2005 was \$45, 300; and for females, \$35, 300. Thus as an average female employees made about 84. 7% of the salary made by her male counterpart. Since Federal pay scales are never based on gender, they are obviously different due to lower ranks occupied by women. It is also clear that the majority of the higher positions are occupied by men. Women occupy 1/3 rd positions below the GS-12 level and only 1/6th of positions above G-13 levels thus implying that the majority of women are clustered in the lower echelons of the hierarchy. Table IV below illustrates the percentage of details of high ranking women with various government agencies. Significantly and in contrast, it can be seen that women occupy 75% and 66. 67% of the top positions with the Defense Security Service and Defense Human Resource Activity respectively. Table IV Ranking of Agencies with the Highest Percentage of Women in Senior Pay Level Positions in FY 2006 (Agencies With 500 Or More Employees).

The years that followed 1991 brought significant changes in the American political landscape and in the entire federal workforce. New Presidents brought new concepts and practices regarding women in high positions. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and Condoleezza Rice as also Attorney General Janet Reno became the pioneering and powerful women to hold cabinet positions, and other appointees like Donna Shalala as Secretary of Health and Human Services, Alice Rivlin at the Office of Management and Budget, and Sheila Widnall as Secretary of the Air Force caused one dignitary to comment that when senior staff members meet at White House 11 meetings half the attendees are usually women. This is however farfetched

and isolated compared to the large array of discriminatory evidence available.