

Part gender  
discrimination plays  
in career  
development  
sociology essay



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

As defined by Ambassador, F. J, “ Gender is a concept that refers to a system of roles and relationships between women and men that are determined, not by biology but by the social, political and economic context”. The socially determined differences between men and women are referred to as gender, whilst the biologically determined characteristics are referred to as sex. An important distinction between gender and sex is all that women and men do, and all that is expected of them, apart from their distinct sexual function (child bearing and breast feeding, provision of sperm, impregnation) which changes with time and varied social and cultural factors (Ambassador F. J. B, 2007).

As defined by Wikipedia on the other hand, “ Discrimination is a sociological term referring to the treatment taken towards or against a person of a certain group in consideration based solely on class or category”. It refers to the actual behaviour portrayed by an individual, group of individuals or society towards another. And basically involves the denial of one group from opportunities and rights that are available to other groups. There are varied forms of discrimination, but any form of discrimination involves the exclusion of one group from the other Wikipedia, The free encyclopaedia, (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Discrimination>).

Determined patterns of behaviour such as rights, obligations, and prerogatives assigned to females and males in society are referred to as gender roles. They differ with time, place and from one society to another. Gender roles are constructed on the stereotype such as;

Men are better than women;

Men are cleverer than women;

Men's works are more valuable than women's work;

Women are weak and dependent;

Men are strong and independent;

Furthermore, as culture is dynamic and socioeconomic situation change over time, so gender patterns change with them. What women and men do can radically changed as a result of war, famine or disaster. Gender does not address people but issues, issues such as relationships, roles, characteristics, differences and social expectations (Ambassador F. J. B, 2007, Abram, S. 2002).

According to Ambassador F. J. B, (2007) “, Gender issues in development concerns division of labour, inequality in access to resources, inputs and benefits. The questions to be asked are: Is there parity? Is access open to all? Is it close to some? Gender inequality is a development problem which refers to relations of power (between rich and poor, between women and men) that prevents equitable development and the participation of all”. As a result, development moves at a slow pace, conflict, lack of interest, disunity, poor participation, opinion sharing becomes limited and there is a setback in society. The main concern about gender issues in development is the actions required to correct the imbalance between men and women. Gender issues are therefore not about women's participation or women's development per se. In the broader sense, they are about addressing imbalance in society. It is an important planning tool. The gender analysis of who does what or who

controls what can assist planners in closing the gender gap since in planning the issue at stake is that of power relationship or power sharing (Ambassador F. J. B, 2007, Abram, S. 2002) .

According to Ambassador F. J. B, (2007), a gender perspective looks not at women alone but at the relationship between women and men and how societies are structure along gender lines.

It is concerned with:

Women's involvement concerns, needs and aspirations as well as those for men;

The impact of policies, plans and projects on women, men and children;

Assessing to who the benefits accrue and in what ways, Financial and other qualitative and quantitative benefits may be assessed;

The whole process of gender planning.

According to Stuart Malkin, gender discrimination as the name implies, is a form of bias that is hurtful and to a great extent, it is as destructive as any other form of bias. In his Ezine article, Stuart Malkin stated that “ women and men are not created equal; they each have their God given strengths, focused on their responsibilities for procreation and family viability “. These differences according to him are difficult to dismiss but are certainly not the cause for gender discrimination in the workplace in particular and society in general (<http://ezinearticle.com/?Gende-Bias-GenderDiscrimination-Gender-Equality&id=14755>).

<https://assignbuster.com/part-gender-discrimination-plays-in-career-development-sociology-essay/>

Discrimination on the other is defined by Wikipedia as a term generally used by sociologists to refer to “ the treatment taken towards or against a person of a certain group in consideration based solely on class or category”. It refers to a behaviour pattern portrayed by one group which involves excluding or restricting other group members from opportunities available them. There are various forms of discrimination, but all forms a virtually speaking the same language of rejection or exclusion (Wikipedia, the free encyclopaedia (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Discrimination>))

## 1. 2 Statement of the problem.

Women form the largest single sector of the population in the United Kingdom but yet form the minority group in the attainment of leadership roles in the labour force. For decades, women across the board have been battling against inequality between men in a bid to bridge the labour force gap, and yet face some form of gender discrimination in the workplace that limit their challenge to attain higher level management roles. The perception about women’s recognition were based on stereotypical assumptions and prejudice such as; women’s achievement was to a great extent attributed to luck or effort rather than the ability to perform, men are cleverer than women; Men are strong and independent; Women are weak and dependent; and a vast majority of people had the notion that child bearing and house maintenance are predominantly a woman’s social roles and responsibilities. Such perceived assumptions resulted to the vast majority of competent women that have excellence potential to stagnate in job assignments that lack challenge. Moreover, unlike men, women over the years have limited legal, political and economic rights which largely increased their dependency <https://assignbuster.com/part-gender-discrimination-plays-in-career-development-sociology-essay/>

on men for financial and other means of support (Lyness and Thomson, 1997).

However, with the advent of equal employment opportunity legislations and the formation of the Gender and career Development-UK, and the Equal Opportunity Commissions to enforce and implement these legislations in practice and promote equal opportunity, women's rights are now protected by law against any form of discrimination in the work place that tend to limit or restrict their aspirations and career advancement opportunities as well as enabling them to overcome prejudice.

Even though women to a certain extent have experienced a positive change in their social status due to employment equality legislations and law enforcement, there is certainty among women as well as the ethnic minority that discrimination and inequality still exist in some form. A good number of women and ethnic minority group face artificial barriers in establishments that deter them from making the best use of their knowledge, skills and abilities to ascend the career ladder. Unlike men, there is considerable number of occupations or positions that appeared impossible for women to attain. Therefore, the vast majority of women in the UK labour force are represented in middle and low managerial positions with less decision making, whilst senior level management and important decision making positions are held by men. It is because of this gender gap and imbalance in society that has brought the idea to investigate about the eminent barriers that prevent women from career advancement.

### 1. 3 The Purpose of the Study

<https://assignbuster.com/part-gender-discrimination-plays-in-career-development-sociology-essay/>

This research study is an attempt to examine the part gender discrimination play in career development; a case study of maternity returners in the UK legal Profession. Therefore in this research study, career development in maternity returners is being evaluated and compared with the career development in men.

From the aspect of career development in maternity returners in the UK legal profession especially in the area of promotion, the present literature suggests an incomplete attempt to identify and resolve the barriers women face in career development in the workplace. Therefore, this research study is an attempt to bridge those gaps in the present literature regarding the obstacles (barriers) women especially maternity returners experience within the UK legal profession.

Successful identification and examination of these barriers will form a unique benchmark for recommendation in order to create a viable society that is discrimination free and thus create a frame work for career development of maternity returners in the UK legal profession. Research studies conducted by Killham et al (2005) concluded that present day organisations recognise the importance of developing women leaders for the twenty first century (Killhan, Hookah, and McCarty, 2005). O'Neill (2005) highlighted that for any organisation to thrive and succeed in the future depends largely on their success in helping women leaders succeed.

Although there appeared to be an increase in the proportion of women in the labour force according to Killham et al, 2005, an attempt to hire and retain this accelerating pool of talent requires the ability of organisations to identify

and mitigate the potential threats women face in these establishments, and the ability of these establishments to meet the developmental needs of the said talent pool. A greater dexterity is achieved in every particular staff in establishments that target and successfully develop this increasing pool of talent, and hence achieve a comparative advantage over other establishments in attracting and retaining highly skilled and talented staff (Killham, Hookham, and McCarty, 2005).

Recent research with regards to the glass ceiling suggested that Gender discrimination in career development have negative implications in the development of society in general and organisations in particular ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glass\\_ceiling](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glass_ceiling)). Although issues surrounding gender discrimination has been a part of the UK government and organisational policies and are tackled with unique legislations within the frame work of developing future leaders, research targeting the barriers to career development of maternity returners in the UK legal profession are yet to be examined and addressed. The findings from the investigation of the barriers to career development of maternity returners in the UK legal profession will serve to mitigate the rising problems of women stagnating in lower managerial positions ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glass\\_ceiling](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glass_ceiling)).

The gap in the research related to across gender relationships, which is typical of an organisation such as the UK legal profession where the vast majority of the senior positions are held by males, prompted the need to examine the specific limitations that deter women (maternity returners) from attaining senior positions as their male counterpart. The study seeks to fill some of the major gaps in the present literature by providing a frame work <https://assignbuster.com/part-gender-discrimination-plays-in-career-development-sociology-essay/>



that addresses the barriers to career development in women, especially maternity returners.

#### 1. 4 Significance of the study

The significance of this research study can be viewed based on the following reasons;

There is a minute fraction of women in leadership positions that can be looked upon as role models.

The conduct of this research study is to assist the UK legal profession in achieving better organisational performance through the reduction or otherwise elimination of gender discrimination barriers in order to enable women attain their desired objectives.

Women to a great extent are playing a vital and diverse role within the UK legal profession.

#### 1. 5 Objectives of the study

The ultimate objective of the present study is to investigate the likelihood of women to gain promotion on return from maternity.

The immediate objectives are as follows;

To examine the frequency of promotion;

To examine potential barriers to development;

To examine the utility of gender based initiatives;

<https://assignbuster.com/part-gender-discrimination-plays-in-career-development-sociology-essay/>

To examine justice perception.

To evaluate the quality of work ;

To examine the skills and qualifications acquired;

To examine the length of service;

To examine employee development and gender discrimination;

## 1. 6 Justification of the Study

1. 6. 1 Lost Productivity: In an establishment where gender discrimination is prevalent, there is every tendency for competent employees with excellent potential to remain in-situ in non-challenging job positions. This to a great extent can lead to lost productivity and will result to the employee seeking for another job elsewhere. This to a great extent can lead to lost productivity and will result to the employee seeking for another job elsewhere. In most cases, the most competent employees are denied of adequate training, not considered for promotions and are denied of raises based on gender. The employees that face this type of discrimination often become dissatisfied and hence in most cases result in lost productivity. On a daily bases, employees who feel they are less appreciated or inadequately compensated will not give their best to the job but may rather spend paid work time on unrelated job activities like gossiping with co-workers about labour practices that seem unfair or job hunting, to name but a few. When employees feel they are been discriminated against at work, and are unable to find an immediate positive remedy, can increase their anxiety, increase dependence or result to substance abuse and cause depression. Company sick leave <https://assignbuster.com/part-gender-discrimination-plays-in-career-development-sociology-essay/>

increase as a result, and can cause work to be limited and hence result to lost productivity (Julia, F, 2010).

1. 6. 2 Trained Personnel Leave: If trained and competent personnel do not see growth opportunities, they will eventually leave the company, thereby creating a void or gap that needs to be filled. Though employees are replaceable, it requires time and money to train one. Moreover, it requires a great deal of time to enable a new employee to develop a level of efficiency or productivity that is equal to that held by a previous experienced employee. By having to spend this additional time and money to train and develop new employees' means lost production and increased work hours, and hence the profit potential of the company is reduced (Julia, F, 2010).

1. 6. 3 Decreased Profits: Lawsuits, public chiding and sanctions may arise as a result of discrimination at workplace. Dealing with issues surrounding these lawsuits and sanctions may lead to a considerable drain in company resources. These drained resources are sometimes more than just monetary. Attending hearing sessions and working on negotiations may require experienced personnel which tend to take expertise away from the company leaving the gap either void or less qualified personnel may need to tentatively fill the gap and hence production is at stake. The company can lose customer confidence if lawsuits become public knowledge. There is every tendency that customers may result to taking their business elsewhere and highly qualified personnel may seek for jobs elsewhere. This will ultimately cause the company to lose potential profits (Julia, F, 2010).

1. 6. 4 Lack of Team Work: Gender discrimination can cause employees to have a different perception about the job and hence working together as a team becomes ineffective in the workplace. This is more so when an employee realises that there are differences (parity) in compensation with his co-employee who has less responsibility, and yet received a better compensation because of gender. When asked to work together on a team project, the employee being discriminated against may not give his or her best. As a result, the individual's expertise and abilities are lost (Julia, F, 2010).

1. 7 Research Questions.

### 3. LITERATURE REVIEW

The focus of this research study is an attempt to examine what part does gender discrimination play in career development? A case study of maternity returners' in the United Kingdom legal profession. The literature in this research is focused entirely on two broad categories; viz-a-viz gender discrimination and career development; and how gender discrimination affect potential career attainment of employees in establishments in particular and society in general.

Women across the board are been discriminated at various fronts. Even though a lot has been done to bridge the gap on gender discrimination through Government legislation and organisational policies, there is yet more to be investigated and resolved in order to achieve the desired impact in development. Gender Discrimination in career development and attainment of leadership roles is a major concern facing women in organisations in the <https://assignbuster.com/part-gender-discrimination-plays-in-career-development-sociology-essay/>

United Kingdom; and is the principal factor that causes women over the years to lag behind in the advancement to higher levels in most organizations ( ).

A lot of research has been done on gender discrimination and the effect it has on the development of society. These include a comparative study conducted by the gender and career development-UK 2005/6, and the glass ceiling effect that examined the issue of gender and carer development and examine the continuing restrictions or limitations to achieving equality of opportunity in career development in the United Kingdom. This was a labour force survey conducted by the National Office for statistics (Labour force Survey Table 19 [http://www. statistics. gov. uk](http://www.statistics.gov.uk)). This is reflected on the data illustrated in table 1. The data suggests that female employees are less likely to gain managerial positions due to reasons yet undiscovered which this case study is attempting to investigate.

The data (on segregation and mobility) below is taken from the Labour Force Survey published by the National Office for Statistics.

Table 1. All in employment by socio-economic classification (%)

Total

Higher Managerial

Lower Managerial

Intermediate

Small employer and own business

<https://assignbuster.com/part-gender-discrimination-plays-in-career-development-sociology-essay/>

Lower supervisory

Semi-routine

Routine

All

28, 812

14. 4

28. 5

12. 3

9. 9

10. 7

14. 3

10

Male

15, 524

18. 8

24. 7

6. 2

13. 6

14. 2

10. 5

12. 2

Female

13, 288

9. 3

32. 9

19. 4

5. 5

6. 7

18. 8

7. 4

Source: Labour Force Survey Table 19 [http://www. statistics. gov. uk/](http://www.statistics.gov.uk/)

(Extracted,

Table 2. Part time and temporary workers by socio-economic classification.

Total

Higher Managerial %

<https://assignbuster.com/part-gender-discrimination-plays-in-career-development-sociology-essay/>

Lower Managerial %

Intermediate %

Small employer and own business %

Lower supervisory %

Semi-routine %

Routine %

All

7, 324

5. 9

21. 9

17. 3

9. 1

6. 1

26. 7

13

Male

1, 996



10

19. 3

7. 1

19

6. 1

21. 2

17. 3

Female

5, 655

4. 9

22. 5

19. 7

6. 7

6. 1

28. 1

12

Source: NOS Table 21 [http://www. statistics. gov. uk/](http://www.statistics.gov.uk/)

<https://assignbuster.com/part-gender-discrimination-plays-in-career-development-sociology-essay/>

The Gender and career development -UK is working with employers and professional institutes to tackle the structured barriers that tend to deter women from working in certain SET profession.

The focus of recent research has been on the glass ceiling effect that impedes the career development of women in the attainment of leadership roles. “ The situation is referred to as ‘ ceiling’ as there is a limitation blocking upward advancement, and ‘ glass’ (transparent) because the limitation is not immediately apparent and is normally an unwritten and an unofficial policy”. The current research study is an attempt to examine the part that gender discrimination play in career development; a case study of maternity returners in the legal profession ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glass\\_ceiling](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glass_ceiling)).

However, a comprehensive research conducted by Kathrine et al (1979) discovered that in principle there appeared a clear path of promotion, but in reality women seem to face impeding factors that limit or retard their career development path. Most women in the labour force cultivated this concept of career development limiting factors, and refused to penetrate and progress beyond these limits. Some authors refer to this situation as the “ glass ceilin”. It is called “ Ceiling” because there appeared to be a limitation or barrier blocking career advancement, and “ glass” (transparent) because the barrier is not immediately apparent and is normally and unwritten and unofficial policy. To a greater extent, this apparent barrier continues to exist in an invisible nature; and is mainly targeted at women in a bid to prevent them from acquiring jobs at the top level. Since it is unlawful to discriminate by any means such as this, organisations’ tend to avoid outlining job <https://assignbuster.com/part-gender-discrimination-plays-in-career-development-sociology-essay/>

specifications based on gender discrimination on job adverts as Equal Employment Opportunity laws deter organisations from discriminating as thus. However, establishments exercise career development discriminatory barriers in a form invisible to the target group and would not accept responsibility if suspected of such act of discrimination. In many cases, establishments tend to use indirect form of gender discriminations to justify their actions.

This limiting barrier of glass ceiling deters a considerable number of women from reaching and securing potentially lucrative and prestigious jobs in the labour force. This apparent and invisible barrier to a greater extent instills the concept of women feeling inferior, unworthy and lacks the confidence to aspire and secure positions of high ranks. The author further noted that this invisible barrier gives women the feeling that their bosses do not take them seriously by all means or do not see them as potential candidates for jobs of greater responsibility ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glass\\_ceiling](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glass_ceiling)).

However, Carly Fiorina proclaimed that there is nothing that appears like a glass ceiling that prevents women from reaching the top upon becoming Chief Executive Officer and chairwoman of the board of HP. Upon completion of her tenure in office, she called her earlier statement a “dumb thing to say”. In an article written by Rebecca Traister (The truth about Carly, 2009), gave the idea behind Carly’s statement (dumb thing to say) meaning that “women shouldn’t fixate on an invisible barrier that’s going to get their way, they should focus on possibilities”. ([http://www.salon.com/life/feature/2006/10/19/carly\\_fiorina](http://www.salon.com/life/feature/2006/10/19/carly_fiorina)).

As the name implies, "glass ceiling" is a term that many schools of thought used to describe the perceived barrier to career development (advancement) in most employment establishments and government parastatals due to gender or sex discrimination.

The Glass Ceiling Commission in the United States, a government-funded group, provided significant findings regarding the persistence in gender discrimination in the industrial sector and service company employment. The commission presented a statistical analysis in the above mentioned sector employment status. As cited by the commission "Over half of all Master's degrees are now awarded to women, yet 95% of senior-level managers, of the top fortune 1000 industrial and 500 service companies are men." In that light the commission recommended a reverse discrimination in a bid to end this form of discrimination. The recommendations strictly reflect hiring and promotional decisions and must not be based on gender perspectives but rather on qualification and experience of employees ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glass\\_ceiling](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glass_ceiling)).

In another development, the United Nations presented a comprehensive literature in 2006 on account of women and the "glass ceiling". Significant findings from the said research study suggested that the rate at which women around the Globe attain leadership and decision making position remains far too slow, and the fortunate ones underwent a deal of struggle to penetrate and break through the "glass ceiling". As cited by Rachel Mayanja (Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Gender Issues), "The past ten years have seen the fastest growth in the number of women in parliaments, yet even at this rate, parity between women and men in parliaments will not <https://assignbuster.com/part-gender-discrimination-plays-in-career-development-sociology-essay/>

be reached until 2040. ” (<http://www.un.org/women.watch/daw/csw/50sess.htm>), ([http://www.un.org/women.watch/feature/iwd/2006/press\\_releaseIWD8march.pdf](http://www.un.org/women.watch/feature/iwd/2006/press_releaseIWD8march.pdf)).

Ruderman et al provided an insight on how existing promotional norms can be investigated and challenged within organisations. His findings presented a comprehensive case analysis of decisions regarding promotion in an organisation. This research study depicted cases where there were some variations in the pattern of promotions of men and women. As cited by Ruderman et al, “ one key difference was when decision makers spoke about promotions of men they often (75% of cases) mentioned a high level of comfort with the candidate. For women the key issue was ‘ continuity’ where the person promoted should already have an intimate knowledge of part of the new job”. According to Ruderman et al, managers seem to have some amount of hesitation in promoting women as they require them to demonstrate personal strength, and being able to prove themselves extensively before a promotion is made. Men on the other hand are less likely to have their promotion accounted for in terms of familiarity with job responsibilities.

Conger, S. (2002) provided a justifiable argument for the formation of a career development culture as a means (among others) of addressing disproportionate numbers of women and other target groups at lower levels. The development of an organisation depends greatly on its career development culture as it helps in addressing the key organisational aspects of productivity, competitiveness, affirmative action, and succession planning.

It gives employees the ability to redefine their talents to realize the full  
<https://assignbuster.com/part-gender-discrimination-plays-in-career-development-sociology-essay/>

potential of their jobs. This can be achieved by supervision and appraisal, and organizing a system of mentorship. A managed career development culture can be rewardfull to the employee in particular and the establishment in general. Moreover, Conger's argument offers the means to accomplish the reasons why both management and workers want a career development culture. In another development, Conger developed five strategies which employees need to recognise, create and follow as career opportunities which are beyond the scope of this research (Conger, S. 2002).

According to Eagly et al (2007), there are a host of limiting factors that stop or prevent women from advancing to or aspiring for senior level positions which include domestic obligations and child caring, disparity in pay and resistance to women's leadership, and suggestions were offered to organisations on account of career development in women (advancing women into higher-level roles). Establishments that handle and manage work and work related (employee family) issues well, and do not discriminate against pregnant or potentially pregnant employees, have a greater tendency to attract and retain the talented staff and at the same time enabling them especially the female staff to reach their full potential and hence greater dexterity in every particular employee is attained. As a result, a high degree of return to work rate for women after maternity leave is expected.

According to McMaster, F (2005), the rate of returns (benefits) from developing women returners into leadership roles is significant. This was an approach taken by IBM Asia Pacific in relation to workplace flexibility.

A statistical analysis drawn by the Australian Bureau of statistics, suggested that an estimated number of 118 Australians return to paid work when their child is aged 6 months or even younger. In a bid to work in accordance with National Health and Medical Research Council recommendations of exclusive breastfeeding for the first 6 months and World Health Organisation recommendations for ongoing breastfeeding to two years and beyond, workplace support is crucial (<http://www.breastfeeding.asn.au/bfinfo/mfwp.html>).

As cited by Creagh et al (1998), three case studies were drawn from Sweden, Italy and the UK regarding flexible work practices. In their research, they were able to explore the advantages and disadvantages for both employers and employees. The research analysis suggested that flexible work practices can yield positive outcome if the required basic steps are followed.

According to Sheridan et al (2000), a Human Resource Management model was developed and intended to be used to bridge the gap between employer and employee needs with regards to workplace flexibility. The model is intended to develop a process of change that reflects flexible work arrangements that is of mutual benefits to both employers and employees. Long term benefits can be achieved by the organisation when the full potential of the employees is realised.

Kottke et al presented a paper that highlighted four key underlying processes for intervention to overcome the barriers women face in career development. These include; Social cognitions, threat potential, justice perceptions, and how to utilise gender based initiatives. This findings

<https://assignbuster.com/part-gender-discrimination-plays-in-career-development-sociology-essay/>

suggest that an understanding of how social cognitions, perceptions of fairness, threat, and utility can individually and collectively impact the success or failure of programs to advance women, organizational leaders can develop and implement informed practices that are embraced by all members of the organization and which, consequently, further the advancement of all organizational members. These processes must be considered, followed and managed as part of the development, implementation and evaluation of initiatives targeting women's career development in a bid to achieve the desired goal.

Francis et al (2002) developed a paper in the construction industry that highlighted issues surrounding workers families that is equally relevant and applicable to other works of life. The paper outlined the need for the use of non-traditional management methods to cater for the increased number of women in the work force. Legal requirements and organisational performance were the reasons presented to justify why organisations should care about workers families. A number of initiatives that organisations in general can adopt and implement are then identified and described.

According to Davey et al (1994), a research study was conducted that involved in depth interview of 16 women as well as completed and analysed questionnaires of a further 160 women who had taken maternity leave from one institution over an 8 year period. The results obtained from analysis, offered an insight into who returns to work, what provisions and opportunities that encourage women to return and the benefits to the organization in providing these provisions.



According to a research study conducted in Australia regarding circumstances surrounding pregnancy discrimination at work and progress to formal redress, 318 cases were explored of alleged workplace pregnancy discrimination which were reported to a community advocacy organisation