

COVALENCE ANALYST PAPERS

Women's employment and current discriminations

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Introduction

Previous statements can be useful to understand women's situation on the labour market. Since the beginning of mankind, division of labour was established: men go hunting while women collect fruits. Afterward, men had been supposed to bring money home, occupying the public sphere, and women had to look after the kids and the household, confined in the private sphere. The patriarchal family system, specially referring to inheritance, forced women outside formal economy. This way of organizing our society affects negatively on women; and even though women have been emancipated at different levels in most occidental societies, this still affects them.

Indeed, men and women not only remain unequal in provided education, but also in accessing jobs (even when they have received the same education). Women are also often paid less than men for the same job, their promotion takes longer and during an economic recession they are usually fired first. But the hardest for them in their working place is undoubtedly the sexual violence whether psychological or physical.

If mentalities are changing, sexual roles stay socially-conceived and social expectations are –unconsciously- not the same for women and men. Low women's presence in regional or national assemblies is also a reflection of this matter. Psychological obstacles are then not to be neglected. Traditional habits involve practices which can obstruct women's professional life and can submerge some of them in precarious situations.

To shape this report, I am firstly describing an average view of women's employment in the world, and according to the sectors and companies through *Covalence* data. Then, I would like to focus particularly on these specific companies: Wal-Mart, Ford and Alcoa. A brief point of view on the obstacles qualified women have to face is also going to be presented. Finally, I am going to mention legal tools and institutional measures to fight women's discrimination(s) and why this subject has become a principal issue for NGOs as well as for governments.

Average overview [source: World Bank, *Report on Engendering Development, 2006* and Human Rights Watch, web site]

- Female rate activity is increasing, but it is still less than the male one.
- In industrial countries, women's wage *tallies with 77%* of the men's.
- Only 1/5 of this gap comes from education's difference or professional experience.

The worst countries: some examples

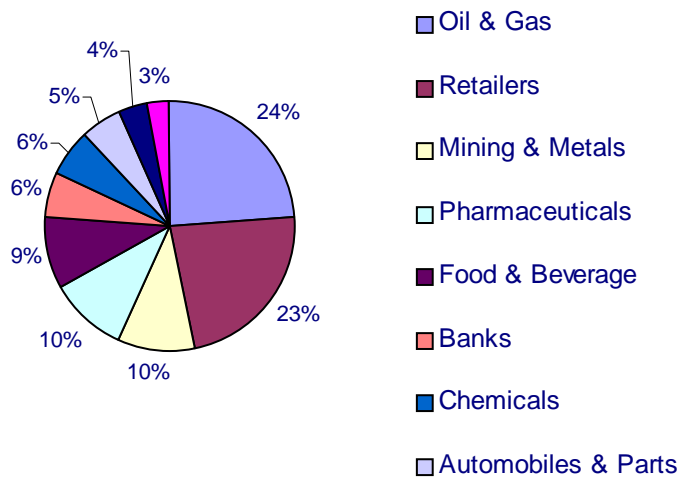
- Ukraine: job advertising sector deny women's employment according to the age, marital and familial status (a married stay-at-home- mother will not be engaged).
- Mexico-Guatemala-Dominican Republic: private companies oblige female applicants to undergo pregnancy exams and deny the one who are pregnant.
- South Africa: farms owners deny black women /or if they employ them, they are less paid.
- Malaysia-Saudi Arabia: female migrant workers are especially vulnerable to abuse (in some cases, they are also accused of crimes they did not commit).

Covalence data:

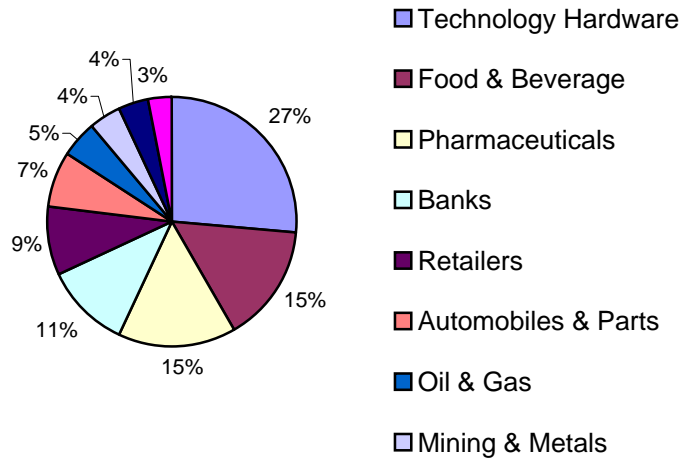
First of all, we can say that there is quite poor information about women's employment, even if the subject becomes more and more fashioned.

About Sectors

According to the sectors, some are more critical than the other for women employment: the most important negative information we have concerns the Oil & Gas sector (24%), Retailers (23%) and Mine & Metals (10%) sectors.



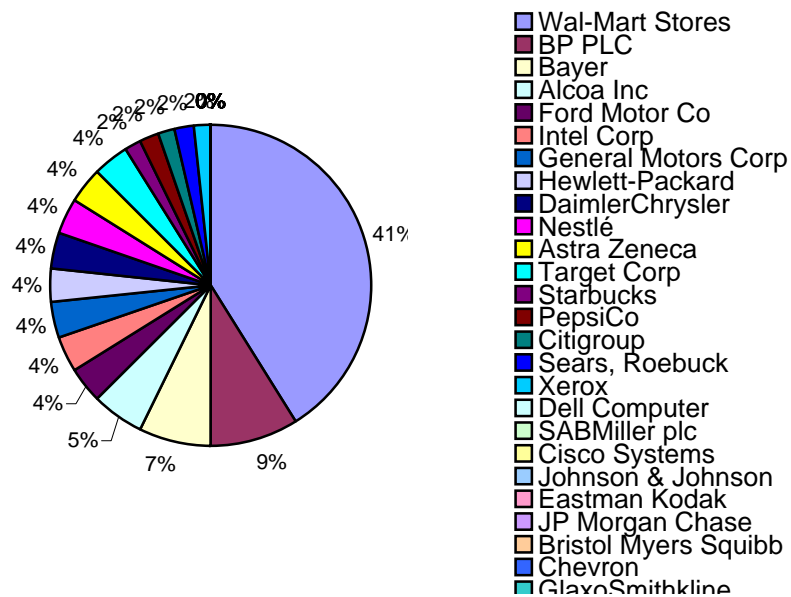
At the opposite, Technology Hardware (27%), Pharmaceuticals (15%) and Food & Beverage (15%) seem to be more favourable sectors for women.



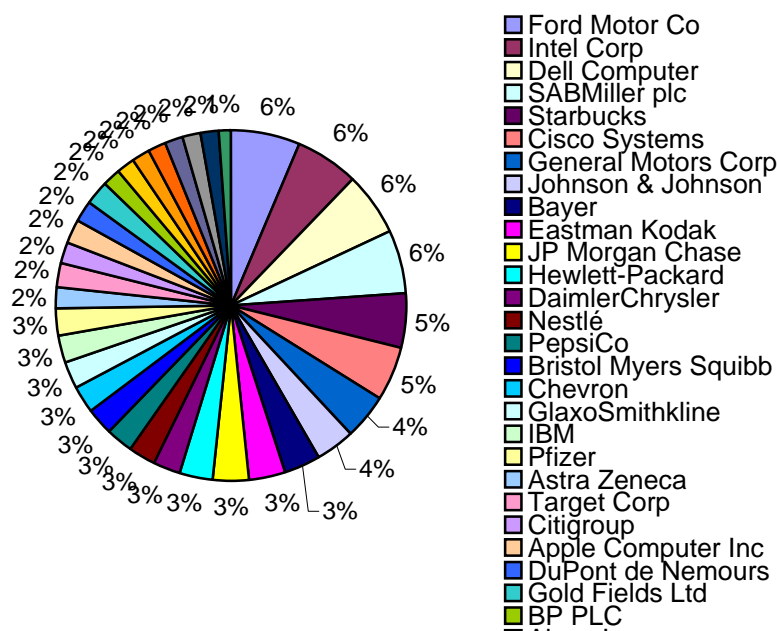
It can be said that this difference between sectors is related to their “nature”; some are traditionally occupied by men more than women according to the data provide above. Other differences between sectors provide from the way they are organized (flexibility required or not, team organization, product innovation) and if an individual promotion spirit exists or not. This information can show other obstacles that woman must overcome. Sciences area, academic and pharmaceutical companies for example present more unfriendly environments for women than the biotech sector. In biotech firms, cooperation is favoured to produce innovation –vs. individual competition in the academic sector. As suggested before, women’s *nature* tends to be for the welfare of everyone more than for their own success through rude competition. [Tomaskovic-Devey D.’s comment on Smith-Doerr. Boulder L., *Women’s Work: Gender Equality vs. Hierarchy in the Life Sciences*, Lynne Rienner, 2004]

About companies

If we look more attentively to the firms inside a sector, we will see that there are great differences between them, especially among the Food & Beverage sector. Wal-Mart appears to be a really non fair company for women, as it registers 41% of negative information. It is followed by BP PLC (9%), Bayer (7%) and Alcoa (5%).



On the other hand, Ford (6%), Dell (6%), Intel (6%) and SABMiller (6%) are at the top of the best companies for women according to the information we receive.



About criterions

Most of the accepted criterions are related to *Human Rights Policy* –as for *sexual discrimination, external working condition or sexual harassment (especially in a “male” sector)*, but refer also to *Info Consumer* and *Environment impact of production*. As we chose “gender” as the keyword, a lot of data was actually more related to transsexual, gay people –and not specifically to women. In French, the keyword “genre” refers quite often to the meaning of “kind of”, and not “gender”. Looking more detailed, I notice that “Labour Standards”, “wages”, “social benefits”, “Training and insertion” and “social sponsorship” were more significant when we speak about women’s working conditions inside a company.

The Wal-Mart case: “classical” discriminations [main source: Richard Drogin, Ph. D., *Statistical analysis of gender patterns in Wal-Mart workforce*, Berkeley, February 2003].

First of all, let’s say that Wal-Mart is among the largest employer in the US. From 1996 to 2001, active employees grew up to 50%, but the percentage of women employees decreased from 67% to 64%, and women employees are mostly hourly (who are less paid than salaried employees). In this firm, two major discriminations can be mentioned: the gap in wages between men and women, and the difficulty for women to get a promotion. Let’s see a few numbers:

1° the wages (2001)

- Salaried women earn ~\$5, 2 less than men
- Hourly women earn ~\$1, 1 less than men
- Among management employees, women earn ~\$14, 5! less than men

2° accessing a promotion

- Women need: ~4, 38 years to become an Assistant Manager, compared to ~2, 86 for men.
- They have to wait in average ~10, 12 years to become a Store Manager, compared to 8, 64 years for men.

Besides this gap, another obstacle for women to get a promotion comes from the mobility it involves.

Their sexual discriminations are known: the firm has been confronted to the largest lawsuit brought by a civil action against a private in end of the nineties. It was accused to deny systematically women workers equal pay and opportunities for promotion or trainees.

Two years ago, the judgement fell: Wal-Mart had to compensate current and former female employees.

Ford: good points thanks to its foundation

Ford received positive information about women's employment essentially for its foundation, chartered on January 15th, 1936 by Edsel Ford (Henry's son) and two Ford Motor Company executives. The aim of the foundation is "to receive and administer funds for scientific, educational and charitable purposes, all for the public welfare." Beside their education program, more relative to women than to men, Ford Foundation has made quite a lot of research and analysis about different subjects concerning women, as Reproductive Health, or women's autonomy. But unfortunately, that does not give us women's working conditions inside the firm itself.

Alcoa: suddenly consciousness?

According to *Covallence data*, Alcoa does not receive good information looking at women's working conditions. But on its website, we can notice that it becomes to be a real relevant issue: "our policy is lead to provide an environment which assists employees to balance work requirements and family responsibilities (...) an environment where work and family conflict and stress are minimised." The company likes to show their efforts to women's work conditions, and the result: Employer of the Year 2001, Winner of Australian Chamber of Commerce & Industry National Work and Family Gold Award in 2001, Finalist in 2002. Equal opportunity for Women in the Workforce Agency recognised Alcoa as employer of Choice for women in 2001&2002.

Many companies, like **Bayer**, have adopted a new policy of hiring a diverse working team, and special measures to improve women's conditions. And if they can not change something, they try to collaborate with a UN program for the image, as this subject is "fashioned". But as long as any survey, analysis or complains are not established, it is quite hard to have a good and objective view on women's employment and their working conditions.

The ceiling glass: Difficult access for women to get top manager positions

According to *Le Figaro*, only 10% of the multinationals' director positions are occupied by women. Among the 300 biggest world firms, only five are lead by women: Indra Nooyi for PepsiCo, Irene B.Rosenfeld at Kraft Food, Margaret Whitman for ebay and Anne Lauvergeon by Areva. Three years ago in Europe, 23 companies were without any female presence inside the administration Council, this number get down to 18 today. [Amedeo F., "Les femmes peinent à s'imposer à la tête des multinationales", in *Le Figaro*, 27 septembre 2006]

Switzerland, as France are quite bad examples in Europe since it counts respectively 5,9% and 6,1% of women inside the direction positions, but it stay better than Belgium (1,8%) or Italy (-2,6%). But two French firms, Credit Agricole and l'Oréal, seem to be an exception: their work for the promotion of women allows them to be nominated to the Women's Forum, which is holding in Deauville these days. [*Le Figaro et Femina*]

American firms are leading in this field (female presence goes from 12, 3% in 2003 to 16, 3% today), and the Asiatic are at the bottom of the scale. China is amazingly the best with 5, 7%, followed by India with only 1, 8% and Japan is the worst with a percentage of 1, 4% of female presence in the top positions of firms management.

The country where we can find the most important number of women at the head of big firms is Sweden (27%).

Why?

There are a lot of obstacles for women, psychological, financial as well as institutional. There are of course all the difficulties tied with the conciliation of a career and a mother-family life. But as it was picked up, "women's nature" plays a role: indeed women choose a job more for the organization itself, then the job and afterwards the wage, while men choose first the wage, then the job and finally the organization. This suggests that working conditions play a major role for women. Notice that there is a psychological factor for firms, as the one lead by women tend to be less capitalised [WB's report].

What the legal and institutional tools and how the situation can be improved?

Legal Tools

In the average overview, two main legal tools have been created to protect specifically women: the Convention on elimination of all kind of discriminations against women (1979) and the Declaration on elimination of violence against women, voted by the Un General Assembly in 1993. The OIL is obviously the main organization looking after women's working conditions: usually they keep in view a decent work for all women and men. But specifically, their rights are enforced by 1) the International Labour Standards (whose violation by a country involves social dialogue and technical assistance) and 2) the Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, which dates from 1998 –a previous one in the same kind was adopted by the ILO Council in 1977. This last legal tool is crucial nowadays since it is a tripartite declaration that means negotiated by governments, employers and workers. Multinationals, as a big force inside the world economy, are then recognised to essential in the process of eliminating women's discriminations.

Concrete measures

Obviously these legal tools are not always respected and unfortunately their violations do not involve serious sanctions against government or employers. OIL can just propose assistance and dialogue, if the governments had agreed to have a study about this subject; because according to Human Rights Watch, a lot of them turn a blind eye to illegal practice and enact and enforce discrimination laws. So Corporations and private individuals can easily engage abusive practices without fear of official condemnation. But the subject is (not only) on the table of many NGO(s), International Organization(s) but also (of) governments.

The European Union proposes some measures to improve the situation by removing psychological and concrete obstacles to employment. In a direct way, as setting up new places for women's post-education [as many of them become disqualified after a break, often to give birth] or favouring and creating jobs inside the traditional male sectors, or in an indirect way in facilitating the conciliation between the professional live and the family life, creating new institutions to welcome children.

Moreover, in some countries, quotas' introduction is on the debate of parliaments. But a lot of people, among who a lot of women as well, disagree with such a measure. Obviously, if there are any women qualified enough for a position, it is not only ridiculous and inefficient to engage one, but it will give bad image for women in general. (look in the Academic area!)

In Switzerland, an initiative wants to force public and para-public companies to count 30% of women in the administration.

Why women's work conditions begin to be an OI and ONG preoccupation?

Economical development is deciding on reducing poverty. Women have to take care of the children and the household; their position is vital for the whole family and for the stability and the development of societies, but they tend to suffer on poverty more than men. As I explained, the unequal inheritance system staves widows, or divorced women who never worked off lands or familial financial resources.

Here the reflexion: high productivity involves new job opportunities and so, can reduce sexual inequality. That is one of the noticing from experiences, as sexual disparities tend to be more relevant in the poorest countries –even there are some exceptions, like China and Uganda. With high productivity, investments are more important and touch, first of all, all the essential infrastructures, like water, energy and transport supply, which contribute to reduce disparities between men and women inside their work's responsibilities [in the formal economy or in the informal one- family or "black work". [WB's Report] Economical development –through the private or the public sector- can afford to allocate more money for education and formation. In conclusion, a better access to the resources (infrastructures but also education and work) brings equal access between men and women, what is approved to be crucial for general society's welfare by all international organization or academic areas.

Mentality can be changed! But it need(s) (an) effort(s) from everyone: employers, governments, NGO and International Organization can reduce sexual discriminations at work. It is just a matter of will, but we can give (us) tools to improve women's employment in general. It is also women's role to improve the situation, getting more self-confidence and try not to reproduce some behaviour, conducted by the patriarchal system.

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