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INFLUENCE OF OCCUPATIONAL SEGREGATION AND TRADITIONAL GENDER ROLES ON WAGE DISPARITIES

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Abstract

This study examines occupational segregation and stereotypical gender roles as the main causes of lingering wage gaps between men and women. In spite of progress made in gender equity, women are disproportionately represented in lower-paying professions and industries, while men lead in higher-paying industries. This research examines structural and cultural underpinnings that perpetuate this split and lead to differential pay.

Occupational segregation has been recognized as a major structural barrier, and female-dominated careers are found to pay less despite controlling for qualification and experience. Caregiving responsibilities and cultural expectations of caregiving roles in traditional gender constructs further restrict the entry of women into better-paid jobs and also cause career discontinuity that takes a toll on earnings. The study points to how social expectation shapes occupational activity, directing women into occupations seen as caregiving and devalued.

The research also explores how wage penalties are more pronounced in female-dominated high-skilled jobs and how low-skilled industries compound women's economic vulnerability. Relying on international evidence, such as the United States, Australia, and Ethiopia, the paper debates the intricate dynamics between labor market structures and cultural norms.

Policy suggestions target elimination of these differences through comparable worth legislation, transparency in pay and increased work-life balance support including parental leave and flexible working conditions. The study concludes that it is necessary to address both the structural and cultural aspects in order to close the gender wage gap and ensure equal labor market outcomes.

Keywords: Occupational Segregation, Gender Roles, Wage Disparities, Gender Pay Gap

I. Introduction

1.1 Background

Occupational segregation and traditional gender roles have long shaped the structure of labor markets and contributed to persistent wage disparities. Occupational segregation occurs when certain demographic groups, such as women, are overrepresented or underrepresented in specific jobs or sectors. This phenomenon is often driven by societal assumptions about the types of work different

genders are best suited for, rather than by differences in skills or qualifications. As a result, women are frequently concentrated in lower-paying occupations, while men dominate higher-paying fields.

The roots of occupational segregation are closely linked to traditional gender roles, which influence educational choices, career aspirations, and labor force participation. These roles often steer women toward "caring" professions—such as education, healthcare, and social work—that are systematically

undervalued and offer lower wages compared to male-dominated occupations, even when controlling for skill and education levels. This “crowding” of women into certain jobs increases the supply of labor in those fields, further depressing wages and reducing bargaining power.

Occupational segregation not only limits women’s immediate earning potential but also affects long-term career advancement, job security, and wealth accumulation. The persistence of these patterns, despite gains in education and workforce participation, highlights the enduring impact of both structural labor market dynamics and cultural expectations around gender. Understanding the interplay between occupational segregation and traditional gender roles is therefore essential for addressing the gender wage gap and promoting greater economic equity.

1.2 Research Objectives

1. To analyze the extent to which occupational segregation contributes to wage differences between men and women across various sectors and skill levels.
2. To examine how traditional gender roles and societal expectations shape occupational choices and influence the distribution of men and women in different types of jobs.
3. To assess the impact of both within-occupation and across-occupation wage disparities on the overall gender pay gap, identifying which factors are most significant in perpetuating earnings inequality

II. Literature Review

2.1 Occupational Segregation: Definitions and Trends

Occupational isolation is the uneven distribution of men and women in colorful occupations, generally leading to women being concentrated in lower- paid or lower prestigious occupations. This trend continues worldwide,

indeed though there has been great progress toward gender equivalency in education and labor request participation. Charles and Grusky, in *Occupational Ghettos: The Worldwide Segregation of Women and Men*, detail how the women are disproportionately represented in mechanical work and men in homemade work, yet men continue to hold the advanced jobs in both orders. The authors point out that, although egalitarian reforms have undermined some hierarchical walls, vertical isolation – sorting women and men into different kinds of jobs – is extremely flexible, indeed in countries with robust equivalency programs. Siltanen’s *Locating Gender Occupational isolation, stipend and Domestic liabilities* also disrupts conventional accounts of occupational isolation by probing the diversity of women’s work experience and the adaptability of unsexed divisions within workplaces. More recent exploration also indicates that, following rapid-fire advancements in the 1970s and 1980s, the falling occupational isolation of women has broken in utmost rich husbandry, and the profitable inefficiency and womanish-specific pay envelope disadvantages linked to the feminized diligence continue to hold.

2.2 Literal Gender places in the Labor Market

Cultural and mingled prospects define traditional gender places, which have a deep influence on the occupational opinions and the conditions of labor request. These gender places direct women into caregiving, tutoring, and service professions, but men are pressed to take up specialized, directorial, or physical posts. Siltanen’s exploration examines the ways in which work and family connections are connected, with gender places affecting both the kind of work women do and the relative value placed on that work. Charles and Grusky maintain that essentialist generalizations of gender are incompletely responsible for vertical isolation’s durability, as societies continue to collude certain kinds of work onto one gender or the other despite sweats to insure equivalency through policy. These deeply hardwired morals not only circumscribe women’s occupational

mobility but also immortalize the undervaluation of work done substantially by women.

2.3 Pay envelope difference Global and Regional Perspectives

Pay envelope differentials between men and women are largely associated with occupational isolation and conventional gender places. Substantiation in the United States indicates that mean earnings are lower for occupations with a lesser proportion of womanish workers, and this is especially pronounced in both largely good professions (like drug and law) and low-professed sectors (like childcare). In Malaysia, exploration has shown that demarcation in stipend among occupations is one of the topmost contributors to the gender pay envelope gap, with within-occupation differences contributing to the largest share of the pay envelope difference between men and women. Occupational isolation is more pronounced in Indian metropolises, where education and occupation both have large places to play in the explanation of pay envelope difference. Yet a significant portion of the pay gap isn't explained, which implies the presence of demarcation and other structural factors. These results are also set up internationally, with Charles and Grusky pressing the lasting effect of occupational isolation on women's pay, power, and control in a wide range of labor requests.

III. Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology based on secondary sources, focusing on the analysis of published literature and online articles related to occupational segregation, traditional gender roles, and wage disparities. The approach is designed to synthesize findings from diverse contexts and provide a comprehensive understanding of the topic.

IV. Patterns of Occupational Segregation

Occupational segregation refers to the unequal distribution of men and women across different jobs or industries, and it remains one of the most persistent patterns in the modern labor market. Despite decades of progress toward gender equality, we still see clear divides between the types of work men and women tend to do—and how those jobs are valued and compensated.

There are two main forms of occupational segregation: horizontal and vertical. Horizontal segregation happens when men and women are concentrated in different kinds of jobs altogether. For instance, women are more likely to be found in teaching, nursing, or administrative roles, while men dominate in fields like engineering, construction, and IT. These patterns are shaped by long-standing gender norms and social expectations about what is "appropriate" work for each gender.

Vertical segregation, on the other hand, occurs within the same profession or sector, where men tend to hold higher-ranking or leadership positions, while women are often in lower-paid or support roles. Take healthcare, for example: while women make up a large percentage of nurses and support staff, men are disproportionately represented among surgeons and hospital executives. Even in fields where women are the majority, men are more likely to be promoted to management roles, a phenomenon sometimes called the "glass escalator."

These patterns aren't just the result of personal choice or skill differences. Socialization from an early age, cultural messaging, and educational guidance often steer boys and girls in different directions. Girls may be encouraged to pursue nurturing, people-oriented roles, while boys are pushed toward technical and physically demanding careers. Over time, this contributes to the clustering of genders into certain job types.

Another major factor is the way that society values work differently depending on who is doing it. Jobs dominated by women often pay

less—not necessarily because the work is easier or less important, but because of historical undervaluation. Care work, for example, is critical to families and the economy, yet it remains underpaid and underappreciated, largely because it's seen as “women's work.”

Furthermore, occupational segregation isn't just a gender issue—it intersects with race, class, and immigration status. Women of color, for example, are disproportionately represented in low-wage, precarious employment, while facing additional barriers to accessing higher-paying, stable jobs.

Changing these patterns requires more than just encouraging girls to study science or giving women access to job training. It means addressing deeper cultural biases, creating equitable career advancement opportunities, and rethinking how we value different types of work. Employers, educators, and policymakers all have a role to play in breaking down these divides.

In short, occupational segregation is not just about where people work—it reflects the broader social structures that influence opportunity, power, and economic equity. Tackling it is key to reducing wage disparities and building a more inclusive and fair labor market for everyone.

V. Impact of Gender Roles on Occupational Choices

Gender roles—the socially constructed expectations about how individuals ought to behave based on their sex—have a profound and enduring influence on career choices. From the earliest years, individuals are surrounded by a world that is portrayed as having some jobs that are appropriate for women and others for men. These messages emanate from family, media, school, and society, influencing not only dreams but also perceived possibilities for the future.

As young as three years old, children start observing what kind of jobs go to men and what go to women. For instance, boys may look up to

men who are featured as engineers, CEOs, or politicians, and girls see women working as nurses, teachers, or caregivers. These trends get promoted by toys, reading books, and shows, slowly pushing the kids in a gender-typical direction. Consequently, these expectations are internalized by many young people, which can result in self-restrictions in their future career choices.

The impact of gender roles pervades into the classroom as well. Teachers and guidance counselors, without realizing it, may be nudging boys toward studying science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM), while pushing girls into social sciences or the arts. Girls tend to steer towards healthcare and biology, with boys holding the upper hand when it comes to physics and engineering. Such preferences are cemented by having, or lacking, role models across professions. The more girls have role models within male professions where women succeed, the more they are likely to aspire towards them. In return, a deficiency of conspicuous male nurses and teachers may discourage boys from taking on these roles.

Studies have demonstrated that the underlying reasons for occupational preferences also vary by gender. Women are more inclined to choose jobs that result in personal satisfaction, impact on society, and congruence with their abilities, whereas men prefer jobs that bring in money and social standing. These drives are an expression of more fundamental societal values and how success is defined for men as opposed to women.

The effects of gender roles reach beyond personal decisions; they influence whole industries. Women are still underrepresented in the STEM disciplines, employing only fewer than a quarter of workers in fields such as computer science and engineering. Men, in contrast, are thin on the ground in caregiver professions like nursing and early childhood education, where women make up the huge majority. This occupational segregation is a factor in the gender wage gap, as gendered occupations

tend to be of lower value and lower pay regardless of the required skill and education.

Notably, these trends are not predetermined. Those societies that have more gender-egalitarian attitudes will have less occupational segregation and smaller wage gaps. When systems and organizations positively challenge stereotypes—through diverse role models being promoted, all students being encouraged to look at a broad range of subjects, and inclusive environments being developed—they serve to open up the vistas for all. Getting men into caregiving professions and women in STEM can create richer, more balanced workplaces and societies.

Together, gender roles structure occupational choices in early socialization, educational impact, and the expectations of employers. By recognizing and confronting such forces, we can enable men and women to choose careers reflecting their true abilities and interests, not the restraints of aging stereotypes

VI. Relationship Between Segregation and Wage Disparities

The connection between occupational isolation and pay envelope differentials is a subtle but deeply hardwired specific of labor requests far and wide. Basically, occupational isolation describes the uneven dissipation of colorful groups most frequently by gender, race, or race – throughout different jobs and diligence. It is n't a matter of arbitrary sorting; rather, it's told by patterns of history, social prospects, and patient demarcation, all of which work together to shape who works where and, importantly, how important they're paid.

One of the most straightforward means by which occupational isolation contributes to pay envelope inequality is through what economists relate to as "occupational crowding." When groups on the perimeters of society, similar as women or ethnical nonages, are disproportionately concentrated in some occupations – generally those that are lower-paying and lower- status – the force of labor in

these occupations is increased, and this can further depress stipend. This miracle was originally proved by economist Barbara Bergman, who demonstrated that employer demarcation tends to reserve high- pay envelope employment for good labor force and drive them into lower- paying jobs. The preceding glut of labor in these occupations reduces their logrolling power and maintains stipend depressed, anyhow of the skill or trouble demanded.

Another nearly linked medium is the devaluation of work. Occupations that are largely womanish or nonage- dominated – like caregiving, education, or service occupations are totally devaluated in the labor request. That is, indeed when these occupations involve high skill or responsibility, they pay lower than manly- dominated occupations. The "caring labor" assiduity, for illustration, is a stark illustration indeed though it's pivotal to society, it's constantly underpaid, a function of societal prejudices and not the work's factual value.

Occupational isolation also restricts perpendicular mobility. When some groups are concentrated in lower- paid or lower- status jobs, they've smaller chances for advancement. This "glass ceiling" miracle can be seen in utmost countries, where women and nonages continue to be underrepresented in top or well-paid jobs despite making progress in education and experience. In Brazil, for case, studies indicate that although women have gained in the occupational graduation, vertical isolation – attention in womanish occupations – remains persistently high, and ceilings to advancement continue to live.

The goods of occupational isolation go beyond short- term stipend. In the long run, being limited to lower- paying jobs influences workers' capacity to save, invest, and make wealth, sustaining inequality over generations. It also affects job stability and career advancement, making it more delicate for the affected groups to survive profitable recessions or benefit from attachments to advanced- status jobs.

Although some enhancement has passed – e.g., further women and nonages have been integrated into a wider array of occupations – the rate of change accelerated in the once many decades. Demarcation, artistic morals, and institutional walls continue to support occupational isolation as the underpinning cause of pay envelope differences. Addressing this issue requires not only anti-discrimination programs and pay equity measures but also a broader reevaluation of the work performed by historically marginalized groups, icing that all jobs are fairly compensated for their true donation to society.

VII. Policy Implications and Recommendations

7.1 Legislative Measures

Legislation is a fundamental intervention to counteract occupational segregation and gender roles underlying wage inequality. Governments ought to consolidate and enforce strictly anti-discrimination legislation banning gender-based hiring, promotion, and remuneration practices. Eliminating legal obstacles preventing women from engaging in specific occupations—e.g., archaic restrictions on women in "dangerous" or "inappropriate" occupations—is a prerequisite to broadening access and combating stereotypes. In addition, policies must remedy indirect causes of segregation, including tax policies penalizing secondary income earners (women, in the case of this country) and guarantee that standards of labor such as minimum wages are strong and fairly enforced.

Parental leave schemes need to be carefully constructed. Maternity leave is crucial but, if not counterbalanced by available paternity leave and subsidized care, can maintain traditional gender patterns and drive women into lower-income, flexible work. Politicians should encourage social insurance-funded leave and childcare available to all, so both men and women can enter the workforce freely without detriment. Quotas or targets for females in decision-making and leadership positions can

also break up vertical segregation and realign organizational cultures.

7.2 Organizational Interventions

Organizations and employers directly impact workplace culture and opportunities. They ought to institute open pay systems and periodic wage audits to detect and correct gender-based pay disparities. Active recruitment, mentoring, and sponsorship initiatives for underrepresented genders in particular occupations can deconstruct occupational crowding, while focused leadership development programs can correct vertical segregation and facilitate women's advancement into better-paying jobs.

Workplaces also need to create inclusive workplaces through gender sensitization training, flexible work arrangements, and explicit anti-discrimination policies. Rewarding and recognizing firms that show improvement on gender equity can provide positive incentives for wider change. Organizations also need to review job descriptions and promotion criteria regularly to ensure that they are free from gender bias and do not unintentionally reinforce traditional roles.

7.3 Future Directions

To bring about sustainable change, policy interventions need to be adaptive and reflexive to changing labor market conditions. Strategies going forward will need to prioritize:

Data Gathering and Research: Disaggregated data gathering and analysis on a regular basis by gender, race, and other identity categories is necessary for measuring change and pinpointing entrenched obstacles.

Intersectional Strategies: The fight against wage gaps calls for an understanding of how race, ethnicity, disability, and other aspects intersect with gender to determine occupational experiences.

Education and Early Intervention: Getting girls and boys interested in a variety of subjects and occupations from the earliest age can disrupt

stereotypes before they become ingrained. Alliances between employers, schools, and governments can encourage diverse career paths.

Public Awareness Campaigns: Wide-reaching campaigns can alter the way that societies think about gender roles and the value of women's traditionally perceived work, thus decreasing both horizontal and vertical segregation.

Continuous Policy Assessment: Policies need to be evaluated and updated continually on the basis of evidence for what works so that interventions do not fall behind as the economy and workforce change.

Through legislative action, organizational dedication, and proactive strategies, it is achievable to diminish occupational segregation, destabilize conventional gender roles, and close pay gaps—ultimately creating a fairer and richer labor market for everyone

Conclusion

The ongoing hold of occupational segregation and conventional gender norms continues to be a principal driver of earnings inequalities across markets. Even in an era of progress in integration within the labor force, broad impediments remain that direct women and minority groups into lower-economically-graded occupations of lower value, usually irrespective of qualification or schooling level. The resulting "crowding" constrains individual potential earnings as much as it pulls down wages for entire industries, sustaining a reinforcing cycle of disparity challenging to circumvent.

Cultural and traditional gender roles also build on these differences by codifying expectations about and choices within career and society from childhood on, urging women into what have historically been "female" and low-paying and status occupations. Despite education and training gains by women and minorities, they continue to be overrepresented in lower-paid jobs and underrepresented at the top or in

better-paid professions, frequently a result of institutional discrimination and the lingering effects of sexism and racism.

The intersection of occupational segregation and deeply rooted gender norms not only impacts current wages but also has long-term effects on career promotion, job stability, and wealth accumulation across generations. Although there has been some narrowing of the wage gap in recent decades, progress has reached a plateau, and the rate of integration into higher-paying, male-dominated industries remains sluggish, particularly for women of color.

These disparities must be addressed with more than just individual effort; they require a change in systems. Policies that support pay transparency, promote fair hiring and promotion practices, and challenge the old gender roles are necessary steps toward a more equitable labor market. Understanding the deeply ingrained nature of occupational segregation and its effects on wage inequality is essential to creating a more inclusive and equitable society where all workers can achieve their full economic potential

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