

Abstract & editorial

The causes of women’s unfair treatment at work – a Finnish Perspective

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Academic Writing

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**Abstract**

Finland has ranked at the top of global gender equality reports for several years, however, unfair treatment of women at work is still a significant issue. This academic report (AR) explores the reasons behind harassment and discrimination, and the negative effects they cause for Finnish women and society. In this AR, harassment is defined as offensive or humiliating behavior. Additionally, the definition used when addressing discrimination, comes from the Non-Discrimination Act of Finland.

The results from the Confederation of Finnish Industries showed that approximately 40% of women have experienced harassment at work. Moreover, the gender pay gap in Finland, which indicates the level of discrimination well, was more than the European Union average. The report presents also some contradictory findings. One study argued that female managers face the most harassment whilst the other stated the opposite. All sources cited, however, agreed that women experience unfair treatment more than men. Furthermore, it was found that the stress and anxiety caused by unfair treatment at work, may result in physical and mental health issues, social alienation, and even disablement.

Based on the findings, it is evident that the actions to eliminate harassment and discrimination thus far, have not been enough. To tackle the issues, the AR presents solutions that have worked in other countries, such as non-transferable parental leave and sanctions for disobeying the equal pay law. Finland should consider these and invest in research to close the remaining gender gap.

**Editorial**

Finland has had a female as a president (2000), prime minister (2003) and as a president of the supreme court (2006). Women have had full political rights since 1907 and a majority in the government. Based on these, the Finnish working life seems somewhat equal, and women should have the same possibilities to advance in their career, however, a woman’s euro is still 80 cents, the vast majority of managers are men, and the recent #MeToo-campaign raised the issue of how many women have experienced sexual harassment.

Some argue that the lack of education and capabilities hinders women from achieving managerial positions or earning as much as men. Those arguments, however, seem weak and vague. More than half of graduates in Finland are women and in recent studies, female leaders have overshadowed males in management skills. So, it seems that there is no rational explanation to exclude women from management or pay them less than men. Studies also show that men harass women to gain status or show their power. However, Finland is a country that promotes equality and, therefore, there should be no need for men to have more power than women. Instead, there should only be a healthy competition between genders.

Closing the gender gap would only be beneficial for both the government and individuals: higher employment rate would bring more tax revenues and enhance competitiveness, and if men would stop wasting their energy on harassing women they could focus more on their work and increase productivity, whilst the stress levels and sick leaves of women would decrease. Additionally, even the OECD has argued that although the gender gap in Finland is relatively small, closing it would still boost economic growth.

The evidence so far suggests that the issue of harassment and discrimination has not been taken seriously enough. Instead of concentrating on how to reform the taxi regulations and other non-urgent matters, the Finnish Government should find better ways to fight unfair treatment at work. It is clear that changing social perceptions is hard, but it has been done before, for instance, there has been a significant improvement in Sweden after it introduced the non-transferable parental leave: more men are using their parental leave and less women are ‘forced’ to stay home. If Finland wants to keep pace with other Nordic countries, actions are needed today.