

INEQUALITIES AT WORKPLACE TOWARD FEMALE WORKERS IN CHO NAM-JOO'S *KIM JIYOUNG, BORN 1982*

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Abstract

Women's participation in the labor market keeps increasing all over the world. However the increase does not really lessen the inequalities toward female workers, such as gender wage gap, disparity in promotion, and sexual harassment. Novel *Kim Jiyoung, Born 1982* raises the inequalities in the workplaces in South Korea as one of the themes experienced by the main character and the other characters in the novel. This research applied a qualitative research to get the data needed to be observed according to the research problem. The data obtain that Jiyoung and her female colleagues experience wage gap compared with the male employees, the opportunities to get projects and promoted are rare and some of them experience sexual harassment at workplace. This research tries to prove that inequalities at workplace toward women still exist until now.

Keywords – *inequalities, workplace, novel*

Introduction

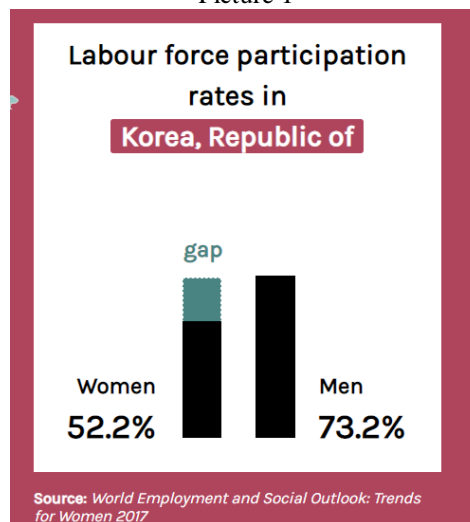
Based on the ILO Key Indicators of the Labour Market (2012), the rate of labor participation can be defined as a measurement of percentage of the working-age population in countries that are actively involved in the labor market through either work or job hunting. The current employment rate for women is almost 49% worldwide. It is 75% for men. This means there is a difference of 26 percentage points and some regions are more than 50 percentage points apart. Although the number of women's participation is still lower compared to men, actually it is increasing over the past 20 years all over the world. It varies from county to country and describes economic development, social norms, education levels, fertility rates and access to childcare and supportive services (Verick, 2014).

The increase of the female participation in the labor market does not go along with the decrease of inequalities toward female workers. Gender inequalities in the workplace take many forms, namely unequal pay, disparity in promotions, incidents of sexual harassment and racism (Wooll, 2021). Wooll (2021) then continues to explain that in 2020, women earned 84% of what men earned in the same job. In contrast, for every 100 men promoted to managerial positions, only 86 women are promoted. Thirty-five percent of American women experience sexual harassment in their careers. Women of color and women who are marginalized are more likely to be harassed than white women.

These discriminations toward female workers lead to women's lower socio economic status. To prevent it, many policies and programs to address gender inequalities are made. Non-discriminative workplace and equal opportunities and treatment are basic and fundamental to achieve social justice and economic development. The principle of equality in employment opportunities and treatment enables people of any race, gender, religion, social or ethnic background, health status and disability to find a way out of poverty to support their family.

As a member of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), South Korea is ranked as one of the countries with the lowest female labor force, with only 52.2% of Korean women aged 15-64 working in the labor force. It is reported that it is 65% market for OECD countries on average. As shown in Figure 1, this rate is below the male participation rate of about 73.2%, close to the OECD average of 79%. Parenting is the biggest obstacle faced by married women seeking a career. The patriarchal organizational culture of Korean companies has not changed significantly enough to affect the recruitment, hiring, promotion and wage structure of female workers (Patterson et al., 2012). On the other hand, in South Korea, which is known as a male-centered society, the incidence of sexual harassment in the workplace is still high. According to the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, about 10% of female employees are experiencing some form of sexual harassment (Korean Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, 2015).

Picture 1



These phenomena are raised by a writer, Cho Nam-Joo, in her novel called “*Kim Jiyoung, Born 1982*” which also tells about the inequality problems experienced by female workers as a part of the stories in the novel. This research question is “Are there any inequalities faced by the characters of female workers in the novel?” This research aims to know the inequalities at workplace faced by female workers in the novel, therefore it can give an insightful knowledge for the readers about the inequalities at workplace in South Korea particularly, and in the world generally.

Methods

This research was a qualitative research method employing an analytical descriptive method. According to Ratna (2006:53), analytical descriptive method is done by describing facts and followed by analyzing the data. By using this method, the writers wanted to know the structure of the novel, and then compared the data to the theories applied. This method starts by collecting data, compiling, classifying and then interpreting. The source of this research was novel “*Kim Jiyoung, Born 1982*” translated by Jamie Chang. The technique of collecting data used library research by analyzing books and literatures related to the research.

Finding and Discussion

Since 1970, Republic of Korea has rapid economic growth and reached its advanced economies, however, the participation of its women in the labor force is still lower than other developed countries. This fact is described in the novel *Kim Jiyoung, Born 1982* when Jiyoung graduates from university, only about 30% of working women in Korea.

In 2005, the year Kim Jiyoung graduated from college, a survey by a job search website found that only 29.6 percent of new employees at 100 companies were women, and it was mentioned as a big improvement (Cho, 2020:47).

Easy access to education for women and legal protection of women's rights do not directly create a better environment for women to participate in the labor force. Patriarchal culture at workplace does not give women-friendly space to be able to involve in the workplace as men can do. The gap of the participation becomes bigger when it is divided by marital status. Based on the data of OECD in 2011 quoted by Kim et al, 2016, the married men participation rate in the Republic of Korea was at 82.7% and married women was at 49.3%. The lower participation rate of married women reflects the childcare costs for married women. According to 2009 Korea Time Use Survey, wives spend an average of three times as much time caring for their children as their husbands, 55 minutes a day compared to 14 minutes. As a result, most women terminate their careers at the childbearing age (25-34 years old). Once a woman starts a family, she is expected by both society and her family to leave the labor market to take care of her husband and children at home (Ma, 2014). When Jiyong and her husband acknowledge that they will have a child soon, they discuss about some possibilities whether Jiyoung will be back to work after their child is born. However, at the end they decide that Jiyoung will quit working since they can afford to find a person who will take care of their child. One of them should quit working which always means the woman.

In the end, they concluded that one of them had to be a stay-at-home parent, and that one person, of course, was Jiyoung. Daehyun's job was more stable and brought in more money, but apart from that, it was more common for husbands to work and wives to raise the children and run the home (Cho, 2020: 72).

Jiyoung says that in 2014, when Jiyoung quits working, one of the five married working women in South Korea decide to stop working because of marriage, pregnancy, childbirth and childbearing. Even when a woman decides to go back to work after childbirth, instead of quitting, generally she will face many challenges concerning her career. Besides her primary responsibility to take care of the child, the other challenges are inflexible working hours along with lack of affordable and good quality childcare facilities which make it difficult to balance between work and home. One of the employees in the company where Jiyong works, there used to be a worker who has a child. The employee finds it hard to get a person to take care of her child when she is working. Most of her paycheck went to the baby sitter, and even then she was frantically looking for someone to watch her child at short notice (Cho, 2020:57). According to OECD 2007, the time to return to work after maternity leave is very important for career development. Longer breaks can permanently compromise a woman's employment and income profile. Women who take long leave are often seen by employers as being less productive and less committed than women who take short leave or no leave of absence (Gorlich and De Grip in Ma, 2014). Kim Eunsil, Jiyoung's superior, says that maternity leave is female employee's right, however some of them do not use it because they are afraid that they will lose their job when they use it. The percentage of female employees who use maternity leave has increased

from 20 percent in 2003 to more half in 2009, and four out of ten still work without maternity leave (Cho, 2020: 48).

When a woman sacrifices her career to take of her children, her husband acts as the breadwinner of the family, while his wife will be the primary caregiver. Some of the women often return to work when their children have reached school age and needed less care. But they will likely to get a job on a regular basis. More often they take a temporary job or shift to family business (Brinton&Lee in Ma, 2014). They find it very difficult to get a regular job as experienced by the married women around Jiyoung's home. Most of the mothers here work as a freelancer or a private teacher. However most of them do a part time job because they cannot get a job for more than 5 years after they quit from the previous job. Besides that, the jobs provided for them give them a small salary.

The most common scenario was getting a part-time job such as a cashier, waitress, telemarketer, or service worker, changing water purifies filters. According to reports, more than half of the women who quit their jobs are unable to find a new work for more than five years. Frequently the pay also decreases (Cho, 2020:81).

When talking about inequalities toward women at work, the first discrimination to be discussed is the discrimination related to the gender wage gap. U.S Government Accountability Office in 2003 states that based on a comprehensive U.S survey using data from 1983 to 2000, researchers found that after adjusting for human capital factors that could affect salaries (education level, work experience, etc), women earn 22% less than men (Stamarski&Son Hing, 2015). In South Korea in 2010, the average monthly salary, which is the sum of monthly salary and annual salary, was 3.2 million won for men and 2 milliommn won for women (Survey on Labor Conditions by Type of Employment in 2010 in Kim et al, 2016). This implies that Korean women on average earn only 64% of what Korean men earn. Female workers in Jiyoung's office also experience this gender wage gap as stated by Jiyong. She also learned that the guys were paid better from the very start. (Cho, 2020:63).

In addition to gender wage gap, the discrimination against women at work also include disparity in promotion. This condition is realized by Jiyoung's senior in University who has graduated and accepted to work in a big company. This senior is very smart and graduates as the best student in her department. Initially, she is rejected by the company since the university has recommended four male students to get interviewed for the job. The company does not want to accept a woman, moreover a smart women since they see a smart woman as an intimidating person. When the company opens a job vacancy again, she applies for the job and gets accepted. Then she realizes that in the company, there is no woman who holds a position as a leader. She had looked around the office one day and realized that there were no women above a certain pay grade (Cho, 2020:48). It is also based on the fact that the percentage of female managers has also increased steadily but slowly from 10.22 percent in 2006 to 18.37 percent in 2014, but it's not even two out of ten yet (Ministry of Labor, 2015 in Cho, 2020:48).

Women are also likely to receive more opportunities at work, compared with men (Martell et al; Eagly&Carli in Stamarski and Son Hing, 2015). The company where Jiyoung works plans to create a planning team. Jiyoung wants to join the team, however she is then informed that she cannot join the team since they have selected the members of the team consisting of three senior managers and two Jiyoung's male colleagues. Then she knows that the director chooses the male members because he sees that female workers cannot do a long-term project. The director in Jiyoung's company sees that the female workers will have some

difficulties to balance between their career and marriage, moreover when they have children. Therefore the director does not consider female workers as a long-term worker.

The planning team was hand-picked by the head of the company himself. The competent middle-management seniors were chosen because the planning team needed a strong foundation, and the men were picked because the planning team was a long-term project (Cho, 2020:62).

In South Korea as a male-oriented society, sexual harassment occurs frequently in the workplace. According to law, sexual harassment in the workplace is a negative working condition by physically and verbally humiliating or using retaliatory measures in a superior position to disadvantage an individual (Korean Ministry of Government Legislation in 2019 in Lee&Oh, 2020). One day Kim Jiyong eats out with a client in a Korean restaurant and the client sees that Jiyong orders *gandoenjang* or vegetables soup made from fermented soy. He says, “A young person with a taste of soybean paste sauce! I didn’t know you were a *doenjangnyeo* too, Ms. Kim! Ha ha!” (Cho, 2020:57). *Doenjangnyeo* or “bean paste woman” was a popular Korean portmanteau word among a host of other misogynistic new terms that ended with *nyeo* meaning woman. Jiyong wonders if the word is supposed to be only a joke or aimed to harass her.

According to the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family in 2015, about 10% of female workers experienced sexual harassment. Researchers have investigated sexual harassment issues triggered by individuals outside companies or organizations such as costumers and clients in service sectors and clinical practice settings (Joo & Rhie; C.S Kim & Aggarwal; S.K. Lee et al in Lee&Oh, 2020). Jiyong’s superior asks some of her team including Jiyong to go to a dinner with their client in a restaurant. There they see that the head of the promotion department has been drunk and asks Jiyong to sit beside him. Although Jiyong actually wants to sit with her friends, she cannot reject the request. She then is forced to drink the beer offered by him. The client praises Jiyong then harasses her verbally by saying sexual jokes. He asked if she had a boyfriend, and whipped out filth (Cho, 2020:59). In spite of being studied, the many cases related to sexual harassment at work have not been treated well by the managerial persons of a company (Lee & Oh, 2020). They often see these cases as only a part of their services to the client to give a good impression.

The hidden camera crime in South Korea is increasing in recent years. This crime is considered as sexual harassment because the perpetrators were taking and circulating pictures or video recording of another person without consent (Teshome, 2019). Besides getting sexually harassed by the client outside the company, some of Jiyong’s friends are the victims of hidden camera in toilet. A security in the office installs a camera in the toilet for women. Sadly, it is known when the security posts the photos in an adult site found by a manager in the office. However the manager sends the photos to his male colleagues without telling the victims. When this is known by the victims, the manager and his male colleagues said that the victims are too exaggerated by saying that they only spread the photos not install the camera, therefore they are not the male perpetrators

“The accused male employees blame us for being too harsh with them,” she added. “They say they neither set up those cameras nor took the picture, they just saw some photos posted on a website everyone has access too, and we are treating them like sexual offenders.” (Cho, 2020:79).

Individuals as a victim of a sexual harassment at workplace can suffer serious consequences. Besides psychological impact, the economic impact after sexual harassment is enormous. It also leads to poor performance, time lost from work and potential unemployment (Loya,; Tjaden & Thoenners in Lee&Oh, 2020). From a public health perspective, it can have serious consequences for affected individuals by causing post-traumatic stress disorders, anxiety, depression and suicide (Ba & Bhopal in Lee&Oh, 2020). One of the victims of the spy camera tells Jiyong that after knowing that she is one of the victims, she goes to a psychiatrist. She always feels that everyone that she meets has seen her photo. She might look fine outside, but she is actually depressed inside. The other victims also go to some counseling and takes medicine to recover from the incident. One of them tries to commit suicide and the others quit working (Cho, 2020:79).

Inequalities at workplace toward women root from the gender roles which serve as a social and cultural construction giving some characteristics for men known as masculinity and for women as femininity. These characteristics eventually construct their existence, roles and social status. Even before entering workplace, women suffer from inequalities during their childhood and school-age period because of patriarchalism. Engels (2004) said that patriarchy is “the world historical defeat of the female sex” or can be interpreted as unequal distribution of power between men and women. Patriarchy subordinates women referring that men are higher and more important than the other. It can be seen in Jiyong’s school where the male students are always put as the first in several things. Number one on the roster was a boy, everything began with the boys, and that felt like the right, natural thing (Cho, 2020:22). The female students have already learned the fact that even during their school period, the managerial position related to the school is given to the male, such as being a chief of class. For the last three years, the selected chief is always male. The teachers prefer to select the female students to do certain tasks, such as checking assignment of their friends, but not as the chief of class although they are smarter than the male friends. Teachers were in the habit of saying that girls are smarter. but somehow always elected boys to be class monitors..” (Cho, 2020:22). It also happens when Jiyong enters university. She joins a club where the chief, vice of chief, and manager are all male. When one of the female members, Cha Seung-yeon, wants the same opportunities for all, the other members ignore her request. A senior male member who has joined the club for nine years says that the female members cannot get the positions because it is a difficult thing for women to do. “How many times do I have to tell you? It’s too much work for women.”(Cho, 2020:44)

Besides the difficulty of getting promotion, women are prone to get sexually harassed. The society often blames the women because they are “asked for” it by wearing tempting clothes or consuming much alcohol. After graduating from college, Jiyong applies for a job in a company. The interviewer asks the applicants what will they do if they are asked to meet a client and the client keeps trying to make a physical contact. One of the applicants answers it by saying that she will check her clothes first whether she is wearing something that provokes the client to do it or not.

“I would check my outfit and attitude,” said the final interviewee, “to see if there were any problems with it, and fix anything that may have induced the inappropriate behavior in the client.” (Cho, 2020:50).

When talking about sexual harassment, women are often blamed when it happens to them. This is based on the stigma that when a victim of sexual harassment reports this form of abuse, it can worsen the outcomes of the victims. Because of the stigma above, a woman might not think harassment as a serious thing. She is afraid that filing a complaint can create an uncomfortable situation in the office. There is nothing much that can be done to fix the situation

or it can harm her career (U.S Merit Systems Protection Board, 1995). When the incident of hidden camera in the toilet for female is revealed, the director of the company only wants to close this case quietly. He does not show empathy to the victims and ignore the request of apology from the male employees who has spread the photos. He chooses to defend the male employees by saying that they have a family to support so he cannot fire them. Besides that the female employees will be harmed when everybody knows about the problem.

It'll ruin this company's reputation if word gets around in the field. The accused male employees have families and parents to protect, too. Do you want to people to find out that your pictures are out there? (Cho, 2020:80).

Conclusion

This research examines some inequalities at workplace experienced by the characters in the novel *Kim Jiyoung, Born 1982*. From the observation of the novel, it can be seen that there is still some wage gap between male and female workers where the female workers get less wage than male. Some companies give more opportunities and projects to the male workers because the higher echelons see that female workers as a non-long term employees since they mainly have to take care of the family once they get married and have children. Female workers are also prone to get sexually harassed at work when they are asked to meet a client or spied through hidden cameras. These data show that inequalities at workplace still exist and harm female workers. Government and employers should make some changes in order to make employees have the same rights in the workplace so that everyone can have the same opportunities to give better support for their families.

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