Research Papers on knowledge, Innovation and Enterprise

KIE Conference 2022 Proceedings

KIE Conference

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*There will be **opportunities to publish papers** in the KIE Conference publications—**2023 Creativity book and Research Papers In Knowledge, Innovation and Enterprise, KIE Conference Proceedings, Volume XI 2023**—and selected papers will be published in the associated journal of the conference—see www.ijkie.org*

Research Papers on Knowledge, Innovation and Enterprise

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Research Papers on
knowledge, Innovation and Enterprise

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The *Research Papers on Knowledge, Innovation and Enterprise (KIE Conference Proceedings)* is dedicated to papers submitted to the *International Conference on Knowledge, Innovation and Enterprise* which was held on 26-28 July 2022. This tenth volume of the journal continues with this tradition.

Like the 2021 edition of the annual conference, this year's conference was held virtually due to the continued impact of the coronavirus pandemic on people and businesses.

A numbers of papers were presented at the conference and submitted for peer-review and publication in his volume but one author returned a successfully revised paper. After a lengthy wait a decision was made to publish the only paper returned.

Gillian Hilton's paper—*The Effects of Anti-Female Bias in the Workplace: Women's Experiences and the Efficacy of Anti-bias Training*—examines bias against women in the workplace, and its impact on the ability of women to progress, move up company hierarchy, and make a success of their career.

Hilton's research documents experiences of women from a variety of backgrounds and professions to find out if the women 'had experienced bias, or seen it affecting others'.

Indeed, the problem of gender bias in the workplace is endemic. According to a research report for the International Labour Organisation (ILO, 2017), globally, women are not only underrepresented in corporations but the proportion of 'women decreases with each step up in corporate hierarchy' (p.3). Much of these biases are embedded in company structure and practices and remain a challenge in the workplace.

Nonetheless, in this paper, Hilton concludes that 'in striving for equality at work, serious bias and a lack of support from other women, is affecting females adversely and also stifling the success of the companies for whom they work'. Enjoy.

On another note, as the pandemic shows some signs of receding, it is pleasing to confirm tentatively that the 2023 KIE conference will take place onsite and we hope to publish both outstanding and new papers in volume eleven of the journal.

James Ogunleye, PhD, FRSA
Chairman, 2022 KIE Conference

Reference

ILO (2017). 'Breaking barriers: Unconscious gender bias in the workplace', ACT/ EMP Research note, International Labour Organisation: Geneva, Switzerland. Available online at https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_dialogue/--- act_emp/documents/publication/wcms_601276.pdf (Accessed: 21.07.2020)

The Effects of Anti-Female Bias in the Workplace: Women's Experiences and the Efficacy of Anti-bias Training

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Abstract

Anti-female bias in the workplace is adversely affecting women in their attempts to move up company hierarchies and to achieve success in what were/are male dominated fields. Bias against women is to a great degree unconscious, as opposed to conscious, learned from society and long held attitudes and beliefs about the female sex. This paper explores the literature on bias against females at work and how it hampers their progress. Research was also undertaken with women from a wide variety of professions to discover if they had experienced bias, or seen it affecting others. In-depth case studies were performed to ascertain women's feelings about bias at work, the training against it offered and their opinions of its efficacy. In addition, women were asked to put forward ideas as to how workplace bias could be overcome and what approaches to training/education about bias they considered to be the most effective. The conclusion was that in striving for equality at work, serious bias and a lack of support from other women, is affecting females adversely and also stifling the success of the companies for whom they work.

Keywords: Workplaces and women Anti-female bias, types of bias, anti-bias training, unconscious bias

Introduction

This paper examines the causes and effects of anti-female bias in the workplace, how women in particular are affected and what is being done to overcome the problem of workplace bias against females. A wide search of literature is accompanied by a small, but in-depth investigation of the experiences of women from a wide variety of professions, as to the presence of anti-female bias and company efforts to overcome the problem through training/education. The topic grew out of a study of women in academic life, undertaken by British Federation of Women Graduates (BFWG), which examined the differences between working in that sector now, in comparison with former years (Hilton, 2019). One of the main topics that arose, was how women in academic life were subjected to biases, that held back their careers and resulted in frustration and a belief that ingrained bias was adversely affecting many women in academic professions. There had been changes from former years, including the linking of anti-female bias now to other biases, such as age and ethnicity, plus a strong belief in many male academics that women's place was not as leaders in the university sector. This was clearly demonstrated by their behaviour towards and expectations of women and their roles at work.

This was most strongly manifested in the traditional male subjects of science, engineering, maths, but was also rife in many other disciplines.

As a result of these findings BFWG undertook further research into other professions to discover if bias was a wide-spread issue for women, how it was manifested and the effects on women at work. In addition, it was decided to explore with the respondents, their experiences of anti-bias training provided at work and its level of effectiveness. Furthermore, women were asked to suggest how such training/education about overcoming biases could be improved in the workplace.

Bias at work

Giuliano (2020) discusses how women are viewed in many societies, as being less important than men and that these beliefs are long held and so deeply ingrained, that they are passed on through generations. This author claims that few questions are asked about their justice and relevancy now. In addition, Garcia-Gonzalez et al. (2019) raised the question of perceptions around the world of what inequality actually is and how it is manifested, clearly demonstrating that it differs between countries. These authors also stressed the need for anti-female bias training/education at work, for all employees. Alexander (2011) discusses the expectation still, that women's roles are of less importance than those of men, who tend to be the leaders. Women's roles are seen in this light, as they are perceived as domestic, controlled by accepted constraints, either social or religious. To some extent this author questions whether the fault lies not solely with men, or social or religious rules, but with women themselves, who accept these 'second class', assigned roles, believing they are there to compliment and support their menfolk and employers.

Male is the norm

Women are faced in life in the majority of countries, as being viewed as 'not male' as opposed to being seen positively as a female. This concept immediately puts women into a lower status grouping than men. This is hard to overcome as it is seen a 'normal' in many societies. In some cases, it involves making women invisible, that is, hiding behind concealing clothing and face coverings, plus often a culture that encourages them to stay at home as much as is possible, whilst caring for a family. In some societies a woman can still not be seen in public, unless accompanied by a male relative.

Criado Perez (2019) puts forward the idea that humans are perceived as male, unless otherwise indicated. Females in many areas are almost invisible. Males she believes, are put first at the heart of all societies. Male is the model; the term is used by anthropologists and other writers to describe humans. In medicine the male body is seen as the norm and pictures in text books show male bodies, in profusion, not female ones. As a result, the influence of human beings of a different sex has been neglected, for example, when prescribing or creating drugs to treat common complaints. The fact that certain blood pressure drugs may make women's hair fall out has, in many cases, been ignored as female hysteria by doctors, despite much clear evidence. Women's health needs, have recently been the subject of much more evident conversations, whilst previously they have been ignored, or seen as shameful. However, period poverty and the inability of poor girls in some countries to attend school when menstruating, or even being viewed as unclean during those times, is still far too prevalent. It took years for the UK gov-

ernment to remove tax from period products still hiding under the term of, 'feminine hygiene' in some stores. It appears that menstruation/periods are not fit to be mentioned, as this natural occurrence is shameful in some way. Lately, one well known personality in the UK has raised the issue of the menopause and its effect on women's health, both mental and physical. This, she believes needs to be discussed much more openly, so both sexes and also employers understand how it can affect not only women's lives, but also their abilities in employment during its transition.

Criado Perez (2019) also points out the lack of interest in the broadcast media in stories about women, unless there is some sexual element to excite the public about a famous star or celebrity. This author also claims that only 24% of broadcast media's coverage is about women and women's issues (Perez, 2019). The question must be raised as to why this is so? Women make more than half of the world's population, but the stories seen to be of interest to the media, are about male activity. Yet again, the woman fades into the background, a supporter of her man, if of course she has been lucky enough to catch and keep one. With these attitudes so deeply ingrained in even so called 'progressive' societies, it is easy to see how difficult the battle for women's equality is.

What is bias and how does it manifest itself?

'Women are rising to the moment as stronger leaders, but their work is going un-recognized' (LeanIn and McKinsey and Company, 2021; 17).
Bias can be conscious, and intentional, or unconscious, without thought and accepted as the norm.

> Unconscious gender bias is defined as unintentional and automatic mental association   based on gender, stemming from traditions, norms, values, culture and/or experience. Automatic associations feed into decision-making, enabling a quick assessment of an individual according to gender and gender stereotypes. (ACT/EMP, 2017: 3).

Unconscious bias is difficult to challenge and overcome, as it is founded on deeply believed and often learned, ingrained ideas about the two genders and their responsibilities in life. These leading to expectations such as domestic and caring roles are for women not men, even if women are fully employed outside the home. Now, women's work burdens have changed, as women are working in and outside the home, yet the majority of home duties still lie, in the main on women (Collins et al, 2020). This is creating stress and burn-out at a level not seen in men (LeanIn and McKinsey and Company, 2021). Unconscious bias is where we fail to question, what is behind any decisions we make about our attitudes to others and our choice of those to favour, or discriminate against. It is this lack of questioning of one's own beliefs that allows bias to continue, even in developed societies where equality, often legally binding, should be the norm, but often fails to change attitudes. Many efforts have been made by companies to address in particular, unconscious bias at work. Training in-house and the use of training companies who specialise in this field are common, but my no means universal. In addition not all companies make training about bias at work compulsory for all staff.

Unconscious (or implicit) bias is a term that describes the associations we hold, outside our conscious awareness and control. Unconscious bias affects everyone. It is triggered by our brain automatically leading to the making of quick judg-

ments and assessments. They are influenced by our background, personal experiences, societal stereotypes and cultural context. It is not just about gender, ethnicity or other visible diversity characteristics - height, body weight, names, and many other things can also trigger unconscious bias (Imperial College London, 2022; 1).

Unconscious bias at work also has a large impact on how we relate to colleagues and make decisions about issues such as who to recruit, promotion, access to flexible working, maternal and paternal leave after childbirth and how women returning from giving birth are treated, regarding chances of promotion and expectations of their performances. Without challenging these assumptions, companies lose out on hiring diverse talents and stifle workplace inclusion. Successful companies educate their teams about the problems caused by biased responses, and approaches in areas such as recruitment, interview strategies, chances of promotion/leadership roles, obtained via measurable achievements and well-managed appraisal and training.

ACT/EMP (2017) and Howard (2020) describe the different types of bias that may be prevalent in the work place and these reports claim that they come from outdated assumptions and a natural preference for what is termed 'affinity bias'. We like people who are like ourselves, echo us in preferences, looks, behaviours and attitudes. We may also be swayed into liking someone who is physically or personality-wise attractive, whether or not they are suitable for a particular role in the company or group 'impression bias'. We also tend to find pleasing those whose attitudes and ideas are similar to our own, as they make us feel comfortable and reassured 'conformation bias'. However, some differences in viewpoints are healthier and open the eyes of a business or company leaders to new possibilities and ideas, or possible problems. We may also attribute our own successes to our skills and abilities, and label others as successful due to luck and their failures to poor ability, 'attribution bias'. This may lead to poor judgment in recruitment, conducting appraisals and evaluating promotion prospects. In addition, we may prefer to have a team around us that conforms, where there is no particular discord, but generally members agree either with the senior member, or the person who is most insistent, to avoid conflict 'conformity bias'. This may not aid progress and innovation. We may also tend to see a colleague from a particular point of view that accentuates or disregards good and/or bad traits. This can result in ignoring negative aspects, or failing to expect employees to address their weaknesses. Conversely, positive abilities can be ignored, if the person in question is somewhat difficult to deal with, though has excellent ideas for the forward movement of a company.

In considering these points it is easy to see why if companies, workplaces and boards are dominated by men, males receive better promotion advancement than women and less adverse criticism as they act as mirrors to and from their superiors. That is, the 'old boys club' is still very active, as many men feel most at ease with their own sex. Women, on the other hand, do not appear to have as yet created an 'old girls club', as far as supporting other females in the workplace. There is a tendency not to support and promote other women, rather, to feel threatened by them. This was manifest in research undertaken by BFWG (Hilton, 2019) into the experiences of academic women working in universities in the UK. Many of the women young and older said, often it was men who supported their progress, rather than other women. However, it must be remembered that the proportion of women at the top of universities is still fairly small in comparison to men in those roles. Women it appears, can be biased against other women merely because they are females. Women need help, through education and training to actively support

and promote other women, not be their rivals. Much emphasis is placed on the need for more flexible working, a work/life balance and the urgent need to improve training on bias against women, as it has the worst feedback of any training initiatives undertaken and is presented in a report of the initial findings on gender equality in the law profession, by the International Bar Association (Rose, 2022).

Many reports exist on the prevalence of bias and how it is manifested at work, including ILO ACT/EMP (2015), Douglas and Leite (2016), Bureau for Employers Activities Report (ACT/EMP, 2017). Grant Thornton Global (2018). McKinsey and Company (Huang, et al., 2019), Learning and Work Institute Report (Smith et al., 2019), Trehan (2019), Avado (Parker, 2021), LeanIn and McKinsey (2021). All these investigations explain how women are losing out on promotion, salary awards, appointment to leadership roles and consideration for their other duties as homemakers, to name only a few points of difficulty. They also demonstrate that bias can be directed particularly against women who work part-time, because of caring duties. Assumptions are made, that they have lost interest in promotion and new tasks and that training them is a waste of company time and money. This factor of lack of training possibilities, adversely affects the movement of women to high positions in companies. It also appears that some employment areas linked to the STEM/STEAM agenda have more problems with bias directed towards women, than other areas of employment. Companies employing larger groups of men than women for example, the car industry and engineering, also appeared to have more bias against promoting women employees. There are of course some positive stories Grant Thornton Global (2018) reported that there is a steady increase of women in leadership positions in the workplace, but this is often related to less women in senior positions lower down the company hierarchy.

Research

BFWG Research Ethics Committee approved the topic and the aims and processes of the research, which attempted to answer the question, 'What are the affects and resulting effects on women of anti-female bias at work; and what part can be played by education and training in challenging and overcoming workplace bias?' This is a highly complex subject, involving not only relationships and behaviours at work, but also attitudes and behaviours in the home, as bias also exists in relationships and expectations within families. Bias at work and women's experiences of it is not entirely separated from home life and is therefore a complex area to examine. Cilliers (1998) put forward the idea of using complexity theory to examine interlocking and non-standard systems and interactions. This involves examining the irregular, multi-faced interactions and elements involved, which are also influenced by their environment. In addition, examining present behaviours and assumptions, which are often based on historical occurrences and traditions, is essential. To understand what is occurring and why in different workplaces, bearing in mind this idea of interlinking yet different influences, can be of use in attempting to explain why actions, behaviours and attitudes in complex human interactions occur.

Methodological Approach

An in-depth case study approach was used employing purposive sampling, in order to target women from a wide variety of professions and levels of employment. Age

ranges of respondents varied from late twenties to late-sixties and early seventies and they were all presently working. Employment experiences of respondents were very varied, media, law, the press, graphic design, accountancy, architecture, broadcasting, human resources, travel industry, nursing, private aircraft pilot, business owner and entrepreneur, coach and mentor for business owners, client/business partnerships, advertising, paediatrics, charity grants management, company branding, human resources, teacher training, designer of training programmes for business, scientist, lecturer. Twenty three in-depth interviews, the majority conducted online and lasting around one hour each, were undertaken.

Questions were asked about the type of company/employer, the respondent's position and level therein and the employment statistics for their company, specifically the balance of males and females. Then qualitative, open-ended approaches were used, to ascertain the experiences or observations of anti-female bias, conscious or unconscious and how it is manifested; how complaints were handled; the existence or not of general bias against women in specific fields of employment; the company's attitude towards bias; the effects of age, class and ethnicity on biased approaches to women; responses by the employers/clients to complaints about bias; what support and training on bias is/was offered and undertaken; the delivery of training, who undertakes it and if it is compulsory for all employees; their judgements as to the effectiveness of the training; how could that training be improved to be more effective; how seriously this is considered; what can be done at company level to improve the situation for women in the company?

The in-depth case study interviews produced a wide range of responses with some clear messages of similar concerns arising from respondents, about the presence and effects of anti-female bias they had suffered or observed. Some also mentioned their added concerns of bias against either young (suffering sexual harassment as the norm) or older women (ignoring their input) and the dual problems of ethnic bias, being added to the anti-female attitudes they suffered. The women's words are summarised, or presented in quotation marks as accurate statements of their speech.

Results

Every case study interviewee had suffered from anti-female bias at work, either in a present or former workplace, or had seen it happening to others. In most cases, apart from the female business owners interviewed, the top of the companies in question were male dominated, even when the company employed far more females than males (e.g. Music Industry). Anti-female bias it appeared, was particularly prevalent against pregnant women and those on, or returning from maternity leave. One respondent told of her bad treatment when suffering from a difficult pregnancy, with constant threats from a female boss and in the end, her being given a severance payment, with her doctor insisting she go on sick leave, as her mental health was seriously affected. She had approached Huaman Resources in which she was herself employed in the company (Government Quango), but had received no support or help from them, or her manager's superiors who were male. She felt bullied and was certain that she was being victimised, as she in fact knew far more than her immediate manager about recruitment into the finance industry. In addition it came to light that the female manager had been attempting to conceive for quite a while to no effect, and this appeared to have made her biased against other women's pregnancies. It appeared also, that there was a 'don't rock the boat policy

in HR', no-one wanted to listen to the interviewees complaints about the attitude of her manager to her difficult pregnancy. They were brushed aside another respondent (Music Industry) talked of the change of attitude when she returned from maternity leave. It was assumed that she was not expected to be so work oriented, or keen to succeed now she was a mother. It took a long time to convince both the males and females of her team, that she was still the same person. When she won two national awards for marketing, after becoming a mother, 'they started to adjust their beliefs'.

Several respondents spoke of the assumptions made by male bosses that females were less likely to want and fight for promotion and discussed the ignoring of ideas put forward by women in meetings and discussions about approaches to workplace problems. It took a long time for men to trust women in their team, whereas they immediately trusted males, was mentioned by many women and strongly by the business owners interviewed. Bias had taken many forms including age related bias, extra pressure put on women from ethnic minorities and in particular treatment by other women, which had often slipped into bullying. One respondent raised the question of women's dress at work. She is now a judge, but sees the same pressure on young barristers that she had suffered when starting out in the profession to 'dress up at work'. Women are still expected to wear skirts, not trousers in court and to have immaculate hair and make-up, or they are not taken seriously by judges and court officials. She described it as 'archaic and sexist' but had to advise young women to conform if they wanted to progress and to avoid being seen with her, as 'she was perceived a trouble maker and a feminist and that, could badly affect their careers'. Little was being done she claimed to bring about a change in attitudes in the profession. In fact the International Bar Association Report (Rose, 2022) stressed the very poor level of training offered against bias across the law profession. On similar lines a respondent in the newspaper industry described the culture of her workplace as 'pale, stale and male, dominated by men at the top and not in touch with modern thinking, and determined not to listen to, or promote women'. One woman, working in graphic design in a company owned by two men, felt that her efforts were not noticed or rewarded, whilst those of men were. She felt that she should have been promoted, but because she was female, 'it had never been discussed'. However, she admitted that she had accepted this behaviour without complaint.

This culture of males at the top and a higher percentage of women lower in the company hierarchy, was very common across most career areas. Even women working in the health service, both a doctor and a nurse. talked about how male colleagues ignored their ideas and insights into how the processes were run and how their male colleagues responded to their ideas and concerns. The doctor discussed experiences working as a joint leader of a multi-GP practice committee. Invariably, her male joint leader was looked on as the leader, the one to be noted and her ideas were often set aside. Her joint leader did everything he could to prevent his colleagues side-lining her, but found it 'almost impossible to prevent them assuming he was in charge'. The pilot who flies a privately owned jet for a company owner, had chosen this route as she is a single mother of two children and had relocated to live near her parents, so she had support for her children when she was on overseas flights. In this role she said, 'often biased assumptions were made by ground staff in many countries and by air traffic control'. The pilot usually occupies the plane's left hand seat, but often ground staff assumed her male co-pilot was the captain and she his deputy, walking around the plane to speak to him.

When he redirected them to the female captain, 'there were puzzled looks and a lack of belief that I was the senior'. She was treated well by her employer, but said that to gain promotion and a higher salary she would have to move to a major airline where often she had previously been subject to bias and found it difficult 'to be taken for a real pilot, as she was female'. She found this bias and assumptions that 'men are in the lead infuriating'. In addition, her caring role would make it 'very difficult to be scheduled to pilot routine flights that could be subject to delay, last minute changes etc'. In addition, 'no allowance is made by the main airlines for attention to children, the pilot's wife is seen as having the responsibility there'. The pilot shared the experiences of a friend, also a pilot, a trans-female who had been a male and had suffered badly from ignorant comments and being ignored by colleagues after coming out. 'They didn't know what to do or say, so made jokes, lacked respect for her skills and abilities, as soon as she appeared as a female'. This 'had never occurred when she presented as male'.

Training was also an area of contention, several women complained that they had not been put forward for training, which could lead to promotion, One, working in advertising was told a man should be given the opportunity, as he was the family's breadwinner. When she attempted to challenge this, explaining that she was the higher earner in her relationship, her arguments were ignored. She felt she said 'stagnant within the company, and that was an acceptable situation to the men with whom she worked'.

The demands of certain jobs, often male employee oriented, were also raised. In the Tech Industry jobs there appeared to be very pressured and this could be off-putting for women of child bearing age. The demands were described by one respondent as, 'full on, all or nothing, impossible to fit with family life'. She felt there was unfair pressure on women in the sector, 'they have to prove themselves much more than the men do, but I am not rewarded for the work I do at a correct level. I feel I, not the men have to constantly prove my worth, yet I am not promoted or paid equally', When she asked for support to deal with some underperforming members of her team she was labelled 'emotional and out of control and needed to calm down' by her male boss. In the advertising world, dominated by men, she saw no support for women and quick dismissal of their complaints. She was blamed by her superiors as being the cause, of what she felt was a legitimate complaint about the behaviour of some of her team, in this a very male dominated environment. Yet again, the preconceived notions that women are emotionally weak and cannot cope with difficult situations when leading teams, was clearly manifest in this situation. The response was automatic, she, the female must be the cause of the problem, which made her she said 'very angry'.

This anti-female bias problem is 'rife in the industry' according to a top level architect who described the condescension she faces in a male dominated profession. She is determined to support and aid the careers of younger female architects, but described in detail the problems she and others face. The profession is dominated by males and women's views are cast aside. She believes this is one of 'the reasons why we make so many mistakes in planning cities, housing and services, as women's views are stifled.' Public areas are she believed, 'designed for and dominated by men. Women are more or less invisible in cities'. Only twenty one percent of registered architects are female and the opinion of men is women's demands for designs of cities are 'too expensive and dismissed, resulting in poor living conditions and services in cities'. Male domination and active anti-female bias she claims, are fiercely defended in the profession. She has seen

'women air-brushed out of photos of architects, leaving only the men. Practices started by women quickly taken over by males'. Women in the profession she said are 'ignored, receive twenty five percent less in salaries than do men and so many give up and leave the profession early in life'. She has campaigned with others to have women allowed into the Architecture Association and achieved this in 2014, but life is still very hard for women in architecture due to biased attitudes.

What was very alarming was the one hundred percent response, that putting forward complaints to Human Resources (HR) did nothing, as they had no interest and complaints were not taken seriously, or resolved. The financial rewards of most respondents, they knew were less than that of men in the same role. The broadcaster accepted this; the company she worked for had been castigated for the discrepancies between male and female pay. 'I know men get paid a lot more than I do, despite my programmes being very popular with the public. This money is extra to my regular salary so I put up with it.' This to some extent was the general response; most women had lost the will to keep fighting for bias in employment against women to be tackled. Two of the business owner/advisers however, were very angry about the attitudes to women entrepreneurs, one claiming 'when bidding for a job I am so fed up that the panel question and talk to my lawyer not me. The panels are mainly men and they seem to find it easier to talk to a man but the business is mine!'

Discussion

The results produced some clear agreement from the respondents. Bias against women existed to some extent in most companies, whilst in many it was clear, and understood and often accepted by all employees. Women complained of being ignored for promotion; expected to dress in a certain way if they wanted to succeed and about the lack of good mentoring available for women staff. Pay differentials they tended to accept, despite it being unlawful and also lack of access to training.

Some of the strongest responses came from women who had suffered bias when pregnant. These included, being made redundant at that time, or had some of their team removed without any information given to them, as to why this had occurred. Perceptions that they were no longer ambitious after becoming mothers, whereas men who became fathers were still expected to be keen to move forward at work, were strongly observed and commented on by many respondents. There was a strong feeling that women on maternity leave were ignored, forgotten and expected to return to work which had moved on, with little support or guidance. The idea of a 'buddy' system where a woman on maternity leave was supported and kept up to date by a work colleague, until she returned was suggested by several respondents and supported by many, but 'just a dream at present' (Press) but there was little evidence of this approach being well supported by companies. 'Pleas for it are ignored by management' (Charity fund manager). Many complained that they had returned to the workplace with little or no support, to discover that there had been, for example, an entirely new IT system installed about which they knew nothing, but were expected to use immediately, with no help. Or office organisation had been changed with responsibilities being moved between different personnel. In most cases they were expected to 'just cope' and if they complained were, in some instances, told they had been 'on leave', appearing to infer that their lack of knowledge of the new system was their fault.

Little understanding or support was offered for caring roles, which mostly fall onto women, apart from some flexible working. This problem was particularly noted during the pandemic, for women, on whose shoulders mostly fell the home schooling of children at this time (Topping and McIntyre, 2021). In addition, it was clear from the respondent's responses, that the burden of work for women during the pandemic and the working from home instructions, highlighted and enforced traditional expectations of women's roles in the household. Despite all the family in most cases, 'working from home' and the teaching requirements mentioned above, women were still performing their socially expected roles, that is shopping, cleaning, washing, caring and cooking with little change from the gendered biases taken as 'normal' expectations in their pre-pandemic lives. Their spouses it appeared, often commandeered the best home-working spaces. The women were confined to any situation where they could place their computer, watch the children and in some cases feed them at the same time, as conducting business conference calls, or meetings or teaching students online. This multi-tasking, was not a burden which was carried by many of their male partners. This led to stress, burnout and resentment from women expected to, in most cases, do all the household's required tasks, as well as their job with all its pressures whilst based at home, without complaint. The clear bias here was that the male job was the more important and the household chores were the responsibility of women.

Several talked of bullying from other women, making their working lives a nightmare and reactions to questions about the support offered by HR were, derisory. There was anger and concern over the ingrained attitudes they faced towards women's roles at work and the support men received from men in meetings, promotion rounds and the lack of support for female employees in similar events, received from other women.

Attitudes to the training/education offered were on the whole derisory, words such as 'poor', 'time wasting', 'makes no difference', 'non-compulsory most men don't go' and it 'produces no change', were rife. Many suggesting that online training, often the only provision during the pandemic, was of no use. The main conclusions were that change needed to be made to allow direct challenges to attitudes and assumptions during real activities, aided by the presence of observers who give feedback after meetings, interviews promotion discussions, etc. One lone voice said the training she had received at her university was good, making her really think about bias. However, she was a Bulgarian who had received no training on bias whatsoever in her home country university, where she lectured. Tackling anti-female bias was new to her and very welcome.

All of the stories above demonstrated the automatic, thoughtless responses, prompted by long held anti-female biases, which were never challenged or accepted as bias by the people who perpetrated these outdated beliefs and, the resulting behaviours arising from them. In addition, the poor support given by women to women at work is troubling and adds to the feeling that the workplace is not welcoming to females, despite most families, needing two incomes to survive.

Therefore from the evidence presented it appears that there is much to be done to improve the lot of women in the workplace. As Trehan (2019, no page) points out:

> The business case for eradicating biases seems blindingly obvious. Businesses in the financial sector with women at the helm are more successful. This fact plays out across other industries too. Statistics show that companies that have higher numbers of females within their senior management

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teams outperform firms that have fewer women within management roles, with returns consistently being above the national industry median.

In addition it appears that far too little progress has been made in challenging anti-female bias. A speech quoted in a Sky TV Documentary in 2022 noted that President Erdogan of Turkey in 2014 said, 'You cannot put women and men on an equal footing, That's, against nature' (SkyDocsHD, 2022).

Conclusion

The reality as experienced by these women, clearly echoed the literature referenced above, in that there seems to have been only minor changes in the twenty first century, as to how women at work are perceived. The anti-female bias culture is strong and flourishing and it appears that some women have abandoned the fight against it, becoming immured to it as 'the norm' accepting that is immovable and there to stay. Little evidence was presented of successful work-based education and training of employees to counteract and challenge bias, despite numerous companies offering highly advertised, expensive programmes. Courses on offer were mostly online and 'did nothing to change attitudes, anyway they are not compulsory and many men ignore them' (Tech Industry) or 'they do not even exist in my company' (Music Industry).

When asked what should replace the offered programmes, most women asked for clearer and better monitoring and challenging of manifested bias. The most vigorous suggestion came from five interviewees, who insisted that monitoring by observation of individual actions and attitudes, could allow immediate challenge to be made by the monitor to biased behaviour/assumptions made by those responsible for interviewing, assessing promotion possibilities, discussing contributions of individuals etc. This could include, asking those involved why they had made that assumption, or asked different questions and had different views of male and female reactions to a specific work place problem. The women asked for more consideration for flexible working, understanding of the many caring duties they perform, plus more effort from men to take on some of the caring burdens. They believed mostly, that the bias was unconscious, males were reacting in the ways generations had, but life and employment had changed and it was possible that a women's viewpoints could benefit the company in question if adopted and explored.

In addition to the need for compulsory and better education and training programmes, is the need to help women support each other at work. Too many instances of anti-female, behaviour by women were noted. It was disturbing to see that despite the number of well established, supportive women's groups around the country, one to one support in the workplace between women was rarely occurring. There was notable evidence of rivalry and to some extent, jealousy of other women's expertise or success. In findings from this and the previous research on academic women mentioned above, in most cases it appeared, their support for betterment at work had come from men, not women. Possibly though, to really accomplish good training which helps all employees to question their own biases, is for companies to adopt the ideas of many research findings. Company owners and senior company officials need to take note, that bias against women employees holds companies back and affects profits, which is a serious waste of potential caused by outdated, unquestioning attitudes and beliefs. Possibly this is the way forward, rather than focussing the arguments on equality and respect, stressing the

potential financial gains for companies who challenge and reject biased attitudes to women, would lead to greater changes in the treatment of women in the workplace. There is obviously still a great deal of work to be done in companies and society, to enable women at work to gain the respect and rewards they deserve and thus benefit the companies they run, or which employ them.

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