

# Perception of Equity Regarding the Promotion and Work Placement of Female Public Servants

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## Abstract

This research attempts to analyze the existing perceptions among public servants of the degree of workplace equity regarding promotion and placement. Promotion and work placement are areas typically associated with gender discrimination, commonly known respectively as the ‘glass ceiling’ and ‘glass wall,’ and are a point of considerable shared interest among public servants. This analysis of the perception of equity among public servants is expected to help prompt discussions of the governmental interventions required to eliminate gender discrimination in the public sector.

**Keywords:** promotion, work placement, equity, perception of gender equality, perception of gender discrimination

## Theoretical Discussions

### *Implications and Definition of Promotion and Work Placement*

The promotion or vertical movement of public servants holds special implications at both the organizational and individual level. In terms of organizational structure, it is essential for filling vacant positions and securing resilience by facilitating vertical circulation within a closed hierarchical structure. For individual public servants, promotion alters their positions within the organization and increases their responsibilities by means of upward movement. Through promotion, individual public servants enjoy the dual benefits of increased status within the organization and enhanced financial stability. Promotion is a

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tool allowing the organization to further motivate its employees in their work and personal development, as well as an opportunity for individual public servants to improve in terms of their work and personal lives. Through promotion, individual public servants receive increased salary, undertake more important tasks, manage a greater number of subordinate staff members, and assume increased responsibility (Hong Mi-yeong et al., 2005).

In general, work placement is understood to be the act of an organization assigning a specific set of tasks to each individual in relation to employment, promotion, or transfer (Kim Yeong-mi et al., 2007). Some researchers define work placement as a change of position within the same rank group and thus assign changes in work position resulting from promotion to the concept of promotion (Yu Min-bong, 2010; Kim Yeong-mi et al., 2007).

### ***Perception of Discrimination and Equity Regarding Promotion and Work Placement***

One of the most widespread terms related to discrimination in promotion and work placement is the so-called 'glass ceiling'. It is currently used extensively to describe discrimination against women and minorities in the workplace (Lee Ju-hee et al., 2004; Kim Yang-hee, 2000). Equity theory is based on Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance and Homans' social exchange theory (1961). The premise of this theory is that fair treatment is a universal desire among all individuals. Equity is a belief that one is subject to equal treatment as others, while inequity refers to the opposite (Lee Chang-won et al., 2008). Whether or not female public servants receive fair treatment in promotion and work placement will be determined through comparison with the treatment received by their male counterparts. Equity in promotion and work placement is important since it has a direct impact on individual public servants' work attitudes (Jeong Jae-hwa et al., 2007: 244).

## **Research Design**

### ***Research Subjects and Methods***

A survey was conducted from August 5 to September 14, 2013. The questionnaires were distributed in person to public servants in charge of human resource management at relevant organizations and collected after their completion. Taking into account missing data, a total of 892 copies were confirmed for the final sample data.

The perceptual differences were examined using intra-group means analyses by gender and rank and cross tabulation analyses by group. The characteristics of respondents were as follows. The proportion of men was higher than that of women, with men making up 56.7% (506 persons) and women 43.3% (386 persons). Those in the 30-40 year old age

bracket amounted to 43.5% (388 persons) and those in the 40-50 group 35.9% (320 persons). In terms of rank, those at Level 4 or higher (managerial positions) accounted for 9.9% (88 persons), those at Level 5 for 27.1% (242 persons), and those at Level 6 or lower (working level) for 63.0% (562 persons). The number of years of employment was ten years or longer for 52.5% (468 persons) and less than one year for 4.9% (44 persons).

Table 1. Respondent Characteristics

Category		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Total	892	100.0
	Male	506	56.7
	Female	386	43.3
Age	Total	892	100.0
	Less than 30 Years Old	104	11.7
	30-39 Years Old	388	43.5
	40-49 Years Old	320	35.9
	50 Years Old or Older	80	9.0
Rank	Total	892	100.0
	Level 3 or Higher	14	1.6
	Level 4	74	8.3
	Level 5	242	27.1
	Level 6	226	25.3
	Level 7	336	37.7
Years of Employment	Total	892	100.0
	Less than One Year	44	4.9
	1-4 Years	184	20.6
	5-9 Years	196	22.0
	10 Years or Longer	468	52.5

Table 2. Questionnaire Structure

Item	Question
Perception of Gender Equity within the Organization	Do you believe women are treated equally to men?
	What are the areas in which men and women are treated equally?
	Do you think there is glass ceiling and/or a glass wall in South Korean society?

Item	Question
Perception of Equity in Promotion	Do you think there is glass ceiling that prevents women from advancing to higher positions?
	Do you think there is discrimination regarding promotion in your organization?
	What do you think is the cause of discrimination?
Perception of Equity in Work Placement	Do you believe there is glass ceiling or glass wall that prevents advancement to key fields of work?
	Do you believe there is discrimination in the posting to key fields of work in your organization?
	What do you think is the cause of the lack of women in key fields of work?

## Analysis Results

### *Perception of Gender Equity within the Organization*

Regarding the perception of gender equity within their organization, female public servants recognized greater inequity than did their male counterparts. In addition, more women than men perceived the existence of a glass ceiling/glass wall preventing women from advancing to higher positions.

Table 3. Perception of Gender Equality within the Organization

Category		Frequency	Mean	Standard Deviation	F
Recognition of Gender Equity within Organization	Male	506	3.14	0.64	127.535***
	Female	386	2.65	0.65	
	Total	892	2.93	0.69	
Existence of a Glass Ceiling/Glass Wall	Male	506	2.15	0.7	79.116***
	Female	386	2.75	0.61	
	Total	892	2.41	0.73	

Note 1: Scale 1=Very negative; 4=Very positive

Note 2: \* p < .05; \*\* p < 0.01; \*\*\* p < 0.001

As to the areas in which they perceive men and women being treated equally, men pointed to employment and promotion, and women to employment and education/training. While both male and female respondents believed that men and women received equal treatment in the hiring process, there was a considerable discrepancy in their perceptions regarding

promotion. Female public servants considered that they were discriminated against in promotion and work placement.

Table 4. Areas in Which Men and Women are Perceived to Receive Equal Treatment

Category	Employment	Promotion	Work Placement	Education/Training	Total
Male	228 (51.4)	134 (30.2)	44 (9.9)	38 (8.6)	444 (100.0)
Female	140 (57.4)	24 (9.8)	12 (4.9)	68 (27.9)	244 (100.0)
Total	368 (53.5)	158 (23.0)	56 (8.1)	106 (15.4)	688 (100.0)

Note 1:  $\chi^2=72.379^{***}$  df=3

Note 2: \* p < .05; \*\* p < 0.01; \*\*\* p < 0.001

## Perception of Equity in Promotion and Work Placement

### *Equity in Promotion*

In order to determine if gender equity was practiced in promotion, the existence of glass ceiling within the organization together with the presence of actual discrimination was investigated. As to the glass ceiling, which represents discrimination in promotion, more women than men considered this to be an issue of concern. Also, female public servants more strongly perceived the existence of actual discrimination in promotion than did males.

Table 5. Perception of Equity in Promotion

Category		Frequency	Mean	Standard Deviation	F
Existence of a Glass Ceiling	Male	506	2.31	0.71	97.421***
	Female	386	2.98	0.58	
	Total	892	2.6	0.73	
Existence of Discrimination within the Organization	Male	506	1.91	0.71	296.761***
	Female	386	2.7	0.66	
	Total	892	2.25	0.79	

Note 1: Scale 1=Very negative; 4=Very positive

Note 2: \* p < .05; \*\* p < 0.01; \*\*\* p < 0.001

Next, the perceived causes of such invisible gender discrimination were pursued. This was analyzed by examining those who responded positively to the existence of gender discrimination in promotion. The causes listed by these respondents include male-oriented organizational culture (21.1%), disadvantages ensuing from the use of maternity and/or childcare leave (28.5), and lack of experience in key fields of work (19.5%). When it was examined by gender, male public servants pointed to a lack of awareness among male managers of the necessity of maternity and/or childcare leave (25.7%), male-oriented organizational culture (15.2%), and lack of experience in key fields of work (21.9%), while their female counterparts highlighted male-oriented organizational culture (25.5%) and disadvantages ensuing from the use of maternity and childcare leave (30.5%). In conclusion, female public servants believed that such discrimination mainly stems from a male-dominated organizational culture and is further reinforced by women taking maternity and/or childcare leave over the course of their career.

Table 6. Perceived Causes of Gender Discrimination in Promotion

Unit: persons, %

Category	Lack of Experience in Key Fields of Work	Inequity in Performance Evaluation	Male-Oriented Organizational Culture	Disadvantages from Using Maternity/Child care Leave	Lack of Awareness among Male Managers of Gender Equity	Other	Total
Male	46 (21.9)	14 (6.7)	32 (15.2)	54 (25.7)	14 (6.7)	50 (23.8)	210 (100.0)
Female	50 (17.7)	24 (8.5)	72 (25.5)	86 (30.5)	26 (9.2)	24 (8.5)	282 (100.0)
Total	96 (19.5)	38 (7.7)	104 (21.1)	140 (28.5)	40 (8.1)	74 (15.0)	492 (100.0)

Note 1:  $\chi^2=28.302^{***}$  df=5

Note 2: \* p < .05; \*\* p < 0.01; \*\*\* p < 0.001

### ***Perception of Equity in Work Placement***

While the term ‘glass wall’ is often used as a similar term as glass ceiling, its meaning is not limited simply to promotion, but expands to include the process of promotion. For example, it refers to the invisible gender barrier in the overall process of human resource management, including work placement and training.<sup>3</sup> According to the analysis in this

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<sup>3</sup> Glass ceiling and glass wall are often used interchangeably, but at times glass wall is included in the concept of glass ceiling.

research, female respondents demonstrated a greater awareness of a glass wall compared to their male counterparts. Furthermore, more women than men reported that women faced greater difficulty than did men in being appointed to key fields of work within their organization.

Table 7. Perception of Equity in Work Placement

Category		Frequency	Mean	Standard Deviation	F
Awareness of a Glass Wall	Male	506	2.28	0.69	107.253***
	Female	386	2.98	0.56	
	Total	892	2.59	0.73	
Discrimination in Placement to Key Fields of Work	Male	506	2.27	0.68	232.181***
	Female	386	2.92	0.56	
	Total	892	2.55	0.71	

Note 1: Scale 1=Very negative; 4=Very positive

Note 2: \* p < .05; \*\* p < 0.01; \*\*\* p < 0.001

Regarding what is the cause for the exclusion of women from key fields of work, the gender difference apparent in the answers provided to this question is interesting. The response that women’s greater responsibility for housework and childcare is an obstacle for women in advancing to key fields of work was the greatest among both male and female respondents. As to the second greatest source of gender discrimination in work placement, however, men pointed to the frequent overtime work required in key fields of work while women indicated managers’ dislike of appointing female workers to key areas of work. Male public servants underlined the environmental factor as the cause of lack of women in key areas of work: for example, areas such as planning and human resource management demand frequent overtime and/or weekend work. The third most common answer among male respondents, that female workers dislike working in major areas of work, can be interpreted in a similar context. To the contrary, women complained that the organization fails to grasp the structural characteristic that women come to assume greater responsibility in household work and childcare over the course of their lives. In this sense, managers’ disinclination to assign female workers to key areas of work may not be due to these individual managers’ whim, but to the organization’s overall culture in which the features of women’s life cycle are considered as a burden or simply ignored.

Table 8. Cause for the Exclusion of Women from Key Fields of Work

Unit: persons, %

Category	Managers' Reluctance to Assign Women to Key Fields of Work	Women's Greater Responsibility for Household Work and Childcare	Women's Avoidance of Key Fields of Work	Demanding Work Schedule in Key Fields of Work, such as Frequent Overtime	Characteristics of the Performance of Key Fields of Work such as the Need for Urgent Handling of Work	Other	Total
Male	50 (9.9)	182 (36.0)	80 (15.8)	124 (24.5)	20 (4.0)	50 (9.9)	506 (100.0)
Female	110 (28.5)	198 (51.3)	12 (3.1)	48 (12.4)	10 (2.6)	8 (2.1)	386 (100.0)
Total	160 (17.9)	380 (42.6)	92 (10.3)	172 (19.3)	30 (3.4)	58 (6.5)	892 (100.0)

Note 1:  $\chi^2=126.917^{***}$  df=5\*

Note 2: \* p < .05; \*\* p < 0.01; \*\*\* p < 0.001

### Summary and Implications of the Analysis

This analysis of the status of gender equity within public organizations demonstrates that there exists a wide gap between men and women in terms of their perception of equity in the workplace. Female public servants more strongly reported the existence of a glass ceiling and/or glass wall within their organizations than did their male counterparts. Although active intervention on the part of the government appears to have reduced system-wise gender discrimination in the public service sector to a significant degree, it was found that female public servants continue to perceive a substantial degree of gender discrimination in practice. In other words, since invisible gender discrimination persists despite the government's efforts to eliminate gender discrimination within the system, the degree of equity perceived by female public servants was lower than that by males.

Gender equity in promotion and work placement has also been questioned. What was notable was that men and women exhibited a remarkable discrepancy in terms of the perceived cause of such discrimination. Female public servants pointed to the male-oriented organizational culture as the greatest culprit in hindering women's advancement to more important positions. On the part of male public servants, while they concur that a male-dominant culture is one of the major barriers, they also suggest that gender discrimination is inevitable due to women's use of maternity and/or childcare leave. This implies that the issue of maternity is still evaluated as a private matter for individual women. Regarding women's appointment to key areas of work, both men and women pointed to women's responsibility for household work and childcare as the greatest obstacle. As to

the second greatest barrier, however, male respondents indicated the demanding work schedule in key areas of work, such as frequent overtime work and heavy workload, while female respondents pointed to managers' dislike for assigning women to such key areas. This finding shows that maternity is still perceived as solely the responsibility of individual women, suggesting a need for organizational efforts to reduce women's burden in balancing work and home lives resulting from the characteristics of their life cycle.

## Conclusion

Promotion, which refers to vertical movement within an organization, is one of the major concerns among public servants since it typically brings with it elevated status and financial benefits. Work placement refers to the act of assigning a certain type of work appropriate to the rank of an individual public servant. While promotion and work placement are not the same, they are closely related since those who fortify their career through major areas of work or key divisions within their organization come to be better positioned for promotion. Therefore, fewer opportunities to work in these key fields of work can lead to fewer opportunities for promotion.

According to this research, the proportion of female public servants who reported the existence of gender discrimination in promotion and work placement was significantly greater than that of their male counterparts. This proves that despite institutional efforts to eradicate gender discrimination, invisible discrimination dubbed the glass ceiling or glass wall persists.

It is also of interest that men and women exhibited a clear distinction in the perceived cause of the lack of women in major areas of work. Both men and women identified women's responsibility for household work and childcare as the greatest obstacle to women's advancement to key areas of work within organization. When it comes to the second greatest barrier, however, women pointed to managers' reluctance to assign women to major areas of work while men considered that women themselves avoided such areas of work due to the related heavy workload and demanding need for professional development.

This finding shows that male public servants believe that characteristics of women's life cycle such as maternity are solely the responsibility of individual women and, as a result, women tend to avoid key areas of work which typically come with a heavy workload.

In order to resolve gender discrimination within public organizations, it appears necessary to increase awareness among employees of the characteristics of women's life cycle. Administrators or decision-makers within the organization should establish policies to support female public servants in their efforts to balance their work and family lives. In addition, while ongoing measures such as a female quota for managerial positions are important, it also seems imperative to provide female public servants with training to assist

them in building the capacities required by their organization.

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