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Introduction

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) Remuneration Convention adopted in 1951 dictates that men and women should be accorded the same remuneration and social rights for similar work they perform (WEPs, n.d). Additionally, the ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1979 stipulated that all state parties should acknowledge the right of workers to equal remuneration and the right to be accorded equal treatment regarding the work they perform. This means that every member state has a duty to eliminate discrimination against female workers to promote equality in the employment sector. Despite these legislations and other policies aimed at eradicating inequality in employment, it is a sad reality that the gender pay gap prevails in most contemporary societies, including advanced nations such as the UK and the US. By definition, the gender pay gap is the systematic differences in the average amount of money male and female workers earn. It is the difference between what men and women earn from the same work (Kochhar, 2023). It is a form of discrimination that has proliferated every society, and it has been the major cause of gender inequality; hence, it demands immediate corrective measures to avert its negative effects.

Measuring the Gender Pay Gap

The global policy of the United Nations on the 2030 Development Agenda foresees that the world shall realise productive and decent employment for both men and women and individuals with disabilities and that everyone shall be accorded equal pay. As an indicator of the desired outcome of this SDG, measuring the gender pay gap is significant in enabling the nations to monitor progress made closely. The idea of measuring the gender pay gap is not only about providing information on the existing inequalities in the employment sector but also about informing policy design and implementation of appropriate measures based on the occupational, sectoral, and educational attainment of the populations (WEPs, n.d.). In the simplest form, the gender pay gap is often measured by subtracting the average wage level for female workers from those of male workers and then dividing the results by the average wage level for male workers, as indicated below.

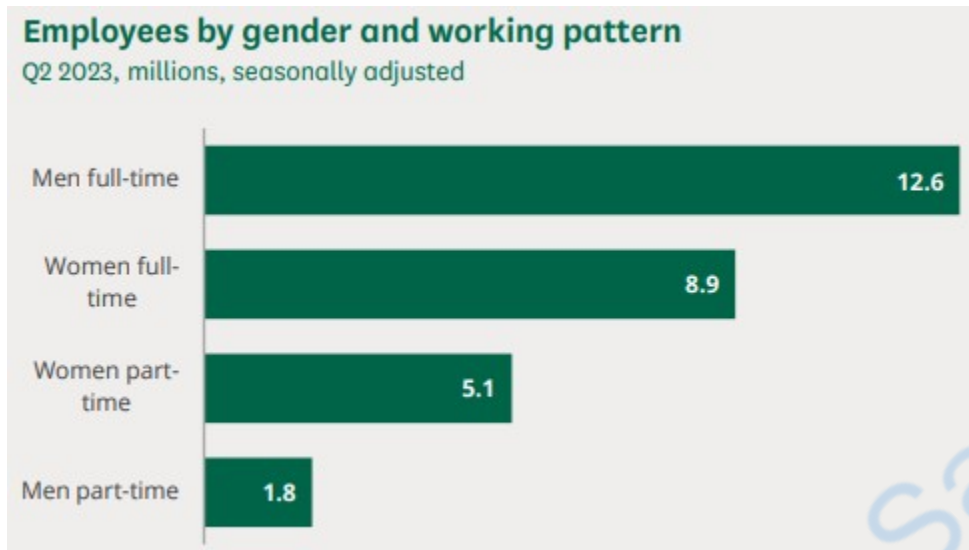


Source: (ILO, n.d.).

According to Francis-Devine and Brione (2024), there are several ways in which the gender pay gap is measured. However, the common measure methods include annual income, weekly earnings, and hourly earnings. The earnings between women and men can be compared through median hourly earnings. The insight provided by this approach is the pay difference between women and men based on each hour worked. The gender pay gap can also be measured by comparing median weekly earnings to get a wider perspective on income disparities. Assessment of the gender pay gap can be attained by comparing men's and women's median annual income by considering their overall year earnings. In the UK, gender gap pay is measured by finding the difference in average hourly earnings between women and men, excluding overtime across all jobs.

In April 2023, reports show that for full-time employees with respect to median hourly pay, women earned 7.7% less compared to men. Regarding part-time employment, the median hourly pay for women was 3.3% higher than men's (Francis-Devine & Brione, 2024). This is attributed to the fact that many women worked part-time, and Schrenker (2023) claims that part-time workers usually earn less hourly. The gender gap between men and women is considerably wider in both part-time and full-time employment.

Figure 1: Working patterns between genders in employment



Source: (Francis-Devine & Brione, 2024)

It is evident from Figure 1 that the highest number of men in the UK at 12.6 million are in full-time employment compared to 8.9 million women working full-time. On the other hand, the highest number of women at 5.1 million worked part-time, while only 1.8 million men worked part-time. Based on these figures, the insinuation is that the gender gap in the UK is attributed to working hours between men and women (Francis-Devine & Brione, 2024).

Figure 2: Gender gap in median bonus and hourly pay



Source: (Francis-Devine & Brione, 2024)

The 2022/2023 report showed that 79% of employers believed that median hourly pay for men is higher than that of women. On the other hand, only 13% of employers indicated that women had higher hourly pay, while 8% stipulated that the median hourly pay between men

and women was the same. For median bonus pay, 65% of the employers stated that men received higher bonuses than women, 18% believed that women got higher bonuses than men, and 17% stated that both women and men received the same pay. It is evident that women getting the same pay as men make the lowest percentage across all work, and when it comes to hourly pay and bonuses, men earn more than women. The gap between women and men earning hourly pay is 66%, while that of bonuses earned is 47% (Francis-Devine & Brione, 2024). This shows the significant pay gap between women and men.

Reasons for the existence of gender pay gap

The figures presented in the measure of the gender gap in the section above point out a significant reason for the existing gender pay in the UK. It has been established that the highest number of women work a part-time job and the highest number of men working a full-time job. Naturally, part-time employees are often paid less than those engaged in full-time employment. Therefore, it can be argued that the gender pay gap exists due to the tendency of most women to take part-time jobs, which pay less than full-time jobs.

According to Francis-Devine and Brione (2024), the gender pay gap among part-time and full-time women and men employees is at 11.5% for those in their 30s. This suggests that the gender pay gap exists because of age.

Figure 3: Gender gap pay based on age group



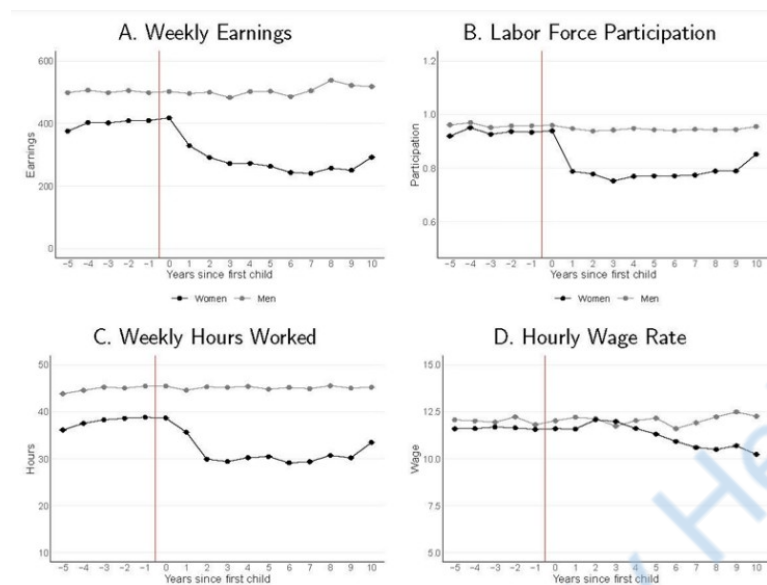
Source: (Francis-Devine & Brione, 2024)

Age difference has been cited as a major factor contributing to the gender pay gap affecting earnings and employment opportunities among women in their 30s and 40s. For women, age can be a factor in the gender gap in pay given that, for instance, women between 30 and 40 may take a break to care for their children or relatives who are elderly hence their future earnings are bound to be negatively affected upon returning to work. Angelov et al. (2016) point out that gender gap pay differs among different ages as the gap is negative or small among full-time and part-time women employees in their 20s and 30s, as shown in Figure 3. However, for employees at the age of 40 years and above, the gap increases significantly.

Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) conducted an analysis and found out that the gender pay gap can be attributed to parenthood. On the contrary, men's average earnings are mostly unaffected by parenthood as opposed to women's, whose earnings significantly decreased after becoming parents. Additionally, their pay stabilisation remains low with minimal growth even

after resuming to work. IFS found that 7 years after having their first child, women's pay remains averagely below the pay men get by half. (Francis-Devine & Brione, 2024). In Figure 4, it is shown that women's earnings after having their first child decreased, as well as their worked hours and labour force participation compared to men.

Figure 4: Women's earnings, hours worked, and labour force participation after first childbirth

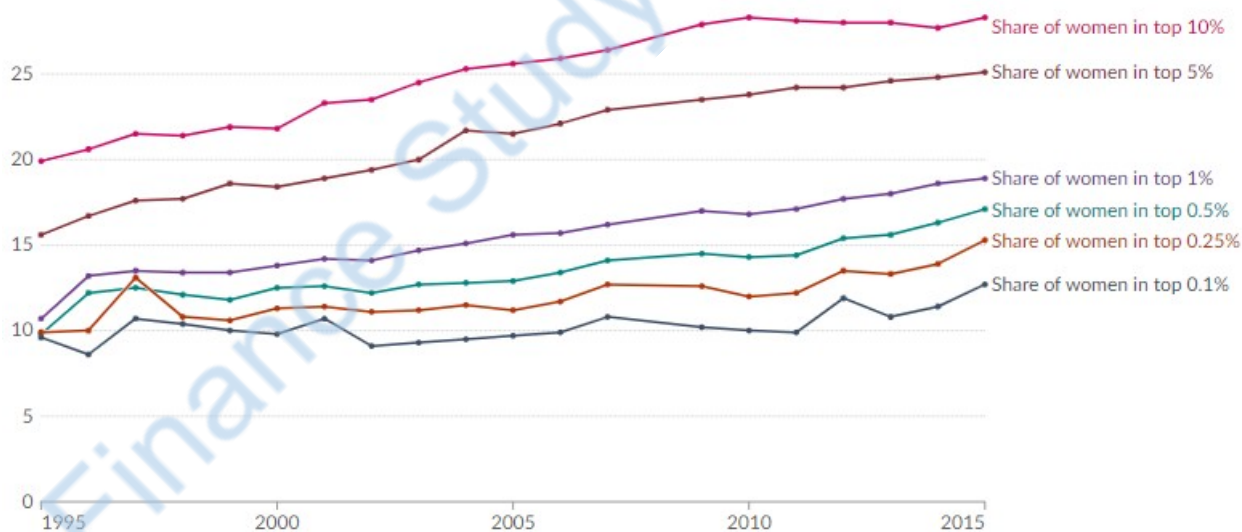


Source: (Francis-Devine & Brione, 2024)

Figure 4 shows that women's weekly earnings decrease significantly while men's earnings remain almost constant and steady. The same trend is evident with labour force participation, where participation decreases significantly 7 years after having their first child. It has been discovered that women with low pay before having their first child are 40% less likely to take part in the labour market. Pech et al. (2021) argue that women tend to decide to take care of their children, and during that period, they choose to work part-time jobs even below their skill levels. Angelov et al. (2016) agree that after childbirth, the gender pay gap widens, and by the time their first children reach 20 years, their hourly wages become one-third of the men's salary. For both women and men who become parents after their first child, the wage gap between them keeps widening due to the amount of time they spend at work. For instance, women in the UK are given a maternity leave of about 26 weeks, while men get only about 2 weeks. This means that women spend less time in the workplace compared to men.

It is public knowledge that women are underrepresented especially in leadership positions and this has led to gender pay gap in the UK. Kresal (2021) claims that the women represented in leadership and management positions in organisations are significantly fewer. Records show that companies under the FTSE 100 had 40.5% of women holding board positions. It is stated that 57 companies either exceeded or already met the target of 40% of women holding board positions by 2025 (Dentons, 2024). It is evident that even with future projections, the percentage of women represented in high organisational positions is still below average at 50%. Additionally, women holding management positions are more concentrated in support functions of management, such as financial administration and human resources, rather than holding more strategic roles. This is evident in Figure 5, which shows that, in as much as the number of women represented in the top 10% has been increasing since 1995, the percentage of women representation as of 2015 was still below 40% (Ortiz-Ospina & Roser, 2019). As a result, women's average salaries in management positions remain down compared to their male counterparts.

Figure 5: Women represented in top-income positions in the UK

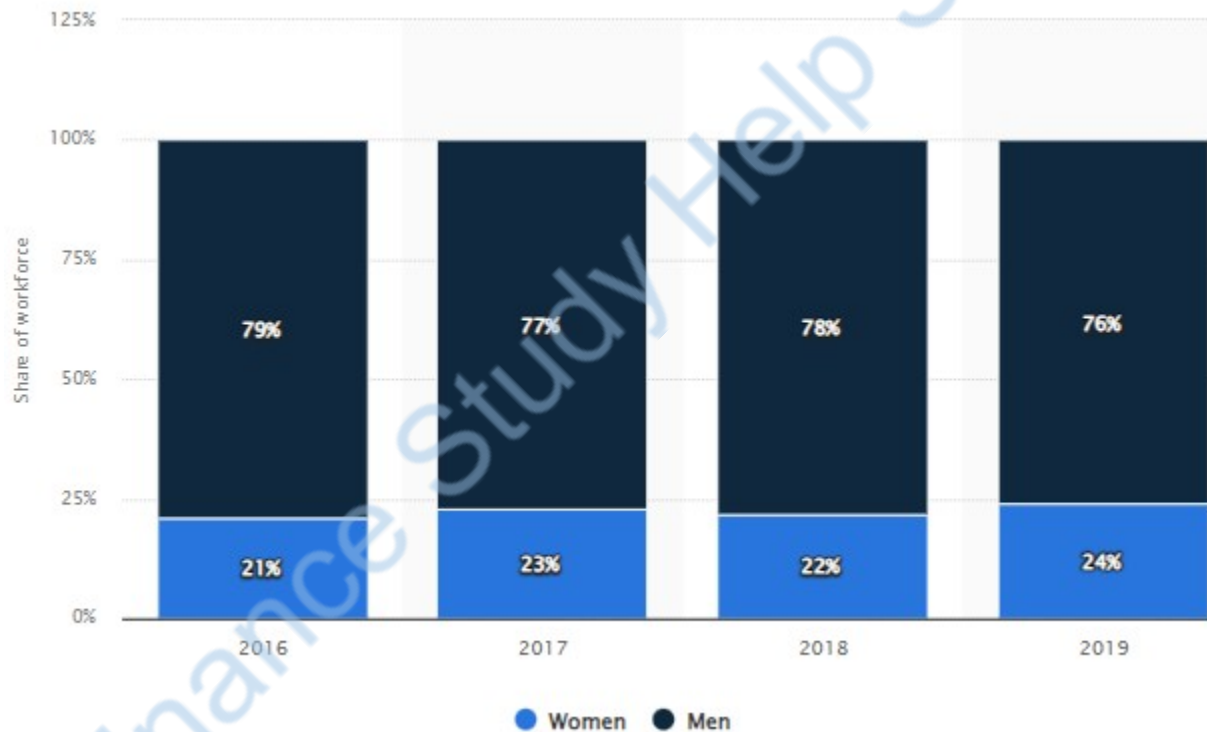


Source: (Ortiz-Ospina & Roser, 2019)

Gender bias in society is another reason the pay gap exists. For instance, more women surpass men in most areas of tertiary education. More women are advancing their careers in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) disciplines. However, women are still lagging behind men in STEM, mainly associated with high-paying jobs. Women can have enough

qualifications in STEM subjects but still find it difficult to get and maintain jobs in these areas, given that men traditionally dominate them. Figure 6 clearly indicates that in a span of 4 years, the distribution of women in the STEM workforce in the UK remained significantly low with minimal growth rate (White & Smith, 2022). In 2016, only 21% of women were in the STEM workforce, which only increased by 3% by 2019 to 24% of women represented in the same workforce (Statista, 2024). Many workplaces, especially STEM areas, more often unconsciously hold traditional gender stereotypes, which instigates gender bias when hiring. Women have been stereotyped as less capable of doing complex or challenging work, which has led to them being undervalued in STEM jobs.

Figure 6: Distribution by gender in the UK STEM workforce



Source: (Statista, 2024).

Solutions for closing gender pay gap

In 1951, at the Equal Remuneration Convention, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) set out the equal pay for work equal work value principle, ratified by 173 countries (WEPs, n.d.). This means that both men and women should be paid equally for equal work done without discrimination. This principle can be used as a base for solving gender pay gaps. Some

of the suggested solutions include promoting pay transparency, determining equal-value work and reviewing it regularly, creating an equitable reward system, supporting flexibility, and offering paid parental and maternity leave.

Promoting pay transparency

Narrowing the gap between what male and female workers earn depends on having great pay transparency; WEPs (n.d.) describes pay transparency as employees' earnings and gender pay gap disclosure. Establishing and sharing the criteria for publicly determining pay structures can assist employers and their employees in ensuring non-discriminatory, fair, and transparent processes. Pay transparency is said to reduce the gender pay gap as it encourages pay for all while slowing the rate of men's pay down, and over time, the pay gap narrows. According to Duchini et al. (2020), employees get their confidence in non-discriminatory and fair pay if their employers practice pay transparency. Employers and employees are also capable of getting the necessary information for assessing gender discrimination to come up with better ways of rectifying pay gaps and negotiating fair pay that ultimately reduces the risk of unequal pay between female and male employees.

Determining equal-value work and reviewing pay regularly

Employers can identify gender pay gaps and create work for equal pay by collecting comprehensive pay data and then analysing pay equity in their compensation practices. This is achieved by determining jobs; numerical value based on a wide range of gender-neutral criteria like working conditions, effort, responsibilities, qualifications, and skills (Roussille, 2021). The criteria will ensure that employers evaluate without being gender biased. Companies can ensure that female employees who have dominated the jobs are not underpaid or undervalued. Evaluating the value of various jobs is important based on objective and common criteria that contribute to equal pay for equal work. During recruitment processes, employers should give equal chances to all genders. The evaluation process of analysing pay equity should begin by identifying both male and female-dominated jobs to assess pay gaps, then make necessary adjustments. Moreover, reviews on pay equity should be conducted regularly.

Providing paid maternity and paternity leave

Providing both paternity and maternity paid leave on an equal scale can help reduce gender pay gaps. It is said that men only get 2 weeks for paternity leave, and by offering them equal paid leave as women, they also get time off to help women with care responsibilities. The outcome of such a measure is that it can reduce penalties against working mothers, whereby a rebalance of expectations of women being the primary caregivers can be achieved when they share unpaid domestic work and care with men (Koslowski, 2021). Women who become mothers on the job get penalised for taking maternity leave by missing out on bonuses, increased pay, and promotions. Upon returning to work after maternity leave, it is recommended that women get pay increases that are the same as what their counterparts received during their parental leave. Companies are also recommended to have elderly care and childcare subsidies as family-friendly policies to encourage the retention of women in employment and close gender pay gaps.

Supporting flexibility

The gender gap between men and women is attributed to challenges women have with balancing their work and personal lives. In this regard, it is suggested that employers should create flexible work arrangements to enable female employees to manage their family responsibilities and be productive at work (Roussille, 2021). On the contrary, being present in the office is still perceived as valuable and, hence, rewarded more. Making arrangements such as working remotely for both women and men will help balance work and personal life.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the gender pay gap is significant, irrespective of measures that organisations have been putting in place to reduce it. The gender pay gap is dominant in the workforce because women's work is mainly undervalued. Women in the STEM discipline also find it difficult to be incorporated into the same field workforce as they are stereotyped as weak to perform challenging tasks. More women end up settling for part-time jobs, which have lower pay than full-time jobs, to balance work and personal life. It has been established that age is a significant contributor to the gender pay gap, especially for women in 30s and 40s. Therefore,

bridging or closing the gender pay gap can be achieved only if employers stick to the non-discriminatory ILO principle of 'equal work for equal pay.'

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