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Women's Work, Wages, and the Feminization of Poverty

Gender gap in United States is increasing at a very fast rate than any other industrialized nation in this world. This larger gender gap certainly means that there are a lot of gaps existing within employment of females, wage rates between men and women and parental status.

According to United States Census Bureau "This gap in the gender that is being increasingly created these days lowers the ability of women to be economically self-sufficient and favors their move towards poverty even more. In 1998, female-headed households accounted for 55% of all poor in the United States." (United States Census Bureau, 10) The trend that has emerged and is growing drastically is known as feminization of poverty.

Feminization of poverty is considered to be a severe issue that is prevailing and extending tremendously in United States and it is not only affecting those women who are only poor but is also impacting those women that are close to being poor. It is a symptom of the gender inequalities that are evident in the U.S.

One of the most important factors contributing to the feminization of poverty is the gender gap in the wage rate. Everyone knows and it is crucial to point out that women are paid far less than the men for the same work. If a female candidate applies for the same job as a male candidate, even if the female candidate has better credentials than the male candidate, firstly the male candidate will always be preferred over female candidate. Secondly even if the female candidate is appointed she will be paid less than the male candidate. This is due to the fact that there is discrimination in wages and people prefer to have more of male employees in the organization even though the females are standing shoulder to shoulder to the male candidates both in education and in professional terms.

According to Starrels "There is also vast occupational segregation by gender; women tend to be clustered in professions such as teaching or secretarial work, which pay less than the occupational areas that men are clustered in, such as law and business." (Starrels, et al, 148-165)

There are even many organizations existing today that do not provide any incentive to their female employees in working hours and expect them to work longer or at the same rate than their male employees which definitely makes it difficult for the female employees to work in organizations and even if they do they disturb their family lives in this manner which creates even more tension and stress for them.

As Meer illustrates "Feminist approaches to women's poverty begin with the premise that pervasive gender inequalities and biases within households, labor markets, legal codes, and political systems throughout the world, render women more vulnerable than men to poverty." (Meer, 21) Considering also the "feminization" of part-time, temporary, and low-income jobs as well as of unemployment (Moghadam, 111-139 and 301-314), it is clear that the category "working poor" refers to women as well as to men. According to Buvinic et al "Given the links between mother's poverty and children's poverty, researchers call for gender-aware analyses, economic and social policies, development projects, and poverty-alleviation projects." (Buvinic, Lycette & McGreevey, 49; Bell, 11)

Something that is of utmost importance is that when we see the correlation between poverty and gender there are so many factors contributing to it such as the class, race, demographic changes, and public policies. In particular, the feminization of poverty is intimately linked to the economic and social policy regime of any given society, as well as to trends in women's employment, wages, and household headship.

There are women who get married either at early ages or get divorced and if children have, it provokes them into the single parenthood situation. Now this further worsens the situation for them because the single parenthood and the way the women have to struggle for the future of their children and their upbringing. Working extra hours and strive for earning for more increases the situation of feminization of poverty.

As I have mentioned already that single mothers earn lesser than the men because of the certain barriers and conditions facing them and secondly their needs as defined by the poverty threshold, are greater than men's because they have more dependents. Again, we should point out that most mothers, when faced with a divorce or a nonmarital birth, prefer to have custody of their child, despite the economic hardships associated with single motherhood. However, as noted above, these women pay a high financial price for their independence.

There is also a relation that we can build between poverty and domestic violence. As Secombe explains, "Many women who are survivors of domestic violence often find that their economic situation is negatively affected once they escape their dangerous situations. These women often must deal with depression, post-traumatic stress disorder or o

ther psychological problems. This makes it difficult to hold a regular job.” (Seccombe, 1094–1100)
Even within the class system, the gender matters now. The significance of within-class gender differences and variations across different societies is an under-researched area. Families that are headed by women who are considered to be poor, belong to poor families, or are near to poor conditions are more deprived than the families that are led by the male who are also facing the poverty conditions because there is a lack of access to land or other resources (e.g., livestock), illiteracy or low educational attainment, poor wages or irregular employment, various types of discrimination against women, and inadequate or no social programs for women and children.
Even that the females living even under the poor male-headed households suffer from severe conditions. Due to the fact that a woman gives birth to a child and feeds him she needs to have proper diet and gain nutritional value. These women might suffer from anemia, as well as high maternal mortality rates and a sex ratio favoring men, would also suggest that the deprivation of women and girls among the poor is especially severe, at least in certain regions (such as south Asia).

Recommendations to improve workforce and family conditions

Everyone knows that there is no quick and one solution to such a pertaining condition in the society. There are some recommendations that I would like to suggest here to improve the condition of the female workforce and to improve the cooperation from the families as well as the government to support these women and to reduce the trend of feminization of poverty.

The welfare system has already seen reform under Clinton’s presidency. The most talked about reform in the new system is the time limits that are placed on cash benefits. According to Rodgers “This is intended to reduce dependency on welfare, by making people realize that the government will not provide for them forever. This works effectively for those who really do not want to work, but it may put those who are unable to work in a desperate situation. These people may be unable to work because of mental illness, disability, lack of childcare, or inability to obtain employment.” (Rodgers, 25) The welfare reform act does not provide for these people, but rather makes massive assumptions about the motivations and lives of all people who receive benefits.

One important issue that I would like to recommend to the government of the welfare reform is to basically get over with the measures that punish work and to make work pay. This can easily be done through the gradual reduction of benefits for the employees so that the employee can become self-reliant at every stage as this would help reduce the feminization of poverty, as it provides incentives for work and helps families to maintain their income while gradually decreasing government assistance.

As Seccombe adds to this scenario “Lack of child support is often a contributing factor to the feminization of poverty. Although one possible policy to remedy this would be to more strictly enforce child support orders, in many cases, this would not help the condition of the mother. It would only lead to the punishment of the father, as many lower-class fathers do not have the money to pay child support and be self-sufficient.” (Seccombe, 1100-1113)

Thirdly I would also recommend that the state should also insure that a proper child support system should be adopted as well. The reason why I am saying this is that single mothers face problems of sending their children under proper care of day care systems. When such reliable systems are provided even more the mothers will be confident to send their young children and can work free of tension at their workplace.

Last but not the least, poor women should be provided proper healthcare, not only for them but also for their children. This would mean that women who are poor would not have to worry about their children’s health that women who are middle-class would not have to worry that a health crisis would throw them into poverty that poor women would not have to remain on welfare to receive health insurance.