



The Gender Pay Gap in the Health & Care Sector

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Introduction

The covid 19 pandemic has reflected the vitality of the health sector in every other facet of our economy, making it critical to take stock of the gender pay gap in the care sector. Besides being paid 20% less than men, they also face demanding work conditions. Thus, a fairer evaluation of women's contribution to the healthcare sector is much needed.

Key Highlights

- It is argued that the feminized nature of healthcare (women occupy 7 out of 10 jobs) contributes to lower pay for workers in the sector vis-à-vis other sectors and for women within the sector compared to men. Even when the number of workers (primarily women) is increased in the care sector, expenditure for the sector does not increase, resulting in lower pay.
- In many countries, the gender pay gap in this sector is higher than in any other sector, with a global average of women being paid 19.2 per cent less than men for every hour worked.
- In LMIC (lower- and middle-income countries), female workers work more in the informal healthcare sector than others (less than 30% in Yemen, DRC, Bangladesh in formal healthcare, as compared to approximately 70% in the US, Canada, Australia).
- Within the care sector, despite low participation in the sector by men overall, they are over-represented in the top decile, and even more so at the top centile of hourly wages (e.g., among the top-quartiles of pay distribution, men earn 69 per cent more than women in Italy and similar results are seen across LMIC).
- There are multiple reasons for the wage gap. The burden of unpaid household work (17% of women in healthcare work part-time due to family responsibilities compared to 3.5% of men) impacts women's productivity, promotions and pay. Men are also more likely to hold university degrees and hold positions classified as "professionals", such as doctors or managers, compared to women who are given "technical occupations" like nursing and lab analysis which have lower pay.
- Women are not hired for occupations of higher pay despite having similar market profiles as men in those positions and having better labour market attributes than men in similar positions. Such an arbitrary pay difference is attributable to conscious or unconscious discrimination and the time constraints motherhood imposes on women. This is why, where part-time work is well established in some countries, older women are more likely to opt for it (e.g., 70 per cent of younger women work part-time compared to 57 per cent of women between 25-34). Consequently, the pay gap also widens as we move toward older women.
- Despite increasing pressures to eliminate gender gaps through global conferences (e.g., The Beijing Declaration), summits and UN-led initiatives (UN Women), inequalities persist. While the inequalities have become worse in some countries (Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Hungary), it has remained static or declined (Spain, UK, Norway, Mexico, France) in others. Notably, women in Europe, Canada, Uruguay, the Philippines, Thailand, and the USA are moving to higher-income professions within the care sector.
- However, the pandemic has undermined the gains toward equality achieved in the 21st century. Working conditions for women on the front lines worsened, and the total wages earned fell (workers in Canada, US and Mexico were not paid for temporary absence). Moreover, because women work in areas where they interact with people constantly, they had to bear the brunt of the pandemic,

which is why recovery by December 2020 was higher for men than women. Women in informal jobs in Mexico saw a 61% drop by June 2020 and were earning 53% less than men.

- Thus, it is essential to assess working conditions in the health workforce, collect data and build evidence-led policy, invest in better working conditions and increase the pace of formalization of the health sector, and improve training and STEM education for girls to increase their participation in high-paying occupations within the health sector. Strengthening legal frameworks, conducting equal pay audits, and increasing transparency and disclosure requirements are avenues to close the gender pay gap.

Read More: http://ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_850909.pdf

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