

GENDER GAP WIDENS AS LOPSIDED ACCESS TO DEVELOPMENTAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPEDE WOMEN'S CAREERS



According to a new study women are prevented from progressing in their careers because there is a marked difference in the opportunities provided to them and those provided to their male counterparts. The study says that imbalanced access to high visibility jobs and lack of worldwide experience are the major impediments to advancing their careers. Entry-level jobs for women are always inferior compared to those of men, in terms of pay and levels. Women invariably start at lesser level jobs and are paid much less than the men. What is worse, the study by non-profit group Catalyst says, is that the gender gap instead of lessening widens as their careers develop. Christine Silva senior director, research at Catalyst and the lead author of the study said that there are a few of those on-the-job experiences that promote and lead to advancement. These are projects that attract everyone's attention and are of vital importance to the company and also provide international exposure to those involved in such projects. Silva says that the crux of her study is that such projects and opportunities are disproportionately dispersed and "women get fewer of all these critical experience than men do." The study based its findings on online interactions of 1,660 outstanding alumni, both men and women from Asia, Canada, Europe and the United States, who graduated from business school in the decade between 1996 and 2007. The study was endeavoring to trace the career path of the graduates from business schools to their work positions and what could be done to bridge this gender disparity. According to the Institute for Women's Policy Research, even though women constitute almost half of the country's workforce, they earned only 77 percent for each dollar earned by their male colleagues – an earnings discrepancy of 23 percent. The study revealed that the women drew lesser pay than the men in almost all professions. The questions that the study posed to the graduates related to their career histories, the number of projects they had been assigned and worked on and would they be prepared to move overseas for a job. A major portion, 62 percent said that they felt that high-profile jobs had impacted their careers the most. A mere 10 percent said that corporate training programs played a major role in their careers. The study also revealed the projects headed by men were double the size than those where women were at the helm. Moreover, the men had more people on their teams and a much broader corporate visibility. The men were given more vital and decisive responsibilities and handled finances upwards of \$10 million. Silva said that even though the women did an equal number of projects as the men, the fact that their projects were smaller and of lesser significance impacted their growth and advancement. "It was those elements that predicted advancement, not how many projects they led," she said. The study also found that men were getting preference when it came to international postings and the women were being ignored. Those who said they'd be happy to shift abroad if the job demanded it, 9 percent more men got overseas postings than the women. Silva said that the research reveals that both men and women are equally motivated and walk the same pathway to achieve career success. Yet the men climb higher than the women, even though both have put in similar efforts. "Women seem to be doing all the right things with those strategies but men get a bigger payoff from them," she said. Silva recommended that women must adopt a hard line attitude by approaching sponsors and asking them to use their influence to help them get promotion and developmental opportunities that they are otherwise denied. She said that only by getting into these big roles could they assist in bridging the gender gap.