

**AN ANALYSIS OF WOMEN'S ACCESS TO EDUCATION AND
WORKPLACE RESTRICTIONS IN DEVELOPED VERSUS
DEVELOPING COUNTRIES**

An Undergraduate Research Scholars Thesis

by

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ABSTRACT

An Analysis of Women's Access to Education and Workplace Restrictions in
Developed Versus Developing Countries

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Gender disparity has become a topic of major discussion in developing countries in recent years, particularly in relation to the access to education and workforce restrictions. The general purpose of this research is to gain an understanding of the factors that limit women's access to education and workforce restrictions placed on women in the three countries, the United States, Mexico, and Guatemala. Using The WomanStats Project, an Internal Review Board approved open access database, our team will compare and contrast the differences between the three selected countries. We highlighted the effects the gender disparity of access to education and workforce restrictions can have on a country and have detailed solutions to counteract these disparities.

Using The WomanStats Project, we analyzed the complexity of the factors that contribute to the limitations placed on women in each of the selected countries. This research should provide valuable data and assist in creating a guide to make improvements for women in the United States, Mexico, and Guatemala.

DEDICATION

We dedicate this undergraduate research to women all over the world. As females studying information technology, a male dominated field, we personally understand what it is like to be treated unequally in the workplace. We hope this research will shine some light on factors contributing to gender inequality.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

There is a major issue of inequalities between women and men in the field of education and the workforce. According to *The World's Women 2010: Trends and Statistics*, “72 million children – 54% of them girls – are out of school” (p. 43). This statistic only accounts for primary education. The United Nation: Department of Economic and Social Affairs stated, “The gap in secondary education is much wider and occurs in more countries than at the primary level” (p. ix). In addition to the gender disparities in education, the workforce for women is also affected due to limitations on fields of study to which women have access (Report, 2015).

Throughout the remainder of this paper, our team examined women’s access to formal education, via The WomanStats Project at Texas A&M University. We determined women’s study restrictions, and compared women’s access and barriers to education and the workforce in the developed country of the United States, in the developing country of Mexico, and in the lesser-developed country of Guatemala.

Significance of the Study

While there have been efforts made to close the gap in gender disparity in education, in general, for women around the world (World Bank, 2015), it is actually an unfilled mission for many. The findings of the study should help identify the factors preventing the closure of the gender gap in at least three countries. The study should particularly focus on women’s access to formal education and to the workforce. Focusing on these two topics will hopefully allow for insight to be gained about the problems that arise when the disparity for women is very wide. Comparisons made between the United States, Mexico, and Guatemala will allow for an

examination of what differing levels of country development have on the limitations placed on women's education. These examinations will not only allow for connections to be made with the factors creating this gap between sexes in the workplace and education access, but it will also help us gain an understanding of what methods are implemented to help improve the situation.

Selection of Countries

The United States, a developed country, was selected because it appears to excel in narrowing the gap between women and men's access to education and the workforce. According to the American Association of University Women (AAUW), in 2015 "women working full time in the United States were paid just 77% of what men were paid, a gap of 23 percent" (para. 3). The Simple Truth guide by AAUW, goes on to explain that the gap has narrowed since the 1970s, due largely to women's progress in education and workforce participation. Rebecca Blank, preceding United States Secretary of Commerce, reported that women have caught up with men in college attendance. She states "... younger women are now more likely than younger men to have a college or a master's degree. Women are also working more and the number of women and men in the labor force has nearly equalized in recent years" (Economics & Statistics Administration, 2011, para. 3). However, Blank did discuss that despite these gains in education and labor force, women are still suffering from income equality. The United States gender disparity is not as prominent as the other two countries selected for the study.

Mexico was the second country selected because it is a developing country with a close proximity to the United States. Although Mexico is in close proximity to the United States, the country continues to obtain a wide gap between gender equality. The United States Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor Department reported that women in Mexico earn

“approximately 65 percent of their male counterparts” (2015, p. 32). Women do not have a fair advantage to participate in professional opportunities because of “social structures and expectations” (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, 2015, p. 32). According to the World Bank (2011), 20 to 30% of people in Mexico agree that a university education is more important for a boy than a girl. Three major factors that contribute to women in Mexico not obtaining a high school diploma or further is: family/cultural influences, pregnancy, and marriage. The study will highlight the differences found between the neighboring countries and how much of an effect the differences have had on the country.

Guatemala was the final country chosen because it is a lesser-developed country that bounds Mexico to the south and because it is one of the poorest Latin American countries with a GDP per capita of \$3,903 (World Bank, 2015). The World Bank discussed how female labor force participation is around 51%, but nearly all of those women are significantly underpaid in comparison to males. According to the Global Education Fund for Guatemala, “less than 30% of poor, rural indigenous girls are enrolled in secondary school” (para. 2). The Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2015 goes on to explain how girls are significantly less likely than boys to be educated to the secondary level. Guatemala is a country with a wide gender disparity, and we hope to find the factors that may have contributed to the disparity.

Objectives

The objectives of our study are as follows:

- Identify social, cultural, and other factors leading to women’s access to formal education in Guatemala, Mexico, and the United States.
- Identify social, cultural, and other factors leading to workforce restrictions placed on women in Guatemala, Mexico, and the United States.

- Compare and contrast the factors influencing the gender disparity in access to education and workforce restrictions in the three selected countries.
- Gain an understanding of the factors of women's limited access to education and workforce restrictions placed on women in the three countries—the United States, Mexico, and Guatemala—and offer potential solutions to improve the situation.

CHAPTER II

METHODS

Our team conducted research into these three countries exclusively while exposing the attitudes toward women, the social and cultural factors affecting women, and other related factors affecting women's access to education and workforce restrictions. We utilized qualitative research methods and cross-case analysis of a multi-case study to answer our four objectives. The cross-case analysis will compare and contrast the gender disparities in the United States, Mexico, and Guatemala. The qualitative method of data collection for our study incorporated the use of The WomanStats Project database at Texas A&M University, an Internal Review Board approved open access database.

The WomanStats Project focuses on gathering data and information about the security and condition of women throughout the world. The WomanStats Project offers a codebook and database that will help provide our team with the necessary information for us to reach conclusions about women's access to education and workforce restrictions placed on women in our three selected countries. According to the WomanStats website, over 170,000 data points are available encompassing 175 countries and covers 350 variables relating to women's condition and security.

Our team focused on several data points to gather our data for the study. For our first topic of women's access to formal education we collected data from data points focusing on the legal rights, if any, women have to education, the percentages of women in school in comparison to men, the societal and cultural barriers impacting women's access to education. We investigated the ordinal ranking of discrepancies for women and men in regards to attainment of

a secondary education. For the second topic of workforce restrictions placed on women, we focused on the following data points: the earning gap between genders, the percentage of women in workforce in comparison to number of unemployed women, the percentage of full-time and part-time women workers, the impact of culture and gender on workforce participation, and the laws placed on women in the workplace.

Focusing on these two topics and the related data points has allowed our team the ability to make a cross-case analysis of the United States, Mexico, and Guatemala. The cross-case analysis has highlighted the disparities women subjected to in comparison to men in their respective countries.

CHAPTER III

RESULTS

The purpose of this research was to gain an understanding of the factors that limit women's access to education and workforce restrictions placed on women in the three countries, the United States, Mexico, and Guatemala. Following, we share the results of our study with three cases.

Three Case Studies

We first present the United States case study and share about the access to education and restrictions in the workplace. Then, we present the same for the other two cases of Mexico and Guatemala.

United States

Closing the gap for gender equality has been a long and arduous battle in the United States. Barbara beck (2011) wrote that by 1980, the number of women and men in the United States was equal value, and by 2011 the number of women graduating has significantly overtaken the number of men. While there has been critical progress in the past hundred years, the gap between males and females still exists. The existence of this gap can be characterized in the inequality of fair wages, the societal perceptions of women, and the disparity within various occupations. The Center for American progress action fund (2008) found that women who work full-time, year-round can be expected to earn less than men counterparts in comparable jobs and education levels.

Access to Education

Females in America have made a considerable progress in the educational attainment the last couple decades. The White House council on women and girls (2011) reported a trend that has displayed steady gains in education among women with recent numbers showing females surpassing their male counterparts in a variety of educational measures. Any child in the United States is entitled to free primary and secondary education by law, and every state constitution contains provisions that are supportive for education attainment.

Mom-Mentum (2015), a non-profit organization for women, stated that nearly 60% of the undergraduate and master's degrees earned in the United States are earned by women. The choice of major can have a significant impact on a woman's salary and potential earning. Women who choose to enter a predominantly female major may earn 95% of what their male peers earn in the beginning. Women entering a male-dominated major have the higher probability of earning even less than men at 75% the year after graduation. Studies have shown that the disparities in wage will increase over time (Economics & Statistics Administration, 2008). Many of the issues women face in the United States originate not in the educational system, but in the workforce where they are consistently and continually paid less than their male counterparts with similar experience and education.

Restrictions in the Workplace

In the United States women are capable of choosing any career path they wish. Women can be engineers, construction workers, scientist and any of the other male dominant careers fields. However, because the science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) workforce is dominated by males, women feel intimidated to choose careers in STEM. According to a report from U.S Department of Commerce: Economics and Statistics Administration, women make up

nearly half of the United States workforce. Despite this good news, women hold less than 25% of STEM jobs. Beede et al. explained how this has been the case for the past decades, because “women with a STEM degree are less likely than their male counterparts to work in a STEM occupation” (para. 1). Beede et al. reported factors contributing to the discrepancy of women and men in STEM jobs, some of the factors include: lack of female role models, and gender stereotyping.

Women are dominant in the occupational fields of education and healthcare. The World Bank stated the gap between females and males in healthcare occupations is roughly a 10% difference. The 10% difference is in result of the environment “noise” that only women can be nurses, teachers, and care givers. Occupations such as engineers, computer scientist, surgeons, architect, etc. have always been seen as masculine jobs. Since the 21st century more women are taking action in creating movements for women to participate in the male dominant workplaces. There are programs and organizations such as “Girls Who Code”, whose purpose is to interest young girls in exploring STEM career fields. Joki Kantor (2014), a New York Times correspondent whose work has covered the workplace, technology and gender, stated “Instead of narrowing gender gaps, the technology industry created vast new ones,…” (para. 7).

“An analysis of 2006–2008 data for the United States on earnings for women and men in the 87 highest-paid occupations showed that the gender pay gap is the highest for occupations such as physicians and surgeons, dentists, personal financial managers, and lawyers and judges. Lower gender pay gaps were found in health-care occupations such as pharmacists, optometrist and veterinarians (Goldin and Katz, 2011)” (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, & Statistics Division, 2015, p. 110). Although women receive the same education as men in the jobs listed above, statistics still show a large pay gap for women in male dominant

occupations. Women in the United States are striving to the top very quickly and after decades of being treated unequal or less equivalent to men, women have had enough. Women in the United States do not plan to give up fighting for equal rights until we see balance in the pay gap compared to men.

Mexico

Many aspects of women's lives have improved over the last few decades in Mexico. Although Mexico is behind in development compared to the United States, women's lives have changed dramatically. Women's participation in public life is a lot greater than it was a century ago. Women in Mexico were granted the right to vote in 1953 (Heather, 2010). According to Heather Dashner Monk, political feminist activist in Mexico, she found that "The country has gone from being overwhelmingly rural to mainly urban; between 1930 and 2000 average life expectancy rose from 34 to 75 years; the conditions in which women do housework and care for children and the sick — still almost exclusively their responsibility — have changed enormously: the majority have running water, gas for cooking, indoor toilets, and homes with flooring" (para. 3).

Access to Education

In 1992, International Women's Rights Action Watch (IWRAW) found women make up 52% of Mexico's population, but only 19% finish elementary school. IWRAW goes on to explain that girls drop out of school more often than boys due to marriage, pregnancy and inability to pay. However, over the past decade the percentage of women dropouts has decreased dramatically. Catalyst, a leading nonprofit organization with a mission to accelerate progress for women (2016), reported that 89% of girls in Mexico are enrolled in high school. Heather Monk (2010) believes the increase of women in school is attributable to women learning more about

sexual education and safe sex. Monk found, “95% of women of reproductive age knew about at least one type of contraceptive in 2010...” (para. 5). Women in Mexico becoming well-informed about safe sex and contraceptives help keep young women in school and work.

According to Catalyst, “53% of Mexico's 15–19-year-olds are enrolled in schools (one of the lowest percentages among 35 member countries), despite the country’s having the largest population of this age group in its history” (Cheryl, 2016, para. 4). Poverty in Mexico is so high that there is a lack of textbooks, teaching material and qualified teachers (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, 2015). The government in Mexico and independent labor activist are fighting to guarantee access to decent education for all children, along with sex education to diminish the gender gap between women and men in school.

Restrictions in the Workplace

Women in Mexico are not allowed to work while pregnant. The National Women’s Institute (INMUJERES) stated “14% of women age 15 and older had been required to take a preemployment pregnancy test to obtain employment...” (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, 2015, p. 32). Mexico does have labor laws in place that prohibit employers from requiring test to obtain employment. However, these illegal actions are still taking place today for women in Mexico. “In 1910, women made up 14% of the work force, by 2008 they were 38%. Almost half that increase occurred in the last 40 years” (para. 4), according to Heather Monk. Women are dismissed from work for pregnancy, because employers believe they will not meet the expectations of their duties at work.

According to INMUJERES, women continued to earn between 5% and 30% less than men for comparable work, whereas the World Economic Forum found women earned 43% less than men for comparable work. The government in Mexico has provided laws for women to be

granted the same legal status and rights as men, but women still experience discrimination in wages, working hours, and benefits. Women in Mexico suffer from social structure and the stereotypical gender role that a women's only job is to clean, cook and take care of the children and house.

Catalyst, found increasing numbers of women entering the workforce. Around 40% of those women employed are in the non-agricultural labor force (Catalyst, 2016). 30 percent of working women in Mexico feel stuck in their work position, and feel as though they do not have opportunities to grow and reach their full potential (World Bank, 2015). Women are limited to specific occupations that are "less" masculine. Only 22% of the companies in Mexico have at least one woman on their executive board in 2005 to 2011 (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, & Statistics Division, 2015).

A major factor limiting women from the workplace in Mexico is the government. There are laws in place to protect women, however, if there are no officials to enforce these laws and regulations., then they continue to be violated. "The law prohibits discrimination with respect to employment or occupation regarding race, nationality age, religion, sex, political opinion, social status, handicap (or challenged capacity), economic status, health, pregnancy, language, sexual preference, or marital status. The law provides for labor protection for pregnant women" (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, 2015, p. 32). Mexico continues to develop every day, and as long as the government and law officials continue to do their jobs properly, women in Mexico should strive to the top. Women in Mexico are getting closer to shrinking the employment gender gap that still exist today.

Guatemala

Throughout history the inequality between men and women has been maintained by a cultural mindset that sees men's and women's issues as separate entities. According to the Guatemala Country Report (2008), this cultural mindset has consistently been displayed in the unequal distribution of resources and opportunities between men and women. Women do not have the same access to decision-making positions in politics or business, women earn less than men while performing similar work or qualifications, and many women suffer a systematic domestic violence at the hand of male relatives and partners.

In recent years, attempts to lessen the inequality have been made, but they have been largely unsuccessful. In 1998 and 1999 amendments were made to the Guatemalan Civil Code that eliminated provisions that until then had reinforced stereotypical gender roles and legally enabled inequality within marriage. It was the duty of the husband to protect and support his wife, the wife's duty was to care for and raise the children and complete household tasks, the husband could legally object to the wife working outside the household, and the husband was the sole legal representative of the couple, the administrator household finances and assets. Musalo (2010) reported that as of 2010 many Guatemalans were unaware of the amendments made to Guatemala's Civil Code.

Access to Education

In Guatemala, primary education is free and compulsory for all children without discrimination of gender (World Bank, 2012). Despite education being free until the sixth grade, a report released by the United States Department of State (2007) indicated that only 73% of children reach the fifth grade. The UNCommittee (2002) stated the drop rates for females was very high within the rural and indigenous populations with nearly 66% of girls leaving the education system by the sixth grade. Females, particularly those living in rural and indigenous

areas, have several barriers that can be seen as the causality for a lower percentage of females completing an education.

The UN Convention (2001) laid out many of the barriers female education faces in Guatemala. The reasoning that the loss of potential income if the girl does not assist with work done by the family and the loss of contribution to daily housework by the girls prevent many rural females from completing their education. The roads and distances children walk to school which raises concerns of the personal safety of girls prevent many from attending. The interactions with male classmates and a shortage of women schoolteachers are other cultural barriers for female education, as well as, the lack of open-mindedness towards gender issues and the inequality between the sexes in regards to classroom participation. In a 2015 report from the United States Department of State it was reported that, “girls were significantly less likely than boys to be educated to the secondary level” (pg. 17). Cultural expectations make it difficult for females to receive the same education as males.

The rural and indigenous female population are affected the most by the educational barriers. A disproportionate number of indigenous girls do not attend school and more than 50% over the age of 15 are illiterate (United States Department of State, 2015). Failing crops and continual droughts are unavoidable obstacles to female education. Men have to leave their homes to find work elsewhere, leading to girls often being removed from school to help their mothers with caring for the household (Americas Quarterly, 20016). The Thomas Reuters Foundation (2016) stated that even with child marriage being illegal in Guatemala, poor, rural families still marry off female family members that are regarded as financial burdens. Many of the barriers are caused by the cultural and societal perceptions have had a detrimental impact the education of females.

Restrictions in the Workplace

Guatemalan women, married and unmarried, are legally able to pursue any job, trade, or profession, they are able to sign contracts, and register a business the same way as men.

According to the World Bank (2012), Guatemala has instituted laws mandating equal pay for equal work and nondiscrimination on the basis of gender in hiring practices. Although women are legally able to work and have a legal right to equal pay, the 2014 Global Gender Gap Report estimates the income for women is 58% to that of men, and on average women in comparable work to men receive 64% of men's salary. Guatemalan women work more frequently in informal employment where wages are lower and benefits are nonexistent (United States Department of State, 2015). Lack of childcare forces women to leave formal employment for informal employment (World Bank, 2011).

Societal and cultural expectations limit women in the workplace. Women are not protected from sexual harassment in the workplace, it is legal to ask questions about family status, women with children do not have any legal rights to more flexible schedules or part-time schedules (World Bank, 2012). According to Karen Musalo (2010), sexual harassment is a widespread epidemic for Guatemalan women, particularly in industries where women make up large portions of the workforce.

The patriarchal culture of Guatemala has systematically and historically factored into the treatment of women even today. Though there are laws in place to help alleviate the discrimination women face, the Guatemalan government fails to safeguard the rights given to women by Guatemalan law and the rights given by international legal documents signed by Guatemala (Guatemala Country Report, 2008). People are largely unaware of the rights given to them by law. For those aware of their rights, they risk the reporting a discrimination to be seen as

a lesser evil for a country where crime is rarely reported, and, even worse, the violation could be seen as a failure of ability to develop their potential in a meritocracy (Guatemala Country Report, 2008). This failure by the government and lack of knowledge by the people creates a vicious cycle where discrimination continues to become a commonplace feature with no recourse for its victims.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research is to gain an understanding of the factors that limit women's access to education and workforce restrictions placed on women in the three countries, the United States, Mexico, and Guatemala. We present our cross-case analysis that concludes our study. We draw similarities and differences among the countries.

Cross Case Analysis

In our investigation, we were able to determine a list of factors limiting women's access to education and workforce restrictions within the three countries. After analyzing the results of the study, the most frequent factor in all three countries is the social environment and gender stereotyping. In Mexico and Guatemala women are forced to marry young, bare children and become typical "housewives". These expectations make it hard for women to go to school and work, while taking care of the children and home. In the United States there are more men taking on the role of child care and house chores today. The United States is by far more developed than the other two countries, and the fact that men are beginning to take on a "mother's" role at home while the women go to work or school attributes to keeping the gender gap small in the United States.

The proportion of companies with at least one woman on their executive board in 2005 and 2011 in the United States was 587 companies. Mexico had a much smaller count with 22 companies and Guatemala falling under Mexico (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, & Statistics Division, 2015). The United States, being the developed country, leads the other two countries with the highest proportion of companies with women in top

positions. Masculine companies such as Information Technology and Industrials have the highest percentage of no women on their corporate board. This issue is an outcome of gender stereotyping, because fields that are male dominant lack an open perspective on women in leadership positions. A great example of men dominating women in crucial leadership roles is past presidents in all three countries. None of the three countries have had a women president in the past. Although the United States was close to having a female president in 2017, Hilary Clinton, the woman, unfortunately, did not win.

Mexico and Guatemala lack in enforcing the laws created to protect women's rights. Women in all three countries protest and fight for their rights and equality, but without women in leadership positions it could take a lot of time to see the gap in gender inequality shrink. The United States is on the verge of closing the gender gap as more women are studying male dominant fields and demanding for equal pay while working their way into leadership positions.

Overall, the women in all three countries still have a long way to go. Women activist are continuing to protest for equal rights in education and the workplace in their countries. Organizations such as Girls Who Code, continue their purpose on working to close the gender gap in technology around the world. The gender gap is real, and as long as the world stays aware of the issues pertaining to women's equal rights women will continue to strive to equality.

Directions for Future Research

In the future, we hope that government officials and researchers will consider multiple sources of information when creating a creating a guide to make improvements for women in the United States, Mexico, and Guatemala. Women in these three countries and beyond these countries are still suffering from lower pay than their male counterparts, gender stereotyping, their social environment of who they should and need to be. Our research is not over. Women

continue to face workplace restrictions, while they are making a big turnaround on their educational status. We recommend that more personal studies take place with women in the three countries with surveys, questionnaires, and short answer interviews. There is a lack of information on the lesser-developed country of Guatemala compared to Mexico and the United States. It would be ideal to update where the women are today in education and workplace restrictions in all three countries--United States, Mexico and Guatemala.

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