

# The Gender Pay Gap

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Summary: The Gender Pay Gap is one of our greatest obstacles towards the formation of an egalitarian society. The Gender Pay Gap has wide reaching branches and extends to almost every socio-economic dimension. From the Gender Pay Gap in the Youth Labour Force to Land Rights for women in India, the paper explores various sides of the same coin. Additionally, data was collected from 107 respondents to check the level of education among high income group Indians with regard to the Gender Pay Gap. The results revealed a distressing lack of education among a considerable number of people despite the respondents having access to good education, technology, etc.

## **The Gender Pay Gap**

**Nandita Mehta**

### **I. Introduction**

The impact of gender on the economy has been receiving much needed attention from Economists all over the world. There has been a lot of work in the fields of the gender pay gap, the pink tax, land rights for women, etc. There has also been considerable change in society throughout the years but it is evident that women continue to face economic disadvantage even today.

The gender pay gap refers to the differences in the earnings of men and women. It is one of our greatest obstacles towards the formation of an egalitarian society. Experts have calculated this gap in a multitude of ways, but the varying calculations point to a consensus: Women consistently earn less than men. This difference can be attributed to a variety of factors: education levels, working hours, societal conditions, under representation, discrimination, etc.

Societal roles come into play as a major contributing factor towards the gender pay gap. Marriage and children negatively impact women's earnings whereas they have a positive effect on the earnings of men. The gendered division of labour places non-work responsibilities such as childcare, eldercare, cooking, cleaning, etc. on women. On the other hand, men are placed into the position of the bread-earners of the family and thus heighten their work commitment. Additionally, the unpaid household work predominantly done by women is not accounted for in the Gross Domestic Product of a country due to Statistical difficulties. This leads to underestimation of women's hard labour, which in fact forms a very important component of the economy.

Youth (15-24 years) constitute 19.1% i.e. a fifth of India's population as per India's Census of 2011. As per the Census of 2011, women constitute 48% of this population. For a country with a relative advantage over other countries in terms of youth population distribution it becomes imperative to ensure active engagement of all people, especially women, in the working age group (15-59 years).

Language plays a very important role in the way we conceive: the order of words in a sentence drives the interpretation. The way the media describes the gender pay gap is very victim centric. For example, "women earn 77 cents on average for every \$1 earned by men" reads the article *The Gender Pay Gap, by State* (2014), published in The New York Times. Such reporting manages to create sympathy for the victim but obfuscates from the perpetrator. The payers need to be held accountable when the grounds are discrimination to ensure change vis a vis the gender pay gap. There is a need for greater education in the field of gender and economics especially at the grassroot level to ensure a more informed and open-minded society.

Through this paper I aim to analyse the various dimensions of the Gender Pay Gap.

## **II. Literature Review**

The literature review touches upon the various branches of the gender pay gap.

### **2.1 The Gender Pay Gap in India**

As per UNDP'S Human Development Reports, India ranks 123 out of 162 countries on the Gender Inequality Index, making it a very difficult country for women to live in. The percentage of women (25 years and older) with some secondary education in the years 2015-19 was also extremely low at 27.7%. The female labour participation for people 15 years and older was only 20.5% compared to 76.1% for men. The male child in India is seen as the bread-earner of the family, whereas the female is looked upon as an outsider who is to be married off upon reaching a certain age. This skews the child sex ratio of the country as parents prefer to have sex selective abortions. The census of 2011 reported the overall child sex ratio for India as 919 females per 1000 males.

Poddar and Mukhopadhyay (2019) attempted to find whether any pay gap existed in the Indian labour market. For this purpose, the National Sample Survey Organisation's 68th round employment and unemployment data was used, and it was found that there exists a gender pay gap in every socio-economic dimension in India. These include different age groups, sectors, education levels, workplaces, occupations, etc.

After Independence in 1947, India adopted a mixed economy system. Some scholars argue that the policies aimed at regulating the economy ended up hampering growth. Others argue that there has been sustained growth in agricultural output, development of a diversified industrial sector and growth in savings. In 1991, India faced an economic crisis which further led to the adoption of the New Economic Policy (NEP). The reforms under this policy aimed at liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation. Ara (2018) conducted an employment analysis in quantitative and qualitative aspects from post reform period data. The findings point towards widened gender inequality. The labour force participation rate for women is already very low as compared to that of men with a wider gap in emerging and developing countries. A comparison of the male and female work participation in India revealed that even though male work participation remained mostly consistent, female work participation significantly declined despite economic growth in the post-reform period. In this trend, participation of educated women from higher income groups increased whereas uneducated women from vulnerable populations showed significant decline. Looking at the structure of employment, it was found that the proportion of men in the self-employed category

marginally declined whereas the proportion of women increased. On the qualitative aspect, it was found that women are highly represented in the informal sector. In a country like India, this translates into no job security, poor working conditions and low wages.

The Northern and Southern parts of India rank very differently in terms of cultures, traditions, language, development, etc. However, the most fascinating difference is in the terms of the attitude towards gender. For example, women living in South Indian states are more likely to be educated, to be more economically sound, to have fewer children, etc. as compared to women in the Northern States of India. Contrastingly, the juxtaposition of these two geographical areas also reveals differences in the extent of the gender pay gap. The effect of variation in female labour participation in terms of emerging and developing countries was first explored by Boserup (1970). Using data from the 1950s, it was found that the gender pay gap was wider in the Southern states of India as compared to the Northern states. She hypothesized that this was due to the greater female labour participation in the Southern states as compared to the North which can be attributed to cultural differences. Mahajan and Ramaswami (2017) in their paper *Caste, Female Labor Supply, and the Gender Wage Gap in India: Boserup Revisited* noted that this was not obvious, as greater female labor supply could depress male wages as well. They thus undertook a formal test of Boserup's proposition. It was found that the differences in female labour supply were able to explain only 55% of the gender pay gap difference between Southern and Northern states. Additionally the female labour supply had a significant effect on female wages but not male wages. On the other hand, male labour supply had a sizable effect on both female and male wages. This, therefore, points towards a marked disparity in the effects of male and female labour supplies in India.

To add to their economic marginalization, women in India rarely own land. Being a secular nation, India's present legal system provides for different sets of laws for different religions. The succession of Hindus in India is thus governed by the Hindu Succession Act, 1956 (HSA). Succession rights have been biased towards women as far back as 1500-1200 BCE, when the Vedas were written. The Vedas provided for inheritance to unmarried daughters and brotherless married daughters. In the Vedic times the widow did not have the right to inherit her husband's property; however, a childless widow could inherit her husband's estate (Jain, P., 2003). Up until recent times the position of women in a Hindu Undivided Family (HUF) was very low. As for succession, no woman in the family had the right to inherit family property irrespective of whether she was a wife, daughter, sister or widow. The males of the family, however, enjoyed a very privileged position: they enjoyed joint ownership i.e. they were coparceners by birth. In 2005, this law was amended to include daughters as coparceners by birth, conferring them the same rights and responsibilities as the sons of the Hindu Undivided Family. This was a positive step towards the economic alleviation of women, however this undid only a fraction of the damage the systemic economic marginalization of women throughout the previous years had created. In Rural India, women continue to work as agricultural labourers on their husband's lands. Correspondingly, widows work on their brothers' lands.

The United Nations estimated the poor in India to be 364 million or a third of India's population in 2019. Thus, Indian law and policy makers introduced an extensive system of minimum wages to ensure a decent standard of living for the poor. Menon and Rodgers (2017) studied the effects of the minimum wage rate across the labour market of men and women. It was found that the minimum wage requirement had had a positive effect on rural sector employment as well as real income earnings. The impact was visible in the formal sector in particular which was dominated by men. However the minimum wage enforcement built into MGNREGA (*Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Generation Act*) has had positive effects on employment of rural women as well. This minimum wage compliance, however, has widened the residual gender pay gap through the period 1983-2008. This is

consistent with the earlier finding of widened gender inequality in the post-reform period (Ara 2019). The widening of the gap may be explained by the non-compliance of minimum wage requirements by firms that predominantly hire female workers. This non-compliance is common to developing countries such as India, where the cost is borne by women.

A very large proportion of India's women are housewives. Even women that do jobs perform domestic labour at their homes to some extent. The notion of work developed by economists and statisticians remained hegemonic and alienated the activities of women by completely overlooking the importance of women's activities for economic development. Feminist scholars in the past, thus, campaigned for wages to housewives that would highlight the economic value of their unpaid labour (Costa, M., D. and James, S. 1972). The household, whose activities were dominated by women, was looked upon as a sight of unproductivity. As compared to developed countries, the activities performed by women in the household in developing countries such as India is greater and unaccounted for.

## **2.2 The Gender Pay Gap in Younger Populations**

The gender pay gap among people of working age is persistent throughout the world, and there have been a multitude of studies with focus on adult employment. However, work on gender wage differences among the younger population remains limited. While a gendered gap in the incomes of the working population can be attributed to various socio-economic factors such as education levels, working hours differences, familial responsibilities, etc., a gap in the latter may reflect gender biases.

A study in Finland revealed a gap in the disposable incomes of teenagers too. Wilska and Lintonen (2016) conducted a study over a 30 year period (1983-2013) to examine this gap. The sources of teenagers' incomes are two: external sources i.e. income from work and internal sources i.e. money from parents. It is rare for younger teenagers to work full time in Finland, thus the major proportion of their disposable income comes from their parents. The study concluded that incomes of 12 year olds was more or less equal in terms of gender, both from work and parent allowances, implying that younger people tend to be financially equal. On the other hand, upon reaching adolescence (14 years) there was a pronounced difference in incomes of girls and boys. As mentioned before, younger teenagers in Finland are not engaged in work to a large extent; therefore, it is reasonable to infer that parents tend to allocate more money to their sons than their daughters. Moving further, the difference in earnings of 16-18 year olds may be due to differences in external work income. In Finland, this gap in the adult labour market is attributed to occupational segregation.

In contrast with Finland, almost every teenager in the USA works before adulthood. Besen-Cassino (2008) analysed the youth labour force in the USA for gender differential earning. Traditional explanations of the gender pay gap have been allocated to individual characteristics like working hours, education levels, familial obligations, etc., but these do not apply to the youth labour in a developed country like the USA, yet the gender gap remains. It was found that adolescent girls and boys tended to work in stereotypically 'female' and 'male' jobs, forming a precursor to the occupational segregation in the adult labour force. Additionally, even when various demographic factors like race, age and income were controlled, a 13% gap persisted. This was termed 'the cost of being a girl'.

India, like other South Asian countries, has lower socio-economic status and resources as compared to both Finland and USA. Unlike Finland it is very common for teenagers and even children to work in India owing to the country's standing in terms of poverty. Young teenagers show occupational segregation: boys are more likely to work in factories whereas girls tend to work in agriculture or as domestic help in urban areas. Consequently, boys are more inclined towards better earnings.

### **2.3 The Glass Escalator Effect**

Budig (2002) concluded that men had equal advantage over women in terms of pay in the context of male-dominant, female-dominant and balanced job categories. Men are paid less in female-dominant jobs as compared to male-dominant and balanced jobs but they continue to maintain their advantage over women even here. Additionally, the analysis of promotions confirms that men are more likely to be promoted in male-dominant and balanced jobs as compared to women irrespective of the gender composition of the job held prior to promotion. There is also a hierarchy in terms of earnings of these categories. Male-dominant jobs are highest paying, followed by balanced jobs and then female-dominant jobs. This can be attributed to higher skill and education requirements of male-dominant and balanced jobs.

Williams (1992), in her paper, *The Glass Escalator*, investigated hidden privileges for men in "feminized" jobs. She addressed men's underrepresentation in female-dominant professions: librarianship, nursing and social work. She conducted detailed interviews with 99 men and women in these engaged professions across four major American cities. The interview data revealed that men in these jobs do not face discrimination within their jobs, but they are stereotyped outside of their professions. Interestingly, it was also found that men generally experience structural advantages which make their career ascension easier as opposed to women who enter male-dominant professions. In fact, women experience a "glass ceiling" which prevents them from moving to higher positions in their careers. Williams termed the phenomenon of men having hidden privileges in female-dominant jobs "the glass escalator effect" in contrast with "the glass ceiling". In 2013, Williams wrote a follow up paper, *The Glass Elevator Revisited* addressing the limitations of her previous work. She acknowledged that (1) she had failed to adequately address intersectionality and (2) her previous work was based on the assumption of traditional work organisations. She concluded that any discussion of "the glass escalator" must take into account the racism, homophobia and class disadvantage of some men as opposed to others. Williams believes that "the glass escalator" may be of limited use in explaining gender inequality in the 21st century. She also believes that it becomes imperative for us to critique capitalism along with gender inequality to ensure alleviation of women and men at the bottom of the pyramid.

### **2.4 The Pink Tax: Price Based Discrimination**

In addition to facing gender disparities in terms of income, women are thus also more financially burdened in terms of consuming goods and services. In addition to earning less, women also must pay more which results in double disadvantage. The pink tax refers to the extra invisible cost women pay for products marketed specifically to them. The male equivalents of these products are available for a lesser amount of money. A study by the State of California in 1994 revealed that women pay an extra \$1351 annually for the same services as men. This 'pink tax' is mostly visible in consumer goods and services. The largest disparities are seen in personal care items which may include deodorants, lotions, razors, etc. Many women involved in the service sector are required to use these products on a daily basis in order to adhere to the gendered appearance norms (Easteal, P., O'Neill, J., & Ryan, T. 2018).

*From Cradle to Cane: The Cost of Being a Female Consumer* (de Blasio, B., & Menin, J. 2015), a study of gender pricing in New York City analyzed the pink tax across various industries in 2015. It was found that out of all the industries analysed, personal care products showed the highest premium for women, costing 13% more as compared to personal care products for men.

The same study also analyzed the pink tax across different ages. It was visible in products such as toys, accessories, and children's clothing. Girls' toys cost more 55% of the time, whereas boys' toys cost more 8% of the time. Similarly, girls' clothing cost more 26% of the

time, whereas boys' clothes cost more 7% of the time. Overall women end up paying more in 30 out of its 35 categories.

The marketing strategy for these products is also interesting to note. In addition to gendering pricing, marketers gender the packaging too. For example, personal care products like shampoos for women are packed in bottles of various light and bright colours and often claim to 'enhance beauty'. In contrast, products intended for men are packed in dark coloured packaging and claim to have 'strong formulas'. (Add: consumer rights vis a vis the pink tax)

Up until a few years ago 12% Goods & Services Tax was levied on sanitary products for women in India. Popularly known as the 'tampon tax', it rendered these products as luxuries instead of necessities. Due to this, only higher income groups of women were able to afford these products. Sanitary products are already inaccessible for most women in India due to their pricing, and the additional tax made them even more out of reach. This imposition of tax triggered wide outrage, and as a result, it was revoked in 2018. Despite the tax removal many women in India are unable to afford these products and are thus victims of various serious infections. Sadly, the pink tax has not received the same attention in India, and manufacturers and marketers continue to unethically profit off of women.

## **2.5 Gendered Dimension of COVID-19**

In addition to causing great destruction of life, the Pandemic has also had various economic, social and political implications. In the 112 countries that provided sex-disaggregated data it was seen that men had an overall higher infection and mortality rate as compared to women (Kabeer, N., Razavi, S., & van der Meulen Rodgers, Y. 2021). Additionally, men and women from low-income and marginalized groups have been disproportionately affected. The International Monetary Fund remarked, "growing disparities will lead to long-lasting grievances and ultimately to social unrest" (Georgieva and Gopinath 2020).

The lockdown orders imposed in various countries across the world impacted the lives of many: they led to an increase in unpaid care work, domestic violence, unemployment, etc. In urban areas online school and work from home alternatives were adopted. On the other hand, in rural areas school closures and unemployment became rampant. Both these situations increased the unpaid domestic care work load predominantly on women. Besides, this work load further escalated as many people contracted the disease and were required to be taken care of. This work is "undervalued and treated as an infinite resource on which the market economy can draw" (Kabeer, N., Razavi, S., & van der Meulen Rodgers, Y. 2021).

It is interesting to note countries led by women had more favourable outcomes as compared to countries led by men. Two studies with different approaches analysed this and arrived at similar results. Abras (2021) used data from 144 countries on heads of state and COVID-19 related deaths. They found that women led countries had an average of 324 fewer cases and 18 fewer deaths daily. Similarly, Kambhampati and Garikipati (2021) used data from 194 countries of which 10% were led by women and found that women-led countries reported fewer COVID-19 cases and deaths over the study period.

## **III. Data**

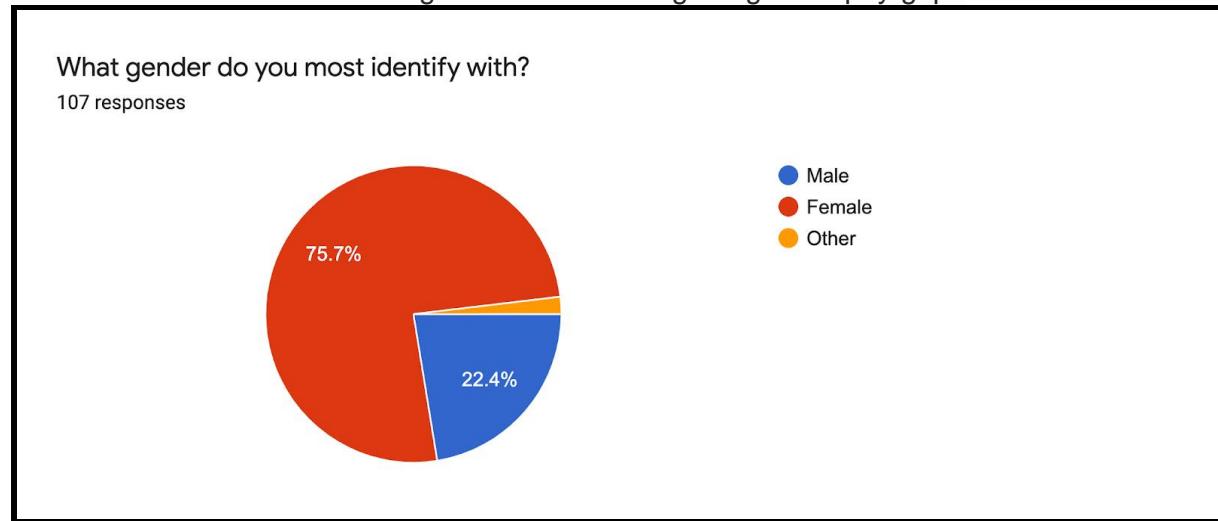
A survey was conducted to analyse the level of awareness with regard to the gender pay gap and its dimensions. The sample consisted of people from high income groups in India. It must be kept in mind that these people have higher education levels, greater access to technology and information and better standards of living as compared to the rest of the population in India. Owing to the COVID-19 Pandemic, the survey was conducted in online mode. A questionnaire was created and circulated via google forms for the same.

The questionnaire is as follows:

Question 1. What gender do you most identify with?

- Male
- Female
- Other

81 out of the 107 respondents were females. The survey was purposely skewed in this manner to examine females' cognizance concerning the gender pay gap.



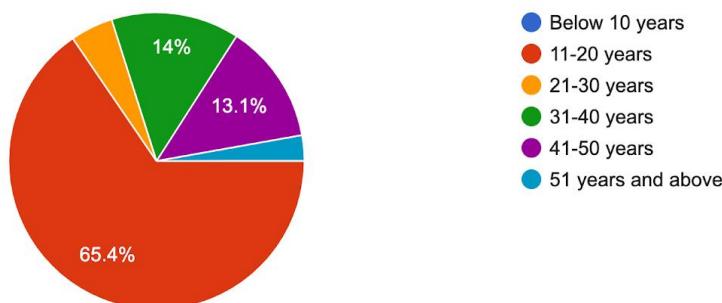
Question 2. How old are you?

- Below 10 years
- 11-20 years
- 21-30 years
- 31-40 years
- 41-50 years
- 51 years and above

The majority of the respondents were in the age group of 11-20 years. The survey was purposely skewed to include people of this age group in a higher proportion to examine the youth's cognizance concerning the gender pay gap. It is especially important to look at the attitude of the youth towards the gap as they are the potential problem solvers of the future with a great chance of bringing positive change. The youth are also linked with new ideas and greater sensitivity to social causes as compared to the older population who tend to be conservative. As mentioned earlier, youth constitute a fifth of India's population rendering it a competitive advantage in the workforce.

How old are you?

107 responses



Question 3. Prior to this survey, were you aware of the gender pay gap?

Yes

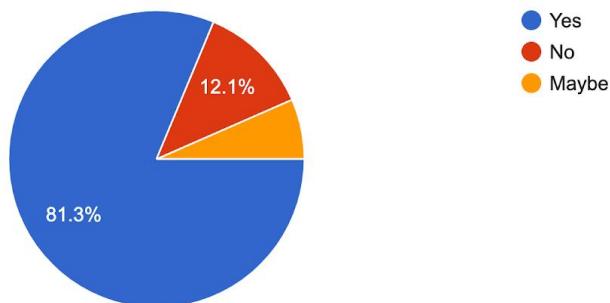
No

Maybe

81.3% of the respondents were aware of the gender pay gap, however the rest were either unsure or unaware of its existence. This was bothersome to note as a fifth of the sample did not recognise something that has directly impacted them. Females formed approximately 75% of this fifth of a sample, most of which were from the ages of 11-40 years. Women within this range are either currently studying or working (with the household or otherwise). Gender Based Discrimination is an issue that is addressed in secondary school textbooks in India only to a limited extent. Income disparities within gender as an issue, thus, finds no place in school curriculum. However, the growth of the internet and social media has opened new horizons for transmission of information. The respondents belonged to high income groups and thus have easy access to technology. Despite this, them being unaware of such a pressing issue is extremely surprising.

Prior to this survey, were you aware of the gender pay gap?

107 responses

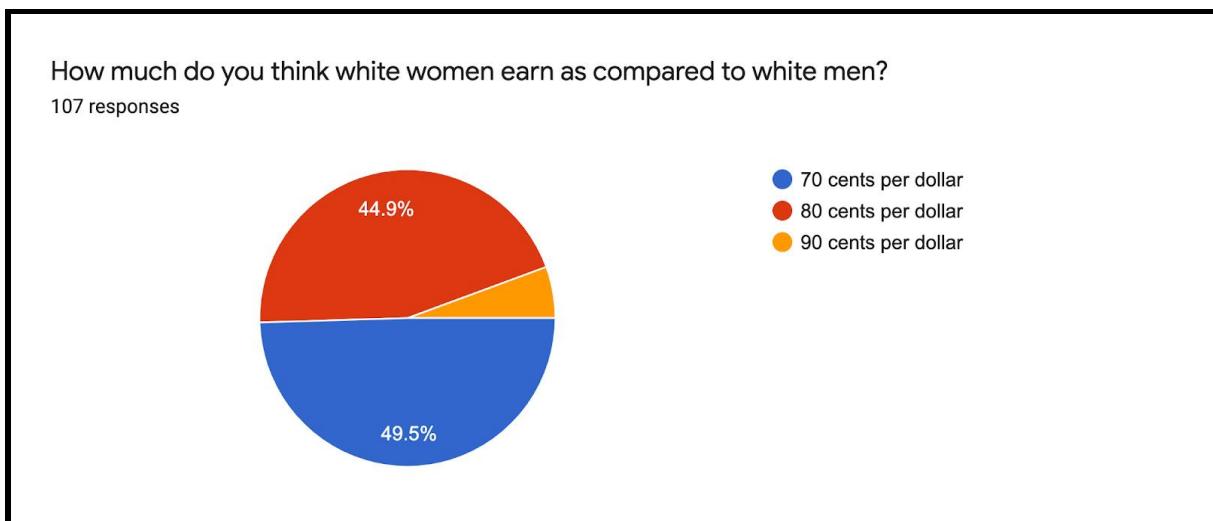


Question 4. How much do you think white women earn as compared to white men?

70 cents per dollar

80 cents per dollar  
90 cents per dollar

White women earn 80 cents for every dollar a white man makes. This further reduces for people of colour. About 45% of the respondents were able to accurately conjecture this. The majority answered 70 cents per dollar (50%), and only a twentieth of the sample answered 90 cents per dollar. This suggests that even though some of the respondents were unaware or unsure of the existence of income disparities between men and women, all of the respondents were well aware of general gender inequality in society. In fact, they tended to believe that the income disparities were worse than they actually were. Thus, there is sensitivity with regard to gender inequality in people coupled with ignorance within the subject matter. It is imperative to note that mere sensitivity would decrease the rate of upliftment of women and narrowing of the pay gap. Any change in society would only be tokenistic.



Question 5. Do you think the gender pay gap is limited to the adult labour force? (Please note that the adult labour force includes people of ages 18 years and above. The youth labour force includes adolescents)

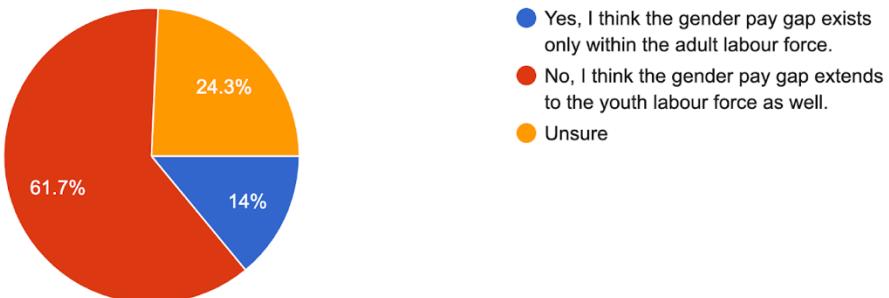
Yes, I think the gender pay gap exists only within the adult labour force

No, I think the gender pay gap extends to the youth labour force as well

Unsure

The Gender Pay Gap in the Youth Labour has been examined by various people as mentioned in the literature review. 61.7% of the respondents conjectured that the gender pay gap extends to the youth labour force as well, while the remaining 38.3% either disagreed or were unsure. Once again, it is important to keep in mind that the respondents belong to the high income bracket which implies that the adolescents in this category are not engaged in work. Some of the older respondents may, however, have adolescents of the low income bracket employed as domestic workers; these domestic workers are predominantly females.

Do you think the gender pay gap is limited to the adult labour force? (Please note that the adult labour force includes people of ages 18 years and above. The youth labour force includes adolescents)  
107 responses



Question 6. Do you think males would be likely to earn better as compared to females even in female dominant jobs such as nursing, librarianship, etc.?

Yes

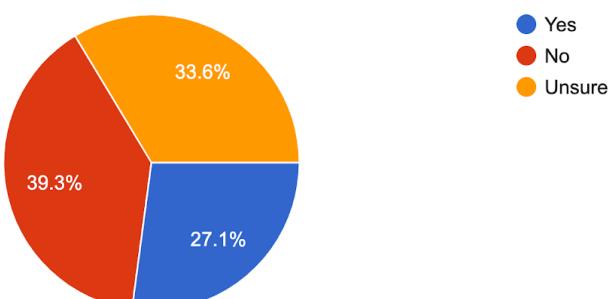
No

Unsure

Most people are well aware of the 'glass ceiling' which prohibits women from ascending in their careers in male dominated fields. On the contrary, this question was aimed at analysing the perception regarding the 'glass escalator effect'. The opinion regarding this question was very divided with 27.1% of people answering yes. It is not clear whether such a 'glass escalator' exists for men involved in feminized jobs in India. There are various important factors that must be kept in mind such as the increased extent of patriarchy and patriarchal structures in India as compared to other developed countries as well as the extent of stereotyping of Indian males in feminized jobs.

Do you think males would be likely to earn better as compared to females even in female dominant jobs such as nursing, librarianship, etc.?

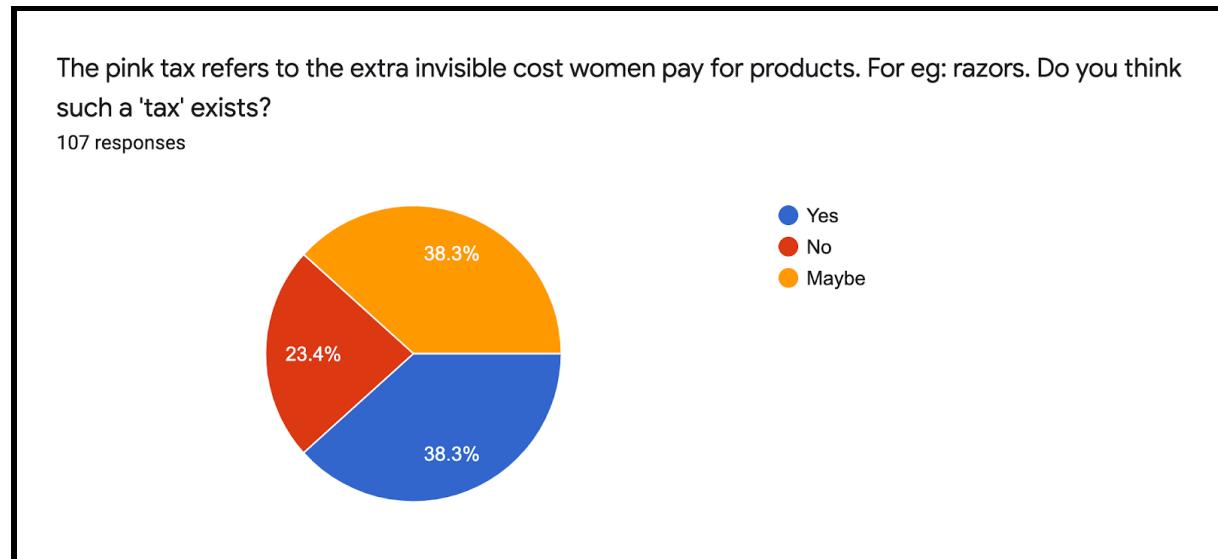
107 responses



Question 7. The pink tax refers to the extra invisible cost women pay for products. For eg: razors. Do you think such a 'tax' exists?

Yes  
No  
Maybe

The respondents are predominantly females and regular buyers of various consumer goods and services. However, only 38.3% of the respondents answered yes. The remaining 23.4% had never even heard of the 'tax', and 38.3% were unsure. These results were very surprising, and it goes on to explain the extent of unawareness among female consumers.



#### IV. Conclusion

The gender pay gap has wide reaching branches and extends to almost all socio-economic dimensions. India is a very diverse country, but also holds lesser economic opportunities for women as compared to other countries. In fact, the gender pay gap in India extends to every socio-economic dimension including but not limited to different ages, sectors, workplaces and education levels. India also poses a dilemma in the extent of the gender pay gap in its Southern states as compared to its Northern states. The gap is wider in the Southern states despite them being more liberal towards women. This was addressed by Boserup in 1970. She attributed this difference to the greater female labour force participation in the South. Mahajan and Ramaswami (2017) later examined through their paper *Caste, Female Labour Supply, and the Gender Wage Gap in India: Boserup Revisited* that the greater female labour force participation in the South was able to explain only 55% of the gap difference. Adding to India's women's disadvantages are the limited land rights for women and the sexual division of labour.

The paper also analysed the gender pay gap in the youth labour population, a topic less talked about. A comparative analysis was taken across three countries: Finland, USA and India. All three countries are very different in terms of socio-economic standing; however, it was seen that the gender pay gap persisted for all three countries in adolescents aged 14-16 years.

Contrary to popular belief, the gap extends to even female dominant jobs such as nursing, librarianship, etc. for certain privileged men. Williams (1992) studied hidden

advantages for men in feminized jobs; her work revealed a ‘glass escalator’ for men in these jobs. It was found systemic advantage for men makes their career ascension easier as compared to women even in these jobs. However it is also imperative to note intersectionality here as these hidden privileges are not the same for all men.

The pink tax i.e. the invisible cost paid by women for the same products as men is another barrier towards the economic emancipation of women. The tax imposed on sanitary products by the Government of India was repealed after constant pressure from activists. The pink tax, however, has not received the same attention in India. The first step towards its eradication would be to build consumer awareness, especially among females.

COVID-19 has had far reaching effects on society as a whole. Women too have been severely impacted by increase in domestic load, unemployment, etc. Kabeer, N., Razavi, S., & van der Meulen Rodgers, Y. (2021) concluded that the outcomes in female led countries had been more favourable as compared to male led countries.

A survey was conducted to analyse the level of education among Indians with regard to the gender pay gap. The results of the survey revealed the distressing level of education vis-a-vis the gender pay gap. The survey was purposely skewed to include a majority of young females despite which the results were inimical. Women aren’t even aware that they’re the victim of something so grave: they earn less and pay more. As has been seen throughout history, awareness is the key to change. Additionally, an uninformed generation would be likely to pass on the same trend to their children. So long as this blindness is prevalent, capitalists will continue capitalising.

At this point it is important to note the limitations of the survey. The survey catered only to relatively high income groups of Indians and is thus not reflective of the views of all Indians. Most of India lives under disadvantage and does not enjoy the same privileges as the former. The respondents revealed unfavourable levels of awareness despite having access to better education and technology. Thus, it would be reasonable to infer that the levels of awareness among most other Indians would be even lower. As the survey catered primarily to females, it is not clear whether males would have higher or lower awareness. Further, the sample size was quite small. The results could thus be less conclusive. There are also several unknown factors that could have affected the results of the study.

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