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Employee Demographics in Human Resource Space in Religious Not-For-Profit Organization in Australia: Understanding Organizational Retention Rates

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ABSTRACT

This study demonstrates that despite promotional discrimination favoring females in a female-dominated workplace, such females likely have reduced tenure compared to men. This delivers a significant difference in gender balance within upper management. An Australian not-for-profit organization's Qualtrics survey provides 113 respondent demographic data sets, or 56% of the potential respondent pool. Females are typically promoted significantly faster than males. However, while males are promoted slower than females, they remain longer in their tenured positions and ultimately move into upper management. Why women choose to leave an organization at higher rates, notwithstanding their promotional advantages, may indicate family child-raising interruptions, in-house personality clashes, or possibly deeper gendered biases within the organization - such as a lack of fulfilment and a greater predisposition to suffer negative workplace conditions. Hence, further research in this area is advised.

Keywords: Gender Bias, Management, Promotion. Tenure, Workplace reform.

INTRODUCTION

Retention of staff in a dynamic environment, where demand for skilled labor outstrips labor market capacity, is one of the major concerns of an organization (Mabaso et al., 2021). In industries like human resources, with a predominantly female workforce, four key aspects of a workplace - the work environment, remuneration and job security, personal fulfilment, organizational values towards work-life balance, and fair treatment, help facilitate female retention (Hammond & Coetzee, 2022).

In human resources, there remains a growing demand for staff. Across such in-demand professions, the choice of workplace brings worker focus onto personal fulfilment and work-life balance considerations (Recuero & Segovia, 2021).

Fulfilment may be problematic for females to achieve - particularly in female-dominated workplaces (Jung & Welch, 2022). Male and female gender differences influence how each group socially connects in their workplace, with males (compared to females) showing greater connectedness in their work-life relative to their family life (Hodson, 2004).

This difference in connectedness has implications for workplace belonging. For example, when females dominate an internal workspace network, those working within it often feel less included and have reduced workplace satisfaction (Jung & Welch, 2022). In contrast, females and males have a greater sense of belonging when there are more males present. This, too, can influence the rates of retention within an organization, such that there is also a long-term bias in upper management towards males (Jung & Welch, 2022). Arguably, the lack of females in upper management is an area where cultural shifts towards improving personal fulfilment may bring some lessening of negative workplace conditions like stress and/or burnout and also assist in the reduction of gendered workplace disparities such as gender per capita pay (Rotenstein et al., 2021).

Understanding the role of family work-life balance can further explain the failure to retain females within the workforce (Burns et al., 2021; Recuero & Segovia, 2021). The natural increased use of emotional coping mechanisms in females, as opposed to the behavior coping using depersonalization, which is more typical in males, increases the risk of females suffering negative workplace emotional behaviors (Gonzalez-Morales et al., 2010; Recuero & Segovia, 2021).

Males and females have different ways of interpreting and responding to social demands. This can explain some disparity in their workplace behaviors - such as the propensity to suffer a negative workplace condition or to fail to mediate their work-life balance (Arman, 2020). This difference in coping strategies can lead to greater long-term retention of males in workplaces that often have higher rates of emotional exhaustion. This, in turn, can often induce higher coping strategies in females, leading to female work-life disruptions (Arman, 2020).

Study Aim

Few recent studies have examined the demographics of a specific human resources department. The human resources profession remains a female-dominant workplace sector. However, within the organization, there remains a historical systemic discriminatory treatment perception of an inherent 'glass ceiling' that often limits a female's capacity to advance into senior management positions (Edgar & Geare, 2004). This study seeks to explore the current demographic composition of an Australian not-for-profit organization with a social service focus, to investigate the organization's diversity and equality in terms of demographic ratios, service history, and opportunity for advancement, and to relate this information to explain retention rates, and to assess the extent of male domination of upper management within the organization's human resource department.

METHODOLOGY

Target Organization

Anglicare Australia is an umbrella organization comprising a network of independent local, state, national and international organizations providing social services in their communities. Anglicare operates as a semi-autonomous branch of the Anglican Church with shared values through service delivery through a workforce comprising over 30,000 staff, including volunteers. Anglicare delivers more than 50 services, including housing, child protection, community services, youth services, aged care and support for people at risk of homelessness in Australian communities to more than 550,000 people, reaching nearly 1.3 million Australians.

Anglicare operates nationwide in the social welfare, aged care, and disability domains. The organization is diverse and multifaceted, with semi-autonomous divisions across Victoria, Tasmania, New South Wales, South Australia, Western Australia, Southeast Queensland, Central Queensland, North Queensland, and Anglicare Northern Territory. Given the diversity within the organization and the dispersed nature of the organization's operations across multiple locations, the targeted geographical population were asked to complete an online survey.

Survey Activation

Anglicare Australia's executive Director assisted with this study by providing employee linkage to the Questionnaire, a cover letter explaining the survey's objectives, assurance of confidentiality, and lastly, explaining the voluntary nature of survey respondent participation.

Data Capture

This study's mixed-methods data capture was presented as a Qualtrics survey to potential respondents over a 12-week period from 16 May to 31 July 2022. It followed a Dillman (2015) non-incentivized, six-differentiated fortnightly reminder approach. Anglicare Australia is a religious, not-for-profit organization. Its ethical requirement conditions allowed gender to be captured as one of three categories - male, female or other.

Sample Size

Online survey respondents totalled 131 of an estimated overall pool of 200 surveys sent. However, after removing incomplete, section-blank, or demographic-incomplete surveys, plus removing two surveys with poor item delineation (either all neutral or all extreme responses), only 57% of the overall pool sufficiently completed the questionnaire items - leaving 113 suitably complete and usable cases available for this study's analysis.

Data Collation

The demographic question provides an overview of the organization's workforce across gender, age, highest level of education, staff roles, and service duration. Respondent geographical respondents (mapped by IP address) also roughly match the Anglicare State-by-State HR workforce membership. Hence, data collection indicates a valid and suitable respondent representation of the Anglicare Australia organization.

DATA ANALYSIS

Statistical analyses applied SPSS Version 28.0 (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). An independent samples Chi-squared test determined if Anglicare's demographics differed from the Australian HR data obtained from the 2021 census, adjusted in February 2023 (H_0 = no difference in the measures). One-way ANOVA determined differences in the number of years worked by gender. Promotion rates are calculated based on time of employment and time in the current position; there is an assumption that no employees were demoted. The demographics of the Anglicare HR workforce reflected 113 respondents answering the demographic questions, although not all respondents answered every question, which varied the respondent number (n) for some analysis.

RESULTS

The areas the HR respondents worked in the organization covered areas from payroll to employee learning and development. Within the HR department, workplace roles were divided into six major areas of operations, with one category for undefined roles. The three minor cohorts with the HR Department (Learning and Development, Recruitment, Work Health and Safety) represent minor sections within Anglicare's HR departments. The level of non-specified roles indicates the diversity of the HR work environment. Respondents often have to deal with multifaceted problems that affect multiple organizational divisions,

making the compartmentalization of roles problematic. Furthermore, it is this diversity in workplace tasks that can affect the individuals' ability to form routines and how they define their roles within the organization, all of which can lead to negative workplace conditions as administrative controls are often unstructured as HR employees are expected to operate independently (Ma & Macmillan, 1999). Notably, the learning and development team, whose function is to prepare and empower employees to deal with the vicissitudes of work, is critical to managing negative workplace conditions and comprises only 2.5% ($n = 5$) of the HR workforce, or 0.00017% of all workplace participants (30,000).

The gender of the HR workforce respondents was primarily female (63.1%; $n = 70$), with males (23.0%, $n = 26$), with the remaining (13.5%; $n = 15$) staff not falling into these categories or preferring not to say (Figure 1). This demographic composition is not significantly different to other HR departments in Australia ($\chi_{(1,2)}^2 = 0.0366$; $p = 0.8482$). The ABS (2016) data showed that 72% of HR professionals were female, averaging 37 years. Similarly, in the United States, women account for 70% of HR professionals and have an average age of 46.6 years (Zippia, 2023). In Anglicare, the dominant combined demographics are represented by women aged 25-54 years, with males aged 45-54 years forming the fourth largest cohort (Figure 1). The smallest combined age cohort was the 18-24-year-old roles. This indicates that middle-aged females, likely with substantial work experience and solid job understanding, continue to dominate the human resource workforce domain.

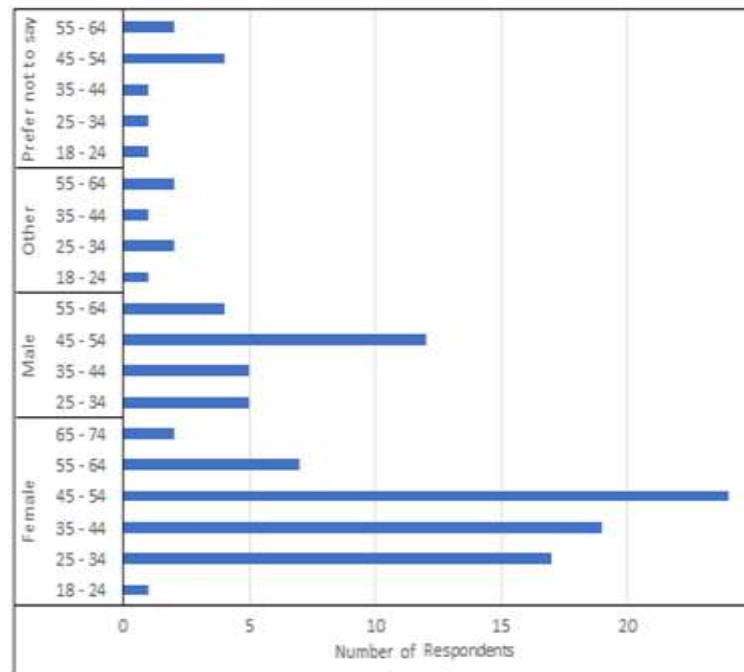


Figure 1: Survey respondent demographic composition by stated gender identity and age ($n = 111$).

The organizational structure comprises 33.9% of HR respondents who were positioned at level 2 ($n = 38$) with duties to deliver special projects, such as HR diversity policies (Figure 2). Considered middle management (Levels 3-4) consisted of 34.8% ($n = 39$) of all employees, and executive management (Level 5) was 23% ($n = 26$) of HR professionals. Only 8% ($n = 9$) of HR professions were administrative and support roles (Figure 3). While there were more females at each level, a significant difference in the gender proportions at different hierarchal levels exists within Anglicare ($\chi_{(4,3)}^2 = 11.21$ $p = 0.1898$; Figure 3). This gender differential reflects gender proportions of the HR industry: higher administrative levels being 38.4% ($n = 10$) of level 5s and upper-middle management, level 4, representing 32% ($n = 8$) of the workforce. In contrast, women (64.3%; $n = 9$) and those who preferred not to say and other (28.5%; $n = 4$) were overly represented in lower-middle management, with men only holding 7.1% ($n = 1$).

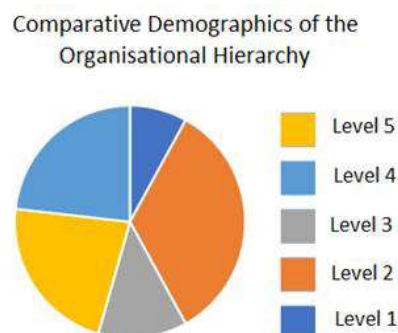


Figure 2: The proportion of HR professionals by administrative level ($n = 111$).

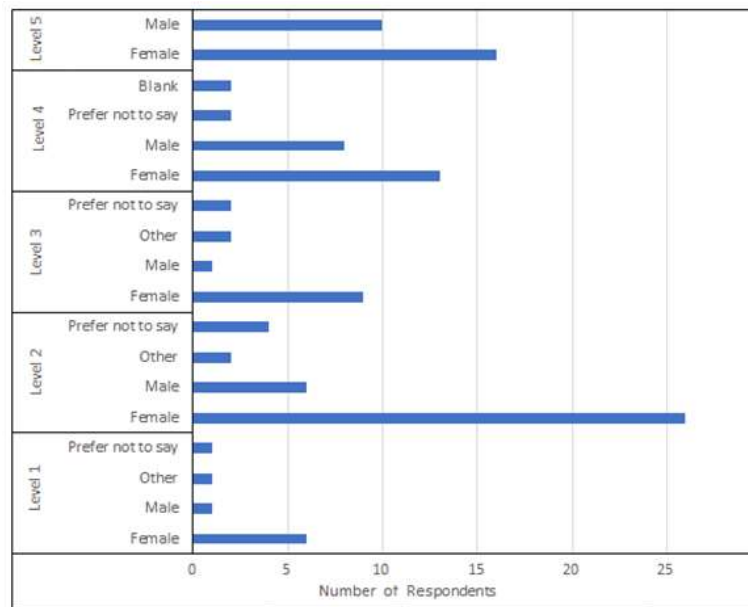


Figure 3: Survey respondent demographic composition by stated gender identity and organization position (n = 112).

Regarding educational attainment, 49% held an undergraduate university degree (Figure 4). In contrast, only 23% of the respondents were master-level tertiary educated, with one holding a PhD. Of the respondents, 18% had non-university post-secondary education, and 8.7% had no post-secondary education (Figure 4). The educational demographics of the survey are not reflective of the broader HR industry in Australia ($\chi^2_{(1,6)} = 12.2135$; $p = 0.0067$), where 14.3% of employees held postgraduate qualifications, 35.9% held a bachelor's degree, 28.4% had post-secondary education, and 21.4% had no formal post-secondary education. Furthermore, both Anglicare and the Australian National average differed from the United States educational standard of HR professionals ($\chi^2_{(2,10)} = 32.7359$; $p < 0.001$), where HR professionals had higher levels of education, with only 3% of HR professionals not holding post-secondary qualifications (Figure 5). The low numbers of 18–24-year-olds indicate the time taken to attain competency in HR and are reflected in the time to achieve the educational attainment required for respondents' positions.

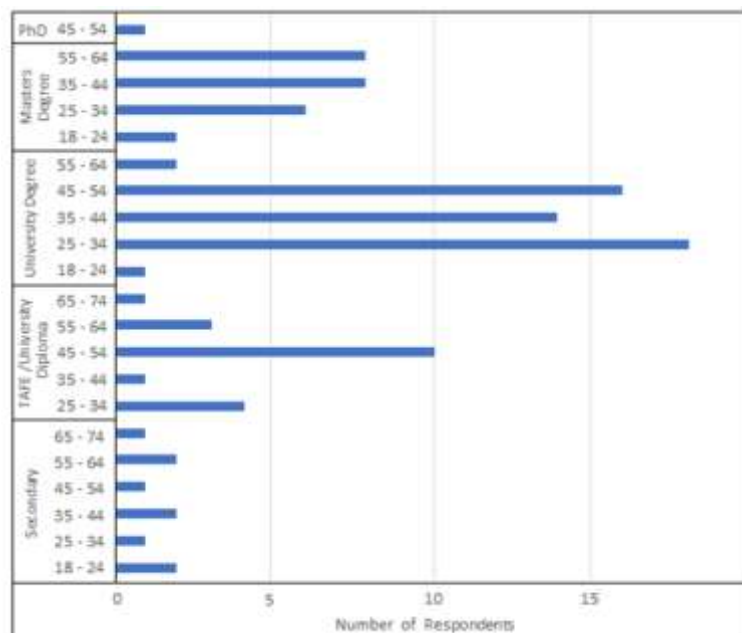


Figure 4: Survey respondent demographic composition by educational attainment and age (n = 113).

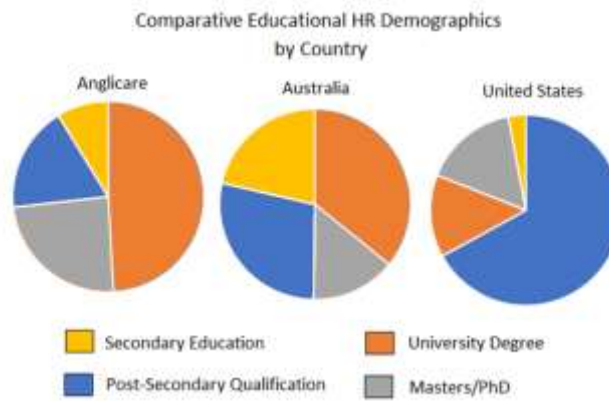


Figure 5: A comparison of educational attainment in the HR profession showing the Australian and the United States contrasted with Anglicare (source: ABS (2016) and Zippia (2023)).

There were differences in the educational attainment between the genders in the Anglicare HR department (Figure 6). The educational attainment of HR staff significantly differed proportionally by gender ($\chi^2_{(2,10)} = 70.9283$; $p < 0.001$). Women had lower educational attainment than men, with 70.3% having some level of university training, while 90.9% of men had university degrees. In contrast, 'other' and those who do not wish to be identified had reduced educational attainment, with 66% of the cohort with tertiary qualifications (Figure 7). Only one respondent held a PhD, and this male was 45-55 year old cohort.

The term of employment varied significantly with gender ($F_{(2,60)} = 0.0037$; $p = 0.008$). Males held their positions for an average of 7.9 years ($n = 21$); in contrast, females held their positions for an average shorter period of 4.2 years ($n = 68$), and those who did not identify or other were highly mobile, averaging only 1.9 years in their positions ($n = 7$).

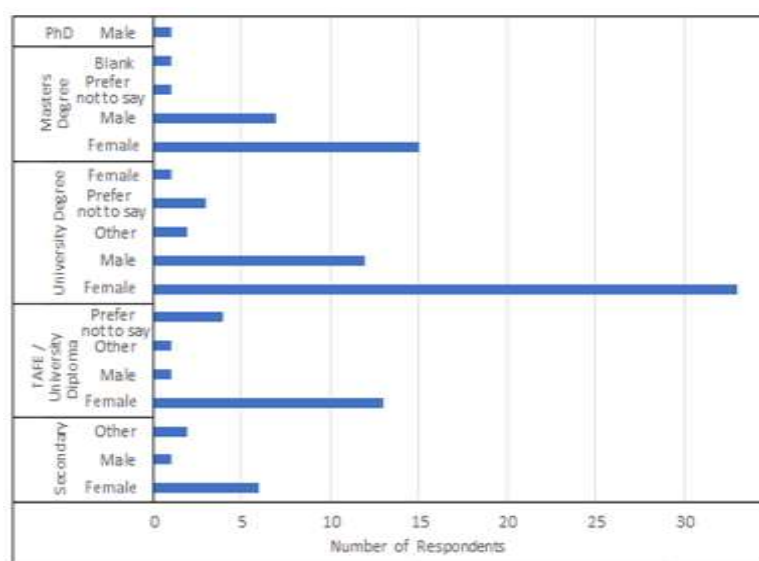


Figure 6: Survey respondent demographic composition by educational attainment and gender ($n = 104$).

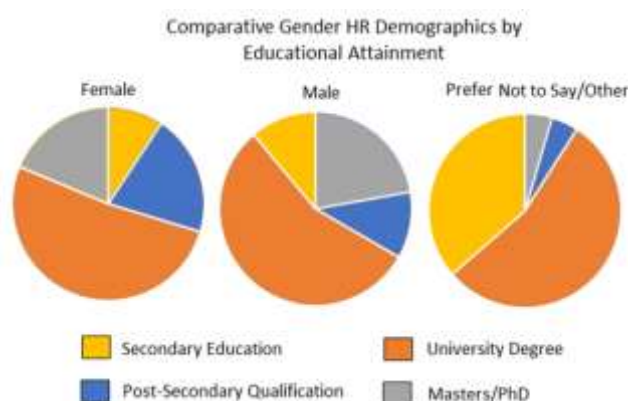


Figure 7: Comparison of educational attainment in the HR profession by gender within Anglicare.

The promotion within the organization represents only 34.5% of respondents' staff currently in their roles ($n = 33$; Figure 8). Of the male respondents, 38.4% ($n = 10$) had been promoted during their tenure; in contrast, 31.4% ($n = 20$) of those identified as female were promoted. Those individuals who did not identify as male or female or preferred not to say had a rate of promotion of 6.7% ($n = 2$). The time taken to be promoted from within the organization averaged 4.2 years of organizational experience prior to being promoted and varied with gender identity, with females promoted faster (3.9 years) than males (5.0 years) and those not identifying as male and females promoted after four years.

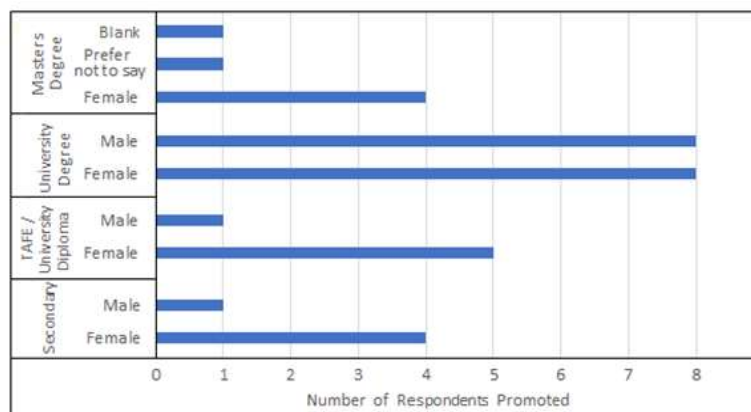


Figure 8: Survey respondent demographic composition by promotion, educational attainment, and stated gender identity ($n = 33$).

DISCUSSION

Organizational Management Implications

The Australian historical gender pay gap has significantly affected women's net wealth throughout their working lives (Wischer, 2023). While there has been a move to facilitate the normalization of male parental leave and the rise of flexible work environments, women remain the dominant caregivers, restricting their overall income-earning potential, notwithstanding the compensation legislated for (Wischer, 2023). In the present study, females were overrepresented in lower-middle management, while males dominated upper management. This disproportionality in gender at differing management ranks would naturally indicate that there is an individual gender pay gap when the average of each gender is calculated. Notwithstanding this disparity in pay, the findings indicate that Anglicare promotes women 22% faster within the HR division of the organization. However, there is a gendered bias with women leaving the organization 48% faster than males. As positions become available, males have served longer within the organization and, therefore, have an implicit advantage of experience when senior workplace roles become available.

Furthermore, males tend to work longer than women, which can be attributed to the increased care roles and less flexibility in hours worked typical of non-executive positions (Parjoleanu, 2020). This has the effect of entrenching males at the higher management levels and distorting the gender/wage average. Therefore, enabling the bridging of the gender pay gap would facilitate the need for higher gender-based pay grades, and this would lead to reverse discrimination which is illegal under Australian workplace laws (Schuster et al., 2022; Wischer, 2023).

Women are attracted to occupations with a core caring role, including caregiving/nurturing occupations and support/administrative occupations like human resources. The findings of this study support this with a female-dominated workforce (Purvanova & Muros, 2010). This female-dominated workplace is actually generating decreased workplace satisfaction for women; this reduces their perceived personal level of fulfilment that women self-report (Jung & Welch, 2022). Furthermore, women had higher rates of stress than males, although this may not always be statistically significant (Marcassa, 2022). Given that women are more predisposed to experience workplace emotional exhaustion, these factors have flow effects that can cause negative workplace conditions to develop, such as burnout (Mullins & Lindeman, 2022).

The gender workplace has differing dimensions for each gender; males and females differ in their understanding of the culture of wellness and self-compassion (Rotenstein et al., 2021). Two identified gendered factors mitigate negative workplace conditions, such as burnout, and the normalization of workplace experiences: the need for personal fulfilment and the ability and ability to control workplace scheduling (Mullins & Lindeman, 2022). Women are also pressured to balance work-life commitments, leaving them more prone to stress and burnout (Marcassa, 2022). While women tend to be underrepresented at a higher level of administration, they tended to be highly overrepresented at lower management, and these gender demographics were consistent with this study and highlighted the leaky pipeline effect where women leave organizations before they reach their full potential (Marcassa, 2022). The limited opportunity for advancement for women of 4.2 years, notwithstanding this time being a faster progression period than males, may also explain the reduced time of tenure of females because of a lack of personal fulfilment (Rotenstein et al., 2021).

Theoretical Implications

One of the leading causes of the gender pay gap is often linked to the workplace dynamics of job security and the casualization of staff (Wischer, 2023). However, this study found that pay gaps can be linked to a lack of retention of female staff; this may reflect the inflexibility within the workplace to enable the employee to mediate the care roles that women often play in family structures (Bergmann et al., 2019; Wisher, 2023). Furthermore, HR departments are stressful environments, with employees at the forefront of organizational change and disruption, as well as having the challenging role of maintaining discipline within the workforce, and this leaves HR personnel at higher risk of hindrance stressors such as organizational politics and interpersonal conflict (Blake Hargrove et al., 2016). The lack of retention of women as they are promoted within an organization, and therefore progress to higher levels of administration, may reflect the increase in organizational stress that they are exposed to, and this can lead to increased rates of burnout, compassion fatigue and other workplace negative conditions (Blake Hargrove et al., 2016).

Future Implications

This study indicates that men tend to remain in their positions longer, and this reflects the gendered gap in coping with work vicissitudes (Arman, 2020). Maximizing the retention of women at higher administrative levels within the workplace requires targeted support, particularly for senior HR workers who often are at the coalface of workplace trauma and conflict. Added organizational support can reduce the effects of the leaky pipeline and build resilience within the upper management, and women in particular (Marcassa, 2022).

CONCLUSION

This study shows the importance of suitable demographics as a potential data-sectioning tool in quantitative surveying. It shows that demographics can help the surveyor to understand better whether data capture is representatively spread across the targeted domain. It shows how even a few aspects of demographic data capture, such as age and job duration, can offer beneficial insights - particularly when undertaking quantitative studies.

This study highlights the gender disparity in the human resources profession workforce. Although dominated by females, there is a gender pay gap per capita within the profession, with a bias towards males. This can be explained by the middle and upper management structure, with a bias towards males, which can be explained in two ways: the increased propensity of females to suffer from negative workplace conditions, particularly when they feel professionally unfulfilled, leading to increased staff turnover rates and males remaining in their positions longer than females. This disparity persists despite an implicit promotional bias towards females who are promoted faster than males. This failure to retain females leads to gender bias favoring males in upper management. In human resources, the problem, therefore, is not one of female recruitment but instead of retention and fulfilment issues that lead to females exiting the promotion pipeline, increasing the proportion of males in upper management through time despite positive discrimination.

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