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Due to new mandatory disclosure laws which require businesses with over 250 employees to reveal gender pay gaps, women in the United Kingdom are finding out how little money they are making in their careers compared to their male counterparts.  Women are incredibly angry about the issue, but some are fearful about speaking out because they fear it will cost them their job. Many women are disappointed but not surprised about the situation, but some women have left their jobs in frustration over the pay gap.

When asked about why the pay gap exists, Ellie Schemenauer from the Women’s and Gender Studies department at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater says that parental leave is a huge factor in the issue.  Since women leave work for a longer time than men to take care of their children, they are less likely to receive promotions or advance in the workplace as a result of their absence.  Since parenting is gendered, meaning women take care of the children more than men do, women leave the workplace more than men and as a result men are more likely to advance in the workplace.

This relates to the fact that men are typically the people who are in hiring positions, and how they typically hire those who are like them.  Schemenauer discusses how leadership is often gendered. Authoritative men are traditionally respected and seen as powerful, and as a result their ideas are listened to and their voices are heard.  On the other hand, authoritative women are seen as unnecessarily snappy and rude, which means that their ideas are not taken into consideration like their male counterparts are and they are silenced.  This allows men to dominate over women.

Schemenauer discusses that a way to close the pay gap would be for men and women to take equal amounts of leave off from work when having children and to have a better life/work balance across the board.  Schemenauer also discusses how when looking at poverty rates, women are disproportionately poorer than men. Thus, when you’re working to close the pay gap you’re working to lessen poverty among women.

Anne Hamilton from the International Studies department at UW-Whitewater suggests another reason that the pay gap exists is because when women were first entering the workforce, they were more interested in getting their foot in the door than they were about pay.  As a result, employers were able to get away with paying their male employees more than their female employees. She also discusses the differences in male dominated work compared to female dominated work. In comparing “maintenance” work to “cleaning” work, they are both very similar.  However, maintenance is dominated by men and cleaning is dominated by women, and as an occupation, maintenance workers make more money.

On a similar note, Schemenauer discussed how the pay gap differs in terms of racial identity and not just gender identity.  Women of color have been paid less than their white counterparts, which is due to racial stereotyping. Women of color are seen as less competent than their white counterparts, which makes the pay gap even worse for them.  Also, women of color have dominated lower paying fields than those of white women.

Schemenauer suggests that for the pay gap to close, there would have to be a massive shift in who is taking which jobs.  Many men would have to switch their occupations and areas of expertise to those of traditionally female dominated positions like teaching, caretaking, etc. and many women would have to switch their occupations and areas of expertise to those of male dominated positions like engineering, mathematics, etc.  This shows how the pay gap cannot just be closed overnight, but will take time.

Hamilton discusses that in the public sector, salaries are published and it is easy to see what certain individuals in certain occupations are making.  In the private sector, individual salaries are not announced and are usually kept to oneself. She suggests that part of the solution to closing the pay gap would be more transparency in seeing what other individuals are making.  In this sense, the United Kingdom is one step closer to closing the pay gap, despite the fact that women are still furious about it. Now that salaries are able to be seen by anybody, the United Kingdom can work to see what tactics work best in their case to achieving a closed pay gap.

Citations:

Hamilton, Anne W. Interview. By Rachel L. Charniak. 13 Apr. 2018.

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