

# Exploring Human Resources beyond Gender Stereotypes: A Textual Analysis

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**Abstract** — This research paper explores the phenomenon of Human Resources (HR) being a female-dominated field, investigating the historical, social, and economic factors contributing to this gender disparity. The study examines statistical data and trends over the past few decades, highlighting the steady increase in the proportion of women in HR roles compared to other business functions. It considers the potential impact on career progression for women within HR and beyond. The findings underscore the need for broader organizational and societal changes to address gender stereotypes and promote diversity across all business areas. This study contributes to the ongoing discourse on gender roles in the workplace and offers recommendations for fostering a more balanced and inclusive professional environment. Additionally, the paper investigates how societal gender norms and expectations influence career choices, leading to a higher representation of women in HR roles. It also considers the implications of this gender imbalance on organizational decision-making, workplace culture, and career advancement opportunities for both men and women.

**Keywords:** Human Resources (HR), Gender Stereotypes, Textual Analysis

## I. INTRODUCTION

Human Resources (HR) as a profession has long been recognized as a pivotal component of an organization's success. It plays a critical role in talent hunting, recruitment, employee relations, and overall organizational development. This profession is also predominantly famous due to its demographic composition, being mainly female.

HR has always been a female-dominated arena, with 60% of HR roles being filled by women applicants. Even though HR hiring is not done with specific gender in mind, there is a push for gender diversity from top management that eventually works in favor of women HR professionals. For years, the number of women applicants has been higher than men, and the exact reason for female dominance in the HR field may not be attributed to a single cause but rather an amalgamation of various business, psychological, societal, and cultural factors (People Matters).

According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), there has been an 8% growth in the number of managerial positions held by women, increasing from 72% in 2016 to a staggering 80% in 2021.

Historically, HR roles have been associated with skills and attributes credited to women, such as empathy and communication. These stereotypes may have subconsciously affected both the hiring processes of companies and the career choices of women. Cultural and societal norms contribute significantly to this scenario. The nurturing presence is one of the societal expectations placed on women, which can explain the trend of female dominance in this field.

Economically, HR provides a healthy work-life balance and flexibility, which help balance professional and personal responsibilities. The prevalence of women in HR positions is not a mere theoretical phenomenon but a consistent pattern across different regions and even countries.

This study utilizes and is backed by both primary and secondary data. We have used pre-existing research papers and conducted our own surveys for this study.

By examining the social, economic, and cultural factors, the aim of this study is to understand why Human Resources is a female-dominated occupation. Additionally, this paper investigates how educational and professional pathways funnel more women into HR compared to other business positions.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The field of Human Resources (HR) has long been noted for its significant female representation. This literature review examines the historical context, contributing factors, and implications of this gender dynamic, with a focus on understanding why HR is predominantly female and what this means for the industry and workforce.

Historically, the HR profession evolved from roles traditionally seen as extensions of women's societal roles, such as caregiving and nurturing (Kirkpatrick). During the 20th century, as HR functions began to formalize, women increasingly occupied these positions, leveraging their skills in communication and relationship management (Cohen).

Eagly and Karau argue that people evaluate others more favorably when their characteristics match societal expectations for their gender. This Role Congruity Theory implies that women are perceived as more suitable for HR roles because these positions align with feminine traits such as empathy and communication. Consequently, women are more likely to be hired and promoted within HR, perpetuating the gender imbalance (Eagly and Karau).

According to Social Role Theory, societal roles and expectations shape the behaviors and traits considered appropriate for each gender, leading to the development of different skills and attributes over time. This social conditioning is deeply ingrained and perpetuates stereotypes about gender roles (Eagly and Wood).

The Gender Schema Theory suggests that individuals internalize societal gender norms and expectations, which shape their perceptions, behaviors, and career choices. According to this theory, a gender schema is a cognitive framework that organizes information and influences how people perceive the world, including their own capabilities (Bem).

## III. OCCUPATIONAL SEGREGATION

By definition, occupational segregation is a pattern where men and women are more commonly employed in particular

occupations or sectors. However, it is more than just a separation of the genders; it also represents a rigid stereotype.

Historically, men were typically involved in physically demanding work, which aligned with societal perceptions of masculinity, while women were confined to domestic or low-paid jobs. It was always believed that women were homemakers and men were the breadwinners.

In the last few decades in India, there has been a gradual increase in women's participation in every field. Women comprise around one-fourth of the labor force and around one-fifth in the corporate sector.

The Human Resources sector is often female-dominated, with an average of 60-75% of employees being female. However, women are still underrepresented in leadership positions. The dominance of women in HR may reinforce traditional gender norms that associate women with supportive, nurturing roles, while men are seen as leaders and decision-makers.

For employees, occupational segregation often leads to wage gaps and financial vulnerability. Women are frequently concentrated in lower-paying jobs, impacting job satisfaction, and leading to a reduced talent pool and higher employee turnover.

#### IV. FEMINIZATION OF CERTAIN PROFESSIONS

The feminization of certain professions refers to the increasing participation of women in occupations historically dominated by men. This shift has occurred in fields such as teaching, nursing, social work, and administrative roles. The feminization of roles brings challenges like the devaluation of these professions, lower wages, and less prestige compared to male-dominated fields. Men may experience stigma or discouragement from entering these fields due to stereotypes (Wegrzyn).

The association of certain professions with women can reinforce traditional gender roles and stereotypes, making it harder for women to break into male-dominated industries or advance in their careers.

As more women enter a profession, wages may decline relative to other fields, often due to societal perceptions that women's work is less valuable, contributing to the gender wage gap.

The HR field has undergone significant feminization over the past few decades, with women now representing a substantial majority of the workforce in this profession. This shift has had numerous implications for the role and perception of HR within organizations.

The feminization of HR has contributed to a more empathetic and people-oriented organizational culture. HR departments, dominated by women, often prioritize employee engagement, diversity, and inclusion initiatives. However, HR is sometimes perceived as being for the "soft and delicate," reducing the talent pool and diminishing the value of this field.

Additionally, feminized professions often face stereotypes and biases that limit career advancement and reinforce traditional gender roles. The feminization of professions highlights the complex relationship between gender, labor, and societal values.

#### V. HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF HR ROLES

To understand the historical development of HR roles, the factors contributing to their feminization, and the association of HR with femininity, we explore these themes through a case study of the Ford Motor Company.

Ford Motors was founded in 1903 by Henry Ford and was credited as a pioneer in early HR practices, including welfare schemes such as the \$5 workday in 1914, which aimed to reduce turnover and improve productivity. The company's personnel department was responsible for hiring, training, and maintaining employee records, marking a significant step in the formalization of HR functions.

One of the key areas where HR has had a strategic impact at Ford is talent management. Ford's HR department developed comprehensive talent management programs, including leadership development, succession planning, and employee engagement initiatives. HR has also played a crucial role in shaping Ford's organizational culture. As the company navigated various challenges, including economic downturns and technological disruptions, HR fostered a culture of innovation, collaboration, and resilience.

Moreover, HR's involvement in labor relations has been critical in maintaining positive relationships with unions and avoiding costly labor disputes. This helped the company maintain a stable workforce.

HR has been instrumental in shaping Ford's success. As the automotive industry continues to evolve, HR at Ford will need to adapt to new challenges and opportunities to ensure that the company remains a leader in the global market.

#### VI. IMPACT OF GENDER NORMS AND BIASES ON CAREER CHOICES

Using a survey conducted as a primary source, responses were gathered from 40 individuals across India, with a demographic split of 20 males, 18 females, and 2 non-binary participants. The respondents represented a variety of occupations, including 9 students, 6 in managerial roles, 6 in Human Resources (HR), and the remainder in other professions.

Out of the 40 participants, 25 had never considered pursuing a career in HR. Their disinterest stemmed from finding the job description unappealing, perceiving themselves as lacking the necessary skills, or viewing HR as a profession predominantly suited for women. This reflects existing stereotypes that may discourage a broader demographic from entering the HR field.

In contrast, the remaining 15 participants either worked in or had considered a career in HR. Their reasons for interest included proficiency in communication, strong soft skills, work-life balance, job flexibility, and networking opportunities, which made HR appealing to this group.

The survey explored respondents' perceptions of gender composition in HR departments. When asked about the gender makeup of HR roles, 65% of participants believed HR is primarily female-dominated, while 28% thought the composition was more balanced. This suggests a prevailing belief that HR is a female-oriented profession.

A follow-up question asked whether positive stereotypes are associated with women in HR. Sixty-five

percent of respondents agreed, citing traits such as higher emotional intelligence (EQ), superior soft skills, and a naturally nurturing or approachable nature. Additionally, many believed HR jobs offer more flexibility, which contributes to the perception that women dominate the field. However, a concern was raised that HR is sometimes viewed as a profession exclusively for women, reinforcing a narrow understanding of who can thrive in the role.

The survey also addressed strategies to enhance gender diversity in HR. Responses emphasized the need for equal pay, breaking gender stereotypes, ensuring equality and non-discrimination, providing merit-based incentives, and expanding the scope of HR tasks to attract a more diverse talent pool.

When asked whether rebranding the HR profession could help attract a more diverse group of talent, including men, 55% of participants responded positively. They believed rebranding HR to focus on broader talent management could open up the field to a wider range of candidates.

In conclusion, the survey reveals significant gender-related perceptions and stereotypes surrounding HR as a profession, with many respondents associating HR with women due to certain soft skills and flexibility. At the same time, there is a clear call for greater gender diversity, with suggestions for equal pay, rebranding, and targeted initiatives aimed at attracting men.

## VII. Conclusion

This research project sheds light on the entrenched gender disparity within the HR profession, where women have historically been overrepresented. Through an analysis of both primary and secondary data, this study identifies the complex interplay of societal norms, gender stereotypes, and organizational practices that perpetuate this imbalance. The feminization of HR, attributed to soft skills such as empathy and communication, reflects long-standing gender expectations and biases.

Moreover, the research highlights how the prevailing association of HR with women impacts the profession, both positively and negatively. While it contributes to a nurturing workplace culture, it also limits gender diversity, narrows the talent pool, and restricts career progression for men and women alike. The economic and organizational consequences of such occupational segregation include wage disparities and underrepresentation in leadership roles for women in HR.

The study also reveals that societal gender norms significantly influence career choices, further perpetuating the cycle of women dominating HR roles while men are discouraged from entering the profession. There is an urgent call for organizational and societal reforms to break these stereotypes and promote a more diverse workforce in HR. Recommendations such as equal pay, merit-based incentives, gender-neutral initiatives, and rebranding HR to attract a wider talent pool—including men—are essential to achieving this goal.

In conclusion, fostering gender diversity in HR will require systemic change and a rethinking of traditional gender roles. By addressing these challenges, organizations can

promote a more inclusive environment, ultimately benefiting both the profession and broader business operations.

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