

Toward Inclusive Hiring: Policy Pathways for Addressing Gender Bias in Lebanese Job Advertisements

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Abstract

Despite global strides towards inclusivity, job advertisements often reinforce traditional gender roles, notably in developing countries like Lebanon, where such biases are prominently displayed in roles ranging from low-skill positions to executive levels. This paper examines the persistence of explicit gender bias in job advertisements within Lebanon, exploring its implications for gender equality and economic productivity. The study adopts a mixed-methods approach, utilizing a literature review and a case study analysis of 297 job listings from Dubizzle Lebanon, which reveals a significant prevalence of gender-specific wording that limits professional opportunities for women and perpetuates societal stereotypes. The findings underscore the challenges posed by Lebanon's inconsistent enforcement of anti-discrimination laws and the cultural entrenchment of gender roles, which together foster a labor market skewed against equitable gender participation. Finally, the paper proposes comprehensive policy reforms aimed at legal, educational, and organizational restructuring to address and mitigate gender bias. The objective is to align Lebanon's employment practices with international gender equality standards, thereby enhancing both societal equity and economic performance.

Introduction

In today's labor markets, job advertisements do more than just solicit applications; they also subtly propagate societal norms regarding gender roles. Despite the global push toward gender equality, explicitly gendered phrases like "Female Secretary Needed: Preferably young; organizational skills are essential" and "Male Manager Required: Must possess strong leadership qualities" remain prevalent, particularly in developing countries (Helleseer et al., 2016). These descriptions constitute modern manifestations of age-old biases, where roles and expectations are often scripted long before the job postings are written.

Gender bias in job advertisements refers to the practice of specifying or implying a preference for a particular gender in the description of job postings. This can be explicit, as in statements like “male only” or “female preferred,” which not only restrict job opportunities based on gender but also suggest that certain groups are predisposed to succeed in roles that conform to their perceived gender profile (Davison & Burke, 2000). Implicitly, this bias is also perpetuated through gender-coded language that aligns with stereotypical masculine or feminine traits. For instance, terms like “aggressive” or “leader” often align with male stereotypes, whereas “supportive” or “caring” are frequently associated with female stereotypes (Hu et al., 2022). Such biases have far-reaching implications, extending beyond the immediate job matching process to reinforce gender stereotypes, limit professional opportunities for underrepresented groups, and undermine efforts towards gender equality and human rights (UNDP, 2023). By normalizing these biases, organizations violate equitable employment principles and hinder the progress toward the UN Sustainable Development Goal 5 for gender equality (UNDP, 2015).

In Lebanon, addressing explicit gender bias in job advertisements is crucial given the country’s distinctive socio-economic and political landscape. While the Lebanese government has formally committed to international standards like the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), practical enforcement of these norms across sectors remains inconsistent. On the one hand, local and international NGOs, such as the Lebanese Women Democratic Gathering and UN Women, actively advocate for fair hiring practices and raise awareness of gender discrimination in employment (UN Women, 2024). Additionally, multinational corporations and some larger local companies often lead by example with more progressive gender policies, driven by global corporate standards and external pressures. On the other hand, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs), which are vital to Lebanon’s economy, often maintain and propagate traditional gender biases in their hiring practices, particularly evident in lower-skilled jobs (UNESCWA, 2021). Such practices are cultivated by the failure of the government to oversee such discriminatory practices. These interactions among stakeholders highlight the challenges of transforming job advertisement norms in Lebanon, positioning gender as a significant aspect for policy reforms aimed at gender equality.

This paper investigates the persistent gender bias in job advertisements within Lebanon and advocates for integrated policy reforms that blend legal, social, and economic strategies to foster economic inclusivity and encourage a cultural shift toward gender equality. The literature review provides the theoretical framework and contextual background, while a case study of low-skill job listings on Dubizzle Lebanon applies these theories to the specific Lebanese context. This approach not only highlights the prevalence and impact of discriminatory practices but also proposes targeted recommendations for transformative actions that effectively bridge policy and practice.

Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods approach to specifically examine explicit gender bias in Lebanese job advertisements. A literature review establishes a theoretical foundation, focusing on the historical development, causes, and implications of explicit gender biases in labor markets globally. The empirical component involves a targeted

case study of 297 low-skill job listings from the online platform Dubizzle Lebanon, using content analysis to identify and quantify explicit mentions of gender preferences. This methodology ensures that the analysis is grounded in robust theoretical insights while directly addressing measurable aspects of gender bias in the local context.

Literature Review

Historical Development of Gender Bias in Job Advertisements

The history of gender bias in job advertisements reflects broader societal attitudes toward gender roles and has seen considerable evolution over the decades. Traditionally, job advertisements were explicitly gendered, aligning with the societal norms and legal frameworks that supported a gender-divided labor market. For example, during the early 20th century, it was commonplace in Western newspapers to encounter advertisements that overtly sought “strong men” for physical labor or “women with pleasant manners” for clerical or domestic roles, reflecting the stark gender roles prevalent at the time (Goldin, 2006). The rise of feminist movements in the mid-20th century and the introduction of equal employment opportunity laws marked a significant shift. These movements challenged traditional gender roles and advocated for inclusive employment practices. In the United States, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, particularly Title VII, made it illegal to discriminate in employment on the basis of sex, among other categories, which drastically changed how job advertisements were crafted (Charlesworth & Chinkin, 2000). Similar legislative changes were seen globally, such as the European Equal Treatment Directive, which aimed to eradicate gender discrimination in employment and vocational training (EU Directive 76/207/EEC).

However, in developing countries like Lebanon, the scenario is more complex. Despite progress in legal frameworks, explicit gender bias in job advertisements remains prevalent, particularly in lower-skilled roles. Job advertisements often directly specify gender, especially in sectors where gender roles are deeply entrenched, reflecting a lag in the cultural shift that has begun in more developed regions. For example, as illustrated in Figure 1, explicit gender preferences are prevalent in job postings across Lebanese online job platforms. This persistence of explicit bias underscores a significant challenge: aligning Lebanon’s employment practices with global gender equality standards (UNDP, 2015).

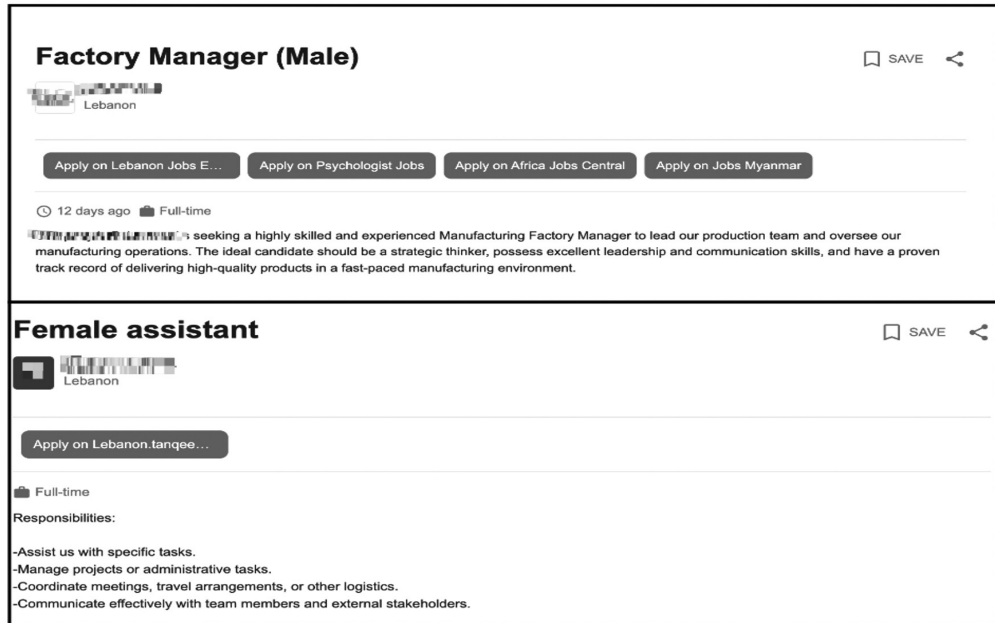
Underlying Causes of Gender Bias in Job Advertisements in Lebanon

To fully grasp why gender bias in job advertisements persists, especially in settings like Lebanon, it is crucial to explore specific underlying factors. These include deeply ingrained societal norms, organizational practices, and the legislative landscape.

Societal Norms and Cultural Expectations

Societal norms and cultural expectations are profound influencers of gender roles (Wood & Eagly, 2012), significantly affecting job advertisement content. In Lebanon, traditional views on gender roles are prevalent, where men are often seen as breadwinners and women as caretakers. These norms are not just social but are reinforced through media and education from an early age (UNDP, 2021). A study by Afioni and Karam (2019) demonstrated that these cultural expectations explicitly shape recruitment practices, with many employers in Lebanon preferring to align job roles with traditional gender roles. For example, job advertisements for positions

Figure 1: Common Gendered Advertisements on Lebanon's Job Sites



Source: Google Jobs, Lebanon, 2024

deemed physically demanding or requiring high mobility frequently discourage female applicants, reflecting and reinforcing the cultural narrative that such traits are predominantly male.

Organizational Practices

Within organizations, recruitment and job advertisement practices often mirror societal gender norms, consciously or unconsciously promoting gender biases. Lebanese companies, particularly SMEs that dominate the economy, frequently draft job advertisements that specify gender, believing it aligns with the 'natural fit' of the role. This practice is partly due to the absence of internal policies that mandate gender neutrality. A survey by the German Cooperation (2019) found that less than 50% of SMEs had formal policies addressing gender discrimination in hiring practices, illustrating a significant gap in organizational governance that allows gender bias to thrive.

Legislative Frameworks

The legislative environment in Lebanon provides a backdrop against which gender bias in job advertisements either flourishes or is mitigated. While Lebanon has ratified international agreements like CEDAW, local enforcement of laws that should prevent gender discrimination in employment is weak. The legal system often lacks specific provisions that penalize gender discrimination in job advertisements, and where laws exist, enforcement is inconsistent. This regulatory gap is highlighted in the report of Lebanon National Gender Observatory (2020), which shows that without stringent enforcement, even well-intentioned laws fail to make an impact on everyday business practices.

Impact of Gender Bias in Job Advertisements on the Lebanese Labor Market

The effects of gender bias in job advertisements in Lebanon are multifaceted, significantly impacting women's employment opportunities, reinforcing gender stereotypes, and affecting national economic productivity.

Limitation of Employment Opportunities for Women

One of the most direct consequences of gender-biased job advertisements is the limitation they impose on employment opportunities for women. In Lebanon, where gender-specific ads are not uncommon, many roles, particularly in sectors like engineering, technology, and upper management, are often explicitly advertised as male-preferred. This practice significantly narrows the professional avenues available to women, discouraging them from entering or advancing in these fields (Gaucher et al., 2011).

Reinforcement of Gender Stereotypes

Academic literature and empirical studies have consistently highlighted how gender-specific wording in job advertisements can discourage applicants of a certain gender and perpetuate gender stereotypes (Gaucher et al., 2011). Gender-biased advertisements reinforce harmful stereotypes through dictating what roles are appropriate for men and women. This cyclical reiteration of gender roles is insidious, as it contributes significantly to societal views that men are more suitable for leadership and physically demanding roles, while women are better suited to supportive and care-oriented positions (Hu et al., 2022). These stereotypes not only influence employment practices but also affect the educational and career choices of younger generations, perpetuating gender segregation in the workforce (Gadassi & Gati, 2009).

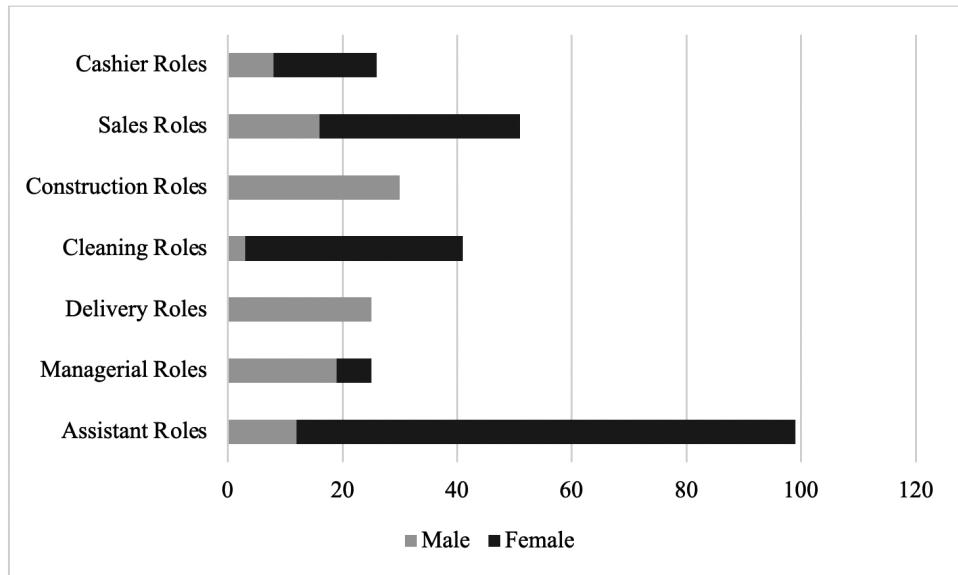
Economic Impact

The broader economic implications of gender bias in job advertisements are profound. By systematically excluding women from certain job sectors, Lebanon is not fully utilizing half of its human capital potential. For instance, increasing female employment and leadership roles to levels comparable with men could boost the national GDP by up to 9% (UN Women, 2023). Additionally, diverse workplaces are shown to be more innovative and productive, suggesting that reducing gender bias in job advertisements could have significant economic benefits for individual companies as well as for the broader economy (Hofhuis et al., 2016).

Case Study: Explicit Gender Bias in Job Advertisements on Dubizzle Lebanon

This case study seeks to identify and analyze explicit gender preferences within job advertisements on Dubizzle Lebanon, a platform predominantly featuring low-skilled job listings, over the course of May 2024. Upon reviewing and categorizing 1,846 job advertisements, it was found that 297 advertisements (16.08%) explicitly specified gender preferences. These advertisements were further classified according to job type and the particular gender preference stated, as detailed in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Breakdown of Gender Preferences in Job Listings on Dubizzle Lebanon



Source: Dubizzle Lebanon, May 2024

Figure 2 illustrates explicit gender preferences in job advertisements on Dubizzle Lebanon, revealing significant disparities across various job roles. Notably, assistant roles are predominantly advertised for female candidates, suggesting a persistent traditional stereotype that associates women with organizational and supportive tasks. This is contrasted sharply with managerial roles, where there is a clear preference for male candidates, reflecting more traditional views that still dominate leadership and decision-making positions in many industries.

Additionally, delivery and construction roles demonstrate a pronounced preference for male candidates, aligning with conventional views that deem physical and labor-intensive tasks as mainly suitable for men. For roles such as delivery and construction, there is also a pronounced preference for male candidates, which aligns with conventional views that deem physically demanding tasks and fieldwork more suitable for men. Cleaning roles, though also tending towards female preferences, show a somewhat lesser degree of gender bias compared to assistant roles. However, it still reflects the stereotypical association of women with caretaking and maintenance tasks.

Sales and cashier roles demonstrate a mixed pattern, with a slight inclination towards female candidates. This trend could be attributed to the stereotype that women possess better interpersonal skills, making them better-suited for roles involving direct customer interaction. Overall, the data from Dubizzle Lebanon underscores the ongoing presence of gender stereotyping in job advertisements.

Analysis: Impact of the Lebanese Labor Law on Gender Bias in Job Advertisements

Having established that gender bias in job advertisements is a widespread issue in Lebanon, it is imperative to delve into an analysis of the existing legal frameworks.

This examination aims to discern why these measures have fallen short in effectively promoting gender equality within the labor market. By scrutinizing the existing laws and their enforcement, or lack thereof, we can better understand the barriers to their effectiveness and identify potential areas for reform.

Lebanon's commitment to gender equality in employment is codified in its labor laws, particularly Article 26, as amended by Law No. 207 of 26 May 2000. This article explicitly prohibits discrimination regarding "type of work, amount of wage or salary, employment, promotion, professional qualification, and apparel." However, the adjacent Article 27 introduces specific restrictions on the types of work available to women, effectively creating a legal contradiction that impacts the implementation of gender equality. Article 27 lists several industries where the employment of women is explicitly prohibited, as shown in Table 1. These include potentially hazardous jobs such as underground work in mines, handling of explosives, and production of materials with high lead content, among others. The prohibition is grounded in concerns for health and safety, traditionally viewing these environments as unsuitable for women. This conflicts with the non-discrimination purpose of Article 26 and reflects underlying gender biases that assume women are less capable of handling physically demanding or hazardous jobs.

Table 1: Industries in which the Employment of Women is Prohibited in Lebanon

1. Underground work in mines, quarries, and all stone extraction work
2. Oven work for the melting refining and firing of mineral products
3. Silvering mirrors by the quicksilver process
4. Production and handling of explosives
5. Glass melting and firing
6. Oxyacetylene welding
7. Production of alcohol and all other alcoholic drinks
8. Duco painting
9. Handling, treatment or reduction of ashes containing lead, and de-silvering lead
10. Production of welding material or alloys with more than ten per cent lead content
11. Production of litharge, massicot, minium, white lead, mico-orange or lead subplate, chromate or silicate.
12. Mixing and pasting operations in the production or repair work of electric accumulators.
13. Cleaning workshops where the operations listed under Nos. 9, 10, 11 and 12 are carried out
14. Operating driving engines
15. Repairing or cleaning driving engines on the run.
16. Asphalt production
17. Tannery work
18. Work in warehouses of fertilizers extracted from excrement, manure, bone and blood
19. Cutting up animal carcasses

Source: Dubizzle Lebanon, May 2024

The presence of Article 27 makes the enforcement of non-discrimination policies as per Article 26 complex and inconsistent. Employers may interpret these

contradictions as legal backing to discriminate by excluding women from certain job categories, thus limiting women's employment opportunities and reinforcing gender segregation in the labor market. Additional factors contributing to non-compliance with Article 26 include weak monitoring mechanisms to ensure adherence to this law and violation penalties that are not sufficiently deterrent (Lebanese Center for Policy Studies, 2023).

This lack of rigorous enforcement renders the law largely symbolic, with minimal impact on actual employment practices. Economic instability further complicates the enforcement of gender equality in employment. During economic downturns, cost-cutting measures often overshadow equitable employment practices, with traditional gender roles influencing hiring and promotion decisions. This economic pressure may lead employers to prefer men for higher-paid and more secure roles, thereby exacerbating gender disparities in the workforce. Moreover, deeply ingrained cultural norms continue to dictate traditional gender roles within the workforce, despite the existing legal frameworks. These cultural factors pose significant barriers to the practical application of laws like Article 26, as employers and broader societal attitudes may not fully support or understand the importance of gender equality.

Policy Recommendations

Given the gap between the legal framework and its implementation, there is a critical need for targeted policy interventions. To effectively address the issue of gender bias in job advertisements within the Lebanese labor market, the involvement of multiple stakeholders is essential. The governmental level requires a holistic strategy to diminish and eventually eradicate gender bias from employment practices. A pivotal initial step is the comprehensive reform of existing labor laws, particularly to rectify the contradictions found between Article 26 and Article 27. This legal reform should be spearheaded by a collaboration of labor law experts, human rights organizations, and independent advisory bodies to ensure the new legislation is unbiased, forward-thinking, and resistant to political manipulation. Additionally, the government should prioritize the implementation of robust enforcement mechanisms, including regular audits and stringent penalties for non-compliance with gender equality standards.

Investment in the education and sensitization of employers is also critical. The government should mandate gender sensitivity training for all HR professionals and business leaders, funded and facilitated through public-private partnerships. This training should aim to reduce both explicit and implicit gender biases, promoting a more inclusive hiring environment. The potential of these strategies is evident in the findings of Mihaljević and Müller (2022) which highlighted the effectiveness of these policies in promoting gender equality in online job postings in Germany. To further this agenda, collaboration with international organizations that have successfully implemented gender-sensitive employment practices can provide valuable insights.

At the institutional level, companies, especially those in male-dominated industries, should commit to enhancing gender diversity across all levels of employment, including senior and executive roles. The establishment of internal audits and transparent reporting on gender diversity statistics would help monitor progress and hold companies accountable. Firms should also ensure that all job advertisements are

vettted for gender neutrality by trained professionals, a process that could be supported by the development of automated tools to detect biased language.

For individual HR professionals and hiring managers, it is imperative to adopt and rigorously apply gender-neutral language in job advertisements and throughout the hiring process. Training modules developed by educational institutions, in partnership with industry leaders, can aid in this transformation by providing up-to-date training on best practices for inclusive hiring. Engaging in community outreach programs to educate about gender bias in job ads can also raise awareness broadly within the industry.

Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated that explicit gender bias in job advertisements remains a significant barrier to gender equality in the Lebanese labor market. Despite legal advancements and societal shifts towards greater gender inclusivity globally, Lebanon continues to exhibit pronounced disparities in how job roles are advertised, particularly in lower-skilled positions. The analysis of job advertisements from Dubizzle Lebanon has highlighted that a substantial proportion still explicitly specifies gender, thereby perpetuating outdated gender roles and restricting employment opportunities based on gender. The persistence of these practices not only undermines Lebanon's commitments to international gender equality standards but also impedes the country's economic and social development. To move forward, it is imperative that Lebanon implements comprehensive legal reforms and enforcement measures to eradicate explicit gender biases from job advertisements. Furthermore, education and awareness campaigns are crucial in shifting cultural perceptions and norms to support these changes. By aligning local employment practices with global standards and actively promoting a cultural shift towards genuine gender inclusivity, Lebanon can foster a more equitable labor market. Such efforts are essential not only for advancing gender equality, but also for enhancing the overall economic productivity and social cohesion of the nation. The findings and recommendations of this study contribute to the ongoing dialogue on gender equality and provide actionable steps for policymakers, employers, and civil society in Lebanon to undertake transformative changes.

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