

Abstract

South Africa is said to display one of the most progressive constitutions in the world.¹ The Right to Equality is the backbone of the fundamental law of the country and yet gender equality in the workplace is still contested to be a myth for the average South African woman. This is a qualitative desktop research study that takes an interdisciplinary approach in investigating if the various affirmative action measures and equity policies post-1994 have in reality enabled the advancement of women's equality in academia. It is now two decades into the new democracy post-1994. Therefore, South Africa should be in a position to look back and take stock of whether or not gender equality still remains a myth in academia.

Drawing from various salient research, even global literature stipulates that although much has been done to combat gender inequality so little progress has been made.² Regardless of how high one stands in the world and looks out into the workplace horizon, specifically in academia, women still have relatively little decision-making power in organisations.³ In the South African context, it is evident that the most progressive legal policies and affirmative action measures (transformation processes) exist in theory but not so much in practice.

Nonetheless, the gap lies in the implementation processes, which come at a high cost for universities.⁴ In that, for them to invest in the development of female academics they have to adopt the implementation of strategies that address the needs of female academics holistically.⁵ However, there are sociological ills, which cannot be divorced from gender stereotyping, cultural norms, attitudes and behaviours that perpetuate gender inequalities. More so because these facets are mostly interwoven in patriarchy and at times are practised subconsciously, as societal norms dictate that men are superior to women.⁶ As illustrated in the iceberg theory, this highlights that gender inequality is perpetuated mostly by the hidden cultures and practices within our society.⁷ Thus, more often than not affirmative action policies tend to take a back seat when it comes to addressing issues of gender inequality in the workplace.

Key terms: affirmative action, human rights, gender equality, academia, women, legal perspectives, sociological perspectives, transformation and interdisciplinary approach

⁸ Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996

⁹ M McGregor 'Affirmative Action: A Right or Defense?' (2003) 1 *SALJ* 64, 66.

¹⁰ Ibid 290.

¹¹ R Smith 'Work - family Spill Over Revisited, is there hope for Marital Happiness in Dual-earner Families?' (2000) 66 (4) *SA* 603,620.

¹² E Hemingway 'The Iceberg Theory' <http://www.culture@work.com/kuber.html>

¹³ M Evans 'Gender in an Age of Austerity' (2013) 22(5) *WHR* 838, 840.

¹⁴ E Hemingway 'The Iceberg Theory' <http://www.culture@work.com/kuber.html>.