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EMPLOYMENT EQUITY AND THE ISSUE OF  
WOMEN: A CASE STUDY OF WALMART

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## 1- INTRODUCTION

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Since the last few decades the no. of women in working force all over the world has been multiplied. Women have walked into professions; occupations and managerial jobs, which were described as, reserved for women previously. This trend has increased the importance of training and education for women. Many of them are acquiring aspiring qualifications and skills required for positions in management. Despite the increasing number of women in the work force, attitudinal and institutional discrimination is still prevalent in the organisation. Wal-Mart is also one of these institution which remain in news for gender discrimination. This case study will examine the hypothesis that gender discrimination is prevalent in Wal-Mart despite a large number of women employees serving Wal-Mart.

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## 2- LITERATURE REVIEW

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In their book Koch and Irby (2002) defined gender equity as “to be fair and just toward both men and women, to show preference to neither, and concern for both”. According to Walker and Foote (2001) define *gender equity* within a culture to mean “all individuals having freedom from limits imposed by self or society that would prohibit both males and females from pursuing the fields of knowledge and skills suited for them.”

The above-defined equity cannot be seen in the organisations till today rather inequality is prevalent in most of the professions and organisations.

The results of a study undertaken by Friedman et al (2004), indicated that female faculty were less likely to be full professors than were men with similar professional roles and achievement. Large deficits in rank for senior faculty women were confirmed in logistic models that accounted for a wide range of other professional characteristics and achievements. Similar multivariable modelling also confirmed gender inequity in compensation. For both physicians and non-physicians, women’s salary deficits are greater for faculty with more seniority. Wal-Mart the world’s largest retailer has remained in news for the controversies regarding the discriminatory behaviour against

women employee and creating glass ceiling for women. In a suit against Wal-Mart the company was charged that it denies female workers equal pay and opportunities for promotion. (St. Louis Business Journal, 2004)

From above literature review it is clear that gender inequality and glass ceiling for women still exist in many organisations. This hypothesis will be tested in this study with special reference to Wal-Mart. A case study approach will be undertaken in order to gain deep and particular information regarding the problem.

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### **3- REASONS FOR CHOOSING THIS TOPIC**

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The fundamental reason for choosing this topic is that having searched literature I found that very few works have been conducted concerning the gender discrimination and inequity for women in management position. This fact has encouraged me to do this piece of work in order to contribute to the existing knowledge about this subject by adding a new point of view. In addition to that companies should understand the problem and respond to it properly. This has urged me to conduct this study in order to show the importance of equity and fair chance availability to women in order to recruit and appoint the most talented individual for key positions in the organisation.

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### **4- AIM**

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The aim of this research is to examine if information disclosed in annual reports is sufficient for shareholders in order to estimate and foretell the level of risk in the company they are investing in.

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### **5- OBJECTIVES**

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- To review the literature about this issue up till now.
- To improve the presentation of matter.

- Ensure that companies adequately address the problem of gender inequity.
- To help companies assess the merits attached with the provision of equal chances for women to work in managerial positions.

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## **6- METHODOLOGY**

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### **6-1- PHILOSOPHY**

Research is a fact finding activity (Dominowski, 1980). The aim of primary research is to make known something previously unknown to human beings and to advance human knowledge by making it more certain or better fitting; the aim is discovery (Elias, 1986). Kerlinger (1970) uses more technical language to define it as the systematic, controlled, empirical and critical investigation of hypothetical propositions about presumed relations among natural phenomena.

The research philosophy depends on the way we think about the development of knowledge and this thinking affects the way we do search (Saunders 2000). Whilst undertaking the research, a clear understanding of research philosophy is essential. Easterby-Smith et al (1997) identify three reasons why the exploration of philosophy may be significant with particular reference to research methodology: Firstly, it can help the researcher to refine and specify the research methods to be used in a study, that is, to clarify the overall research strategy to be used. This would include the type of evidence gathered and its origin, the way in which such evidence is interpreted, and how it helps to answer the research questions posed. Secondly, knowledge of research philosophy will enable and assist the researcher to evaluate different methodologies and methods and avoid inappropriate use and unnecessary work by identifying the limitations of particular approaches at an early stage. Thirdly, it may help the researcher to be creative and innovative in either selection or adaptation of methods that were previously outside his or her experience.

Two views about the research process dominate the literature: positivism and phenomenology which have an important part to play in business and management research (Saunders, 2000). Positivism is founded on the belief that study of human behaviour should be conducted in the same way that as studies conducted in the natural sciences. On the other hand phenomenology is concerned with the understanding human behaviour from the participant's own frame of reference (Hussey and Collis, 2003).

<b>Positivistic paradigm</b>	<b>Phenomenological paradigm</b>
Tends to produce quantitative data	Tends to produce qualitative data
Uses large samples	Uses small samples
Concerned with hypothesis testing	Concerned with generating theories
Data is highly specific and precise	Data is rich and subjective
The location is artificial	The location is natural
Reliability is high	Reliability is low
Validity is low	Validity is high
Generalises from sample to population	Generalises from one setting to another

**Figure 1: Features of the two main paradigms (Hussey and Collis, 2003)**

As the research philosophy depends fundamentally on the research question (Saunders 2000), the phenomenological philosophy has been chosen in this paper. This choice originates from that researcher's topic/question that aimed to investigate the gender discriminating practices of management of Wal-Mart by restricting the women to work at key position.

## **6-2- QUALITATIVE VERSUS QUANTITATIVE PRIMARY RESEARCH TECHNIQUES**

Qualitative techniques stand in contrast to quantitative techniques, the main difference being that quantitative techniques involve numerical data whereas qualitative techniques involve more abstract information. Data collected using qualitative techniques do not generally lend themselves to statistical analysis whereas quantitative techniques do (Veal, 1997).

A mixed methodological approach will be used in this research, because mixing methods enables the insufficiencies of both qualitative and quantitative methodologies research design to be overcome and can assist with data collection and data analysis (Jennings, 2001).

### **6-3- INTERVIEWING**

An interview is a purposeful discussion between two or more people. It enables you to gather valid and reliable data that are relevant to your research question and objectives. There are three types of interview; structured, semi-structured and unstructured interviews (Saunders et al, 2000).

A semi-structured interview model will be utilised as it:

- Is flexible, not standardised
- Enables me to gain an analysis, explanation and description in relation to my research aim and objectives.
- Facilitates the exploratory nature of my research
- Gives me an opportunity to discover issues I have not considered before

Interviews provide in-depth information about a particular research issue or question. They are designed to gather a broad range of information from a few units. They are the best method to get detailed answers about your questions. They are also the best method for advertising pre-testing, where researcher is seeking individual interpretations and responses. The main disadvantage of interviews is that they are

time consuming, and that the respondent may feel like ‘a bug under a microscope’ and be less willing to open up than in the relaxed atmosphere of a group (Research solutions 2005).

- A number of 10 women working in the Wal-Mart will be interviewed.

Choosing interviews for this stage of this part of the research was in order to get as much information as possible from the few people that will be interviewed. Interview questions will be compiled from the existing literature and detailed in relation to the research topic, aim and objectives

## 6-5- ANALYSIS

On their own, data are rarely used in their original form. Through the process of data analysis, value is added to the data to turn them into information. It is information rather than data which users especially policy and decision-makers are interested in (Uganda bureau of statistics, 2005). However this will be a very sensitive and critical stage in my research process as misinterpretation or over-interpretation is always a potential risk.

The process of data analysis in this research will include the following steps:

- Categorise the data collected. This can be done according to gender, origin, age... etc.
- Reading through the interviews carefully and coding them after the event in relation to the types of answers, themes and issues, and then categorising of response (keeping a note of what the codes refer to).
- Then by asking some questions like what are the answers that keep repeating, what are the deviations from these answers, and Are there



themes emerging? Contradictions? Then it would be possible to draw some relative generalisations.

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## **7- POSSIBLE LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH**

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- Lack of literature done so far concerning the disclosure of risk in annual reports might represents a major obstacle.
- Another limitation might be lack of time. The researcher will follow a hybrid approach in data collection, which will include interviews and questionnaires. Collecting data through these methods, analysing and demonstrating them is time consuming and the researcher does not have much time.
- There might be challenges in convincing to gain access to the relevant information required within the company I intend to research. Confidentiality has been a barrier before researchers. It is required to reassure the firm that all data and information collected will be treated in the strictest confidence.

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