Experts at Herzliya Conference call for progress in women’s employment

Problem is that women pursue ‘feminine jobs’ such as teaching and nursing, which have lower salaries, says IDC’s Tali Regev

*By DANIELLE ZIRI*

While more women than men study in Israel’s higher education system, they are not as present in the job market, according to panelists at the Herzliya Conference on Tuesday speaking on the economic resilience of women.

The session, which was moderated by Interdisciplinary Center Herzliya’s dean of law Prof. Sharon Rabin-Margaliot, included female speakers from the different backgrounds of economics, academic research and government offices.

Opening the discussion, Yafit Alfandari, the head of consumption in the finance sector and coordinator of gender statistics at the Central Bureau of Statistics, presented some data about ‘women employment’ in Israel in comparison to the other OECD countries.

Alfandari explained that the country is ranked in the bottom section of OECD nations in terms of women’s participation in the job market. This is also the case for Israeli men, but it is only due to the fact that a large portion of them belong to the haredi sector and do not work.

Israel also lags behind in terms of women serving in leadership positions. While on average one out of two women in OECD countries works as a manager, in Israel only one out of three occupies such a position.

“Women who work still remain the primary caregivers at home,” Dr. Tali Regev of IDC’s School of Economics said at the panel. “A woman who works won’t take on responsibility that interferes with her responsibility at home,” she added. “The average man doesn’t jump on the opportunity to do the laundry, wash the dishes or change diapers.”

Regev explained that while women’s family responsibilities may be one of the reasons why they are less present in the business world, another problem exists, namely that women tend to lean toward “feminine jobs” such as teachers and nurses, which, she said, are jobs that are less valued in society.

“The problem is that in these jobs that are considered feminine, you also earn less money,” she continued.

Vered Pear Swid, the head of the Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women, said during the session that the subject of women’s economic status concerns both men and women.

“Every dad, when his daughter graduates from college, wishes, like his wife, that her salary will be equal, whether it is in the public or private sector and that there won’t be any obstacles or glass ceilings and much less concrete or steel ones that exist across the world,” she stated.

Swid also said that the phenomenon of the glass ceiling can be prevented by fighting certain social norms.

“We have to educate towards this. We have to start choosing, from when they are very little, what stories we tell, what movies we show them on television,” she explained.

Vice President of Human Resources at Teva Pharmaceuticals Ilana Fahima explained that she sees the gap between women and men at work as an opportunity for improvement.

“Our job as a society is to take the opportunity, and the potential that exists in women, who are a very educated social group, and our challenge is to diminish the gap, create more availability and presence of women at work,” she told the audience.

Panelists also spoke about women’s representation in influential government positions and called for the Knesset to advance women in these roles.

Speaking at a different panel, Brig.-Gen. (res.) Eival Gilady, the chairman of Western Galilee College, said there was a “quiet revolution” happening in Israel’s universities.

“72% of the Arab students are female,” he stated. Figures released last week by the Central Bureau of Statistics put the figure closer to 67%.

That trend has a huge impact on Arab society, he said, explaining that the households of educated women look very different than others. Such households were more likely to resemble a typical Tel Aviv home, with women bringing in more wages and giving birth to fewer children.

*Niv Elis contributed to this report.*