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Gender-Based Pay Inequality in the Canadian Insurance Companies

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Abstract

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

The problem in this study was gender-based pay inequality among women at Canadian insurance companies. The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to understand gender-based pay inequality for women at Canadian insurance companies. Aigner's, Cain's, Arrow's, and Phelps' statistical discrimination theory guided the study. The theoretical foundation also included the human capital theory by Becker and Schultz. The research questions focused on understanding C-suite and V-level executives' lived experiences of gender-based pay inequality and identifying effective strategies that should be adopted to overcome the problem at Canadian insurance companies. This study used purposeful sampling to recruit 15 C-suite and V-level executives from Canadian insurance companies. Twelve participants were necessary to reach saturation. Inductive coding started after the transcript verification. A thematic analysis of the 12 transcripts helped to establish six themes: statistical discrimination; limited efficacy; gender equality policies; standard, fair, and transparent hiring and promotion practices; actively seeking women in leadership positions; and antioppression training. Participants stated that the women's remuneration was not congruent with their experience, education, training, or qualifications because of statistical discrimination. The implications for positive social change are that policymakers should ensure that gender pay equity laws get universally implemented in public and private companies on the federal and provincial levels. The policymakers at companies also need to adopt fair and transparent hiring and promotion strategies, implement antioppression training, and increase the quota representation of women in top-level positions and committees to influence positive social change further.

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my wife, Salimeh Afshin, who supported and

encouraged me to get my Ph.D. I also dedicate this work to Nasrin Hakim Zadeh, our

family's best friend, who cheered me all the time for my education; she passed away.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Gender-based pay inequity is a prevalent global problem despite the significant developments in the labor markets, increased modernization, advocacy for equality, and equal access to educational opportunities. This is valid in Canada because the nation is ranked eighth highest in gender-based pay inequality out of the 43 Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries (OECD, 2020). Therefore, the study assessed gender-based pay inequality in Canadian insurance companies.

Despite the increased advocacy and commitment to improving women's educational achievement and participation in the labor market, gender-based pay inequality across different industries exists globally. Notably, gender-based pay inequality is 10% lower in the public sector when compared to that in the private sector (Shi et al., 2019). Women's average remuneration is 86% and 76% of their male counterparts in the public and private sectors, respectively. The variance can be attributed to the fact that wages in the public sector are significantly regulated. In Canadian literature, most researchers attribute gender-based pay inequality to traditional factors such as women's career choices, educational levels, and job schedules (Buchanan et al., 2021). Conversely, after controlling for the workplace and human capital variables, there exist unexplained portions of the gender-based pay gap. For instance, in 2018, approximately 41.2% of women had a bachelor's degree in Canada, compared to 32.3% of men (Pelletier et al., 2019).

According to the Canadian Women's Foundation [CWF] (2019), approximately 10% to 15% of gender-based pay inequality is caused by discrimination or other

unexplained concepts. Additionally, Pelletier et al. (2019) found that 43.4% of the gender

gap narrowing between 1998 and 2018 was unexplained. For this reason, the purpose of

this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to understand gender-based pay inequality

for women at Canadian insurance companies. The first need for conducting this study

was that as of 2020, the gender-based pay inequality in Canada was 16.1% (OECD,

2020). The gender-based pay inequality indicates that women's economic inequality

exists across professional levels and industries and should be mitigated to eliminate the

social imbalance (CWF, 2019; Moyser, 2019). Second, when this study was developed,

no qualitative studies had been conducted using a phenomenological design to understand

gender-based pay inequality from the lived experiences of C-suite (CEOs and CFOs) and

V-level executives (vice presidents). In the majority of the current literature, researchers

have assessed the phenomenon from a quantitative perspective using recorded data from

Labor Force Surveys (LFS), Canadian Income Survey (CIS), and Longitudinal Worker

Files (LWF) (Fortin, 2019; Li et al., 2020; Moyser, 2019; Steffler et al., 2021).

Third, the problem has been attributed to bundled factors, including inconsistent

federal, provincial, and territorial legislation relating to equal pay in public and private

sectors (Fortin, 2019). The study's potential social implication was that the findings

provided advocates and policymakers who use the gender pay ratio as the primary

indicator of disparities in the labor market with suggestions on how to mitigate the issue.

Thus, understanding whether the gender-based pay inequality for women at Canadian

insurance companies was influenced by their position, experience, and educational

attainment was essential to different policies that can be adopted to promote equality

effectively (Fortin, 2019). This chapter contains a discussion on: (a) the background of the study, (b) the problem statement, (c) the purpose of the study, (d) research questions, (e) the theoretical foundation, (f) the nature of the study, (g) definitions, (h) assumptions, (i) scope and delimitations, (j) limitations, (k) significance of the study, and (l) summary and transition to Chapter 2.

Background of the Study

Gender-based pay inequity is a complex interdisciplinary historical problem (Fortin, 2019; Moyser, 2019; Pelletier et al., 2019; Petit & Tedds, 2020). Since the 1980s, industrialized and developed countries such as Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Sweden, and Germany have experienced a proliferation in top income inequality (Moyser, 2019). In Europe, Sanchez-Mangas and Sanchez-Marcos (2021) indicated that gender-based pay inequality evolved against women over the 5 years after graduating with degrees in business, law, social science, and economics. Although not all women earn less than men, the population in Canada earns 76.8 cents for every dollar a man makes (Moyser, 2019). In the United States, the gap is slightly lesser because it is estimated that women of all races earn, on average, 82 cents for every dollar a man makes (Center for American Progress, 2020).

Similarly, the pay gap is complex because women with the same experience, demographic, and social-economic background earn $7,200 less than their male peers annually (Moyser, 2019; Pay Equity Office, 2020). The pay gap is significantly wide among Indigenous, racialized, newcomers, and women living with a disability. Pelletier et al. (2019) found that female employees aged 25 to 54 years in 2018 earned 13.3%

($4.13) less per hour than their male counterparts (Moyser, 2019; Pay Equity Office, 2020). The gender gap is a 5.5% ($1.04) decrease in the hourly wage difference in 1998 (Moyser, 2019). The reduction in gender-based pay inequality between 1998 and 2018 was associated with an increase in women's educational attainment and a reduced number of men in unionized employment (Moyser, 2019; Pay Equity Office, 2020).

According to Pelletier et al. (2019), the prevailing gender-based pay inequality can be attributed to factors such as: (a) the excessive presence of women in part-time jobs, (b) distribution of both genders across industries, (c) the work experience, and (d) unobservable concepts such as gender-based biases. Treleaven and Fuller (2021) attributed pay secrecy as a factor limiting systemic and individual detection, thus supporting the importance of wage transparency. Gender-based pay inequality is consistent among the entire women population across different industries. For example, Cohen and Kiran (2020) found that Canadian women in the medical field are paid less than their male counterparts. The pay gap is neither associated with women working fewer hours nor inefficacy. Instead, the disparity can be attributed to systemic bias in hiring, societal structures, and promotion (Cohen & Kiran, 2020). Alon et al. (2020) studied the possibility that the COVID-19 outbreak had a considerable economic downturn in gender-based pay inequality during the decline and the subsequent recovery. The authors found that closures of daycare centers and schools had an enormous impact on working mothers. They found that the effect of the crisis on employed mothers will be persistent (Alon et al., 2020).

Boesveld (2020) conducted a study to indicate that gender-based pay inequality exists even in higher positions internationally. For example, more women who qualify as doctors in Canada and worldwide are paid less than their male associates. In a recent international survey, physicians in the United States, United Kingdom, Germany, France, Brazil, and Mexico reported similar gender-based pay inequalities. Female doctors in those countries make 20%–29% less than their male colleagues (Boesveld, 2020). Similarly, Steffler et al. (2021) added more evidence by indicating that gender-based pay inequality is a significant problem that requires bundled directed interventions to overcome. Petit's and Tedd's (2020) and Steffler et al.'s arguments are congruent because the researchers indicated a need to mitigate the structural barriers of systematic and institutional discrimination associated with gender-based pay inequality. Li et al. (2020) assessed the impact of a firm's hiring and remuneration-setting policies on the Canadian gender earning gap. The researcher's findings were congruent with other published literature that one-quarter of the 26.8% average pay gap between male and female workers could be attributed to firm-specific premiums (Li et al., 2020).

Although gender-based pay inequality exists across industries, it is prevalent in insurance companies. Women hold approximately 11% of C-suite executive jobs and 19% of board positions (STEMconnector, 2018). Women make up 46.5% and 85% of sales agents and claims/processing clerks (Roy, 2020). The recent literature shows that researchers do not pay attention to the ongoing gender-based pay inequality issues and accountability of Canadian insurance companies, making the problem a prevalent issue globally (Matitaputty & Davianti, 2020; Ozkazanc-Pan, 2019).

Schirle and Sogaolu (2020) studied the gender-based pay inequality among full-time working men and women in the private sector, Indigenous people, visible minority groups, and non-Indigenous men and women born in Canada and those who were not. In this study, researchers identified that women's hourly wages in the private sector were 27% less than men's in 2000. By 2019, the hourly pay inequality had narrowed to 19%. Authors found that most of the pay gap was associated with differences in men's and women's job characteristics. Sepulveda (2017) indicated that policymakers and corporate leaders are responsible for making and implementing laws and regulations to create a social protection system against gender-based pay inequality. Although social protection has increased worldwide, women still suffer from gender-based pay inequality (Sepulveda, 2017).

The study was focused on filling the gap in the literature on the influence of position held, experience, and educational attainment on gender-based pay inequality in Canadian insurance companies, specifically among C-suite and V-level executives. In addition, the study was needed to help identify the strategies and improvements that should be made to the current compensation policies at the federal, provincial, and territorial legislation levels to mitigate gender-based pay inequality, specifically in Canadian insurance companies.

Problem Statement

There was a problem in society and organizations. Specifically, the problem was gender-based pay inequality in Canadian insurance companies. Currently, women earn $4.13 less per hour than their male counterparts (Moyser, 2019; Pay Equity Office,

2020). As a result, there has been increased advocacy for equity in the workplace. However, gender-based pay inequality is persistent, especially with the inconsistent adoption of legislation concerning equal pay in insurance companies. This problem impacts women, specifically newcomers, Indigenous, and racialized women, because they earn less than 76.8 cents for every dollar a man makes (Moyser, 2019). Many possible factors are contributing to this problem, among which are: (a) the overrepresentation of women in part-time jobs, (b) the distribution of both genders across industries, (c) gender-based biases, (d) systematic and institutional discrimination structural barriers, (e) pay secrecy, and (f) ineffective policies (Fortin, 2019; Pelletier et al., 2019). The study contributed to the body of knowledge needed to address this problem by collecting lived experiences of C-suite and V-level executives to understand whether gender-based pay inequality was associated with the position held, experience, and education attainment. Also, the C-suite and V-level executives' lived experiences were used to understand the strategies adopted or implemented to mitigate the gender pay gap (Pay Equity Office, 2020).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to understand gender-based pay inequality for women at Canadian insurance companies. Gender-based pay inequality is the variance between men's and women's compensation (OECD, 2020). Although there are different approaches for calculating the pay gap, such as using average hourly wages, annual earnings, or median annual compensation, a consensus is that gender-based pay inequality exists. Therefore, hermeneutic phenomenological

research was applied to understand gender-based pay inequality among women at Canadian insurance companies (Ramsook, 2018). Hermeneutic phenomenology focuses on participant's lived experiences and allows researchers to emphasize the personalized interpretations of individuals in a specific situation or background. In the hermeneutic phenomenology approach, researchers use different methods to collect data, such as in-depth interviews, document analysis, and questionnaires with open-ended questions (Ramsook, 2018).

Research Questions

The following three research questions guided the study:

Research Question 1: What were C-suite and V-level executives' lived experiences of how employee position, educational level, gender, and experience influence their pay?

Research Question 2: What were C-suite and V-level executives' lived experiences of how effective the current strategies are in decreasing gender-based pay inequality in Canadian insurance companies?

Research Question 3: What were C-suite and V-level executives' lived experiences of the strategies adopted to decrease the gender-based pay inequality and ensure that remuneration is congruent with training, experience, and educational attainment?

Theoretical Foundation

The statistical discrimination theory and the human capital theory supported this study. Aigner and Cain (1977), Arrow (1973), and Phelps (1972) are attributed to have

developed the statistical discrimination theory in their respective seminal literature: *Statistical theories of discrimination in labor markets, the theory of discrimination,* and *the statistical theory of racism and sexism*. The theory is considered an alternative to the taste-based model. The statistical discrimination theory assumes that inequality in the workplace is caused by additional factors other than animus alone. The theory is based on the premise that workplace discrimination is caused by preferences and group characteristics as a proxy for determining productivity-related attributes (Aigner & Cain, 1977; Arrow, 1973; Phelps, 1972; Tilcsik, 2021).

Based on the statistical discrimination theory, employers initiate their beliefs on a group to make decisions about the individuals from the cohort (Tilcsik, 2021). The employers use observable groups with unobservable skills, helping them base their beliefs. Risk-averse employers with imperfect information might discriminate against groups with anticipated variance in productivity. Thus, employers who perceive women as less productive might compensate them at a lower rate than men, resulting in a disparity (Aigner & Cain, 1977; Arrow, 1973; Phelps, 1972; Tilcsik, 2021). An additional discussion of the theory is provided in Chapter 2.

The statistical discrimination theory was selected because it was a suitable framework for understanding discrimination in the labor markets. In their study, Tilcsik (2021) applied the theory to rationalize the discriminatory decisions made by employers. Bohren et al. (2019) provided additional evidence on the theory's applicability in explaining discrimination in the labor market. The statistical discrimination theory relates to the qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological study because it provides a scholarly

underpinning on the factors that result in the discrimination of women in terms of compensation. The statistical discrimination theory's premise is that beliefs influence an employer's decision about a cohort, supported by the use of employee position, educational level, gender, and experience as tenets in the second research question (Aigner & Cain, 1977; Arrow, 1973; Phelps, 1972; Tilcsik, 2021).

The second framework that guided the study was the human capital theory. The theory was developed through the collective efforts of various researchers. Becker (1993) and Schultz (1961) advanced the theory in their respective publications, *the economic way of looking at behavior* and *investment in human capital*. The theory was based on the premise that human capital is the skills and abilities people have gained through education and training (Becker, 1993; Schultz, 1961). The gained competencies are the foundation of their earnings. Therefore, the theorists assume that education is an investment that increases productivity and individuals' earnings. The theory's principles discussed in Chapter 2 are education and training (Becker, 1993; Schultz, 1961).

Aliu and Aigbavboa (2019) and Park (2018) supported applying the human capital theory in rationalizing why earnings should be based on knowledge, skills, attributes, and values, not discriminatory factors. The framework was congruent with the research approach because it allowed assessing C-suite and V-level executives' experiences to assume that pay should be based on educational attainment and experience. The human capital theory's assumption provided the foundation for the research question focused on understanding the strategies adopted or approaches

Canadian insurance companies should implement to ensure that pay is based on training, experience, and educational attainment and not discriminating factors.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework was derived from the statistical discrimination and human capital theories. In particular, gender-based pay inequality in Canadian insurance companies can be attributed to: (a) the overrepresentation of women in part-time jobs, (b) the distribution of both genders across industries, (c) gender-based biases, (d) systematic and institutional discrimination structural barriers, (e) pay secrecy, and (f) ineffective policies (Fortin, 2019; Pelletier et al., 2019). Hence, these factors may result in women's statistical discrimination, causing inequality in the workplace. Based on the human capital theory, education, training, and experience increase women's competencies and skills. In a perfect market, the education level, experiences, and skills should be congruent with compensation. Conversely, Canadian women's competencies, skills, and experiences are not congruent with their pay (Aigner & Cain, 1977; Fortin, 2019; Pelletier et al., 2019; Tilcsik, 2021).

The conceptualized concepts from the statistical discrimination and human capital theories underpin the research questions. The first research question was focused on assessing the influence of employee position, educational level, gender, and experience on women's pay, which are concepts related to the statistical discrimination theory and the human capital theory. The second research question focused on identifying the strategies adopted and their efficacy in decreasing the statistical discrimination-related factors that cause gender-based pay inequality in Canadian insurance companies.

Additionally, the third research question aimed to identify strategies that should be adopted to decrease statistical discrimination, ensuring pay is congruous with the human capital theory concepts, specifically training, experience, and educational attainment. The conceptual framework supported developing the interview questions because Questions 1 and 2, 3 to 5, and 6 to 10 are related to Research Queries 1, 2, and 3, respectively.

Nature of the Study

The study was conducted using a qualitative methodology and hermeneutic phenomenological design. Hermeneutic phenomenological design involves deriving common meaning from the participant's lived experiences (Husserl, 2014; Van Manen, 2017). The design was identified as suitable for the study for three core reasons. First, the design helped understand the common meaning from the lived experiences of C-suite and V-level executives on gender-based pay inequality and the strategies adopted or should be implemented to mitigate the problem (Husserl, 2014; Van Manen, 2017). Second, the approach supported the researcher's objectivity because the core focus was on the participant's lived experiences to answer the research questions. Third, a phenomenological design was congruent with the developed research questions based on *what* and *how* phrases (Husserl, 2014; Van Manen, 2017).

Qualitative Methodology Rationale

For five reasons, a qualitative methodology was selected as the most appropriate approach to guide the study. First, the approach was suitable for guiding the systematic inquiry of gender-based pay inequality from the C-suite and V-level executives' perceptions and experiences. It was expected that the respondents' lived experiences

would provide me with adequate data to derive meaning, and answer the research questions (Denzin & Lincon, 2017; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The study's population was top-level professionals who: (a) worked in Canadian insurance companies, (b) held C-suite or V-level executive positions, and (c) had experience in dealing with gender-based pay inequality. Second, the methodology was selected because it allowed me to collect in-depth responses on gender-based pay inequality from C-suite or V-level executives. Gender-based pay inequality is a complex phenomenon underpinning the appropriateness of the qualitative inquiry in understanding the concept.

Third, the approach supported collecting primary data from the participants using researcher-developed semistructured interviews (Thelwall & Nevill, 2021). Fourth, in qualitative studies, the sample size is usually small, and there is no consensus on the most appropriate figure. Conversely, leaders in the discipline have proposed a sample of 8 to 10 participants as adequate in a qualitative study where data are gathered using interviews (Vasileiou et al., 2018). Fifth, it is anticipated that a sample size of 15 participants was appropriate. The concept of saturation was applied to determine the actual sample size (Vasileiou et al., 2018).

Data Collection

The study conducted interviews with C-suite or V-level executives using one-on-one Zoom sessions to collect adequate data on the participant's lived experiences. The recorded audio data were transcribed into separate Microsoft Word documents and sent to the participants for verification. Inductive coding started after transcript verification

(Denzin & Lincon, 2017). NVivo 12 was used to manage the data and facilitate the analysis process.

The study focused on gender-based pay inequality that was assessed from three perspectives. First, I focused on understanding the C-suite or V-level executives on how the employees' position, educational level, gender, and experience influence their pay. The second was understanding Canadian insurance companies' strategies to mitigate gender-based pay inequality. The third was to explore the participant's lived experiences on the approaches that should be implemented to mitigate the gender-based pay gap and ensure that remuneration is congruent with training, experience, and educational attainment.

Definitions

C-suite executives or C-level executives: C-suite executives are the professionals in a company's top category responsible for making core decisions (Northwest Executive Education, 2020).

- C-suite or C-level executives were participants in the study (Northwest Executive Education, 2020).

- The professionals include the chief executive officer (CEO), chief operating officer (COO), chief finance officer (CFO), chief technology officer (CTO), chief human resource officer (CHRO), chief marketing officer (CMO), and chief green officer (CGO).

Gender pay gap or gender-based pay inequality: Gender-based pay inequality is the average difference between men's and women's earnings adjusted for hours worked (OECD, 2020).

- Gender-based pay inequality can refer to the difference in the median or mean hourly, weekly, or annual earnings (Pay Equity Office, 2020).

- In the study, the gender gap or gender-based pay inequality was the phenomenon of focus.

Lived experience: Originated from philosophy, phenomenology presents a unique opportunity for capturing the lived experience of participants (Frechette et al., 2020).

V-level executives: V-level executives are the professionals who support C-suite executives (Betterteam, 2022).

- The professionals include vice presidents and heads of human resources, finance, and administration departments. In this study, V-level executives were participants (Betterteam, 2022).

Assumptions

The study was based on ontological and methodological assumptions (Al-Ababneh, 2020). The ontological assumption was that the C -suite and V-level executives' lived experiences would be subjective because the professionals may have perceived the phenomenon of gender-based pay inequality differently. The assumption applied to this study because the participant's responses were the sole data source. A methodological assumption was that the selected qualitative methodology and hermeneutic phenomenological approach were the most appropriate design for assessing

the focus problem. Another methodological assumption was that the researcher-developed semistructured interviews would help collect adequate data to answer the research questions (Al-Ababneh, 2020).

Scope and Delimitations

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to understand gender-based pay inequality for women at Canadian insurance companies. The study's scope was to understand C-suite and V-level executives' lived experiences on: (a) how employee position, educational level, gender, and experience influenced their pay; (b) the efficacy of the implemented strategies in mitigating the gender-based pay inequality; and (c) the approaches that can be adopted to eliminate the problem. The scope was achieved by sampling the participants via purposeful and extensive sampling and interviewing them using a researcher-developed interview guide containing semistructured questions. The population of focus was limited to at least 15 C-suite and V-level executives working in Canadian insurance companies. The study was associated with two delimitations. The first delimitation was that C-suite and V-level executives from other sectors were excluded from the study. However, women across all industries experience gender-based pay inequality (Li et al., 2020). A second delimitation was that this study's theoretical foundation was provided by the statistical discrimination theory and the human capital theory, despite the availability of other frameworks, such as the taste-based inequality theory. Taste-based inequality theory is founded on the concept that the privileged cohort in society has a distaste for other groups, and the workers with an advantage may require compensation for the distress (Tyrowicz & van der Velde, 2021). Applying the theory

could have helped explain that the gender-based pay inequity emerges from men demanding more compensation for sharing the same workspace as women.

Conversely, the theory was not selected because it assumes that gender-based pay inequality is founded on emotional and irrational motives. Based on the literature, it has been identified that policies and pay secrecy influence the problem (Fortin, 2019; Pelletier et al., 2019). Thus, the rationale for selecting the statistical discrimination theory was based on the premise that distaste is not the sole contributing factor to gender-based pay inequality (Tilcsik, 2021). The study's transferability was promoted by providing detailed descriptions to ensure that the results were meaningful to other readers (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). A comprehensive description of the problem, purpose, research questions, methodology, and findings may increase the readers' understanding of how the results or recommendations apply in their context. In addition, this study's findings may be transferable to other financial service sectors, such as investment corporations and banks (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Limitations

The study was associated with four limitations related to the methodology. The first limitation was that a qualitative method was perceived as subjective compared to quantitative and mixed methods approaches because the focus was on the participant's lived experiences. Also, the findings were analyzed and interpreted by one researcher. I mitigated the limitation by promoting the study's dependability, which involved performing inductive coding and deriving the findings from the participant's responses (see Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

The second limitation was the anticipated small sample size associated with the methodology. Generally, qualitative studies' sample sizes are usually small because the approach requires researchers to perform in-depth assessments of the collected data. The limitation was mitigated by recruiting participants up to saturation (Denzin & Lincon, 2017; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). A third limitation is that the researcher's conceptual perception, assumptions, values, and preconceptions might have affected the interpretation of the findings (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). I overcame any bias related to: (a) gender, (b) age, (c) race, (d) immigration status, (e) sexual orientation, (f) personal experiences, (g) political affiliation, and (h) professional beliefs through reflexivity. Specifically, I maintained a diary and considered the committee members' feedback on the possible areas where bias arose.

A fourth limitation was that qualitative studies are challenging to replicate, hindering their transferability. Conversely, the limitation was mitigated by providing detailed descriptions of the recruitment process, participant's attributes, and the data analysis procedure (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). I do not have any conflict of interest to declare. Also, as a man, I did not have a personal bias toward the pay gap because inequality does not directly affect me. I overcame the bias by basing all the findings on the participant's responses.

Significance of the Study

Gender-based pay inequality is a persistent issue globally and nationally (Treleaven & Fuller, 2021). The situation in Canada is similar to other developed countries, such as the United States, where gender-based pay inequality is a social and

management problem (CWF, 2019). Gender-based pay inequality is a standard indicator of women's economic inequity (CWF, 2019; OECD, 2020). Thus, this study had significance to practice, theory, and positive social change.

Significance to Practice

The study was significant to management because there was a need to mitigate the systematic and institutional discrimination structural barriers associated with gender-based pay inequality (Petit & Tedds, 2020). The gender-based pay inequality results in the perception of unfairness, causing low organizational commitment, reduced job satisfaction, increased turnover rates, and a rise in the firm's transactional cost (Van der Lippe et al., 2019). Thus, identifying a solution for mitigating the problem was one initiative closer to decreasing the adverse outcomes the management experience because of gender-based pay inequality.

Significance to Theory

The study was anticipated to increase the applicability of the statistical discrimination theory in understanding how gender in Canadian insurance companies affects wages. Also, the study was anticipated to advance the application of the human capital theory in explaining why women experience pay inequality despite their educational attainment, training, and experience. Applying both theories was expected to increase the available literature based on the frameworks.

Significance to Social Change

There has been an increased call to action for gender equality and women empowerment (Moyser, 2019). The study may be significant to social change because it

focused on identifying the strategies that should be adopted to mitigate gender-based pay inequality. Gender-based pay inequality disproportionately impacts low-income, newcomers, Indigenous, and racialized women (CWF, 2019). Gender-based pay inequality can be attributed to women's poverty and health issues that affect children. Thus, since pay inequality is neither associated with women working fewer hours nor inefficacy but with systemic bias in hiring, societal structures, and promotion, there was a need to mitigate the problem (Cohen & Kiran, 2020). The implications for positive social change are identifying strategies Canadian insurance companies can implement to mitigate systemic and discriminatory structural barriers. Eliminating the obstacles could support sustainable livelihood among women from Indigenous, newcomers, racialized, and living with a disability cohort, decreasing the peril of poverty and underpinning transformative change (see Petit & Tedds, 2020).

Summary and Transition

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to understand gender-based pay inequality for women at Canadian insurance companies. The focus problem in this study was gender-based pay inequality in Canadian insurance companies. The pay inequality results in economic inequality for women, specifically Indigenous, newcomers, racialized, and those living with a disability. Researchers have supported that gender-based pay inequality is a global and national problem attributed to the excessive presence of women in part-time jobs, gender-based biases, systematic and institutional discrimination, structural barriers, and ineffective policies.

Statistical discrimination and human capital theories provided the study with academic support. The research was conducted to mitigate the problem by interviewing C-suite and V-level executives. Applying a qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological study allowed data collection using interviews. The collected data helped address the problem statement and answer the research questions. Answering the research questions helped to understand how women's position, educational level, gender, and experience influence their pay, the efficacy of implemented strategies in mitigating gender-based pay inequality, and the approaches adopted to overcome the problem.

Chapter 2 contains a detailed literature review on gender-based pay inequality and discusses the theoretical foundations. The additional sections addressed in Chapter 2 are the literature search strategy, literature review of critical concepts, and summary and conclusions. Chapter 3 contains a discussion on the qualitative research methodology.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Gender-based pay inequality is a complex societal and organizational issue associated with numerous factors, such as the excessive presence of women in part-time jobs and unobservable concepts of gender-based biases (Moyser, 2019; Steffler et al., 2021). The qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological study was conducted to understand gender-based pay inequality among women in Canadian insurance companies. In their studies, Fortin (2019), Li et al. (2020), Moyser (2019), and Steffler et al. (2021) supported that gender-based pay inequality is a prevalent global problem. Canada has a 16.1% gender-based pay inequality, ranking eighth out of the 43 OECD nations (OECD, 2020). The gender-based pay inequality is more significant among racialized women, who earn 40% less than white men in the nation (Canadian Labor Congress, 2021). In addition, the pay inequality is at 45%, 55%, and 56% for Indigenous women, immigrant females, and women with a disability, respectively (Canadian Labor Congress, 2021).

Women in Canadian insurance companies are less likely than men to occupy top-level positions, despite their academic achievements, training, and experience (CWF, 2019; Moyser, 2019). The underrepresentation and pay inequality signify the economic disparities experienced by women, which has increased advocacy to mitigate the problem (CWF, 2019; Moyser, 2019). However, gender-based pay inequality in Canadian insurance companies is not adequately assessed. The study contributed to the body of knowledge needed to address this problem by collecting lived experiences of 15 C-suite and V-level executives to understand whether gender-based pay inequality was associated with the position held, experience, and educational attainment. Also, the C-suite and V-

level executives' lived experiences were used to understand the strategies adopted or implemented to mitigate gender-based pay inequality (Pay Equity Office, 2020).

The second chapter was categorized into four sections: Literature search strategy, theoretical foundation, literature review of key concepts, and summary and conclusions. In addition, each section contains subsections that support a detailed discussion of the required components. A transition to Chapter 3 was also provided at the end of the chapter.

Literature Search Strategy

A detailed literature search was conducted on different electronic databases. The first database was EBSCOHost, accessed via Walden University's Library. Additionally, a search on Google Scholar was performed to ensure that all current literature on gender-based pay inequality was identified. EBSCOHost and Google Scholar helped me access Springer, Sage, Elsevier, Taylor Francis, and Wiley Online articles. I also assessed the reference lists of the retrieved articles to identify related, current, and applicable studies to the study topic.

Keywords and Search Terms

The literature search was conducted using the following keywords: Gender-based pay inequality, gender pay gap, Canada, insurance companies, C-suite executives, V-level executives, experience, educational attainment, training, policies, gender-based bias, economic inequality, racialized women, Indigenous women, women with disabilities, and part-time jobs. Boolean operators AND/OR were applied to combine the keywords and develop search phrases, helping expand the yield. The developed search terms included

the following: (a) "gender-based pay inequality OR gender pay gap AND Canada AND insurance companies," (b) "Gender-based pay inequality OR gender pay gap AND racialized women," (c) "Gender-based pay inequality OR gender pay gap AND Indigenous women," (d) "Gender pay gap AND women with disabilities," (e) "Gender-based pay inequality AND educational attainment," (f) "Gender-based pay inequality AND training OR experience," (g) "Gender-based pay AND policies," (h) "Gender pay gap AND gender-based bias," (i) "Economic inequality AND gender pay gap," (j) "C-suite executives AND V-level executives AND gender pay gap AND insurance companies," (k) "Gender-based pay inequality AND part-time jobs."

Iterative Search Process

The iterative literature search process was performed on EBSCOHost or Google Scholar. On Google Scholar, the same search terms were used after placing a 5-year limit yielding 6,100 (a), 5,610 (b), 16,000 (c), 17,200 (d), 17,000 (e), 17,300 (f), 17,200 (g) 17,700 (i), 0 (J), and 9,430 (k). When performing the search, I used the publication date as an initial filter on EBSCOHost. The following search terms were "Gender-based pay inequality OR gender pay gap AND Canada (a)," "Gender-based pay inequality OR racialized women (b)," "Gender-based pay inequality OR Indigenous women (c)," "Gender pay gap AND women with disabilities (d)," "Gender-based pay inequality AND educational attainment (e)" "Gender-based pay AND policies (f)," "Gender pay gap AND gender-based bias(g)," "Economic inequality AND gender pay gap (h)," C-suite executives AND V-level executives AND gender pay gap AND insurance companies

(i)," and "Gender-based pay inequality AND part-time jobs (j)" yielded 71 a, 36 b, 501 c, 1 d, 4 e, 246 f, 6 g, 175 h, 5 i, 0 j, and articles.

Articles were considered eligible for inclusion in the literature review if they were: (a) published between 2017 and 2021, (b) written in English, (c) available in full text, and (d) relevant to the study in terms of the key concepts or methodology. Retrieved studies that fulfilled the inclusion criteria were excluded if published in predatory journals and not peer-reviewed. Applying the inclusion-exclusion criteria, assessing the titles, and reviewing the abstracts helped retrieve 43 articles synthesized in the literature review. There was sufficient preceding scholarly literature, dissertations, and conferences on gender-based pay inequality based on the search yield.

Theoretical Foundation

Statistical discrimination and human capital theories guided the study. The sources for the statistical discrimination theory are *statistical theories of discrimination in labor markets, the theory of discrimination, and the statistical theory of racism and sexism* (Aigner & Cain, 1977; Arrow, 1973; Phelps, 1972; Tilcsik, 2021). The statistical discrimination theory assumes that prejudice is founded on rational decisions by individuals guided by an empirically informed assessment of peril and productivity. According to the theorists, women earn less because they are discriminated against based on unfavorable gender stereotypes held by co-workers and/or employers. Based on the theory, stereotypes are activated when there is limited and ambiguous information (Aigner & Cain, 1977; Arrow, 1973; Phelps, 1972; Tilcsik, 2021).

The imperfect observability of the workers' productivity is assumed to be performed by employees who are considered rational information-seeking individuals who use aggregate cohort attributes to make decisions such as wage rates (Aigner & Cain, 1977; Arrow, 1973; Phelps, 1972; Tilcsik, 2021). The theory's core prepositions are that discrimination is founded on peril and information cost instead of market function or tests for discrimination. For instance, a risk-averse employer aiming to maximize profit might offer women lower wages or less desirable roles based on their information about the group's characteristics. Unlike the taste-based theory of inequality founded solely on animus, statistical discrimination occurs when a group differs in characteristics associated with a specific situation. For example, men are less likely to take fewer sick days than women. Consequently, an employer determining the wage payable to a man or woman can use the individuals to represent the cohort (Tilcsik, 2021).

The second framework, the human capital theory, was developed through the collective efforts of various researchers. Becker (1993) and Schultz (1961) advanced the theory in their respective publications, *the economic way of looking at behavior* and *investment in human capital*. The theory is based on the premise that education and training make people more productive. The theorists assume that more productive individuals are more employable and have higher earnings. Thus, the investment in training and education can be measured by a person's lifetime earnings (Becker, 1993; Schultz, 1961).

According to the theory, the productivity-associated discrepancy between men and women, such as skill, education, and experience, can be used to explain the

productivity differences between women and men (Becker, 1993; Schultz, 1961). A critique of the theory is that education does not always make an individual more productive. The theory supports the concept of labor market discrimination in explaining gender-based pay inequality, specifically among men and women with equal skills, education, and working experience (Becker, 1993; Schultz, 1961; Tao, 2018).

Previous Application of the Theories

Wiedman (2019) used the statistical discrimination theory to explain the impact of congruity bias on gender-based pay inequality. Wang and Gunderson (2019) advanced the applicability of the statistical discrimination theory in explaining that employers engage in statistical discrimination, meaning that they judge individuals based on the perceived performance of the members in their cohorts. Wang and Wong (2021) assessed the underlying discriminatory mechanisms that result in gender inequalities in the labor market. Applying the statistical discrimination model and using the age-specific fertility rate (ASFR) to determine the probability of women taking parental leave. The women's and men's earnings were also assessed. Based on the data, the researchers identified a gender-asymmetric correlation between the ASFR and young employees before their prime fertility age. On average, ASFR was negatively related to young women's but not men's earnings. The negative association was prevalent in female workers employed in the private sector. Applying the theory helped the researchers explain that employers in private companies support stereotypes and discrimination (Wang & Wong, 2021). Thijssen et al. (2021) applied the statistical discrimination theory to understand the bias experienced by individuals from ethnic minority cohorts. The authors argue that personal

analytical information does not influence group productivity (Thijssen et al., 2021). In another study, Tilcsik (2021) advanced the evidence on the applicability of the statistical discrimination theory by applying the framework to rationalize the gender-based pay inequality made by employers.

Adillon-Boladeres et al. (2017) provided empirical evidence on gender-based pay inequality in the starting salaries of newly graduated workers. The researchers applied the human capital theory to provide their study with theoretical support and explain the gender-based pay inequality among equally qualified and experienced graduate students (Adillon-Boladeres et al., 2017). In a different research, Bilan et al. (2017) explained that the human capital theory provides quantitative indicators such as experience, gender, and educational level that explain the gender pay gap. Tao (2018) applied the theory to describe those women who earn less than men because of their lower levels of human capital investment.

The Rationale for the Selected Theories

The statistical discrimination theory was selected as an appropriate theory because it is a labor market framework that supports explaining the persistent gender-based pay inequality (Wang & Wong, 2021). In addition, the theory assumes that a deviation causes differences in the anticipated productivity value or reliability among groups. Consequently, the theory is the most appropriate framework to explain the occurrence and persistence of gender-based pay inequality despite more women having higher educational attainment, specifically at the tertiary level (Tilcsik, 2021; Wang & Wong, 2021). The human capital theory was selected because of two core reasons. First, it

justifies why gender-based pay inequality should not exist among men and women with

equal education attainment, experience, and skill (Adillon-Boladeres et al., 2017; Tao,

2018). Second, the theory complements the human capital theory because it supports that

the gender-based pay inequality between men and women with equivalent or similar

experience, educational attainment, and skills can be explained using labor market

discrimination (Becker, 1993; Schultz, 1961; Tao, 2018).

Theories Relevance to the Study and Research Questions

The statistical discrimination theory is relevant to the study and the second

research question because it can be applied to explain gender-based pay inequality

(Tilcsik, 2021; Wang & Wong, 2021). For instance, an employer may perceive that

women are more likely to be quiet than peers with similar educational attainment and

experience. Thus, employers can use the women's turnover rate as an unreliability factor.

Consequently, an employer may pay women less or exclude them from jobs requiring

firm-specific training or positions. The theory is relevant to the study and the second

research question because they are based on the discussed example. The theory is

anticipated to support its applicability to an employee's position, educational level,

gender, and experience influence their pay (Tilcsik, 2021; Wang & Wong, 2021). The

human capital theory is relevant to the study and the first, second, and third research

questions because it can be applied to explain how skill, education, and experience result

in gender-based pay inequality between men and women. The qualitative study was

anticipated to advance the theory's applicability in explaining the strategies adopted to

ensure that men's and women's pay is congruent with their skills, education, and experience.

Conceptual Framework

The statistical discrimination theory and the human capital theory provided a scholarly underpinning for understanding gender-based pay inequality in Canadian insurance companies. The concepts relevant to this study were imperfect information and stereotypes (see Figure 1). According to the statistical discrimination theory, employers; poor observation of women's productivity results in subjective decisions about their wages (Aigner & Cain, 1977; Arrow, 1973; Phelps, 1972; Tilcsik, 2021). Therefore, based on the imperfect information and perceived stereotypes, it can be rationalized that insurance companies offer women lower wages and less desirable jobs based on imperfect information. Such as, men are less likely to go on parental leave or take sick days compared to females (Aigner & Cain, 1977; Arrow, 1973; Phelps, 1972; see also Figure 1; Tilcsik, 2021).

Additionally, in the human capital theory, individuals with similar education qualifications, skills, and experience should be compensated equally (Becker, 1993; Schultz, 1961; see also Figure 1). Conversely, women with equal education qualifications, skills, and experience in Canadian insurance are often compensated lower than their male counterparts with similar competencies (Moyser, 2019; Pay Equity Office, 2020). Consequently, imperfect information and stereotypes could be conceptualized as the cause of the discrimination resulting in gender-based pay inequality.

According to the developed conceptual framework, the adoption of imperfect information, acceptance of stereotypes, lack of objectivity, and less desirable jobs could be attributed to the gender-based pay inequality in Canadian insurance companies. The benefit of applying the conceptual framework was that it provided the study with an academic foundation for interpreting the phenomenon of focus. Accordingly, the identified concepts supported rationalizing the persistence of gender-based pay inequality in Canadian insurance companies. Also, the concepts derived from the statistical discrimination and human capital theory supported the literature search and development of interview questions.

Figure 1

Statistical Discrimination-Human Capital Conceptual Framework

Note. The figure represents the conceptual framework derived from the statistical discrimination and human capital theories.

Literature Review

This literature review of key concepts are categorized into the following five sections: (a) constructs of interest, methodology, and scope of the study; (b) approaches to the problem and the strengths and weakness; (c) rationale for selection of the concepts; (d) synthesis of studies related to the key concepts and phenomena; and (e) synthesis of studies related to the research questions. Sections b, c, d, and e contain subsections that facilitate the comprehensive discussion of the concepts. The concepts discussed in each section were retrieved from the topic, research questions, purpose, and problem statement.

Constructs of Interest, Methodology, and Scope of the Study

The identified literature was focused on one core interest: gender-based pay inequality. The researchers applied qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods methodologies in the studies. Most of the published and identified studies were conducted using a quantitative methodology. Only one study conducted using the mixed-methods approach was identified. The studies conducted using qualitative methods were limited, signifying a gap in the literature.

Bertrand et al. (2019), Brower and James (2020), Card et al. (2020), Casarico and Lattanzio (2019), Cortes and Pan (2019), Fortin (2019), Fuller (2018), Heywood and Parent (2017), Jehn et al. (2019); Li et al. (2020), Momani et al. (2019), Nafilyan (2020), Wang and Gunderson (2019), and Wiedman (2019) are some of the reviewed studies where the authors conducted their research using a quantitative methodology. Even though the researchers used a quantitative method, which, if applied, could not have

allowed me to achieve the intended purpose, address the problem statement, and

sufficiently respond to the research questions, the author's findings are within this study's

scope. For example, Fortin conducted their study using a quantitative methodological

approach. Although the approach enabled the researchers to identify the causal

relationship between gender-based pay inequality and implemented policies, the findings

do not adequately assess the problem (Fortin, 2019). Similarly, in their quantitative study,

Bertrand et al. performed statistical tests to identify the impact of a board representation

quota on female labor outcomes in numerals. Even though the approach can be

considered more objective when compared to a qualitative methodology, the study's

scope was limited as the findings do not provide an in-depth comprehension of the

concept assessed.

Barnetson (2018) conducted a mixed-methods study by collecting quantitative

data from Alberta's provincial government's collective bargaining agreement listing and

performed eleven interviews. The qualitative aspect of the quantitative methodology

enabled the researcher to recruit an adequate sample size, where saturation was achieved

at eight participants. In addition, conducting the study using a mixed-methods approach

helped the researchers mitigate the weaknesses of using qualitative or quantitative

methodologies (Barnetson, 2018).

Saari et al. (2021) conducted a qualitative study to assess archival text by a union.

The methodology enabled the researchers to evaluate comprehensively the data

facilitating the identification of information in addressing the problem statement and

recognizing that the politicization of the process hinders the efficacy of gender equality

policies. In another study, Kohout and Singh (2018) conducted 23 interviews with marginalized populations. The researchers performed a thematic analysis, helping to understand the experiences of marginalized women in fulfilling equal pay. Applying the qualitative methodology allowed the researchers to recruit participants from traditionally underserved or vulnerable populations. Data were collected using semistructured interviews, supporting the collection of detailed responses. Applying a phenomenological approach helped the researchers assess the participant's lived experiences, supporting the appropriateness of the selected study (Kohout & Singh, 2018).

In another qualitative methodology, Nichols (2018) applied a phenomenological design to understand the employment experiences of 30 newcomer women in Toronto. The methodology helped the researchers conveniently sample participants to recruit an adequate sample size. The sampling techniques helped the researchers recruit participants up to saturation (Nichols, 2018). Applying the methodology also allowed the researchers to use semistructured interviews to collect data over the telephone or Skype for 30 to 60 minutes. The researcher's included verbatim responses from the participants, supporting the credibility of the findings (Nichols, 2018). Kemper et al. (2018) provided more evidence on the appropriateness of the qualitative methodology in facilitating in-depth data collection. The researchers applied MAXQDA version 11 (MAXQDA is a software package for qualitative and mixed methods research) to facilitate the qualitative data analysis. The researchers also included the respondent's verbatim responses in the findings section, supporting the results' reliability (Kemper et al., 2018).

Approaches to the Problem and the Strengths and Weakness

Different approaches to mitigate gender-based pay inequality have been proposed

in the literature. The approaches include gender equality policies, unionization, and an

increased representation quota. The section contains a discussion on the strengths and

weaknesses of the identified approaches for mitigating gender-based pay inequality.

Gender Equality Policies

Fortin (2019) critically assessed existing gender equality policies in Canada. The

researchers indicated that the most common approaches for mitigating gender-based pay

inequality focus on job-established pay disparities by fostering a balance between pay

and work or enhancing comparable worth. In addition, the policies focus on pay

disparities at similar hierarchical levels in an organization. In practice, six provinces in

Canada have implemented pay equality laws that extended to the public sector in Quebec

and Ontario in the 1990s (Fortin, 2019). A strength of the approach is that the rules focus

on mitigating the pay discrepancies arising from horizontal occupational gender

segregation. The goal is to eliminate any pay gap between predominantly female and

male job classes as it supports compensation based on skills or qualifications,

responsibility, mental and physical effort, and working conditions. Conversely, a

weakness is that the assumption that lower relative female wages occur in predominantly

female job classes is not transferable to Canada's case. Thus, the current pay equality

laws are not adequately targeted because they do not focus on mitigating the pay

differences resulting from vertical segregation within a setting and industry (Fortin,

2019).

Saari et al. (2021) also acknowledge that implementing gender equality policies can mitigate the pay gap. Conversely, the policies can be politicized during the implementation process. In the study, the researchers identified that the effective implementation of gender equality policies is hindered by corporatist regimes promoting the status quo (Saari et al., 2021). The overall weakness of a majority of the gender equality policies is that they do not focus on the causes of pay inequality; instead, they are outcome-oriented (Antonie et al., 2020; Nafilyan, 2020; Saari et al., 2021).

Enhancing the legislative safeguards could be a practical approach to promoting pay equity; however, the implemented policies had mixed impacts (Momani et al., 2019). Adopting the strategic controls under the Pay Equity Act has resulted in a slight decrease in employment ratios. Conversely, the legislation made no discernible impact on the gender pay gaps. Hence, the legislation can be perceived as a significant administrative burden because its compliance is associated with decreasing the gender pay gap (Momani et al., 2019). Additionally, Polachek (2019) indicated that additional policies promoting daycare utilization and those aimed at increasing women's lifetime work could help decrease the gender wage gap. However, despite the issues associated with the Pay Equity Act, it advocates for the principle of equity in remuneration for work of similar value. Also, the act has the potential to decrease gender inequalities because it supports the recognition that disparity in remuneration is an amalgamation of structural issues and gendered practices.

Increased Representation Quota

Bertrand et al. (2019) assessed the impact of the 40% representation of each gender on public limited companies' boards. As reported by the researchers, a weakness of the approach is that it did not benefit the women employed at the companies affected by the quota. On the other hand, a strength of the approach is that it fosters improvements in the labor market outcomes for young females with business degrees who are in their early career changes. Conversely, the improvements might not have resulted from the representation quota reform (Bertrand et al., 2019). In another study, Schneider et al. (2021) identified that the increased representation of women on executive boards is affected by gender-based pay inequality. An assessment of 359 board members in 27 firms helped identify an 11% gender-based pay inequality prevalent among them, primarily if they were recruited from outside the firm. Thus, an increased representation does not explicitly result from equality, supporting the need to enhance women's bargaining position (Schneider et al., 2021).

Unionization

Card et al. (2020) evaluated the changes in the relationship between wage inequality and unionization in Canada and the United States. A strength of unionization is that it decreases economy-wide inequality by less than 10%. The impact is more significant in the public than in the private sector. In this study, Card et al. countered previous findings that a limitation of unionization is that it only helps decrease inequality among men but not among women. The authors found that disaggregating by sector eliminates the difference in the unions' impact on wage inequality between men and

women. The authors indicated that the core difference in union impact was between the private and public sectors (Card et al., 2020). Bruns (2019) added to the discussion by indicating that a decrease in union coverage and firm-specific wage determination during collective bargaining agreements are associated with the prevalent pay inequality. The researchers supported the importance of unions in decreasing the discrepancy in male and female premiums.

Unlike Card et al. (2020), Legree et al. (2017) argued that union-friendly legal environments could benefit professional women in public service more than those employed in private services. Masso et al. (2020) identified that the prevalent gender-based pay inequality could be attributed to low minimum wages, lack of unions, and inadequate bargaining skills among women. Barnetson (2018) indicated that most unionized rural workers are employed in large public organizations. From a different perspective, it was identified that there is limited unionization in private companies. The interviews with trade unionists helped the researchers identify the difference in unionization between employees in private and public companies: unequal distribution of capital, preference for adequate bargaining units, and rural workers' spatial embeddedness (Barnetson, 2018).

The Rational for Selection of Gender-Based Pay Inequality

The rationale for selecting gender-based pay inequity as a concept in this study was supported by the prevalence and the increased emphasis on the need to mitigate the issue (Jewell et al., 2020). Smith et al. (2017) indicated that gender-based pay inequality is an underestimated issue whose implications have not been adequately considered. In

the published literature, researchers have supported that gender-based pay inequality is a

prevalent global issue that affects women in all industries (Litman et al., 2020; Wang &

Gunderson, 2019; Wiedman, 2019). Likewise, the difference in earnings between the

public and private sectors is negligible and statistically insignificant. The causes of

gender-based pay inequality include statistical discrimination, motherhood penalty,

household responsibilities, gender-specific age, consequences of parenthood, part-time

wage, and heterogeneity in the firms' policies (Antonie et al., 2020; Coudin et al., 2018;

Farja et al., 2020; Heywood & Parent, 2017; Li et al., 2020; Wang & Gunderson, 2019).

In this theme, the causes and prevalence of gender-based pay inequality were provided,

supporting the rationale for selecting the issue as a concept in the study.

Litman et al. (2020) explained that although the modern labor market is

characterized by increased flexibility, improved anonymity, and comparatively

homogeneous work, gender-based pay inequality is still evident. The researchers argued

that, on average, women's hourly earnings are lower than men's by 10.5%. The factors

associated with gender-based pay inequality are work heterogeneity, resulting in

occupational segregation, discrimination, and women's propensity to select jobs with

lower advertised hourly pay. However, gender-based pay inequality persists despite the

absence of labor segregation, overt discrimination, inflexible work provisions, adequate

experience, and sufficient education attainment (Litman et al., 2020).

Wiedman (2019) explained the role of congruity bias as a cause of gender-based

pay inequality. The author assumed that discrimination is more likely to occur when

ambiguity about performance exists, and stereotypes are prevalent (Wiedman, 2019).

Heywood and Parent (2017) advanced the findings by indicating that gender-based pay

inequality and the motherhood penalty are associated. Specifically, the number of hours

wives work in married couples with children is significantly and negatively associated

with their husbands (Heywood & Parent, 2017). Wang and Gunderson (2019) supported

that the male-female pay gap is associated with differences in household responsibilities

between the two groups. The findings are congruent with the human capital theory

because it was identified that higher earnings were associated with unionization, hours

worked, higher education, tenure, job permanency, and organization size (Wang &

Gunderson, 2019).

Antonie et al. (2020) used hourly and weekly wages from the Canadian labor

force survey (LFS) from 2000 and 2018, focusing on full-time and part-time jobs.

Assessing the data helped identify those part-time salaries are lower than full-time

compensations. Also, the majority of the part-time workers were women. Consequently,

the abovementioned findings decrease the female aggregate wage, resulting in higher

gender-based pay inequality. Therefore, selecting full or part-time jobs is a core

determinant of gender-based pay inequality, making it essential for strategies focused on

mitigating the causes of the imbalance to be implemented (Antonie et al., 2020).

Nafilyan (2020) aimed to understand whether gender discrepancy in their

willingness to commute can explain gender-based pay inequality. The researcher focused

on hourly pay and commuting time, helping identify that commuting time significantly

impacts women's decision to leave a job. In contrast, the hourly rate significantly

influences men's decisions. The researcher proposed understanding why women accept

lower-paying jobs for increased flexibility and decreased commutes (Nafilyan, 2020).

Farja et al. (2020) offer an additional perspective on gender-based pay inequality by

arguing that a lower labor market mobility among women relative to men is an essential

explanatory factor that causes pay differences between and within organizations. Coudin

et al. (2018) explained that the heterogeneity of the firm's pay policies and women-

specific wage consequences of parenthood could be attributed to gender-based pay

inequality. Coudin et al. (2018) added more evidence to the argument by indicating that

mothers prefer working in firms with flexible working hours and close to their homes.

The women's gender-specific choices result in wage losses that increase the mothers'

probability of exiting the labor market.

Johnston et al. (2020) posited that during the COVID-19 pandemic, women in

households with children younger than 15 years spent twice as many additional hours

weekly engaging in childcare. Notably, before COVID-19, women in Canada devoted

twice as many hours as men to childcare roles; hence, the pandemic execrated inequality

(Johnston et al., 2020). Likewise, Fuller and Qian (2021) identified that the COVID-19

pandemic exacerbated the educational and employment inequalities likely to increase the

gender pay gap. Similar to Fuller and Qian and Johnston et al., and Matteazzi and Scherer

(2021) indicated that it is clear that women earn less and engage the most the domestic

roles. The gender disparities in the housework performed to some extent can help explain

the gender wage gap. As a result, Matteazzi and Scherer recommended the need to

decrease women's involvement in domestic roles as an approach to reducing the gender

wage gap. Women experience more parenting responsibilities, which could explain their

preference for jobs with lesser commutes, but increased flexibility (Farja et al., 2020; Fuller & Qian, 2021; Matteazzi & Scherer, 2021; Nafilyan, 2020).

Li et al. (2020) provided more evidence on the causes of gender-based pay inequality by accessing data from Canadian companies on how firms' hiring and pay policies affect gender-based pay inequality. Based on the findings, the researchers identified that firm-specific premiums could be used to explain approximately one-quarter of the 26.8% average earning discrepancy between female and male workers in Canada (Li et al., 2020). Bruns (2019) extended the discussion by assessing the causes of the increasing gender-based pay inequality. The researcher identified that high-wage firms have overall wage growth and hire disproportionately more men. Similar to Li et al., and Bruns identified that male firm premiums increase faster than women. Canada's prevalence and increased causes of gender-based pay inequality make the concept a priority that should be mitigated to enhance equity (Jehn et al., 2019).

Synthesis of Studies Related to Gender Inequality-Based Statistical Discrimination and Human Capital

The study's key concepts and phenomena were racialized Indigenous, newcomers, and women with disabilities, gender pay, and gender-based pay policies. The gender pay gap was perceived as an economic inequality supporting the need to understand the phenomena. The study focused on understanding the impact of gender-based pay inequality in Canadian insurance companies.

Gender-Based Pay Inequality and Statistical Discrimination

Gender-based pay inequality founded on statistical discrimination, specifically bias, stereotypes, and the adoption of imperfect information, results in problems that compound the problems experienced by women in their professions (Bohren et al., 2019; Brower & James, 2020; Wiedman, 2019). Forth and Theodoropoulos (2022) acknowledged that earning discrimination happens when employees are compensated differently, despite producing work of equal value. Discrimination is irrefutable among the sources of gender-based pay inequality in the workplace. Bohren et al. (2019) posited that statistical discrimination emerges from inaccurate beliefs, which results in identification problems. Wiedman (2019) advanced the concept of statistical discrimination by indicating that bias is likely in a context where performance ambiguity and stereotypes exist in the workplace. In their study, Wiedman sampled women from a facility where the population is underrepresented in most senior ranks. Analyzing the collected data helped the researchers identify the existence of bias that negatively impacts women's remuneration. Arguably, the systematic variation in women's pay from that of men cannot be attributed to productivity, signifying the impact of bias (Wiedman, 2019).

Likewise, Brower and James (2020) identified that the men's odds of being ranked in higher positions associated with better pay are double that of women, despite possessing similar competencies. The finding supports the prevalence of statistical discrimination and contradiction with the premise of the human capital theory because despite having identical career trajectories, women are still paid lesser than men. Arguably, the persistence of statistical discrimination will likely hinder the achievement

of gender-based pay equity (Brower & James, 2020). Momani et al. (2019) advanced the discussion on the impact of statistical discrimination by indicating that it is one of the core factors that could be used to explain the persistence of gender-based pay inequality. The researchers found that the gender pay gap has worsened despite adopting policies to curb the problem (Momani et al., 2019). Additionally, Dossa et al. (2019) indicated that bias is a significant cause of gender pay inequality because it cannot be explained by variance in hours worked. Accordingly, in addition to women's empowerment, discriminatory statistical factors such as bias, stereotypes, and adoption of imperfect information should be decreased to mitigate the unexplainable gender-based pay inequality (Bohren et al., 2019; Brower & James, 2020; Wiedman, 2019).

Gender-Based Pay Inequality and Human Capital

Islam and Safavi (2020) identified that wage inequalities are influenced by gender and firm size. In particular, women in small-sized firms are more likely to be reimbursed lower than their male counterparts, irrespective of the industry. However, in a different study, Jehn et al. (2019) identified that gender-based pay inequality is highest among community and trades college graduates, undergraduates, and master's degree holders but disappears among those with doctorate degrees. Notably, a few women working in insurance companies have doctorate degrees. Moreover, although Jehn et al. posited that women with doctorate degrees earn the same as men if employed full-time, there is a possibility that female graduates with Ph.D. are more likely to work part-time. Hence, human capital principles do not fully apply, making promoting gender pay equality an essential concept (Jehn et al., 2019).

In a different study from Jehn et al. (2019), Waite (2017) acknowledged that women's educational attainment has increased over the years. Notably, gender wage gaps are less among women with master's degrees than those with bachelor's and doctoral degrees. Waite's and Jehn et al.'s findings contradict because the researchers' findings on the impact of educational attainment on the gender pay gap vary. Conversely, a commonality in the researcher's results is that university-educated women, irrespective of their occupation, earn lower than their male counterparts (Jehn et al., 2019; Waite, 2017). Milian and Seward (2021) advanced the discussion on the variance between women's education and remuneration, which resulted in an income gap of approximately 5.3%.

In another study, Fuller (2018) identified that the wage gaps net of human capital variances were not mainly due to mothers' lower wages. Conversely, gender-based pay inequality can be attributed to mothers being overrepresented in workplaces where all employees are paid poorly. Accordingly, discrimination is a significant aspect that cannot be ignored. According to Fuller, organizations ought to decrease the occurrence of discrimination, which could significantly reduce or eliminate the gender pay gap, particularly among mothers. Although Bakas et al. (2018) focused on the tourism industry, the researchers conducted a thematic analysis that identified that gender-based pay inequality persists because of horizontal segregation and the number of men in hierarchical positions compared to women (Bakas et al., 2018).

Racialized, Indigenous, Newcomers, and Women with Disability Gender Pay

Cortes and Pan (2019) indicated that low-skilled immigrant women are overworked and significantly affected by gender-based pay inequality. The researchers

explained that working longer hours is associated with higher pay in skilled occupations. Conversely, working overtime is not congruent among low-skilled immigrant women, increasing gender-based pay inequality. The researchers supported that statistical discrimination that women are not adequately productive because of their household responsibilities can be associated with gender-based pay inequality, specifically among newcomers, supporting the need to motivate the issue through policies that address the social norms (Cortes & Pan, 2019). Schirle and Sogaolu (2020) explained that a pay gap between white, Indigenous, and members of visible minority populations working full-time in the private sector exists. As of 2019, the hourly pay gap between men and women was 19%. Also, it was identified that the pay gap between racialized populations is influenced by a complex interaction between race, gender, and immigration status.

Kohout and Singh (2018) focused on assessing the experiences of marginalized women in gaining equal pay in Ontario, Canada. The researchers chose to conduct the study in the Canadian province because it is a leading global jurisdiction in adopting and implementing pay equality legislation. A thematic analysis of the women's lived experiences helped identify those structural, organizational, and societal barriers that hinder marginalized women from achieving parity. Kohout and Singh concluded that there is a shortage of research on gender-based pay inequality, specifically among marginalized women, supporting the need for additional studies on the concept. Haan et al. (2020) provided more evidence by arguing that few studies assess gender-based pay inequality among Indigenous populations. The researchers identified some factors that result in income differences between men and women in the population. The researchers

support the human capital theory applied in this study because they found that the education and employment industry is a core socioeconomic status that influences gender and income. Gender-based pay inequality among Canada's Indigenous population is a prevalent problem, but returns cannot directly explain the discrepancy in education, skill levels, or the employment industry (Haan et al., 2020).

Adillon-Boladeres et al. (2017) indicated that women's wages were lower than their male counterparts during the initial period. Also, gender-based pay inequality between feminized and masculine fields of study is negatively related to the percentage of women in each area. Dostie et al. (2020) assessed the impact of organizations' employment and wage policies on immigrant-native compensation change. Dostie et al. added to Bruns' (2019) and Li et al.'s (2020) arguments by indicating that firm-specific wage premiums are attributed to a significant amount of inequality in Canada, creating an average earning gap between natives and immigrants in the nation. Dostie et al. indicated that the immigrants' earnings increased relative to Canadian natives in the decade after receiving permanent status.

Smith et al. (2017) indicated that children decrease woman's wages but not men's. Although Tao (2018) conducted a study in the context of the United States, the findings are generalizable because the researchers focus on gender-based pay inequality, specifically among different races. An assessment of archival data helped the researchers identify gender-based pay inequality among minoritized and majority populations. The discrepancy supports the need to improve gender earnings to foster equality (Tao, 2018).

Gender-Based Pay Policies

It is well understood that heterogeneity in the firms' pay policies is associated with increasing gender-based pay inequality (Casarico & Lattanzio, 2019). Schirle and Sogaolu (2020) argued that federal and financial legislation could ensure that every Canadian can participate and benefit from the work in the Canadian labor market. Conversely, equal pay and employment opportunity legislation have limited effectiveness and application in the private sector. Schirle and Sogaolu proposed policies to improve education and training for women, Indigenous populations, and visible minority cohorts. Also, the researchers emphasized the importance of family-friendly policies in enhancing labor market opportunities (Schirle & Sogaolu, 2020).

Canada's immigration policy focuses on immigrants with discipline-specific education and job skills. Nichols (2018) interviewed 30 newcomer women in Toronto to understand their employment experiences. An assessment of the findings helped the researchers identify that employees experience challenges getting better work because of unpaid household labor and limited social support. Thus, an association exists between the marginalization of newcomer women, most of whom are employed in unstable or risk-associated work, and Canadian immigration policy (Nichols, 2018).

Women's Educational Attainment, Experience, and Training

In the published literature, researchers have attributed statistical discrimination to gender-based pay inequality because the women's educational attainment, experience, skills, and training are not congruent with their remunerations (Sin et al., 2017). The discrepancy in gender productivity cannot explain the differences in the pay gap. The

correlation between gender wage productivity and skills was not congruent, making

statistical discrimination an essential explanatory factor for the discrepancy (Sin et al.,

2017). In another study, Stritch and Villadsen (2018) indicated that women's educational

attainment in private companies is not congruent with their wages. The researchers

argued that placing structural limits on the ability to leverage educational attainment

could help reduce the gap (Stritch & Villadsen, 2018).

Castellano et al. (2018) provided additional reasons why the pay gap is based on

unobservable factors such as discrimination. In the study, the researchers measured the

extent unobservable factors result in gender-based pay inequality by comparing pay and

educational attainment. In addition to discrimination, it was identified that gender

disparities in pay inequality could also be attributed to women's preferences (Castellano

et al., 2018). Castagnetti et al. (2018) extended the discussion by assessing the role of

overeducation on the unexplained gender-based pay inequality. An assessment of the data

helped identify that gender-based pay inequality is significantly higher among

overeducated women than adequately learned workers.

Garcia-Prieto and Gomez-Costilla (2017) concurred with the discussed literature

by indicating that discrimination significantly influences gender-based pay inequality

because it does not decrease with higher educational attainment. Addison et al. (2020)

advanced the findings by demonstrating a mismatch between women's occupational skills

and pay and addition to education. In a different study, Costa Dias et al. (2020) identified

those differences in working experience that can be applied to explain up to two-thirds of

the gender-based pay inequality of college graduates 20 years after giving birth to their first child.

Strategies for Mitigating Gender-Based Pay Inequality

The proposed strategies for mitigating gender-based pay inequality are the following: pay equality laws, policies that support full-time employment initiates to decrease the disproportionate burden of household tasks, and change toward adopting promoting transparency and accountability in wage-setting (Antonie et al., 2020; Fortin, 2019; Wang & Gunderson, 2019). Fortin (2019) supported the need for equal pay laws to evolve into more comprehensive strategies that are not significantly focused on micro-management of the compensation structure. Although equal pay laws may result in procedural fairness in the organization's process for the population targeted by the law, there is a need to change the current laws facilitating the adoption of equal pay approaches. Equal pay approaches include all workers, irrespective of the job's femaleness or maleness. Antonie et al. (2020) recommended the need for policies that promote women's full-time employment to decrease gender-based pay inequality.

Wang and Gunderson (2019) provided a unique policy change recommendation. The researchers indicated a need for policy initiatives to decrease the disproportionate burden of household tasks experienced by women. The introduction of childcare-related policies and parental leave could help share domestic responsibilities among men and women, thus, decreasing the disproportionate impact of household responsibilities on one cohort (Wang & Gunderson, 2019). Congruent with Wang and Gunderson, Cortes and Pan (2019) supported the idea of policies that support the change in social norms,

underpinning equitable labor division among households. The change could potentially

decrease the gender-based pay inequality in hours worked between men and women in

the labor market. Van der Lippe et al. (2019) advanced the discussion by supporting the

need for flexibility policies over parental leave.

Salinas and Bagni (2017) agreed with the discussed concepts by indicating that

implementing initiatives that support a gender-balanced workforce by introducing family-

friendly policies could help decrease the pay gap and promote women's career

progression. Although the study was conducted in higher education settings in Europe,

the findings are transferable because the researchers focused on the phenomenon of

focus. The researchers indicated that despite the underrepresentation of women in top-

level positions and statistical discrimination, there is significant inequality in gender pay

(Salinas & Bagni, 2017).

Kemper et al. (2018) performed in-depth interviews with executives to identify

the actions that should be conducted to promote gender equality. Although a small

sample size of 20 participants limits the generalizability of the findings, the results are

transferable in this study because it was identified that there is a need for change to

mitigate the prevalence of inequality. Stritch and Villadsen (2018) advanced the results

by specifying that adopting transparency and accountability in wage settings, similar to

those implemented in public companies, can promote change.

Duchini et al. (2020) acknowledged that pay transparency is meant to increase

awareness of the gender-based pay gap and improve employee bargaining power. In the

study, Duchini et al. identified that pay transparency improves the women's probability

of being employed in above-median-wage jobs by 5%. Conversely, pay transparency does not result in a significant increase in women's wages. Similarly, in an Australian study, Gulyas et al. (2021) asserted that the pay transparency law promoted a decline in the gender wage gap. The researchers explained that they did not find evidence that wage transparency was associated with a decrease in the pay gap. In particular, Gulyas et al. (2021) indicated that the pay transparency initiative was ineffective because the women lacked the bargaining power to renegotiate their wages. Cullen and Pakzad-Hurson (2019) advanced the pay transparency concept by indicating that it is only effective if employees have the bargaining power and capability to negotiate aggressively.

Gaps in the Literature

In the reviewed studies, researchers applied different methodological approaches, such as qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods, to support that gender-based pay inequality exists in the modern labor market (Antonie et al., 2020; Coudin et al., 2018; Farja et al., 2020; Heywood & Parent, 2017; Li et al., 2020; Litman et al., 2020; Wang & Gunderson, 2019). Additionally, the causes of gender-based pay inequality, including statistical discrimination, motherhood penalty, household responsibilities, gender-specific age consequences of parenthood, part-time wage, and heterogeneity in the firms' policies, have been studied (Antonie et al., 2020; Coudin et al., 2018; Farja et al., 2020; Heywood & Parent, 2017; Li et al., 2020; Wang & Gunderson, 2019). Additionally, researchers have suggested different policy changes, increased union membership, wage transparency, and improved representation as suitable strategies for mitigating gender-pay inequality (Antonie et al., 2020; Fortin, 2019; Wang & Gunderson, 2019).

Gender equality policies have supported the most appropriate approaches for mitigating the problem, but their efficacy depends on implementation (Antonie et al., 2020; Nafilyan, 2020; Saari et al., 2021). For example, increased representation has resulted in some changes, but the approach's significance has not been supported in the literature (Bertrand et al., 2019; Schneider et al., 2021). Additionally, unionization has been supported as a practical and effective approach, but there is inconsistent support for the strategy in mitigating the problem (Barnetson, 2018; Bruns, 2019; Card et al., 2020).

In published research, it has adequately been indicated that the women's (especially those categorized as: (a) racialized Indigenous, (b) newcomers, or (c) with disabilities experience), educational qualification, and training are incongruous with the pay, signifying the existence of statistical discrimination (Addison et al., 2020; Adillon-Boladeres et al., 2017; Castagnetti et al., 2018; Castellano et al., 2018; Cortes & Pan, 2019; Haan et al., 2020; Schirle & Sogaolu, 2020; Stritch & Villadsen, 2018). However, after conducting the comprehensive literature search, the researcher did not identify a qualitative phenomenological study conducted to assess the lived experiences of C-suite and V-level executives regarding gender-based pay inequality at Canadian insurance companies.

Additionally, organizational-specific approaches for mitigating the problem were not identified, signifying another gap in the literature. Hence, the purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to understand gender-based pay inequality for women at Canadian insurance companies. The study conducted was anticipated to decrease the gap in the literature by increasing an understanding of (a) how employee

position, educational level, gender, and experience influence their pay, (b) how effective

the current strategies are in decreasing gender-based pay inequality in Canadian

insurance companies, and (c) the approaches that should be adopted to decrease the

problem.

Summary and Conclusions

It was expected that applying the statistical discrimination theory and the human

capital theory would provide the study with theoretical support, helping understand the

impact of gender-based pay inequality in Canadian insurance companies (Aigner & Cain,

1977; Tao, 2018; Tilcsik, 2021). Researchers have supported gender-based pay inequality

in the modern labor market characterized by flexibility, work homogeneity, and

anonymity (Litman et al., 2020). The causes of gender-based pay inequality include

statistical discrimination, motherhood penalty, household responsibilities, gender-specific

age consequences of parenthood, part-time wage, and heterogeneity in the firms' policies

(Antonie et al., 2020; Coudin et al., 2018).

Different approaches, such as unionization, increased representation, and gender

equality policies, have been proposed to mitigate gender-based pay inequality (Antonie et

al., 2020; Barnetson, 2018; Nafilyan, 2020). Gender-based pay inequality is a significant

issue among racialized Indigenous, newcomers, and women with disabilities (Adillon-

Boladeres et al., 2017; Cortes & Pan, 2019). Women's educational attainment,

experience, and training are not congruent with the pay, increasing the influence of

discrimination on the gap (Addison et al., 2020; Castagnetti et al., 2018). The literature

review helped identify that although there is adequate evidence of gender-based pay

inequality, there are limited qualitative studies conducted in Canada on the concept. It was anticipated that conducting the research would help decrease the gap in the literature. The following section, Chapter 3, contains the qualitative methodology and phenomenological design applied to the research.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Gender-based pay inequality is a prevalent societal and organizational problem that should be mitigated. The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to understand gender-based pay inequality for women at Canadian insurance companies. This chapter contains a discussion on: (a) the research design and rationale, (b) the role of the researcher, (c) methodology, (d) issues of trustworthiness, and (e) a summary and transition to Chapter 4.

Research Design and Rationale

The study was conducted to answer the following research questions:

Research Question 1: What were C-suite and V-level executives' lived experiences of how employee position, educational level, gender, and experience influence their pay?

Research Question 2: What were C-suite and V-level executives' lived experiences of how effective the current strategies are in decreasing gender-based pay inequality in Canadian insurance companies?

Research Question 3: What were C-suite and V-level executives' lived experiences of the strategies adopted to decrease gender-based pay inequality and ensure that remuneration is congruent with training, experience, and educational attainment?

The study was conducted using a hermeneutic phenomenological design. The design was selected because of five core reasons. First, the design was suitable for understanding lived experiences and texts expressed by individuals (Neubauer et al., 2019; Nigar, 2020; Suddick et al., 2020). Applying the methodology was anticipated to

help me understand the C-suite and V-level executives' lived experiences on: (a) how employee position, educational level, gender, and experience influence their pay; (b) strategies implemented to decrease gender-based pay inequality; and (c) the approaches that should be adopted to ensure that compensation is not based on statistical discrimination. Second, the approach supported the focus on a phenomenon such as gender-based pay inequality within a group of individuals, C-suite, and V-level executives who have experienced the concept. Third, the design supported the collection of subjective and objective experiences of the C-suite and V-level executives, supporting the findings' dependability (Husserl, 2014; Neubauer et al., 2019; Van Manen, 2017).

Fourth, phenomenology helped decrease bias by enabling me to focus solely on the C-suite and V-level executives' lived experiences. The process is called bracketing, which helps reduce the impact of the researchers' past knowledge or preconceived notions on the study results (Nigar, 2020; Suddick et al., 2020). Fifth, the phenomenological design was selected to guide me in systematically analyzing data. Allowing the transition from a narrow unit of analysis to broader concepts and descriptive summaries that support answering the *what* and *how*-based research questions (Emiliussen et al., 2021; Nigar, 2020; Suddick et al., 2020). I acknowledged other traditions such as grounded theory, narrative review, epidemiological research, and case study. However, the approaches were not selected because they were incompatible with the study's purpose.

The study's central phenomenon was gender-based pay inequality and the current or possible strategies adopted to ensure that women's salaries are not influenced solely by statistical discrimination. Thus, ensuring pay was congruent with the human capital

theory principles of training, experience, and educational attainment. Also, gender-based

pay inequality has been associated with bundled factors. Such as the excessive presence

of women in part-time jobs, gender-based biases, systematic and institutional

discrimination, structural barriers, policy inefficacy, and pay secrecy (Fortin, 2019;

Pelletier et al., 2019). This study used gender-based pay inequality to mean the average

difference between men's and women's median or mean hourly weekly or annual earnings

(OECD, 2020; Pay Equity Office, 2020).

Role of the Researcher

In this study, I took the role of an observer. I was responsible for performing all

the activities to ensure the successful completion of the study. The activities that I

performed included: (a) developing the participant's recruitment email, (b) screening the

C-suite and V-level executives to determine their eligibility, (c) selecting the most

suitable respondents, (d) developing the interview guides, (e) performing a mini-test, (f)

collecting and analyzing data, (g) interpreting the data to answer the research question,

and (h) developing the final manuscript.

As an experienced employee with various Canadian insurance companies, I had

professional and personal relationships with diverse C-suite and V-level executives,

resulting in selection bias. I overcame the problem by not recruiting C-suite and V-level

executives with whom they have personal or professional relationships. I had no power

over the suggested study population, and the potential participants were informed that

their involvement was voluntary. Although the participants were appreciated for agreeing

to participate in the study, they were not compensated for their time.

Methodology

The study was conducted using a qualitative methodology, which was selected for five reasons. The first reason was that the approach enabled me to collect data from C-suite and V-level executives at the convenience of their workplaces. Thus, the respondents were not required to make significant changes to their daily routine to participate in the study (Denzin & Lincon, 2017; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Second, I collected data using an interview guide containing a semistructured interview protocol. Third, a qualitative methodology allowed me to be a core data collection instrument, which helped collect in-depth information on gender-based pay inequality (Denzin & Lincon, 2017; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Fourth, a qualitative methodology enabled me to apply inductive logic to retrieve themes from the participant's lived experiences, answering the research questions. Fifth, other methodologies, specifically quantitative and mixed-methods approaches, were not suitable for answering the research questions. A quantitative methodology would have been appropriate if I aimed to determine the causal impact between gender-based pay inequality and other variables such as educational attainment, experience, training, and skills. Applying a qualitative approach and a mixed-methods methodology would have helped mitigate the study's weaknesses. Still, I did not select the technique because of the quantitative aspect that hinders feasibility (Denzin & Lincon, 2017; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Participant Selection Logic

The study's target population was C-suite and V-level executives working in Canadian insurance companies. More than 30 insurance companies in Canada provided me with an adequate population to sample participants (LSM Insurance, 2019). I used LinkedIn to recruit the participants. The process involved sending the participant recruitment letters (see Appendix A) to at least 30 C-suite and V-level executives to get 15 eligible executives willing to participate in the interviews. Sending messages to the executives via LinkedIn gave me direct access to the professionals.

Sampling Strategy

A purposive sampling technique was applied to recruit C-suite and V-level executives. The non-probabilistic sampling approach was selected for three reasons (Farrugia, 2019). First, the sampling strategy enabled me to choose the most appropriate C-suite and V-level executives knowledgeable in gender-based pay inequality and adequate experience with the phenomenon (see Farrugia, 2019). Thus, the participant's adequacy in knowledge and expertise helped answer the research questions. Second, the sampling approach allowed the selection of C-suite and V-level executives who fulfilled the inclusion criteria. Third, a purposeful sampling strategy required less effort, time, and financial resources than other probabilistic approaches, such as randomization (see Farrugia, 2019).

The Criterion for Participant Selection

The executives were considered eligible to participate in the study if they: (a) worked in Canadian insurance companies, (b) held C-suite or V-level executive positions, and (c) had experience in dealing with gender-based pay inequality. I assessed the participant's eligibility using a screening tool to determine whether the potential participants had experience with gender-based pay inequality (see Appendix B). The investigator assumed that the participants were truthful in their responses. Participants who did not fulfill the inclusion criteria were not involved in the study. Applying the requirements helped decrease selection bias.

How Participants are Known to Meet the Criteria

A screening tool was used to determine whether the participants fulfilled the criterion. I called all the participants who expressed their interest in the study. During the call, I asked the prospective participants the questions in the screener tool (see Appendix B). Participants were eligible to participate in the study if they responded *yes* to all the questions. Prospective participants who did not fulfill the criteria were thanked for their interest and provided with why they did not qualify to participate in the study.

Participant's Identification, Contact, and Recruitment

Participants were sent invitation emails via LinkedIn. I sent consent forms to the executives who were considered eligible to participate in the study. The executives were required to write *I understand and consent* in the provided space and send the form back to the researcher. Once a form was received, I confirmed whether it was signed. I called

all the executives who signed and returned the consent forms to schedule the interview based on their availability.

Relationship Between Saturation and Sample Size

In the study, I anticipated sampling 15 participants. In qualitative research, the sample size is usually small (Vasileiou et al., 2018). Sim et al. (2018) indicated that it is challenging to rationalize the most suitable sample size in qualitative research. Conversely, the sample size is usually small because of the in-depth nature of the data collection process. Therefore, I recruited and collected data from 15 executives in this study. Saturation was achieved at the 12th participant; hence there was no need to recruit additional individuals.

Instrumentation

Data in the study were collected using an interview guide containing 10 semistructured questions (see Appendix C). The instrument helped collect data to answer all the research questions focused on: (a) how employee position, educational level, gender, and experience influence their pay; (b) strategies implemented to decrease gender-based pay inequality; and (c) the approaches that should be adopted to ensure that compensation is not based on statistical discrimination. The researcher-developed interview protocol was retrieved and formulated based on literature and theoretical principles of statistical discrimination, education, skills, and training. The study did not use historical or legal documents as a data source. Therefore, the researcher-developed interview protocol was a suitable data collection instrument (Denzin & Lincon, 2017). In the reviewed literature, Kemper et al. (2018), Kohout and Singh (2018), Nichols (2018),

and Saari et al. (2021) supported the appropriateness of semistructured interview protocols in underpinning the collection of in-depth data.

The semistructured interview guides were based on the key concepts discussed in Chapter 2 and the principles of the theoretical framework. The research questions addressed the principles of statistical discrimination and human capital theory. Additionally, I focused on the key concepts of racialized, Indigenous, newcomers, women with disabilities, gender pay, and gender-based pay policies. Specifically, the research questions were answered by data collected using 10 semistructured interview questions that focus on: (a) employee position, educational level, gender, experience, and pay; (b) the policies and organizational initiatives implemented to decrease statistical discrimination; and (c) strategies that should be adopted to ensure that pay is congruent with the human capital theory's tenets of training, experience, and educational attainment (see Appendix C).

Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted to establish content validity. I completed the pilot study based on the procedure used for the actual study after receiving approval from the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) on 05-11-22-0971810. The pilot study was performed with two executives who were recruited via LinkedIn. The recruitment process involved sending the potential participants a message via LinkedIn requesting they be part of the pilot study. In total, five C-suite and V-level executives were contacted, but only two agreed to participate. The two participants subsequently

signed the consent forms indicating their willingness and understanding of the pilot study activities.

I scheduled the data collection period on two separate days. I used the developed semistructured guide during the interview to collect data for the participants. The interviews were performed via Zoom. Accordingly, the pilot study assessed the clarity and relevance of each interview question in collecting the intended data, which also helped determine the data collection duration for each Zoom interview session.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Data were collected using a 10-item interview protocol in the study. I used the interview guide to collect lived experiences from C-suite and V-level executives on gender-based pay inequality. It was anticipated that they possess adequate knowledge of gender-based pay inequality, supporting their ability to provide recommendations on how to mitigate the problem. The executives were recruited over LinkedIn using a structured message containing the study's purpose and activities involved in the process. Only participants who contacted me expressing interest were screened to determine their eligibility. Consequently, only eligible participants were sent the consent form. Participants who returned the consent forms were scheduled for Zoom-based interview sessions, which lasted approximately 38 minutes.

I conducted all anticipated 15 interviews via Zoom. I expected that the one-on-one sessions would allow the participants to provide in-depth information freely. At the beginning of the meeting, the participants were requested to provide verbal consent allowing me to record the Zoom session. In addition to asking for the participant's verbal

permission, I reminded the executives that participation was voluntary and they could choose not to answer any or all the research questions. Once the interview was over, I stopped recording and saved the audio file with the participant's pseudonym. I began the transcription process after interviewing all of the participants in the study. Each interview was transcribed on a separate Microsoft Word document and sent to each participant for verification. Also, I changed the interview transcripts based on the participant's responses. I assumed that participants who did not respond perceived the transcripts as accurate.

Participant's Recruitment Follow-up Plan

I anticipated that saturation would be achieved at 15 participants. Conversely, it was achieved with 12 participants. Hence, there was no need to extend the recruitment period by 3 weeks. I reached saturation when interviewing more participants and did not yield new information, which was achieved with 12 participants of the 15 interviewed.

Exiting the Study

The participants were made aware that they could end the Zoom interview session at any time during the process if they did not want to proceed. The participants who completed the study were thanked. I also reassured the participants that the data collected would be reported in the aggregate and only used to answer the research questions. Once the interview session was completed, I ended the Zoom call.

Follow-Up Procedures

I performed a follow-up to clarify the vague responses from the participants. Also, I completed the follow-up to seek clarification on any imperceptible responses. In

essence, the follow-up was insignificant because, during data collection, I requested the

participants to find a quiet place to prevent background noise from affecting the

responses, which helped decrease the need for follow-up. Accordingly, follow-up was

only done to seek clarification on instances where the participant's audio responses were

inaudible.

Data Analysis Plan

Data in the project were collected using a 10-item interview protocol. Each

interview query was related to a specific research question (see Table 1). For example,

the first and second interview questions were used to answer the first research question.

Interview queries three, four, and five were used to answer the second research question.

The third research question was answered using queries six, seven, eight, nine, and 10.

Table 1

Research Questions and Respective Interview Question Numbers

Research Questions	Interview question numbers
Research Question One: What were C-suite and V-level executives' lived experiences of how employee position, educational level, gender, and experience influence their pay?	1-2
Research Question Two: What were C-suite and V-level executives' lived experiences of how effective the current strategies are in decreasing gender-based pay inequality in Canadian insurance companies?	3-5
Research Question Three: What were C-suite and V-level executives' lived experiences of the strategies adopted to decrease the gender-based pay inequality and ensure that remuneration is congruent with training, experience, and educational attainment?	6-10

Coding, Software, and Discrepant Cases

The first process of the six-step procedure was organizing all the transcribed interviews, ensuring that they were formatted in the NVivo 12 format. Second, I read the transcripts to gain a detailed understanding of the collected data. Re-reading the transcripts helped me understand the participant's lived experiences regarding gender-based pay inequality. Third, I imported the interview transcripts into NVivo to facilitate data analysis and data management as one project. Fourth, I performed inductive coding, which involved categorizing the participant's responses using terms identified by the respondents verbatim. Fifth, I combined the codes to develop themes appropriate for answering the research questions. The themes were included in NVivo's *node* folder. Sixth, I categorized each participant's response to the suitable theme and developed the fourth chapter. I included figures and tables containing information about the participant's themes and research questions to support data interpretation in Chapter 4.

Managing Discrepant Cases

In this study, no discrepant cases were identified. If any had occurred, I would not have included any data from the incomplete interviews. Also, data from participants who would not have responded to the interview questions would not have been included to support consistency. Analyzing complete transcripts ensured that saturation was achieved in all questions.

Issues of Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, trustworthiness is essential because it promotes a study's quality and accuracy (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). The study's trustworthiness was

promoted using dependability, credibility, transferability, and conformability. The section contains a discussion on how the study's trustworthiness was promoted.

Credibility

I promoted credibility through transcript verification, member checking, and collecting data up to saturation (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Transcript verification involved sending participants a typed copy of their responses to assess the information's accuracy. The process helped eliminate any misrepresentation. Data saturation involved collecting data until no new themes emerged from the participant's responses. Member checking was performed to verify the objectivity and accuracy of the interpreted data. The activity involved sending the participants a copy of the study's data analysis and discussion sections (Denzin & Lincon, 2017; Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Transferability

Transferability was enhanced by providing the participants with a detailed description of the sampled executives, data collection activities, and analysis procedures (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). In Chapter 4, I comprehensively described the participant's age, gender, and years of experience to provide the readers with an understanding of how their responses apply to their context. The detailed description of the data collection and analysis procedures increased the study's replicability, helping the readers determine the results' relevance to their setting (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Dependability

The dependability of the findings was supported by inductive coding and the results of theoretical frameworks (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Inductive coding involved

retrieving the themes directly from the participant's responses, decreasing the risk of bias

or subjectivity. Furthermore, applying the statistical discrimination theory and the human

capital theory supported dependability because I ensured that the developed themes were

congruent with the tenets in the frameworks (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Confirmability

One researcher conducted the study, which increased the impact of the

researchers' gender, culture, or socioeconomic background on the study findings

(Korstjens & Moser, 2018). I promoted objectivity by maintaining a reflective journal

during the entire process. I anticipated that performing audit trails of the iterative data

analysis process supported the findings' conformability (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Ethical Procedures

The study was conducted after receiving IRB (05-11-22-0971810) approval from

Walden University. Once the study was authorized, I sent the recruitment email to the

identified C-suite and V-level executives. I only screened the executives who initiated

contact because participation in the study was voluntary. I also completed the

Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI). Thus, I understood how to conduct

a study congruent with ethical standards. I considered the C-suite and V-level executives

as autonomous individuals capable of making decisions during data collection. As a

result, I did not collect data from any executive who did not return the filled consent

form. Filling the form with the word *I understand and consent* indicated that the

participant comprehended what the study was about, thus, their willingness to participate.

In addition, the participants were made aware that they could decline to answer any or all of the interview questions without any consequence.

I treated the participants with dignity, respect, and fairness, which helped collect adequate data to answer the research questions. The targeted population was not among the vulnerable cohorts. Also, I did not collect personally identifiable data from the executives. I only collected demographic data on age, gender, years of experience, and race/ethnicity to support the transferability of the study findings. The participants were assigned pseudonyms that only I could decode. Although I included some of the participant's responses in the data analysis chapter, the excerpts cannot be used to identify them because the information was reported in aggregate. The study was not associated with any risk beyond the minimum. Participating in the interviews could have been stressful, but I eased the problem by collecting data based on the executives' availability. I also informed the executives that there was no correct or wrong answer because their responses were based on their lived experiences. I did not have a conflict of interest or personal bias toward the topic because the gender-pay gap inequality did not directly affect men, which supported objectivity during data analysis.

I promoted the participant's confidentiality by assigning them pseudonyms and not collecting data such as names, employee identification numbers, or employers. I had no power over the participants, which was anticipated to promote autonomy. The study was conducted based on benevolence and contribution, helping ease any psychological, legal, relationship, or professional risk in the study. Only I had access to the participant's raw data, which was maintained as soft copies. I stored the data in a personal password-

protected computer. In addition, I stored copies of the data on an external hard disk for backup. I kept the external hard disk in a lockable cabinet in a home office, free from excessive heat, moisture, and water. The collected data were only used to answer the research questions. I will store the data for 5 years, and once the period expires, it will be deleted permanently.

Summary

The study was conducted using a qualitative methodology and hermeneutic phenomenological design. Data were collected using a 10-item interview guide containing semistructured questions based on the research problem, published literature, and principles of theoretical frameworks. A purposive sampling technique supported recruiting participants up to saturation, which helped collect adequate data to answer the research questions. I complied with the ethical principles when conducting the study. In Chapter 4, I discussed the: (a) research study setting, (b) demographics, (c) data collection and analysis, (d) evidence of trustworthiness, and (e) results.

Chapter 4: Results

The three research questions that guided the study were: (a) what were C-suite and V-level executives' lived experiences of how employee position, educational level, gender, and experience influence their pay?; (b) what were C-suite and V-level executives' lived experiences of how effective the current strategies are in decreasing gender-based pay inequality in Canadian insurance companies?; and (c) what were C-suite and V-level executives' lived experiences of the strategies adopted to decrease the gender-based pay inequality and ensure that remuneration is congruent with training, experience, and educational attainment? The chapter is categorized into eight core components, namely: (a) pilot study, (b) setting, (c) demographics, (d) data collection, (e) data analysis, (f) evidence of trustworthiness, (g) results, and (h) summary.

Pilot Study

I conducted a pilot study to assess the suitability of the proposed recruitment approach and data collection process and developed an interview guide for collecting adequate. As such, the pilot study helped identify that the decision to recruit the participants via LinkedIn was appropriate because the platform enabled me to recruit participants who fulfilled the inclusion criteria. Subsequently, performing the interviews via Zoom helped identify the videoconferencing platform as appropriate in supporting the data collection process.

During the interviews, the participants adequately understood the questions and responded appropriately. As such, it can be posited that the interview questions were easy to understand and clear. The participants did not recommend any change to the interview

question. Hence, the interview guide used in the pilot study was applied in collecting data in this study. Notably, the interviews lasted an average of 34 minutes. Hence, I anticipated the interviews would be conducted within the same period.

Research Setting

The 15 interviewed C-suite and V-level executives were retrieved via LinkedIn. Hence, the study was not affected by any organizational factors influencing the participants or their experience. Other than information about the participant's working in Canadian insurance companies, data on their employers were not collected to mitigate causing any professional risk and promote confidentiality. Hence, I am unaware of any personal or organizational conditions that could have influenced the participant's experiences during the study.

Demographics

The demographic data collected in this hermeneutic phenomenological study were age, highest education qualification, gender, position held in the organization, and years of experience as C-suite or V-level executives (see Table 2). During data collection, personally identifiable data were not collected to promote the researchers' confidentiality. Also, the participants were given the pseudonyms P1 to P15 to promote confidentiality. Most participants were 50 years and older, male, and had a master's degree. The participants who were chartered life underwriters (CLU) or certified financial planners (CFP) had master's or doctorate degrees except one. Ten interviewed participants had more than 5 years of experience as C-suite or V-level executives (see Table 2).

Table 2

Demographic Information

Description	Age	Gender	Highest educational qualification	Professional designation	Position	Experience
P1	48	Male	Bachelors	-	V-level	7 years
P2	53	Male	Masters	CLU	V-level	10 years
P3	46	Male	Bachelors	-	V-level	6 years
P4	58	Male	PhD	CLU	C-suite	15 years
P5	51	Male	PhD	CLU	C-suite	13 years
P6	49	Female	Masters	CFP	C-suite	4 years
P7	40	They	Masters	-	C-suite	5 years
P8	39	Female	Bachelors	CFP	V-level	3 years
P9	37	Male	Masters	-	V-level	2 years
P10	54	Male	Masters		C-suite	10 years
P11	55	Male	Masters	CFP	C-suite	7 years
P12	50	Male	Bachelors	-	C-suite	7 years
P13	49	Male	Masters	-	V-level	3 years
P14	38	Female	Master's	-	C-suite	4 years
P15	59	Male	Bachelors	-	V-level	9 years

Note. A table representing the participant's age, gender, educational qualifications,

professional distinction, position, and experiences.

Data Collection

This study collected data from 15 participants using a researcher-developed interview protocol. The participants were recruited using the purposeful sampling technique. The process involved sending 30 C-suite and V-level executives the recruitment letter via LinkedIn. Out of the 30 prospective individuals, 20 volunteered to participate, and I assessed their eligibility. Conversely, five did not fulfill the inclusion criteria. The 15 participants who fulfilled the inclusion criteria were interviewed using semistructured interview questions after providing their consent.

The semistructured interview focused on understanding gender-based pay inequality in Canadian insurance companies. The semistructured interview contained nine open-ended questions assessing the C-suite and V-level executives on: (a) the influence of education, employee position, and experience on pay; (b) efficacy of current strategies; and (c) strategies adopted to decrease gender-based pay inequality. During the interviews, the semistructured interview allowed me to ask probing questions based on the participant's responses.

The Zoom-based interviews were conducted for convenience because COVID-19 imposed social-distancing directives. The interviews conducted over 12 days ranged between 30 and 38 minutes. On average, each interview session lasted approximately 35 minutes (see Table 3). Zoom's recording feature was used to facilitate the data collection process. Archibald et al. (2019) supported the efficacy and acceptability of Zoom as an instrument for collecting interview data. Specifically, the innovative videoconferencing

platform's feature that allows concurrent data collection and recording supports the software's feasibility.

Additionally, the platform is relatively easy to use, cost-effective and has data management features that support the effective handling of the interview transcripts. Further, Zoom's security features supported me in promoting the participant's confidentiality (Lobe et al., 2020). Hence, Zoom was considered an appropriate alternative to the traditional telephone or face-to-face data collection approaches (Archibald et al., 2019).

The data collection process was consistent with the one described in Chapter 3 because there was no cause to change the data collection. The only variance was that the interviews took an average of 35 minutes instead of the anticipated 38, which can be attributed to the fact that the participants provided direct responses. The data collection process involved interviewing each participant individually via Zoom. Once all the participants were interviewed, the recorded video interviews were downloaded and transcribed into 15 Microsoft word documents. Subsequently, each participant was sent their transcript for verification. The participants had 5 days to review and respond to whether the transcripts accurately represented their lived experiences.

Archibald et al. (2019) reported that technical challenges could arise when using the platform despite the advantages associated with Zoom as a data collection approach. Similarly, in this study, technical difficulties occurred on two occasions. The first occasion was during an interview with P5 when the participant's Zoom platform malfunctioned, prompting a re-launch of the software. The second issue occurred when

interviewing P13 when the researcher's computer automatically restarted. I had only

introduced myself to the participant; hence, the technical challenge did not result in data

loss. Generally, the technical difficulties did not significantly impact the data collection

process.

Table 3

Data Collection Duration

Participant	Data collection duration (minutes)
P1	38
P2	37
P3	34
P4	35
P5	33
P6	37
P7	30
P8	38
P9	35
P10	36
P11	38
P12	33
P13	36
P14	39
P15	30
Average	35

Data Analysis

The initial step involved organizing the transcribed data to facilitate the analysis

(Lester et al., 2020). All the transcripts were formatted, ensuring the content was in the

same structure. Subsequently, the interviews were imported into NVivo's *Sources* folder

to facilitate the data management and analysis. In-depth interviewing results in a

significant amount of text, making it essential for a qualitative researcher to inductively

reduce the data (Lester et al., 2020). Consequently, the second step involved reading the

transcripts while identifying the core concepts in the participant's responses. Reading all

15 transcripts helped me make sense of the participant's responses, resulting in the

development of suggestive memos. Third, the coding process was developed, which

involved identifying brief and descriptive words or phrases derived from the participant's

specific terms. The codes identified included discrimination, transparency, equal pay,

wage gap, gender, education, federal, provincial, organizational, representation, and

equality policies (see Table 4).

Table 4

Codes and Frequencies

Code	Frequency
Discrimination	20
Transparency	16
Equal pay	11
Wage gap	16
Gender	17
Education	24
Federal	15
Provincial	8
Organizational	29
Representation	18
Equality policies	16

Fourth, the codes were combined, resulting in the development of six themes

recorded in NVivo's *nodes* folder. The retrieved themes included: (a) statistical

discrimination; (b) limited efficacy; (c) gender equality policies; (d) standard, fair, and

transparent hiring, and promotion practices; (e) actively seeking women in leadership

positions; and (f) antioppression training. The first and second themes were related to the

first and second research questions. Consequently, the other four themes were related to the third research question. The nodes were developed by: (a) selecting the *create* tab on the software's menu bar, (b) clicking the *node* ribbon, and (c) typing the initial theme. Steps a, b, and c were repeated for themes two to six. Analyzing the transcripts using NVivo supported the effective management of the interview transcripts and facilitated the process, eliminating the cumbersomeness associated with performing the activity manually.

Fifth, I re-read each transcript while assigning the respective verbatim responses to the appropriate themes. The process involved identifying and selecting the relevant chunk of text and categorizing it to the relevant theme. The iterative process was performed up to the 12th transcript, where saturation was achieved. The thematic analysis of the transcripts beyond the 12th participant would not have identified new concepts for answering the research questions.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Qualitative methodological approaches have prevalently been criticized for being more subjective when compared to quantitative techniques. For this reason, it is essential to ensure that qualitative results have rigor by promoting trustworthiness (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). The study's trustworthiness was achieved through the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability criteria discussed below.

Credibility

This study achieved credibility through transcript verification, member checking, and collecting data until saturation (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). The transcript verification

process involved sending the participant's the transcribed documents to confirm the

accuracy of the written content. All the participants were sent their transcripts and given

5 days to communicate to me any discrepancies identified. Then, the necessary

modifications were made to the two transcripts. Ten participants confirmed that the

transcripts accurately represented their lived experiences.

Conversely, three participants did not respond, even after the 5 days and

subsequent follow-up elapsed. Additionally, data were collected up to saturation,

achieved with 12 participants. Thereupon, three transcripts were eliminated during the

thematic analysis, resulting in the study having 12 participants. Member checking was

performed by sending the participants the analyzed data to determine whether the

aggregately reported data were congruent with what they had experienced and perceived

to be true.

Transferability

Transferability significantly depends on the readers; consequently, it is the

researchers' responsibility to ensure it is achieved by providing detailed descriptions

(Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Specifically, I provided detailed descriptions of the

participant's data collection process and thematic analysis in this study. In the

demographics section, a comprehensive discussion of the C-suite and V-level executives

allows the readers to determine whether the findings apply to their context or setting. In

addition to the age, gender, and years of experience indicated in Chapter 3 would be

reported in Chapter 4, the highest educational achievement and position were added. The

description of the data collection process provides the readers with knowledge of how the

primary data used to answer the research questions were gathered, underpinning

determining transferability. Also, describing the qualitative analysis process helps the

reader determine how relevant the codes and themes are in their study.

Dependability

Like transferability, the readers also determine dependability (Korstjens & Moser,

2018). For this reason, inductive coding was performed, and the results were interpreted

based on the published literature and theoretical framework. Inductive coding was

involved based on the results of the participant's verbatim responses, meaning that the

findings were not derived from the researcher's preconceived assumptions of the focus

topic. Additionally, interpreting the with relation to the statistical discrimination theory

and the human capital theory supports the results' scholarly underpinning.

Confirmability

The inter-subjectivity of the collected and analyzed data was promoted through an

audit trail, which provided a comprehensive justification of the core activities performed

in the study (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Specifically, justifications for the methodology,

design, data collection, sampling, and derived findings were provided in the study. The

audit trail promoted confirmability because I could justify the data collection process.

The audit trail process involved maintaining a diary, where I recorded core decisions,

assumptions, and actions performed during data collection and analysis. Maintaining a

diary also promoted the researcher's reflexivity (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Study Results

The thematic analysis of the collected data enabled me to determine the

sufficiency of the participant's responses in helping answer the research questions. As a

result, six themes adequate for answering the research questions were derived from the

participant's responses based on the analyzed data. The themes that were defined and

described in this section about the research questions were: (a) statistical discrimination;

(b) limited efficacy; (c) gender equality policies; (d) standard, fair, and transparent hiring,

and promotion practices; (e) actively seek women in leadership positions; and (f)

antioppression training (see Table 5).

Table 5

Themes and Research Questions

Research questions	Themes
Research Question 1: What were C-suite and V-level executives' lived experiences of how employee position, educational level, gender, and experience influence their pay?	Statistical discrimination
Research Question 2: What were C-suite and V-level executives' lived experiences of how effective the current strategies are in decreasing gender-based pay inequality in Canadian insurance companies?	Limited efficacy
Research Question 3: What were C-suite and V-level executives' lived experiences of the strategies adopted to decrease the gender-based pay inequality and ensure that remuneration is congruent with training, experience, and educational attainment?	Gender equality policies Standard, fair, and transparent hiring, and promotion practices Actively seek women in leadership positions Antioppression training

Research Question 1

The first research question was: What were C-suite and V-level executives' lived

experiences of how employee position, educational level, gender, and experience

influence their pay? Data to answer the research question were retrieved from interview

questions one and two. In essence, the purpose was to understand the C-suite and V-level

executives' lived experiences of identifiable and reassurance factors such as employee

position, educational level, gender, and experience influence on remuneration. All the

respondents acknowledged the factors influencing the pay gap based on the research

findings.

Theme 1: Statistical Discrimination

One theme, statistical discrimination, was derived from the participant's

responses concerning the first research question. Statistical discrimination was used to

mean that the C-suite and V-level executives perceive that the pay gap can be attributed

to the employee's position, educational level, gender, and experience, and unanimous

discriminatory factors, related to profit maximization. Specifically, P1, P2, P3, P4, P5,

P6, P7, P9, and P12 acknowledged that gender-based pay inequality is a prevalent,

significant, and complex global problem; Canada has not been an exception. For

example, P6 noted that "…despite the fact that times have changed, resulting in women's

accommodation in the labor market because of the increased access to educational

opportunities, gender-based pay inequality persists…."

Notably, the respondent's aggregate response was that a person's pay, irrespective of gender, should be concurrent with their position, educational level, experience, and training in a perfect world. Conversely, P1 indicated that "…in some cases or rather majority of the cases, men, irrespective of their positions, educational levels, experience, and training are compensated more than women with similar qualifications…." P12 advanced the conversation by indicating that he decided to learn more about gender-based pay inequality when he saw the recruitment flyer. He explained, "…I chose to participate in your study upon learning that Canada is ranked among the top 10 Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development countries for gender-based pay inequality …."
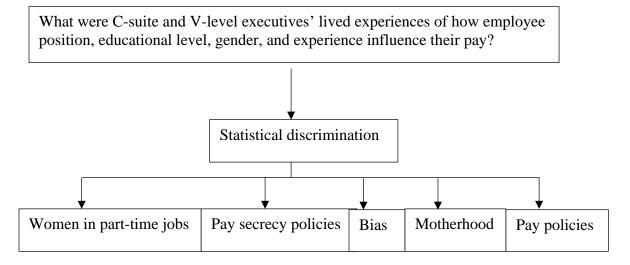
Likewise, P2 acknowledged the problem by saying that "…the pay gap in Canadian insurance companies is complex considering that women earn significantly lower than their male counterparts despite having similar experiences, demographic, and social-economic background..." She added that "…the main contributing factors to this problem include the overrepresentation of women in part-time jobs, gender-based biases, having pay secrecy policies, and systematic and institutional discrimination structural barriers..." Also, she posited that "… the level of education in the country should be strongly related to income considering that it reflects an individual's demand in the labor market [but this is not the case]…." P5 added to the causes by indicating that the gender gap can be attributed to "…household responsibilities, motherhood, parenthood, and heterogeneity in the firms' policies…."

P9 provided additional evidence on the statistical discrimination concept by indicating that "...I do not think that the pay gap can be attributed to the women working lesser because that would mean ignoring any bias or barriers that exist in the process…" (see Figure 2).

P3's response was congruent it P1's, P2's, and P12's because he indicated that "…I know racialized women with similar experience, demographic, and social-economic background earn less than white men in the nation..." She added that "…more years of experience is often associated with better pay.... [similarly] higher educational attainment [is related to being] knowledgeable, hence [individuals] tend to be well remunerated. However, this is not what happens, specifically among women…." Similar to P3, P4 also focused on the impact of race for gender-based pay inequality by indicating that "… the gender wage gap is presumed to be specifically large among women, particularly the Indigenous, racialized, newcomers, and those living with some form of disability…."

Figure 2

First Research Question Theme and Components

Research Question 2

The second research question was: What were C-suite and V-level executives'
lived experiences of how effective the current strategies are in decreasing gender-based
pay inequality in Canadian insurance companies? The research question was answered
using data collected from the third, fourth, and fifth interview questions. Accordingly, the
research question aimed to identify the efficacy of the currently adopted strategies for
decreasing the gender-based pay gap. All 12 participants indicated that their
organizations had implemented strategies for reducing the gender-based pay gap, which
has been effective to some extent.

Theme 2: Limited Efficacy

The limited efficacy term was used to mean that although strategies to decrease
gender-based pay inequality in Canadian insurance compiles have been implemented,
they are limited in achieving the intended outcome. Some of the strategies the executives
reported to have been implemented included pay equity laws, increasing the minimum
wage, promoting organizational diversity, and pay transparency used at the provincial or
corporate levels (see Figure 3). The themes were particularly prevalent among P1, P2, P3,
P4, P5, and P6. For instance, P3, P6, and P7 supported the effectiveness of the pay equity
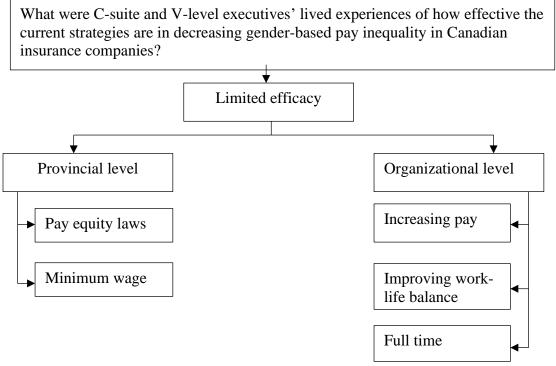law. P3 responded, "….the pay equity law has been widely adopted across Canada...."

Similarly, P1 posited that "….at the provincial level pay equity laws [have been
implemented], whereby the employees are expected to be compensated equally regardless
of their gender…." P1 added: My organization's strategies are to reduce gender-based pay
inequality, including raising the minimum wage, increasing pay transparency, and

improving work-life balance by supporting full-time employment. These strategies will decrease the burden of home care responsibilities that women assume. Indicating the pay range of employees at various levels has significantly helped reduce pay secrecy, ultimately decreasing pay gender inequality.

Conversely, P1 noted that the prevalence of gender stereotypes in the organization, to some extent, hinders the effective implementation of the strategies. Similarly, P2 responded that "…the pay equity law is currently in place to help address the issue of statistical discrimination at the provincial level..." He added that "….policies supporting full-time employment initiatives have also been implemented…."

Other participants indicated that there had been increased advocacy for diversity in their organization. For example, P4 indicated that ".…my organization has made diversity part of its core values in efforts to reduce the gender-based pay inequality…." He added that "….with a diverse work environment, employers are mandated to treat each employee with respect while embracing their gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and educational level differences. Subsequently, this helps reduce gender-based pay inequality...." In addition to adherence to the pay equity law, P5 indicated that ".…the main strategy employed in my organization is based on discouraging pay secrecy…." He provided a rationale for his statement by elaborating that "....evidence shows that with pay secrecy, most women tend to avoid requesting for an increase in their wages, considering that they are unaware of what their male peers earn...."

Figure 3

Second Research Question Theme and Components

What were C-suite and V-level executives' lived experiences of how effective the current strategies are in decreasing gender-based pay inequality in Canadian insurance companies?

Limited efficacy

Provincial level

Pay equity laws

Minimum wage

Organizational level

Increasing pay

Improving work-life balance

Full time

Research Question 3

  The third research question was: What were C-suite and V-level executives' lived experiences of the strategies adopted to decrease the gender-based pay inequality and ensure that remuneration is congruent with training, experience, and educational attainment? Data collected from interview queries six to nine were used to answer the research question. Thereupon, the purpose was to identify the strategies that ought to be implemented on the organization and provincial or federal levels to mitigate the complex gender-based pay inequality.

Theme 3: Gender Equality Policies

Gender equality policies in this study referred to one of the proposed strategies for decreasing gender-based pay inequality, which would involve legislative actions. The participants recognized that policies had been implemented to promote equality, but they have not to need effectively adopted in Canadian provinces and private insurance companies. The concept was particularly proposed by P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, and P6. P1 asserted that "….the implementation of pay equity laws is among the strategies that can be adopted at the federal or provincial level to ensure that employees are compensated based on their training, experience, and educational attainment…." He added that "….equal pay laws may contribute to procedural fairness in the procedural process for the targeted population…."

Similarly, P2 responded that "….the effective adoption of the pay equity law at the provincial or federal level can be effective in ensuring that pay is equitable...." In addition to enhancing the adoption of gender pay equity laws, P3 and P6 introduced the concept of social norms. P3 posited that "…. pay gender inequality can be reduced by implementing policies that focus on supporting change in social norms…."

Theme 4: Standard, Fair, and Transparent Hiring, and Promotion Practices

The phrase standard, fair, and transparent hiring, and promotion practices were used in this study as the second recommended strategy for mitigating gender-based pay inequality in Canadian insurance companies. In the study, the C-suite and V-level executives recommended that insurance companies select organizational-specific

standardized, fair, and transparent hiring and promotion practices. The strategy was recommended by P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P10, and P11.

P10 emphasized that "…re-evaluating corporate practices based on pay can help ensure that employees are compensated based on their level of education, experience, and training..." Similarly, P11 added to the discussion by stating the essence of "….encouraging pay transparency [and] improving work-life balance by supporting full-time employment initiatives focusing on women are among the strategies that should be implemented to reduce gender-based pay inequality at my organization…." Likewise, P7 said that "…. encouraging transparency in pay is among the most effective techniques. The respondent added that "….by publishing the expected wage range of employees assuming varied positions at the organization, all workers will be aware of their expected salaries, and act accordingly in cases of perceived wage discrimination…." P8 recommended the essence of reducing bias by assessing corporate approaches. P8 indicated that "…corporate strategies based on pay can significantly help reduce the [problem] by ensuring that employees are compensated based on their qualifications." Overall, P5 responded that "….reducing bias in hiring can also help mitigate systematic and institutional discrimination structural barriers...."

Theme 5: Actively Seek Women in Leadership Positions

Actively seeking women in leadership positions was recommended as another strategy to ensure that more women are represented in C-suite and V-level executive positions. The participants acknowledged that women are under-represented in top-level management positions, hence the essence of promoting diversity. P5, P6, P8, P9, P11,

and P12 proposed the strategy. P11 indicated that "…. I believe that increasing the number of women in top-level leadership positions could be effective…." Additionally, P12 stated that "…. transparent promotion opportunities solely based on merit could increase the number of women in top-level positions…." She added that "….the women can subsequently introduce strategies for promoting equity while considering factors such as motherhood...."

P3 encouraged making diversity a core value in the organizations, which would mean having more women in the establishments' top-level management. Similarly, P8 indicated that "….empowering women and improving gender diversity…." could be effective strategies for decreasing the gender-based pay gap. Finally, P9 said that "….women hold not more than 25% of C-suite executive jobs and board positions, making the need for change evident…."

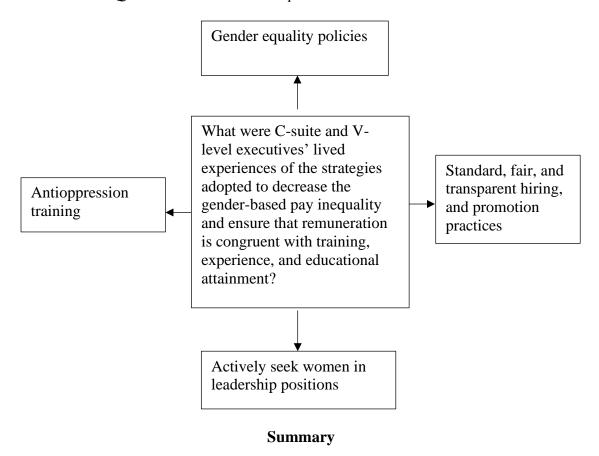### *Theme 6: Antioppression Training*

Antioppression training was used to mean the process of educating core stakeholders on equality as a strategy for decreasing gender-based pay inequality (see Figure 4). In general, the need for antioppression training among the executives, managers, and employees was recommended by P1, P2, P3, P5, P8, P9, and P10. For example, P1 indicated that "….educating employees at the company regarding the importance of gender equality in promoting economic prosperity can help mitigate the identified barrier that limits the implementation of strategies to ensure that pay is congruent with an individual's qualifications…." P10 argued that the lack of knowledge among leaders and employees could hinder the adoption of strategies for promoting

gender-based pay inequality. He ascertained that "….working with leaders and colleagues with inadequate knowledge of the importance of closing or reducing the gender wage gap can hamper efforts to address gender-based pay inequality.…"

Similar to P1 and P10, P2 supported the importance of "….implementing educational programs to improve employees' knowledge of the value of gender equality...." However, P3 responded from a different perspective to P2 and said that "….employers with insufficient knowledge on the significance of closing the pay gap are unlikely to engage in initiatives intended to promote wage equity…." Additionally, P8's and P9's responses were focused more on the importance of educating employers on the essence of increasing the workforce's diversity, particularly because of the possible increase in productivity.

Figure 4

Third Research Question Themes and Components

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                    ┌─────────────────────────────┐
                    │   Gender equality policies   │
                    └─────────────────────────────┘
                                  ▲
                                  │
┌──────────────────┐  ┌─────────────────────────────┐  ┌──────────────────────┐
│                  │  │ What were C-suite and V-     │  │ Standard, fair, and  │
│ Antioppression   │◄─┤ level executives' lived     ├─►│ transparent hiring,  │
│ training         │  │ experiences of the strategies│  │ and promotion        │
│                  │  │ adopted to decrease the     │  │ practices            │
└──────────────────┘  │ gender-based pay inequality  │  └──────────────────────┘
                      │ and ensure that remuneration │
                      │ is congruent with training,  │
                      │ experience, and educational  │
                      │ attainment?                  │
                      └─────────────────────────────┘
                                  │
                                  ▼
                    ┌─────────────────────────────┐
                    │   Actively seek women in     │
                    │   leadership positions       │
                    └─────────────────────────────┘
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Summary

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to understand gender-based pay inequality for women at Canadian insurance companies. Data were collected using a semistructured interview protocol from 16 purposefully sampled C-suite and V-level executives, but only 12 transcripts were analyzed because saturation was achieved. The participants were issued pseudonyms P1 to P12 to promote confidentiality. The semistructured interview questions asked over Zoom were sufficient to support the participant's effective engagement because each interview lasted approximately 35 minutes.

Strategies such as transcript verification, member checking, detailed description, and audit trail were performed to promote the results' trustworthiness. The data analysis process included organizing, reading the transcripts, coding the data, creating the themes, and assigning descriptions to the themes. For example, the first research question was What were C-suite and V-level executives' lived experiences of how employee position, educational level, gender, and experience influence their pay? Based on the participant's responses, it was identified that employee position, educational level, and experience are not the only determinant of the pay gap among women. Rater, pay is influenced by statistical discrimination factors that are either unobservable or unmeasurable.

The second question was: What were C-suite and V-level executives' lived experiences of how effective the current strategies are in decreasing gender-based pay inequality in Canadian insurance companies? It was identified that although initiatives and strategies at the provincial, federal, and organizational levels have been implemented to mitigate the problem, they are limited in efficacy because gender-based pay inequality is prevalent. Lastly, the third research question was: What were C-suite and V-level executives' lived experiences of the strategies adopted to decrease the gender-based pay inequality and ensure that remuneration is congruent with training, experience, and educational attainment? The proposed strategies included gender equality policies; standard, fair, and transparent hiring and promotion practices; actively seeking women in leadership positions; and antioppression training. The next chapter contains an interpretation and discussion of this study's findings.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Gender-based pay inequality is a significant and prevalent historical problem globally (Fortin, 2019; Moyser, 2019; Pelletier et al., 2019; Petit & Tedds, 2020). However, despite the persistence of gender-based pay inequality, the problem has decreased over time, a factor that can be attributed to: (a) significant developments in the labor markets, (b) increased modernization, (c) advocacy for equality, and (d) equal access to educational opportunities (Fortin, 2019; Moyser, 2019). Additionally, in Canada, women have surpassed men in educational attainment. More representations of females in higher-status occupations have increased, factors that support the need to assess the persistence of gender-based inequality (Pelletier et al., 2019).

In essence, based on the premise of the human capital theory, increased education attainment and training should be congruous with their earnings. Conversely, the theoretical construct is false because of the statistical discrimination and gender biases (Tilcsik, 2021). Hence, the prevailing gender-based pay gap can be explained by human capital, occupation or industry of work, job attributes, and demographics. Likewise, the remaining gender-pay gap can be explained through statistical discrimination.

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to understand gender-based pay inequality for women at Canadian insurance companies. A thematic analysis of the retrieved data helped identify that statistical discrimination is the core concept that can be used to explain the prevailing gender-based pay inequality in Canadian insurance companies. The implemented strategies have limited efficacy, justifying the need for the comprehensive implementation of gender equality policies;

introducing standard, fair, and transparent hiring and promotion practices; actively

seeking women in leadership positions; and introducing antioppression training. A

comprehensive interpretation of the results was included in this chapter. The five core

sections in this fifth and final chapter are: (a) the interpretation of findings, (b) limitations

of the study, (c) recommendations, (d) implications, and (e) the conclusion.

Interpretation of Findings

The thematic analysis helped retrieve six themes relevant to answering the three

research questions. The themes identified in this hermeneutic phenomenological study

were: (a) statistical discrimination; (b) limited efficacy; (c) gender equality policies; (d)

standard, fair, and transparent hiring and promotion practices; (e) actively seeking

women in leadership positions, and (f) antioppression training. The themes were

interpreted in this section in relation to the research questions.

Research Question 1

The first research question answered in this study was: What were C-suite and V-

level executives' lived experiences of how employee position, educational level, gender,

and experience influence their pay? One theme, statistical discrimination, was identified

in the participant's responses. Specifically, it was identified that employee position,

educational level, gender, or experience are not the only determinants of pay among

women. The finding was congruous with the argument that preferences and group

attributes are proxy factors that determine productivity-related attributes, which influence

compensation (Tilcsik, 2021).

Essentially, imperfect, ambiguous, limited information or unfavorable stereotypes about women's productivity could result in prejudice (Tilcsik, 2021). In the study, the penalty of motherhood emerged, one of the core characteristics that differentiates men from women. For instance, women are more likely to go on maternity leave than men. This statistical discrimination factor can result in one cohort being compensated more than the other. Another factor related to the penalty of motherhood and parenthood identified in the study is that more women work part-time jobs than men. The finding could also be applied to explain why among female employees, their compensation is not congruous with their training, education, and qualifications, as proposed by human capital theorists. Congruent to the study findings, Wang and Gunderson (2019) acknowledged that gender-based pay inequality could be attributed to motherhood. Particularly, wives with children tend to opt to work part-time. Additionally, Wang and Gunderson posited that the male-female pay gap is associated with variance in the two cohorts' household roles and responsibilities.

According to human capital theorists, the skills and abilities gained through training and education should be a core foundation for earning (Aliu & Aigbavboa, 2019). In Canada, women have more educational attainment than men (Pelletier et al., 2019). Also, women have diversified their fields of study at tertiary institutions, which has resulted in their representation in higher-status professions (Pelletier et al., 2019). Conversely, based on this study's findings, the human capital premise does not apply to women because of statistical discrimination, specifically, motherhood, bias, more women in part-time jobs, and pay secrecy.

In addition to the discussed arguments on the bias, penalty of motherhood, and prevalence of women in part-time jobs, it was identified that pay secrecy policies were based on the executives' lived experiences. The findings in this study advance the concepts published in the literature. Accordingly, the executives responded that gender-based pay inequality could be attributed to hiring and pay policy variance. Similarly, Bruns (2019); Li et al. (2020) found that firm-specific premiums can explain one-quarter of the nation's 26.8% discrepancy in pay. Also, Fortin (2019) and Pelletier et al. (2019) attributed the problem to pay secrecy, a concept that the executive discussed. Overall, the findings in this study advance those in published literature and the selected theorists' concepts, which supports an increased understanding of gender-based pay inequality and the influence of statistical discrimination on human capital.

Research Question 2

The second research question answered in the study was: What were C-suite and V-level executives' lived experiences of how effective the current strategies are in decreasing gender-based pay inequality in Canadian insurance companies? It was identified that strategies at the provincial and organizational levels had been implemented. Conversely, the strategies are limited in efficacy, another factor other than statistical discrimination that can be applied to understand the prevailing gender-based pay gap.

At the provincial level, policymakers introduced pay equity and minimum wage laws (Fortin, 2019). Conversely, the executives acknowledged that pay equality laws were not unanimously implemented across Canada. In their study, Saari et al. (2021)

acknowledged the politicization of policies and regulations introduced to mitigate gender-based pay inequality. In this hermeneutic phenomenological study, the concept of the inefficacy of the implemented policies was advanced by increasing an understanding of the existing problems that should be mitigated. Congruous to Antonie et al. (2020) and Nafilyan (2020), it was identified that the implemented gender equality policies are not outcome-oriented, which hinders mitigating the problem.

On the organizational level, initiatives have been adopted to increase pay transparency, improve work-life balance, and provide women with full-time employment. Conversely, the strategies mentioned earlier are not effectively implemented across the organizations, limiting mitigating gender-based pay inequality. The findings advance concepts in published literature by providing the organizational-specific strategies adopted to mitigate gender-based pay inequality. In addition, a literature gap was identified when searching for evidence, resulting in the conclusion that there is a lack of publications where organizational-specific approaches have been recommended. Hence, the findings helped decrease the literature gap.

Research Question 3

The third research question was: What were C-suite and V-level executives' lived experiences of the strategies adopted to decrease the gender-based pay inequality and ensure that remuneration is congruent with training, experience, and educational attainment? Based on the executives' responses, the identified strategies were gender equality policies; standard, fair, and transparent hiring and promotion practices; actively seeking women in leadership positions and antioppression training. The first

recommended strategy, gender equality policies, has also been proposed in published

literature and the findings in this study. For instance, Fortin (2019) found that gender

equity policies can help mitigate the gender-based pay inequality that arises because of

horizontal professional segregation. Additionally, Casarico and Lattanzio (2019) and

Schirle and Sogaolu (2020) emphasized mitigating the heterogeneity of the gender-based

pay policies as a strategy for decreasing the prevailing gap, ensuring that every Canadian

participates in the labor market benefits. The proposed policies should be based on

proactively mitigating the gender-based pay gap by focusing on improving the underlying

factors, such as the lack of adequate education and training among women, Indigenous

populations, and visible minority cohorts.

The other strategy that the executives predominantly supported was adopting

standard, fair, and transparent hiring, and promotion practices. Specifically, the need for

transparent reporting of payments, non-statistical discrimination-based hiring activities,

and standardized promotion criteria, chiefly for racialized, Indigenous, newcomers, and

women with a disability, was emphasized. Also, the process would involve openly

advertising vacant positions transparently. In the published literature, Treleaven and

Fuller (2021) supported wage transparency because it helps mitigate the occurrence of

systemic discrimination. Additionally, Petit and Tedds (2020) and Steffler et al. (2021)

advanced the discussion by indicating that transparency and accountability can help

decrease the systematic and institutional discrimination structural barriers associated with

gender-based pay inequality. The findings in this study advanced the content in published

literature by introducing the need to standardize the recruiting and promotion criteria.

Another strategy recommended by the executives was to seek women in leadership positions. An increased representation of women in leadership positions would result in the inclusion of women in negotiation committees, executive positions, and boards. In addition, the strategy can result in gender representation on hiring committees, which could actively seek and encourage female candidates. Also, the strategy would involve actively mentoring and sponsoring women. Similarly, Bertrand et al. (2019) and Schneider et al. (2021) argued for the need to increase the representation quota of women on executive boards from the current 11% and 40% in private and public companies, respectively.

The other strategy was providing antioppression training to employees and executives on negotiating committees. In the published literature, Addison et al. (2020) and Stritch and Villadsen (2018) proposed the need for providing formal employment to women. However, in the reviewed literature, the need for antioppression training has not been proposed in a hermeneutic phenomenological study before. Accordingly, the findings in this study advanced the published literature by proposing training for employers, improving their understanding of the possible positive outcomes that could emerge from having a diverse and equitably remunerated workforce.

Limitations of the Study

The conducted hermeneutic phenomenological study was associated with methodological limitations. The first limitation is that the study did not fulfill data, method, or investigator triangulation, which might have affected the findings' credibility taking into consideration the subjective nature of the qualitative methodology when

compared to the mixed-methods or qualitative approaches. Although triangulation was not achieved, trustworthiness was promoted using other strategies, specifically member checking, audit trails, prolonged engagement, and thick description.

The second limitation was associated with the fact that although data were collected from the C-suite and V-level executives up to the point of saturation, the sample size in quantitative studies is usually small. Vasileiou et al. (2018) argued that choosing a sufficient sample size in qualitative research is associated with conceptual debates and practical uncertainties. Likewise, sample size justifications are limited in the published literature. Hindering the findings' trustworthiness, specifically, were conformability and transferability (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Vasileiou et al., 2018). Therefore, it would have been redundant if a sample size beyond the saturation point had been used.

A third limitation is that the study findings were based on the participant's responses, resulting in subjectivity because the C-suite and V-level executives might have varying recollections of their lived experiences (Ross & Zaidi, 2019). Accordingly, data were collected using a semistructured interview protocol, which allowed the participants to respond based on their experiences, which cannot be independently verified. Hence, there is a possibility that the qualitative data were affected by attribution, exaggeration, and selective memory (Ross & Zaidi, 2019).

Fourth, although detailed descriptions of the study's core activities, specifically participant's recruitment, data collection, and thematic analysis, support transferability, there is a possibility that some elements might be challenging to replicate. In particular, it might be challenging for future researchers to recruit C-suite and V-level executives with

similar experience as those involved in the study, limiting transferability. Nevertheless, despite the limitations, this hermeneutic phenomenological study was based on rigor, and the findings possess trustworthiness (see Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Recommendations

The recommendations for future researchers were founded on the weaknesses identified in the literature review section and this hermeneutic phenomenological study's limitations. In the reviewed literature in Chapter 2, a gap was identified in the lack of qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological studies where researchers assess gender-based inequality in Canadian insurance companies. In the published literature, only Kemper et al. (2018), Kohout and Singh (2018), Nichols (2018), and Saari et al. (2021) conducted qualitative studies assessing the phenomena. Conversely, to the researcher's knowledge, this was the first hermeneutic phenomenological study conducted assessing gender-based pay inequality in Canadian insurance companies from the perspective of C-suite and V-level executives. Hence, the first recommendation for future researchers is to conduct an additional qualitative study assessing the phenomena from the perspective of different top-level executives and employees, particularly in the Canadian insurance industry and other sectors such as medicine.

A second recommendation is for future researchers to apply a mixed-methods approach to help mitigate the limitation associated with the sample size. Accordingly, a mixed-methods approach has a quantitative aspect that allows applying G* power analysis to rationalize the sample size (Hong et al., 2019). Hence, if future researchers apply a mixed-methods approach, it will help mitigate the qualitative study limitation

involving the use of a small sample size. The third recommendation is for future researchers to use a mixed-methods or qualitative study because the methodologies support the collection of data using validated and reliable tools, helping decrease the impact of attribution, exaggeration, and selective memory on the findings (Hong et al., 2019; Ross & Zaidi, 2019).

A fourth recommendation is for future researchers to achieve data, method, or investigator triangulation (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Triangulation was not achieved in this hermeneutic phenomenological study; hence, future researchers can mitigate the limitation by having three data sources, applying different methods, and involving other investigators, especially in data analysis and interpretation. The three data sources can be interviews, focus groups, and observations. Finally, the fifth recommendation is for researchers to apply a more objective methodology to improve the study findings. Essentially, conducting a quantitative study might improve the results' validity.

Implications

In this section, the researchers focused on the study's implications for positive social change, methodology, and theory. The collected, analyzed, and interpreted data helped adequately answer the research questions. The implications were presented in three categories.

Implications for Social Change

Gender-based pay inequality is a complex societal and organizational problem that can be attributed to statistical discrimination, resulting in an imbalance (CWF, 2019; Moyser, 2019). It is well understood that gender-based pay inequality impacts

marginalized, racialized, and low-income women, which is associated with poverty among the population (CWF, 2019). This study confirmed that the prevailing gender-based pay inequality could be explained by statistical discrimination because women in Canadian insurance companies are equally qualified and experienced as men in the field (Pelletier et al., 2019). The identification that human capital concepts do not apply in Canadian insurance companies supports the need to mitigate the discriminatory and systemic structural barriers that cause the persistence of the problem.

Gender-based pay inequality is a topic of interest among academics and policymakers. It was identified that the implemented strategies to mitigate gender-based pay inequality are ineffective, a factor hindering women from being effectively remunerated. The inequity hinders women from earning a sustainable livelihood, increasing the risk of poverty (Petit & Tedds, 2020). For this reason, this study's findings have implications for social change because the need for transformation at the federal, provincial, and organizational levels was identified. Specifically, policymakers need to ensure that gender pay equity laws are universally implemented in public and private companies on the federal and provincial levels. Also, to achieve social change, organizations need to adopt fair and transparent hiring and promotion strategies, implement antioppression training, and increase the quota representation of women in top-level positions and committees to influence positive social change further.

Methodological, Theoretical, and Empirical Implications

In the study, a qualitative methodology was applied that allowed hermeneutic phenomenological design to assess C-suite and V-level executives' lived experiences

relating to gender-based pay inequality. The study's results have implications for the methodology because the findings support the efficacy of the qualitative method in supporting the collection of in-depth data to answer the *what*-based research questions. Another methodological implication is that the study supported the effectiveness of semistructured interview questions in collecting adequate data. The semistructured interview questions helped collect sufficient analyzed data, helping address the problem statement and achieve the study's purpose.

The first theoretical implication is that the findings advanced the application of the statistical discrimination theory in explaining gender-based pay inequality. Specifically, this study's findings helped confirm that women's remuneration is not directly influenced by their experience, training, or education. Rather, profit-maximizing employers base their decisions on imperfect observations (Tilcsik, 2021). Hence, this advanced the application of statistical discrimination theory. The second theoretical implication is that the results advanced the need to apply the human capital theory in rationalizing the essence to ensure that education and training are the core determinants of remuneration. Conversely, the human capital theory concepts do not apply to women in Canadian insurance companies because their remunerations are not congruous with their education, training, and experience.

The empirical implication is that the study advanced existing literature by being the first qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological research assessing gender-based inequality in Canadian insurance companies for C-suite and V-level executives' perception. Also, the findings advance the application of NVivo to facilitate data

analysis. The additional literature on gender-based pay inequality supports

contextualizing the phenomenon.

Recommendations for Practice

Based on the study findings, four recommendations for practice were provided.

The currently implemented organizational and provincial/federal strategies are ineffective

in mitigating gender-based pay inequality in Canadian insurance companies. Hence, the

first practice recommendation is for gender equality policies to be implemented

effectively throughout Canadian provinces and insurance companies. In the short term,

the equitable implementation of policies could help decrease the gap in gender-based pay

inequality among women, particularly in the public and private sectors. Likewise, the

policies could ensure that women's pay is congruous with the human capital premise in

the long term. Therefore, it can be implied that the homogeneous implementation of the

developed policies across the Canadian provinces and private industries could decrease

the prevailing gender-based pay inequality.

A second recommendation is for organizations to adopt standard, fair, and

transparent hiring and promotion practices, which could help foster accountability and a

justifiable rationale for determining the type of employees in a specific position and their

remuneration, qualification, educational level, and training. The strategy could also create

transparency, facilitating compensation based on justifiable and measurable factors

instead of statistical discrimination. A third recommendation is for organizations to

actively seek women in leadership positions because their increased representation could

help decrease decisions based on imperfect observations, reducing bias. The fourth

recommendation is introducing antioppression training to increase awareness among employees, executives, and employers, which could help decrease resistance to the introduced changes. It is well understood that gender-based pay inequality results in the perception of unfairness, causing low organizational commitment, reduced job satisfaction, a rise in turnover rates, and an increase in the companies' transactional costs (Van der Lippe et al., 2019). In essence, it is anticipated that: (a) gender equality policies; (b) standard, fair, and transparent hiring and promotion practices; (c) actively seeking women in leadership positions, (d) and antioppression training could help decrease the statistical discriminations that significantly cause gender-based pay inequality.

Conclusions

The qualitative methodology and hermeneutic phenomenological design facilitated the identification of C-suite and V-level executives; they are aware of statistical discrimination, which prevents women's remunerations from being congruous with their education, training, and qualifications. Indubitably, strategies, such as the Pay Equity Act at the federal, provincial, and organizational levels, have been implemented but are limited in efficacy. For this reason, there is a need to adopt gender equality policies, implement standard, fair, and transparent hiring, and promotion practices, actively seek women in leadership positions and provide antioppression training.

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Appendix A: LinkedIn Participants Recruitment Email

Executive's name

Insurance company name

Address

Dear Executive,

My name is Mostafa Shayangogani, and I am a student at Walden University studying for a Ph.D. in management. I am conducting a study, *Gender-Based Pay Inequality in Canadian Insurance Companies: A Phenomenological Study*. The purpose of this phenomenological study is to understand gender-based pay inequality for women at Canadian insurance companies. This study is partial degree fulfillment of the Ph.D. program. I am emailing you to seek your voluntary participation in the study; I am looking for C-suite (CEOs and CFOs) and V-level executives (vice presidents). The study is Zoom interview-based and only requires approximately 38 minutes of a participant's time. The process will involve answering 10 semistructured questions based on your lived experiences that will help me understand: (a) how employee position, educational level, gender, and experience influence their pay, (b) strategies implemented to decrease gender-based pay inequality, and (c) the approaches that should be adopted to ensure that compensation is not based on statistical discrimination. The study results will be reported in the aggregate and in no way connect your insurance company to the findings.

If you need additional information, you may contact me at mostafa.shayangogani@waldenu.edu. Also, you can contact Walden University's IRB (Institutional Review Board) at irb@mail.waldenu.edu or the University's IRB director, Dr. L E (Dr. L G) by email at leilani.endicott@waldenu.edu or phone at 1-866-492-5336. Sincerely,

Mostafa Shayangogani

Appendix B: C-suite and V-level Executives' Screener Tool

Criteria	Yes	No
Do you work at an insurance company in Canada?		
Do you hold the position of a C-suite or V-level executive?		
Do you have experience in dealing with gender-based pay inequality?		

Appendix C: C-suite and V-level Executives' Interview Guide

I want to thank you for agreeing to participate in my study. The interview will last for approximately 38 minutes. The information you provide in the interview will be recorded and only used for this study. As a reminder of the information in the consent form, your participation is voluntary, and you will not be compensated for your participation. You may answer some or all the questions, stop at any time, and withdraw, and even after completing the interview, you can request that your input not be used. Your participation and comments are confidential; the information provided will not be shared with anyone, reported in the aggregate in the final document, and will be destroyed after 5 years. (I will ask the participant for any questions before starting the interview). For example, an executive might ask what does statistical discrimination mean? I will answer statistical discrimination that explains how employers make employment decisions. Since the productivity of an individual is imperfect in the application, employers use statistical information on the individual group to derive productivity. If the minority group is initially less productive, each individual in this group will be assumed to be less productive, and discrimination will arise (Phelps, 1972).

Demographic Questions

1. How old are you?

2. What is your highest educational qualification?

3. Are you male, female, other, or prefer not to say?

4. What position do you hold at your organization?

5. How long have you been a C-suite or V-level executive?

Interview Questions

1. How do you perceive the gender-based pay inequality in Canadian insurance companies?

2. Does employee position, educational level, gender, and experience influence their pay? If yes or no, please explain how each (i.e., employee position, educational level, gender, and experience, affects their pay).

3. Based on your lived experiences, what effective strategies have been implemented at the provincial or federal level to decrease statistical discrimination among women, specifically among racialized, Indigenous, newcomers, and women with disabilities?

4. Based on your lived experiences, what effective strategies at your organization have been implemented to decrease gender pay inequality?

5. What are the barriers that hinder the implementation of strategies for decreasing gender-based pay inequality?

6. Based on your lived experiences, what strategies can be adopted at the provincial or federal level to ensure that pay is congruent with training, experience, and educational attainment?

7. Based on your lived experiences, what strategies can be adopted at the organizational level to ensure that pay is congruent with training, experience, and educational attainment?

8. What barriers could occur during the implementation of the proposed strategies?

9. How can the barriers be mitigated?

10. Do you have anything else to add?