



Issue: The question of the pink tax

Forum: Commission on the Status of Women

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Introduction

The pink tax is a form of gender based discrimination. It refers to an extra amount of money on products that are directed to female consumers, even though they are particularly similar or even identical to products directed to male consumers. The only difference often seems to be the packaging color.

The pink tax is an upcharge on multiple products and some services intended for women or girls, such as clothing or toys. It is proven that products for women cost 7 percent more than comparable products for men. Women's products cost more 42 percent of the time, while men's products cost more only 18 percent of the time. When products directed to female consumers are more expensive than products directed to men, it affects about 50 percent of the whole population. These higher prices are often unavoidable for women and it costs an additional 1351USD a year. That ultimately adds up to 40530USD by the time a woman turns 30.

“Think about it this way: you’re paying extra to play a made-up role that society pays you less for inhabiting.” - Danielle Kurzleben, journalist

Furthermore, unequal pay between men and women is still a major issue. The gender pay gap in the US in 2018 was 18 percent, according to the Global Wage Report of 2018. That means that women earn 18 percent less than men. This does not only occur in the United States, this is also valid in other countries, in South Korea the wage gap is even as large as 36,7 percent. For women, this is a big issue, seeing as they are charged more for various products even though they earn significantly less. Gender equality is a human right and the pink tax is a violation of the human rights.

Definition of Key Terms

Pink tax

The pink tax or gender based pricing is the extra amount a woman or a girl is charged for certain products and services, such as personal care products, toys and dry cleaning, that are geared toward women.

Gender equality

The act of treating women and men equally. Gender equality will be achieved when women and men can experience the same rights and opportunities.

Gender discrimination

A situation in which someone is treated less well because of their sex, usually when a woman is treated less well than a man. It is a common civil rights violation that can be recognized in different acts, including unequal pay for women.

Feminism

The believe that women should be allowed the same opportunities, rights and power as men. This goes together with a set of activities to achieve a state where men and women are treated the same way.

Gender pay gap

The gender pay gap or wage gap is the difference between the amounts of money paid to women and men, often for doing the same work.

General Overview

Studies have shown that women are charged more for multiple products and some services. 7 percent of products for women similar to products for men are more expensive, to be exact. The higher amount of money that is charged for women's products is called the pink tax.

The pink tax explained

Women have been in this situation for many years, this can be explained through a social and a financial point of view.

In our society, men have always been privileged. The battle for equal rights is a recent development, the first wave of feminism only begun a 139 years ago. Thus the reason why it is socially acceptable to charge more for certain women's products, is merely because they are women. The biggest problem is that most women are unaware of this issue, because of the fact that it is accepted by society. If the pink tax would apply to men it would be fully unacceptable and changes would occur quickly, because men would address this issue with a higher priority.

The pink tax can also be explained through an economical point of view. This is associated with the marketing of these products. Marketers spend more time thinking about how their products would appeal to female consumers, as they are believed to be more loyal to particular brands. Therefore multiple companies expect women to be willing to pay more for female products.

Personal care products

Personal care products are for self care, these are products such as shampoo, razors or deodorant. These products have proven to be more expensive 13 percent of the time. In a study, hair care seems to have the largest price discrepancy. Sometimes the ingredients in women's products vary from the ingredients in men's products. In which case production costs for women's self care products can be higher than the men's self care products. However, the pink tax does not apply for the women's products with a higher production cost. It applies to products directed to women that are very similar or even identical to products directed to men, whereby the production costs remain the same. Personal care products are purchased with a high frequency, so the fact that commonly bought products such as razor cartridges are more expensive for women is a big issue. It shows that frequent purchases are greatly affected by the pink tax.

Toys

The pink tax can be found on children's toys too, this indicates that the pink tax does not only affect women, but also girls. In this industry, the word 'pink' in pink tax makes the difference between the pricing of the products for boys and the products for girls. Many toys targeted at girls seem identical to the toys that are targeted at boys, the only difference being the color. An example would be the pink beginner bike from Target, a well known American store, and the non-pink beginner bike. The beginner bike that had a pink color cost 80USD, while the other bike that was not pink cost 64USD. Still, these toys are being purchased by the parents of a child. Knowing this the pink tax does not affect a girl directly at a young age, however it does show that girls are confronted with gender discrimination at a very young age.

Services and the pink tax

The pink tax does not only apply on goods as clothing, toys or personal care products, it can also be found on some services. An example of a service that uses the pink tax would be dry cleaning. A study in New York found out that when a woman wanted to bring a shirt to the dry cleaners that was identical in material and color to the shirt of a man, they had to pay 3USD more than a man. Luckily, there are some states and cities that have banned charging women more for services, such as haircuts or dry cleaning. But unfortunately, the pink tax is still used for many production goods.

Tampon tax

The pink tax affects every woman greatly, but it is not the only upcharge that affects poorly on a woman's life. There is the "tampon tax", unlike the pink tax, this is a sales tax on feminine hygiene products. Feminine hygiene products are products that are used by women during their menstruation, which the majority of the women worldwide have to use for most of their lives. Many countries consider these feminine hygiene products a luxury good, which means that it is also being taxed as a luxury good. Similar to the pink tax, this is also a form of gender discrimination, as it is a pricing that only affects women.

Gender pay gap

The gender pay gap refers to the average annual pay of all women who work full time and year round, in comparison to the similar cohort of men. In the United States the gender pay gap is around 16 percent, so that means women earn 16 percent less money than men. A woman still earns less

money than a man, because it is believed that a man is better qualified and that they can manage to do a job better than a woman. Because of this, more men have higher functions within the workplace and therefore their salary will increase. Knowing that there is still a large difference between the salary of a woman and the salary of a man, it makes the issue of the pink tax broader. Seeing as women have to pay more for products, while they earn less money.



A chart about the gender pay gap from 2018

The reaction of companies on pink tax

In the past and currently, many types of research have been done on the pink tax and a lot of companies have been called out for implementing it. Yet the gender based pricing does not cease to exist. Marketing is mostly based on women’s needs, with that major companies claim that the similar looking products actually do cost more to produce. Even though many multinationals use the pink tax, they do not get bad publicity, because they have more power than to those smaller studies. There are also various companies that spoke out against the pink tax; they “veto” the pink tax. An example of such a company would be Boxed, a company located in the United States that sells multiple products, from beverages to household products.

Sustainable Development Goals

Sustainable Development Goal 5 states: ‘Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls’. This goal mentions that gender disparity is caused by economic and political realms, the pink tax is an example of an economic cause. SDG 5 states that “Since all areas of life relate to gender equality, efforts must be made to cuto the roots of gender discrimination

wherever they appear". This emphasizes that gender discrimination comes in various forms. The pink tax is a form that is harder to detect, therefore creating awareness is a very important step toward eliminating the tax. The SDG's have been mentioned in the Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women Strategic Plan 2018-2021, they play a big role in achieving more empowerment of women, especially SDG 5. With the existence of the pink tax, gender equality cannot be achieved. This goal states the achievement of gender equality, therefore it also aims toward solving the issue of the pink tax. Measures must be taken to stop this infringement of the human rights.

Major Parties Involved

UN Women

UN Women is a UN organization that focuses on gender equality and the empowerment of women. It works together with governments and civil society to create laws, policies, programmes and services that benefit girls and women worldwide. UN Women works together with UN Member States to achieve gender equality. This UN organization has spoken out about the importance of calling an end to the practice of gender based pricing. UN Women believes that terminating the Pink Tax is very relevant to achieve gender equality.

Canada

Canada views this topic as important. Canada is very involved in the pink tax issue. The pink tax has even been a discussion in the media, as they have found evidences for the pink tax similar to other countries. However, large countries like Canada have a sizable source of income coming from major companies. Thus Canada still wants to take the needs of the companies into consideration.

United Kingdom

The United Kingdom has expressed its involvement in the pink tax. It is viewed as an important issue. Some companies that are based in the UK have even made changes in their approach toward the pink tax, such as Tesco and supermarket Sainsbury's. However, the United Kingdom shares the same opinion of keeping in mind the needs of companies if sanctions will be implemented.

United States of America

The United States of America views this topic as an important issue and they want to see a change. Many types of research have taken place in the USA that show the existence of the pink tax. Important people in the US, like congresswoman Jackie Speier and former president Barack Obama have as well spoken out about this issue. But like as Canada and the UK, the United States would want to keep the interests of major companies in mind.

France

France was the first country that had publicly spoken out about the issue of the pink tax. The activists persuaded the Ministry of Economy in France in 2014 to launch a study about the pink tax. After the study the existence of the pink tax was evidenced. As a result, the French government created a council with the purpose of abolishing the pink tax.

Timeline of Key Events

When	Event
December 10, 1948	The Universal Declaration of Human Rights
1994	The State of California studies the issue of gender based pricing and finds out that a woman pays an additional 1351USD annually
October 13, 1995	The State of California approves the law against gender based price discrimination in services
January, 2010	Consumer Reports find out that products targeted at women are more expensive than similar products targeted at men
September, 2015	The adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with 17 SDG's
December, 2015	The New York City Department of Consumer Affairs does a study on gender pricing in New York City

March 14-24, 2016

The 60th session of The Commission on the Status of Women with as priority theme: “Women's empowerment and its link to sustainable development”

August 30, 2017

United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women Strategic Plan 2018-2021 is published

Previous attempts to resolve the issue

The previous attempts that have been carried out to resolve the issue of the pink tax came mostly in the form of research. Many types of research have been done on this issue and they were published online or through newspapers, yet it did not seem to have made a difference. It can be explained through certain points.

These pieces of research are very legitimate and contain valid points that prove companies implement the pink tax. However, people are still very unaware of this fact. That is because these kinds research are never shown in the media. In our society, people often depend on the information that they receive from the media. Knowledge about this issue is harder to access for the general public, assuming that a large number of people is not aware of the pink tax. When there is public awareness about the gender based price discrimination, more people will be able to speak up. Therefore, large companies will feel more pressure to repeal the pink tax. However, to achieve this result, the involvement of the media will be necessary.

Another reason why these attempts have failed, is because they do not have a higher authority than the major companies that implement the pink tax. These companies do not respond to these accusations, because they are not forced to do that. For companies to change their pricing, interference of a higher authority, for example the United Nations, will be needed.

On July 8 2016, a congresswoman in the United States named Jackie Speier, introduced the Pink Tax Repeal Act. This proposed legislation would prohibit companies from charging women more than men for similar or identical products and services. This was another attempt to solve the issue of the

pink tax. The legislation was not accepted back in 2016. In 2018, the same legislation was proposed by Jackie Speier.

Possible Solutions

A possible solution for this issue will be to provide the younger generation, especially girls, with information and education on gender equality. It is very important for girls and women to be able to recognize different forms of gender based discrimination, including the pink tax. This information will be provided either at school or through the media and social media. The difficulty of this issue lies in the fact that most of the people are unaware that there is a pink tax. By creating awareness, more people will not hesitate to speak up and work towards solving this type of gender discrimination.

For the women around the globe that are aware of the pink tax, the possible solution is uncomplicated, it is to simply avoid the pink tax while buying certain products. However, for a real change to occur, a major authoritative party should interfere and assure a change in the pricing of companies. Therefore, another solution would be for the United Nations to implement measures to create transparency for international corporations. With this the UN will know about the pricing of companies and they will see if a company wants to implement the pink tax. Then when the UN knows about the intentions of the company, they can put heavy sanctions on their deeds. By doing this, most companies will not want to bring their business at risk, therefore the amount of companies that use the pink tax will decrease.

A highly necessary measure that should be taken, is that governments of UN Member States need to implement legislations to cease the pink tax, similar as the legislation that congresswoman Jackie Speier in the United States proposed. More people that have political power within countries should use this as an example to also make propositions of such legislations. These people are known by the general public and by making statements about such legislations, the awareness of the pink tax will increase. Moreover, with legislations about the pink tax, companies will not implement the pink tax as quickly as before, seeing as they would violate the law.

Appendix/Appendices

Appendix 1: A link to the agreed conclusions of the UN Commission on the Status of Women

http://www.gender.go.jp/international/int_kaigi/int_csw/pdf/sengen60_g.pdf

Appendix 2: A link to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

https://www.ohchr.org/EN/UDHR/Documents/UDHR_Translations/eng.pdf

Appendix 3: A link to the strategic plan of UN Women 2018-2021, United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

<http://undocs.org/en/UNW/2017/6/Rev.1>

Appendix 4: A link to the UN Women analyses on women and the Sustainable Development Goals

<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/2322UN%20Women%20Analysis%20on%20Women%20and%20SDGs.pdf>

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