

## **Impacts of workplace discrimination on employee wellbeing**

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### **Abstract**

Discrimination in the workplace is a common problem that can hurt an organization as well as its employees. When a person or group of people is treated unfairly or unequally in the workplace due to particular characteristics, this is discrimination. This could be based on their age, gender, ability, skin color, nationality, place of birth, race, religion, and sexual orientation. There are many forms of discrimination in today's workplaces. Workplace discrimination can occur between coworkers, job applicants, or employees and their employers. Discrimination, whether intentional or unintentional, is against the law.

Discrimination in the workplace may have an impact on employees' health. In today's world, discrimination is a serious issue that many people continue to face. Employees who experience discrimination may experience increased job turnover, absenteeism, and productivity losses. Additionally, discrimination in the workplace can result in costly lawsuits and damages for an organization. Organizations can take preventative measures against workplace discrimination by comprehending its causes and effects.

**Keywords: Workplace discrimination, psychological wellbeing, women employees, nationalized banks.**

### **I Introduction**

Workplace discrimination against women bank employees is prevalent in India. Women are discriminated against because of their gender, marital status, and caste. There are no laws to stop this discrimination which leads to women bank employees not getting promotions they deserve, getting less salary than male counterparts, and not being considered for big projects. In India, women make up nearly half of the population and almost 40% of them are illiterate. But the number is growing every year as women seek opportunities for economic independence and

better quality of life for their families. Women in the labor force make up 11% of the total workforce but only 6% of women work in managerial positions (19% globally). Women also face challenges like unequal pay rates and lack of training opportunities which contribute to high levels of unemployment for females. This is in particular difficult for Indian women who generally work in the informal sector, which make up 65% of all workers in India. The standards of living at home also affect the decision to continue working after marriage and to forego education. The employee's health is seriously impacted when they experience discrimination. Depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder are among the many health issues caused by stress and poor treatment. Studies indicate that emotional issues can result in heart attacks and sudden death, and that long-term stress has a negative impact on health some of which are mental and some of which are physical. Physical symptoms like migraines, high blood pressure, diabetes, and heart problems whereas Mental symptoms like anxiety, overthinking, depression, sleeping problems, anger, and frustration.

## **II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Several papers show that obese people face discrimination in the workplace, as we will see in the next paragraphs. The review by Roehling (1999) shows that there is a stereotype of this group (people consider the obese as lazy and less competent), which produces a negative impact on several areas, such as: 1) Lower status jobs; 2) Problems with coworkers; 3) Low wages; 4) Higher rate of unemployment; and 5) Biases in hiring. First of all, we will focus on lower status jobs. Ball, Mishra, and Crawford (2002) in a study of more than 8,000 Australian participants found that being obese is associated with worse jobs. Obesity is a medical condition in which excess body fat produces a negative effect on health, reduces life expectancy and increases the likelihood of several illnesses, among others, heart disease, breathing difficulties during sleep, type 2 diabetes, certain types of cancer and osteoarthritis (see Haslam & James, 2005; World Health Organization, 2000). But besides the medical problems, overweight or obese people usually face enormous difficulties in some social areas. Several studies prove that being fat generates rejection and discrimination problems in healthcare settings (see for example Hebl & Xu, 2001), in the school (see Hayde-Wade, Stein, Ghaderi, Saelens, Zabinski, & Wilfley, 2005) or in interpersonal relationships (Falkner, Neumark-Sztainer, Story, Jeffery, Beuhring, & Resnick, 2001), although in this paper we will just focus in rejection in the work area. According

to the reviewed literature the fact of being obese it is not only a health risk but also a big trouble maker in everyday life. For example, to illustrate this idea, one study shows that people tend to rent fewer apartments to obese people (Karris, 1977). This article found that it was more likely to find an apartment to rent with a normal weight, because people with higher weights were rejected more often when they were trying to rent a flat. In this paper we will try to answer the next question: how can the discrimination that obese people suffer at work affect their well-being? The results of this study show that women with the worst jobs were 1.4% more likely to have a higher Body Mass Index (BMI) than women with proper jobs. In this line Schulte, Wagner, Ostry, et al., (2007) found that obese people have more probabilities to have very demanding and challenging jobs, to work more hours, and to work in positions in which employees feel they have little control over their own job.

### **III Impact on Employees**

Accordingly to the current law it is illegal to discriminate against an employee based on characteristics such as: age, ethnic origin, skin color, disability, gender identity, nationality, place of birth, race, religion, gender, and sexual orientation. Discrimination means that an individual is treated unfairly in their workplace in relation to such aspects of employment as: recruitment, training, assignments, promotion, salary, and benefits.

There are many forms of discriminatory acts that can be observed in contemporary workplaces, some of those acts are only one-time incidents, other form continuous, never ending situations (harassment, bullying). Discrimination can occur not only in relation between an employer and his employee, but between employees as well.

There is no one way of discriminating – some mistreatment may be done even unintentionally due to the lack of awareness and knowledge. In spite of the form, severity or intentions, discrimination is extremely harmful for all parties: the business and the employees. Offensive, uncivil conduct always brings detrimental effect to productivity, efficiency and innovativeness of the company.

From the perspective of individual, who experiences discrimination, each occurrence of intimidation causes stress and can be linked with physical and mental health issues.

## Examples of workplace discrimination

### From fellow employees:

- Not listening, interrupting
- Ignoring, silent treatment
- Speaking with bad tone of voice
- Talking about somebody behind his back, gossiping
- Making humiliating remarks
- Showing gestures, making faces, eye rolling
- Not returning phone calls or e-mails
- Excluding somebody from activities
- Withholding information

### During recruitment process:

- Suggesting preferred candidates in job advert
- Specifying age of candidates for job
- Removing potential candidates from recruitment
- Not providing accommodation for disabled candidates
- Creating gendered titles of job adverts

### During work:

- Unequal access to training, referrals or assignments
- Glass ceiling, barriers in promotion
- Harsh discipline for one group of employees
- Unequal treatment related to performance management

- Unequal pay, no benefits

#### **IV How discrimination can affect physical and mental health of your employees?**

Experiencing discrimination has a serious impact on health of the employee. The list of health problems related to stress and bad treatment is long and includes: depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder. Individuals, that were treated unfairly at work may develop heart conditions and cortisol dysregulations. Long-term stress impacts health negatively and studies show that emotional issues may trigger heart attacks and sudden death.

Stress is a natural and automatic reaction of the body. Every time a person is faced with danger, real or illusionary, hormones (adrenaline, cortisol) are being released to the bloodstream and this triggers all chain of complex reactions in the body. Even minor stress, experienced from time to time, has a detrimental effect and can have serious consequences for your health. In case of chronic stress the negative effect is even stronger since the body is constantly in the state of fight-or-flight, what means that the stress hormones are produced almost all the time. This damages the body in the long-term.

The list of stress related conditions is long, some of them are physical other are mental. Additionally, stress influences not only the health, but the behaviors – it takes practice to deal with stress sensibly and usually humans tend to search for quick fix: alcohol and drugs provide immediate relaxation.

#### **V A link between diversity management and equal employment opportunity in the workplace**

Problems arising from unequal treatment and discrimination are a challenge to the society and enterprises. Modern organizations search for top solutions for diversity management in the workplace and eliminate the unequal treatment. The main objectives in this area focus on equal employment opportunities and effective team collaboration in its diversity. The right to equal treatment and protection from discrimination is a global issue addressed in many legal acts.

- Equal employment opportunity

To meet the dynamic socio-demographic changes, modern companies attach great importance to issues related to equal treatment in the workplace regardless of gender, skin color and sexual

orientation. Compliance with the principle of gender equality ensures that women and men are given equal rights and responsibilities, including remuneration and opportunities for professional development. An important aspect is to fight stereotypical thinking and assigning specific social roles for men and women in both their personal and professional lives. The legal acts mentioned in the introduction intend to discipline employers with regard to equal treatment and fair assessment regardless of gender, marital status, national and ethnic origin, language, social status, age, sexual orientation, disability, religion or belief.

Equal criteria and employment conditions should be applied during the recruitment process. Also, all employees should have the same opportunity to enhance their skills, gain practical experience, use employee benefits and bonuses, as well as receive equal base and supplementary compensation.

- Diversity management

Diversity in the workplace is a complicated issue that affects both small and large organizations. It may be either a key element of employment policy or a source of threats and abuse. In order to eliminate its negative consequences, employee diversity must be managed in a skillful and purposeful manner, to create a comfortable and safe workplace.

Diversity management is about noticing differences in the team and skillfully using that potential to meet strategic goals of the company. It is essential to create a suitable and safe workspace for everyone, no matter who the person is.

Diversity is about employing people who are different in terms of gender, age, skin color or religion. An integral part of diversity management should be the ongoing education of all employees on how to use their differences to build lasting relationships and improve their work quality.

## **VI. CONCLUSION**

Finally, we have reviewed several studies that demonstrate that discrimination in the work place exists. In our work we have found that this discrimination provokes a decrease in the perception of job skills. This result suggests that perceived discrimination produces that obese people see themselves as less skilled for some positions, which finally may provoke a self-fulfilling

prophecy (i.e. there is a stereotype that says that the obese are worse in a job, which provokes a decrease in the job skills of the obese, and finally they receive a lower wage because they really work worse). This is very similar to what happens with the stereotype threat (Spencer, Steele, & Quinn, 1999). According to these authors stereotype threat is the disruptive concern that one will be evaluated based on the stereotype that exists about a group. It is important to remark that stereotype threat has been shown to undermine the performance of people of different groups (Afroamericans and women specially) and in different domains (e.g. maths). When there is a stereotype about a group in a particular skill (like the ones related to work), the behavior of the person in those situations in which such capacity is being evaluated is affected by the extra pressure of feeling judged. Our results suggest that obese people could be affected by stereotype threat in the workplace. That is, the fact that there is a negative stereotype (less competent than thin people) of the obese person in the workplace (Roehling, 1999) may cause them a high anxiety when they are working, which can cause a bad performance.

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