DISCRIMINATORY PRACTICES BY PERPETRATORS AND ITS ADVERSE EFFECTS ON EMPLOYEES, EMPLOYMENT, AND WORKPLACE

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Abstract

The study aims to explore the existing literature in the field of discrimination at workplaces around the world and identify the negative effects of discrimination. The discriminatory practices and its process and motifs are explained through the lens of social identity theory and behaviors from intergroup affect and stereotypes map (BIAS). The current study highlights, among the many forms of discrimination practiced by perpetrators, discrimination based on gender, sexual minority, age, disability, and race, origin, and ethnicity. The existing literature suggests that laws, campaigns, and regulations have been passed and enacted to curb all four of these discriminatory practices. Even though these laws and policies have been able to reduce the extent of these discriminations, such practices still remain. In the face of rising legal steps, few organizations and its employees oftentimes resort to covert forms of discrimination which are harder to detect. As an effect of the continued practices of discrimination, workplaces often suffer from various acts of aggression where the perpetrators even resort to violence, bullying, and abuse. These acts of aggression function as stressors for the victims, causing emotional and physiological problems, strains, strain symptoms, and reduced job satisfaction, thus affecting the well-being of the victims. Some of these aspects negatively affect the performance of the victims which, in turn, affects organizational performance in the long run.

Keywords : *Affirmative Action, Age, Behaviors from Intergroup Affect and Stereotypes Map, Disability, Discrimination, Ethnicity, Gender, Origin, Race, Sexual Minority, Social Identity Theory.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Discrimination refers to the prejudicial or biased treatment of any person due to his/her membership or association with a certain group in the society (Wood et al., 2013). Discrimination at the workplace occurs when people differentiate others based on a certain characteristic, and subsequently, systematically or unsystematically, deny the latter of their workplace rights. Characteristic-centric discrimination can be based on gender, race, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, disabilities, religion, and many more. It is to mention that when discriminating against a person based on his/her association with a certain group, the discriminator's behavior is often influenced by stereotypes.

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While macro and micro level initiatives are being taken across the world to lessen discriminatory practices, they still exist. There are companies trying to find loopholes of anti-discriminatory policies; as overt practices are forbidden by the law, people often resort to subtle discriminatory behaviors. The current study aims to shed light on the current status of such practices, in various forms, and simultaneously elaborate the scope, extent, and effect of these derogatory practices.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Stereotyping

Stereotyping, one of the prime sources or causes of discriminatory behavior, refers to the practice of judging an individual based on the group he/she belongs to (Robbins & Judge, 2013). Among the many negative effects of stereotyping, a notable one is the stereotype threat which refers to the extent to which the victims of discrimination internally agree with the negative perceptions that people have about their group. To elaborate, if someone from the baby-boomer generation applies to a job where most of the existing employees are millennials, he/she might assume that the interviewer thinks he/she (the baby-boomer) is not technologically updated. It might be the case that the baby-boomer is technologically sound, yet because of stereotype threat, he/she internally agrees to the stereotype that baby-boomers are out of date. This internal agreement to the stereotype is referred to as a stereotype threat. The threat looms larger especially when the stereotyped group is a minority in an organizational setting. Studies have shown that stereotype threat negatively affects the performance of the victim (Kulik, 2014). Because of this threat, the victims often turn into their own enemies as they start losing confidence in themselves. This, in turn, often leads to a self-fulfilling prophecy where their belief turns into a reality. To illustrate, Melloy and Liu (2014) in their study on unemployed and underemployed workers found out that the common stereotype held regarding this group is that they tend to be lazy and aimless. When they are re-employed, they suffer from the stereotype threat, meaning they retain the commonly held belief that they are lazy and aimless. Another negative effect of stereotype threat is that, oftentimes, because of this belief they try to overcome the stereotype through overcompensation or overdoing (Robbins & Judge, 2013). In the earlier case, the reemployed workers may try to overcompensate by working long extra hours which may lead to burnout and a decrease in long-run productivity.

2.2 Overt and Covert Discrimination

Discrimination refers to "unjustifiable negative behavior towards a group or its members, where behavior is adjudged to include both actions towards, and judgements/ decisions about, group members" (Al Ramiah et al., 2010). Discrimination can broadly be categorized into two groups, namely overt or direct, and covert, subtle, automatic, or unconscious. Overt discriminations refer to the unequal treatment of someone based on written policies and procedures (Robbins & Judge, 2013). Examples of overt discrimination include refusing to hire personnel due to his or her

ethnic background, formally having a policy to not promote pregnant women to a certain role and denying someone a promotion who is suffering from mental health. However, with increasing social disapproval and law enactment and enforcement, overt forms of discrimination are being replaced by covert forms of discrimination. These are difficult to identify or to tag with a specific perpetrator. Making jokes about a gay colleague, belittling him/her in day to day workplace activities are illustrations of subtle discrimination.

2.3 Discrimination Theories

In order to explain the reasons and mechanisms of discrimination, numerous theories have been proposed over time such as the social identity perspective, the 'behaviors from intergroup affect and stereotypes' map, aversive racism theory, and system justification theory (Al Ramiah et al., 2010). Among these theories, the first two demand elaboration to understand the basic concepts and mechanisms of discrimination. According to the social identity theory, members of a group tend to protect their self-respect, and retain a positive identity as a group. This motivation for a group positive identity often leads to a situation where people favor their in-group members (in-group favoritism) and ignore, often want to do harm to their out-groups. This difference in behavior towards in-group and out-group members leads to discrimination.
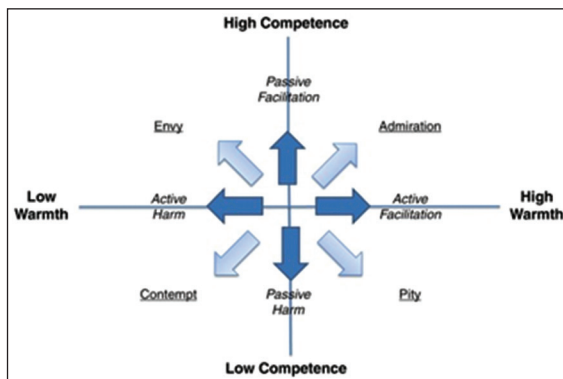

Figure 1: The BIAS Map: Behaviors from Intergroup Affect and Stereotypes

While the social identity theory helps explain the process and reason for discriminatory behavior, the BIAS (Behaviors from Intergroup Affect and Stereotypes) map elaborates the ways we discriminate against people from certain groups. According to this model, group stereotypes can be thought of as a mixture of warmth and competence attributes; this mixture, in turn, leads to certain emotions and behavioral action tendencies. In the above illustration (figure 1), the warmth dimension predicts the behavioral tendencies which are active in nature, whereas the competence dimension predicts the ones that are passive. Here, negative active and passive behaviors may constitute discriminatory practices. To elaborate, ignoring others' presence and depriving certain members of a certain group of numerous

opportunities are examples of negative passive behavior whereas supporting racism at an institutional level and vividly supporting anti-immigration political parties are examples of negative active behaviors.

2.4 Aftermaths of Discrimination

Discriminatory practices at the workplace, both overt and covert, have numerous short and long term effects (Carter & Murphy, 2015). Discrimination not only affects the victims' physical health (i.e. substance abuse, poor health management) (Yoshikawa et al., 2004), but also harms mental health through stress. Besides actual discrimination, perceived discrimination (i.e. perceived racism) often leads to anger, depression, and distress (Brondolo et al., 2008). Similar to racism, perceived age discrimination also leads to stress, job dissatisfaction, and other mental health deterioration aspects which ultimately translate into the deterioration of physical health.

These outcomes of discriminatory behavior can be moderated by numerous other variables, thus leading to ununiform effects on individuals (Xu & Chopik, 2020). These effects can be exacerbated or mitigated depending on the perceived control, optimism, co-worker support, and personality traits of the victims. Evidence suggests that employees with high neuroticism, high extraversion, and high agreeableness are highly affected by discriminatory practices. On the other hand, high perceived control was found to mitigate the effect of such practices.

In the face of various forms of discrimination, organizations and governments are coming up with numerous policies to fight discriminatory practices. One such step is affirmative action or positive discrimination where individuals belonging to a discriminated or stereotyped group are favored so that the discrimination slowly moves away (Robbins & Judge, 2013). Moreover, legally, overt discrimination is prohibited in many jurisdictions.

Other steps are also being taken both at the macro and micro level, by governments, employers, and various activists. Such steps have even been extended to ex-offenders through the 'ban the box' movement (Baur et al., 2018). Ban the box refers to a movement for banning employers from asking candidates about their past criminal record at the very early stages of the application process. Because of the checkbox in the application asking candidates about their criminal record, many ex-offenders do not get a chance to enter the labor market, or at least finds it really difficult to do so. The aforementioned movement seeks to delay such queries to a much later stage of the selection process – at the time of provisional job offer – so that the barriers to labor market entry lessens (Solinas-Saunders & Stacer, 2015).

However, in spite of numerous steps being taken at micro and macro level, discrimination still exists with its adverse effect on the individual and the organization; discrimination exists in many forms and to many extents.

3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Gap

The current descriptive study aims to address two specific research gaps: First, studies on discrimination are being conducted by researchers for quite a long time (Levine & Leonard, 1984; Deitch et al., 2003); however, studies focusing on multiple forms of discrimination, both overt and covert, in one single space are limited. The current study aims at providing a comprehensive picture of the different forms of discrimination, thus creating a compare and contrast scenario. Second, the researcher also focuses on the practices of discrimination in the workplaces, especially on the novel ways followed by perpetrators trying to bypass the various anti-discriminatory laws and regulations in place. The current study aims to address both these issues through conducting a literature search and critically analyzing the findings through the lens of relevant theoretical models.

3.2 Research Objectives

The primary objective of this study is to conduct a literature search of numerous forms of discrimination, both overt and covert, in the workplaces around the world. Even though steps are being taken in countries to counter discrimination, such practices still exist. The researcher aims to portray a descriptive picture of different forms of discrimination around the world. The specific research aims of the study are:

1. To explore different forms of discrimination in the workplace
2. To identify the negative effects of discrimination, both on the individual and the organization

3.3 Research Philosophy and Methodology

A researcher's philosophy refers to the set of beliefs which guides the researcher in taking the decision of the ways of conducting a research, collecting data, and analysing the data in coming up with the final results (Bell et al., 2018). This research philosophy in turn depends on the epistemological and ontological positions of the researcher. From an epistemological position, the researcher takes an interpretivist viewpoint with the aim of analysing the subjective meaning of various social actions; the researcher believes that subjective rather than objective or positivist approach is better able to unveil the true reasons behind various human actions in the society. Moreover, this approach makes it possible to perform an emphatic analysis of the participants' actions and the surrounding environment which directly or indirectly affects all the human activities.

In conducting the research, a critical realist ontological position is taken by the researcher; any human action and effects of the action cannot be explained in a vacuum; these actions are shaped by numerous rules and norms of the society (relativism)(Edwards, 2005). These interplays can be captured from a critical realist perspective.

In terms of methodology, the current study is based on a secondary research strategy. Among the various secondary data sources used, academic articles, journals, and company reports on anti-discriminatory practices are notable. Drawing from studies done in different country contexts and multiple areas of discrimination, the current study aims to explore the present status and effects of discriminatory practices across the globe.

Discriminatory practices, overt or covert, was documented based on numerous characteristics such as gender, gender orientation, age, race and ethnicity, origin, disabilities, job tenure, religion, and others. Among all these characteristics, the current study's scope, depending on the severity of the spread and effect of the discrimination, includes five selected characteristics namely discrimination based on gender, sexual minority, age, disability, and race, origin, and ethnicity.

4. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

4.1 Gender Discrimination

Among all the discriminatory practices, gender discrimination might be one of the oldest forms. In many countries, this discrimination is in favor of the men where a stereotype is held against female candidates that they are not suited for a certain type of jobs (Robbins & Judge, 2013); even, in certain countries, women are thought to be better suited for the home rather than the workplace. Even when the women are chosen for organizational roles, they often face discrimination in career progression, wage rates, and assignment of leadership roles, even though studies have shown that there is no difference in the effectiveness of leadership performance between men and women. In spite of academic findings to the contrary, some organizations often tend to follow their standard leadership profile which is fulfilled by a male employee (Wechsler, 2015). Moreover, regarding career progression, working mothers often face discrimination in the form of 'maternal wall bias' where they are not even considered for higher positions after having children (Casselman 2013 cited by Robbins & Judge, 2013). As a result of such practices, women often let their management aspirations go. There are countries such as Japan where females are not considered for full-time jobs, rather for part-time peripheral jobs only (Rubery, 2003). Even though many countries such as Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States have passed laws against gender discrimination, and other countries such as France, Norway, and Spain are trying to promote gender diversity at the workplace (i.e. through setting laws to increase the percentage of women on the board of directors), discriminatory practices still loom at large in certain countries.

It is to mention that gender discrimination and unequal treatment towards women, and the resultant lack of career growth can be attributed to the welfare system and lack of organizational support of different countries. In the strong bread-winner or corporatist countries (i.e. Germany) (Esping-Anderson, 1990), there is re-enforcement of gender division through a system where men are expected to take a breadwinner role. On the other hand, in the weak bread-winner model welfare states or social-democratic

countries (i.e. Norway), women are encouraged to participate in the job market. In order to facilitate female participation, the social-democratic countries even facilitate publicly funded childcare system, and strong parental leave system. Thus, it can be said that in weak bread earner model countries, the extent of gender discrimination might be less as they promote equal participation in the labor market; on the other hand, strong bread-winner model countries treat women more as mothers than as worthy candidates in the job market.

While many academics have rightly pointed out the role of the micro and macro systems of the society in creating opportunities of gender discrimination, Hakim (1991) believes that women themselves are responsible for such a situation. She states that women are satisfied with low quality jobs; their work commitment is lower than that of men; and job is a secondary role to many of them, the family role being the primary one. According to her, the minority of women take jobs as their first priority. As a result, for women, it is a choice they have made, and as a job is a secondary commitment for many, women tend to be satisfied with their job even when it is of poor quality or without career progression. However, opposing her arguments, authors (Ginn et al., 1996; Procter & Padfield, 1999), based on empirical and secondary data, have shown that it is indeed the family, organizational, and state system which lead to unequal treatment of and discrimination against women.

4.2 Discrimination against Sexual Minorities

Even though many countries in the world are trying to promote diversity and eradicate discrimination in terms of race, ethnicity, and gender, policies addressing discrimination against sexual orientation and gender identity is yet to be properly addressed. In spite of having equality provisions for numerous minority groups, more than 30 states do not have an adequate policy against sexual discrimination (Lopez, 2016). The LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) workers who are discriminated against suffer from lower job satisfaction and poor physical as well as mental well-being.

In their review of 50 studies, Badgett et al. (2007) found out that 16-68% of the people belonging to the LGBT community faced employment related discrimination. Alarmingly, 41% was harassed at the workplace. The scenario was also bleak for the LGBT individuals with regards to payment (payment up to 32% less than that of heterosexual men of equal rank), recruitment and selection (a major portion was denied of their jobs), and career progression (Grant et al., 2011).

Because of these discriminatory practices, LGBT individuals often attempt to hide their sexual orientation. LGBTs often find themselves in an approach-avoidance conflict where it is difficult for them to decide whether to be themselves as they are, or to remain closeted in order to avoid discrimination. They struggle with whether to "display or not to display; to tell or not to tell; to let on or not to let on; to lie or not to lie; and in each case, to whom, how, when and where" (Goffman, 2009). Such struggles and the concealment of one's identity often affect the psychological well-

being (Herek & Garnets, 2007), job and life satisfaction, and work attitude of the concerned individuals which in turn may harm organizational productivity.

In an attempt to counter discrimination, implementing LGBT-friendly organizational policies has proven to gain some success. Empirically, organizations with LGBT-friendly practices were found to report a fewer number of discrimination cases than the organizations with no such policies (Button, 2001). However, even though recently certain states and countries are proposing and enacting policies to counter such discriminatory practices, these policies, although capable of reducing overt discrimination, often fall short of addressing covert forms of discrimination. Alongside the old-fashioned overt discriminations, now there are covert or modern forms of discrimination that are harder to deal with through the use of the law.

Micro-aggression is one such covert form which refers to "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative slights and insults toward members of oppressed groups" (Nadal, 2008). Micro-aggressions may include the use of transphobic language in day to day office work, transphobia, or treating the LGBTs as sex objects rather than human beings (exoticization). Another notable covert discrimination is ostracism. While micro-aggression can be referred to as acts of commission (making subtle insulting comment), ostracism refers to the acts of omission where the perpetrator ignores the LGBT individual. To be precise, fear of ostracism is identified as one of the primary reasons LGBT individuals choose not to reveal their sexual identity (Levine & Leonard, 1984). As they hide their true identity, they are not able to build true social connections with their co-workers which may affect the harmony of the organization.

4.3 Age Discrimination

Although age discrimination was documented from the distant past, at present, this form of discrimination needs attention more than ever. In the present fast-paced world of globalization and digitalization, it might be a common stereotype that the age-old workers are not fast or updated enough to cope with today's pace. According to research findings, age discrimination was experienced by 24% of older Europeans (Abrams et al., 2011).

According to various study findings, the occurrence of age discrimination varies across employment status, industries, and work-related characteristics. Those working in the precarious sector of the economy (i.e. part-time, seasonal work) suffer more from age discrimination, partly due to their low bargaining power (Standing, 2014). With regards to industries, the fast developing IT industry and catering and hotel industry were documented to be more discriminatory than the production sector, partly because of the customer-service centric business model (Johnson & Neumark, 1996). Along with the differences across economies and type of employment, age discrimination also varies in nature: soft and hard practices. Not hiring older workers, paying them low, prohibiting them from promotions are some of the hard forms

whereas subjecting them to impolite remarks, commenting in a belittling manner, and intimidating or humiliating them are some of the soft discriminatory practices.

4.4 Disability Discrimination

Disability discrimination in the workplace occurs when an employer treats a mentally or physically disabled person in an unfavorable manner. By definition, disabled ones are those people whose physical or mental impairment substantially affects or limits their day to day activities. Missing limbs, depression, diabetes, schizophrenia, and chronic back pain are few of the notable examples of disability at the workplace. Countries around the world such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Japan have passed certain laws to protect disabled personnel(Turner & Suflas cited by Robbins & Judge, 2013). In the USA and the UK, organizations now have to make reasonable accommodations at the workplace to make sure that it is accessible to people with disabilities, both physical and mental. However, these positive actions have not been able to bring success in all parts of the world. In Europe, such policies could not bring significant change in the participation rate of the workers with disabilities in the workforce; affirmative action through the quota system has failed as well in Germany, Poland, and France (Nelissen et al., 2014). In the quota system, at least 5% of the seats were required to be reserved for candidates with disabilities. However, this quota system was perceived by the non-disabled people as an unfair treatment to them; often the disabled employees were frowned upon. Because of such outcomes, many suggest that current legislation on fighting disability discrimination needs to be amended; some even argue that the legislations, instead of encouraging the individuals to express their mental disabilities, force them to not disclose their impairment.

4.5 Race, Origin, and Ethnic Discrimination

Even though race and ethnicity overlap in our day to day conversations, race basically refers to the heritage people use to identify themselves with whereas ethnicity refers to their cultural characteristics; race is related to biological characteristics whereas ethnicity is related to culture (Robbins & Judge, 2013). Another relevant concept is origin which usually refers to the country of origin of a person in this context. Members of ethnic and racial minorities face workplace discrimination in numerous forms. In the United States, research suggests that African Americans suffer from employment related decisions compared to native Whites. Their sufferings at the workplace include low pay, few promotions, and lower performance appraisals (Sacco et al., 2003). In another study it was documented that African Americans with no criminal background often receive a fewer number of job-offers than Whites with a criminal background.

These discriminatory behaviors not only lead to stereotype threat, they also affect the mental and physical well-being of the victims. Frustration from being racially and ethnically discriminated often leads to binge drinking or smoking (Chavez et al., 2015). Regarding this issue, Hispanics were documented to be more associated with

drinking rather than smoking, whereas smoking was prevalent among black non-Hispanics. However, even though the acts vary among different racial groups, all of them suffer from deteriorated health due to these activities which were resorted to as a result of being victimized through discrimination.

5. EFFECTS OF DISCRIMINATION

The literature of discrimination has developed separately from other derogatory workplace acts such as violence, bullying, and abuse by the clients of the company. However, some studies have also explored discrimination under the umbrella term of workplace aggression (Wood et al., 2013), as all the mentioned negative acts above have adverse effects on employee well-being. Because of such negative effects, discrimination is considered a stressor (Bowling & Beehr, 2006). Emotional and physiological arousal, strains, strain symptoms, and reduced job satisfaction were some of the various adverse effects of discrimination.

The effect of discrimination may also vary depending on numerous factors. Empirical evidence suggests that depending on the relative power of the perpetrator, sense of organizational justice among the victims, and source of discrimination, the adverse effects on well-being vary in strength. Wood et al. (2013), in their study on 1733 mental health workers in the UK, documented (via hypothesis testing using structural equation modelling) that even though discrimination from all sources (managers, co-workers, patients, and visitors) had negative effects, that from managers had the strongest effect. This finding complies with the power thesis which suggests that different sources of aggression have differential effects on well-being. Moreover, the relationship between discrimination and well-being is mediated by the perception of organizational justice held by the victims. It is to mention that here, the organizational approach to ethical standards is not questioned; rather, the fairness maintained in providing the victims/stereotyped groups their justified rights and resources are perceived.

Another reported effect of discrimination is under-utilization of skills which refers to a case where people hold more skills than required to perform a specific job (Rafferty, 2019). Skill-underutilization, also termed over-skilling, is a direct result of discrimination, especially ethnic minority discrimination. Falling victim to discrimination, the victims often accept jobs way below their skill-level to avoid unemployment. Even when the victims (i.e. women, minorities) get jobs, they suffer from allocative discrimination where people from certain groups are sorted into different kinds of jobs (Petersen & Saporta, 2004). In her study on the data collected from 30 countries across Europe, Rafferty (2019) found out that workplace victims of discrimination based on race or ethnicity, gender, age, and nationality were more likely to report underutilization of skills. The risk is also high for religion-based, disability, and sexual orientation-based discrimination victims. Such discrimination happens when organizational gatekeepers provide support to their in-groups when it comes to promotion, career development, job posting and other organizational benefits, while ignoring the out-groups.

6. CONCLUSION

The research findings highlight that even though numerous steps have been taken, discriminatory practices are still present. While many countries (i.e. social-democratic ones) are actively coming up with strategies to lessen gender discrimination, and increase women's participation in the workforce, from a global perspective the scale is far from balanced. LGBTs yet feel shy in revealing their true identities in fear of being ostracized or falling victim to micro aggression. These discriminatory practices affect the physical and psychological well-being of the victims. It is to mention that the intensity of these effects depends on the relative power of the perpetrator, sense of organizational justice among the victims, and source of discrimination.

While numerous policies are being enacted to fight discrimination, perpetrators are resorting to covert forms of discrimination which are hard to detect or prove. While many countries at the macro level and large corporations at the micro level have taken steps and designed campaigns to put an end to discriminatory practices, and halt stereotypes, a lot is yet to be achieved. Further research needs to be done to identify the scope and extent of discriminatory practices in small and medium- sized companies. Once a holistic picture is gathered, policies can be designed to further eradicate such practices, especially the covert ones. Campaigns may be designed on a national scale to demonstrate that the effect of discriminatory practices not only harms the individual, but also the organization to a significant degree. With the eradication of discrimination not only individual well-being can be ensured, at the same time, organizations may benefit by getting rid of skill underutilization and employing their human capital to the fullest of their abilities.

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