

**IMPACT OF WORKPLACE DISCRIMINATION ON EMPLOYEE
PERFORMANCE: SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE SRI LANKAN APPAREL
INDUSTRY**

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INTRODUCTION

Discrimination is illegal. When a particular group of people is mistreated, this is considered discriminating. In essence, employers have to offer equal employment opportunities to employees of different sexes, colours, ethnicities, and religions, among other personal characteristics. Human resource managers frequently neglect to monitor their workers during their free time. Because of this, the employees engage in discussions that support discrimination based on age, gender, ethnicity, and religion (Denissen & Saguy, 2014). Discrimination demotivates workers and lowers potential job satisfaction (Denissen & Saguy, 2014). Finding a long-term solution to workplace discrimination may be possible if biases are understood clearly. Despite their apparent insignificance, some workplace practices significantly impact discrimination that impacts employee performance in the long run. Hence, the purpose of the study is to find out the effect of workplace discrimination on employee performance. Therefore, the study will address the main research objective of identifying how workplace discrimination impacts employee performance. Previous studies have provided evidence that workplace discrimination takes many forms. Abbass et al. (2011) found that gender discrimination in employee promotion harms employee performance. Moreover, Day (2006) said that employees in religiously diverse organizations might be prone to increase interpersonal conflicts and misunderstandings that impact employee performance. Furthermore, studies by Rynes and Rosen (2007) highlighted that workplace age discrimination occurs when one employee is treated differently than another because of their age. Moreover, Cox (2001) emphasized that different ethnic backgrounds of employees could result in discrimination in the workplace, impacting their overall performance at work. The empirical significance of the study is to help employees and employers create a non-discriminatory workplace to improve employees' performance. Moreover, the study will contribute to identifying some of the workplace's discriminatory practices, such as wage disparities because of age and gender, and implement strategies accordingly to improve employee performance. However, it is essential to consider time, logistical and monetary constraints as possible limitations in conducting this study.

METHODOLOGY

There has been tremendous change in the workplace with more women's participation in the workforce. However, regardless of women's representation, they still face discrimination in various sectors within the organization. The stereotypical thinking has led to the notion that women are less committed to the organization (Welle & Heilman, 2005). Thus, such stereotypical thinking can hinder women's progress in workplace growth. Even though the participation of women in the workforce is increasing, the glass ceiling still prevails in the business environment. Women are marginalized in areas such as salary, rewards, and

exercising authority in the workplace (Ngo, 2003). Adhikari (2014) stated that there is no significant difference in the performance of different gender employees. Still, there is discrimination in a workplace where female workers are underrepresented and paid less than men. Thus, the following hypothesis is advanced,

H₁: Gender discrimination has an impact on employee performance.

Discrimination can take many forms, from simple remarks about grooming or traditional dress to job termination. However, current research on religion in the workplace focuses primarily on management practices such as dress codes and meeting schedules. Individuals nowadays frequently express their personal views and seek religious accommodations in the workplace, according to Morgan (2006). This could result in some organizational conflicts. However, these concerns only scratch the surface of more severe issues, such as behavioral outcomes that affect organizational performance, such as employee commitment and engagement. According to Robert (2007), employees are subjected to harsh and unfavorable treatment because of their religion or faith. Thus the following hypothesis is advanced,

H₂: Religion discrimination has an impact on employee performance.

Workplace age discrimination occurs when one employee is treated differently than another because of their age (Rynes & Rosen, 2007). While the overall number of claims has risen, age discrimination claims have increased in tandem with the general economy and layoffs (Becker, 2005). Companies that discriminate based on age believe that older workers are less flexible and willing to learn new tools and technologies. Younger workers are more dedicated, hardworking, and detail-oriented (Agu, 2009). Individuals who believe they have been mistreated because of their age, according to Snape and Redman (2003), are more likely to feel undervalued by the organization, which can affect their productivity. Becker (2005) further emphasizes that prejudice usually motivates age discrimination. Hence, the following hypothesis is advanced.

H₃: Age discrimination has an impact on employee performance

Ethnic diversity refers to a socio-cultural workforce diversity specified by the number of people who have different ethnicity in the company concerning languages, cultures, and values (Gupta, 2014). Cox (2001) adds that ethnic diversity is the differences in people's ethnic backgrounds; team members belong to different ethnic groups applied to a work team. Bell et al. (2010) argue that someone's work style is often linked to someone's ethnic background and that ethnic diversity within a team affects how team members work together and perform. Consequently, organizational performance seems increasingly dependent on diverse employees working together, which could explain the increased attention of managers and researchers to work on group diversity and its relationship with performance. Thus, the following hypothesis is advanced,

H₄: Ethnic discrimination has an impact on employee performance

Hence, the following conceptual framework is proposed;

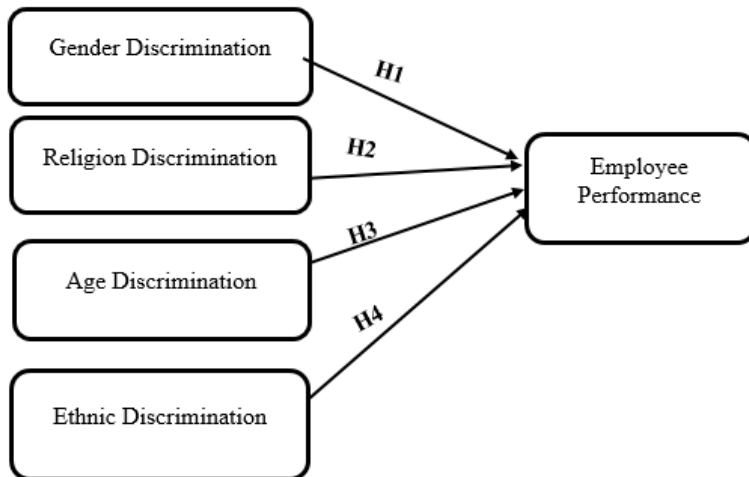


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

This study adopted a positivistic research philosophy using a quantitative method for data collection. For this study, the middle-level employees of the apparel industry were studied as they make decisions in the organization by playing a more significant role. Convenience sampling was used for easy access to gather data from a self-administered questionnaire, and the approximate sampling size was 150. The respondents were required to read each question carefully and indicate the option representing their opinion using a five-point Likert scale.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The raw data was initially reviewed for missing values after being entered into the SPSS 25. The summary of the study's response rate is illustrated in table 1.

Table 1 Responses Rate

Number of Google forms distributed	Number of responses received	Response Rate %
200	150	75%

The sample composition is analyzed through every variable included in the questionnaire, namely; gender, age, and year using descriptive statistics using frequency tables. The frequency tables are further illustrated. The sample consists of 94 female respondents (63%) while male respondents amount to 56(37%). Hence it can be concluded that the responsiveness of females is higher than that of males. A sum of 84 respondents (56%) fall between the ages of 18-25, 62 (41%) fall between the ages of 26-33, 3 (2%) fall between 34-41, 1 (1%) fall between the ages of 42-49 years, No falls between the ages of 50 and above. Ages 26-33 constitute the most significant percentage. Moreover, 62 (41%) had A/L or Diploma, 75 (50%) had BSc/HND, 12 (8%) had a Master's Degree, and 1 (1%) had Ph.D. BSc/HND constitutes the most significant percentage.

Table 2 Reliability Statistics

Variable	No of items	Cronbach's Alpha
Employee performance	5	0.879
Age Discrimination	3	0.830
Gender Discrimination	5	0.858
Ethnic Discrimination	10	0.943
Religion Discrimination	3	0.882

Cronbach's Alpha of 0.7 or higher is considered acceptable, ensuring reliability (Table 2).

Table 3 Correlation Coefficients

Variable	Gender Discrimination	Age Discrimination	Ethnic Discrimination	Religion Discrimination
Correlation Coefficient	-.818	-.765	-.829	-.829
Sig Value	0.001	0.984	0.000	0.000

Based on Table 3, which indicated a 95% confidence level, the relationship between variables is negative and significant to employee performance. Furthermore, looking at the variables, it could be stated that the impact of gender, ethnic and religious discrimination is slightly higher than age discrimination. After that, the regression analysis was conducted to test the hypothesis.

Table 4 Hypotheses Testing

Hypotheses	Sig Value	Accept/Reject
H ₁ : Gender discrimination has an impact on employee performance	0.001	Accept
H ₂ : Religion discrimination has an impact on employee performance	0.000	Accept
H ₃ : Age discrimination has an impact on employee performance	0.984	Reject
H ₄ : Ethnic discrimination has an impact on employee performance	0.000	Accept

Except for age discrimination, all hypotheses in Table 4 were accepted. It could be seen based on the statistics the impacts of all the independent variables (gender discrimination, ethnic discrimination, religion discrimination) except age discrimination on the dependent variable (employee performance) are negative and significant.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This study aimed to explore the impact of workplace discrimination on employee performance. This study was conducted under the framework of the apparel sector of Sri Lanka. Based on the hypotheses developed, the study findings revealed a negative relationship between gender discrimination and employee performance with a sig value of 0.001. This result is consistent with the work of Robert (2007), Cynthia (1995), and Oloyede (2009) that

women often experience a "glass ceiling" and that there are no societies in which women enjoy the same opportunities as men. Moreover, religious discrimination and employee performance too revealed a 95% confidence level, and the sig value is less than 0.05, indicating an acceptance of the hypotheses tested. Result proves Weiss's (2008) assertion that the number of religious discrimination grievances is beginning to rise faster. It was further revealed that ethnic discrimination is more prevalent, especially against other ethnic groups in the apparel sector, as the coefficients sig value is 0.000 at a 95% confidence level. This confirms past study that observes that ethnic discrimination is a significant feature among humans. By implication, it also means that middle-level employees in the apparel sector may also be discriminated against in one way or the other. However, it was revealed that although age discrimination and employee performance have a positive relationship with a correlation coefficient of 0.765, its impact on employee performance was rejected with a sig value of 0.984. With the study's revelations, practitioners must consider that multi-ethnic and multi-religious groups pose a severe challenge to relationships and work ethics in an organization. The inherent tendencies in humans to discriminate even made it more challenging. Managing such diversity effectively will yield several positive benefits. Organizations aiming to enhance performance and achieve its objective and goal must consider good and sustained organizational culture. The general culture in organizations is the primary determinant of the employees of the organizations and their commitment to not only their assigned jobs and responsibilities but also to the achievement of the goals and objectives of the organizations. To a considerable extent, sustained organizational culture determines the quantity and quality of the employees' work. The achievement of any organization's goals and objectives depends on employees' performance. Thus, it is the employer's responsibility to ensure such workplace discrimination of any form does not exist in the organization. This study further calls upon researchers to study other variables, such as geographic location, to understand how such discrimination impacts employee performance.

Keywords: Apparel industry, employee performance, workplace discrimination

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