

Discrimination in the Workplace: A Case of Discrimination at U Mart in Gelang Patah, Johor, Malaysia

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.9020209>

Received: 09 February 2025; Accepted: 13 February 2025; Published: 12 March 2025

ABSTRACT

This study investigates workplace discrimination at U Mart in Gelang Patah, Johor, Malaysia, and its impacts on employees and the organisation. Adopting a qualitative approach, the research involved in-depth interviews with five employees from diverse backgrounds, including administrative staff, cashiers, and supervisors. An interview protocol guided the data collection process to address the research objectives comprehensively. Thematic analysis, conducted using NVivo 12 Plus software, revealed that workplace discrimination at U Mart manifests in various forms, including gender, age, and religious discrimination. The findings indicate that these forms of discrimination stem from organisational biases, cultural stereotypes, and favouritism. Discrimination negatively affects employees by diminishing job satisfaction, mental well-being, and career growth opportunities. At the organisational level, it results in diminished staff productivity, increased turnover rates, and harm to the company's brand. Notwithstanding these hurdles, the study underscores the need to combat prejudice by enacting inclusive policies, training staff, and cultivating an equal workplace. Future studies should investigate the broader ramifications of workplace discrimination at various organisational tiers through a mixed-methods approach to yield profound insights and practical recommendations.

Keywords: Workplace discrimination, gender discrimination, age discrimination, religious discrimination, employee productivity, turnover rates, inclusive policies.

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Workplace discrimination, including gender, ethnicity, and religious bias, remains a significant issue affecting employee well-being and organisational success. Despite efforts to promote diversity, discrimination challenges organisations worldwide, especially in diverse settings like Malaysia. This study focuses on U Mart in Gelang Patah, Johor, to examine how discrimination affects employees from various backgrounds.

While existing research highlights discrimination's impact on mental health (Rafi, Mutalib & Sabri, 2019), there is limited focus on its effects in multi-ethnic, multi-religious workplaces in Malaysia. This study aims to fill that gap, providing insights for organisations to improve their policies and foster a more inclusive work environment.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

To explore the forms of discrimination experienced by employees at U Mart in Gelang Patah, Johor, Malaysia, analyse the factors that cause discrimination among employees at U Mart in Gelang Patah, Johor, Malaysia

To examine the impacts of discrimination on employees, employers, and the U Mart in Gelang Patah, Johor, Malaysia.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Forms of Discrimination

Age Discrimination

Age discrimination refers to prejudiced behaviours towards workers based on their age, including rejection or termination of job applicants. Macdonald and Levy (2016) studied various psychosocial factors, such as age identity and anxiety, and their impact on job satisfaction, commitment, and engagement. Their findings suggest that addressing age-related concerns in the workplace enhances employee engagement and organisational commitment. Perron (2018) found that over 60% of workers aged 45+ experience age discrimination, including derogatory comments and limited career opportunities. Age discrimination is particularly prevalent during job searches and in career progression.

Gender Discrimination

Gender discrimination continues to affect women's participation in social, economic, and political spheres. Sakariyau and Zakuan (2017) analysed gender inequality in Nigeria and Malaysia, highlighting advancements in education and politics but noting persistent disparities that hinder women's empowerment. Effective gender mainstreaming policies are needed to achieve fairness and human rights.

Weight Discrimination

Individuals facing obesity or being underweight encounter discrimination in the workplace. Flint et al. (2016) found that obese candidates are viewed as unqualified workers, especially in physically demanding

roles. Peng et al. (2018) revealed that over 50% of obese Malaysian workers reported being offered lower-quality jobs, perceiving their weight as a factor in task assignments. Sikorski et al. (2016) also found significant discrimination against underweight individuals in Germany, indicating that weight bias affects both extremes of body weight.

Race Discrimination

Racial discrimination continues to be a significant issue, particularly for African American individuals in the United States (U.S.). Bleich et al. (2019) revealed that 33% of black Americans face discrimination in healthcare, employment, and law enforcement. Kadiresan and Javed (2015) reported that racial discrimination is a subtle yet persistent problem in Malaysian workplaces linked to historical and political contexts. Lino et al. (2017) highlighted racial microaggressions among Malaysian students, demonstrating how policies may perpetuate racial bias.

Religious Discrimination

Religious discrimination involves unfair treatment based on religious beliefs. Vang et al. (2019) found that religious prejudice negatively impacts life satisfaction, particularly for those who experience discrimination due to their faith. Padela et al. (2016) discovered that Muslim healthcare providers face higher levels of religious discrimination, especially those who prioritise religious practices. Valfort (2020) revealed that Muslims, particularly devout males, face significant disadvantages in the French job market, requiring them to submit more resumes than their Christian counterparts to secure a job interview. In Malaysia, Ismail (2021) found that Malay respondents in the private sector face barriers due to religious and language prejudices, influencing their employment prospects.

Factors of Discrimination

Social Factors

Lack of Understanding

Narayanan (2018) conducted a quantitative study across 10 privately owned organisations in the Klang Valley, Malaysia. It revealed that employers' lack of empathy and awareness significantly hindered the inclusion of disabled workers. Inaccessible workplace environments, insufficient understanding of employees with disabilities, and coworkers' reluctance to collaborate with disabled team members were identified as significant issues. Miscommunication, especially between hard-of-hearing and non-disabled employees, further reduced efficiency and satisfaction.

Law and Policy

Koburtay, Syed, and Haloub (2020) explored the effects of societal norms, faith, and legal frameworks on women's employment in Jordan's hotel industry. Tribal customs and patriarchal interpretations of Islam limited women's opportunities despite Islamic principles advocating fairness. The authors emphasised the need for policy reforms to eliminate gender discrimination and foster equality in employment across the Middle East.

Religious Belief

Sears et al. (2021) studied religious prejudice in workplaces through 194 interviews with individuals from diverse faiths.

Muslims, Jews, and evangelical Christians reported significant discrimination based on visible religious symbols and practices. For instance, Muslim and Jewish women wearing head coverings faced stereotyping, while Christian employees were often perceived as judgmental due to their beliefs. Such prejudice undermined professional relationships and contributed to exclusion.

Favouritism

Cignacco (2019) defined workplace favouritism as an unjust preference for certain employees. Lee and Khalid (2016) highlighted ethnic bias in Malaysia's private sector, where Chinese candidates received significantly more job callbacks due to employer preferences and language skills. Similarly, Hazaha, Rahman, and Rahman (2020) found that non-religious organisations in Malaysia discriminated against Muslim employees in terms of hiring, salaries, and allowances, influenced by shared religious values and stereotypes. Panahi (2017) noted that workplace diversity could inadvertently lead to perceived discrimination, with favouritism emerging regarding working conditions and employment practices.

Stereotype and Prejudice

Stereotypes in the workplace often contribute to significant discrimination based on race, gender, and age. Mokhtar et al. (2022) and Hazaha, Rahman, and Rahman (2020) highlight how racial stereotypes, such as Islamophobia and biases against Muslim women wearing headscarves, perpetuate exclusion and hinder opportunities. Global events, such as the September 11 attacks, have fueled Islamophobic stereotypes, associating Muslims with terrorism and gender injustice. These prejudices often manifest as discriminatory hiring practices, lower wages, and limited allowances for Muslim employees. Similarly, gender stereotypes reinforce that men are more logical and better suited for leadership, as outlined by Zakuan (2023) and Zulqaram et al. (2021). These biases limit women's participation in politics and leadership roles while confining them to traditional domestic responsibilities.

Age-related stereotypes also contribute to workplace discrimination. Gargouri and Guaman (2017) revealed that young adults are often viewed as inexperienced, leading to bias in hiring and professional development

opportunities. Conversely, older employees may face termination or exclusion due to assumptions about their declining capabilities. Such stereotypes, whether based on race, gender, or age, create barriers to equity and inclusivity, undermining the potential of diverse workforces.

Stigma

Davensizer (2021) described stigma as negative judgment based on a characteristic, such as race or disability. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Xu et al. (2021) reported widespread discrimination against Chinese individuals globally due to cultural stereotypes and misinformation. Stigma led to hostility and exclusion, particularly for people from Wuhan and also other regions affected by the pandemic.

Lack of Skills

Pumipatyothin (2018) found that Thai migrant workers in South Korea often experience workplace discrimination due to their limited language proficiency in English and Korean. This deficiency relegates them to low-skilled or semi-skilled labour, exposing them to unsafe working environments, unclear employment contracts, and unequal pay. These conditions further impede their access to healthcare and contribute to ongoing prejudice.

Adaptation Issues

Rahman et al. (2019) discovered that Bangladeshi workers in Sarawak, Malaysia, face discrimination due to difficulties in adapting to the local culture. Low-income workers, in particular, struggle with cultural assimilation and remain rooted in their native practices, making them more susceptible to prejudice compared to higher-income workers who form positive socio-cultural connections with locals.

Lack of Trust

Salahshour and Boamah (2020) highlighted a pervasive lack of trust toward Muslims as a significant driver of workplace discrimination in New Zealand universities. Muslim employees often face task gatekeeping based on religious identity, limiting their opportunities for career progression and perpetuating a cycle of exclusion from professional development.

Political Issues

Kadiresan and Javed (2015) reported that racial discrimination in Malaysian workplaces is deeply rooted in the country's political history. Historical conflicts have fostered resentment and prejudice, particularly along ethnic and religious lines, which overshadow issues such as gender and age discrimination.

Fear

Decker et al. (2019) revealed that fear of discriminatory police misconduct and victim-blaming deters women in Baltimore in the U.S. from seeking law enforcement assistance after experiencing intimate partner violence or sexual violence. Structural and community factors, such as power imbalances and social norms, reinforce this avoidance, exacerbating gender and racial disparities.

Emotional Factors

Ability to Control Emotions

Brescoll (2016) noted that gender-emotion stereotypes portray women as overly emotional, hindering their selection and evaluation as leaders. Zakuan (2023) reinforced this in Malaysia, where women are often seen as emotional and less capable, creating significant barriers to leadership roles in politics and professional settings.

Impacts of Discrimination

Individual Impacts

Health Problem

Discrimination has profound effects on physical health. Versey and Curtin (2016) demonstrated that inequality, directly and indirectly, impacts the physical well-being of African American and White women in the U.S. Factors such as low self-esteem and heightened awareness of

societal biases contribute to adverse health outcomes, such as

chronic conditions. Discrimination's role in increasing stress also disrupts the brain-gut-microbiome (BGM) system, as highlighted by Zhang et al. (2023). Their study revealed that prejudice alters brain responses to food cues and gut metabolism, increasing the risk of obesity and related health issues. These findings underscore how societal biases manifest in tangible, harmful ways on the physical health of targeted individuals.

The psychological toll of discrimination includes stress, paranoia, and anxiety. Hodge, Zidan, and Husain (2015) found that verbal abuse heightens depressive symptoms among Muslims, while religious practices like prayer provide some relief. Similarly, Koura (2016) revealed that Muslim women often employ psycho-spiritual resistance to cope with discrimination, though fears of workplace rejection and harassment remain significant. Paranoia is another common effect, as Pearce et al. (2019) and Shaikh et al. (2016) demonstrated that perceived ethnic and racial discrimination correlates with heightened paranoia and psychosis. Moreover, Tineo et al. (2021) identified acculturative stress as a mediator between discrimination and anxiety or depression among Muslim students, highlighting the need for culturally sensitive mental health support.

Work Productivity

Salleh et al. (2021) investigated foreign workers in Malaysia and found that language barriers and discrimination negatively impact their work productivity. Miscommunication and cultural misunderstandings were significant contributing factors.

Job Satisfaction

Tabor and Dalton (2021) discovered that perceptions of racial discrimination negatively affect job satisfaction in Arkansas, U.S. African Americans reported higher instances of racism, which significantly impacted their job satisfaction, although job stability was less affected.

Career Stagnation

Fitasari and Mas'ud (2023) found that Muslim women wearing hijabs in Indonesia face career stagnation due to subjective evaluations from superiors. Challenges such as lack of recognition, teasing, and limited job advancement negatively impact their emotional well-being and professional performance.

Unhealthy Lifestyle

Zhang et al. (2023) highlighted the correlation between discrimination and obesity. Discrimination disrupts the brain-gut-microbiome axis, leading to increased responsiveness to food cues and unhealthy eating habits, raising obesity risk. Interventions addressing these disruptions could mitigate stress-related health issues.

Trust Issues

Singh, Tubsree, and Sakulkoo (2020) revealed that discrimination erodes trust in cross-cultural workplaces, particularly in Indian manufacturing companies in Thailand. This mistrust hinders the effective utilisation of human capital and corporate equity.

Teamwork

Kelley et al. (2024) found that female sales employees face challenges due to consumer biases. Assigning female agents to customers results in a 50% drop in purchase probability, reduced total sales, and delays in customer responses caused by customer apathy toward female agents.

Social Support

Chavez et al. (2015) discovered that workplace discrimination leads to unhealthy behaviours such as excessive drinking and smoking. Racial or ethnic bias is correlated with high smoking rates and alcohol misuse among specific groups, highlighting the need for policies to mitigate these health risks.

Psychological Effects

The psychological effects of discrimination in the workplace are profound, often leading to reduced self-confidence and a sense of isolation. According to Hamilton et al. (2016), individuals with mental health conditions face stigmatisation and exclusion, resulting in diminished self-esteem and worsened mental health. Discriminatory behaviours, such as stereotyping and dismissiveness, exacerbate feelings of loneliness and a perceived lack of support, negatively impacting both personal and professional life. Moreover, as highlighted by Jones et al. (2017), subtle forms of discrimination create a cycle of isolation, where marginalised employees are excluded from social interactions and opportunities, further reinforcing their sense of being undervalued and disconnected from the workplace.

This psychological toll also manifests as a lack of appreciation and motivation. Hennein et al. (2023) found that gender discrimination, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, led to women feeling unappreciated due to inequitable workloads and limited career advancement. Likewise, Elei (2016) noted that workplace discrimination lowers employee motivation, contributing to disengagement, anxiety, and reduced job satisfaction. This combination of feelings of exclusion, low self-worth, and lack of support leads to significant emotional distress and can impair both individual well-being and overall workplace productivity.

Lack of Opportunity

Hingle et al. (2018) explored gender disparities in the medical field, showing that women face barriers like lack of mentorship and gender bias, which hinder their career advancement. Despite progress, these challenges result in lower job satisfaction and encourage women to leave for more equitable opportunities.

Discipline

Glover, Pallais, and Pariente (2017) discovered that managerial bias negatively affects minority employees' performance, leading to lower productivity and higher absenteeism. This highlights the importance of inclusive management to ensure all employees perform at their best.

Burnout

Anjum et al. (2018) found that toxic workplace environments characterised by bullying and harassment significantly contribute to employee burnout. This reduces productivity and increases stress levels, showing the need for a healthier, more respectful work culture.

Organisational Impacts

Organisational Performance

Triana, Jayasinghe, and Pieper (2015) conducted a study on the effects of perceived workplace racism, finding that it negatively impacts both individual worker outcomes and organisational performance. Perceptions of racism lead to decreased morale, productivity, and job satisfaction, undermining overall business success.

Turnover Rate

Elçi, Sert-Özen, and Murat-Eminoğlu (2021) explored the connection between perceived sexism and turnover intentions among female employees. Their findings showed that gender discrimination in the workplace is a key factor driving women to leave their jobs, especially when job satisfaction is low. Organisations with sexist environments face higher turnover rates.

Organisational Image

Sharma and Mann (2018) highlighted how workplace prejudice damages an organisation's image. Discrimination harms employee morale and tarnishes the company's reputation in the marketplace, making it harder to attract diverse talent and eroding public trust in the business.

Organisational Costs

Abate, Schaefer, and Pavone (2018) revealed that low job satisfaction and burnout contribute to higher turnover rates, increasing organisational costs. Companies should improve job satisfaction to reduce turnover and its associated financial burden.

Talent Issues

Kroll, Veit, and Ziegler (2021) noted that discrimination during recruitment limits the talent pool and harms a company's diversity. Discriminatory practices can hinder attracting skilled candidates, so organisations must adopt inclusive hiring processes to retain top talent.

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative research uses a case study design to investigate workplace discrimination at U Mart in Gelang Patah, Johor, Malaysia. Primary data is gathered via semi-structured, in-depth interviews with chosen employees to enhance understanding of their experiences. The qualitative approach is the most appropriate method since it facilitates a profound assessment and investigation of events, which is crucial for studying discrimination phenomena. Meanwhile, the case study design is employed because it provides a focused exploration of U Mart with its diverse workforce, enabling detailed insights into discrimination's forms, factors, and impacts.

Population and Sampling

The workforce comprises six individuals, including the manager and assistant manager from U Mart. The informants are selected based on their diverse backgrounds, including gender, age, ethnicity, and religion.

Five employees, chosen using purposive and criterion sampling techniques, participated in interviews. These methods ensure that the sample includes individuals

who have experienced discrimination and can provide relevant insights.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data was gathered via semi-structured interviews, lasting 40-60 minutes, aimed at examining four primary domains: (1) demographic information, (2) forms of discrimination experienced, (3) factors that contribute to discrimination, and (4) the effects of discrimination on employees and the organisation. Open-ended inquiries enable participants to articulate their experiences comprehensively. In order to ensure accurate data collection, the interviews were audio recorded with the consent of the participants. Identify trends and subjects related to the study's goals. The gathered data underwent thematic analysis utilising NVivo 12 Plus software to discern patterns and topics pertinent to the research objectives.

The Demographic Information of The Informants

Table 1: Demographic Backgrounds of The Informants

Informant	Aiman	Diana	Fatin	Mages	Mirul
Age	22	37	24	23	28
Gender	Male	Female	Female	Female	Male
Race	Malay	Malay	Malay	Indian	Malay
Religion	Islam	Islam	Islam	Hinduism	Islam
Status	Single	Married	Single	Single	Married
Place of Origin	Melaka	Johor	Johor	Perak	Kelantan
Level of Education	Malaysian Higher School Certificate	Malaysian Certificate of Education	Malaysian Certificate of Education	Malaysian Certificate of Education	Malaysian Higher School Certificate
Position	Store Sales Associate (SSA)	Senior Sales Assistant	Assistant Supervisor	SSA	Supervisor
Period of Service	4 Month	3 Years	2 Years	1 Years	1 Month
Salary	RM2000+	RM2000+	RM2000+	RM1900+	RM3000+

Table 1 summarises six informants' demographic and professional details: Aiman, Diana, Fatin, Mages, and Mirul. The group includes males and females aged 22–37 from various states in Malaysia, predominantly Malay Muslims, except for Mages, an Indian Hindu. Educational qualifications range from Malaysian Certificate of Education to Malaysian Higher School Certificate, with positions including store sales associate (SSA), senior sales assistant, assistant supervisor, and supervisor. Work experience varies from 1 month to 3 years, with salaries ranging from RM 1,900 to over RM 3,000. Aiman, Diana, and Fatin earn over RM 2,000, while Mages earn RM 1,900, and Mirul earns the highest at over RM 3,000.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Forms of Discrimination

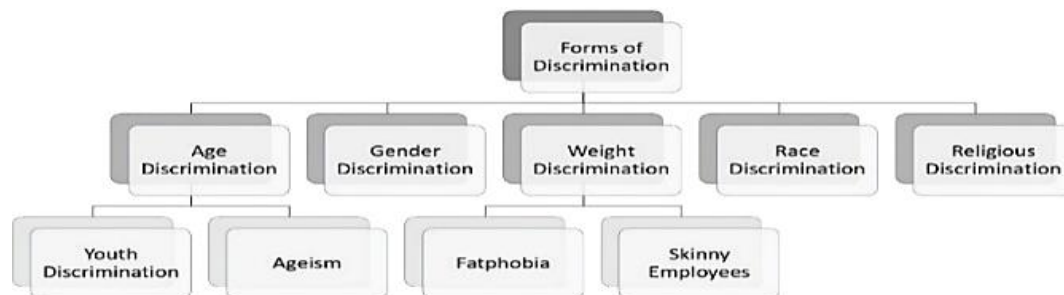


Figure 1: Forms of Discrimination

Discrimination manifests in various forms, including age, gender, weight, race, and religion, arising from biases based on cultural, physical, or ideological differences.

Age Discrimination

Employees, especially younger workers, often experience exclusion or lack of trust due to age. Mages, at 22, felt left out as co-workers doubted her abilities:

“I have experienced discrimination because of my young age. When I first started working, I was 22, making me the youngest person there. The others did not believe I could do the work and did not take me seriously. They rarely gave me tasks, so I felt excluded even though they treated me well. I was only assigned specific tasks because they did not trust me.”

Aiman also shared that his young age led people to underestimate him:

“So far, I have only been working here for four months, so I have not experienced much discrimination. But, when people here find out about my age, they react like, “This kid does not know anything for sure. There was a small quantity of it at the beginning. I mean, I am only 22, right? So, when I started working, they looked at

me like, "This kid is inexperienced, still young, and does not know anything about life yet." Especially this one person. I used to work at 7-Eleven before, so I am already used to this kind of work. Dealing with people looking down on me and all that. It is nothing new to me."

Older workers face challenges due to assumptions about their physical strength or technology skills. Diana, an older employee, observed that older individuals are often not hired due to these stereotypes:

"Maybe they assume that older people lack technology skills or can no longer do the work. However, it seems they prefer hiring older workers over younger ones in jobs like the one I have now."

Aiman also noted that older workers may struggle with technology, which affects their employability:

"It feels like it is not good to say this, but older people, you know, might not be as experienced when it comes to dealing with IT and technology. So, because of that, companies find it harder to hire people like that."

Gender Discrimination

Mages observed that men are often favoured for promotions, regardless of the women's skills:

"I am not sure about this, but from what I see here, people in higher positions are mostly male. Even if women do a lot of work and do a good job, men always get promoted. Only one woman is in a high position here, and all the others are men. It seems like they prefer men over women. There was even a time when someone came to ask for a job, and I told my manager. She immediately asked if the person was male or female, and when I said female, her face looked like she did not like it. Well, not that she did not like it, but it seemed like she did not want to hire her.

So, I feel like they are biased towards men here."

Similarly, Diana, who felt her promotion was delayed, highlighted the preference for male employees in leadership:

"I feel like I have experienced this, but it is from the company I am working at now, not from the other employees. This is because a male worker has been here for only 3 months and is already in the process of getting a promotion. Although his position is not as high as mine, I had to work for a long time to get this position. Recently, a new supervisor joined this outlet, and he is a male who has only been working for 3 weeks, yet he already holds the position of supervisor."

Fatin also noticed how women's suggestions are sometimes dismissed:

"When a woman speaks about an opinion or suggestion, sometimes it is not taken seriously because they think women cannot make decisions. It is not obvious, but you can feel it a little when working in different places."

Weight Discrimination

Fatin experienced teasing from coworkers about her body size and food habits:

"Sometimes there are light teasing comments, like "Eating a lot, huh?" or "No wonder the uniform is tight." However, it is never anything serious. Sometimes, it does get annoying, but I ignore it. The important thing is that I am comfortable with myself. As for the workplace culture, it is normal to have people making jokes about body weight. Maybe the company could offer training or raise awareness so that staff are more mindful and sensitive about such issues."

However, Mages, who is also thin, experienced teasing from coworkers about her body type:

"They are all skinny like anchovies. They often tease each other just because they are thin, but I was worse."

Race Discrimination

Mages, being Indian, felt excluded and mistreated by a new supervisor:

“It happened recently when a supervisor was transferred here from another outlet. Usually, new people or those who transfer here treat me well because I treat them well, but this new supervisor did not treat me well. If he wanted to ask something, he would ask other employees here, even though the other employees have only been working for a month and a half, while I have been working here for almost a year. If I wanted to teach him anything, he seemed too lazy to pay attention to me. I did nothing wrong, but I do not know why he acts like that. So, I feel a little hurt. He does not like me much. He does not let me do my work and does not talk to me. Even when I try to talk to him, he ignores me. It is like he hates me, so I feel like he has a terrible prejudice against me. Maybe it is prejudice against Indians.”

Aiman supported this, stating that Mages often face discrimination because of their race:

“For me, here, it is not that we, as Malay Muslims, face discrimination, but there is one Indian person who often faces discrimination here. Sometimes, when I see her, I feel sorry for her.”

Mirul, another informant, also noted the racial imbalance in higher positions:

“I feel like most of the higher-ranked positions here are held by Malays, so you can probably see the discrimination there because the majority here are Malays.”

Religious Discrimination

Just like races, Mages, a Hindu, also experiences religious discrimination by her new supervisor. Her co-worker, Aiman, confirms this. Aiman emphasised that Mages are well-treated by almost all workers except for the supervisor. He remarked:

“There is only one Hindu worker here. She is probably the one who faces discrimination because she is the only Hindu, but everyone here is fine with her, except for the new person.”

Factors of Discrimination

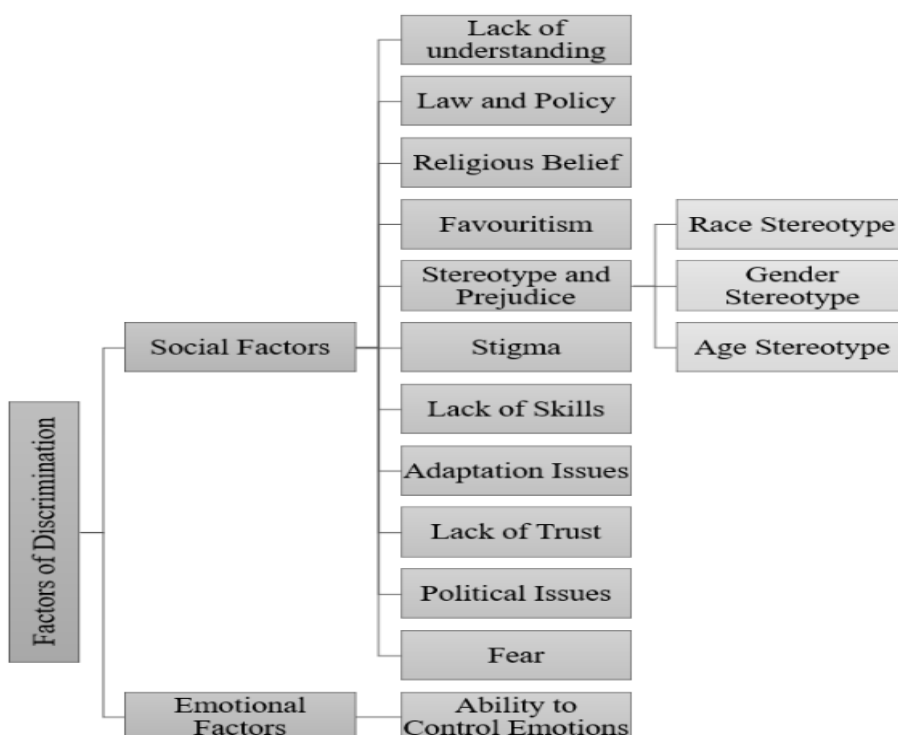


Figure 2 Factors of Discrimination

Figure 2 highlights key discrimination factors, divided into social and emotional aspects. Social factors include lack of understanding, biased laws, religious differences, favouritism, stereotypes (race, gender, age), stigma, skill gaps, adaptation challenges, distrust, political issues, and fear. Emotional factors focus on gender-emotion stereotypes that hinder women's leadership opportunities. These elements collectively perpetuate inequality across various contexts.

Social Factors

Lack of Understanding

Misunderstandings about a person's behaviour or background often lead to discrimination in the workplace. Fatin highlighted how people sometimes perceive a shy individual as arrogant, resulting in difficulty in cooperation. She said:

"There was a misunderstanding about someone who did not speak much, and they were considered arrogant. However, they were shy because they were new to the job and adjusting. So, the other staff found it difficult to cooperate with them because of this misunderstanding."

She also emphasised that lack of understanding towards older people, certain ethnic groups, and religions often results in discrimination, stating:

"Older people might not be able to do heavy work, certain ethnic groups may be perceived as less productive, and certain religions may prevent good cooperation. These are usually the causes of discrimination; it is all based on misunderstandings and misconceptions from their side. People judge and look down on others when they do not understand certain cultures or needs. For example, if they do not understand why someone needs time to pray or has special needs, they assume that those individuals are not committed to their work. Misunderstandings spread easily, especially when no one tries to correct them. Eventually, it becomes the norm, making it difficult for people facing discrimination to change others' perceptions."

Mages supported this by explaining how the absence of understanding towards a particular group leads to mistreatment, stating,

"When there is no proper understanding of a certain group, they can easily misunderstand and treat people from that group poorly. The lack of understanding leads to the spread of discriminatory behaviour."

Law and Policy

Diana noted that although anti-discrimination laws exist in Malaysia, many workers are unaware of them, making it difficult for them to seek legal recourse. She pointed out:

"There is a lack of awareness and understanding of anti-discrimination laws. If they do not understand, how can they seek help from the discrimination laws? I believe that the anti-discrimination laws in Malaysia are not ineffective, but workers who are discriminated against are unaware of the law and policy. I feel that many workers out there face discrimination but do not take any action because they are unaware of the existing discrimination laws."

Mages echoed this sentiment, sharing her lack of knowledge about discrimination laws, saying:

"Even though there is discrimination in the workplace, it is rare for employees to report it to management. I do not know much about the policies and anti-discrimination laws, but I think they exist in Malaysia and have heard about many discrimination cases. A challenge might be that they do not have strong evidence to prove they have been discriminated

against. Like me, I do not have strong evidence to show that I have been discriminated against by my supervisor, even though it is true. So, I feel that many workers do not get legal help because they do not have enough proof or think their case is too small, even though it is a big issue."

Fatin expanded on the issue by highlighting that the complex and costly process of seeking legal help deters employees from pursuing justice. She said:

“The process is complicated. There are many steps to take, and many parties are involved, so many people do not want to escalate the issue, even if it is serious. Also, the cost of getting legal help is high, so they are even less likely to report these issues.”

Religious Belief

Mages emphasised how false information about religions can cause discrimination. She noted:

“I think many people start to dislike certain religions because of false narratives being spread. Even if the information is true about a particular incident, it does not mean all followers of that religion behave the same way. We should not generalise an entire religious group based on the actions of a single follower who behaved poorly.”

Fatin added that misunderstandings about religious practices, such as Muslim prayer time requests, can also lead to workplace discrimination. She explained:

“People often misunderstand certain religious practices. For example, some think that Muslims always request extra leave because of religious obligations. In reality, they are fulfilling their religious needs, which does not disrupt their work at all.”

Favouritism

Favouritism in the workplace often manifests in the unfair distribution of praise and promotions. Aiman pointed out that favouritism shows in how some employees are praised while others are criticised, stating:

“Favoritism can be seen in how praise is given among employees. For instance, when employees do something right, but the boss fails to acknowledge their efforts, or worse, criticises them. It creates a sense of exclusion. It impacts morale negatively. Similarly, others may feel left out if the boss consistently praises or focuses on a single employee. This type of behaviour reflects biased treatment. Equal recognition is essential to maintaining a positive work environment.”

Mages, who faced favouritism based on gender bias, highlighted the issue of promotions, saying:

“Favoritism also appears in gender bias. For example, my boss seems to prefer male employees over female employees. The boss often promotes employees they like. A new male employee was sent for training to prepare for a promotion, while I, despite working for a year, have not been promoted or received any salary increase. If you are the boss’s favourite, it is easier to get promoted.”

Diana further elaborated on the promotion issue, noting that favouritism can cause resentment, saying:

“Favoritism at my workplace is evident in promotions. For example, my boss promoted a new employee over those who had been with the company for a long time. This caused resentment among the longer-serving employees, and their relationships with the promoted employee became strained. The promoted employee even asked me not to reveal the news to avoid conflict. So, favouritism can make employees feel disliked or undervalued by their boss, especially when the boss prefers others over them. I have seen cases where favouritism led to promotions being given to less qualified employees simply because the boss liked them. This prevents deserving employees from advancing in their careers.”

Stereotype and Prejudice

Discrimination based on race, gender, and age is prevalent due to stereotypes. Fatin explained that people rely on stereotypes rather than trying to understand different races, resulting in exclusion. She said:

“Discrimination often stems from a lack of understanding or exposure to diversity, whether in ethnicity, religion, or abilities. Instead of seeking to understand, people rely on assumptions and stereotypes based on what they hear or see. Stereotypes result in premature judgments about someone's abilities, often excluding them from important tasks or opportunities because of perceived incompetence tied to their ethnicity. Stigma can cause employees to feel insecure and less confident, knowing they are not perceived as equals. Being seen as different or less capable makes it harder for them to demonstrate their full potential.”

Diana echoed this, describing how race-based stereotypes led to discrimination in her workplace, stating:

“Workplace challenges arise when supervisors lack cultural understanding of certain ethnic groups, such as Indians. This lack of familiarity creates an uncomfortable environment, as seen with a supervisor who may rely solely on limited, media-based stereotypes rather than direct interactions with Indian individuals. Misconceptions about Indian communities are prevalent, with many associating them with aggression or violence. Such stereotypes lead to avoidance, even though most Indians I know do not fit this false narrative.”

Gender stereotypes also contribute to discrimination. Diana expressed frustration with gender-based bias in promotions, stating:

“Discrimination based on gender manifests in my workplace, where the belief persists that men are inherently more skilled and better suited for certain roles than women. For instance, I was overlooked for a promotion in favour of a male colleague who was newly hired. This stems from societal stereotypes perpetuated across generations, reinforced by family, education, media, and peers. These biases make men more capable, particularly for roles requiring physical strength or decision-making authority. Men predominantly hold high-ranking positions, as they are perceived to excel in work performance and possess superior physical abilities compared to women.”

Mages shared similar experiences, where her capabilities were overlooked simply because of her gender, saying:

“There is a stereotype here that men are more efficient at their jobs. Decisions often favour male employees, even if they have only worked briefly. Such stereotypes lead to male employees being perceived as more capable while dismissing the contributions of women. For instance, I feel overlooked, as my abilities are often underestimated simply because I am a woman.”

Finally, Aiman spoke about age discrimination, where older employees doubted his abilities because of his youth. He reflected:

“I think one of the misunderstandings here, involving me as well, is related to my age. Since I was young, the senior employees here tend to look at me as if, “Oh, this kid does not have the skills or experience to do this.” However, the truth is, I actually know how to handle it.”

Stigma

Stigma often leads to unfair treatment, especially for individuals with mental health issues or belonging to certain racial groups. Fatin observed that a colleague with mental health challenges was unfairly denied complex tasks despite being capable. As she stated:

“I once observed a worker who had mental health issues, and many assumed that they could not handle stress even though they were very competent at their job. However, the stigma made it difficult for them to be trusted with important tasks because people believed they were incapable.”

Similarly, Mages experienced racial stereotypes, particularly towards Indians, stating:

“There is a lack of interaction with people who are different from them, for instance, those from different ethnicities. Some might assume that Indians are violent, even though they have never actually befriended an Indian person. So, when people interact, they do not know the true nature of the community and make

assumptions as they please.”

Lack of Skills

Discrimination can arise from a perceived lack of skills due to age or inexperience. Aiman shared his frustration with coworkers who did not trust his abilities due to his age:

“Even though I have worked at 7-Eleven and similar stores before, they would not assign me heavier tasks, even when it is part of my job. They assumed I was not capable just because of my age. They did not know I had prior experience working at 7-Eleven. If you lack skills, of course, you cannot get promoted. To be a leader, you must already know how to handle the work.”

Diana also expressed concern about not assigning new employees challenging tasks, saying:

“It is not about unfair treatment, but maybe for new workers, I do not give them the harder tasks because I am afraid they will make mistakes. They are not skilled yet, so it is not appropriate for them to handle tasks that could trouble everyone. It is better to let them ease into simpler tasks first.”

Adaptation Issues

Struggles to adapt to diverse work environments can create friction and discrimination. Aiman found it challenging to work with people from different ethnic backgrounds, noting:

“It is fine overall, but it is challenging when working with colleagues from other ethnic groups. The main issue is differing approaches to work, like, they do things one way, and I do it another, so it is tough to collaborate effectively.”

Mages also felt her supervisor struggled to adapt to working with her, remarking:

“The supervisor just seems to have a harder time adjusting here. They do not seem to know how to talk or interact with me. I do not know if it is because they dislike me or find it hard to adapt to working with me. However, with others, they seem fine. If someone genuinely does not like another person, how can they adapt to working with them?”

Lack of Trust

Lack of trust often leads to missed opportunities for promotion and responsibility. Diana explained how her Indian colleague was passed over for promotion due to a lack of trust, saying:

“This is about my Indian colleague. The boss does not trust her enough to handle higher positions or tasks requiring significant responsibility. Because of this lack of trust, she has not been promoted yet, while newer employees have advanced before her. It could also be due to gender. My colleague is a woman, and the newer promoted employee is a man. It is clear they prefer men for higher-ranking positions.”

Similarly, Mages shared:

“The main cause of discrimination, in my opinion, is a lack of trust in certain groups and misconceptions or wrong assumptions about them. If there is no trust, how can someone be promoted? It is often based on stereotypes. For instance, people assume that since I am young and Indian, I cannot handle difficult tasks or responsibilities, and therefore, I am not fit for promotion. Nevertheless, I have been working here long and know how to do my job well. Despite that, they still do not trust me or offer me training. Younger male employees are usually trusted to make decisions, like handling orders. People do not trust me to order supplies, even though I have been here longer.”

Political Issues

Political beliefs can sometimes contribute to workplace discrimination, especially during sensitive times like elections. Fatin mentioned hearing stories of employees being unfairly treated because of differing political views, adding:

“I have heard stories of employees with certain political views feeling like they are not treated fairly, especially if their views clash with those of management or the majority within the company. This becomes more noticeable during elections or when political issues are hot topics. Political beliefs are not usually openly discussed in hiring or promotions, but sometimes those with good connections to certain influential parties seem to get better opportunities. Discrimination is not explicit, but political factors play a role behind the scenes. I have not personally experienced political discrimination directly, but I know of employees who feel their opinions are not taken seriously because they do not share the same political views as management. This can show up in conversations, work opportunities, or how collaboration is approached.”

Mages also shared how racial tensions between Malays and Chinese might lead to discrimination, stating:

“Regarding this, I have heard colleagues gossip negatively about Chinese individuals because of past racial tensions between Malays and Chinese. This makes me think it would be challenging for us to get along and work well together if there were Chinese employees here.”

Fear

Fear of backlash often prevents employees from reporting discrimination. Mirul observed that:

“I feel like it is not the law failing to protect employees, but rather employees who fail to protect themselves due to fear. People are afraid to report cases like these because they fear it might backfire on them. They might face consequences without evidence, especially if the person being reported holds a higher position. Another reason is the lack of evidence. Even if we report something, such as lower-ranking employees, or if we report someone in a higher position, we might face backlash or even threats. So, it is better to just focus on our work and not get involved.”

This fear and a lack of evidence lead to a culture where employees avoid speaking out.

Emotional Factors

Ability to Control Emotions

The inability to control emotions, especially in women, can lead to discrimination, particularly in leadership opportunities. Aiman admitted his emotional struggles, stating:

“I used to struggle a bit with controlling my emotions, and I am the type who speaks directly without sugar-coating. Because of this, the work environment sometimes felt awkward in the past. Of course, others might feel afraid to work or avoid interacting with someone like that. This situation often happens to women, but I, as a man, also experience this, and they seem too scared to get close to me whenever my face is gloomy.”

Diana also shared that her emotional expression affected her career progression, saying:

“When it comes to emotions, if they are not controlled, people may not like it, and then discrimination starts. Customers often think I am angry, resulting in them giving bad reviews. Even if you are talented, if people see you as emotionally unstable, they might think twice before giving you a promotion or leadership opportunities.”

Fatin experienced similar challenges, noting:

“Emotions greatly influence our chances of being considered for leadership roles. Leaders who can manage

their emotions well are more respected and trusted. If someone cannot control their emotions, it impacts how higher-ups view them, potentially hindering their chances of being entrusted with bigger responsibilities. There was a time when I felt disappointed with a company decision. Even though I tried to express my feelings professionally, I was still labelled as "too emotional." I felt this was unfair because I wanted to share my opinions openly, but it was misunderstood."

Impacts of Discrimination

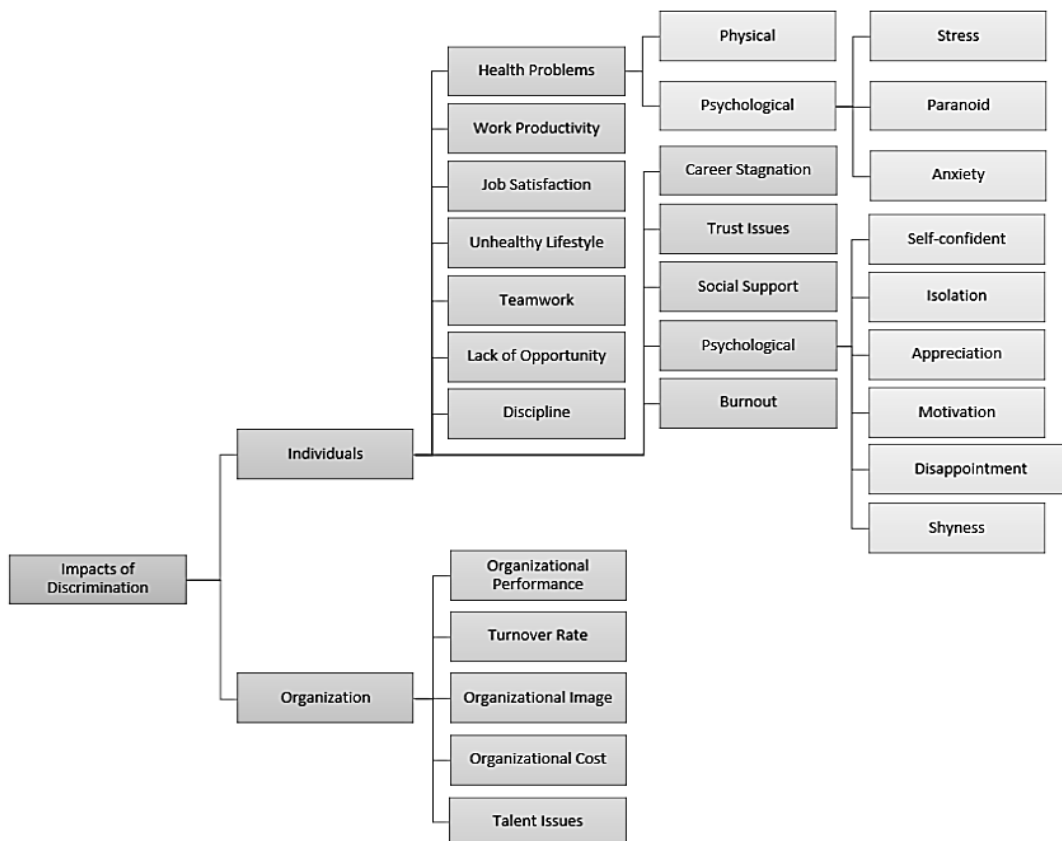


Figure 3 Impacts of Discrimination

Figure 3 shows how discrimination impacts employees and the organisation. For individuals, it leads to health problems (physical and psychological), career stagnation, reduced job satisfaction, unhealthy lifestyles, and social challenges such as isolation, lack of support, and trust issues. Organisations face increased turnover rates, tarnished reputations, higher costs, and talent retention challenges. These effects collectively hinder productivity, morale, and overall performance, emphasising the need for inclusive and equitable practices.

Individual Impacts

Health Problem

Discrimination leads to both physical and psychological health issues. Aiman shared that stress from workplace treatment disrupts his sleep, making him more susceptible to illness:

"When your mind keeps dwelling on the treatment you will receive at work, it disrupts your sleep. Lack of sleep makes you feel weak and more prone to falling ill."

Similarly, Fatin highlighted the long-term health risks caused by continuous discrimination, such as exhaustion and heart problems:

"In the long term, discrimination can lead to physical stress. Sometimes, I feel more exhausted or have trouble

sleeping because I overthink too much about work-related issues. Continuous discrimination can also lead to physical health problems, such as heart issues.”

Psychologically, discrimination causes stress, paranoia, and anxiety. Mages explained the physical toll stress can take due to frequent discrimination:

“People who frequently experience discrimination are more likely to deal with constant stress. If you are often discriminated against, stress can spike suddenly. When stressed, your body feels tired, you do not get enough rest, and headaches become common. Sometimes, it even leads to migraines. After my new supervisor discriminated against me, I could not stop thinking about it. I kept wondering how to work with them, which stressed me out.”

Mirul shared how discrimination creates discomfort at work and turns it into a burden:

“Dealing with discrimination makes me feel stressed, but not overly stressed. Stress leads to discomfort in the workplace, and it turns work into a burden. So, I try not to let it stress me out because I do not want to cause issues with coworkers.”

Work Productivity

Discrimination diminishes motivation and productivity. Fatin explained that feeling unappreciated reduces her motivation, affecting her work efficiency:

“Sometimes, I feel unappreciated, which reduces my motivation. Furthermore, sometimes, that can make me lose the mood to do better work.”

Mages shared how constant discrimination lowers the drive to perform well, as employees feel their efforts go unnoticed:

“We lose the drive to give our best because we think, “Why put in more effort if no one notices? Every time I go to work, I feel stressed and do not feel excited to be productive. This stress lowers my motivation because work becomes an emotional burden I cannot bear. When you are constantly discriminated against, it makes you uncomfortable to go to work. It feels like, “Why deal with people who do not appreciate me?” I feel like that a lot now when I go to work. I work because it is for my benefit. I have a lot of commitments, so I have to work.”

Aiman shared that overthinking discrimination disrupts his focus and slows down productivity:

“Discrimination makes us overthink. Our focus gets disrupted because our minds are preoccupied with unfair treatment from coworkers or bosses. When the mind is disturbed, work slows down.”

Mirul pointed out that discrimination strains relationships between coworkers, reducing cooperation and hindering work productivity:

“Discrimination can create tension between coworkers. When relationships are strained, cooperation towards shared goals suffers, which reduces productivity.”

Job Satisfaction

Discrimination erodes job satisfaction by making employees feel undervalued. Aiman shared that discrimination isolates him from coworkers, impacting his sense of connection to the team:

“When faced with discrimination, it feels isolating from coworkers. This makes me feel less connected to the team, and this connection is important for job satisfaction.”

Fatin explained that the lack of equal opportunities and perceived injustice make her feel the work is not worth the effort:

“Discrimination directly affects my job satisfaction. When I do not feel like I am given equal opportunities or when there is injustice, it makes me feel like the work is not worthwhile. I start to feel like I am not valued at the company.”

Career Stagnation

Discrimination leads to career stagnation, especially for those overlooked during promotions. Fatin highlighted that discrimination based on race and gender made her feel sidelined in the promotion process despite her good performance:

“Yes, I have felt sidelined in the promotion process just because of my race and gender. Even though my performance was good, others were more ‘liked’ because they had a certain ‘profile’ and were always given opportunities.”

Mages expressed frustration when she was overlooked for promotion despite her readiness and hard work:

“There was a time when I felt confident and ready to apply for a promotion. However, I noticed that my supervisor chose a colleague who was very different from me—he was a male, Malay, and Muslim, even though I had been working there for a year.”

Unhealthy Lifestyle

Discrimination contributes to unhealthy coping mechanisms and disrupts work-life balance. Aiman explained that stress caused by discrimination leads him to neglect healthy activities like exercise and turn to unhealthy food choices:

“The sense of hopelessness from discrimination can make me less motivated to exercise or engage in healthy activities. When I feel powerless, I prefer to sit still and be inactive. With all the pressure from discrimination, I often neglect time for myself. I tend to overlook activities I enjoy, like exercising or socializing. I tend to ignore healthy habits, such as exercising or eating well. When feeling stressed from discrimination, I tend to choose unhealthy foods as a way to feel better. Chocolate or fast food become my go-to options.”

Fatin acknowledged that discrimination triggers unhealthy behaviours like overeating to cope with emotional distress, leading to poor eating habits:

“Yes, I have noticed that discrimination often makes me more likely to use unhealthy coping mechanisms to manage my emotions and stress. For example, when I feel pressured, I tend to overeat. Discrimination at work forces me to work harder to prove my abilities. This leads me to neglect my time with my family, damaging my work-life balance, as I sometimes have to work overtime, disrupting my personal life. I lose the motivation to maintain a healthy lifestyle or join social activities. This leads me to choose unhealthy food as a way to cope, which affects my eating habits. I become more likely to eat irregularly and choose unhealthy foods.”

Mirul added that stress from discrimination discourages him from maintaining a healthy lifestyle, causing him to turn to unhealthy food for comfort:

“To cope with the stress, I may tend to choose unhealthy food as a source of comfort. I might miss the opportunity to share healthy eating experiences, which makes me less motivated to maintain a healthy lifestyle with others.”

Trust Issues

Discrimination erodes trust in coworkers, supervisors, and the organisation. Aiman shared how discrimination caused a lack of trust, especially towards his supervisor:

“When discrimination happens, a lack of trust emerges. Trusting others, including my supervisor, becomes difficult because I fear they may have negative views about me.”

Diana expressed that discrimination makes her lose trust in the company’s management and vision:

“Discrimination can make me lose trust in the company and its management. When I feel that the management is unfair, I lose confidence in the company’s vision and mission.”

Fatin highlighted that favouritism and biased treatment further reduce her trust in coworkers and the fairness of the hiring process:

“Discrimination can create a gap in work relationships. I find it hard to trust coworkers or my supervisor when I feel they are biased or show favouritism. Discrimination in the hiring process can damage my perception of job opportunities. If I see certain people with specific backgrounds always getting priority, my chances are limited. This can make me sceptical about whether the selection process is truly fair.”

Teamwork

Discrimination disrupts teamwork and collaboration. Aiman shared that discrimination creates discomfort in collaboration and fragments teamwork, making it harder to achieve shared goals:

“Discrimination makes it uncomfortable for people to collaborate. When there is no harmony, teamwork becomes fragmented, and achieving common goals is difficult. When employees feel unaccepted, they tend to distance themselves from the team. This prevents building good relationships, which are crucial for innovation and teamwork.”

Mirul echoed this, explaining that discrimination reduces the willingness to cooperate, leading to delays and a weakened team spirit:

“When you feel discriminated against, your willingness to collaborate with others drops. You become less interested in teamwork because you do not feel comfortable, which can cause work delays or disruptions. When team members notice discrimination, the team’s spirit weakens. If one person is mistreated, others lose motivation because they feel injustice in the team. That is why I say cooperation is crucial to prevent environmental discrimination. Discrimination can create tension in teamwork. Unfairness among team members makes cooperation difficult, damaging the overall relationship. Discrimination can create tension between coworkers. When relationships are strained, cooperation towards shared goals is disrupted.”

Social Support

Discrimination creates feelings of isolation and limits access to support. Diana explained that when discrimination is present, coworkers and supervisors are less likely to offer support, affecting her professional growth:

“When discrimination occurs, coworkers may be less likely to offer support. The feeling of being isolated makes it hard for me to get the support I need from others, including my supervisor. Discrimination makes me feel less supported by management. Without support, it is hard to find the courage to speak up or ask for bigger opportunities.”

Mirul added that discrimination also limits support from friends and family, intensifying the emotional strain:

“Discrimination makes it difficult for me to get support from coworkers. Without support, asking for advice or getting guidance on developing my skills is hard. Discrimination can also lead to a lack of support from friends and family. It becomes even harder to get through tough times when I feel like the people around me do not understand.”

Psychological

Discrimination negatively impacts self-confidence and motivation. Aiman shared that being criticised due to discrimination made him feel insecure and hesitant to take the initiative:

“When I was working on ordering items that were out of stock, a coworker commented negatively about me ordering incorrectly, criticising my work and decisions. That comment made me feel insecure and increased my discomfort in speaking up or taking initiative.”

Similarly, Fatin highlighted how discrimination can make her insecure, affecting her willingness to try harder:

“Discrimination makes me feel less confident. I often think there is no point in trying harder because the outcomes will still be biased. Every rejection caused by discrimination diminishes my confidence, making me afraid to try again.”

Next is about isolation. Only one informant experiences isolation due to discrimination, which is Mages. Mages shared that when other coworkers receive more attention, he feels left out, which can diminish his sense of belonging. This feeling of exclusion can negatively impact his self-esteem, making him feel undervalued compared to his peers. She sadly complained:

“Sometimes, other coworkers get more attention, and I feel left out.”

The third sub-impact is appreciation. Information Fatin explained that discrimination makes her feel undervalued despite her successes and prevents her from receiving recognition for her efforts. This lack of acknowledgement affects her sense of accomplishment and worth in the workplace. This is evident in her account as follows:

“Even though I have achieved some successes, they are not recognised in proportion to my efforts. Discrimination makes me feel undervalued and not given the recognition it deserves.”

Then, for motivation, informant Fatin shared that discrimination diminishes her motivation, making her feel that her efforts are pointless when she does not receive recognition. The lack of appreciation for her work leads to a loss of drive, reducing her willingness to contribute further. Her narrative highlights this point as shown below:

“In the long run, discrimination can weaken our spirit to work. Sometimes, I feel like there is no point in trying harder if I do not receive the recognition that matches my work. I lack motivation to participate in company activities when I feel unappreciated by those in charge. So, discrimination brings me down and makes me feel unmotivated to contribute more. This experience of discrimination affects my motivation. Every time I try for a job and get rejected, the disappointment makes me feel even less motivated to try again. I start feeling like my efforts are pointless, and sometimes I avoid applying for new jobs because I do not want to face the same situation.”

Only one informant, Mages, expressed her disappointment about discrimination. Mages shared that discrimination leads to disappointment with the recruitment process. When efforts are not recognised or rewarded, it causes a sense of wasted effort, making him reluctant to continue searching for new opportunities. She said:

“When facing discrimination, I often feel disappointed with the recruitment process. It feels like all the efforts I have put in are wasted, and this makes me reluctant to continue searching.”

Last but not least, it is about shyness. Mages also the only information that expresses the impacts of discrimination on her is shyness. Mages shared it leads to

disappointment with the recruitment process. When efforts are not recognised or rewarded, it causes a sense of wasted effort, making her reluctant to continue searching for new opportunities. As seen in her narrative, this is

illustrated by the following:

“Discrimination makes us feel embarrassed or reluctant to interact. When interactions become uncomfortable, it is hard to discuss things or ask for help, leading to communication breakdown.”

Lack of Opportunity

Discrimination creates fear and limits access to growth opportunities. Aiman shared that it makes him fearful of not getting good opportunities and feeling left behind:

“Discrimination creates a fear about my future. I am afraid I will not get good opportunities, which makes me feel hopeless. Seeing others succeeding while I do not make me feel further away from the opportunities available.”

Fatin added that discrimination often blocks important training or exposure opportunities, affecting her skill development:

“Sometimes, discrimination blocks opportunities for important training or exposure. My skills are not fully recognised because others are given priority.”

Discipline

Discrimination leads to absenteeism and disengagement from work. Aiman explained that when he feels marginalised, his motivation to work disappears:

“When I feel marginalised, the motivation to work disappears. The absenteeism increases because I feel there is no point in coming to work.”

Fatin agreed, noting that discrimination increases the likelihood of employees skipping work and finding excuses to avoid showing up:

“When someone feels discriminated against, they are more likely to skip work or find excuses not to show up.”

Burnout

Discrimination contributes to burnout by causing mental and emotional stress and exhaustion. Aiman shared that this constant stress significantly affects work performance:

“Discrimination can lead to burnout quickly. When we feel mentally and emotionally stressed, our bodies get exhausted, and we cannot perform well. Over time, work performance deteriorates significantly.”

Organisational Impacts

Organisational Performance

Discrimination hinders organisational growth. Diana noted that employees who feel marginalised may leave, which impacts the company’s success:

“In an environment of discrimination, organisations may miss opportunities to learn and grow. Diverse opinions may not be accepted, which could help achieve strategic goals.

Employees who feel marginalised or discriminated against may choose to leave the company. When talented individuals leave, the company loses potential that could contribute to its growth. Discrimination can cause companies to lose valuable talent. If quality employees leave, it becomes difficult for the company to meet its objectives.”

Fatin further emphasised that discrimination reduces collaboration and innovation, weakening the company's ability to meet its goals:

"Discrimination hinders my ability to innovate because it reduces collaboration and the healthy exchange of ideas within the team. When there is a sense of injustice, individuals tend to become more closed off and reluctant to share their thoughts or ideas, which weakens innovation and the ability to adapt to market demands. When discrimination is present, I feel that the ability to focus on the company's strategic goals is affected. When employees feel they are being mistreated, it can demotivate them, reducing their productivity. This creates a barrier to the company's success. When we feel mistreated, it impacts our engagement and commitment to the company. The enthusiasm to be fully involved in projects or company activities may decrease."

Turnover Rate

Discrimination increases the turnover rate as employees seek better opportunities. Aiman described discrimination as a "silent toxin" that erodes emotional well-being, leading employees to leave:

"Discrimination can make me start looking for other opportunities. When my heart is not satisfied, and I feel looked down upon, I have no hesitation in seeking a place that might treat me better. Employees who experience discrimination may quickly feel bored and dissatisfied, leading them to look for job opportunities elsewhere. Discrimination in the workplace is like a silent toxin. When you feel unappreciated or marginalised because of gender, race, religion, or any personal factor, it gradually eats away at your mental and emotional well-being. You start thinking, "What am I doing here?" because you know your hard work would not be recognised the same as others who are not facing discrimination."

Diana shared that when management does not address discrimination, employees start considering leaving:

"When management does not take discrimination issues seriously, I start thinking, "If this is the case, why stay?" Employees who feel side-lined or unappreciated tend to look for other job opportunities, which leads to higher turnover rates. Experiencing or witnessing discrimination significantly impacts my sense of job security. When I see colleagues mistreated, I worry about my position. Discrimination at work plays a key role in my decision to stay or leave an organisation. If I feel treated unjustly or marginalised, my motivation to continue working there definitely decreases. When I experience or witness discrimination, feelings of dissatisfaction and being sidelined begin to surface. It makes me think, "Why should I stay here?"

Organisational Image

Discrimination negatively impacts the company's reputation, leading to declining customers. Fatin emphasised that when an organisation's reputation is tarnished, it affects the customer base:

"The company's reputation can also be affected by this issue. When the reputation is tarnished, it can result in a decrease in customers."

Mages agreed, noting that a company known for discrimination risks losing customers to competitors:

"Discrimination within an organisation can also harm the company's image. If the company's poor reputation is poor, customers might shift to competitors better at managing diversity."

Organisational Costs

Discrimination increases recruitment and training costs due to high employee turnover. Aiman explained that the cycle of replacing employees puts a strain on the company's budget:

"When an organisation struggles to retain employees, the costs for recruitment and training new hires will increase. This can have a significant impact on the budget and profits."

Talent Issues

Discrimination discourages new talent from applying to organisations that lack diversity and inclusion. Aiman shared that companies that do not prioritise diversity will struggle to attract new talent:

“Companies not committed to diversity and inclusion will struggle to attract new talent. People nowadays prefer to work at places that prioritise these values.”

Mages further added that a reputation for discrimination will deter quality talent from applying:

“If a company is known for being discriminatory, it will damage its reputation. Quality talent may avoid applying because they do not want to work in a place that does not value diversity.”

Research Findings

Objective 1: Forms of Discrimination

The study identified key forms of workplace discrimination, including gender, religion, age, disability, and racial discrimination. Gender biases, rooted in patriarchal norms, hindered women's advancement and perpetuated unequal treatment in promotions and salaries, while men faced challenges in roles stereotypically seen as female-dominated (Zakuan, 2023). Religious minorities reported difficulties with accommodations and exclusionary practices, reflecting systemic barriers (Valfort, 2020). Age discrimination affected both older and younger employees, undervalued due to inexperience (Macdonald & Levy, 2016), while racial discrimination was evident in hiring, task distribution, and microaggressions (Kadiresan & Javed, 2015).

Objective 2: Factors of Discrimination

The study identified several factors driving workplace discrimination. Miscommunication and ignorance about diverse groups perpetuate exclusion, as highlighted by Narayanan (2018). Ambiguous regulations and insufficient diversity programs fail to address biases effectively (Koburtay et al., 2020). Favouritism and workplace stigma undermine fairness and reinforce inequities (Bhugra, 2016). Stereotypes about race, gender, and age further marginalise minorities, women, and older employees, echoing Mokhtar, Ayob, Zulkifli, Asnawi, Ismail, Chong, Roslan, Awang, Fathy & Baharin (2022). Skill gaps and adaptation challenges, particularly for minority groups, contribute to feelings of alienation (Narayanan, 2018). Distrust, often rooted in historical biases, and fear of change or competition exacerbate discriminatory behaviour.

Objective 3: Impacts of Discrimination

Workplace discrimination significantly impacts individuals and organisations. For individuals, it reduces productivity, induces physical and psychological health issues, and erodes job satisfaction and career progression (Macdonald & Levy, 2016; Harnois & Bastos, 2018). It also fosters mistrust, unhealthy coping behaviours, and limited opportunities, undermining motivation and social interactions (Rather, 2022; Valfort, 2020). For organisations, discrimination hampers productivity, increases turnover, damages reputation, and incurs financial losses from legal disputes and recruitment challenges (Perron, 2018; Vang et al., 2019). These findings highlight the need for inclusion to mitigate these detrimental effects.

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Limitations

This study's limitations stem primarily from its methodological and contextual constraints. Firstly, the sample size was limited to a small group of informants, which may not fully capture the diversity of discrimination-related experiences. This constraint restricts the generalizability of the findings to broader populations or other organisational contexts. Additionally, the reliance on qualitative data, while insightful, limits the study's ability to comprehensively quantify the extent of discrimination's impact. There were also challenges related to

informants' willingness to disclose sensitive information, potentially affecting the depth and accuracy of the data collected. Lastly, the research was confined to a specific organisational setting and geographical location, which might not account for variations in workplace discrimination across different industries or cultural contexts. Future studies should consider a larger, more diverse sample and integrate quantitative methods to enhance the robustness of the findings while exploring diverse settings to provide a broader perspective on workplace discrimination.

Recommendation

Recommendation for Organizations

Organisations must prioritise the creation of an inclusive and equitable workplace to mitigate discrimination. This includes implementing a thoroughly

anti-discrimination policies and ensuring they are strictly enforced. Training programs on diversity, equity, and inclusion should be conducted for employees and management to foster awareness and eliminate biases. Additionally, organisations should establish transparent mechanisms for addressing grievances, ensuring victims of discrimination can report incidents without fear of retaliation. Encouraging open dialogues and integrating minority groups into organisational activities can enhance mutual understanding and cohesion. Furthermore, organisations should adopt merit-based systems for promotions, compensation, and task assignments to ensure fairness across all levels.

Recommendation for Future Research

Future research should expand on this study by including a larger and more diverse sample size to capture broader perspectives on workplace discrimination. A mixed-methods approach combining qualitative and quantitative data would provide a more comprehensive understanding of

the issue, enabling researchers to quantify the impacts of discrimination alongside qualitative insights. Comparative studies across industries, cultures, and geographical locations are also recommended to identify patterns and unique challenges related to workplace discrimination. Additionally, future studies could focus on the long-term effects of organisational anti-discrimination initiatives and explore innovative strategies to foster inclusivity and equity in a dynamic and evolving workplace environment.

The study effectively highlights workplace discrimination at U Mart in Gelang Patah, Johor, Malaysia, using a qualitative research approach. A significant strength is the comprehensive analysis of multiple forms of discrimination—gender, age, religious, and racial—using thematic analysis through NVivo 12 Plus software. The research is grounded in relevant literature, citing numerous studies that reinforce its findings. Additionally, the study provides real-life testimonies from employees, making the research more authentic and relatable. The research methodology, which includes semi-structured interviews, ensures detailed and nuanced data collection. Furthermore, the study outlines practical recommendations for addressing discrimination, including policy reforms and training programs, making it highly applicable to workplace settings.

One limitation is the small sample size, as the study only includes five employees, which may not fully represent the broader workforce at U Mart or other organisations. The reliance on qualitative data, while insightful, restricts the ability to measure the extent of discrimination quantitatively. Additionally, while the study provides real-life experiences, it lacks strong statistical validation, which could have strengthened the credibility of the findings. Another weakness is the limited generalizability of the results due to the study's focus on a single organisation in one location. Lastly, although discrimination laws in Malaysia are mentioned, the study does not deeply analyse their effectiveness in preventing workplace discrimination.

To improve the study, future research should expand the sample size to include more employees across different job levels and locations to enhance generalizability.

Integrating a mixed-methods approach with quantitative surveys could provide statistical backing to qualitative

insights, making the findings more robust. Additionally, exploring the role of management and HR policies in either mitigating or perpetuating discrimination would offer a deeper understanding of organisational responsibility. The study should also provide a comparative analysis with other companies in similar industries to highlight broader trends in workplace discrimination. Finally, including legal analysis on the effectiveness of Malaysia's anti-discrimination laws in workplace settings could provide valuable insights for policymakers.

CONCLUSION

Workplace discrimination profoundly impacts employees and organisations, reducing productivity, well-being, and morale. This study highlights the need for robust policies, education, and inclusive practices to address discrimination and foster fairness and equity. Creating supportive environments enhances organisational success and contributes to societal harmony. Continued research is essential to guide practical actions and deepen understanding of this critical issue.

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