

Employee Experiences with Workplace Discrimination Law

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Workplace discrimination remains a pervasive issue with significant impacts on employee well-being and organizational effectiveness. This study aims to explore the nuances of employee experiences with workplace discrimination law, focusing on how individuals perceive, react to, and are affected by discriminatory practices in their workplaces. A qualitative research design was employed, using semi-structured interviews to collect data from 30 participants who had experienced or observed workplace discrimination. The study targeted theoretical saturation to ensure comprehensive coverage of relevant experiences. Data were analyzed using NVivo software, which facilitated thematic analysis and helped identify key themes and categories within the interview transcripts. Three main themes emerged from the data: Perceptions of Discrimination, Experiences with Legal Processes, and Impact on Workplace Culture. Each theme included multiple categories, such as Legal Knowledge, Personal Impact, Reporting Procedures, Outcomes of Legal Action, Changes in Workplace Dynamics, and Long-term Effects. These categories encompassed various concepts like understanding of rights, emotional distress, confidentiality issues, settlement outcomes, changes in team cohesion, and shifts in organizational policies. The findings reveal the complexity of workplace discrimination and underscore the need for robust organizational policies and practices that can effectively prevent and address discrimination. The study highlights the importance of enhancing legal and procedural knowledge among employees, improving reporting and support systems, and fostering an inclusive culture to mitigate the adverse effects of discrimination on workplace dynamics and employee health.

Keywords: Workplace discrimination, employee experiences, legal processes, organizational culture.

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1. Introduction

In the evolving landscape of workplace dynamics, the prevalence and impacts of discrimination have garnered extensive attention, underscoring significant challenges across various sectors and demographics. Discrimination in the workplace is not only a social and ethical issue but also a substantial barrier to organizational efficiency and employee well-being. The essence of workplace discrimination encompasses a

range of behaviors and biases, including, but not limited to, gender, race, age, and mental health stigmas, all of which have been shown to adversely affect employee engagement and productivity (Boulet et al., 2022; SteelFisher et al., 2019; Triana et al., 2018).

Research has increasingly highlighted the multifaceted impact of workplace discrimination. For instance, Alnuaimi (2022) explored the detrimental effects of workplace factors on employee engagement within the public sector, indirectly pointing towards the



repercussions of discrimination on organizational commitment and individual performance (Alnuaimi, 2022). Similarly, the relationship between demographic diversity and perceptions of workplace discrimination has been intricately analyzed by Boulet, Lachapelle, and Keiff (2022), who assert that the context of an employee's work environment significantly modulates the effects of discrimination on their psychological and physical well-being. This underscores a critical need for a nuanced understanding of how diverse workplace environments interact with discrimination to shape employee experiences (Boulet et al., 2022).

The legal landscape surrounding workplace discrimination has also evolved, influenced by societal shifts and increasing awareness of equality and inclusion. Cavico and Mujtaba (2021) discuss the complexities of managing workplace romance and sexual favoritism in the era of the #MeToo movement, highlighting the legal and practical challenges for management in ensuring equitable treatment (Cavico & Mujtaba, 2021). This discussion is pertinent as it reflects broader concerns over gender discrimination, further analyzed by Triana et al. (2018), who synthesized findings from various studies to reveal the pervasive adverse impacts of perceived gender discrimination on employee outcomes, including job dissatisfaction and reduced psychological well-being (Triana et al., 2018).

Mental health discrimination in workplace settings, as explored by Reavley, Jorm, and Morgan (2017), remains a critical area of concern. They found that discrimination against individuals with mental health issues not only perpetuates stigma but also significantly hampers their employment opportunities and professional growth. These findings are crucial in understanding the intersectionality of mental health and workplace discrimination, particularly in the context of promoting inclusive policies that address both visible and invisible diversities (Reavley et al., 2017).

The empirical evidence provided by Goldman et al. (2006) and Rospenda, Richman, and Shannon (2008) further complements these themes by delineating the antecedents and consequences of employment discrimination. They highlight the psychological strain and the pervasiveness of harassment and discrimination across different workplace settings, which not only affects individual employees but also the organizational

climate and overall productivity (Goldman et al., 2006; Rospenda et al., 2008).

Furthermore, the narrative on workplace discrimination is enriched by the perspectives of ethnic minority professionals as discussed by Laer and Janssens (2011), and the broader implications of racial and ethnic discrimination examined by Chavez et al. (2015). These studies collectively emphasize the subtle yet profound experiences of discrimination that continue to challenge the norms of equity and inclusion within professional settings (Chavez et al., 2015; Laer & Janssens, 2011).

The current study aims to delve deeper into these issues by examining firsthand accounts of employees who have encountered discrimination, utilizing a qualitative approach through semi-structured interviews. This methodology is intended to capture the nuanced and often covert experiences of discrimination that quantitative methods may overlook. The goal is to foster a deeper understanding of how legal frameworks, organizational policies, and individual actions interact in the complex fabric of workplace discrimination.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

This study utilized a qualitative research methodology to explore employee experiences with workplace discrimination law. Participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique to ensure a diverse representation of experiences across different industries, job roles, and demographic backgrounds. The study aimed for theoretical saturation, where no new information was observed in the data, guiding the decision on the number of participants. This saturation was reached after interviewing 30 individuals, ensuring a robust dataset for analysis.

Participants were informed about the study's purpose, the voluntary nature of their participation, the confidentiality of their responses, and their right to withdraw from the study at any point without any consequences. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to the interviews.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Semi-Structured Interview

The primary data collection method involved conducting semi-structured interviews with employees who have had direct or indirect experiences with workplace discrimination. These interviews were designed to elicit detailed responses about personal experiences, perceptions of legal processes, and the impact of these experiences on their professional and personal lives. Interviews were conducted face-to-face and via video conferencing to accommodate participants in various locations. Each interview lasted approximately 45-60 minutes and was recorded with the consent of the participants. The interview format followed a semi-structured guide, which included open-ended questions to allow for a detailed exploration of the participants' experiences while providing the flexibility to probe deeper into specific areas of interest.

2.3. Data Analysis

The recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim. Data analysis was performed using NVivo software, a powerful tool for qualitative data analysis. This software facilitated the organization, coding, and thematic

analysis of the transcriptions. Codes were generated both deductively from the research objectives and inductively from the emerging themes in the data. The coding scheme was continuously refined and adjusted as new data were analyzed, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the dataset.

3. Findings and Results

In this study, a total of 30 participants were interviewed to understand their experiences with workplace discrimination law. The demographic profile of participants was diverse, encompassing a wide range of ages, genders, ethnic backgrounds, and employment sectors. Specifically, the participants included 16 females, 12 males, and 2 non-binary individuals, reflecting a varied gender representation. The age distribution was equally varied, with 10 participants aged between 25-35 years, 12 participants between 36-50 years, and 8 participants over the age of 50. Ethnically, the sample included 12 Caucasian, 10 African American, 5 Hispanic, and 3 Asian individuals. Participants were employed across various sectors including technology (8), healthcare (7), education (6), manufacturing (4), and services (5).

Table 1

The Results of Qualitative Analysis

Main Themes	Subthemes	Concepts (Open Codes)
Perceptions of Discrimination	Legal Knowledge	Understanding rights, Awareness of laws, Legal resources, Clarity of policies
	Personal Impact	Emotional distress, Career setbacks, Loss of motivation, Sense of injustice
	Response to Discrimination	Seeking legal advice, Informal resolution, Formal complaints, Escalation to authorities
Experiences with Legal Processes	Preventive Measures	Training programs, Policy enforcement, Awareness campaigns, Whistleblower protection
	Reporting Procedures	Confidentiality issues, Accessibility of reporting channels, Response time, Feedback mechanisms
	Outcomes of Legal Action	Settlements, Legal victories, Unresolved cases, Retaliation incidents
Impact on Workplace Culture	Support Systems	Legal support, Peer support, Union advocacy, Management response
	Changes in Workplace Dynamics	Team cohesion, Communication openness, Trust levels, Inter-departmental relationships
	Perception of Management and HR	Leadership response, HR effectiveness, Transparency, Bias in management
	Employee Well-being	Job satisfaction, Mental health support, Stress levels, Work-life balance
	Long-term Effects	Policy changes, Cultural shifts, Employee turnover, Reputation impact

3.1. *Perceptions of Discrimination*

Our study revealed that employees have varied perceptions of workplace discrimination and its implications.

Legal Knowledge emerged as a crucial subtheme, with employees expressing a range of understanding about their rights and relevant laws. One participant noted, "I wasn't really sure what my rights were or who I could turn to," highlighting the gap in legal awareness. Another expressed the importance of accessible information: "Once I understood my rights, I felt more empowered to act."

Personal Impact of discrimination was profoundly felt, as participants described their experiences leading to "emotional distress and significant career setbacks." A respondent shared, "It's not just a job thing; it shook my whole life, making me question my worth." Many reported a "loss of motivation and a deep sense of injustice" within their professional environments.

The Response to Discrimination varied, ranging from "seeking legal advice" to "informal resolutions or formal complaints." One interviewee explained, "I just wanted to solve it quietly, but ended up having to escalate it to someone higher up when things didn't improve."

Preventive Measures suggested by participants included "more robust training programs and stricter policy enforcement." This subtheme captures the proactive strategies employees wish their workplaces would adopt, such as "awareness campaigns and whistleblower protections to prevent discrimination in the first place."

3.2. *Experiences with Legal Processes*

Participants discussed their interactions with legal and institutional frameworks when addressing discrimination.

Reporting Procedures were often described as daunting. As one employee stated, "The process was far from confidential, and it took too long to get any sort of feedback." This subtheme reflects the challenges with "accessibility of reporting channels and adequate response times."

Outcomes of Legal Action varied, with some reporting "settlements or legal victories," while others faced "unresolved cases or retaliation." A participant

recounted, "Even though we won, the aftermath was bitter, and the working relationship got even worse."

Support Systems played a critical role, with many relying on "legal support, peer support, or union advocacy." Effective support was often tied to positive outcomes, as one interviewee appreciated, "The support from my peers was crucial in navigating the legal maze."

3.3. *Impact on Workplace Culture*

The long-term effects of discrimination cases on workplace culture were significant.

Changes in Workplace Dynamics were frequently noted. Employees observed shifts in "team cohesion and trust levels," with one mentioning, "The whole ordeal created a rift in our team that took months to heal."

Perception of Management and HR was critical, as many questioned "the effectiveness and transparency of HR practices." A prevalent comment was, "HR seemed more interested in protecting the company than resolving the issue."

Employee Well-being was deeply affected, impacting "job satisfaction and mental health support." One poignant reflection was, "I never felt the same about my job after what happened, and it took a toll on my mental health."

Long-term Effects included both positive and negative changes, such as "policy changes and cultural shifts," yet some reported "increased employee turnover and damaged reputations." An employee highlighted, "Things did change for the better eventually, but some of us moved on due to how it was initially handled."

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The qualitative analysis of semi-structured interviews with 30 participants identified three main themes related to their experiences with workplace discrimination: Perceptions of Discrimination, Experiences with Legal Processes, and Impact on Workplace Culture. Each of these themes was further subdivided into several categories, capturing the complexity and variability of the participants' experiences.

The first main theme, Perceptions of Discrimination, encompassed four categories: Legal Knowledge, Personal Impact, Response to Discrimination, and Preventive Measures. The Legal Knowledge category

revealed concepts such as understanding of rights, awareness of laws, legal resources, and clarity of policies, indicating varying degrees of familiarity with legal protections against discrimination. Personal Impact included emotional distress, career setbacks, loss of motivation, and a sense of injustice, highlighting the profound personal and professional effects of discrimination. The Response to Discrimination category showed a range of actions, from seeking legal advice to filing formal complaints and escalating issues to authorities. Preventive Measures suggested by participants included training programs, policy enforcement, awareness campaigns, and whistleblower protection, pointing to proactive strategies to combat workplace discrimination.

The second theme, Experiences with Legal Processes, was divided into three categories: Reporting Procedures, Outcomes of Legal Action, and Support Systems. Reporting Procedures included concepts like confidentiality issues, accessibility of reporting channels, response time, and feedback mechanisms, which describe the administrative and procedural aspects of dealing with discrimination. Outcomes of Legal Action detailed the varied results of legal proceedings, such as settlements, legal victories, unresolved cases, and retaliation incidents, reflecting the uncertain and often unsatisfactory resolutions employees face. Support Systems comprised legal support, peer support, union advocacy, and management response, underscoring the importance of support networks in navigating the aftermath of reported discrimination.

The final theme, Impact on Workplace Culture, included four categories: Changes in Workplace Dynamics, Perception of Management and HR, Employee Well-being, and Long-term Effects. Changes in Workplace Dynamics covered shifts in team cohesion, communication openness, trust levels, and inter-departmental relationships, indicating the broader organizational impact of discrimination incidents. Perception of Management and HR involved leadership response, HR effectiveness, transparency, and bias in management, reflecting employee views on organizational leadership and human resources practices. Employee Well-being focused on job satisfaction, mental health support, stress levels, and work-life balance, highlighting the direct effects of discrimination on employees' health and happiness.

Long-term Effects discussed policy changes, cultural shifts, employee turnover, and reputation impact, offering a view into the enduring changes that discrimination can catalyze within workplace environments.

Our study's exploration of employee perceptions of discrimination resonates with findings from Hirsh and Lyons (2010), who examined the role of legal consciousness and workplace context in shaping how employees perceive and react to discrimination (Hirsh & Lyons, 2010). Similar to their results, our study found that employees with a more nuanced understanding of legal and organizational frameworks felt more empowered to address discrimination. This empowerment, however, varied significantly across different demographic groups, as also noted in the work by Chavez et al. (2015), who highlighted the particular vulnerabilities faced by racial and ethnic minorities in workplaces (Chavez et al., 2015).

The experiences reported by participants concerning the efficacy of legal processes and organizational responses are particularly illuminating. Consistent with the observations by Cavico and Mujtaba (2021), our participants expressed a range of challenges in navigating the legal and institutional frameworks designed to handle discrimination complaints (Cavico & Mujtaba, 2021). This finding underscores the complexity noted by Goldman et al. (2006), who argued that the antecedents and consequences of employment discrimination are often deeply embedded within organizational practices, making them challenging to address effectively (Goldman et al., 2006).

Our findings on the impact of demographic diversity and perceived discrimination align closely with those of Boulet, Lachapelle, and Keiff (2022). They suggested that the context of demographic diversity significantly influences the perception and impact of workplace discrimination, a theme that was evident in our study as well (Boulet et al., 2022). Participants from more diverse backgrounds reported a heightened awareness of and sensitivity to discrimination, which could be attributed to their own experiences or those of their peers. This is in line with the evidence presented by Daldy, Poot, and Roskrige (2013), who found that immigrants and native-born New Zealanders perceive workplace discrimination differently, reflecting broader societal attitudes and workplace cultures (Daldy et al., 2013).

The nuanced impacts of gender discrimination found in our study are corroborated by the meta-analysis conducted by Triana et al. (2018), which highlighted the pervasive negative consequences of perceived gender discrimination on employee outcomes (Triana et al., 2018). Participants in our study who experienced or witnessed gender discrimination reported significant effects on their job satisfaction and mental health, a finding that aligns with the broader literature on the subject (SteelFisher et al., 2019).

The intersection of mental health and discrimination emerged as a significant concern among our participants. This finding aligns with the research by Reavley, Jorm, and Morgan (2017), who documented the adverse impacts of discrimination against people with mental health problems in workplace settings (Reavley et al., 2017). Our study extends this research by highlighting the ongoing challenges faced by employees in securing and maintaining support within their workplaces, which is crucial for their overall well-being and productivity.

The evidence presented in this study suggests that there is still much work to be done in terms of improving organizational practices and legal frameworks to better support employees facing discrimination. This aligns with the practical considerations discussed by Cavico and Mujtaba (2021) and underscores the need for more robust policies and training programs that not only address discrimination after it occurs but also work proactively to prevent such behaviors from manifesting (Cavico & Mujtaba, 2021).

This study explored the intricacies of workplace discrimination through qualitative analysis of semi-structured interviews with 30 employees who have encountered or observed discrimination in their professional environments. Key findings highlight several critical areas: first, employees' perceptions of discrimination vary widely and are deeply influenced by their understanding of legal rights and workplace policies. Second, experiences with reporting discrimination and navigating legal processes revealed significant challenges related to efficacy and responsiveness. Third, demographic diversity influences both the perception and impact of workplace discrimination, with those from diverse backgrounds often experiencing heightened sensitivity to discriminatory practices. Lastly, the intersection of gender discrimination and mental health issues surfaced

as pivotal areas affecting employee well-being and workplace dynamics.

The study conclusively shows that while workplace discrimination is a multi-faceted issue, it consistently undermines employee engagement, well-being, and organizational cohesion. It is evident that understanding and addressing workplace discrimination requires a comprehensive approach that considers legal, organizational, and individual dimensions. This research underscores the necessity for workplaces to foster an inclusive culture that actively works against discrimination and supports all employees equitably.

The primary limitation of this study is its reliance on qualitative data from a relatively small sample size, which may not fully represent the wider diversity of workplace experiences across different industries and geographic locations. Additionally, the subjective nature of semi-structured interviews may introduce bias in how participants recall and interpret their experiences of discrimination. The theoretical saturation approach, while robust, limits the scope to specific themes that emerged and may overlook less common but equally significant issues.

Future research should aim to expand the demographic and geographic diversity of participants to include a broader array of industries and potentially cross-cultural perspectives on workplace discrimination. Quantitative studies could be employed to validate and extend the findings of this qualitative research, providing a more comprehensive statistical backbone to support nuanced policy-making. Additionally, longitudinal studies could offer insights into the long-term effects of discrimination and the effectiveness of different intervention strategies over time.

Organizations should consider implementing regular training sessions that not only address discrimination directly but also promote general awareness about diversity and inclusion. Such training should be integrated with robust support systems and clear, accessible reporting mechanisms that ensure all employees feel safe and valued. The findings also suggest the importance of transparent communication regarding the handling and outcomes of discrimination reports, which could help in rebuilding trust and ensuring accountability within the workplace. Ultimately, fostering an organizational culture that prioritizes respect and inclusivity will be essential in mitigating the

adverse impacts of discrimination and enhancing overall workplace productivity and employee satisfaction.

Authors' Contributions

Authors contributed equally to this article.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Considerations

In this research, ethical standards including obtaining informed consent, ensuring privacy and confidentiality were observed.

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