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Breaking Barriers: An Examination of Gender Inequality and Discrimination in Malaysia's Workplace

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Abstract

Gender discrimination persists globally and is a fundamental obstacle to achieving peace, prosperity, and sustainable development (Stage, 2022). In Malaysia, workplace sexism affects both men and women, and this study aims to identify its main causes and examine its prevalence and severity. The study collected data from 211 workers using questionnaires and found that gender stereotypes are the primary cause of workplace sexism in Malaysia. Women experience higher levels of gender discrimination than men, and family education and culture influence an individual's attitude in the workplace. The study suggests that fostering a culture of inclusivity and equality can create a more positive and productive work environment as in line with (Singh and Bhakar, 2020). Addressing workplace sexism is crucial for achieving gender equality and promoting social justice, and the study's findings offer important implications for policymakers, employers, and researchers to develop effective strategies for preventing and addressing workplace gender discrimination (Lai, 2021). Research findings can significantly contribute to workplace profitability, employee retention, job satisfaction, loyalty, and talent recruitment, as noted by (Picincu, 2020; Bank, 2020). This research has shown that gender equality can create a more positive work environment and drive enterprise development as Crawford (2022) points out that promoting gender equality can also reduce inequality within and between countries, promoting sustainable development worldwide.

Keywords: Gender Discrimination, Workplace Sexism, Malaysia, Gender Stereotypes, Inclusivity

Introduction

Gender discrimination has always been a subject of global concern. Most of the gender inequalities in social life come from gender stereotypes and prejudices that have been inherited for a long time. The principles of equality and non-discrimination were fundamental principles of the United Nations Charter, adopted by world leaders in 1945 (Stage, 2022).

Millions of women and sexual minorities throughout the world continue to experience discrimination in the enjoyment of their civil, cultural, economic, political, and human rights. Gender discrimination refers to the unequal treatment of people in society based on their gender (Bank, 2020). Sexists believe that they can understand or judge social individuals according to their gender group, that is, male or female (Villines, 2021). Such a view assumes that all human beings can be clearly classified as "male" or "female." Commenting on how a boy looks and acts like a girl or how a girl looks and acts like a boy is labelling women and men. Words such as "feminine", "tough woman" and "coward" are products of prejudice and discrimination.

Because of women's natural biological structure, as well as natural family problems such as pregnancy and childbirth, female workers suffer discrimination in the workplace. Such discrimination usually occurs in the process of women's job hunting and employment. Gender discrimination in the workplace makes women constantly deprived of the opportunity to compete and develop in the workplace (Sheng, 2020). In the workplace, however, men are more likely than women to be promoted to leadership roles because of the societal positioning of men as managers, lawyers, financial advisers, etc. However, they often encounter discrimination when looking for occupations that are considered feminine, such as teaching and nursing (Sheng, 2020). As a consequence, men have traditionally held jobs with high salaries and high social status. Even with different pay for the same work, women's economic and social status is still low.

In Malaysia, the situation of gender discrimination is relatively serious. For example, under the law, child marriage, domestic violence and marital rape cannot constitute a crime (Tizmaghz, 2021). Discrimination against women in the workplace in Malaysia can cost them promotions, extended probation periods, demotions, and dismissals. More than 40% of women surveyed have faced discrimination at work because of their pregnancy, according to the survey (Sheng, 2020). About 20% of women surveyed said they were pregnant, leading to rejection or withdrawal of a job application. Whether it's encouraging women to look well, take care of their husbands and children, or asking women to be gentle and virtuous, that in itself is shaping female stereotypes (Sheng, 2020).

Literature Review

Reviewing the development of gender discrimination from ancient to modern times, women's status is higher than men's in a matriarchal society. They are valued as much as men in the social, economic, and religious spheres (Lewis, 2019). It was not until the appearance of the agricultural revolution that men showed their physical advantages and could bring more economic benefits. Women in charge of childbirth lacked social activities, so women gradually lost their original social and financial status (Davis, 2018). Then the gap between the rich and the poor made rich families value family lineage, reputation and wealth, and women's sexual morality was controlled. In some civilizations, the status of women in religious life was also reduced, power in political life was transferred to men, and discrimination and restrictions against women began to stabilize and become cultural (Boris, 2001). For example, the Code of Hammurabi, compiled in 1700 BC, explicitly forbade women from divorcing, but allowed men to terminate marriages.

With the development of the industrial revolution, women began to pursue gender equality. They fought for the right to speak in society, fought for the right to vote and seized political positions (Picq, 2022). Throughout history, women have been fighting for their rights for centuries. Even though the Universal Declaration of Human Rights advocates equal rights

between men and women and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women Outlines a vision of gender equality, the situation for women's rights remains grim (Furer, 1969). Worldwide, women still earn 77 cents for every dollar earned by men, according to the survey. In addition, in some communities, women can spend up to 14 hours a day cooking, cleaning, gathering wood and carrying water, and caring for children and the elderly. But economic models classify this time as "leisure time." Even gross domestic product is zero value for everything that happens in the household (Dilli & Rijpma, 2018). This flawed indicator forms the basis for economic decision-making, distorts policy and deprives women of opportunities.

Gender discrimination has always been a global problem. A study on American women's experience of gender discrimination and sexual harassment found that many American women not only face serious gender discrimination in the workplace, but as well in many fields, such as health care, higher education, and the legal system. Indian women are also particularly vulnerable to gender discrimination and harassment among minority groups (Fisher & Findling, 2019). These women have not only experienced sexism at work, but also sexual harassment or violence at home. In Pakistan, inequality is reflected in the level of violence against women. In the workplace, the female labor force participation rate in Pakistan is only 15%, which is very low compared to other countries with similar average GDP and population (Rabia & Tanveer, 2019). Women of higher status in elite groups face less discrimination in Pakistan, while men of lower socioeconomic status and more religious beliefs tend to experience more discrimination against women. In Malaysia, the researcher found that educational opportunities were in fact fairly evenly split between the sexes. However, there are still significant disparities in the proportion of economic participation and opportunity and political participation in major positions (Mahidin, 2020). According to data released on the official website of Malaysia's Human Resources Department in 2019, the country's labor force is 15,073,400, of which 9,22,400 are male workers and 5,871,000 are female workers (Mahidin, 2020). From the above data, it can be seen that discrimination against women in Malaysia is greater than that against men. It is obvious that women are discriminated against at work.

Gender equality, equal rights between men and women and equal pay for equal work have been hot topics in recent years (Eisenberg, 2019; Froehlicher et al., 2021; McArthur, 2022). But the truth is that the problem of unequal treatment and even harassment of women in the workplace has not been effectively addressed for years (Commission, 2020). In today's society, gender equality is increasingly being promoted, but Malaysia's gender discrimination still seems to be a serious problem. Therefore, the goal of this study is to raise public awareness and gradually recognize the importance of gender equality. On the other hand, the research also hopes to allow the public to escape the shackles of stereotypes and not be defined by society. Therefore, this study will test several hypotheses regarding gender stereotyping and discrimination at the workplace.

H1 Gender stereotyping is the main cause of gender discrimination at the workplace.
H2 Women experience workplace gender discrimination more than men.
H3 The influence of family education and culture will affect an individual's attitude in the workplace.

Methodology

The study focused on the workplace group in Malaysia, and the researchers recruited participants from social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and other social groups. The use of social media platforms was chosen due to the fast and wide distribution of the internet, which allowed for the posting of questionnaires on these platforms, and attracted a larger number of participants. The researchers selected workers as the sample because they believed that workers could better fit the purpose of the study and improve the accuracy and validity of the study. To test the main hypothesis of the study, the study subjects were chosen from different age groups and different working environments. This was to understand gender stereotypes in the workplace and the respondents' perceptions and recognition of gender discrimination in the Malaysian workplace based on various aspects of the interviewees. According to Alshibly (2018), the minimum sample size for a study is 100 participants when the population is large. Therefore, the researchers utilized convenience sampling as a sampling method. Convenience sampling is a non-probabilistic sampling method that takes samples from a group of people who are easily accessible or accessible (Singh, 2018). Since the study focused mainly on the workplace, the sample for the study was workers in the workplace. This method made it easier for researchers to get participants. In addition, researchers select samples from a target group rather than randomly. This means that not everyone gets a chance to participate in the survey. The researchers designed a series of questions related to workplace sexism in a questionnaire consisting of three main sections. The first part was to collect demographic information about the respondents. The second part was an investigation of workplace gender discrimination. The third part was the influence of gender stereotypes on sexism. There were 20 questions. In addition, Parts 2 and 3 used a five-point Likert scale, where 1 indicated complete disagreement and 5 indicated complete agreement. This was used to ask respondents to express how much they agreed or disagreed with a particular statement. Due to the epidemic, it was not convenient for researchers to conduct face-to-face communication and interviews.

Therefore, an online questionnaire survey was the most appropriate choice to complete this study effectively. After data collection, the researchers used SPSS software to analyse all the original data. SPSS was chosen as the analysis tool for data analysis, as it covers the main operation process of data analysis very comprehensively and provides data analysis operations such as data acquisition, data processing, data analysis, and data display (Alchemer, 2021). In this study, descriptive and regression analyses were used to analyse the data. Descriptive analysis was used to describe the basic characteristics of the research data, and statistical tests were conducted to test the hypotheses proposed in this study (Larson, 2006). Regression analysis was applied to examine the influence between variables, which can also be employed for prediction and prediction (Team, 2022). Regression analysis is a robust method of analysis, which allowed the researchers to confidently determine which factors were most significant and how these factors affected each other during regression.

Results

Descriptive Analysis

Table 1

Profile of Respondents

	Demographic Profile (f)	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Female	125	59.2%
	Male	84	39.8%
	Others	2	1%
Age	16-25	115	54.5%
	26-35	49	23.2%
	36-45	41	19.4%
	46-55	6	2.8%
	55 and above	0	0%
Educational Levels	SPM level	37	17.5%
	High School level	28	13.3%
	Diploma level	26	12.3%
	Degree level	111	67.7%
	Other	9	4.6%
Marital Status	Single	136	64.5%
	Married	75	35.5%
Work Attributes	Science & Technology	30	14.2%
	Medical & Agricultural	15	7.1%
	Art & Design	36	17.1%
	Humanities & Social Sciences & Mass Communication	47	22.3%
	Business & Management	55	26.1%
	Other	28	13.2%
Working Age	Below 5 Years	126	59.7%
	6 - 10 Years	30	14.2%
	11 - 20 Years	42	19.9%
	21 - 30 Years	12	5.7%
	31 Years and above	1	0.5%
Work Experience	1 year	51	24.2%
	2 years	50	23.7%
	3 years	52	24.6%
	4 years	30	14.2%
	5 years	20	9.5%
	others	8	3.8%

Table 2
Means Score and Std. Deviation for all Items

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Part B – The influence of gender stereotypes on gender discrimination					
1. Do you think gender discrimination is serious in the workplace in Malaysia?	211	1.0	6.0	4.26	1.131
2. You have noticed or experienced gender discrimination in the workplace.	211	1.0	6.0	3.73	1.352
3. You think that both men and women have their own jobs. For example: fireman is a man's job, nurse is a woman's job.	211	1.0	6.0	3.18	1.644
4. Do you agree with the statement that "a man has to be the breadwinner"?	211	1.0	6.0	2.83	1.446
5. Men only to be successful in the workplace to become a successful person	211	1.0	6.0	2.94	1.443
6. Do you agree with the saying that "men work outside, women work inside"?	211	1.0	6.0	2.52	1.468
7. "A good marriage is better than a good job for women", do you agree with this statement?	211	1.0	6.0	2.56	1.424
8. You think women should focus on family life after giving birth.	211	1.0	6.0	2.70	1.381
9. Women's personalities will lead them to make bad decisions in the workplace.	211	1.0	6.0	2.54	1.445
Part C – Situation of gender discrimination in the workplace					
10. You think women experience more workplace gender discrimination than men.	211	1.0	6.0	4.59	1.132
11. men are better equipped to be leaders than women.	211	1.0	6.0	2.95	1.463

12. There are more male than female leaders in the workplace.	211	1.0	6.0	4.22	1.163
13. Women will lose promotions in the workplace because of fertility problems.	211	1.0	6.0	3.85	1.405
14. You think men are more likely to be promoted in the workplace than women	211	1.0	6.0	4.02	1.278
15. You think it's easier for men to get jobs than women.	211	1.0	6.0	3.95	1.358
16. You've seen job advertising that say women only.	211	1.0	6.0	3.71	1.499
Part D –The influence of family education and culture on gender discrimination in the workplace					
17. You think that family education has a great influence on gender awareness.	211	1.0	6.0	5.01	.923
18. Your parents have told you that girls need to learn to take care of the family and do housework.	211	1.0	6.0	3.98	1.485
19. If you are a woman, your parents hope you to marry a financially capable man	211	1.0	6.0	4.41	1.442
20. Your parents have told you that boys need to work hard to support your families	211	1.0	6.0	4.46	1.346
21. If you are a man, your parents hope your wife to be a gentle and virtuous woman	211	1.0	6.0	4.30	1.274
22. Nowadays, you think the workplace culture is sexist	211	1.0	6.0	4.30	1.196
23. You often hear derogatory or indecent words about women in the workplace	211	1.0	6.0	4.02	1.302
24. There is an unwritten culture in the workplace that women and men have their own professions, such as female secretary and male manager	211	1.0	6.0	4.37	1.263

Regression Analysis

Table 3 shows the results of the regression analysis of hypothesis 1. The overall regression was statistically significant (β = .766, Adjusted R 2 = .585, F = 297.556, p < 0.001). In the social sciences, even a relatively low R-squared (e.g., 0.5) is considered strong (Fernando, 2021). As a result, it can be seen that H1 has strong support, and item No. 6 significantly predicts item 7 (β=.766, p<.001), therefore rejecting the null hypothesis.

Table 3
Summary of regression analysis results for hypothesis 1

Hypothesis 1	Beta Coefficient	R 2	Adjusted R^2	F	p-value	Hypotheses Supported
Gender stereotyping is the main cause of gender discrimination in the workplace.	.766	.587	.585	297.556	<.001	Strong support

a. Predictors: (Constant), Item no.6
b. Dependent Variable: Item no. 7 Note: *p < 0.05

Table 4 shows the results of the regression analysis of hypothesis 2. The overall regression was statistically significant (β = .629, Adjusted R 2 = .393, F = 136.729, p < 0.001). Value of R square between 0.3 and 0.5 is moderate (Srinivasan, 2020). As a result, it can be seen that H2 has moderate support, and item No. 14 significantly predicts item 15 (β=.629, p<.001), therefore rejecting the null hypothesis.

Table 4
Summary of regression analysis results for hypothesis 2

Hypothesis 2	Beta Coefficient	R 2	Adjusted R^2	F	p-value	Hypotheses Supported
Women experience workplace gender discrimination more than man.	.629	.395	.393	136.729	<.001	Moderate support

Predictors: (Constant), Item no.6

a. Dependent Variable: Item no. 7 Note: *p < 0.05

Table 5 shows the results of the regression analysis of hypothesis 3. The overall regression was statistically significant (β = .642, Adjusted R 2 = .410, F = 146.899, p < 0.001). Value of R square between 0.3 and 0.5 is moderate (Srinivasan, 2020). As a result, it can be seen that H3 has moderate support, and item No. 21 significantly predicts item 20 (β=.642, p<.001), therefore rejecting the null hypothesis.

Table 5
Summary of regression analysis results for hypothesis 3

Hypothesis	Beta Coefficient	R 2	Adjusted R^2	F	p-value	Hypotheses Supported
The influence of family education and culture will affect an individual's attitude in the workplace.	.642	.413	.410	146.899	<.001	Moderate support

a. Predictors: (Constant), Item no.6
b. Dependent Variable: Item no. 7
Note: *p < 0.05

Discussion and Recommendation

This report focuses on the study of gender discrimination in the workplace in Malaysia. As the circumstances and severity of gender discrimination vary in each country and society, the subject of gender discrimination has not been widely studied in Malaysia (Sheng, 2020). In addition, it is also hoped that this study will make more Malaysians aware of the situation of workplace gender discrimination in Malaysia. Workplace gender discrimination is the main research scope and direction of this report. The researcher found that women are discriminated against in the workplace, causing them to be treated unfairly. The main research method used in this investigation is quantitative research. Online questionnaire surveys and SPSS are used to analyze results, and test hypotheses.

H1 proposes that gender stereotyping is the main cause of gender discrimination in the workplace. Referring to the above hypothesis, the statistical analysis from the results shows that H1 has strong support (β = .766, Adjusted R 2 = .585, F = 297.556, p < 0.001). H2 suggests that women experience workplace gender discrimination more than men. With regard to the above hypothesis, the statistical analysis from the results indicates that H2 has moderate support (β = .629, Adjusted R 2 = .393, F = 136.729, p < 0.001). H3 proposes that the influence of family education and culture will affect an individual's attitude in the workplace. Referring to the above hypothesis, the statistical analysis from the results indicates that H3 has moderate support (β = .642, Adjusted R 2 = .410, F = 146.899, p < 0.001).

Based on the findings of H1, the researcher found that the idea that "*men who work outside and women who work inside*" is related to the idea that "*women make an excellent marriage rather than a good job*". Because of gender stereotypes that women should focus their lives on the family, raising children, and taking care of the house, marriage is generally considered more significant than work for women. Even if women perform well in the workplace, it is believed that women eventually need to return to the family (Parker, 2015).

The findings are similar to earlier studies by Davis (2018), which show that women lost their economic status in society and were dominated by men starting with the agricultural revolution. To survive and reproduce, women were required to spend more time on childbearing, and domestic work became women's main work contribution. Women are far away from social and social activities, while men are involved in politics and provide economic benefits (Center, 2015). The agricultural revolution stratified society, and the wealth gap made wealthy families value family lineage and reputation, so women in charge of childbirth

were more restricted and discriminated against (Davis, 2018). In addition to banning women from filing for divorce, there will also be restrictions on women's business and mobility. This long-lasting cultural and social phenomenon has led to the general belief that a woman's marriage is of the utmost importance. After a discussion of these results and earlier studies, the hypothesis has been accepted. The main cause of gender discrimination in the workplace is gender stereotyping.

Based on the findings of H2, the researcher found that "*more promotion opportunities for men than women in the workplace*" was associated with "*unequal work opportunities for men and women* (Anker et al., 2003)." Due to the general social misrecognition of women's abilities and women's fertility factors, there are deep-rooted stereotypes about women's behavior and occupational distribution in the workplace, which results in gender occupational segregation (Karaca, 2011). As a result, the concentration of one gender in some industries is too high, resulting in a quantitative difference between the sexes, inequality, and segregation.

The findings are similar to earlier research on gender discrimination done by Roser et al (2018) in the workplace, which found that women around the world are more likely to work part-time and receive lower pay. In addition, management positions are almost exclusively occupied by male workers, and women are unable to reach major political and economic positions (Roser et al., 2018). Malaysia has an unequal distribution of male and female labor force, in which male workers make up most of the main labor force. Referring to Department of Statistics Malaysia (2022), the labor force participation rate in 2021 for women in Malaysia was 55.5%, compared to 80.9% for men. Due to gender characteristics and physiological differences between the sexes, it is generally believed that women should play a supporting role in society, while men are the dominant ones. These concepts have gradually become gender stereotypes, regulating cognition and behavior between the sexes, as well as creating gender discrimination in the workplace. There are many reasons why men have more advantages in the workplace than women. Therefore, there will be a social phenomenon that men are easier to get jobs and promotion opportunities than women (Tribune, 2016).

Based on the findings of H3, the researcher found a correlation between the idea that a wife should be gentle and virtuous and the idea that a husband should work hard and provide for the family. This result is in line with research by (Pickering, 2015). Most parents use different methods and norms when raising their children. When parents bring up a girl, they will teach children how to be a polite, gentle, and virtuous woman. When parents raise a boy, they strive to prepare him to be a brave, capable, and responsible man (Claudia, 2021). It has become an unwritten culture that all life skills and social abilities differ by gender. Sexism and stereotypes exist when families and cultures teach everyone that men and women have different social roles to play.

The results of this study are similar to the results of earlier studies by (Cuddy and Fiske, 2009). In the content model of stereotypes, professional women have a significant improvement in the dimension of enthusiasm after childbearing compared with that before childbearing. However, people's evaluation of women's workability decreases. In the workplace, fathers not only raise the warmth dimension but do not decrease the aptitude dimension, so there is gender inequality. As a result, most women faced leaving the workforce due to fertility problems, leading to a common stereotype that family was the most significant thing for women. This gender stereotype leads to a more difficult situation for women than men in the workplace. The education of family and cultural environment shapes everyone's thinking and reaction to gender, thus producing different attitudes. After discussion of these results and earlier studies, a theoretical acceptance idea becomes feasible. This is because it

can be determined that the influence of family education and culture will affect an individual's attitude in the workplace. Based on the limitations mentioned above, the researcher also makes several suggestions for future research to address these issues. Because a sufficient sample size is a necessary guarantee for scientific and reliable research results (Chetty, 2016; Andrade, 2020). According to Fernando (2021), when determining sampling area scope, researchers should consider time, sample objects, and area. Given a sufficient time frame, the researcher could break down the target population in Malaysia by state and collect data for each state. This would enable him to get a more comprehensive and accurate national picture. Comprehensive data can also be used to further explain and analyze the understanding of workplace gender discrimination in Malaysia.

Second, the culture of gender discrimination has been deeply rooted in society, and its causes are also complicated. Gender discrimination is caused by many other factors besides gender stereotypes, which is the scope of research not covered in this report. Therefore, to comprehensively study the topic of gender discrimination, it is essential to carry out research on all aspects. Referring to Kubala (2021), prospective studies should more carefully consider the potential effects and factors of sexism, such as mental health and social differences. Besides, the limitations of previous studies also provide directions for future research. In addition to the workplace, other aspects of society should also be the direction of future research to explore the influence of various aspects of gender discrimination on workplace gender discrimination and the relationship between them (Kubala, 2021). This is the key to successful attempts to overcome and address gender discrimination and gender stereotypes.

Furthermore, adolescent sexism may become a significant field and direction of future research. Teenagers and even children are likely to be the main subjects of future research. According to research results, gender stereotypes are the primary cause of gender discrimination. People’s attitudes and concepts are formed in childhood, so a sensitive understanding of gender roles usually comes from a family background (Marks, 2009; Artifacts, 2020). Children and teenagers are not only the main force of future social production, but also the next generation of social successors. They have better conditions and more opportunities to drive and shape development, and they have more access to information, technology, education, and training. Adolescents will play a key role in advancing gender equality, peace, development, and human rights in the future. More research will confirm this speculation and draw the attention of relevant organizations to the importance of this point. Gender equality has more advantages than disadvantages for the country and has a significant impact on national and economic development while emphasizing human rights (Ullrich, 2022). Looking ahead, research in this area could be very helpful in eliminating gender discrimination.

Conclusion

In conclusion, most people indicated that they had noticed or experienced workplace gender discrimination. This means that the situation of workplace gender discrimination is serious and gender stereotypes play a significant role in it. Although the advent of the new century has gradually popularized the concept of gender equality, more and more people have begun to advocate gender equality, and the government and enterprises have taken some relevant measures, gender stereotypes and prejudices still exist and deeply affect Malaysians (Sandys, 2005). Therefore, it can be observed that the situation of workplace gender discrimination is still serious in Malaysia. Since ancient times, gender stereotypes and gender discrimination have infiltrated virtually every aspect of society, including family,

workplace, and school, which has become a social phenomenon and culture (Cuddy & Fiske, 2009; Crawford, 2022). At present, the world is committed to eliminating gender discrimination and attaining equality, and this should be done in all respects. To achieve gender equality, it must rely on the strength of society. Men, not just women, need to be more involved and society need to be more diversify (Picincu, 2020). In terms of achieving gender equality in the workplace, the future also needs to create more equal workplaces where all employees are involved. Broad gender representation, cultural diversity and perspectives are very critical in workplace discussions and decision-making (Manuel & Koh, 2019). Therefore, future research should be conducted in a more realistic environment, and further research is inevitable to address the adverse effects of gender discrimination and stereotyping.

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