

# **Discrimination in Employment and Task Delegation at Workplace in the Malaysian Context**

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## **Abstract**

Discrimination has an area of concern for Human Resource Management in all workplaces and it has been a great concern in Malaysia. The purpose of this research is to analyze the demographic characteristics which trigger discrimination in workplace. It is to examine the intensity of these factors in order to develop a solution for the discrimination which is present in the workplace. The idea is to deduce the relationship between the demographic background of the employees and the biased treatment which they tend to receive at workplace from other employees or their superiors based on the similarities and differences of these demographic features. An empirical approach has been adopted in this study by using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) method. Employees from various private organizations in the state of Kuala Lumpur participated in this study. Through this research, managers, top management and relevant parties are expected to identify the intensity of the factors which influence discrimination and tactfully find ways to avoid work discrimination. Furthermore, this research can also be an eye opener to employers to realize their roles and enhance how their decisions can affect their employees. The findings and conclusion of the results are further discussed in this research.

**Key words:** - Discrimination, Employability, Task Delegation, Workplace, Malaysia, Demographic

## **Introduction.**

There is a huge concern on discrimination at workplace especially at managerial level in the Malaysian context despite many implementation of good regulatory practices by the Malaysian government. Article 8(2) of the Federal Constitutions was amended in 2001 to prohibit discrimination against Malaysians on the grounds of religion, race, descent, and place of birth or gender (Anuradha, 2008; Maizatul Azila, Hawa & Rohaidah, 2011; Othman & Othman, 2015).

Malaysia is one of the few countries which requires a picture of the potential employees attached to their credentials. The need to differentiate one from another or to hire and delegate tasks and duties in a biased manner because of these demographic differences such as age, race, gender and others can all be considered some form of discrimination (Keleiner & Keleiner, 2001). Basically, discrimination in work place can be described as anything that makes someone feel less appreciated or treated differently based on their features and characteristics which do not reflect on their job performance.

For an organization to function on its optimal potential, it is crucial for the employees to achieve job satisfaction as they are the largest asset. (Phomphakdy & Kleiner, 1999). Managers in the HR department tend to generalize the value and skills of the employees. In terms of decision making and employability, women was deprived to climb up the career ladder in a male dominant environment. The skills and qualifications should ideally speak for themselves and should be the only aspect the managers should be concerned with however, this is not always the case. In Malaysia, cases of gender discrimination where females are associated with insignificance and males are attributed as authority figures is practiced often. Racial inclination and discrimination is common as well (Daily Express, 2014). For a nation which consists of three unique and equally important races, Malaysia fails to display this fairness when it comes to workplaces in organizations. Ignorance and lack of exposure hinders the managers from realizing that they are being biased or preferential towards certain characterized employees. This proves a barrier between healthy workplace relationships. Once the relationships are not stable between colleagues, it starts to affect their job performance which evidently effects the overall performance and efficiency of the organization. A study conducted on effects of discrimination showed that employees tend to become more stressed and demotivated consequently, they try to leave the job position and work elsewhere. (Naidoo, 2009) Hence, it is important to find out the causes and factors that influence managers to discriminate while hiring and assigning tasks to employees.

## **Review of Literature**

### **Discrimination**

Discrimination is the differentiating and giving preferential treatment to certain people over others. It is associated with unfairness and being biased while making decisions or treating people based on their demographic features. (Riesch & Kleiner, 2005) There are two kinds of discrimination for which a company can be sued for: disparate treatment and disparate impact. Disparate treatment is where the employee is discriminated because the employer does not like his/her age, gender, race, etc. disparate impact is where the policies and regulations of the company are discriminatory (Kapur & Kleiner, 2000) .For example, flight attendants must be within a certain weight, height and age group. Ratsamy Phomphakdy and Brian H. Kleiner (199) conducted a research on ways to eliminate discrimination in a workplace. In this study they described workplace discrimination by using factors such as the race, age, gender, cultural background etc. as basis on which employees are hired, dismissed, given raises and bonuses, promoted and delegated. Similarly, other researchers have found preferential treatment

towards employees as discriminatory based on age, race, religion, and gender as well (Supateera & Kleiner, 1999).

A study was conducted on the discrimination on religion particularly for Muslim women in the workplace and their decision to wear to headscarves in the USA. The research showed that even though Islam in the second largest religion in the world, the stigmatism associated with women wearing headscarves has led to hostile discrimination in the workplace. In addition, Muslim Americans faced the most discrimination by their claims due to the relation of their religion and the extremist terrorist attacks faced by the country. Forms of discrimination are also associated with bullying which includes name calling, avoiding eye contact, refusal to serve, acts of intimidation and staring. (Reeves, McKinney, & Azam, 2012) .These attitudes effect the victims psychologically which can result in low job satisfactory and eventually effects the victims' self-esteem. The discrimination against Muslims arose greatly after the terrorist attacks of 9/11. Most organizations refused to hire any Muslims and the ones who were already hired were bullied and mentally tormented as mentioned in the research (Schulze & Kleiner, 1999).

Another study on gender discrimination in Greece showed that women in Greece are hired in large numbers but are kept in contingent job positions such as lower managerial levels while the male population is easily promoted. Males who are promoted over the women share equal levels of qualification. The findings concluded that gender discrimination was primarily the impact of the employees' attitudes towards their own gender. (Mihail, 2006) .This proves gender discrimination in delegating tasks by managers. The chances of promoting a male employee are higher than that of a female due to their gender. (Quak & Kleiner, 2001)

Booyesen & Nkomo, (2010) mentioned that racial and gender discrimination in South Africa exists generally due to the historical and political background of the country. The percentage of both black and white men think that males should be managers while the black women strongly disagree. This shows that factors of managers discriminating while delegating tasks is due to the persona created by the society of two main variables; gender and race.

A research on age discrimination showed that is it common to associate old workers or aged employees with technological ignorance, their lack of ability to learn and comprehend new skills, their old habits are hard to break and that they lack the energy and flexibility required to work. There are different forms of age discrimination (Osborn & Kleiner, 2005) .For example, an obvious case would be a young employee who is inexperienced is given low profile tasks such as photocopying documents and running other errands while the senior employee gets a better position. (Ozcan, Ozkara, & Kizildag, 2011) This discrimination could also be seen in a more subtle manner where a senior employee who is close to retirement is shifted into a smaller office space (Xia & Kleiner, 2001) .Discrimination towards younger employees can also be shown when older workers get promoted over the younger ones due to their seniority. Younger employees complain that they are equally qualified yet underpaid. There have been cases

where employees have sued companies for age discrimination because benefits of the company were not given due to their age (Shah & Kleiner, 2005).

The findings from previous researches show that the impacts of discrimination in workplace are plenty but there is not enough information as to what causes these discrimination and how much of it is the product of the managers who are in charge. This research is conducted in order to explore the demographic factors of the managers which characterize them and may influence their behavior while delegating tasks to the employees.

### **Race**

The previous researchers have determined that race is one differentiation in people which has proven to be the cause for most discrimination cases. (Tisserant, Wagner, & Barth, 2012). In the study of South Africa, it was found that black and white men and women have been treated unequally over the years due to the history of the country. Managers who have employees that share the same race as them tend to get better treatment than the rest. This shows partiality (Dhesi, 1998). A study conducted in USA shows that Hispanic ethnicity is discriminated against on the average of one out of every five times they apply for a job. The same research shows that Hispanics face barrier to promotions as well. The case showed that promotion for middle and upper level management positions was given to whites who had less experience and qualifications than the Hispanics (Hsieh & Kleiner, 2001). Similarly, in Asia, companies were sued by employees for favoring white men over Asian during downsizing (Dong & Kleiner, 1999). Mexican-Americans are another race which have been in America for some time yet they still experience discrimination. The civil rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s gave them a certain amount of help in this department but job discrimination still exists. (Nguyen & Kleiner, 2000).

### **Gender**

Gender discrimination is common in most countries. It is one of the factors which still struggles for equality in countries such as Saudi Arabia and Yemen (Marshall, 2007). Gender discrimination and stereotyping go hand in hand. (Huang & Kleiner, 2000) The work from past research studies show that this form of discrimination existed in most work places in different parts of the world from Greece and USA to South Africa. The ego-centric war between male and females and the right for equality is yet to be settled. (Chan & Kleiner, 2000) Pregnancy discrimination can be categorized under gender discrimination as women are the ones who get pregnant. (Chester & Kleiner, 2001) It can be argued that in most countries this falls under marital status discrimination as it is assumed that a married woman will have the potential to get pregnant. In the western and European countries where it is normal for single ladies to be pregnant, this is considered gender discrimination. (Middlemiss & Downie, 2009). Gender discrimination is one of the most common forms of inequality which was observed by several studies on workplace discrimination (Kuta & Kleiner, 2001).

## **Religion**

Religion is an acquired property consisting of a set of beliefs that can be dynamic in nature. (Gebert & Boerner, 2011) Other than disability, it is the only protected basis that may require accommodations in the workplace practice to avoid intentional or unintentional discrimination. (Wang & Kleiner, 2001). It describes the faith they possess and consequently the principles they live by (Fakhro & Kleiner, 1999). Many people in Malaysia are still confuse and assume that religion is the same as race. This is due to stereotyping. For example, if they see someone who is Indian, they will assume that person is Hindu. (Morgan, 2005) .It is important in this research to keep these two factors separately in order to understand which one is more likely to be the cause of discrimination at a workplace. (Pearce, Kuhn, & DiLullo, 2005) . In India, discrimination level is due to caste and religious diversity where people who share the same caste and religion as the person in charge of hiring them is more likely to be selected for a job over others (Sengupta & Sarkar, 2012). Some countries such as Malaysia, have an unspoken connection between religion and the government which can be the cause of religion discrimination (Vasconcelos, 2009) .A study conducted on the US and India showed that religiously-based disaster relief in the US is conducted through groups and networks while in India, it is taken place more through values and norms. (Paulson & Menjivar, 2012). Religious discrimination can be found in various forms in the workplace. Harassing employees for practicing religion or wearing religious clothes, refusal to give a raise which the employee deserves, due to his/her passion for religion, or firing an employee due to his/her religious beliefs are some of the forms (Huang & Kleiner, 2001.(Johnes & Sapsford, 1996)).

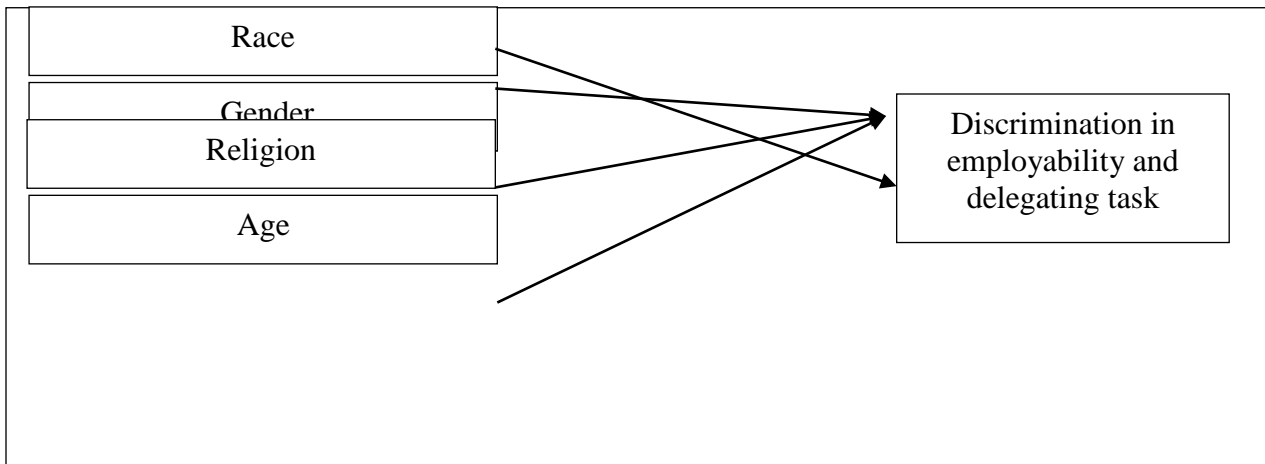
## **Age**

Age discrimination occurs when the skills and qualifications of the employee are overlooked due to their seniority or youth. (Peng & Kleiner, 1999) .This is common in industries in Malaysia where the salary of an employee depends on the seniority instead of anything else. (Topper, 2009). Young employees with high qualifications still need to serve their time before they can get a promotion or pay-raise. A study of employees working in the States showed that age discrimination is more on purpose for older employees. Thus, older people feel more unwanted and uninvolved in the workplace than younger ones. Demolishing age discrimination lies in the hands of the organization. (James, McKechnie, Swanberg, & Besen, 2013) The managers should be educated and trained to know that age is just a number hence, is should be used against an employee. (G, Shen, & Kleiner, 2001) Government rules and regulations also impact age discrimination. (Shah & Kleiner, 2005).

**Research Framework**

Independent Variables

Dependent Variable



religion.

There are four hypothesis based on the objectives of this research:

- H1: There will be a significant relationship between race and the discrimination faced at workplace.
- H2: There will be a significant relationship between gender and the discrimination faced at workplace.
- H3: There will be a significant relationship between religion and the discrimination faced at workplace.
- H4: There will be a significant relationship between age and the discrimination faced at workplace.

**Research Methodology**

The population in this research are the employees of the private companies in the state of Kuala Lumpur. A descriptive analysis was adopted by using SPSS version 21 where it supports to evaluate data skills (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012). Total number of 250 questionnaires were distributed but only 199 were received. The discrimination faced at work was measure through surveys using a five point likert scale which ranges from strongly agree to strongly disagree was used to help measure the results in a more uniformed way. The questionnaire was sent to employees working in various industries such as IT, engineering, health and care, and education. Participants were given assurance to participate as confidentiality was taken care of.

**Results and Findings**

The statistics for the frequency findings of race indicates that most of the employees who answered the questionnaire are foreigners. Out of the 199 results, 106 are of other races. This makes up more than half of the survey results which is 53%. The second highest race which answered the survey is Chinese with a total of 38 replies consuming 19.1% of the total results. This is followed by Malays and finally Indians bringing in 29 (14.6%) and 26 (13.1%) of the survey results respectively. As for gender, the number of females who responded are 106 while

the number of men is 93 out of a total of 199 responses. This means that 53.3% of the overall results are from females which makes more than half of the total results. According to religion of respondents, the highest percentage of the respondents are Muslim (38.2%). This comprises of 76 people out of the 199 responses. The least popular religion among the respondents is Buddhism. Most of the respondents fall in the age group of 25-30. A total of 81 out of 199 respondents fall in the range of 25-30 which makes up 40.7% of the overall respondents. The second largest age group of the respondents is 30-50 which consists of 52 of the total respondents. The majority of the people who responded are from the age group of 25-30 which is the common age of when people first start working. The second highest amount of people who replied are in the range of 18-24. This means that the majority of people who replied don't have much experience. The least amount of people who replies are from the age group of 50+. This shows that most of the people working are in generation Y.

**Table 1 : Employment Industry**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Banking	2	1.0	1.0	1.0
Business	3	1.5	1.5	2.5
Education	35	17.6	17.6	20.1
Engineering	34	17.1	17.1	37.2
Event Management	3	1.5	1.5	38.7
Health and Care	23	11.6	11.6	50.3
HR	2	1.0	1.0	51.3
HSE Coordinator	2	1.0	1.0	52.3
Human Resource	3	1.5	1.5	53.8
Information Technology (IT)	86	43.2	43.2	97.0
Management/marketing	6	3	3	100.0
Total	199	100.0	100.0	

The results from the Table 1 above shows the type of different industries which the respondents are currently employed. From the results displayed, 86 of the respondents are in the IT industry which makes 43.2% of the total sample survey. The second most popular industry among the respondents is from Education which consists of 35 people closely followed by Engineering with 34 respondents. These industries make 17.6% and 17.1% of the total survey respectively. Majority of the respondents are in IT while Engineering and Education consist of almost the same amount of people. Other industries which include HR, HSE Coordinator, and Banking etc. have very few respondents.

Furthermore, Pearson correlation analysis was used to test the data of the relationship between the independent variables and dependent variables.

### ***Correlation between Race and Discrimination in Employability and Task Delegation at Workplace***

Based on the findings of the result, race has a correlation of .504 to discrimination. There is high correlation between the two variables which proves that race has a significant relationship with the discrimination faced by employees. A research conducted in the US on housing discrimination based on race shows that segregation due to race is a common discriminatory factor (Chai & Kleiner, 2003). Therefore, it can be concluded that there is a significant relationship between race and discrimination.

### ***Correlation between Gender and Discrimination in Employability and Task Delegation at Workplace***

Gender shows a coefficient of .349 which is a moderate correlation meaning that it is neither very high nor very low. It does prove however, that there is a relationship between gender and discrimination faced by employees. This is supported by Booyesen & Nkomo, (2010) studies, where gender discrimination has caused women to face inequality in salaries and job promotions in Greece. This shows that gender has an effect on the discrimination employees' face. Therefore, there is a significant relationship between gender and discrimination.

### ***Correlation between Religion and Discrimination in Employability and Task Delegation at Workplace***

Religion shows a strong correlation with discrimination with the coefficient of .455. It can be said when religion presence increases, the discrimination will increase as well. Researchers have concluded in previous researches that this is true. This verification proves that religion has a significant relationship with discrimination (Chi-Chen, 2001). Therefore, in summary, there is a significant relationship between religion and discrimination.

### ***Correlation between Age and Discrimination in Employability and Task Delegation at Workplace***

Age has a correlation along the lines of gender which means it is not as high as race and religion. The correlation for age resulted .395 which proves a relationship with discrimination. In Malaysia, there is priority given to seniority. The older people get paid more and are prone to have higher chances of getting promoted compared to the younger employees such as fresh graduates'. In certain countries seniority is given superiority while in others, the companies discriminate against hiring old people. They prefer younger fresher minds which proves age discrimination still exist (Keleiner & Keleiner, 2001; Chi-Chen, 2001). This rejects the hypothesis



H0 there is no significant relationship between age and discrimination and concludes that there is a significant relationship between age and discrimination

**Multiple Linear Regression Analysis**

**Table 2:Model Summary**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.569 <sup>a</sup>	.324	.303	.962

a. Predictors: (Constant), race, age, gender, religion.

The Table 2 above shows the relationship between the independent variables and intensity of their influence on the dependent variable. The R value shows the strength of the relationship between the independent values and the dependent values. In this case, the value for R is .569 which shows a strong relationship. This means the independent variables have a high level on influence on the dependent variable. R square shows that the independent variables has a 32.4% of effect on the dependent variable.

**Table 3:ANOVA<sup>a</sup>**

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	85.212	6	14.202	15.357	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	177.562	192	.925		
	Total	262.774	198			

a. Dependent Variable: Discrimination in hiring/selecting and delegating tasks

b. Predictors: (Constant), age, gender, religion, race

The ANOVA analysis in Table 3 indicates the F-value of 15.357 and the significance of 0.000. This is less than 0.5 which shows a positive relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable.

**Discussions and Conclusion**

Based on these findings of the study, it has been revealed that the existence of discrimination at workplace in Malaysia in terms of age, race, religion and gender in the workplace can be still felt in subtle forms. Most of the respondents felt that race is a major factor although the other factors of age, religion and gender hold significance as well. From the research, most foreign employees felt that racial discrimination in the workplace is due to the political history of the

country and the reasons cannot be narrowed down to one or two. This is something that is built over years within people due to historical conflicts which result in some sort of resentment or dislike of people who fall under a certain category. The same goes for religious discrimination since religion and race are interrelated more often than not. Furthermore, the findings indicates the level of significance of race and religion towards discrimination is higher than that of age and gender. Thus, the chances of improving towards avoiding gender and age discrimination are much higher. The Human Resource Departments must monitor closely on the recruitment and selection process to minimize any workplace discriminations. Integration of best practices into the workplace culture will allow the employers to improve the quality of treatment among the employees in the companies. One way could be by training managers and employers in charge of delegating tasks to deal with people of different age groups and gender in a fair manner. Inner improvement of a company would be the best way to step closer towards fixing this problem of discrimination. When the employee feels discriminated or undervalued, chances of productivity level to reduce increase and the motivation for working and achieving goals for the organization begins to slowly dissipate. Therefore, it is crucial for managers to be aware of their actions and feedbacks toward the employees

The study also suffers from several limitations where most of the respondents were foreigners. This could be because the organizations selected are private organizations. Therefore the scope of the sample survey may not be accurate. In addition, the areas to which these surveys were sent are limited and the results cannot be considered accurate for the whole of Kuala Lumpur.

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