



RESEARCH PAPER

University Students' Perceptions about Gender Discrimination at the Workplace

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PAPER INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: August 11, 2021	<p>This paper investigated university students' perceptions about gender discrimination at the workplace. The purpose of this study was to find out how university students' perceive gender discrimination with them, others, as well as how it can impact their careers. The focus of the study was also to compare the male and female students' perceptions about gender discrimination. For this purpose, data were collected through a questionnaire developed by Carr et al. (2000). A total of 344 students (185 male and 159 female) studying in the final year of MBA and BSIT programs who had completed the mandatory internship were selected randomly as participants of the study. The findings showed that university students are aware of gender discrimination issues and they perceive that gender discrimination exists at the workplace. Moreover, female students perceive that gender discrimination has more negative effects on them and their careers as compared to male students. Female students perceive that gender discrimination affects their confidence, skills, and advancement. Hence, the educational institutions might play a significant role to reduce gender discrimination by having close collaboration with the community and educating male students to treat women with equal respect and rights.</p>
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Introduction

Gender is a socially constructed phenomenon that focuses on males' and females' domestic, education, and professional responsibilities. Gender also refers to our expectations regarding behaviours and specific characteristics of males and females. Their different roles attribute to gender inequality in society (Chaudhry & Rahman, 2009). According to Kataeva and DeYoung (2017), most authoritarian countries shifted their authoritative approach towards democracy and focused on gender equality in the modern world. This shift was painful for military conflict, high

employment, and corruption. Kataeva and DeYoung (2017) further stated that gender issues had become a challenge for many countries. The statistical data presented by UNECE (2012) explored that women in Tajikistan have been suffering from gender inequalities and facing low status at the professional level since 1991. Moreover, women have an insignificant place in society, and they face domestic violence. As a result, they secure limited positions in the public and private sectors.

Gender issues are of different types all over the world. Afzali (2017) mentioned that the majority of the universities and colleges administration considers gender inequalities between work and family responsibilities as major trauma. The reason is that majority of women face inequality because of part-time jobs and tenure track systems (Reddy, Zondi & Mkhize, 2020). Similarly, Pedro (2009) described that women are perceived to be less professional than men. Jung and Choi (2017) analyzed that females' wages are lesser than males and this difference is based on the nature of the selection of self-employment by males and females. It is also due to an individual's choice of self-employment to expect lifetime benefits. Hence, women's self-employment selection differs from males' productivity due to females' other family responsibilities (Jung & Choi, 2017).

Kataeva and DeYoung's (2017) mentioned that many countries have recognized the value of gender equality and are working to expand women's participation in higher education. Moreover, they conducted a study focused on the deleterious effects of changes in higher education which negatively affected the female faculty members working in Tajik universities during the post-Soviet era. The study also revealed that women were kept deprived of different development opportunities at social, educational, and economic levels during the Soviet era.

The position of women in Pakistan is considered not much different from western society. The controversial but strong gender inequalities exist in Pakistan at the educational, social, and professional levels (Shaukat & Pell 2016). According to Shaukat, Siddiquah and Pell (2014), gender inequalities exist in the education system in all developing countries, and Pakistan is one of them. Pakistan is a multicultural country. In Pakistan, gender inequalities are still present in different fields of life including education. Stereotype gender difference still prevails in urban and rural areas of Pakistan. Pakistan is a patriarchal society where women are considered less worthwhile in every field of life compared to men (Chaudhry & Rahman, 2009).

The universities provide opportunities to students of MBA and BSIT to complete their internship at the workplace. As a result of gained experiences at the workplace, university students develop an insight into gender inequality and discrimination at the workplace. Moreover, the internship improves the professional approaches of the students in the future to meet the challenges in the educational field at the national and international levels because students need to become

professional administrators and educators as per the designed policy of HEC Pakistan. Therefore, the present study was designed to explore the perception of students studying in the final year of MBA and BSIT programs who had an experience of internship at the workplace. Moreover, the focus of the study was also to compare the perception of male and female students about gender discrimination with them, others, and its impact on their career.

The rationale of the study is many fold. Firstly, it has a different population regarding gender discrimination, i.e., university students. Previous studies investigated professionals' perceptions, but this study is an attempt to investigate the perceptions of university students of MBA and BSIT who completed their internships from different organizations.

Literature Review

Gender is described as 'the state of being male and female. The word gender refers to men and women who are socially constructed and given some specific responsibilities. Hence, there is a difference between the responsibilities among men and women, and this difference is based on family background and culture. These different roles cause inequality in men and women (Chaudhry & Rehman, 2009).

Successful women like Hillary Clinton, Condoleezza Rice, and Oprah are the key figures who believe that some individuals cause the gender equity gap in business is to be narrowed. In the last five decades, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was amended in 1991, and the Equal Pay Act of 1963 has taken initiatives to protect women from the biases of gender discrimination at the workplace. Although these successful women like Hillary Clinton, Oprah, etc., are the epitome of society, gender inequality still exists at the workplace (King & Johnson 2003).

Piussi and Arnaus (2010) argued that European and national policies have promoted women in higher education in the past. In this regard, Morley's (2006) study showed that in Nigeria, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, and Uganda, women experience gender discrimination and exclusion in higher education through a highly gender organizational culture. According to Torres et al. (2017), women also face various gender inequalities, and these inequalities limit their role in life.

On the other hand, studies on self-employment showed that men earn more than women (Rosti & Chelli, 2005). Jung and Choi's (2017) study investigated the two-stages of estimates of the earnings equation and corrected for worker selectivity to decompose the gender earnings differentials into productivity-related and discriminatory factors. The results showed that the wage gap is larger than self-employment, and it is due to differences in selectivity. These results showed that the

gender earning gap in the wage sector is due to gender discrimination against women. They further said that the gender earnings gap is still present in the field of economics. This gap is also due to small self-employment sectors in developed countries (Jung & Choi, 2017).

The study by Arrazola and de Hevia (2016) showed that in Spain gender wages gap also exists. It is due to women's domestic tasks, which are greater than men. The findings showed that women have higher reservation wages and lower offered wages than men. It showed women's little participation in the labour market.

Amayah and Haque's (2017) study focused on the challenges females face in positions of leadership in the context of sub-Saharan Africa. Their study showed several challenges sub-Saharan African women leaders face, including societal culture, occupational culture, sex stereotypes, and lack of access to education. Moreover, the study also revealed how leaders behave and raise their behaviours for organizational and socioeconomic outcomes to improve their effectiveness.

According to Moghadam (2004), the cause of gender inequalities in Sub-Saharan African society is the patriarchal-oriented society where women are under the control of men. Likewise, patriarchal-oriented societies are still found in Europe and Asia. Javidan and Dastmalchian's (2003) study found that Iranian women have issues removing gender inequalities gaps only because of religious and cultural pressures.

Azcona and Bhatt (2020) stated that gender roles represent males' and females' roles in society. If in a country, politics is run by men, women cannot run an office. Culture also plays a significant role in enhancing and devaluing women's roles. Furthermore, religion is one of them (Amayah & Haque, 2017). Moghadam (2004) is in a similar context and says that "Muslim family laws have served to reinforce patriarchal gender relations and women's subordinate position within the family." Opposite to this, Nigerian women can do business and can run political offices. Because of religious and cultural beliefs, Nigerian women indulge in challenges and seek leadership positions for themselves (Moghadam, 2004).

Gender discrimination is also investigated to explore academic ranks and salary across Commission on Accreditation for Marriage, and Family Therapy Education (COAMFTE) accredited training programs. The data was collected from gender, academic rank, institution's Carnegie Classification, and program type data collected from 126 COAMFTE accredited programs. The findings indicated that although women were larger, men were higher in proportion at academic ranks and institutions. The data from 35 institutes showed that men are paid 12% more than women (Torres et al., 2017).

Woodfield (2019) stated that the UK's higher education system had been changed over many decades. The change occurred due to the gender balance of the undergraduate students and due gender gap in retention and attainment. Woodfield's (2019) study showed that in the UK, men are less in number to achieve higher education degrees than women. The minimal empirical research shows men's perceptions and reveals that men do not know about their minority in HE and disadvantages. The findings showed that men do not consider themselves as a minority within higher education. The findings also showed that women face challenges during studies due to gender issues.

Shah and Baporikar (2013) analyzed that gender discrimination is a worldwide issue. There is not a single country that does not address gender issues. The Global Gender Report 2008 showed that some countries like Norway, Finland, Sweden, and Iceland have little gender issues with an average of 20% as compared to Yemen and Pakistan, which percentage of gender inequality is 47% and 44.5%, respectively (as cited in Shah & Baporikar, 2013).

Khan et al. (2012) stated that human history shows that women are the most powerless creature on the earth. This powerlessness further devalues her position in society. Morely (2014) mentioned that women's presence in universities is less due to the obstacles which they face and limit their achievement at professional level likewise Aiston and Jung (2015), Morley (2014), O'Meara (2015), and Mayer (2013) stated that women are under-represented and disadvantaged at academic and promotion level. Women have more teaching workloads than men (Aiston & Jung, 2015).

Ward (2011) coined a new investigation and found that women have fewer publications because women seldom switch to jobs and work at temporary appointments. In this context, Batool, Sajid, and Shaheen's (2013) study showed that women's enrollment at universities is less than men's in Pakistan. Opposite to this, the study by Subbaye and Vithal (2017) showed that there is no significant difference among males and females in promotion rate in the field of teaching similarly Aiston and Jung (2015) reported that women ratio in universities is more than men while Sipe et al. (2010) study showed that college students are the victim of gender discrimination. Sipe et al. (2016) study showed that students perceive gender inequalities due to a neutral gender workplace. The study by Winslow (2010) revealed that women spent more time on teaching than on research while men spent time on research than teaching, and women have larger allocation mismatches than men. These differences showed how gender inequality is produced and maintained at the workplace and how women are less productive than men.

Mohamad (2019) asserted that many reasons indicate why women are less productive and earn less than men, and due to these issues, gender discrimination developed. Mohamad (2019) further said that firstly women are conscious of education and work employment. Secondly, women prefer minimum job hours while men prefer maximum. Third and last, men without education can get jobs like becoming drivers, fire extinguishers, etc. This is why men earn more, and as they earn more, it also develops gender discrimination among males and females.

According to Kelsey (2015), to remove gender inequalities issues, society must take initiatives in the field of economy to overcome gender issues. Bible and Hill, (2007), and Kelsey (2015) argued that there are some areas where gender inequality occurs. First, a specific agenda must be arranged to remove women's disadvantages, and second is that an independent female economy is needed, and stronger communities are also required to overcome gender issues.

Morabito and Vandebroek (2016) found that early childhood education best addresses gender inequalities. The findings showed that 26% of parents in the sub-Saharan African country of Mauritius preferred there must be a discourse among the parents to teach and guide parents regarding early childhood inequalities. On the other hand, the study also found that the difference in poverty and circumstances develop gender inequality issues among the children. Similarly, Morabito and Vandebroek (2016) argued that the tussle between circumstances, poverty, and policies develop gender inequality among the children, while policies address poor parenting to develop gender issues in children; hence structural circumstances affect an individual's responsibilities to remove gender violence.

The study by Raza and Murad (2010) showed that the gender gap is due to social, religious, and cultural backgrounds in Pakistan. They further said that social and religious roles are imposed on women, affecting women's progress in society. Pakistan is a country that is in a changing process. It is shaped by social-political and Islamic rules (Saeed, Saleem, & Khan 2021). Due to this multi-dimensional-oriented country, Pakistan exhibits gender inequality in education and employment (Chaudhry, 2014).

Based on the above literature, it becomes clear that gender discrimination has multidimensional issues. Some studies address the social and cultural backgrounds which are the core of gender inequality. Some studies investigated the gender gap in the workplace by taking employees' perceptions. Since, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, in Pakistan, no study is conducted on university students' perception of the workplace. This study aimed to seek students' perceptions of how they take and respond to gender issues, yet they are not professionals. This study also aimed to know University students' perceptions of gender discrimination on self and others and its impact on career.

Material and Methods

Quantitative research was conducted to achieve the objectives of the study. The target population of the study was comprised of all students studying in MBA and BSIT programs of public sector universities of Lahore. A total of 344 male and female students studying in the final year of MBA and BSIT program who had completed their internship at the workplace were selected randomly as participants of the study. The data were collected through a questionnaire developed by Carr et al. (2000).

The questionnaire of Carr et al. (2000) was designed on five points Likert scale ranging from 1 (never) to five (likely). Carr et al.'s (2000) questionnaire was based on gender-based issues and sexual harassment, but the researcher discarded questions of sexual harassment from the questionnaire by keeping in view the cultural context of Pakistan. The questionnaire was consisted of three categories: (i) impact of gender discrimination on self, (ii) impact of gender discrimination on others, and (iii) the potential impact of gender discrimination on the career. The researchers also included demographic variables to collect information regarding gender and program in the questionnaire.

The participants were asked to respond to the questionnaire to give their opinion about the impact of gender discrimination on themselves. In this section, a total of seven questions were asked. In the second section, nine questions were asked based on how others can face gender discrimination at the workplace, and in the third section, five questions were asked to examine the impact of gender discrimination on the career in form of self-confidence, job satisfaction, and career advancement. Data were analyzed by using SPSS version 20. Mean, standard deviation, cross-tabulation, and t. test were used to analyze the data. The cross-tabulation helped in understanding the relationship between independent demographic variables and students' perception of gender discrimination. The responses provided by students in form of never, rarely, and possibly were combined into one negative response for the study.

Results and Discussion

Table 1
Demographic Information of the Participants

Variables	<i>N</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Male	185	53.78
Female	159	46.22
Total	344	

Table 1 shows that out of 344 participants, 185 (53.78%) were male students and 159 (46.22%) were female students.

Table 2
Comparison of Male and Female Students' Perception about Gender Discrimination

	Male		Female		<i>t</i>	df	P
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
Gender discrimination: Self	2.45	0.88	2.83	0.90	-2.29	344	0.024
Gender discrimination: Others	2.60	0.74	2.83	0.82	-1.60	344	0.113
Gender discrimination: Impact on career	2.50	0.90	3.20	1.04	-3.91	344	0.001

The independent sample t.test was conducted to compare the perception of male and female students about gender discrimination. There was a statistically significant difference between the perception of male students regarding the impact of gender discrimination on career (*Mean*=2.50, *SD*=0.90) and female students (*Mean*=3.20, *SD*= 1.04; *t* (244)= -3.91, *p*=001, two-tailed). It indicates that female students perceive that gender discrimination affects their career more as compared to men. Moreover, the analysis of mean scores related to gender discrimination to self and gender discrimination to others shows that female students perceive that gender discrimination occurs more frequently to women as compared to men.

Table 3
Comparison of MBA and BSIT Students' Perception about Gender Discrimination

	MBA		BSIT		<i>t</i>	df	P
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
Gender discrimination: Self	2.59	0.93	2.65	0.86	-0.359	344	0.720
Gender discrimination: Others	2.77	0.79	2.57	0.75	1.305	344	0.194
Gender discrimination: Impact on career	2.72	1.00	2.96	1.04	-1.19	344	0.236

The independent sample t.test was conducted to compare the perception of MBA and BSIT students about gender discrimination. There was no statistically significant difference between the perception of MBA and BSIT students regarding the impact of gender discrimination on self, others, and career. It indicates that MBA and BSIT students have almost the same perception about gender discrimination.

Table 4
Cross-Tabulations of Respondents' Negative Perceptions of Gender Discrimination: Impact on Self

	Male%	Female%
There will be gender-specific biases or obstacles to your career success.	85	75
You will have fewer opportunities for advancement because of your gender.	85	75
Parental leave will interfere with a future promotion or professional opportunity.	78	80
You will have fewer opportunities for networking because of your gender.	79	59
You will have fewer opportunities for mentoring because of your gender.	73	65
You will have less time to devote to your career because of your gender.	78	61
You will be paid less because of your gender	70	65

Note: Negative perceptions represent ratings of never, rarely, and possibly.

The results in table 4 show that majority of male students did not anticipate that they will face gender discrimination in the workplace. However, female students responded more negatively than male students when asked about gender discrimination's impact on self. 85% of male students think that gender-specific biases will not affect their career while 75% of female students perceive this negatively. 82% of male students said that they will never have fewer opportunities because of gender inequality, while 80% of female students think that it will affect their career opportunities. 73% of male students said that they will never have fewer opportunities for mentoring because of the gender gap, while 65% of female students negatively responded to this question. 78% of male students think that they will never have less time for their careers, while 61% of female students think that they will have less time for their careers. 70% of the male students do not perceive that they will be paid less due to gender discrimination, whereas 65% of female students perceive that they will be paid less due to gender biases.

Table 5
Cross-Tabulations of Respondents' Perceptions of Gender Discrimination: Impact on Others

	Male %	Female %
Your colleagues will have lower expectations of you because of your gender.	76	65

Women will face gender-specific biases or obstacles to their success.	79	69
Parental leave will interfere with a woman's promotion or professional opportunity.	73	67
Women will have less opportunity for networking because of their gender.	76	59
Women will have less opportunity for mentoring because of their gender.	70	51
Women will have less opportunity for advancement because of their gender.	76	55
Women will have less time to devote to their careers because of their gender.	76	53
Women will be paid less because of their gender.	84	59
Women's colleagues will have lower expectations of them because of their gender.	70	59

Note: Negative perceptions represent ratings of never, rarely, and possibly

The results in table 5 show that majority of male students did not anticipate that women will face gender discrimination in the workplace, whereas most of the female students perceive that other women will also face gender discrimination in the workplace. It indicates that female students had a more negative perception than male students when asked about gender discrimination's impact on others.

Table 6
Cross-Tabulations of Respondents' Perceptions about Impact of Gender Discrimination on Career

	Male %	Female %
If you experience gender discrimination in the workplace, it will have a negative effect on your confidence as a professional.	91	71
If you experience gender discrimination in the workplace, it will have a negative effect on your career advancement.	90	69
If you experience gender discrimination in the workplace, it will have a negative effect on your job satisfaction.	75	57
If you experience gender discrimination in the workplace, it will have a negative effect on your organizational commitment.	70	45
If you experience gender discrimination in the workplace, it will have a negative effect on your career commitment.	64	43

Table 6 shows that majority of male students did not anticipate that gender discrimination will affect their career as compared to female students. The majority of female students perceive that gender discrimination at the workplace will have a negative effect on their confidence, career advancement, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and career commitment.

Discussion

The opportunity of internship at the workplace provides awareness to future professionals about gender discrimination. Therefore, they might develop a positive or negative perception about gender based on their personal experiences at the workplace during the internship. The positive perception helps future professionals to enter into different fields with confidence, while the negative perception may have an adverse effect on this confidence.

Literature focuses on professionals' perceptions about the gender discrimination gap. The results of the present study show that postgraduate students (professionals cum students) are aware of gender discrimination potentials. Furthermore, the majority of male students believe that gender discrimination does not affect them, others, or their careers, whereas female students believe that gender discrimination affects them, others, and their careers more frequently. Most of the male students do not see a gender discrimination gap at the workplace, and according to their perceptions gender gap would not affect their confidence at the workplace, whereas, most of the female students believe that as a result of the gender gap, they will have less opportunity for mentoring, professional advancement, and getting good pay. Consequently, they will lose self-confidence, organizational commitment, and job satisfaction. These findings support Fitzgerald's (2012) arguments that women are at the level of a disadvantage when asked about career advancement. His study results also showed that 65 % of females reported the same reservations while responding about gender discrimination by mentioning that they would get less pay because of a gender gap. These findings support the present study's third research question (based on females' responses).

The negative results regarding gender discrimination on self, its impact on career and pay are similar to previous studies where different results showed that females always see gender discrimination gap on self and its possible effects on getting less pay. These findings are similar to Jung & Choi (2017) that gender earning gap attributes against women and women receive a fraction of earning than to males.

Another finding of the present study related to female students' responses about the impact of gender inequality on others with less percentage is somewhat aligned with Schmitt et al. study conducted in 2002, which revealed that females

who have been receiving disadvantages at the workplace do not see this gender discrimination on others. The results showed that sometimes participants are reluctant to perceive that others are also experiencing gender discrimination. Shah and Baporikar (2013) argued that the main reason for this difference is the behaviour and attitude of females who do not see and think positively about other women.

The results about female students' perception of gender discrimination indicated that they are more likely to perceive incapability of a system in which knowledge, skills, and abilities are neglected. Shah and Baporikar (2013) conducted a similar study in Pakistan, which argued that Pakistan is a gender-discriminatory country due to economic and social conflicts. They further mentioned that women are considered less educated and skilled. A report on Participatory Poverty Assessment (PPA) was carried out in KPK in Pakistan in that report males reported bluntly "all the rights are for men, women have to follow their husbands and be content with what they have" (Planning and Development Department, 2003). Friedl, Joseph, and Najmabadi (2006) assumed that in Muslim countries, women's mobility is limited, and limits are also set to their behaviour that how they act and react.

The overall findings indicated that females have more negative perceptions about gender discrimination at the workplace. Even though the selected female participants are not steeped in professional life, their responses showed that while living in a society where men are the sole decision-makers, and dominant, females look and see gender discrimination negatively. They have beforehand knowledge about their future career.

Conclusion

The results suggested and have established arguments that postgraduate students feel that gender discrimination exists at the workplace. The results also suggested that female students perceive the negative impact of gender discrimination on themselves and their careers that ultimately can reduce their confidence, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment. Gender discrimination is a worldwide reality, and students must be trained to avoid gender discrimination in professional life. In the light of the findings, the conclusion drawn from this study is that institutes must value the existence of gender discrimination at the workplace. The educational institutions might play an important role by having a close collaboration with the community to raise awareness and educate them about equal rights of males and females. Moreover, male students might be educated to give respect to women's rights so the element of discrimination might be reduced. The steps to remove gender discrimination might be taken by conducting workshops and seminars, bringing change in curriculum, coaching classes, and with the help of human resource experts (Masinga., Nzimande, & Khumalo 2020).

Recommendations

- Based on the findings and conclusion, it is suggested that relevant courses regarding proper student welfare in professional life must be introduced at universities. Second, workshops, training, seminars might be conducted to facilitate and teach students how to eliminate the aspect of gender discrimination. The aim of these courses and training classes might be to educate and prepare students for a future professional career so that they would be able to develop confidence in themselves.
- Educational institutions might train their students about the work environment's actual realities, rules and regulations and address gender discrimination through adequate policies and training.

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