IMPACT OF WORKPLACE DISCRIMINATION ON FEMALE EMPLOYEES' WELLBEING IN THE MALAYSIAN RETAIL INDUSTRY

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Abstract

The research was conducted to determining the impact of women workplace discrimination on the worker's mental state or psychological wellbeing, as this is a prevalent issue is every corner of the world, and despite the efforts and measures put in place, the discriminatory practices against female workers are still being reported. A primary concern is their psychological wellbeing due to discrimination, which if left unattended, might escalate to a larger societal problem with dire consequences. The scope of the study is the retail industry, which is one of the largest contributors to the country's Gross Domestic Products. The target population for this study is the female worker from the retail business in Klang Valley. This is a quantitative study using an online questionnaire where the sampling was done using the convenience technique. The inferential analysis concluded that of the three independent variables studied, only Perceived Societal Discrimination was negatively and significantly impacting the female workers in the retail industry. This could be contributed by the fact the in the Asian culture, discriminatory practices against women are considered as a norm and less measures were taken to address them by the society. Women are subject to discrimination in this male dominated society on daily basis. Gender stereotyping and Perception of Organizational Justice were observed not to impact the female workers wellbeing either positively or negatively.

Keywords: Discrimination, Wellbeing, Female Employee, Retail Industry.

1. INTRODUCTION

Discriminatory practices at the workplace and the consequences on the mental state of the employees are the focus of the present study on the impact of gender discrimination at the workplace on the wellbeing of the workers in the retail industry in Malaysia. The act of discrimination is defined as any decision or action by the organizations in providing either favorable or unfavorable treatments based on the demographic characteristics of the employer candidates instead of work-related qualities such as academic qualifications and experience (Crane & Atten ,2020). Discriminatory practices, as Paresashvili et al., (2021) explained it is not limited to intentional practices where evidences are available but also unintentional where employment practices may not initially appear as discriminatory. Griffifth & McKinney (2021) distinguish the two forms of discriminatory practices as the first being the act where obvious physical traits such as gender and age are part of the criteria of hiring and promotion, and the other one is due to practices through seemingly neutral policies where one group is treated harsher than the others, such as not promoting women to higher position despite the policies are in place to on equal employment opportunities. Disparate treatment is the intentional discrimination where employees

purposively not given the same hiring, promotion, or membership opportunities as other employees, despite being qualified (Zafar, et al., 2017).

In recent times, the local media have highlighted several discriminatory practices in local industry, which despite the low number of cases, it is still a case of concern (Lokman & Atikah, 2018). There is no law in Malaysia that protects employees from discriminatory practices, through ample provision are available for workplace harassment. In fact, the only specific equality and anti-discrimination Act in Malaysia is the Person with Disabilities Act 2008. Nevertheless, the Federal Constitution of Malaysia assures equal and fair treatment of every citizen of this country through Article 8 which states " All persons are equal before the law and entitled to the equal protection of the law" and through Article 8(2) which states " "*There shall be no discrimination against citizens on the ground only of religion, race, descent, place of birth or gender in any law or in the appointment to any office or employment under a public authority or in the administration of any law relating to the acquisition, holding or disposition of property of the establishing or carrying on of any trade, business, profession, vocation or employment*" (Federal Constitution of Malaysia,1957). As such the constitution stated all deserved to be treated equally in every area of life, in particularly employment. Despite this provision, discriminatory practices are still prevalence in Malaysia, and it is only valid for an empirical study conducted to determine the consequences of these discriminatory practices on the female employees, specifically in the Retail Industry in Malaysia, such as the shopping complexes and outlets, where higher percentage of female employees.

Despite being the main contributor towards the growth of this country's economy and providing millions of employment opportunities, discrimination towards women is still prevalence within this industry. First as reported by the International Labor Organization (2021) as of 2020, male participation in labour (77.8%) in Malaysia is significantly higher than the female labour force (50.8%). Meanwhile, a statistical analysis by Women's Aid revealed that 56% female has experienced different forms of discrimination at the workplace and majority were experienced being frequently asked about the marital status during interview instead of acknowledging and recognizing their ability or achievement.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Amin and Zarka (2019) mentioned that the retail industry proved a barrier for female applicant and only 44% are being hired and worst scenario among 44%, 23% are being somehow involved with workplace discrimination. It also being indicated that the different questions were asked during interview, promotion and performance evaluation are totally differ compared to male and female. Workplace discrimination resulting in unfavorable treatment experienced by female employees where their actual performance is discarded, overlooked or even undermined. (Paresashvili et al, 2021). Ahmed et al., (2019) simplified the definition by stating discrimination as acts in which certain segments of the larger population enjoyed underserved preferences over others. Female employees may feel victimized or discriminated against when they perceived the disadvantage or unfavorable

treatment, suffer from systematic gender discrimination by comparing with male counterpart, unequal treatment on compensation, salary and promotion.

A comparative study by Bourabin and Verhaeghe (2018) on gender discrimination in the retail industry between an African country and European country revealed that discrimination is prevalence on daily basis, even in the simple task such as greeting them where men are more often greeted and acknowledges. A growing awakened is being felt throughout the develop world in ensuring equal treatment is extended to both genders, as well as other perceived differences between the workers such as race, religious beliefs and sexual orientations. In U.S. greater efforts are progressively made to ensure equality between the genders, which are evident in the sizeable representations of women at the workplace (Combs & Milosevic, 2016).

Recent study by Ahmed et al., (2019) conclude that retail industry in Malaysia are keen in hiring female employees due to the nature of the work and demand however, many of them are felt under-rated employees where they are not receiving the right salary and compensation. They also added that the long hours of working and no proper basic needs was provided by the employer has caused many of them feel suppressed. They added that gender stereotyping was one of the major causes that lead towards suppression among the female employees.

A study by Othman (2015) on discriminatory practices in Malaysia reveal that there is discrimination is still prevalent due to the traditionally held view that women at managerial positions are less likely than their male counterpart. It is indicating that there is still practices in retail industry which suppress the female employees from growing further. A number of empirical studies have been carried out in recent years on the women discrimination at the workplace in Malaysia, however none insofar have dwelt deeper on the consequences on the female employees psychological wellbeing. Fui Yee (2019) examined discrimination in terms recruitment and pay a little attention to other form of workplace related discrimination. This study while addressing the gap that exist today between the two genders in this country, has not addressed sufficiently on the consequences of these discriminatory on the psychological wellbeing for female employees. Jalal (2020), concluded through secondary sources of data, again addressing the inequality between the genders at the workplace, while providing no conclusion on the impact of this inequality, which is a form of workplace discrimination, on the female employee's wellbeing. While this study acknowledges the prevalence of female workplace discrimination, unfortunately less effort was shown in proving the impact of these practices.

Despite much being unearthed on female workplace discrimination through empirical studies, and concentrated efforts continuously made to tackle this alarming issue, there is no convincing indication that the policies and laws in place are adequate in elevating the status of female worldwide higher or same with the equally qualified male employees, while protecting female against every form of discrimination. World Bank placed Malaysia in the last place of 18 countries in East Asia and Pacific region, in providing sufficient provision legally to curb gender discrimination. The Federal Constitutions under Article 18

prohibits any form of discrimination based on one's gender, however this provision binds only to government employment, with no provision on protecting female against discrimination in the private sectors. Section 34 and 35 of Employment Act of 1955 (Act 265), while prohibits discrimination between the genders, they failed to adequately and explicit mandate for equal remuneration between the gender. As such it is only valid to conclude that there is no legal provision in Malaysia, besides the vaguely worded sections under Employment Act of 1955, for equal treatment and protection of female workers in every sector against discriminatory practices. Therefore, this study will be exploring on the female workplace discrimination and psychological wellbeing in retail industry.

3. METHODOLOGIES

The present study a causal research as its primary objective in to determine the causal relationship between perceived workplace discrimination and psychological wellbeing. The target population for this study is the female employees from the retail sector in the area of Klang Valley, which encompasses the capital of Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur as well as a large part of Selangor, mostly Petaling Jaya. A sampling frame which contains every female employee in the retail sector in klang Valley could not be obtained due to privacy concerns of the employers, which implies that probability sampling is not possible. This study applied a convenience sampling techniques, where members of the population which are easily accessible are sampled. This technique is sometimes called the availability sampling techniques, as it samples members of the population of this study, is most effective in sampling the respondents in the most cost and time effective manner, especially when the sampling frame cannot be determined in period of time (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016).

A cross sectional study is done when changes in behavior over time the respondents is deemed not vital in answering the research questions (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). A cross sectional study is deemed more appropriate for this study. Four hypotheses formulated and tested using the Simple Bivariate Pearson Correlation analysis and Multiple Linear Regression for testing of relationship that involves multiple independent variables. Testing will be done at 95% confidence level, implying that the null hypothesis will be rejected when the probability of error or significant value p is less than equal to 0.05. p value is an indicator of the probability of committing Type 1 and Type 2 errors. The strength and direction of the relationship between dependent and independent variables will be determined from the values of the coefficient.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

There are three dominant races in this country namely Malay, Chinese and Indian, with the minor races constituting the natives of Sabah and Sarawak and in Peninsula Malaysia together with descendants of the Thai people found normally in the northern states of Peninsula Malaysia. Chinese employees form the largest representative in this sample (92.8%), followed by Malay (4.3%), Indian (1%) and others at (0.4%). The employment level of female employees is; junior executive (31.9%), senior executive (13.0%), Manager

(1.4%) and others (53.6%). Mostly of them are having degree (44.9%) and diploma (30.4%), fresh graduate (13.0%) and other are 11.6%.

Table 1: Frequency of Female Employees experience on different forms of discrimination

Types of discrimination	Frequency (100%)
Glass Ceiling	18.5
Mockery	15.7
Intimidation	15.0
Glass Wall	16.1
Stereotype	16.6
Wage Discrimination	18.1
Total	100.00

From the table above, the glass ceiling is the most common types of workplace discrimination experienced by women worker. This is where women are prevented from progressing further. Next is wage discrimination where women are given lower salaries than their male counterparts for the same work done. The least type of discrimination is intimidation where women are felt threatening or punished for mistakes or faults they did by male counterparts.

It is also evident that 65.3% of female agree that they are subject to the intentional discrimination and only 34.7% agreed it is unintentional.

Table 2: Summary of Normality Testing

Measurement Scales	Histogram	Normal Q-Q Plot	P value from Shapiro Wilk Normality Testing	Normally Distributed
Gender Stereotyping	Bell Shaped curve	Straight linear plot	p = 0.760	YES
Perception of Organizational Justice	Bell Shaped curve	Straight linear plot	p = 0.185	YES
Societal Discrimination	Bell Shaped curve	Straight linear plot	p = 0.116	YES
Psychological Wellbeing	Bell Shaped curve	Straight linear plot	p = 0.563	YES

Based on the table above, as all four variables studied in this research falling a normal distribution, it is therefore statistically accurate to pursue subsequent testing of the hypotheses using parametric testing techniques. This is also concluding that the assumption of normality has not been violated, therefore dismissing the consideration for non-parametric testing.

Table 3: Hypothesis testing decision

Hypothesis	Testing required
H1- There is a relationship between gender stereotyping and psychological wellbeing of female employees in the Malaysian Retail Industry	Simple Bivariate Pearson Correlation Analysis
H2- There is a relationship between perception of organizational justice and psychological wellbeing of female employees in the Malaysian Retail Industry	Multiple Linear Regression due to the present of multiple independent variables.
H3- There is a relationship between perceived societal discrimination and psychological wellbeing of female employees in the Malaysian Retail Industry	Simple Bivariate Pearson Correlation Analysis
H4- There is a relationship between challenges of female workplace discrimination and psychological wellbeing of female employees in the Malaysian Retail Industry.	Multiple Linear Regression due to the present of multiple independent variables.

Simple Bivariate Pearson Correlation analysis is preferred in testing the relationship between the co- variable. The testing shall be performed at 95% confidence level, where the null hypothesis will be rejected when the p value is less than acceptable value of 0.005. Correlation coefficient r will then be interpreted to indicate the strengths and direction of the relationship. Multiple Linear Relationship is a more practical approach in determining the relationship between the dependent variable and more than one independent variables. Similar with the earlier test this testing is also performed at 95% confidence level.

Table 4: Hypothesis Outcome

Hypothesis	Coefficient	Decision
H1- There is a relationship between gender stereotyping and psychological wellbeing of female employees in the Malaysian Retail Industry	+0.022 – indicates a weak and positive relationship.	Accept the null hypothesis because the p value is much greater than the acceptable value of 0.05 at 0.855.
H2- There is a relationship between perception of organizational justice and psychological wellbeing of female employees in the Malaysian Retail Industry	weak model, concluded with the low score of Adjusted R Square, which at 0.012, is able to be explained only 1.2% of the changes in the dependent variable	The p value of 0.543, which is way greater thanthe acceptable value of 0.05.
H3- There is a relationship between perceived societal discrimination and psychological wellbeing of female employees in the Malaysian Retail Industry	+0.022 – indicates a positive relationship.	p value of 0.015, which is less than the acceptable alpha value of 0.05, therefore allowing the null hypothesis to be rejected
H4- There is a relationship between challenges of female workplace discrimination and psychological wellbeing of female employees in the Malaysian Retail Industry.	Regression model explains 10.2% of the changes in the dependent variable, concluded based on the score of Adjusted R Square of 0.102 as indicated in the table above, and also concluded as statistically insignificant based on the p value of 0.069, which is greater than theacceptable alpha value of 0.05.	The null hypothesis is therefore not rejected and concluded thatthere is no statistically significant relationship between Psychological Wellbeing and Challenges to Workplace Discrimination.

5. CONCLUSION

Malaysia, like most Asian countries is a masculine country, where male are dominants in most spheres of lives, especially in businesses and politics. The trend however has been changing in the recent years with more and more female taking up higher positions in both business and politics. Women in this country are longer confined to the traditionally defined roles such as homemakers. However, it is worth nothing that women are subject to harassment and discrimination is every aspect of their lives include in within the four walls of their house, social activities, education places and of course workplaces. This is especially more prevalent in Asian culture such as Malaysia, where the masculine culture and sense of male superiority, allows for the discriminations to be committed without perceiving or judging them as morally and legally wrong.

Society in this part of the globe have not only accepted discriminations as a culture norm but also perceive that in a male dominated society, no actions shall and can be taken to address this gripping issue without fearing any form of retaliation. The stress ad trauma of being discriminated and harassment, on a day-to-day basis tend to leave a lasting impact on the mental state of female workers, majority of whom are also carrying the dual responsibilities of caring for the families as well, therefore well justifying the finding of this study which related psychological wellbeing to perceived societal discrimination.

The psychological wellbeing of female employees is still questionable as many may not want to express their feeling because of the fear of losing job. Since female occupied at least 40% of the job in the retail industry and there are many of them agree of facing intentional discrimination but somehow keeping quiet as there is no relevant law to assists and help them. It also strongly being voice out that it is difficult to prove evidence over this issue. In near future this research can be replicated into a qualitative perspective to explore in depth evidence of their feeling. Among others, companies and authorities in general can adopt a few measures in addressing discrimination against women by establishing Equal Employment Opportunities (EEO) policies and acts where women are promoted, and rewards are fairly distributed accordingly based on their achievement, qualification and experiences. Implement Affirmative Action policies where special quotas and reservations for women are established to redress the century – old discriminations faced by them and also promote awareness campaign on the quality between the two genders and the consequences experienced by women due to discriminatory practices.

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