

# Workplace Discrimination against Working Women in Jordan

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore the sources related to work place discrimination against working women in Jordan. The studied discrimination sources are: age discrimination, racial discrimination, religious discrimination, gender discrimination, women social status discrimination and sexual harassment. Data were collected via questionnaires from 154 working women in academic and managerial positions at Al-Balqa Applied University in Jordan. Crosstabs were used to describe sample characteristics related to discrimination and Chi square test was used to test the hypotheses. Crosstabs tabulations results found that educated and married women who are moving to a higher age category feel more discriminated at workplace. Chi Square findings indicated that Jordanian working women exposed to different sources of discrimination except religious discrimination at workplace.

**Keywords:** age discrimination, discrimination, gender discrimination, racial discrimination, religious discrimination, sexual harassment

## 1. Introduction

Arab women studies that examined sources related to discrimination against Arab working women in workplace are very seldom reported in women literature review, but experts in the field of Arab women issues agreed about men domination in social and work environments and that Arab culture is masculine bias. Many studies have shown that in Arab world there are widespread gender disparities in personal attributes and work conditions aspects, for example in Egypt females earn less income and work in less intense jobs, they reported that they felt unsatisfied with their jobs and suffered from high levels of psychosomatic and exhaustion symptoms and they were not engaged enough in work (Burke & El-Khot, 2011). Although Lebanon is considered as an Arab country with a diverse society in religions, women face in their works institutional structural and attitudinal barriers and they reported that their careers successes are defined by social networks that are dominated by men, in other words discrimination practices appeared in organizational structures in Lebanon (Tlaiss Hayfaa, 2015). Saudi working women suffer from labor law that does not provide a mechanism that supports gender equality, as a result it caused the absence of women regulatory support reinforces in organization's discriminatory practices (Al-Asfour, Tlaiss, & Khan, 2017). There are unfavorable gendered attitudes toward the Emirate women roles in workplace environment that inhibit them from selecting their future professions, the Emirate men look at the independence that Emirate women have achieved through their developed economic situations as a source of threats (Al Marzouqui, 2011). Emirate women manager's turnover was predicted through work life quality, economic and social requirements (Yaghi, 2016). Al-Waqfi and Al-faki, (2015) study found that there are in the UAE work place gender-based disparities and inequity in employment and specific impacts of contextual factors on the employment conditions of women compared to men, these factors are affected by workers' nationalities. In Jordan the political, social and economic status of women fluctuates according to law, traditions, culture, and religion over time. The Jordanian women rights are determined by the integration between European civil law and Islamic principles, but the traditional view about masculinity and femininity are still the main determinants of women conditions to select their education and professions in work place. Jordanian women passed through long steps searching equality within their societies in general and in their works more specific, they achieved significant improvements in education field but they still complain from inferior treatment in economic, political, and social life, approaches to opportunities, and discrimination in work place environments (Al-Manasra, 2013). Although the various regulations and legislations issued in Jordan to strengthen and support the site of women in workplace, the working women still suffer from different discriminatory treatment in formal procedures in their

organizations such as: placement selection, compensation appraisal, training, and promotion (Al-Manasra, 2013). Jordanian women are exposed to different occupational segregation both horizontal and vertical segregation. The glass ceiling represents the vertical segregation where the women force is centered in lower level jobs categorization, the horizontal segregation appears in situations where the female presence is concentrated in certain occupations (World Bank, 2005). Although Arab women passed long steps in the past century searching equality within their societies in general and in their works more specific, they are still facing inequalities actions in their workplaces. For these reasons the researcher found motives to investigate the sources of discrimination against working women in Jordan using a quantitative approach.

## 2. Literature Review

Discrimination acts in workplace are noticeable in every part of organizations, it creates an aggressive condition among organization's members, it affects the organization's capability to employ talented employees and generate many employees' problems that impede organization's efficiency (Triana, Jayasinghe & Pieper, 2015). It is considered as a source of social problems that affects lives of people worldwide because of the rejection of equal practices to people based on their group affiliation (Allport, 1954). Discrimination is viewed as a pattern of behaviors that create societal, physical and psychological obstacles that impede minority group members from achieving parity with majority group members (Bowen, Edwards and Lingard, 2013). It can be related to two biases called institutional and ethnocentrism bias. Ethnocentrism creates a perspective on individual from certain group that his/her values, behaviors and beliefs are more ideal than those from other groups. Institutional bias sustains the continuous of the pattern preference around approaches that manage the organization and creates barriers that retard the full employee involvement from different backgrounds (Vasconcelos, 2015). Hemphill and Haines (1997) described six basic types of discrimination are namely disabilities discrimination, age discrimination, sexual harassment, racial discrimination, sexual orientation discrimination and gender discrimination.

### 2.1 Age Discrimination

Age discrimination concentrates on age being the main attribute in identifying abilities and skills, it looks at the older employees that are less effective in performing job functions when comparing with younger employees (Carden & Boyd, 2014). This perspective views that a young employee is preferred to be hired more than an older one, according to this perspective an older employee is not flexible in performing some projects (Workplace Ethics Advice, 2013). Many studies found that most of the age discrimination occurs during the interview process (Morgeson et al., 2008).

### 2.2 Racial Discrimination

Race is the group of people that are classified according to their physical characteristics, for example skin's color, hair's type, shared nose and eyes (OXFORD Advanced Learner's Dictionary). Racial discrimination is caused by racial stereotype that people create. The human nature tends to categorize people into different groups during their life's growing stages affected by different social groups' perspectives such as families, friends, colleagues, and media, this developed process determined racial groups based on categorization elements of these groups (Chang & Kleiner, 2003). The stereotype is a rigid image around a group of people shared the same type of person, in fact it is not an accurate conclusion. Racial stereotypes cause communication's obstacles in workplace because the perceptions of different races are distorted and stereotypical, causing degrading and humiliating feelings that hurt others. During the communication process between the sender and the receiver who come from different races an inefficient communication can be happen because each party interpret the letter's content in a way causing inferiority feelings to the other party (Chang & Kleiner, 2003).

### 2.3 Religious Discrimination

There is no specific definition clarifies the term "religious discrimination work" or "religious discrimination employment" however, Ghumman, Ryan, et al., (2013) addressed the disparate treatment as the most type of religious discrimination that takes attention which refers in work environment to differences in treatment according to hiring, recruitment, promotion and other employment issues due to an individual's religion. Ghumman, Ryan, et al., (2013) explained that increased religious diversity, legal ambiguities, growing expression of religious beliefs and the unique nature of religion are trends that contribute to religious discrimination in the work place.

### 2.4 Gender Discrimination

In our world gender has been the most demographic characteristic used to segregate occupations inside the organizations, as men and women are classified in separate industries, departments and occupations. Gender

segregation can be either vertical or horizontal; vertical segregation occurs when females are assigned in the lower levels of the organization hierarchy (Chandra & Kleiner, 1998). There are many reasons behind the women job segregation such as restricting women in particular job training, stereotyping of female characteristics by the employer's prejudices, economic arguments that allows employers to pay women less, opposition from male craft unions, obstacles in establishing anti-discrimination legislations, and female domination that is associated to the lower status and pay level in the organization. (Chandra & Kleiner, 1998). According to Al-Asfour, Tlaiss and Khan (2017) study found that the impediment behind the Saudi women occupational progress is due to organizational structural, and attitudinal obstacles, these obstacles include a lack of mobility; the salience of gender stereotypes; gender discrimination in the workplace; limited opportunities for growth; development, and career advancement; excessive workload caused by a lack of family-work balance; and gender-based challenges related to dealing with pregnancy. Tlaiss Hayfaa (2015) study focused on the gendered working conditions that Lebanese female managers experience and how they capitalize on their individual agency to survive the hegemonic masculinity embedded in their workplaces, along with the inequalities that it promotes.

### 2.5 Sexual Harassment

Harassment is a hostile sexual physical or verbal behavior towards individuals based on their gender, race, religion, or sexual preference (Bowen, Edwards & Lingard, 2013). Sexual harassment can occur in different situations where harasser and harassment victim might be a female or male, it is not necessary to be the victim from the opposite gender, the harasser can be anyone in the organizational hierarchy (Grochin & Kleiner, 1998). Bowen, Edwards and Lingard (2013) stated that South African construction professions are experiencing harassment and discrimination based on ethnic grounds where high levels of work stress were related to harassment and discrimination. Bader et al., (2018) study found that female expatriates are exposed to gender harassment more the male expatriates, this behavior is more apparent in host countries with high institutional level gender discrimination resulting unsatisfied and frustrated working females.

## 3. Hypotheses and Research Model

### 3.1 Research Model

Discrimination against working women is a multidimensional complex phenomenon, the researcher developed the study model and formulated six hypotheses based on previous literature review (Hemphill & Haines, 1997).

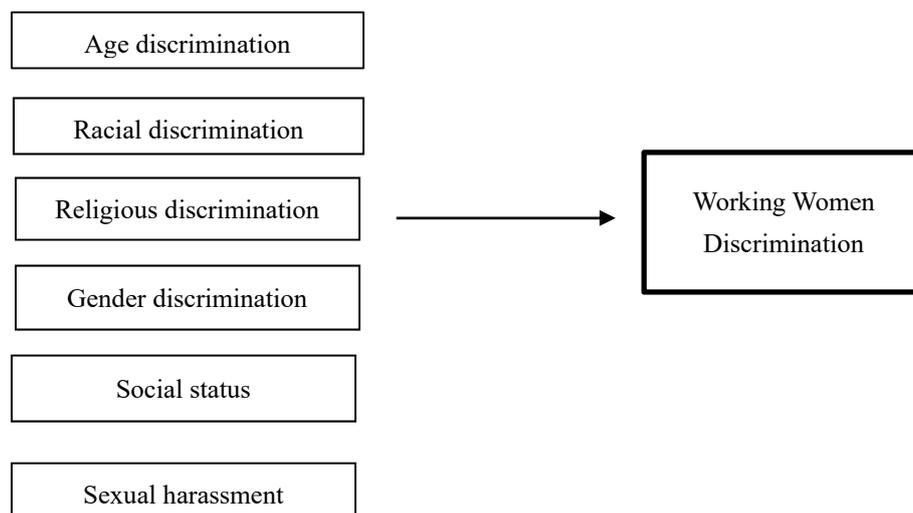


Figure 1. The research model

### 3.2 Hypotheses

*H1*: Age is related to working women discrimination

*H2*: Race is related to working women discrimination

*H3*: Religion is related to working women discrimination

*H4*: Social status is related to working women discrimination

*H5*: Gender is related to working women discrimination

*H6*: Sexual harassment is related to working women discrimination

#### 4. Research Methodology

##### 4.1 Sample

A total of 154 working women in academic and managerial positions at Al Balqa Applied University in Jordan composed the purposive sample. Questionnaires were distributed face to face in order to explain some issues that are delicate in the Arab culture such as sexual harassment and resistance against discrimination.

##### 4.2 Sample Characteristics

According to the age category results in table 1, it is shown that in Jordan women are recruited from different ages starting from 18 until 55 years old but after fifty-five they tend to retire. From social status results, it is seen that most working women are married (86%) then (42%) are single and (22%) are divorced, this means that the social status of the women doesn't impede the women from work. Depending on education results it is shown that "Bachelor" degree took the highest percentage of education level with (55.8%) this percentage is an indicator that most of the Jordanian working women are well educated.

Table 1. The main characteristics of the sample

Category	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Age</b>		
18-25	34	22.1
26-30	44	28.6
31-40	34	22.1
41-50	40	26.0
51-55	2	1.3
<b>Social status</b>		
Single	42	27.3
Married	86	55.8
Divorced	22	14.3
Widowed	4	2.6
<b>Education</b>		
Secondary	20	13.0
Diploma	12	7.8
Undergraduate	86	55.5
Master	30	19.5
Doctorate	6	3.9
<b>Job category</b>		
Employee	94	61.0
Managerial	46	29.9
Academic	14	9.1

##### 4.3 Variables and Measure

The questionnaire is divided into three parts, the first part, collected demographic data about working women such as: age, social status, education and job category to describe the characteristics of respondents. The second part, is used to determine sources of discrimination the respondents felt that they are exposed to (age, race, religion, social status, gender and sexual harassment) and the third part, is to get answers about discrimination resistance through a direct question: "Do you resist discrimination?" if yes, "how?" "verbal or written resistance or by law". Hypotheses are tested using Chi-square Test. The dependent variable (working women discrimination) was measured by a direct nominal question (yes or no) asking working women about their feelings about discrimination and the independent variable which is represented by discrimination sources (age, religion, race, gender, social status and sexual harassment) was measured by asking the working women to choose among them.

## 5. Results

### 5.1 Descriptive Results

Descriptive analyses (crosstabs) were used to describe sample distribution between discrimination and each working women demographic variable (age, education, social status and job category). The Crosstabs results were presented in the following tables:

Table 2. Discrimination \*age cross tabulation

Discrimination	18-25	26-30	31-35	36-50	51-55
	16	16	22	28	2

Discrimination\*age cross tabulation results showed that whenever a working women are moving to a higher age category, they feel more discriminated at work, because women in this age category are expected to achieve remarkable career progress so they are being exposed to glass ceiling practices from their men colleagues.

Table 3. Discrimination \*education Cross tabulation

Discrimination	Secondary	Diploma	Undergraduate	Master	Doctorate
	8	10	36	24	6

Discrimination\*education cross tabulation results indicated that discrimination practices are applied to working women although they are well educated and it is clear that the more working women are educated, the more they are discriminated.

Table 4. Discrimination \*social status cross tabulation

Discrimination	Single	married	divorced	widowed	Total
	18	44	18	4	84

Discrimination\*social status cross tabulation results indicated that discrimination practices are applied to working women in all their social status but it is noticeable that married women are more discriminated than others, it could be explained that the stereotype view looks at working married women, as if they are not fully labor focused because of their social responsibilities.

Table 5. Discrimination \*job category cross tabulation

Discrimination	Employee	Managerial	Academic
	42	30	12

Discrimination\*job type Cross tabulation results showed that working women at all levels of jobs are feeling discriminated, more who are in employee's positions because most of them reported that they have been in the same work position for many years without promotion. Managerial women reported that they are exposed to glass ceiling practices that impede them to take high managerial positions and all of the academic women reported that they are not treated in the same way as their men colleagues.

Table 6. Clarified discrimination resistance forms through asking the respondents a direct question: "Do you resist against this discrimination?" if yes, how do you resist it? "verbal or written or by law".

Table 6. forms of discrimination resistance

Forms	frequency	percent
Verbal	54	64
Written	16	19
Law	14	16

These results showed that most respondents preferred to express their resistance against discrimination by verbal

procedures avoiding straight confrontation with their superiors because they feared of retaliation by the administration, although the respondents that used legal procedures, expressed that they got their rights when they presented their complaints to the Ministry of Labor in Jordan.

### 5.2 Hypotheses Testing

Hypotheses testing were represented based on the Chi-square Test tabulation results in the following tables:

H1: Age is related to working women discrimination

Table 7. presented the Chi-square test result. Age appeared to have a significant relationship with discrimination ( $\chi^2 = 12.833$ , sig=0.00). So H1 is accepted.

Table 7. Discrimination\*age Chi-square test

Pearson chi-square	Value	Df	asyp.sig (2-sided)
	12.833 <sup>a</sup>	1	0.00

H2: Race is related to working women discrimination

Table 8. presented the Chi-square test result. Race appeared to have a significant relationship with discrimination ( $\chi^2 = 7.032$ , sig=0.008). So H2 is supported.

Table 8. Discrimination\*race chi-square test

Pearson chi-square	Value	df	asyp.sig (2-sided)
	7.032 <sup>a</sup>	1	0.008

H3: Religion is related to working women discrimination

Table 9. presented the Chi-square test result. Religion doesn't appear to have a significant relationship with discrimination ( $\chi^2 = 3.422$ , sig=0.064). So H3 is not accepted.

Table 9. Discrimination\*religion chi-square test

Pearson chi-square	Value	df	asyp.sig (2-sided)
	3.422 <sup>a</sup>	1	0.064

H4: Social status is related to working women discrimination

Table 10. presented the Chi-square test result. Social status appeared to have a significant relationship with discrimination ( $\chi^2 = 21.389$ , sig=0.00). So H4 is accepted.

Table 10. Discrimination\*social status chi-square test

Pearson chi-square	Value	df	asyp.sig (2-sided)
	21.389 <sup>a</sup>	1	0.00

H5: Gender is related to working women discrimination

Table 11. presented the Chi-square test result. Gender appeared to have a significant relationship with discrimination ( $\chi^2 = 32.868$ , sig=0.00). So H5 is accepted

Table 11. Discrimination\*gender chi-square test

Pearson chi-square	Value	Df	asyp.sig (2-sided)
	32.868 <sup>a</sup>	1	0.00

H6: Sexual harassment is related to working women discrimination

Table 12. presented the Chi-square test result. Sexual harassment appeared to have a significant relationship with discrimination ( $\chi^2 = 26.068$ sig=0.00). So H6 is supported.

Table 12. Discrimination\*sexual harassment Chi-square test

Pearson chi-square	Value	df	asympt.sig (2-sided)
	26.068 <sup>a</sup>	1	0.00

## 6. Conclusions

The results indicated that Jordanian working women suffer from different sources of discrimination mainly based on age, race, gender, social status and sexual harassment, particularly women who are in higher age category or married or more educated or from different race and they may have been exposed to sexual harassment behaviors. The results also showed that religion is not related to working women discrimination in Jordan, this result can be explained by clarifying some Jordanian issues in regards to law, society structure and historical background. For example, The Jordanian Constitution (1952), preserves religious rights in the country, referring to its Article (6) that states “Jordanians shall be equal before the law. There shall be no discrimination between them as regards to their rights and duties on ground of race, language or religion.” And Article (14) states “The state shall safeguard the free exercise of all forms of worship and religious rites in accordance with the customs observed in the kingdom, unless such is inconsistent with public order or morality” and from a social view the Jordanian structure is composed of about 94% Muslims and 6% Christians but they all belong to the Arab race (Gharaybeh, 2014). The study concluded that preventing discrimination against the working women in the workplace is the responsibility of all employees in the organization but leaders play a leading role impeding discrimination acts inside their organizations (Al-Manasra, 2013). Senior management must stop denying the fact that women are exposed to discrimination in the workplace, they need to ensure that organizational culture and structure appreciate women and treats them with respect and fairness. The respect and fairness start with appreciating the value of the working women among the workplace judging them according to their experience level, efficient reliable practices and performance. Phomphakdy & Kleiner (1999) suggested the implementation of a top-down strategy where leadership modelling starts from senior management to the lower-level management and employees to bring the cultural changes necessary to eliminate discrimination against working women.

## 7. Study Limitations and Future Research

Although this paper has offered some contributions to the Arab working women literature, it has also limitations, particularly the convenience sampling approach, due to the small size of the sample as it was only applied on the public sector in Jordan. In the first place, this means that the findings cannot be generalized to all women employed in Jordan and secondly in the Arab world. Another limitation is the cross-sectional nature of the study; many other contextual factors are overlapping according to the Arab country in which the study is conducted.

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