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THE GLASS CEILING IN HEALTHCARE: EXPLORING THE EFFECTS OF GENDER DISCRIMINATION ON FEMALE DOCTORS' JOB SATISFACTION AND TURNOVER INTENTIONS IN PAKISTAN

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Abstract

The primary objective of this study is to investigate how gender discrimination influences the intention of female doctors in Pakistan to leave their jobs. The study also examines the role of psychological distress as a mediator in this relationship. The research involved 300 female doctors in Pakistan who were chosen using convenience sampling. The study utilized structured equation modeling with Smart PLS software. Finding reveals gender discrimination including assignment, career, and evaluation strongly impacts the intention to quit among female doctors in Pakistan. Moreover, some of these relationships between Gender discrimination dimensions and Intention to Quit are mediated by psychological distress. The findings of the present study offer important implications for both doctors and policymakers.

Keywords: *Gender Discrimination, Psychological Distress, Intention to Quit, Job Satisfaction.*

Introduction

Intention to Quit (IQ) is a important metric to study turnover as it indicates how likely an employee's intends to depart from their current position in an organization (Price and Mueller, 1981). Various factors do tend to contribute significantly towards his or her intention to leave an

organization, i.e. age (Gardulf et al., 2005; Heinen et al., 2013), job tenure, career preferences (Gardulf et al., 2005), compensation (Brewer & Kovner, 2014), and favorable working conditions, encompassing both physical and psychosocial aspects (Li et al., 2010) etc. One of the major factors is a hostile work environment that influences an individual's intention to leave, with Gender Discrimination (GD) playing a substantial role in this regard. Gender Discrimination refers to injustice and unfair treatment experienced by an individual due differences in gender that further leads to biasness in various fields such as employment, education, healthcare, and social settings. Gender Discrimination can manifest in various forms resulting in Psychological Distress (PD) characterized by anxiety, depression, and physical ailments induced by environmental stressors.

Gender discrimination is detrimental for working women, causing stress and feelings of under evaluation and exclusion in a hostile environment and they eventually start considering leaving. Moreover there exists a relationship between GD, psychological distress, and intention to quit as the discriminatory practices in the organization can cause distress, impacting mental health and job satisfaction, ultimately leading employees, especially women, to contemplate leaving their jobs. Past studies identify the need for more research to thoroughly understand and to explore other sectors providing comprehensive results (Bilodeau et al., 2020) due to lack of relevant studies on system-justifying beliefs influencing gender discrimination and resulting impact on mental well-being (Jackson, 2019). Limited research in the area of Gender Discrimination against healthcare professionals reports low female respondents participation which negatively affect the generalizability of research findings (Riley et al., 2021) highlighting the need for additional research (Joung et al., 2018; Elçi et al., 2021) and system-justifying beliefs (Ofuebe et al., 2022).

The purpose of the present study is to explore the underlying relationship between gender discrimination, i.e. assignment, career, and evaluation discrimination, on the likelihood of female doctors job turnover intentions in public and private hospitals Pakistan, while examining the role of psychological distress as a mediator. The research attempts to address the following questions What is the influence of assignment, career, and evaluation discrimination on the intention of female doctors to quit? How does Psychological Distress affect the relationship between assignment, career, and evaluation discrimination and the intention to quit? The findings of this study could have substantial implications for the healthcare sector by revealing the factors contributing to female doctors' desire to leave their positions, potentially leading to the development of policies and interventions aimed at improving retention rates.

Literature Review:

Intention to Quit (IQ)

The intention to quit (IQ) is defined as an intention of an employee's to voluntarily leave their present job in the near future. This Intention to leave one's current job is influenced by various factors such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, perceived job alternatives, and work-related stress etc. According to Tepper et al. (2009), this phenomenon defined an initial indicator of turnover hence is considered crucial for understanding the complexities in context of employee retention strategies, organizational dynamics and for effective human resources management. In light of globalization and technological advancements organizations are becoming increasingly focused on acquiring and retaining high-quality human resources (Iyigun & Tamer, 2012). Also the cost associated with turnover (Hinkin & Tracey, 2000) and labor shortages in critical industries (Wu et al., 2010) have heightened significance of retaining valuable personnel. Efforts have been made by policymakers by formulating and implementing various policies and procedures to address these challenges.

Gender discrimination

Gender discrimination (GD) is a major issue that involves unfair or biased treatment towards individuals on basis of their gender experienced by people in aspects of life, such as work, education, and social settings, solely because of gender or gender identity etc. Gender Discrimination often results in unequal opportunities, unjust stereotypes, or prejudices while undermining the skills or capabilities of individuals (Hang-yue et al., 2006). Three distinct but interconnected factors included in Gender Discrimination that serve as measures of discriminatory treatment within organizations are career discrimination, assignment discrimination, and performance assessment discrimination. Research studies report that this three-factor framework aligns well with the psychological experience of discrimination (Ormerod et al., 2002). Numerous research works have emphasized the prevalence and adverse effects of gender discrimination which is evident of the fact that problems still exist in the workplace making this an imperative that we address this issue. Gender discrimination often leads to biased appraisals and evaluations of performance of especially women and this eventually leads to lower pay and fewer advancement opportunities compared to men (Eagly et al., 2007).

Following research studies highlight the negative effects of discrimination experienced by the female employees in work place which emphasis the need for collective responsibility and efforts to discourage such practices in workplace . These practices contribute towards an imbalanced work environment and cause an increased psychological distress among women employees (Gutek, 2012) emphasizes that. According to Mavin and

Williams (2013) gender based unfair treatments and experiences can lead to an increase desire to leave the organization. Additionally, Foley and Hang-Yue (2004) found that individuals who experience discrimination in their organizations are more likely to demonstrate lower organizational commitment and may choose to leave. Furthermore, studies by Fitzgerald et al. (1994), Glomb et al. (1997), and Saunders et al. (2007) reveal that women who encounter harassment and discrimination may suffer from different medical including physical and psychological effects and even experience setbacks in their careers and job security. The effects of gender discrimination affect employees at individual as well as at organization level which leads to increased employee turnover, litigation costs, damage awards, and a tarnished reputation (Channar et al., 2011; Shah, 2010).

The existing body of literature extensively underscores significant impact of workplace discrimination and violence on employee intention to leave their jobs or careers. According Hämmig '(2023) there exists a direct correlation between workplace discrimination and the likelihood of employees to leave their jobs. Based on research findings by Arshad (2020), gender discrimination leaves detrimental effects on employees' job performance and satisfaction. Research conducted by Gächter et al. in 2013 meticulously examines the negative effects of workplace factors i.e. fairness, social capital, and work-life balance on police officers' intentions to quit. According to comprehensive meta-analysis by Johnson and Blackshire (2019) gender discrimination has harmful on job satisfaction, performance, and overall well-being of employees in an organization. The present study seeks to bridge the existing research gap on gender discrimination by meticulously examining its impact on female doctors' intentions to leave their profession, considering factors such as assignments, career prospects, and evaluations.

H1: Assignment Discrimination has a significant impact on the Intention to Quit.

H2: Career Discrimination has a significant impact on the Intention to Quit.

H3: Evaluation Discrimination has a significant impact on the Intention to Quit.

Psychological Distress

"Psychological Distress" comprises of variety of emotional and mental health symptoms indicating a state of psychological discomfort or suffering of an individual. It includes feelings of anxiety, depression, or overall emotional unease that can have a significant impact on overall wellbeing and functioning ability of an individual. Psychological Distress can lead to feelings of concern, impatience, irritability, mood swings, which in turn leads to difficulties and challenges in managing everyday life (Kessler et al., 2003). Women who face Gender Discrimination (GD) may develop various mental health issues. GD can result in disparities in household

socioeconomic conditions, affecting both physical and mental health. Women experiencing socioeconomic disparities may also have increased levels of anxiety and despair, impacting their overall well-being. Gutek, Cohen, and Tsui (1996) suggested that female employees' reported discrimination might be linked to their diminished sense of authority and career status. There is a growing interest in understanding how discrimination may perpetuate health disparities, given the increasing awareness of its significance (Williams et al., 2003).

The impact of racism, discriminatory experiences, and views on health is multifaceted. According to Williams and Collins (1995), racism affects health in three main ways. Firstly, racism leads to structural modifications in socioeconomic status, resulting in disparities between racial and ethnic groups. Second, it hinders access to health-promoting products and services. Lastly, racism and discrimination exacerbate psychological distress, negatively impacting health-related behaviors and mental and physical well-being. Gender discrimination (GD) has been associated with higher levels of job stress, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment compared to other common types of job stress, such as job conflict (De Jonge & Dormann, 2006). Discrimination and other stressors may have similar effects (Pascoe & Smart Richman, 2009). Research indicates that discrimination may have a greater impact on psychological distress compared to other stressful life events (Utsey et al., 2008; Williams & Mohammed, 2009). Furthermore, perceived discrimination has been found to predict future adverse mental health outcomes more accurately than vice versa (Brown et al., 2000). The nonspecific symptoms of sadness, anxiety, burnout, and stress are all encompassed in post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Galderisi et al., 2015; Viertiö et al., 2021), which can range from mild stress to severe suicidality. Previous literature has also shown high rates of Parkinson's disease (psychological distress) among doctors (Dutheil et al., 2019), with 66.7% citing discrimination based on race or gender as a contributing factor (Riley et al., 2021). However, increased awareness and concerted efforts have the potential to bring about significant improvements in these areas.

H4: Psychological Distress has a mediating effect on the relationship between Assignment Discrimination and Intention to Quit.

H5: Psychological Distress mediates the relationship between Gender Career Discrimination and Intention to Quit.

H6: Psychological Distress has a mediating effect on the relationship between Evaluation Discrimination and Intention to Quit.

3. Methodology

To test the conceptual model, the present study uses a cross-sectional survey to gather data on female doctors in Pakistan. We gathered data using self-administered questions and online using Google Forms. The questionnaire

is based on a Likert scale consisting of strongly disagree, disagree, neutral to strongly agree to agree about gender discrimination, and intention to quit. All of the time, most of the time, some of the time, A little of the time, and none of the time for psychological distress. Number of respondents are 300. In the first part of the questionnaire, demographics-related questions were asked, including Age and Designation, etc. The remaining part of the questionnaire included items for constructs including Gender Discrimination dimensions (Evaluation Discrimination, Assignment Discrimination and Career Discrimination), Intention to Quit and Psychological Distress. The scale items on these constructs were adopted from the validated scales of the previous studies. The Gender Discrimination Scale (2002 WGR), based on 12 items, surveyed the participants regarding adverse behaviour experienced in performance evaluations, assignments and careers during the last 12 months. The scale included four items for Evaluation-related discrimination, three items for Assignment-related Discrimination and five items for measuring Career Discrimination. The Intention to Quit scale was adopted by Tepper et al. (2009) and included three items. Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10) is used to measure Psychological Distress. A total of 350 questionnaires were distributed with a total response of 315, out of which 15 were incomplete and therefore discarded. The total number of questionnaires that were included in the final analysis was 300. The demographics results revealed that 80% of the respondents were 18-30 years of age, 13% of respondents were 31-40 years old, 4% were 41-50 years old, and 2% were 51 to 60 years old. All the respondents were female.

Data Analysis Tools and Procedure

In the current study, we utilized SmartPLS software to estimate the model. The estimation involved two levels: measurement model assessment and Structural model assessment. Within the Measurement model assessment, we aimed to evaluate various quality criteria such as factor loading, construct reliability, and construct validity.

Construct Reliability:

The reliability of the constructs is evaluated using both Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability. Upon reviewing the results presented in Table 1, it is evident that all constructs demonstrate high reliability, as both Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability exceed the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2022). Additionally, all the items exhibit factor loadings greater than 0.5, further confirming the reliability of the constructs (Hair Jr et al., 2011). Furthermore, the value of rho_A surpasses 0.7, providing additional evidence of the constructs' reliability (Ramírez & Palos-Sánchez, 2018).

Table 1

	Factor Loading	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Assignment Discrimination	0.938	0.791	0.916	0.875	0.708
	0.948				
	0.587				
Career Discrimination	0.752	0.794	0.809	0.86	0.556
	0.769				
	0.875				
	0.598				
	0.707				
Evaluation Discrimination	0.81	0.843	0.867	0.895	0.682
	0.906				
	0.844				
	0.733				
Intention to Quit	0.869	0.823	0.825	0.894	0.738
	0.846				
	0.862				
Psychological Distress	0.584	0.901	0.907	0.918	0.531
	0.794				
	0.772				
	0.769				
	0.697				
	0.649				

Construct Validity:

The assessment of Construct Validity involves evaluating Convergent Validity and Discriminant Validity. Convergent Validity is determined through Average Variance Extracted (AVE), with AVE greater than 0.5 considered acceptable. In Table 1, all constructs have an AVE value greater than 0.5, demonstrating the achievement of Convergent Validity, indicating that latent constructs explain more than 50% of the indicator variance (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Discriminant Validity is assessed using the Fornell & Larcker Criterion and Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) Ratio. The results in Table 2 confirm the attainment of Discriminant Validity, as the

HTMT Ratio value is less than 1 (Henseler et al., 2015). According to the Fornell and Larcker criterion (1981), the square root of the average variance extracted by a construct must exceed the correlation between the construct and any other construct. The outcomes in Table 3 establish the fulfilment of the Fornell & Larcker Criterion. Therefore, based on the HTMT Ratio and Fornell & Larcker Criterion, the measurement model satisfies the conditions for Discriminant Validity.

Table 2 Heterotrait- Monotrait (HTMT) Ratio

	Assignment Discrimination	Career Discrimination	Evaluation Discrimination	Intention to Quit	Psychological Distress
Assignment Discrimination					
Career Discrimination	0.302				
Evaluation Discrimination	0.404	0.219			
Intention to Quit	0.371	0.704	0.198		
Psychological Distress	0.173	0.57	0.152	0.705	

Table 3. Fornell & Larcker Criterion

	Assignment Discrimination	Career Discrimination	Evaluation Discrimination	Intention to Quit	Psychological Distress
Assignment Discrimination	0.841				
Career Discrimination	0.191	0.746			
Evaluation Discrimination	0.306	0.177	0.826		
Intention to Quit	0.317	0.735	0.172	0.859	
Psychological Distress	0.137	0.495	0.13	0.623	0.729

Structural Model Assessment

The analysis indicates that the R-squared values for Intention to Quit and Psychological Distress are 0.656 and 0.248, respectively. R-squared, also referred to as the Coefficient of Determination, is utilized to assess the model's predictive capability. In this instance, both R-squared values surpass the minimum threshold of 0.10. The significance of the direct paths and estimates of the standard errors were evaluated using the Bootstrapping resampling method with 5000 resamples. The results of all the proposed hypotheses in the study are presented in Table 4. The path coefficients in Table 4 offer standardized linear regression weights for comprehending potential causal relationships among the statistical variables in the structural equation modeling approach.

Table 4 Results of the Structural model path coefficients (Direct Relationships)

Hypothesis		Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STDEV V)	P Values	Decision
H1	Assignment Discrimination -> Intention to Quit	0.174	0.177	0.075	2.331	0.02	Accept
H2	Career Discrimination -> Intention to Quit	0.539	0.527	0.08	6.713	0.000	Accept
H3	Evaluation Discrimination -> Intention to Quit	-0.021	-0.012	0.064	0.322	0.748	Reject
	Psychological Distress -> Intention to Quit	0.335	0.342	0.059	5.712	0.000	

The findings from the direct relationships indicate that H1 is supported, as Assignment Discrimination shows a significant relationship with intention to quit. The results in Table 4 reveal a positive and significant relationship between Career Discrimination and Intention to Quit, thereby supporting H2. However, the results do not support H3, as Evaluation Discrimination is not found to be a significant factor contributing to female doctors' intention to quit.

Mediation Analysis

Table 5 Mediation Results

	Total Effects		Direct Effects		Indirect Effects				
	Beta	t-Value			Hypothesis	Beta	t-Value	p-value	Decision
Assignment Discrimination ----- Intention to Quit	0.185	0.015	0.174	2.384	H4	0.012	0.312	0.755	Reject
Career Discrimination ----- Intention to Quit	0.701	10.666	0.539	6.777	H5	0.162	3.692	0.000	Accept
Evaluation Discrimination ----- Intention to Quit	0.009	0.123	0.021	0.322	H6	0.011	0.278	0.781	Reject

The research hypotheses 4,5 & 6 focused on assessing the mediating role of Psychological Distress in the associations between Assignment Discrimination, Career Discrimination, and Evaluation Discrimination with Intention to Quit. The findings, outlined in Table 5, revealed that Psychological Distress significantly mediated the link between Career Discrimination and Intention to Quit. However, the study's results did not support the hypotheses related to Psychological Distress mediating the relationships between Assignment Discrimination and Evaluation Discrimination with Intention to Quit among female doctors in Pakistan.

Conclusion and Discussion:

The current research indicates that gender discrimination significantly impacts the intention to quit, particularly in cases of assignment discrimination and career discrimination. However, evaluation discrimination does not significantly influence the intention of female doctors to quit in Pakistan. Similar findings have been observed in Switzerland, where workplace violence and discrimination against healthcare workers increase the likelihood of intending to quit or leave the profession, especially when multiple forms of discrimination are encountered. Poor work climate contributes to turnover intentions and career endings (Hämmig, 2023). Gender discrimination has a negative impact on organizational attachment, leading to employee turnover. Conversely, distributive and procedural justice have a positive influence on affective commitment and organizational identification (Qu et al., 2019). Additionally, it was found that psychological distress mediates the relationship between career discrimination and intention to quit. Similar findings have been reported in the past, showing a connection between psychological distress, burnout, and job satisfaction among primary healthcare nurses. Higher levels of distress and burnout are associated with lower job satisfaction and an increased intention to quit (Stefanovska-Petkovska et al., 2021). According to Bentley (2021) higher levels of psychological distress experienced by social workers leads to a heightened intention to leave the profession, which is mediated by higher economic exchange and lower social exchange.

In the healthcare industry, gender discrimination against Pakistani women doctors in hospitals and clinics has been identified by medical professionals as having a significant detrimental effect on their cognitive abilities. This discrimination manifests in various ways, such as biased treatment in comparison to their male counterparts, limited opportunities for career advancement, and unequal pay. The pervasive nature of gender discrimination not only hinders the professional growth of women doctors but also leads to considerable psychological distress. The discomfort experienced by female doctors has a significant impact on their job satisfaction and mental well-being, particularly due to the ongoing battle against discriminatory practices. As a result, the primary reasons for female doctors leaving their jobs are gender discrimination and the resulting psychological distress. It is crucial to address these concerns in order to retain talented female doctors and enable them to fully contribute to their professional responsibilities without the burden of gender-based biases and stress. The findings mentioned above, supported by previous literature, indicate that healthcare professionals in Pakistan are significantly affected by gender discrimination, leading to turnover intention and psychological distress. These core factors are causing women in healthcare professions to

leave their jobs, highlighting the urgent need for top management in these institutions to address gender discrimination. Based on my research, it is evident that females in this sector are facing discrimination, prompting them to quit their jobs.

5.4. Practical Implications

The measure of IQ holds significant implications for workforce stability and the retention of skilled professionals within the hospital setting. Gender discrimination is an important determinant of employee intention to leave an organization which in turn leads to several other consequences stemming from discriminatory practices. These include compromised continuity of patient care and potential negative impacts on patient outcomes. Furthermore, the psychological distress experienced by female doctors may adversely impact their ability to effectively perform and meet their professional obligations. The psychological discomfort has become a common phenomenon among female employees in recent times, who find themselves unable to progress in their careers simply due to unfair treatment of their male colleagues and lack of managerial support. This sense of unfairness can significantly impact an employee's decision to leave their position or even the company altogether. The creation of a hostile work environment as a result of the discriminatory actions against female doctors not only leads to feelings of isolation among these professional but most importantly causes a decline in their job performance. Therefore, it is crucial for organizations to strive towards eliminating gender discrimination while promoting equal opportunities for female employees in the workplace. These employees are more likely to feel supported and motivated to excel in their careers once they are assured that discrimination is not tolerated and diversity is genuinely valued. Organizations can create dedicated workforce and can effectively contribute to the fulfillment of the employees professional aspirations by fostering the right mindset and providing support for female workers.

5.5. Research Implications

The validation and enhancement of theories related to gender discrimination, occupational stress, and turnover intention can all benefit from this research. By exploring the potential mediating role of psychological distress in the link between gender discrimination and the intention to leave, researchers can deepen their understanding of the underlying mechanisms at play. This study's focus on the impact of gender discrimination on women in high-stress occupations contributes to the advancement of gender studies, emphasizing the importance of using a gender-sensitive approach in organizational research and practices. The interdisciplinary findings have the potential to impact research in fields such as sociology, psychology, human resource management, and healthcare

administration, drawing attention to the interconnectedness of mental health, gender, and professional relationships.

5.6 Limitations and Research Directions

The present study is based on views and opinions of healthcare professionals and are restricted to medical staff to investigate the role of psychological distress as a mediating factor on relationship between turnover intention and gender discrimination (GD). Based on the findings of this study future researcher can explore additional mediator variables to understand how GD influences employees' intentions to leave. Given the cross-sectional nature of this study, we recommend employing longitudinal research designs to comprehend better individuals' intentions to join or remain in an organization. This study integrates gender discrimination and turnover intention into a unified research framework, providing a conceptual basis for understanding employee work attitudes and behaviors. Future studies should also investigate how GD impacts other behavioral outcomes and consider the various dimensions of gender discrimination. Furthermore, we suggest conducting a qualitative study alongside quantitative research using the same variables to obtain more nuanced results.

Data Availability Statement

Data will be provided by the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Disclosure Statement

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Funding Declaration

The authors did not receive any funding for conducting this research work.

Consent to Participate

All respondents provided informed consent before participating in the study. They were informed about the purpose of the research, the voluntary nature of their participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequence

Ethics Declaration

This research was conducted in accordance with the Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct set forth by the American Psychological Association (APA).

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