

The Impact of Gender Discrimination on the Psychological Level of Individuals

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Abstract. Gender discrimination is a general social problem present in both work and daily life, and it left marked adverse effects on people's mental health. This study indicates how gender discrimination influences two core mental health indicators: anxiety and subjective well-being (SWB). Based on longitudinal research, cross-national evidence and psychological theories, it in detail explores the psychological mechanisms through which discrimination causes harm. The results confirm that gender discrimination dramatically increases anxiety levels; longitudinal data reveal that women frequently exposed to workplace discrimination have a 37% higher risk of chronic anxiety. Two key factors are identified. one is identity threat, which arises from the discrediting of gender identity will leads to lasting fear and self-doubt. others are insufficient social support, which worsens helplessness and emotional isolation. As for subjective well-being, discrimination lowers both life satisfaction and emotional wellness and causes to the "gender well-being paradox." The harm varies across occupations, intersecting identities and cultural settings, and women with disadvantaged suffering more severe impacts. Strong gender identity and collective identity perform as protective factors. This paper also points out under-studied areas, such as the long-term career effects of discrimination, the function of organizational procedures and evolving workplace patterns after the covid. it also raises targeted institutional and educational interventions, proposed to mitigate discrimination and enhance human's mental health. These results showed the critical necessity of structural reforms to promote gender equality and safeguard individual well-being.

Keywords: Gender discrimination, anxiety, subjective well-being, identity threat, social support

1. Introduction

This section focuses on introducing the research background of the study. In current society, gender discrimination remains a pervasive social phenomenon that permeate both in the workplace and daily life. In the workplace, the discrimination is reflected in unfair treatment, for example in recruitment, promotion, salary distribution and career development opportunities. In daily life, it illustrates in biased stereotypes, unequal social resources treatment and implicit prejudice in social interactions [1]. Against this background, this study roses forward the core research question: how does gender discrimination affect individuals' anxiety levels and subjective well-being? Subjective

well-being, as a key indicator to measure individuals' mental health and life satisfaction, and anxiety level, which is a common negative emotional response, closely related to people's quality of life and social adaptation. This study is of great improve in revealing the psychological impact mechanism of gender discrimination, it provides theoretical support for reducing gender discrimination and improving personal mental health. Finally, this paper lays a clear foundation for the subsequent research content.

2. Introduction to the main concepts

2.1. The definition and different types of gender discrimination

Gender discrimination represents for the unfair treatment, gender-based bias, or prejudice due to individuals' gender. It is different from biological sex, which refers to mental characteristics. however, gender still is a social construct, that shaped by cultural norms, roles, and expectations for both men and women [2]. This discrimination happens when these norms are used to justify unequal treatment. the discrimination will limit individuals' opportunities or even inflict harm on them for failing to conform to gender stereotypes.

Gender inequality also reflects itself in institutional discrimination, a structurally unique and highly prevalent form that goes beyond individual-level bias. As defined by Feagin & Feagin, this type of discrimination refers to discriminatory practices embedded in laws, organizational policies, and social systems, which systematically place individuals at a disadvantage due to their gender. Workplace gender discrimination is widespread, including unequal pay for the same workwomen often earn less than men for doing the same job with the same qualifications. It also includes barriers to career advancement, such as the "glass ceiling" that stops women from getting senior leadership positions. Other examples are gender-based hiring bias and sexual harassment at work. Between 2019 and 2020, the global women's labor-force participation rate declined by 3.4%, total labor income for the subset of OECD countries for which researchers have access to recent data. It is immediately evident that gender gaps in earnings are very large across all these countries. In the UK, women earn around 40% less than men [3].

Social life discrimination occurs in daily non-work environment, such as the violence that based on gender, educational discrimination, and unequal household chores. For example, girls are sometimes denied equal education or encouraged to choose "gender-appropriate" subjects instead of STEM fields. In many households, women devote two to three times more hours to unpaid domestic labor and childcare than men, a disparity that constrains their opportunities for personal development and career advancement [4].

2.2. The definition of anxiety and happiness

Anxiety is fundamentally a state of tension or disquiet inside of people that they desire to resolve, and it is most accurately defined as stress directed toward some future event or uncertainty [5].

Unlike temporary stress, chronic anxiety is long-term and interferes with daily life, with physical symptoms (including rapid heartbeat, headaches, sleep problems), cognitive symptoms (including uncontrollable negative thoughts, difficulty concentrating), and behavioral symptoms (like avoiding social situations, restlessness). For example, a woman who experiences persistent gender discrimination in the workplace may develop major anxiety about speaking up, as well as experience sleep disturbances.

Happiness is a positive emotional condition, which combines the short-term joy and the long-term life satisfaction. It includes emotional well-being and a global evaluation of one's life. Individuals with higher happiness often enjoy better health, stronger relationships, and higher productivity. While low happiness will lead to poor health and relationship conflict. For those affected by gender discrimination, eroding happiness is a long-term harm. Research shows diminishing subjective well-being will reduce work engagement, output creativity, and increase absenteeism. In context, it creates a self-reinforcing cycle: discrimination lowers happiness, which impairs job performance, reinforces biased perceptions of women's competence, and further limits their career advancement.

2.3. The impact of gender discrimination on individual anxiety

Gender discrimination is a major factor that increases individuals' anxiety levels, and many research studies have confirmed that this will bring harm to people's relationship. This impact is reflected not only in statistical findings, but also in the subjective psychological experiences of those exposed to discrimination.

While cross-sectional studies have identified links between gender discrimination and anxiety, they cannot establish causal direction due to their observational nature. Longitudinal research. By contrast, it provides more firm evidence that gender discrimination contributes to elevated anxiety, rather than merely representing a correlational association. Longitudinal studies follow participants over a long period of time, which can effectively avoid the confusion of cause and effect. For example, a study in 2022 followed 1,200 working women in the United States for 5 years [6]. The researchers collected data on the frequency and severity of gender discrimination during they work, such as unequal payment, being passed over for their promotions and sexual harassment, or being judged unfairly due to their gender. At the same time, they tracked the women's anxiety levels through standardized psychological tests every year. The results showed that women who reported higher levels of gender discrimination had a 37% higher risk of developing chronic anxiety by the end of the study, even after controlling for other factors that might affect anxiety, such as job stress, family pressure, and pre-existing mental health issues. This means that gender discrimination itself is an independent risk factor for anxiety, not just a side effect of other stressors.

A further UK longitudinal study supports this conclusion. The study followed 3,081 women aged 52 and older for six years. It recorded their experiences of gender discrimination and later mental health. Results showed women who faced discrimination had worse mental health and more long-term psychological distress. Even occasional unfair treatment harmed mental health over time. This confirms gender discrimination has lasting bad effects on emotional health [7]. These two studies, from different countries and with large sample sizes, prove that long-term exposure to gender discrimination will gradually increase individuals' anxiety, and this impact is lasting and difficult to reverse in a short time.

Second, the impact of gender discrimination on anxiety varies significantly across different occupational groups, and this difference is closely related to the degree of gender discrimination in the industry. In male-dominated fields such as engineering, construction, technology, and finance, women face more severe and frequent gender discrimination, which leads to a higher level of anxiety levels than women in other fields. For example, a 2021 survey of women in the global tech industry found that 68% of respondents reported experiencing gender bias in hiring and promotion—many were asked inappropriate questions about their family plans during interviews, and their professional abilities were often questioned simply because they were women. In addition, 52% of women in the tech industry reported experiencing sexual harassment or inappropriate remarks from

colleagues or superiors. As a result, these women's average anxiety scores were 40% higher than those of women in female-dominated fields such as education, healthcare, and social work, where gender discrimination is relatively less pervasive [8].

Even within the same industry, women in senior positions face a unique discrimination that will bring more serious anxiety. Female CEOs, managers, and senior professionals often face a "double bind": if they lead assertively and decisively, they are easily labeled as "too aggressive" or "unfeminine"; if they adopt a more empathetic and gentle leadership style, they are regarded as "too weak" and "not competent enough". This constant pressure to balance gender stereotypes and professional requirements makes them in a state of high tension for a long time. They have to constantly prove their ability, carefully handle every interaction with colleagues and superiors, at the same time have to worry that any mistake will be attributed to their gender rather than their ability. This long-term mental pressure contributes to women's chronic anxiety, including persistent worry, difficulty concentrating, and sleep disorders. Many female senior managers reported that they often stay up late because of anxiety that relate to work and even have panic attacks in serious cases.

Last, the fact that why gender discrimination can contribute to increasing the anxiety of individuals is that there are clear psychological and social processes, which identity threat and lack of social support are the two most important pathways. Identity threat is a psychological pressure brought about by the devaluation or stereotypes of the social identity of one in a particular context. In the case of women who are victims of gender discrimination, their gender identity is usually looked down upon, they are less capable, less professional or more emotional just because they are women. This always keeps them in a state of fear: fear of being judged unwarranted, fear of not being appreciated due to their hard work, and fear of confirming negative gender stereotypes through their own conduct [9].

As an illustration, a woman in a male dominated engineering staff may experience anxiety each time she speaks at a meeting, she fears that her views will be overlooked or challenged because of the gender she belongs to. She can even avoid taking the initiative to advance her ideas to avoid possible criticism, a reaction that will only aggravate her frustrations and will worsen her anxiety. Such constant fear and self-doubt slowly transform into chronic anxiety, which affects her performance at work and life in general.

Absence of social support is yet another decisive mechanism that augments the impact that gender discrimination has on anxiety. Lack of instrumental support, including good reporting systems and practical support, leaves individuals with low means of dealing with unfair treatment. In the meantime, inadequate emotional support robs them of validation and understanding, exacerbating psychological distress. These two types of support deficit together contribute to the development of anxiety through different mechanisms: one of which leads to helplessness, the other to loneliness and rumination. When people are subjected to gender discrimination, they tend to feel lonely and helpless. Most victims of discrimination fear to report discrimination as they are afraid that no one will be able to comprehend their experiences of discrimination, or there is the possibility of being retaliated against once they report discrimination, such as being ostracized by colleagues, demoted, or even fired. An example is a woman who has been sexually harassed at the workplace, she may decide to keep it to herself since she is afraid that her workmates will accuse her or that her career will be destroyed in case she reports the incident. This silence renders her incapable of getting emotional help of any kind, peers, family, employers, the strains and pains of discrimination cannot be relieved in time.

Moreover, the compounded impact of the long-term effect of gender discrimination also contributes significantly to the anxiety escalation. Occasional discrimination can only be a source of

temporary stress, but repeated and long-term discrimination will make people develop a negative mental pattern, that is, they will gradually start thinking that they are inferior, they will be always treated unfairly, and that they are incapable of changing their situation. This negative thinking supports and strengthens anxiety in a vicious cycle. Discrimination brings about anxiety, increases the sensitivity of individuals to bias experiences, and eventually worsens the symptoms of anxiety. Strategies that can be used to break this cycle can be evidence-based strategies that can address the negative thinking patterns that perpetuate anxiety, as well as such organizational strategies as bystander intervention training and formal anti-harassment regulations. These strategies are aimed at the structural environments which enable discrimination to persist.

2.4. The impact of gender discrimination on happiness

2.4.1. Core negative correlation between discrimination and subjective well-being

Gender discrimination directly harms people's subjective well-being (SWB). Many studies have confirmed this negative link. A major research review found that unfair treatment based on gender strongly reduces both life satisfaction and emotional well-being. The effect is clearer in places where gender inequality is high.

Two key parts of well-being are affected. First, evaluative well-being, which refers to how people rate their overall lives. Second, affective well-being, which includes feelings like stress, anxiety, and sadness. Research also shows a special pattern called the "gender well-being paradox." Women often report similar or even higher life satisfaction than men in many countries. However, when they face gender bias, they report much higher rates of negative emotions, anxiety, and depression.

This kind of contradiction can be seen as discrimination not only reduces people's happiness but also weakens the ability of emotional regulation and self-healing, making people bear the psychological burden for a long time. From the physiological level, discrimination will bring continuous stress, stimulate the body's stress mechanism, and keep the stress hormone cortisol at a high level for a long time, making people more prone to strong stress reactions. A long-term survey of older women shows that people who have experienced gender discrimination have 34% higher levels of depression and 14% more loneliness than those who have not been discriminated against, and these negative consequences will last for seven years [10].

Thus, obvious unfair treatment (like unequal pay or sexual harassment) and subtle, invisible bias (like micro-aggressions or being overlooked) will cause harm. Subtle bias is often more damaging because it is constant and hard to identify, making its effects more harmful over time

2.4.2. Heterogeneous impacts across social groups

Happiness reduction from gender discrimination differs for different groups of people. They are different for different people because of their jobs, social status, age, and other memberships. This is because of the combination of gender and other social disadvantages that marginalized groups are particularly vulnerable to harm from.

A person's job type will affect the impact of discrimination on them. Since Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) are usually men's domains, women are often viewed as exceptions; for example, there might be only one woman on a project, unfair performance appraisals, and being excluded from informal leadership circles. According to research, women scientists in all-male teams have been 35 per cent more likely to experience burnout due to social isolation and gender bias.

At the same time, women working in care-giving-intensive fields, such as nursing and social work, also have low professional value, relatively low wages, and few promotion opportunities. Although they are emotionally satisfied with their work, they are still dissatisfied with their jobs. Women who are in charge at work also cannot reach the top of the company; they have met with a "glass ceiling". Therefore, they are stressed about not achieving their professional aspirations and suffer from poor health [11].

Gender plus other identities mean a person is exposed to harm from discrimination. Migrant women are also the focus of double discrimination based on gender and migration status. A study in Europe has found that, because of discrimination, the quality of life for migrant women is approximately 42 per cent lower than that of local women.

Working-class mothers have stresses. They are often unable to obtain reasonable childcare and face discrimination at work for being parents, thus having higher levels of depression and lower life satisfaction. Gender discrimination in older age groups is still relatively serious. Older women who have experienced gender discrimination report lower quality of life and life satisfaction than those who have not.

Racial minority women are also exposed to differential harm. Studies have shown that Black women in the U.S. have had different patterns of happiness over the years than white women. The happiness of white women decreased gradually, but it improved for Black women. Thus, both race and gender are associated with negative health and social outcomes.

2.4.3. Moderating role of identity

Identity plays a key role in how people respond to discrimination. It changes whether discrimination harms their well-being or not. Two important types of identity are gender identity and collective identity.

A strong, positive gender identity helps people cope with discrimination. People with a clear sense of their gender are more likely to blame unfair treatment on external prejudice, not their own flaws. This reduces the chance of internalizing bias and feeling bad about themselves [12].

Studies show that women with a strong feminist identity reported 20% lower anxiety after experiencing gender bias. They used collective empowerment to resist negative self-perceptions. In contrast, people with weak or confused gender identities may internalize bias, leading to self-doubt and lower well-being. Long-term research also shows that gender discrimination can weaken gender identity over time, creating a harmful cycle where discrimination lowers self-concept, which in turn makes people more vulnerable to future harm.

Collective identity—identifying with one's gender group, occupation, or community—also protects against harm. Strong collective identity fosters social support and solidarity. Women in supportive gender networks or professional organizations cope better with discrimination. They have lower rates of well-being decline compared to those isolated from their peers. This shows that group-based communities can effectively reduce the negative impact of discrimination.

2.4.4. Cultural and contextual moderation

Cultural norms and social systems further shape the link between discrimination and happiness. In more gender-egalitarian societies (places that value gender equality highly), discrimination has a stronger negative effect on well-being. This is because people expect fairness, so bias feels more disruptive and stressful [13].

In more traditional societies, gender bias may be more deeply normalized, which can result in individuals reporting a relatively muted subjective response to discriminatory experiences. Institutional context also matters. Countries with less discriminatory social systems have higher life satisfaction scores. When gender equity is enforced, the number of "unhappy" people drops significantly. This shows that cultural and institutional factors change how discrimination affects happiness. Structural reforms can greatly improve collective well-being.

In summary, gender discrimination harms happiness through chronic stress, unequal impacts across social groups, and identity dynamics. Cultural and institutional contexts also shape how severe these harms are. Targeted interventions are needed to support diverse groups and reduce discrimination's negative effects.

2.5. Discussion and suggestion

2.5.1. Summary of core finding

This study confirms that gender discrimination has a strong negative impact on people's happiness. It causes long-term stress, impairs emotional regulation capacity, and inflicts heterogeneous harm across different social groups. Identity and cultural contexts play important roles in shaping these effects. While individuals have gained key insights, several underexplored links remain in current research, which limit the ability to fully understand gender discrimination and design effective solutions.

2.5.2. Unerexplored links in current research

Link between individual bias and promotion outcomes: It is known that managers often hold gender biases, but few studies explain how these personal biases directly lead to unfair promotion decisions. The specific steps from personal prejudice to unequal career advancement remain unclear.

Role of organizational processes: Workplace rules, performance evaluation systems, and mentoring programs shape promotion equality, but research rarely explores how these processes either reduce or strengthen gender bias. Researchers lack clear evidence on which workplace practices create barriers or support fairness.

Long-term impacts of discrimination: Most studies only capture a single moment in time. Researchers do not fully understand how gender discrimination affects happiness and career outcomes over a person's entire career, or how early bias leads to long-term disadvantages.

Post-pandemic shifts in the workplace have transformed interaction patterns through remote and hybrid work arrangements, yet research on their implications for gender bias in promotions and subjective well-being remains scarce. Preliminary evidence indicates gendered outcomes: women in remote settings have continued to take on a disproportionate share of unpaid domestic and childcare duties alongside professional work, which may exacerbate career disadvantages and widen gender gaps in well-being. Even so, systematic investigations into how hybrid work specifically shapes gender disparities in promotion outcomes and long-term happiness remain limited. New forms of bias (like being "out of sight, out of mind") may have emerged but remain understudied.

Based on existing findings, this study offers simple, actionable suggestions. Workplaces should use clear, transparent promotion criteria to reduce bias. They should also create support networks for women, especially those in marginalized groups. Governments should strengthen laws against gender discrimination and provide affordable childcare to support working mothers. Addressing the underexplored links above will help make these suggestions more targeted and effective.

In conclusion, gender discrimination harms happiness in multiple ways, and key links in current research remain underexplored. Closing these gaps will help to build better theories and interventions to reduce inequality and improve well-being for all.

3. Conclusion

People's anxiety and reduces their well-being, briefly mentions intervention strategies from institutional and educational perspectives, and emphasizes the practical significance of this study for promoting gender equality and improving individual mental health.

In conclusion, this study mainly explored the impact of gender discrimination on people's levels of anxiety and happiness. Finally, it was clearly confirmed that gender discrimination significantly exacerbates people's anxiety and simultaneously reduces their sense of happiness. As a pervasive social inequality, gender discrimination impairs individuals' self-worth perception and social belonging, thereby triggering persistent anxiety and weakening their life satisfaction and overall sense of well-being. To reduce these negative psychological effects, useful measures need to be taken at the institutional and educational levels. Institutionally, relevant laws and regulations need to be improved, supervision over gender discrimination in the workplace and other fields should be strengthened, and a fair and impartial social operation mechanism should be established. In terms of education, more gender equality-related education should be conducted in schools and communities, and gender biases should be eliminated. This will enable people to have a better understanding and acceptance of gender equality. This study not only illustrate the specific circumstances of the psychological harm that caused by gender discrimination but also provides doable suggestions for promoting gender equality in society. This research plays a crucial role in improving people's mental health and creating a more inclusive and equitable society.

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