

Gender Discrimination, Psychological Distress and Job Performance among Female Employees

Iqra Ashraf

SU94-MSCPW-F24-030@superior.edu.pk

Student, Department of Clinical Psychology, The Superior University Lahore, Pakistan.

Ushna Seher

ushna.seher@superior.edu.pk

Lecturer, Department of Clinical Psychology, The Superior University Lahore. Pakistan.

Corresponding Author: Iqra Ashraf SU94-MSCPW-F24-030@superior.edu.pk

Received: 08-02-2026

Revised: 12-03-2026

Accepted: 20-03-2026

Published: 30-03-2026

ABSTRACT

The study aims to investigate gender discrimination, psychological distress and job performance among female employees. Although awareness of equal opportunity in the workplace and other areas is increasing, gender discrimination remains a major issue that often brings down the mental health and productivity of people. A sample of 300 female employees working in public and private sector organizations were collected by using convenience sampling. Findings revealed that Psychological distress was positively related to gender discrimination, and task and contextual performance was negatively related to gender discrimination. The regression analyses revealed that gender discrimination was a significant predictor of psychological distress and job performance and that psychological distress was a significant predictor of job performance. The private sector workers also suffered more from discrimination and distress, but on the other hand, they had lower job performance than the public sector workers.

Keywords: Gender Discrimination, Psychological Distress, Job Performance, Employees.

INTRODUCTION

Gender discrimination is the unequal or unfair treatment of people based on their gender. Access to employment, promotion, salary, and benefits is unequal based on gender. Same with training, leave, benefits, leadership opportunities, and position. The use of the term “gender” originated as the counterpart of the power built into the socially constructed sex roles. Discrimination can happen against both men and women, but due to patriarchal social setups and traditional cultural norms, women are more impacted in terms of participation and growth in the workforce (World Health Organization, 2024).

Workplace gender discrimination is closely connected to mental stress in women. Unfair experiences are linked with elevated stress and anxiety, increased depressive symptoms, and reduced emotional energy. A new longitudinal study found that gender discrimination in the workplace is associated with a higher risk of depressive symptoms among women workers (Baek & Yoon, 2025).

Gender discrimination not only affects mental health but also impacts job performance settings. Women employees perceive low job satisfaction and poor organizational commitment, reduced work engagement and performance outcomes due to discrimination. When employees are discriminated against, their confidence and motivation suffer, which reduces their productivity, including their intent to leave. As a result, organizations with gender inequality may face challenges in workforce effectiveness and retention (Banumathi & Vennila, 2024).

Psychological distress refers to a state of emotional suffering in which people experience symptoms such as stress, anxiety, depression, restlessness, hopelessness and reduced emotional functioning. It's not always a clinical disorder, but it is a sign of poor mental well-being and difficulty dealing with the demands of everyday life (Drapeau et al., 2012).

Psychological distress is a major occupational health concern. Indeed, it affects employees' motivation, concentration, commitment and other aspects of workplace functioning. Research suggests that constant exposure to discrimination can lead to emotional overload and exhaustion that may lessen employees' capacity to cope with work demands. Moreover, work discrimination impacts employee outcomes and workplace behavior through important mechanisms, namely, psychological distress (Bravo-Rojas et al., 2026). Psychological distress can be defined as a blend of emotions and cognitive symptoms such as anxiety, depression, tiredness, irritability, and poor psychological well-being. Furthermore, socioeconomic status, workplace environment and gender were found to be major determinants for the development of psychological distress (Viertiö et al., 2021).

According to Blom (2018) Job performance can be defined as an employee's behavior, their level of job fulfilment under the given conditions, or their contribution to the organization's goals. Employee job performance is among the critical psychological constructs in organizational behavior and human resource management, given its focus on how effectively individuals undertake actions that help realize organizational goals.

According to Wang Harmancı Seren et al. (2018), task performance refers to the actions that help employees meet their job requirements or the objectives outlined in their job descriptions. Task performance is basically the formal duties and responsibilities that are expected from a worker in her position. The activities involved in task performance include completion of assigned tasks, attainment of goals set at the work place, maintenance of quality of work performed, adherence to procedure of doing the job, application of professional knowledge and attainment of desired level of productivity. In other words, task performance indicates the ability of a worker to accomplish her major work for which she was employed. With regard to female workers, task performance can be hindered due to such factors as discrimination, disparity in work distribution, absence of appreciation and psychological pressure (Platania et al., 2023).

Contextual performance focuses on employee behaviors that support the organization's efficient operation in addition to task performance. It is characterized by positive employee behaviors that are not specified in job descriptions but are encouraged by the organization (Guo & Ling, 2020). Contextual Performance involves the positive behavior of employees in the organization that promotes the social and psychological environment of the workplace. Contextual performance entails assisting colleagues, working cooperatively with other workers in teams, taking initiatives, adhering to the organizational policies, developing good interpersonal relationships and going out of one's way to do things for the benefit of the organization. Different from task performance, contextual performance is not necessarily part of the job description; however, it is beneficial for the organization's operations. In case of females in an organization, contextual performance will be adversely affected by issues such as gender discrimination, being left out of decision-making processes, harassment and lack of respect in the organization (Koopmans, 2015).

METHODOLOGY

Sample

The sample for the present examine consisted of 300 female employees working in public and private organizations selected through convenience sampling. Only those aged 25 to 60 were included in the study.

The participant had an education beyond intermediate. An employee had at least 6 months of experience to provide adequate exposure to working conditions.

Instruments

Following instruments were used to measure the variables including:

Demographic sheet: On the basis of literature, the demographic variables of age, education, marital status, employment sector, organization type, job position, monthly income and work experience were explored.

Workplace Gender Discrimination Scale (Kim, 2019)

The Workplace Gender Discrimination Scale was used to measure gender discrimination which was adapted from Jee-young Kim (2019). This scale measured unfair treatment (e.g. promotion, pay, opportunity, colleague treatment) of employees at workplace because of their gender. The scale, which consists of a total of six items, uses the 4-point Likert type ranging from 0 (Strongly Disagree) to 3 (Strongly Agree). A higher scale score indicated a greater perception of gender discrimination in the workplace. The instrument was a unidimensional scale, which means it is measuring a single construct of perceived gender discrimination and not more than one subscale. The scoring process obtains the total score by summing all item responses and dividing it by the number of items to get a mean score. Higher scores mean a higher level of discrimination perceptions. Cronbach's alpha of the scale has been reported to be 0.80 to 0.88.

Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10; Kessler et al. 2002)

The Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10), developed by Ronald C. Kessler et al. (2002), was used to assess psychological distress. The K10 is a common tool that examines a general population's non-specific psychological distress, which would include symptoms of anxiety and depression of employees. The scale has ten items which use a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (None of the time) to 5 (All of the time), based on respondents' experiences in the last four weeks. The overall score can vary from 10 to 50, depending upon the summation of all item response (α developed & subsequently validated). Higher scores indicate greater psychological distress. The K10 is essentially a unidimensional scale, which does not have any sub-scales. Also, it has shown excellent reliability. Especially, the Cronbach's alpha usually ranges from 0.85 to 0.93 in various populations.

Job Performance Scale (Çalışkan & Köroğlu, 2022)

The evaluation of the employees' job performance was done through the Job Performance Scale developed by (Çalışkan & Köroğlu, 2022) to assess employees' job performance. The scale was developed to measure overall job performance through a valid and reliable instrument and consists of 11 items in its revised version after the removal of one item during factor analysis. The scale comprises two dimensions: Task Performance (5 items) and Contextual Performance (6 items). Responses are measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("Strongly Disagree") to 5 ("Strongly Agree"), where higher scores indicate higher job performance. The scale demonstrated satisfactory psychometric properties with strong validity and high internal consistency reliability. The reported Cronbach's alpha values for the overall scale ranged from .871 to .943 across different samples, indicating excellent reliability.

Procedure

The study was conducted after obtaining formal approval from the competent authority. Following the necessary approval, participants were recruited through institutions and personal contacts in public and

private sector organizations. Before data collection commenced, the purpose of the study was explained to the participants and their informed consent was obtained. All responses were kept confidential and were used solely for research purposes. A structured questionnaire was used to collect the data. The questionnaire comprised the Workplace Gender Discrimination Scale (Kim, 2019), the Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10) (Kessler et al., 2002) and the Job Performance Scale (Çalışkan & Koroğlu, 2022). The questionnaires were administered either in hard-copy form or through an online survey, depending on the participants' accessibility and convenience. Participants were provided with sufficient time to complete the questionnaires and any queries regarding the items were addressed by the researcher. After the data had been collected, the completed questionnaires were screened for completeness. Incomplete questionnaires were excluded from the analysis. The finalized data were coded and entered into statistical software for subsequent analysis.

Hypothesis

1. There will be a relationship between gender discrimination, psychological distress and job performance among female employees.
2. Gender discrimination will likely influence psychological distress and job performance.
3. There will be a significant effect of psychological distress on job performance among female employees.

RESULTS

Table1: Bivariate Correlations among Gender Discrimination, Psychological Distress, Task Performance, and Contextual Performance (N = 300)

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4
1. Gender discrimination	10.83	4.60	-			
2. Psychological distress	33.36	9.56	.53**	-		
3. Task performance	14.37	5.30	-.45**	-.61**	-	
4. Contextual performance	16.57	6.08	-.43**	-.60**	.85**	-

*Note. Values represent Pearson's correlation coefficients. ** $p < .001$ (two-tailed).*

Table 1 indicates that there are significant associations between gender discrimination, psychological distress, task performance and contextual performance among 300 females working in organizations. There is a significant positive association between gender discrimination and psychological distress, $r = .539$, $p < .001$, but gender discrimination has significant negative correlation with task performance, $r = -.459$, $p < .001$, and contextual performance, $r = -.434$, $p < .001$. Psychological distress has a significant negative correlation with task performance, $r = -.613$, $p < .001$ and contextual performance, $r = -.605$, $p < .001$. Task and contextual performance have strong positive correlation, $r = .851$, $p < .001$.

Table 2: Simple Linear Regression Predicting Psychological Distress and Job Performance from Gender Discrimination (N = 300)

Variable	Model 1: Psychological distress			Model 2: Job performance		
	B	β	SE	B	β	SE
Constant	21.22***	—	1.19	42.89***	—	1.43
Gender discrimination	1.12***	.54	.10	-1.10***	-.46	.12
R^2	.29			.22		
Adjusted R^2	.29			.21		
F	122.09***			81.58***		

Note. Dependent variable = psychological distress. $R = .539$, $R^2 = .291$, adjusted $R^2 = .288$, $F(1, 298) = 122.088$, $p < .001$. B = unstandardized coefficient; SE = standard error; β = standardized coefficient; CI = confidence interval.

Table 2 shows that gender discrimination significantly and positively predicted psychological distress ($\beta = .54$, $p < .001$), explaining 29% of its variance. It also significantly and negatively predicted job performance ($\beta = -.46$, $p < .001$), explaining 22% of its variance.

Table 3: Simple Linear Regression Analysis Predicting Job Performance from Psychological Distress among Female Employees (N = 300)

Variable	Model 1		
	B	B	SE
Constant	55.13***	—	1.78
Psychological distress	-0.73***	-.63	.05
R^2	.40		

Note. Dependent Variable = Job Performance. $R = .633$, $R^2 = .401$, Adjusted $R^2 = .399$, $F(1, 298) = 199.158$, $p < .001$. B = Unstandardized Regression Coefficient; SE = Standard Error

The results of the simple linear regression analysis conducted to explore the relationship between psychological distress and job performance among female workers are shown in Table 3. The general regression analysis was found to be statistically significant, $F(1, 298) = 199.16$, $p < .001$, and accounted for 40.1% of the variability in job performance ($R^2 = .401$, adjusted $R^2 = .399$). Psychological distress was found to negatively predict job performance, $B = -.725$, $SE = .051$, $\beta = -.633$, $t = -14.11$, $p < .001$. Thus, the higher the level of psychological distress, the poorer the job performance of female workers.

DISCUSSION

The findings of the present study suggest that there are significant associations between gender discrimination, psychological distress, task performance and contextual performance among 300 females working in organizations. There is a significant positive association between gender discrimination and psychological distress, but gender discrimination has a significant negative correlation with task

performance and contextual performance. Psychological distress has a significant negative correlation with task performance and contextual performance. The previous literature is consistent with the current findings suggested that perceived workplace gender discrimination is linked to detrimental employee outcomes such as lower job satisfaction, weaker organizational commitment, and lower well-being (Triana et al., 2019). Kim et al. (2022), there was a significant association between workplace gender discrimination and depressive symptoms among female employees in South Korea. Experiencing discrimination at work can negatively affect mental health in the longer term. Sarwar and Abbasi (2019) in Pakistan, women are confronted with several career barriers such as patriarchal norms, discrimination at the organizational level, limited access to leadership positions, pressures from work and family, and more which all may increase stress. Ali et al. (2022), there are various aspects responsible for gender discrimination which are normalization, unequal power relations and patriarchy values in society particularly in Pakistan. The discrimination they face impacts women's health, education and employment. Discrimination faced by working women in District Sahiwal has raised their stress levels and frustration, besides lowered motivation, job satisfaction, and work performance (Shaheen et al., 2023).

In addition, the positive correlation between gender discrimination and psychological distress is similar to Kim et al. (2020), who reported higher depressive symptoms among employed women who reported gender discrimination in the workplace. Hennein et al. (2023) found that gender discrimination among female health workers was linked to depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress and burnout. Cross-sectional data also revealed that workers exposed to workplace discrimination experienced greater psychological distress, and that wage-based gender discrimination was associated with a higher likelihood of having depressive symptoms, compared to those who were not discriminated against (Baek & Yoon, 2025; Keller et al., 2024). Additionally, the negative association between gender discrimination and task and contextual performance is confirmed by Triana et al. (2019), who conducted a meta-analysis where perceived gender discrimination in the workplace was related to worse psychological health and work-related outcomes. Unfair treatment can lead to lower motivation, focus, loyalty to the organization, and willingness to go the extra mile. Similarly, the negative links between psychological distress and the two aspects of performance are in line with Meunier et al. (2022), who identified psychological distress as a factor associated with lower job performance. Last but not least, the positive correlation between task and contextual performance parallels that reported by Demerouti et al. (2014), who argued that task and contextual performance were distinct yet related components of an employee's performance. Moreover, the findings reveal that Gender discrimination was a significant negative predictor of job performance. These results suggest that more gender discrimination is linked to worse job performance.

The finding is in line with the results of Kim et al. (2020), which revealed that women who experienced gender discrimination at work had higher depressive symptoms. In the same way, Hennein et al. (2023) found that higher scores for depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress and burnout were found among female HCWs who reported of high levels of gender discrimination. Longitudinal analyses also revealed that women's higher risk for depressive symptoms after experiencing wage-related gender discrimination (Baek & Yoon, 2025). In addition, the findings regarding the detriment of gender discrimination to job performance concur with those of Triana et al. (2019) who conducted a meta-analysis of the relationship between perceived gender discrimination in the workplace and psychological well-being and work variables. Similarly, Banumathi and Vennila (2024) described that discrimination in promotion, salary increments and workplace benefits had adverse impacts on the performance of female workers. The stress can result from discriminatory treatment, which can negatively affect motivation and organizational commitment and the use of psychological resources for effective job performance.

Moreover, it was revealed that Psychological distress was found to negatively predict job performance. Thus, the higher the level of psychological distress, the poorer the job performance of female workers. This finding aligns with Meunier et al. (2022) who determined that psychological distress accounted for the

reduction in job performance, and acted as a mediator between perceived stress and job performance. Parent-Lamarche et al. (2022) also found that poor working conditions were linked to lower levels of work performance via higher levels of psychological distress. Following, in a longitudinal study, Keramat et al. (2025) identified that moderate to severe psychological distress was linked to increased sickness absence, presenteeism, underemployment and productivity loss. Employees experiencing psychological distress can have difficulty focusing, concentrating, have poor energy, motivation and ability to carry out expected duties and demonstrate appropriate work behaviors. Previous empirical results support the finding of a strong negative relation between psychological distress and job performance that was found in this study.

CONCLUSION

Gender discrimination has been linked to higher levels of psychological distress and lower levels of task and contextual performance by women workers. Gender discrimination was a significant predictor of both psychological distress and job performance, and psychological distress was a significant predictor of poor job performance. Private sector workers suffered from more discrimination and distress and performed poorly in their jobs when compared to public sector workers. There were also differences found among educational groups, whereby education-qualified individuals intermediate had the lowest and MPhil/MS educated individuals had the highest outcomes.

REFERENCES

- World Health Organization. (2024). *Gender and health*. Geneva, Switzerland: World Health Organization.
- Baek, S. U., & Yoon, J. H. (2025). Perceived gender discrimination in the workplace and onset of depressive symptoms in women: A population-based longitudinal analysis in South Korea. *Journal of Psychiatric Research*, 181, 689-694. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpsychires.2024.12.040>
- Banumathi, R. C., & Vennila, D. (2024). Discrimination Based on Gender and How It Affects Employee Performance. *NMIMS Management Review*, 32(1), 21-31. DOI: 10.1177/09711023241260518
- Drapeau, A., Marchand, A., & Beaulieu-Prévost, D. (2012). Epidemiology of psychological distress. *Mental illnesses-understanding, prediction and control*, 69(2), 105-106.
- Bravo-Rojas, G., Castelluci, I., Fuentes-García, A., & Méndez, J. I. (2026). Association between perceived discrimination and depressive symptoms among male and female mining workers in Chile: a sex-stratified analysis and the mediating role of psychological distress. *BMC Public Health*, 26(1), 274. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-025-25787-2>
- Viertiö, S., Kiviruusu, O., Piirtola, M., Kaprio, J., Korhonen, T., Marttunen, M., & Suvisaari, J. (2021). Factors contributing to psychological distress in the working population, with a special reference to gender difference. *BMC public health*, 21(1), 611. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-021-10560-y>
- Platania, S., Morando, M., Gruttadauria, S. V., & Koopmans, L. (2023). The individual work performance questionnaire: Psychometric properties of the Italian version. *European journal of investigation in health, psychology and education*, 14(1), 49-63. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ejihpe14010004>
- Guo, Y., & Ling, B. (2020). Effects of leader motivating language on employee task and contextual performance: The mediating role of feedback quality. *Psychological Reports*, 123(6), 2501-2518. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0033294119862989>

- Koopmans, L., Bernaards, C. M., Hildebrandt, V. H., de Vet, H. C., & van der Beek, A. J. (2014). Measuring individual work performance: Identifying and selecting indicators. *Work*, 48(2), 229-238. <https://doi.org/10.3233/WOR-131659>
- Kim, S., Won, E., Jeong, H. G., Lee, M. S., Ko, Y. H., Paik, J. W., & Han, K. M. (2022). Gender discrimination in workplace and depressive symptoms in female employees in South Korea. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 306, 269-275. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2022.03.050>
- Kessler, R. C., Andrews, G., Colpe, L. J., Hiripi, E., Mroczek, D. K., Normand, S. L., ... & Zaslavsky, A. M. (2002). Short screening scales to monitor population prevalences and trends in non-specific psychological distress. *Psychological medicine*, 32(6), 959-976. doi:10.1017/S0033291702006074
- Çalışkan, A., & Köroğlu, E. Ö. (2022). Job performance, task performance, contextual performance: Development and validation of a new scale. *Uluslararası İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Dergisi*, 8(2), 180–201. <https://doi.org/10.29131/uiibd.1201880>