

## Gender bias: Everything you need to know

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Bias is prevalent in every aspect of our lives. It is defined as a systemic prejudice for, or against something or someone, based on things like stereotypes. Biases can adversely impact our judgment, causing us to make non-fact-based decisions in favour of one person or group to the detriment of others. While bias comes in many forms, this article focuses on gender bias and its role within the workplace. Whereas overt forms of discrimination against women at work have decreased over time with the passage of formal anti-discrimination laws, implicit biases against women still plague organizations.

Gender bias is the tendency to prefer one gender over another. It is a form of unconscious bias, or implicit bias, which occurs when one individual unconsciously attributes certain attitudes and stereotypes to another person or group of people. These ascribed behaviours affect how the individual understands and engages with others.

In today's society, gender bias is often used to refer to the preferential treatment men receive. It is often labelled as "sexism" and describes the prejudice against women solely based on their sex.

### Identifying gender bias in the workplace

**Performance Support:** This occurs when employers, managers and colleagues provide more resources and opportunities to one gender (typically men) over another. Globally, women are underrepresented in corporations, and the share of women decreases with each step up the corporate hierarchy. Women encounter many barriers to advancement into corporate leadership positions, and these barriers include gender-base discrimination as well as unconscious gender bias.

**Performance Reviews:** This bias occurs when employers, managers and colleagues review an employee of one gender differently from another gender — even when the evaluations are purely merit-based. Harvard Business Review found that performance evaluations are

inherently biased, even when companies make an effort to remove bias by making them open-ended. In fact, without structure to evaluations, people are more likely to review an individual based on stereotypes related to gender and race than reviewing individuals meritocratically.

**Performance Rewards:** Performance reward bias occurs when employers, managers and colleagues reward an employee of one gender differently from another gender. Rewards may be in the form of promotions, raises or other merit-based rewards. One study found that when women and minorities receive the same performance evaluation score as white men for the same job and work unit, they receive lower pay increases than white men.

**Glass Ceiling:** A major result of these biases have contributed to the creation of the glass ceiling. The glass ceiling is a metaphor for the evident but intangible hierarchical impediment that prevents minorities and women from achieving elevated professional success. Women generally experience a barrier that prevents them from reaching upper-level roles in leadership and the C-Suite.

**Diminished Responsibilities:** A company's exempting—formally or informally—women from performing certain tasks, such as those involving heavy physical labour, despite their inclusion in the job description can come across as patronizing and a pretense for claiming women aren't able to perform the essential duties of the job.

**Positional Bias:** Are all of your receptionists female and all your maintenance personnel male? This would be an example of positional bias, whereby people are put in positions at least in part due to gender stereotypes.

**Terminations:** Terminations are often telling in terms of how gender issues are treated. Common hypothetical examples include a woman being fired for complaining about sexual harassment and a man *not* being fired after violating policies around such harassment.

**Outdated Views:** Some companies adhere to outdated views of what is proper behaviour, attire, etc., for men and women.

## Statistic on the effects of gender bias on women in the workplace

- 42% of women experience gender discrimination at work.
- In 2017, 25,000 sex-based discrimination claims were filed.
- In 2018, victims of sex-based discrimination received more than \$148M in payouts from the complaints.
- 5 of the 14 top barriers women face in the workplace are related to discrimination and gender bias.
- Both men and women are twice as likely to hire a male candidate.
- Women are 79 times more likely to be hired when there are at least two female candidates in the finalist pool.
- Women are 25-46% more likely to be hired with blind applications or auditions.
- Half of the men believe women are well-represented at their company when 90% of senior leaders are men.
- 40% of men and women notice a double standard against female candidates.
- Men view unconscious bias as the number one barrier women face in their careers.
- 34% of men and women believe male executives are better at risk assessment.
- Men are 30% more likely to obtain managerial roles.
- Women and men ask for pay raise at the same rate.
- Women receive pay raises 5% less often.
- 23% of CEOs are women.
- 4% of C-Suite roles are held by women of colour.
- 6% of CEOs at Fortune 500 companies are women.

## How gender bias in the workplace is introduced

**Recruitment:** Research has shown that both male and female hiring managers are twice as likely to hire a man over a woman.

**Job Descriptions:** Language inherently has gendered associations, so including words like confident, decisive, strong and outspoken have been found to attract male candidates and deter female candidates. Research also shows that men apply to jobs where they meet 60% of the qualifications while women only apply to jobs that they meet 100% of the qualifications.

**Interview Questions:** When interviews are not standardized, the questions interviewers ask can be biased based on the candidate's personality, experiences and yes, even gender. Hiring managers are also more likely to ask female candidates about parental plans and responsibilities, and while discriminating against parents and pregnant people is illegal, asking questions about a candidate's parental status technically is not illegal.

**Hiring Managers:** One study found that when candidates were assessed separately by individual hiring managers, 51% of managers were influenced by the candidate's gender and selected the under-performing candidate. However, when candidates were evaluated by a hiring team together, gender didn't affect their decision, they simply hired the highest-performing candidate.

**Professional Development & Career Advancement:** Research has shown that 60% of male managers are uncomfortable mentoring, socializing with or working one-on-one with female employees and 36% of men think it would look bad if they worked one-on-one, travelled with or had dinners with female colleagues.

**Compensation And Rewards:** Between men and women, the gender pay gap ranges from 3% to 51% and on average sits at 17%. When considering the gender pay gap, you must account for the fact that more women are segregated to lower-level jobs in low-paying industries and are unable to obtain upper-level roles due to biases and the glass ceiling. These disparities in opportunities, prevent women from excelling in their career and inhibits their ability to make the same amount as men.

**Perks & Benefits:** The perks and benefits companies offer can significantly contribute to gender bias and opportunity discrepancies between genders. This is especially true when it comes to benefits for working parents since women are typically assigned to act as the primary caregiver of children, which has led to a motherhood penalty.

**Parental Status Affects Income and Career Development:** Research shows full-time working mothers that are 42 years of age experience a wage 'penalty,' making 11% less than women without children. Full-time working fathers of the same age, however, actually

experience a wage 'bonus,' making 22% more than men without children.

Another study found that when candidates of equal merit apply for the same job, mothers were penalized. Women without children received 2.1 times more callbacks and were recommended to be hired 1.8 times more compared to equally qualified mothers. Not only that, but fathers were recommended to be hired at a slightly higher rate than men without children.

**Sexual Harassment:** While both men and women experience sexual harassment, nearly [75% of sexual harassment claims](#) are filed by women. A staggering 70% of women who experience sexual harassment, experience it in the workplace.

## Ways to reduce gender bias in the workplace

### 1. Collect & Analyze Employee Demographic Data

Start by collecting data about your employee demographics. Look at disparities between men and women by department, seniority and retention.

### 2. Collect & Analyze Employee Compensation Data

Conduct regular pay audits to identify how men and women are paid and promoted differently. One study found that when Denmark created a law in 2006 requiring companies to report on their salary information and break it down by gender, the gender wage gap was reduced by 7% in just 12 years.

### 3. Run Experiments Unique To Your Team

Aside from collecting demographic and compensation information, you also need to gather open-ended, real experiences from your team. Employee engagement surveys are a great way to gather more data about your team and identify trends in how your employees engage in their work.

#### **4. Identify Gender Bias In Your Recruiting Process**

To reduce gender bias in your recruiting process, start by looking at the language you use. Implement blind applications and interviews to improve female candidates' chances of being hired by 25-46%.

#### **5. Utilize Automation And Artificial Intelligence**

One simple way to reduce gender bias in your recruiting process is to invest in recruitment tools that utilize automation or artificial intelligence to make decisions. It will help filter through candidates based on merit rather than gender or other characteristics that may place them at a biased and unfair disadvantage.

#### **6. Implement Regular Gender Bias Training**

Start by informing your team of the different types of unconscious bias and then look for diversity and inclusion professionals or unconscious bias programs near you that will support your efforts.

#### **7. Provide Leadership Training Opportunities**

Such training is essential to reducing gender bias, closing the gender wage gap and breaking the glass ceiling. It will also help both men and women become better mentors for females earlier in their careers.

#### **8. Give Everyone A Seat At The Table For Important Projects**

One study found that gender-diverse teams are 73% better at decision making than teams that are all men. A gender diverse team will also support women in their professional development and provide them with opportunities they may otherwise miss out on.

#### **9. Offer Perks & Benefits For Equal Opportunities**

When you review the perks and benefits you offer, bring your entire team in on the conversation. Provide them with an opportunity to share honest feedback on the benefits they wish your team had and the benefits that would draw them to another company.

## 10. Review Your Anti-Discrimination And Bias Policies

You should review your non-discrimination and anti-harassment policies, and make sure this information is included in job descriptions, employee handbooks and your career page. In addition to your policies, provide employees with information and resources on who to reach out to in different situations. Include clear steps for what is going to happen so people know what to expect when they file a complaint.

## Conclusion

As with any cultural transformation, removing gender bias in your workplace will take time, effort, *and* the right tools. Hopefully, this article will help you address the issues correctly.

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