

GENDER DISCRIMINATION AMONG FEMALE MANAGERS IN THE SRI LANKAN APPAREL INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT

The study was contextually undertaken in three major apparel companies in Sri Lanka with two objectives: to explore the different forms of discriminatory cases female managers encounter in relation to various HRM practices within the Sri Lankan apparel industry and to examine the nature of reactions of female managers in the Sri Lankan apparel industry to such discriminatory practices. This study involved nine female workers in managerial positions. Given the subjective nature of gender discrimination, a qualitative approach was employed as the main methodological stance and the research was based on an inductive approach. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, using a predetermined interview guide. At the initial stage, purposive sampling was used to identify key participants who were known to have experienced gender discrimination. From the second stage onward, snowball sampling techniques were used to refer to other female managers with similar experiences. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data after transcribing the interviews. The analysis revealed three major forms of gender discrimination addressing the first research objective: bias in recruitment and selection, barriers to promotion and career advancement, and inequities in salaries and benefits. Regarding the second research objective, the study found that female managers typically react in one of three ways: by hiding discrimination (Unreported, Hider), using reporting and support systems, or resigning and seeking new opportunities. The study also revealed that cases of discrimination often go underreported or unnoticed owing to factors such as fear, organizational culture, social influence, lack of awareness, and lack of support systems. Significantly, this research will enhance solutions to overcome and reduce gender discrimination matters and inform females about ways to protect themselves from the gender-related issues commonly seen in the apparel industry.

Keywords: Qualitative research, apparel industry, female managerial employees, gender discrimination, Sri Lanka