

Exploring Female Teachers' Experiences in Facing Gender Discrimination in the Workplace: A Phenomenological Perspective

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Abstract

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Gender discrimination in the workplace remains a persistent issue in the education sector, where female teachers continue to experience unequal treatment that affects their professional roles and personal well-being. This study aims to explore female teachers' lived experiences of gender discrimination, focusing on how they perceive and navigate gender bias, the impacts of discrimination on their professional and personal lives, and the coping strategies they employ. Using a phenomenological approach, this study applied Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to in-depth data collected through semi-structured interviews with three female teachers. The findings reveal multiple dimensions of gender discrimination in the school environment, including its underlying causes, psychoemotional impacts, limited institutional support, the role of the work environment, participants' expectations for change, and strategies used to cope with discriminatory practices. From the perspective of positive psychology, the results indicate that gender discrimination undermines subjective well-being and constrains the development of individual potential. Female teachers largely rely on personal resilience and peer support in the absence of systematic organizational protection. The novelty of this study lies in its phenomenological examination of gender discrimination by foregrounding female teachers' subjective experiences within the educational workplace, thereby offering a holistic understanding of discrimination that integrates structural, emotional, and coping dimensions. The study underscores the urgent need for changes in institutional mindsets, organizational structures, and workplace cultures, as well as the implementation of gender-sensitive policies and practices to foster inclusive, supportive, and gender-equitable educational environments.

INTRODUCTION

Gender discrimination in the workplace remains a significant issue in the field of education, particularly for female teachers. Although the role of women teachers is crucial in shaping the nation's next generation, they often face various forms of injustice stemming from patriarchal cultures and gender-biased institutional structures within

schools (Zhao et al., 2024; Little, 2025).

Gender discrimination within the Indonesian educational context is a complex and persistent phenomenon that shapes teachers' roles, attitudes, and professional experiences in schools. Although national policies formally promote gender equality and inclusive education, their implementation at the school level is frequently partial and fragmented, compelling teachers to confront entrenched gender stereotypes, non-inclusive curricula, and limited institutional support (Muafiah et al., 2025). This condition is particularly evident in private secondary schools, where formal commitments to equality often coexist with subtle yet systemic gender biases. Such biases are reproduced through curricula and learning materials that continue to privilege male dominance and reinforce traditional gender roles, especially in textbooks in which women are underrepresented or predominantly portrayed in domestic contexts (Fawaid & Handayani, 2025). Within school environments, these representations shape students' perceptions and normalize unequal gender relations, which may manifest as discriminatory attitudes, gender-based bullying, and unequal participation in academic and social activities (Shore & Cahyani, 2019). Furthermore, socio-cultural and religious norms—including gender-segregation practices and moral regulation—significantly influence interaction patterns between male and female students and teachers, sometimes producing hidden forms of inequality in educational practices that appear protective on the surface (Nurcahyono, 2019). These challenges are embedded within broader cultural and structural contexts, where patriarchal values reinforced by religious and socio-economic norms continue to shape expectations of women's roles in education and society, particularly in disadvantaged areas (Sudarso et al., 2019).

Within school environments, gender discrimination is not only reproduced through formal organizational structures but also through everyday social interactions, including gender-based bullying and subtle biases that disproportionately affect women teachers (Adriany, 2019). Differences in teachers' attitudes and motivation across gender further reflect unequal professional positioning, where female teachers often experience greater emotional burdens, reduced authority, and lower motivational outcomes, shaped by tenure and institutional recognition (Triyanto & Handayani, 2016). Although gender-mainstreaming policies have been introduced in Indonesian education, their implementation at the school level—particularly in private secondary schools—remains partial and uneven. This condition underscores the need for deeper institutional commitment, sustained teacher capacity building, and school management reform to foster genuinely inclusive and gender-equitable learning environments (Nurhaeni & Kurniawan, 2018, 2019).

The concept of gender refers to a socio-cultural construction that differentiates roles, behaviors, mentalities, and emotional characteristics between men and women in social development (Hibau, 2018). In organizational contexts, gender discrimination in the workplace reflects underlying values, beliefs, and norms, which in turn shape

employees' perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors toward the organization (Toscano et al., 2020).

Female teachers experience various forms of discrimination, including gender microaggressions, sexual harassment, and stereotypes that limit their professional roles. Research by Ateşoğlu and Demirkasimoğlu (2025) demonstrates that female teachers in Turkish schools frequently encounter sexual objectification and traditional expectations that portray them as less competent than male teachers. Such discrimination originates not only from male colleagues but also from students, parents, and school leaders. Similarly, Gilsenan and Sundaram (2025) emphasize that sexual harassment in schools is often legitimized through power imbalances between men and women, thereby obstructing women's career progression, particularly in promotions to managerial positions (Kılavuz & İnandı, 2022). In the United States, female music education lecturers also face gendered expectations in both professional and personal domains, compounded by unsupportive institutional policies such as limited maternity leave and inadequate childcare facilities (VanDeusen & Wagoner, 2025). Overall, sexual harassment and misogyny emerge as the most prevalent forms of discrimination experienced by female teachers, with sexist and harassing behaviors perpetrated by male students, colleagues, and parents and often normalized within school culture (Zhao et al., 2024; Little, 2025).

Gender discrimination in the workplace constitutes a form of structural injustice that occurs when organizational decisions—such as recruitment, performance appraisal, promotion, remuneration, and career development—are based on gender rather than individual competence or performance. As emphasized in the sociology of work and organizational psychology literature, gender discrimination should be understood as a systemic and institutional practice, rooted in stereotypes, social norms, and biased organizational structures rather than individual prejudice alone (Yan et al., 2009; Lloyd-Jones et al., 2018). The Lack of Fit Model proposed by Heilman explains that gender bias arises when characteristics associated with women are perceived as incongruent with roles socially constructed as masculine, leading to unfair evaluations of women's work performance (Heilman & Caleo, 2018). Additionally, the Theory of Ambivalent Sexism developed by Glick and Fiske highlights that discrimination may also operate through seemingly positive, protective attitudes that ultimately reinforce traditional gender roles (Cheema & Baruch, 2024).

Furthermore, Social Role Theory, advanced by Eagly, emphasizes that socially constructed divisions of labor shape expectations that men are better suited for leadership roles, while women are perceived as less capable of occupying strategic positions, thereby perpetuating inequality in the workplace (Lloyd-Jones et al., 2018). The Cycle of Discrimination Model explains that gender discrimination is reproduced through the continuous interaction of social norms, individual biases, and organizational practices (Marsden et al., 2025). Patriarchal theory, articulated by Walby and further

developed by Bourdieu through the concept of masculine domination, posits that gender inequality is embedded in social systems that position men as dominant and women as subordinate (Semali & Shakespeare, 2014). Moreover, status discrimination theory explains how cognitive biases and social assumptions influence evaluations of competence based on gender (Correll & Benard, 2006). An intersectional perspective further complements this framework by emphasizing that gender discrimination frequently intersects with social class, culture, and health norms, creating layered and complex experiences of injustice (Heise et al., 2019).

Statistical evidence further illustrates the scale of workplace gender discrimination. In 2021, approximately 5.23 million women in the European Union reported experiencing workplace discrimination, compared with 3.63 million men (Eurostat, 2022). A report by ciphr.com (2025) indicates that 57% of adults in the London region experience discrimination either at work or during recruitment processes. Women are more likely than men to be rejected due to gender discrimination (10% vs. 5%), and 45% of women report having unpleasant workplace experiences. The most common forms of discrimination include wage inequality (48%) and catcalling (40%). Workplace policies frequently overlook women's specific rights; for example, 27% of respondents reported the absence of menstrual leave. Limited promotion opportunities persist, with 25% of women perceiving unfair access to advancement, while men continue to occupy 53% of managerial positions (Goodstats, 2024).

Working women frequently encounter discrimination in the form of verbal sexual harassment, including sexist jokes, abusive language, and unwanted physical contact (Sarina & Ahmad, 2021). They also experience limited access to professional training aligned with their fields, constraining future career opportunities (Leovani et al., 2023). Even when demonstrating strong performance, women often receive lower recognition and rewards than men (Murtado et al., 2024). Such discriminatory practices create unsafe work environments and significantly hinder women's career development (Forsyth et al., 2019).

The impact of gender discrimination on female teachers manifests in psychological distress, reduced job satisfaction, and barriers to career advancement (Tsubono et al., 2024; Tara & Hong, 2024). Beyond professional consequences, discrimination also generates psychological and social effects, including fear, anger, withdrawal, and diminished self-worth (Ateşoğlu & Demirkasimoğlu, 2025). Many female teachers experience self-doubt and marginalization of their professional identities (Maheshwari & Srivastava, 2025). In Brazil, for instance, female lecturers face persistent dilemmas between maternal responsibilities and professional expectations (Messias et al., 2024).

To cope with discrimination, female teachers employ various strategies, including building solidarity with colleagues, seeking family support, and advocating for inclusive policies (Li et al., 2023; VanDeusen & Wagoner, 2025). However, many

educational institutions still lack robust structural protections and policies to address gender bias effectively (Gauci et al., 2022). Family support plays a crucial role in maintaining work-life balance (Messias et al., 2024), while inclusive institutional policies and organizational awareness are essential for challenging oppressive gender norms (Li, Xue, & Li, 2023).

Existing research highlights the importance of coping strategies and social support in helping female teachers survive unequal work environments. Support from families, colleagues, and gender-inclusive institutional policies can mitigate the negative impacts of discrimination (Kılavuz & İnandı, 2022; Tsubono et al., 2024). Nevertheless, many educational institutions continue to lack systematic and proactive approaches to creating gender-responsive workplaces.

Sunaryo (2021) found that female employees experiencing glass ceilings perceive their organizations as unfair, which negatively affects career prospects, work engagement, and organizational commitment. Conversely, perceptions of fairness enhance confidence, participation, and commitment. Supporting this finding, Agatha et al. (2023) reported that 78.9% of participants perceived their workplaces as relatively gender-equal due to collegial and supervisory support, which strengthened organizational commitment and reduced turnover intentions despite discriminatory experiences.

The study of workplace gender discrimination draws on diverse social and feminist theories that explain the persistence of inequality in modern organizations. Critical Race Theory and socio-legal scholarship reveal how hidden racism and sexism are embedded in social structures and reinforced by legal limitations (Edelman et al., 2016). Intersectional feminism further emphasizes that discrimination is shaped by overlapping identities such as race, class, and ethnicity, necessitating comprehensive analytical approaches (Altamirano, 2022). Social Identity Theory explains how in-group gender identification can trigger bias, while focusing on professional identities may reduce discriminatory tendencies (Ferrari, 2025). Role Congruity Theory similarly explains that bias emerges when gender roles conflict with professional expectations, particularly in gender-segregated workplaces (Aragón et al., 2023).

Despite extensive research on workplace gender discrimination, empirical studies focusing specifically on female teachers at the secondary education level remain limited, particularly within non-Western contexts. Female teachers continue to face barriers to leadership and career advancement compared with male counterparts (Stead et al., 2023; Tara & Hong, 2024), reinforced by stereotypes that portray women as less competent or unsuitable for authority (Son Hing et al., 2024). These conditions contribute to slower promotion rates and underrepresentation of women in senior academic and administrative roles, reflecting the persistent glass-ceiling phenomenon (Raj et al., 2019).

Gender discrimination encompasses unequal treatment, rights, and opportunities

in employment based on gender or sexual orientation, including recruitment, promotion, compensation, and job classification (Dharmawardhane & Navaratne, 2019). Organizational structures, individual behaviors, and social interactions frequently privilege men, resulting in systemic injustice. Importantly, the pursuit of gender equality is not antagonistic toward men but aims to establish fair relationships and equal opportunities for all individuals (Murtado, Kurniawan, & Sa'ad, 2024).

Balancing professional and domestic responsibilities remains a major challenge for female teachers, particularly when institutional policies related to maternity leave, childcare, and flexible work arrangements are inadequate (Stead et al., 2023). Persistent traditional gender norms within educational institutions—especially male-dominated environments—exacerbate these challenges (Son Hing et al., 2024). Such imbalances not only impede career progression but also contribute to stress and burnout. Women are entitled to equal employment opportunities, fair wages, safe working conditions, and access to professional development (Krisnalita, 2018). Organizations that fail to harness women's capabilities risk losing innovation, diversity, and productivity (Forsyth et al., 2019).

Despite the growing body of international literature documenting the prevalence, forms, and consequences of gender discrimination in educational workplaces, important gaps remain insufficiently clarified in relation to female teachers' lived workplace experiences. Existing studies have often relied on quantitative surveys, policy analyses, or macro-level organizational perspectives, which, while valuable, may provide limited access to how female teachers themselves interpret, experience, and negotiate gender discrimination in their everyday professional lives. Moreover, empirical research focusing specifically on female teachers at the secondary education level—particularly within non-Western and Indonesian contexts—remains relatively scarce. Prior studies conducted in Turkey, Brazil, Nepal, and Western countries provide important comparative insights; however, their findings may not fully transfer to Indonesian private secondary schools, where gender norms, religious interpretations, and institutional governance structures operate within distinct socio-cultural configurations. In addition, relatively limited attention appears to have been directed toward the subjective meaning-making processes through which female teachers understand discrimination, cope with its psychoemotional impacts, and formulate adaptive or resistant strategies within constrained organizational environments. Consequently, there is a need for in-depth, phenomenological research that foregrounds female teachers' lived experiences and situates them within their specific cultural and institutional contexts. Addressing this gap is both timely and necessary, as it contributes nuanced empirical evidence to the field of educational and organizational psychology while informing more context-sensitive and gender-responsive institutional policies.

The focus of this study on female teachers at the secondary education level

addresses a notable gap in the literature (VanDeusen & Wagoner, 2025; Ateşoğlu & Demirkasimoğlu, 2025). By examining this issue within the Indonesian context, the present study offers an empirically grounded perspective that complements existing evidence from Turkey, Brazil, and Nepal (Sitaula, 2023; Messias et al., 2024). Beyond contributing theoretically, the study offers practical insights for improving gender equality in educational workplaces. Its findings are expected to inform institutional policies and strategies aimed at strengthening equity, justice, and support for female teachers.

Therefore, in-depth phenomenological research is required to understand how female teachers interpret, respond to, and negotiate experiences of gender discrimination within their specific social and cultural contexts. Accordingly, the primary objective of this study is to explore female teachers' lived experiences of workplace gender discrimination, focusing on how they perceive, respond to, and navigate these experiences within educational institutions.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as the analytic framework. IPA was selected to enable an in-depth exploration of how participants interpret and make meaning of their subjective experiences related to gender discrimination in the workplace. Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews, allowing participants to reflect on and contextualize their personal experiences within their professional environments. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy and analytical rigor. Data analysis was conducted manually and iteratively, involving repeated readings of the transcripts, initial descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual noting, the development of emergent themes, and the examination of relationships between themes across cases. Participants were selected purposively based on their direct involvement in the phenomenon under investigation. Through this interpretative process, the researcher examined how participants themselves understood and interpreted their experiences, resulting in a rich and nuanced account of the phenomenon.

Research Theory

This study is grounded in several theoretical perspectives that explain gender discrimination as a structural, cultural, and psychological phenomenon. The Theory of Gendered Organizations (Williams, Muller, & Kilanski, 2012) posits that gender inequality is embedded not only in individual attitudes but also in organizational systems and structures. Within school contexts, this theory helps explain how institutional policies, divisions of labor, and leadership patterns may reproduce unequal roles and opportunities for male and female teachers.

In addition, the Lack of Fit Model (Heilman & Caleo, 2018) suggests that discrimination emerges when women are perceived as incompatible with roles socially

constructed as masculine, particularly leadership and decision-making positions. In the present study, this framework elucidates why female teachers often feel compelled to exert additional effort or demonstrate heightened competence to attain recognition equivalent to that of their male counterparts.

From a socio-cultural perspective, Social Role Theory (Lloyd-Jones, Bass, & Jean-Marie, 2018) emphasizes that culturally constructed gender norms shape expectations regarding appropriate roles for men and women. These norms contribute to unequal divisions of labor and restrict women's access to strategic and leadership positions within educational institutions.

Furthermore, the Integrated Gendered Work Evaluation (IGWE) Theory (Moreno, Fuentes Lara, & Tench, 2021) highlights the relationship between gender discrimination, job evaluation, satisfaction, and stress by integrating professional experiences with personal life domains. In the context of teaching, this framework helps explain the emotional and psychological consequences of discrimination on female teachers' work-life balance.

Finally, the Social Psychological Perspective (Hanek & Garcia, 2022) integrates theories such as role congruity and prescriptive gender norms to examine social and psychological barriers faced by women, including prejudice, performance devaluation, and social pressure. This perspective supports the interpretation of how patriarchal power structures and social expectations within schools shape female teachers' subjective experiences. According to social role theory, women are often perceived as more suited to nurturing roles, while men are associated with authority and leadership, reinforcing stereotypes that limit female teachers' professional development (Hanek & Garcia, 2022).

Bergman (2003) conceptualized women's workplace culture as consisting of four dimensions: perceived burdens on women, personally experienced burdens, sexual harassment, and inadequate organizational support. Similarly, Stainback et al. (2011) identified three contextual dimensions of workplace gender discrimination: sex composition, workplace culture, and relative power. Gender discrimination tends to decrease when women constitute the majority within a work group; however, individuals in higher positions may still experience discrimination. Additionally, Toscano et al. (2020) identified three dimensions of discrimination against women in the workplace: perceived societal barriers to career development, perceived organizational barriers, and sexual harassment. These frameworks informed the analytical lens used to interpret participants' narratives.

Research Sample

The research participants were individuals selected to provide in-depth information regarding the research setting and the phenomenon under investigation. A purposive sampling strategy was employed to select participants who possessed direct, first-hand experience of workplace gender discrimination and were willing to articulate their experiences. The inclusion criteria required participants to be female teachers who

had worked for more than four years, ensuring sufficient familiarity with institutional dynamics and professional practices.

In accordance with phenomenological principles, the sample size was not intended to be large but rather sufficient to achieve data saturation, defined as the point at which additional interviews no longer yield new insights. Accordingly, three participants were included in this study, which is consistent with IPA methodological guidelines emphasizing depth of analysis over breadth.

Data Collection Technique

Data were collected directly by the researcher, making the participants the primary source of information. Semi-structured interviews were employed to enable flexible yet focused exploration of participants' experiences in relation to the research objectives. The interview guide consisted of open-ended questions designed to encourage participants to narrate their experiences freely, while also allowing the researcher to probe emerging issues and clarify meanings.

This interview format facilitated rich, detailed accounts of participants' lived experiences without imposing rigid question structures. All interviews were conducted ethically, with careful consideration of participants' comfort and confidentiality (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). To enhance data credibility, the researcher established rapport with participants, applied informed consent procedures, transcribed interviews verbatim, and conducted member checking, allowing participants to review transcripts for accuracy and interpretive validity. In addition, reflective memos were maintained throughout the interview and analysis processes, and consistent coding procedures were applied in accordance with qualitative research standards (Rowlands, 2021; Thille et al., 2021).

Research Procedure

Prior to data collection, each participant received a clear and comprehensive explanation of the study's objectives, procedures, and ethical considerations and provided written informed consent without coercion. At the beginning of each interview session, the researcher reiterated the purpose of the study and explained the interview process. Interviews were conducted using semi-structured guidelines, with participants' responses audio-recorded to ensure accuracy.

In this qualitative study, the researcher functioned as the primary research instrument. To address potential limitations related to memory and interpretation, an interview guide and digital voice recorder were used to support accurate data capture and verbatim transcription. The semi-structured interview approach enabled participants to express their views, feelings, and experiences openly, while ensuring consistency across interviews. Ethical principles—including respect for persons, beneficence, and justice—were applied throughout the research process, from planning to reporting. Participant anonymity and data confidentiality were maintained through the use of codes and secure data storage.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using manual Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, following the procedures outlined by Smith (2010). The analytic process involved multiple stages, including repeated reading of transcripts, initial exploratory noting, the development of emergent themes, the organization of superordinate theme categories, and cross-case analysis to identify shared patterns across participants.

Throughout the IPA process, the researcher engaged in iterative interpretation, moving between participants' narratives and emerging themes. Exploratory comments were refined through successive readings, followed by interpretive coding and thematic clustering. Themes were then synthesized into core categories that represent female teachers' lived experiences of gender discrimination, including interpretations of self, professional roles, emotional responses, coping strategies, and expectations for change within gender-biased institutional environments.

RESULTS

This study explores the experiences of female teachers who face workplace discrimination. The findings of this study generated six core themes: forms of gender discrimination in the workplace; factors that contribute to gender discrimination in the workplace; the support and role of the work environment; psychoemotional impacts; expectations and desired changes; and strategies to address discrimination.

Forms of gender discrimination in the workplace

Mrs. N, a female educator, narrates various forms of gender-based verbal harassment, workplace bias, and everyday struggles experienced by women teachers in the educational environment. These statements illustrate how gender discrimination is manifested through language, role expectations, and unequal treatment, shaping women's professional identities and emotional experiences at work.

“Verbal harassment was expressed by the head of the madrasah, female colleagues, and several senior coworkers, stating that a woman is merely a ‘child-producing factory.’ They even suggested to a male teacher to ‘add another factory’ if his first one no longer wished to have children—an offensive statement directed at me and two other colleagues” (Mrs. N, 6). This statement reflects a form of verbal gender-based harassment that reduces women's identities to reproductive roles, indicating how misogynistic language is normalized within the workplace.

“The voices of female teachers are often unheard, but when there is ‘something’ that needs to be fixed at school, the first ones approached are the women teachers—because they are considered more meticulous and patient” (Mrs. N, 8). This account demonstrates how female teachers are marginalized in decision-making processes while simultaneously being burdened with additional responsibilities, reflecting gendered expectations of care and diligence.

“The sexual harassment I experienced came in the form of catcalling, which I received from my own students. My physical appearance as a female teacher became a

topic of discussion among the students and even among a male teacher" (Mrs. N, 24). This experience indicates the blurring of professional boundaries and the vulnerability of female teachers to sexualized treatment within the school environment.

" "We are expected to remain professional in the workplace while also fulfilling social expectations of being gentle, obedient, and motherly. As a result, women often suppress their self-expression to avoid being seen as too dominant or unfeminine" (Mrs. N, 34). This statement highlights the double burden placed on female teachers, who are expected to balance professional competence with restrictive gender norms.

"The ideas of female teachers at work are not really heard; the male teachers in administrative positions dismiss them. It is as if we are too idealistic and cannot go with the flow. That is the most frustrating part—when we share opinions, we are seen as complicated and overly idealistic. However, when there is work that requires patience and diligence, it's immediately handed to the female teachers. The men? They just show up for appearances" (Mrs. N, 69). This narrative illustrates gendered power relations, in which women's intellectual contributions are devalued while their labor is disproportionately utilized.

"Our ideas and thoughts are often considered unrealistic or too ambitious. That is how it always goes—female teachers are labeled as being too fussy" (Mrs. N, 81). Such labeling reflects gender bias in the evaluation of women's professional input, framing assertiveness as problematic.

"When it comes to female teachers, even the smallest mistake is treated as if it were an elephant—something huge and impossible to miss" (Mrs. N, 85). This experience points to unequal standards of evaluation, where women face heightened scrutiny compared to male colleagues.

Mrs. H also illustrates various forms of gender bias and inequality within the school environment. "Sexist jokes from both male and female teachers, gender-biased division of workload, and lack of support for women's biological experiences" (Mrs. H, 6). "I once saw a colleague receiving sexist jokes and body shaming, not only from male colleagues but even from male students" (Mrs. H, 14). "Yes, I have experienced stares, touches, and sexually suggestive comments" (Mrs. H, 22). These statements indicate that sexualized and degrading treatment is not isolated but embedded in daily interactions within the school setting.

"Other female teachers, in my opinion, also have to work extra hard. They must achieve, must show discipline to be recognized as exemplary teachers in meetings. Even when it is only about reporting achievements to the chairperson, I think female teachers still have to make extra efforts" (Mrs. H, 36). This reflects unequal performance expectations, where women are required to demonstrate higher levels of achievement to gain recognition.

"In this school, there has never been a case where a man is subordinate to a woman. On the contrary, it is women who are always subordinate to men here" (Mrs. H,

40). This statement reveals a rigid gender hierarchy within organizational structures.

“My ideas are appreciated, but only by female teachers and a few people who believe in the value of the ideas for their substance, not for who expresses them” (Mrs. H, 44). “The school leadership tends to assign male teachers more frequently than female teachers, reasoning that men are less burdened by caregiving responsibilities” (Mrs. H, 46). “The school leadership tends to be more permissive toward male teachers, while female teachers receive more pressure to be disciplined” (Mrs. H, 56). “There is a tendency to assume that female teachers are ‘overly emotional’” (Mrs. H, 58). These experiences demonstrate how gender stereotypes shape task allocation, leadership trust, and the interpretation of women’s emotional expressions.

Mrs. D describes how patriarchal norms are enacted through everyday practices. “I was told to make drinks, even though it was not my job. However, because there were male teachers there, and I was the female teacher, I was the one asked to do it” (Mrs. D, 6). This illustrates how domestic roles are implicitly assigned to women, regardless of professional boundaries.

“There was a teacher whom I personally saw being stared at by students because of her body shape. I also overheard male students talking about the size of a female teacher’s breasts” (Mrs. D, 18). “Moreover, in the same subject area, the male teacher was prioritized to attend training... the reasons given were that female teachers might get tired easily, might not get their husbands’ permission, or have to care for their children” (Mrs. D, 18). These statements indicate gendered assumptions that restrict women’s access to professional development opportunities.

“There was a male teacher who held the mouse while I was sitting in front of the computer, making it seem too close—too intimate, so I stood up” (Mrs. D, 30). “During a school evaluation event, the principal once said, ‘Oh, this teacher is brilliant, but she does not have children yet—maybe because she is tired’” (Mrs. D, 30). These experiences reflect inappropriate physical proximity and gendered microaggressions that trivialize women’s competence.

“Maternity leave is available, but without pay” (Mrs. D, 46). “Some of my ideas were appreciated, but others were forgotten, then ignored, and never implemented” (Mrs. D, 56). “The principal prefers to send male teachers to training” (Mrs. D, 60). “In every event... the committee chair is always a man” (Mrs. D, 64). “There is never a direct offer... women have trouble getting permission from their husbands” (Mrs. D, 66). These accounts collectively demonstrate structural discrimination, where institutional practices systematically privilege male teachers and marginalize women.

Factors influencing the causes of gender discrimination in the workplace

This theme captures how participants understand and explain the underlying causes of gender discrimination in their workplace. The narratives consistently point to patriarchal cultural norms, entrenched gender stereotypes, and misinterpretations of religious teachings as central factors shaping discriminatory practices against female

teachers.

“In a patriarchal culture, men are considered more suitable for making decisions, while women are expected to follow simply” (Mrs. N, 20). This statement reflects a deeply internalized belief system in which authority and decision-making are culturally associated with men, positioning women as subordinate actors.

Mrs. H further elaborates on how gender discrimination is legitimized through social and religious interpretations. “Subordination, stereotypes, and misinterpretations of religious texts ultimately lead to gender discrimination under the pretext of obeying religious law. The belief is formed that women are second-class beings” (Mrs. H, 12). “Women are always attached to various stereotypes” (Mrs. H, 20). “Their mindset still equates being critical with spreading hate speech” (Mrs. H, 50). These statements illustrate how discriminatory practices are sustained through normalized beliefs, where women’s critical voices are delegitimized and framed as disruptive rather than constructive.

“The perspective that caregiving tasks are fully assigned to women makes it impossible for them to perform optimally. In Javanese terms, it’s called nggendong anak (carrying a child). They believe that hiring women or entrusting female teachers will reduce organizational or school performance, since women must divide and balance themselves between work and household matters” (Mrs. H, 54). “Because I and other female teachers were born as women, that is one reason why we are treated unfairly or experience discrimination in the school environment” (Mrs. H, 56). These accounts indicate how caregiving stereotypes are used to justify exclusion, positioning women as inherently less capable of fulfilling professional responsibilities.

Mrs. D similarly explains how gendered expectations are reinforced through cultural and religious language. “Maybe people define leaders’ meaning differently. Then women are maknum (followers), and that definition also varies—except in prayer, where maknum means the person behind the imam. But people’s interpretation of maknum is often different” (Mrs. D, 14). This metaphor demonstrates how religious terminology is symbolically extended into organizational life, reinforcing male leadership and female subordination.

“Women must speak gently, while men hitting others is seen as normal. That makes it difficult for female teachers to be themselves. There are so many expectations—women must do this and that. For instance, they must handle domestic matters at home while still being professional at school. There are too many demands” (Mrs. D, 26). This narrative reflects the double standards imposed on women, who are expected to maintain emotional restraint while simultaneously meeting excessive role demands.

“Yes, because I am a woman, I am rarely given opportunities for certain positions. I’m considered incapable, and they never ask me directly. They assume I can’t do it or that I’m busy with my children” (Mrs. D, 66). This statement illustrates how assumptions about women’s domestic responsibilities translate into systematic exclusion from

leadership and professional advancement opportunities.

Support and role of the work environment

The narratives of the three participants—Mrs. N, Mrs. H, and Mrs. D—reveal persistent gender bias within the school environment, accompanied by weak institutional support mechanisms and limited formal spaces for female teachers to articulate their concerns and aspirations. Overall, the findings indicate that support from the work environment is largely informal, fragmented, and heavily reliant on peer solidarity rather than organizational structures or policies.

Mrs. N highlights the absence of institutional platforms that enable teachers, particularly women, to express their aspirations and grievances openly. She explains that meaningful support does not originate from formal organizational channels but rather from trusted colleagues who share similar values and perspectives. As she states, “There is a severe lack of space for teachers to express their aspirations. The most genuine social support I receive actually comes from my ‘sane’ colleagues.” (Mrs. N, 38). This reliance on informal peer networks is further reinforced by the absence of clear institutional policies addressing gender-related issues. According to her, “Sometimes there is tolerance, sometimes not. But there has never been any written or verbal policy that was officially announced.” (Mrs. N, 54). Consequently, emotional coping and problem-solving tend to occur in private discussions among colleagues rather than through formal mechanisms. As Mrs. N explains, “The place to vent all of that is with colleagues who share the same principles and perspectives. If there is anything we can do from those discussions, we will do it. If not, well, whatever—just let it be.” (Mrs. N, 77). She also observes a structural imbalance in trust and authority, noting that leadership positions are overwhelmingly occupied by men, which directly affects the distribution of support and recognition. This perception is reflected in her statement, “Men receive more trust because around 80% or even 90% of structural positions in the school are occupied by male teachers. So I conclude that men are the ones who receive more trust and support.” (Mrs. N, 79).

Similarly, Mrs. H’s experiences demonstrate a profound lack of institutional responsiveness to gender discrimination. She recounts how reports of harassment were met with dismissive attitudes rather than protective actions. As she explains, “The school did not respond seriously. They told me to be patient, assuming the perpetrator had mental limitations.” (Mrs. H, 22). This response reflects a broader organizational tendency to trivialize gender-based issues. In her view, the problem extends beyond insufficient support to a complete absence of it, as she explicitly states, “The school never treats gender discrimination as a serious issue. So, in my opinion, the problem is not that support is lacking—it simply does not exist.” (Mrs. H, 24). Moreover, Mrs. H emphasizes the neglect of women’s biological and reproductive experiences within institutional policies and facilities. She critically describes the school’s treatment of female teachers, stating, “The school still treats women teachers like dairy cows—just expected to maximize their

teaching duties. Schools never care about women's biological experiences. Even during pregnancy or maternity leave, female teachers are unpaid. They are not given the freedom to experience their biological conditions comfortably. There is no lactation room, and flexible working hours are barely implemented." (Mrs. H, 32). In the absence of organizational empathy, emotional support is again confined to peer relationships, particularly among female teachers. As she notes, "I have a place or someone I can lean on to talk openly, but so far that place or person is always among fellow female teachers." (Mrs. H, 50).

Mrs. D's account further illustrates how institutional expectations reinforce gendered burdens while offering only conditional and punitive forms of flexibility. She describes the dual demands placed on women, who are expected to excel both professionally and domestically. As she explains, "We are demanded to do more, you know. Women must be able to do everything. For instance, a woman working must ensure domestic affairs are handled, but at school, she must also be professional." (Mrs. D, 26). Although flexible working arrangements formally exist, they are accompanied by material consequences that undermine their supportive intent. This is evident in her statement, "Flexible working hours are allowed, but if your child is sick and you take time off, your salary gets cut. It is permitted, but there is a consequence." (Mrs. D, 46). Mrs. D also points to leadership mindsets that remain firmly rooted in binary gender perceptions, noting, "The leadership here both the foundation and the school—already has a fixed mindset: men are men, women are women. Their positions are always viewed with that bias." (Mrs. D, 48). Despite these constraints, informal solidarity among female teachers functions as a coping mechanism and source of mutual support. She briefly refers to this network, stating, "There's a kind of post, you know, with other female teachers here." (Mrs. D, 62). Nevertheless, structural exclusion persists, as reflected in her admission, "Throughout my time teaching and working here, I have never once been given the opportunity to be a committee chair." (Mrs. D, 64).

Collectively, these accounts demonstrate that the role of the work environment in supporting female teachers remains limited and largely symbolic. Institutional policies are either absent or inconsistently implemented, leadership structures favor men, and formal mechanisms for addressing gender discrimination are weak or nonexistent. As a result, female teachers rely predominantly on informal peer support—particularly solidarity among women—to navigate professional challenges, manage emotional strain, and sustain resilience within a gender-biased organizational context.

Psycho-emotional Impacts

The findings reveal profound psychoemotional consequences experienced by female teachers as a result of persistent gender discrimination, verbal harassment, and institutional neglect within the school environment. Across participants, discriminatory practices and gendered stereotypes have significantly affected emotional well-being, professional motivation, self-esteem, and perceptions of safety at work.

Mrs. N describes how repeated verbal harassment and the systematic silencing of her voice have deeply undermined her confidence and professional identity. She explains that degrading comments related to her marital status and gendered labeling eroded her sense of purpose as an educator. As she states, "Verbal harassment once made me feel down and insecure because I often received degrading comments about my marital status. Meanwhile, having my voice go unheard made me lose my 'spark' as a teacher who once held fast to the principles of dedicated teaching I had designed in college. Statements that female teachers are troublesome or too strict make me reluctant to discipline students. Even my enthusiasm to organize school events to promote the school's name has disappeared." (Mrs. N, 12). This loss of motivation reflects emotional exhaustion and disengagement from professional roles that once provided meaning and fulfillment. Her sense of futility is further articulated in her rhetorical question, "Why should I bother trying to shine if the people around me do not even care about any of that sparkle?" (Mrs. N, 59), illustrating how the absence of recognition and support diminishes intrinsic motivation and professional commitment.

Mrs. H emphasizes the psychological discomfort and emotional strain experienced by female teachers within a gender-biased environment. She notes that women often feel inferior and uneasy at work, stating, "Psychologically, female teachers feel uncomfortable in the workplace and sometimes even inferior." (Mrs. H, 8). This feeling of inferiority is reinforced by persistent gender stereotypes that portray women as overly emotional or dramatic, which delegitimize their perspectives and experiences. As she explains, "Women are always associated with words like 'dramatic' or 'too emotional'. This makes women seen as inferior and their voices unheard." (Mrs. H, 12). Such labeling not only silences women's voices but also normalizes emotional invalidation as part of workplace culture. Mrs. H also recounts the emotional impact of specific discriminatory incidents, noting, "That clearly made me feel uncomfortable and angry." (Mrs. H, 22). Over time, these experiences accumulate, leading to chronic fatigue and burnout among female teachers. She observes, "Many female teachers are exhausted at school, and when some tasks are not completed optimally, they tend to burn out or feel overwhelmed. I think it's a natural response when female teachers are given so many burdens." (Mrs. H, 32). Beyond exhaustion, the emotional toll extends to perceptions of insecurity, as reflected in her statement, "Many female teachers in this school feel that the environment here is unsafe and uncomfortable." (Mrs. H, 58).

Mrs. D's account further illustrates how gendered expectations and repeated exposure to dismissive or inappropriate behavior affect both emotional and physical well-being. She describes persistent irritation and demotivation, stating, "It is annoying, right, Ma'am? I just feel annoyed with people like that, it makes me feel lazy too." (Mrs. D, 32). Her narrative highlights the embodied nature of psychoemotional strain, where emotional pressure translates into physical exhaustion. As she explains, "Physically, yes,

Ma'am, very much so. Physically, what should have been used only for work ends up being doubled. Moreover, for someone like me who tends to overthink, the expectations and opinions of others also affect my mind. It's sad because it drains my energy and makes me easily tired." (Mrs. D, 44). This statement reflects the cumulative burden of excessive expectations, emotional labor, and internalized pressure, which together contribute to sustained fatigue and reduced well-being.

Collectively, these findings demonstrate that gender discrimination in the workplace generates significant psychoemotional harm for female teachers. Feelings of insecurity, anger, inferiority, exhaustion, and loss of motivation are not isolated reactions but interconnected outcomes of structural inequality, stereotyping, and insufficient institutional support. The psychoemotional impacts identified in this study underscore the urgency of addressing gender discrimination not only as an organizational or policy issue but also as a critical concern for teachers' mental health, professional identity, and long-term engagement in the educational field.

Expectations and desired changes

The participants articulate clear expectations for transforming the school environment into one that is equitable, inclusive, and responsive to gender-related concerns. Their aspirations emphasize structural reform, leadership accountability, cultural change, and the provision of facilities and policies that acknowledge both professional and biological needs. Collectively, these expectations reflect a desire for institutionalized gender equality rather than reliance on informal or individual coping strategies.

Mrs. N emphasizes the importance of creating a work environment that guarantees equal opportunities and recognizes teachers' voices without reinforcing gendered stereotypes or interpersonal tensions. She envisions a professional setting in which teachers can express their opinions freely and collaborate constructively. As she explains, "The work environment provides a proper and decent place for teachers, offering equal opportunities for all teachers to express their opinions and aspirations without the stereotype of 'jealousy' among colleagues. School administrators are willing to cooperate and be united in disciplining students." (Mrs. N, 32). Beyond general fairness, she calls for concrete institutional measures to address gender inequality. In her view, schools must actively design policies and structures that protect women and enable their professional growth. This is reflected in her detailed recommendation: "First, it is important for schools to formulate policies that explicitly support gender equality, including protection against discrimination and harassment. Second, schools need to provide discussion spaces or special forums for female teachers to express their aspirations, experiences, and needs. Third, school leadership should receive gender-awareness training to become more sensitive and responsive to the issues faced by female teachers. Fourth, schools need to create a supportive work culture where women are given the space to grow, trusted with strategic positions, and appreciated equally for their contributions." (Mrs. N, 46).

Mrs. H frames her expectations around the need for a fundamental shift in mindset among school stakeholders, arguing that policy reform must be grounded in inclusive perspectives. She stresses that gender equality begins with fair thinking, which then translates into equitable policies and supportive facilities. As she states, "A more women-friendly environment, especially for female teachers, must begin with a change in mindset and perspective among stakeholders. If their perspective is fair, there is great hope that the policies issued later will also be gender-fair. After that, gradually, school facilities should also be developed to accommodate the biological experiences of women." (Mrs. H, 10). Her vision of a gender-responsive workplace extends to comprehensive policy provisions that recognize women's biological and social realities. She describes an ideal environment as one that "provides menstrual leave, maternity and paternity leave (not only for women but also for men), eliminates gender pay gaps, distributes workloads based on competence, properly applies a meritocracy system, is smoke-free, provides lactation rooms, builds facilities that are also accessible for persons with disabilities, and enforces policies that are friendly to all genders." (Mrs. H, 18). Mrs. H further underscores the central role of leadership and collective awareness in sustaining inclusivity, asserting, "It must start with leaders who have an inclusive perspective. Besides school leaders, colleagues, and all academic members of the school must also have an inclusive mindset." (Mrs. H, 26). To ensure sustainability, she calls for formal institutionalization through education, regulation, and infrastructure, noting, "The organization of educational activities on inclusive schooling for all academic members, the formulation of written policies and regulations, and the establishment of SOPs to realize an inclusive school are necessary. In addition, the school must build lactation rooms, restrooms friendly to women and persons with disabilities, and provide complaint services." (Mrs. H, 28). She also highlights the responsibility of the school foundation, stating, "The leaders must first correct their mindset, then improve the system. There should be education for all academic members in the school to create a safe and friendly environment, not only for students but also for teachers, including female teachers. In my opinion, since we are under the foundation's management, the foundation must also address this issue. At the very least, the foundation should have SOPs on how to create a safe, comfortable, and friendly school environment for everyone." (Mrs. H, 58).

Mrs. D's expectations focus on the practical implementation of gender equality in everyday school practices. She highlights the importance of respectful communication and the elimination of intrusive, gendered remarks in professional interactions. As she explains, "There are specific reminders not to discuss inappropriate matters at school, such as asking 'When will you get married?', 'When will you have children?', or saying 'Women should not work too hard.' Such remarks are immediately addressed and reminded during meetings to ensure that everyone maintains respectful communication." (Mrs. D, 12). She also stresses that equal opportunity must be reflected in decision-making and leadership selection processes, rather than being influenced by gender or

seniority. This expectation is evident in her statement, “The school provides equal opportunities. For example, when someone makes a suggestion, it is not judged based on whether the person is male or female or their job title. If the idea is good, it should be accepted, even if it comes from a junior female teacher. It is not necessary to wait for a senior to speak before taking action. First, everyone’s voice is heard. Second, equal opportunities are given for certain positions. For instance, if a male vice principal is not competent, and there is a capable female teacher, she should be allowed to step forward to become vice principal.” (Mrs. D, 24). In addition, she highlights the need for schools to actively create leadership opportunities for women, noting, “The school provides certain opportunities for female teachers—for example, allowing them to lead school events as committee chairs or event hosts. Female teachers are also encouraged to express their voices so that the school listens to their perspectives.” (Mrs. D, 40). She concludes by emphasizing leadership commitment to equality as a catalyst for cultural change, stating, “The principal shares the vision that gender discrimination should not exist in school. For instance, inviting guest speakers who emphasize equality and speaking publicly against discrimination. In practice, the process and workflow are gradually changing the mindset that leadership positions need not always be held by men. If there is a capable woman, she should be given the opportunity.” (Mrs. D, 68).

Overall, the expectations expressed by the participants highlight a shared demand for systemic transformation. Their narratives underscore the need for gender-fair policies, inclusive leadership, supportive facilities, respectful communication norms, and equal access to decision-making and leadership roles. These desired changes reflect a collective aspiration to move beyond symbolic commitments toward a genuinely inclusive and gender-equitable educational work environment.

Strategies to deal with discrimination

The findings indicate that female teachers employ a range of adaptive strategies to cope with gender discrimination in the workplace. These strategies are shaped by limited institutional support and are predominantly individual or collective coping mechanisms rather than outcomes of formal organizational intervention. Across participants, the strategies reflect attempts to preserve dignity, maintain professionalism, and secure emotional safety within a gender-biased environment.

Mrs. N conceptualizes her coping approach as a form of “survival mode,” which involves asserting personal boundaries while selectively engaging in collective expression with trusted colleagues. She explains, “The survival mode firmly asserts and voices the boundaries that should not be crossed, formulating strategies to express the same concerns together with like-minded colleagues during meetings.” (Mrs. N, 28). In this context, informal peer discussions become a crucial outlet for emotional release and shared reflection. As she states, “The place to vent all of that is with colleagues who share the same principles and perspectives. If there is an action we can take from those

conversations, we will do it. If not, well, we stop caring." (Mrs. N, 77). However, prolonged exposure to unresponsive leadership appears to erode confidence in the effectiveness of any strategy. This sense of resignation is evident when she remarks, "So, as for strategies to deal with it, we do not have any anymore. We are just like, 'Whatever, do as you please.' What matters is that we come to school to fulfill our duties as teachers. Because no strategy will work if the leader is not open-minded." (Mrs. N, 85). Her narrative illustrates a shift from active resistance to emotional withdrawal as a means of self-preservation.

In contrast, Mrs. H emphasizes formal and collective approaches as initial strategies for addressing discrimination. She recounts her attempt to engage institutional mechanisms by reporting incidents to authorities, stating, "I tried to report the issue of gender discrimination committed by male students to the school leadership. The strategy I once used in responding to gender discrimination was to report it to the institution overseeing our school." (Mrs. H, 16). Nonetheless, she acknowledges that meaningful change requires collective effort rather than isolated action. This is reflected in her assertion, "The strategy is that we really have to work collectively." (Mrs. H, 58). Her perspective highlights an awareness that individual complaints are insufficient in environments where organizational commitment to gender equity is weak.

Mrs. D describes a set of strategies grounded in avoidance, boundary-setting, and self-regulation. She prioritizes personal safety and emotional control by deliberately limiting interactions with individuals she perceives as inappropriate. As she explains, "I avoid this, Ma'am. I always maintain my own boundaries—it is like respecting myself. Oh, do not be too friendly with people I consider, what is the word, flirtatious. Just stay away. When they get close, we walk away." (Mrs. D, 9). This avoidance strategy is reinforced by conscious emotional management, as reflected in her statement, "Survive and avoid, Ma'am. If there are senior teachers who are flirtatious, we stay away when necessary. Then, if there are unpleasant remarks, in survival mode, we support ourselves — think positively." (Mrs. D, 22). In some cases, immediate disengagement becomes the preferred response, as she notes, "Just leave immediately, kind of an avoidance mode." (Mrs. D, 32).

Alongside avoidance, Mrs. D highlights the importance of solidarity among female colleagues as a source of emotional resilience. She explains, "Among female colleagues, we are often supportive of one another. Do not take it to heart, just let it go. We support each other as female teachers, encouraging each other. Do not take it personally, Ma'am — sometimes we feel down too." (Mrs. D, 38). This peer support extends into professional collaboration and mutual reinforcement, as reflected in her statement, "With fellow teachers, since we're in the same institution and perhaps teach similar classes, we've experienced similar incidents — so we support each other. For example, working together to maintain discipline, 'Come on, let's do it together,' or strengthening one another to prevent uncomfortable situations at school, especially

involving the students." (Mrs. D, 62).

Professionalism and self-improvement also emerge as key coping strategies for Mrs. D. She frames competence development as a way to assert professional identity beyond gendered expectations, stating, "Trying to improve my competence is for my profession as a teacher, not to be recognized as a woman. Personally, it's not about seeking recognition, but proving that I can — it's not validation I need, just professionalism." (Mrs. D, 48). In addition, she describes self-protection practices that combine personal agency with social caution, noting, "First, improve skills; second, stay professional in our work. Socialize with positive colleagues who think broadly. I still protect myself by wearing modest clothing. Even though we already dress properly and conservatively, we cannot control others' thoughts. Still, we make the effort — that is our way of protecting ourselves." (Mrs. D, 70).

Overall, the strategies identified in this subsection reveal that female teachers navigate discrimination primarily through adaptive and defensive mechanisms rather than through structural support. Survival modes, avoidance, emotional regulation, collective solidarity, reporting efforts, and professionalism function as compensatory responses to institutional shortcomings. These strategies underscore both the resilience of female teachers and the persistent absence of systematic organizational measures to address gender discrimination in the workplace.

Table 1
IPA Coding Results

Big theme	Category theme superordinated
Forms of gender discrimination in the workplace	Verbal Abuse and Covert Sexism Gender Bias in Duties and Awards Neglect of Women's Voices and Participation Barriers to Access to Positions and Training Inequities in Assessment and Recognition Traditional Gender Role Stereotypes Lack of Support for Women's Conditions Insecurity and Exclusion in the Work Environment Inequality in Power Relations and Patriarchal Structure Culture of Blaming and Normalizing Discrimination
Factors influencing the causes of gender discrimination in the workplace	The Dominance of Patriarchal Structures in Organizations Traditional Gender Role Stereotypes Internalized Social and Cultural Bias Injustice in Institutional Systems and Policies Normalization and Tolerance of Discrimination
	Negative Assumptions on Women's Abilities

Unfair Distribution of Workload	
Support and role of the work environment	Lack of Institutional Support and Protection Inequality in HR Policy and Management Inequities in Evaluation and Opportunity Lack of Space for Women's Aspirations and Representation Unacknowledged Social and Emotional Burden Resilience and Personal Initiative The Role of Social Support for Female Teachers
Psychoemotional Impacts	Emotional and mental exhaustion Decreased motivation and dedication to work Feelings of helplessness and pessimism Frustration and job dissatisfaction Impact on self-esteem and identity Social discomfort and anxiety
Expectations and desired changes	Changes in Gender-Fair Institutional Policies Gender Equality Education and Training Leadership Transformation and Leadership Mindset Creating a Safe and Supportive Work Environment Equal Opportunity and Participation in Leadership Increased Space for Aspiration and Dialogue Integration of Inclusivity Values in School Culture
Strategies to deal with discrimination	Assertive Strategy and Internal Advocacy Personal Self-Protection Strategies Passive and Adaptive Emotional Strategies Cooperative and Collective Strategies Competency and Professionalism Strategy Prevention and Situational Awareness Strategies

DISCUSSION

Gender discrimination in the workplace remains a complex and persistent issue experienced by women across various professional sectors, including education. Consistent with prior studies, the findings of this research indicate that gender discrimination manifests through job segregation, biased recruitment and promotion practices, the persistence of glass ceilings, and wage inequality despite comparable qualifications and responsibilities (Quezada et al., 2019; Rajeswari et al., 2024). These patterns suggest that female teachers are frequently positioned in less strategic roles, which constrains career mobility and reinforces structural inequality. Such findings reaffirm that gender bias is not merely interpersonal but deeply embedded within organizational structures and human resource practices.

The emergence of gender discrimination is influenced by multiple, interrelated factors, including entrenched gender role stereotypes, patriarchal cultural norms, and organizational policies that insufficiently protect women's rights. As documented in earlier research, the dual burden of professional and domestic responsibilities disproportionately affects women and intensifies their vulnerability to discrimination (Tiwari et al., 2018; Rached et al., 2021). In

addition, individual characteristics such as marital status, educational background, and type of work intersect with gender to shape women's experiences of inequality in the workplace (San et al., 2021; Kim, 2025). In male-dominated educational environments, discrimination often occurs in subtle and normalized forms, including verbal harassment, social exclusion, and the devaluation of women's professional contributions (Taylor et al., 2018; Basharat & Alam, 2024). These findings support the view that discrimination operates through both overt and covert mechanisms that are sustained by cultural acceptance and institutional silence.

Societal attitudes toward sexism further contribute to the persistence of gender discrimination. Napier et al. (2020) argue that in contexts where sexist beliefs are widely accepted, gender discrimination is more likely to be denied or minimized as a social problem. Such denial legitimizes organizational inaction and reinforces unequal treatment, thereby normalizing discriminatory practices in professional settings, including schools.

The findings also highlight the critical role of the work environment in shaping women's experiences of discrimination. A supportive organizational climate—characterized by gender-sensitive leadership, equitable policies, and justice-oriented practices—has been shown to enhance women's well-being, job satisfaction, and sense of belonging (Uzman et al., 2022; Panerati et al., 2025; Singh & Seal, 2025). Conversely, discriminatory work environments are associated with severe psychoemotional consequences, including stress, anxiety, diminished self-confidence, and reduced work effectiveness (Hennein et al., 2023; Hackett et al., 2024). The present study corroborates these findings by demonstrating that the absence of institutional support compels female teachers to rely on informal peer networks and personal coping strategies rather than systemic protection.

The psychoemotional impact of gender discrimination is particularly pronounced. Consistent with previous research, women who experience discrimination report emotional exhaustion, anger, burnout, and feelings of inferiority (Hennein et al., 2023; Jadhav et al., 2024). These psychoemotional burdens not only reduce job satisfaction but also undermine professional identity and self-confidence, thereby affecting long-term career engagement (Tost et al., 2022; Maheshwari & Srivastava, 2025). Persistent exposure to discriminatory practices fosters stigma consciousness, whereby women internalize systemic bias and interpret professional setbacks as personal inadequacies. As a result, gender discrimination emerges not only as an organizational issue but also as a significant mental health concern that requires institutional attention.

Addressing gender discrimination therefore necessitates comprehensive strategies that extend beyond individual resilience. While this study identified various coping strategies—such as avoidance, boundary-setting, peer solidarity, and professionalism—these responses primarily function as adaptive mechanisms in the absence of organizational change. As noted by Maleku et al. (2023), individual coping alone cannot dismantle structural inequality. Revising job descriptions, increasing women's representation in leadership roles, and challenging gendered assumptions about competence are essential steps toward disrupting male-dominated workplace cultures (Heilman et al., 2023). Women must be recognized as full

contributors to organizations based on their qualifications and performance, rather than being treated as symbolic representatives of gender inclusion.

Participants' expectations for change align with broader scholarly calls for structural reform, including the implementation of gender-fair policies, leadership transformation, and sustained gender-awareness education (Singh & Seal, 2025). Effective organizational interventions may include mentorship programs, regular audits of promotion and evaluation systems, institutionalized complaint mechanisms, and continuous training to address implicit bias (Nally et al., 2019). In addition, modifying the physical work environment—such as providing breastfeeding and lactation facilities—serves both practical and symbolic functions by affirming the legitimacy of women's biological and caregiving roles in professional spaces (Heilman et al., 2023).

For example, the presence of a breastfeeding facility indicates that an organization supports the role of motherhood for employees and enables them to fulfill maternal roles. Thus, modifying the physical environment can be a powerful tool for reshaping normative beliefs about what is acceptable and desirable in the workplace (Heilman et al., 2023).

The benefit-finding literature further suggests that women who experience gender discrimination may develop greater motivation to engage in collective action and may strengthen psychological resources. In Mosley and Branscombe's (2020) study, benefit-finding was associated with increased motivation to combat gender discrimination in the future, improvements in self-esteem, and an increased focus on personal growth. Importantly, learning from past discriminatory experiences can help women navigate future social spaces that may remain susceptible to intergroup bias. The pursuit of benefits can also help individuals consolidate their sense of who they are in the present and who they aspire to become in the future. These findings encourage women to reflect on the lessons and implications of discriminatory experiences, which can enhance subjective well-being while simultaneously motivating action for positive change. Therefore, society must continue pursuing structural changes to reduce discrimination against women. A similar pattern is evident in Tara and Zhang (2023): although their data indicate recognition of gender discrimination—60% of participants expressed agreement and 34% indicated agreement regarding the existence of inequality—the majority of educators (80%) reported implementing coping mechanisms when facing gender discrimination, reflecting a proactive stance and highlighting resilience in the workforce despite persistent adversity.

In particular, the findings of this study emphasize the importance of gender-sensitive institutional policies in improving job satisfaction and teacher welfare. Discriminatory practices embedded in performance evaluations, promotion opportunities, and masculine work cultures have the potential to hinder teachers' professional development and reinforce structural inequalities within the school environment. Therefore, educational institutions need to critically review their evaluation mechanisms, develop systematic gender-awareness training programs, and strengthen inclusive mentoring and leadership systems. In addition, reinforcing gender-sensitive curricula and teaching materials constitutes an important strategy

for reducing veiled biases that are reproduced through everyday educational practices. The implementation of these measures not only contributes to the creation of a safe and inclusive work environment for teachers but also positively affects the quality of education and the overall school climate (Cheema & Baruch, 2024; Tara & Hong, 2024; Valencia et al., 2025).

The practical implications of these findings further point to the need for increased critical awareness through continuous training for teachers and school leaders, enabling them to recognize implicit and normalized gender biases in daily interactions. Moreover, the study highlights the importance of strengthening inclusive institutional policies, particularly in relation to performance evaluation, career development, and the protection of female teachers. From a phenomenological perspective, the results also demonstrate that limited leadership support and hierarchical organizational cultures can intensify feelings of marginalization, anger, and inhibition in carrying out professional roles as educators. Consequently, schools need to cultivate an organizational culture that values teachers' subjective experiences, strengthens professional support networks, and integrates gender-equity-based reflective practices into curriculum development and teacher training (Ullman, 2020; Özaslan et al., 2024; Monteiro et al., 2025).

Overall, recent research confirms that gender discrimination arises not only from individual bias but also from organizational structures and workplace cultures that remain unequal. Accordingly, effective strategies to address gender discrimination must encompass policy reform, organizational culture transformation, sustained gender equality education, and robust legal advocacy to ensure protection and justice for all workers, regardless of gender (Maleku et al., 2023).

CONCLUSION

In the field of education, female teachers often encounter challenges related to gender stereotypes that place them in a less equal position compared to their male counterparts. Gender stereotypes continue to hinder women's career advancement by shaping perceptions of their competence in the work environment and limiting the range of workplace behaviors considered appropriate for women. These conditions reinforce unequal professional relations and restrict women's opportunities for growth and recognition.

This study contributes not only to the psychological understanding of gender bias but also provides insight into how gender discrimination negatively affects female teachers and educational organizations. Discriminatory practices reduce teachers' motivation, well-being, and professional engagement, ultimately preventing organizations from functioning optimally. When educational institutions fail to address gender discrimination, they risk losing women's potential contributions and weakening organizational performance.

By examining the lived experiences of female teachers, this study highlights the need for educational organizations to minimize gender discrimination and promote

gender equality in the workplace. Creating a positive organizational environment requires institutional awareness, equitable treatment, and supportive policies that enable all teachers to work according to their abilities. Through such efforts, educational institutions can foster fairer, more inclusive, and more effective professional environments.

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