



WHAT DO WE MEAN BY DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION?

- **Diversity** is the representation of “identities, abilities, backgrounds, cultures, skills, perspectives and experiences” and reflects the composition of Canada’s population.⁽¹⁾
- “**Equity** seeks to ensure fair treatment, equality of opportunity, and fairness in access to information and resources for all”.⁽²⁾
- “**Inclusion** builds a culture of belonging by actively inviting the contribution and participation of all people.”⁽²⁾ An **inclusive** workplace is “fair, equitable, supportive, welcoming and respectful.”⁽¹⁾ It “recognizes, values and leverages differences in identities, abilities, backgrounds, cultures, skills, experiences and perspectives that support and reinforce Canada’s evolving human rights framework.”⁽¹⁾

WHAT CONSTITUTES WORKPLACE DISCRIMINATION?

- **Workplace discrimination** occurs when an “employee or group of employees is *treated differently, negatively or adversely* because of their gender, race, colour, culture, nationality, ethnic origin, religion, age, disability, marital status, pregnancy, sexual orientation, trade union membership or any other prohibited grounds of discrimination.”⁽³⁾ **Any type of unfavourable or differential treatment** by a co-worker, manager, client, or anyone else in the workplace is considered discrimination.⁽⁴⁾
 - One of these treatments could be **microaggressions**.⁽⁵⁾ For definition and more details on these, please refer to the bullying and harassment resource sheet of this toolkit.

DIVERSE EXPERIENCES OF WORKPLACE DISCRIMINATION

Workplace discrimination is common in Canada. Some Canadians have experienced discrimination at work due to: [their gender \(22%\)](#); [sexual orientation \(16%\)](#); [age \(26%\)](#), [racial discrimination \(17%\)](#) and [religious discrimination\(16%\)](#).

- **Gender:** Women are still more likely to have [part-time jobs](#), [earn less](#), [have lower rates of workplace participation](#), [miss on career advancement opportunities](#) and are [less likely to be in leadership positions](#), all related to workplace discrimination and other factors.
 - Both women and men [experience less discrimination when they constitute majority of their work group](#).
- **Gender diversity:** Transgender individuals [experience work-related discrimination more often than cisgender participants](#). Many transgender people report problems accessing washrooms of their gender at work; [either they were not allowed to use them or received complaints from colleagues when they did](#).
- **LGBTQ2S people:** Close to [30% of LGBTQ2+ respondents](#) felt that they had experienced discrimination in Canadian workplaces, in comparison to 3% of the general population.
- **Indigenous people** encounter discrimination when applying for jobs where employers do not utilize inclusive hiring practices. Indigenous people in Saskatchewan “are [more than twice as likely](#) to feel they've been mistreated at work.”
- **Racial minorities:** Compared with 9 countries, Canada was amongst the highest reporting experiences of racism during hiring. [Those from visible minority background are 11% more likely to experience discrimination in hiring](#).
- **Persons with disabilities:** [12% of Canadians with disabilities](#) reveal they had been refused a job because of their disability, and a [third among those with a severe disability](#).
 - **Experiencing MH issues can also act as a basis for discrimination** in employment. One study shows that close to 60% of respondents with depression did not apply for work, education or training because they [anticipated discrimination](#).
- Despite legislation against bias in hiring, discharge, promotion, referral, and other aspects of employment;⁽⁴⁾ legislation that forbids discrimination on the basis of gender, race, ethnicity and other grounds;⁽⁶⁾ and legislation requiring Canadian employers to take active steps to improve employment opportunities for certain groups of people.⁽⁶⁾ **discrimination and bias present a major barrier to workplace inclusion.**⁽¹⁾

IMPACT OF DISCRIMINATION VS. INCLUSION ON MENTAL HEALTH

Workplace discrimination across a variety of intersecting social identities has a negative impact on mental health in the workplace.

- Sex and gender-based discrimination has been linked to differences in mental health between men and women.⁽⁷⁻¹⁰⁾
 - Women experience more job insecurity, lower control, and worse working conditions and report poorer self-perceived mental health.⁽⁷⁾
 - Discrimination experienced by gender diverse individuals has been linked to emotional exhaustion and a negative impact on their mental health.⁽¹¹⁻¹⁴⁾
- Multiple forms of workplace mistreatment (*such as sexism, racism, ageism*) among men and women are related to poorer mental health.⁽⁹⁾
 - A US study of women of color reveals that sexist and racist workplace discrimination was linked to higher psychological distress.⁽¹⁰⁾

More inclusive workplaces are linked to positive mental health.

- Investing in inclusivity has been found to [raise staff morale and feelings of psychological health and safety in the workplace](#).
- Social inclusion in the workforce can contribute to raising levels of employment of vulnerable groups, including people with mental health problems. ⁽¹⁵⁾

PROMISING PRACTICES TO HELP ADDRESS WORKPLACE DISCRIMINATION AND ENSURE INCLUSIVE WORKPLACES

RESPECT RELEVANT LEGISLATION

- The **Canadian Human Rights Act** forbids discrimination on the basis of gender, race, ethnicity and other grounds in employment and services within federal jurisdiction.⁽⁶⁾
- **Canada's Employment Equity Act** requires “employers to take active measures to improve the employment opportunities for specific groups of people in the country” (i.e., *women, Indigenous persons, persons with disabilities and members of visible minorities*).⁽⁶⁾

ESTABLISH ORGANIZATIONAL DISCRIMINATION PREVENTION AND REDUCTION STRATEGIES, INCLUDING ONGOING TRAINING AND EVALUATION

- Proactively adopt or adapt **inclusion and diversity targets and training** to address bias in the hiring process.^(16–18)
 - **Provide training to address barriers in hiring processes:** The [Centre for Addiction and Mental Health \(CAMH\)](#), a specialty hospital in Toronto with 2,432 employees which was declared the top employer in 2019, provides bias-free interview training for recruiters and managers, and mandatory diversity training for new hires.
 - **Set and attain equity targets:** The [Catalyst Accord 2022](#) calls on Canadian boards and CEOs to commit to accelerate the advancement of women in business. The targets call for increasing the average percentage of women on boards and in executive positions in corporate Canada to 30% or more by 2022.
- Adopt or adapt **anti-discrimination policies** that clearly outline protected grounds and penalties if policy is breached. Establish anti-discrimination **practices that encourage managers** to deal with incidents of discrimination and harassment at the outset.
 - The Newfoundland & Labrador Public Service Secretariat’s [Maintaining a Harassment & Discrimination-Free Workplace A Guide for Managers & Employees](#) encourages managers to meet with the employee right away, listen to her/his/their concerns, discuss resolution options and arrange an action plan.
- Having **diversity policies** established in organizations (*e.g., policies supporting gay and lesbian employees, such as a [written nondiscrimination policy](#), [same-sex partner benefits](#)*) is associated with higher job satisfaction as well as lower job anxiety and work-home conflict among gay and lesbian employees.^(19,20)

ENSURE EQUITABLE REPRESENTATION THROUGH DIVERSITY AUDITS

- **Diversity assessment/audit tools** assess policies and practices to increase diversity and inclusiveness, and can measure an organization’s progress in increasing diversity not only within its HR functions but also throughout the organization’s value chain.^(21, p.16)
 - Nova Scotia, for example, has created a [diversity assessment/audit tool](#).
- The **Canadian Human Rights Commission (CHRC)** is preparing a new [horizontal auditing process](#) to make sure that there is a fair representation of the four federal employment equity groups in particular industries (e.g., banking).
- The **Canada Revenue Agency** implemented an [Indigenous Student Employment Program](#), [Indigenous Mentorship Initiative](#) and the [Indigenous Buddy Initiative](#) in its ongoing efforts to achieve an equal representation of Indigenous peoples.

COVID-19 & WORKPLACE DISCRIMINATION

- The Covid-19 pandemic has provoked discriminatory behaviours against certain people. As the virus originated in Wuhan, China, people of Asian descent have been subjected to racism and xenophobia.⁽²²⁾ Canadian news media have reported that Chinese and Chinese-looking Canadians have experienced racist attacks, violence, and discrimination as a result of the association of Covid-19 with China.^(23,24) Similarly, the [STOP AAPI HATE](#) website for Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, which was set up to report incidents of COVID-19 discrimination including workplace discrimination, received 1497 reports in the first four weeks of its creation.⁽²⁵⁾ While it is unclear how much workplace discrimination against people of Asian descent has increased as a result of Covid-19, any increase is concerning given evidence that this group has experienced work-related discrimination even before the start of the pandemic.^(26,27)
- Discrimination against communities of Asian background seems to perpetuate and exacerbate long-established patterns of inequality, and impacts negatively on mental health.
 - One Canadian study, based on data from a nationally representative survey conducted in March and April, 2020, found that higher levels of mental health symptoms among East Asian Canadians compared to white Canadians can be explained by higher incidences of acute discrimination experienced by this group as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. ⁽²⁸⁾
 - Future research will need to explore to what extent workplace discrimination against people of Asian descent might have increased during the pandemic and how that impacts their lives and mental health.
- Some employment sectors most affected by physical and social distancing measures are dominated by women and visible minorities, such as food services, personal services, and certain types of retail and manufacturing.⁽²⁹⁾ As a consequence of Covid-19, disproportionate numbers of employees of colour and women have been laid off from their jobs. ⁽²⁹⁾ The Covid-19 pandemic might have more serious consequences for such groups of workers who already experience discrimination and limited access to employment opportunities.
 - Future studies will need to address the impact that the pandemic might have on unemployment or underemployment of women and people of colour and in turn, their mental health.

VIGNETTE: WORKPLACE DISCRIMINATION

Jada is a black bisexual woman who works in a lab as a scientist. When she first joined the department, she used to hide her bisexual identity as she feared she would be stigmatized. After three years of working in that department, she finally felt comfortable with the idea of coming out. Once she revealed her identity to her colleagues (most of whom are white males), she started to experience harassment and discrimination, something that she never felt before. She noticed that her workload has increased significantly and her colleagues started to treat her differently (e.g., some even stopped talking to her). She experienced being passed over for promotion and was refused permission to attend a conference. Her boss threatened to fire her when they disagreed over a minor issue. Her situation was made worse by discrimination and bias she felt was a result of her racial background. Indeed, she compared the experience of her white male colleague who came out as gay but did not experience nearly as much ostracism and bias as she did. While she thinks that changing labs would be a solution to end the racial discrimination and stigma based on her sexual orientation, she is reluctant to do that. She would like to stay and try to fight ('after all, this is something Black people have been doing for ages', she says), even though she is fully aware how much all of this is affecting her mental health. Indeed, she feels depressed, has tried self-medicating with alcohol and has only recently asked for help. She is now taking antidepressants and going to counselling sessions two times per week.

Box 1: Important SGBA considerations for managers/supervisors

Applying an SGBA lens to the issue of workplace discrimination faced by an employee is one step towards resolving the situation described in the vignette. It will help you to better understand the issue, address it appropriately, and ensure solutions that are fair.

Based on the vignette and using the evidence you have just read:

- Think about how Jada's different **identities** (*being Black, a woman, and bisexual*) impact on her experience of workplace discrimination and bias?
 - How do her manager's and co-workers' responses to her different identities shape the way they treat her?
- Consider how workplace culture that *tolerates discrimination* issues in the workplace might lead to mental health issues among affected employees (*e.g., black woman who works in a white male-dominated sector/department that has no zero tolerance discrimination policies, and/or discrimination prevention and reduction practices, might easily become a target for discrimination*).
 - The impact on affected employees can be more profound if the person who discriminates is supported by colleagues who also blame the victim.
- Think about what the evidence suggests in terms of the impact of sex/gender and other identity factors on workplace discrimination and in turn on the mental health of employees.

As a manager/supervisor think about **your employee's life as a part of a larger context** before you and your employee make any plans to deal with the situation. Consider:

- How might the wider context, including societal processes (e.g., cultural norms/traditions) influence employees' mental health (*e.g., Jada's culture might not be accepting of bisexuality*).
- In addition to sex/gender, how other individual factors (e.g., race, age, disability, indigeneity), might impact the experience of being discriminated against?

GLOSSARY

Bias: “stereotypes about people based on the group to which they belong and/or based on an immutable physical characteristic they possess, such as their sexuality.”⁽³⁰⁾

Bisexual: a person “that may be emotionally and sexually attracted to members of both sexes. The degree of attraction may not be the same for both sexes, and may vary over time.”⁽³¹⁾

Diversity audit tool(s): tool(s) that assess(es) policies and practices to increase diversity and inclusiveness and measure an organization’s progress in increasing diversity not only within its human resources functions but also throughout the organization’s value chain.⁽²¹⁾

Inclusive workplace is “fair, equitable, supportive, welcoming and respectful.”⁽¹⁾ It is free from bias and “recognizes, values and leverages differences in identities, abilities, backgrounds, cultures, skills, experiences and perspectives that support and reinforce Canada’s evolving human rights framework.”⁽¹⁾

LGBTQ2+: an acronym for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Two-Spirit. The + encompasses sexually diverse people who do not identify with the aforementioned labels.

Trans or transgender: the term refers to “a person whose gender identity differs from what is typically associated with the sex they were assigned at birth. It includes people who identify with binary genders (i.e. trans men and women), and people who do not fit within the gender binary, i.e. non-binary, gender non-conforming, genderqueer, agender, etc.”⁽³²⁾

Workplace Discrimination: a differential, negative or adverse treatment of an employee or group of employees due to their gender, race, colour, culture, nationality, ethnic origin, religion, age, or any other prohibited grounds of discrimination.⁽³⁾

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