



## DISCRIMINATION IN THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS – YOUNG ADULTS’ PERSPECTIVE

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### Abstract

The article addresses the issue of the scale of gender discrimination in the recruitment and selection process among young adults. The intensity of the examined phenomenon occurring in job advertisements and during the recruitment interview was identified, which, despite its low frequency, may significantly affect the future functioning of the labor market. Additionally, it was examined what impact the phenomenon they experienced had on the respondents, on their self-esteem and way of thinking. The overwhelming percentage of negative impact and unpleasant memories was intertwined with young adults’ indifference to gender discrimination directed at them. The topic covered in the study is broad and requires interest and in-depth study.

### DYSKRYMINACJA W PROCESIE REKRUTACJI – PERSPEKTYWA MŁODYCH OSÓB DOROSŁYCH

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Słowa kluczowe: dyskryminacja ze względu na płeć, rekrutacja, selekcja, młode osoby dorosłe.

### Abstrakt

W artykule podjęto zagadnienie dyskryminacji ze względu na płeć w procesie rekrutacji i selekcji, wśród młodych osób dorosłych. Zidentyfikowano intensywność badanego zjawiska występującego w ogłoszeniach o pracę oraz podczas rozmowy rekrutacyjnej, które mimo niskiej częstotliwości

może znacząco wpłynąć na przyszłe funkcjonowanie rynku pracy. Dodatkowo zbadano, jaki wpływ na respondentów, na ich samoocenę i sposób myślenia miało doświadczone przez nich zjawisko. Przeważający procent negatywnego wpływu i przykrych wspomnień występował wraz z obojętnością młodych osób dorosłych względem skierowanej w ich stronę dyskryminacji ze względu na płeć. Temat poruszony w opracowaniu jest szeroki, wymaga zainteresowania i pogłębienia.

## **Gender Discrimination in the Recruitment Process – Concept, Causes and Manifestations**

There are many types of unethical behavior in the labor market, often based on stereotypes. These actions are not only reflected in the behavior of employees, but also in the actions of employers, often taking the form of discrimination. From an economic point of view, discrimination can be considered synonymous with unequal treatment. Narrowing the concept to the area of recruitment and selection, it should be noted that candidates for a given position, while equally productive, are treated differently due to the observed feature. In the case of the scope of research, this distinguishing feature will be gender (Liebkind *et al.*, 2016, p. 404).

A different definition defines discrimination as a set of behaviors whose consequence is a different perception of the situation of given individuals, characterized by *de facto* the same qualities or attributes. The essence of the above concept is therefore discrimination based on prohibited criteria (Głogowska, 2015, p. 85, 86).

From a non-economic point of view, the concepts of discrimination and unequal treatment should not be used synonymously. According to this concept, discrimination is a technical term indicating specific behaviors, while equality is only a kind of idea. The relationships between the indicated concepts can be treated as ambiguous (Głogowska, 2015, p. 85, 86).

It is necessary to distinguish between situations in which we can actually talk about the occurrence of gender discrimination. Applying different assessment criteria to people who have similar demographic and socio-professional characteristics, while depriving them of equal opportunities and rights of a given gender, indicates the occurrence of discrimination. If one of the sexes is in a worse situation for objective reasons, it should not be claimed that there has been discrimination, but only differentiation, not taking into account worse treatment (Zwiech, 2012, p. 162, 163).

The main cause of gender inequality concerns value systems and the nature of the structures of social institutions. The factor that creates and deepens differentiation is the subjectivity of views, referring to stereotypes that often take control over human behavior (Raczkowska, 2014, p. 119).

The Labor Code (Act of June 26, 1974, Labor Code) defines gender discrimination as an act that is „unwanted behavior of a sexual nature or relating

to the employee's gender, the purpose or effect of which is to violate the employee's dignity, in particular to create an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or insulting atmosphere towards him; This behavior may include physical, verbal or non-verbal elements (sexual harassment)" (Pawłowska-Cyprysiak, 2012, p. 17).

Gender discrimination can be divided, first of all, into direct and indirect. The first form concerns situations when a given individual, for reasons related to gender, was, is or could be treated worse than another individual. It is related to the individual relationship between the employee and the employer or the candidate for a given position and the potential employer. Indirect discrimination is related to seemingly neutral provisions, criteria or actions, which, however, lead to unfavorable disproportions (Pacian *et al.*, 2012, p. 81-85).

With technological progress, recruitment and selection are increasingly taking place online, in the form of so-called e-recruitment. Discrimination on the basis of gender was also observed in this form of conducting a recruitment interview or reviewing candidates' documents. This phenomenon is explained by the theory of rational bias, which shows how much influence the superior's behavior and the organizational climate have on employees. If discrimination is intentionally promoted in both of these aspects, subordinates who did not previously have their own prejudices are consciously encouraged to do so (Garcia-Izquierdo *et al.*, 2015, p. 157).

The criteria causing discrimination based on gender, illustrated in the theory of prejudice, are: the norm of preference and the instrumentality of compliance. They show that the basis of unequal treatment is the pressure exerted by superiors and clients, as well as the fear of ruining one's career in the event of failure to adapt to existing prejudices (Garcia-Izquierdo *et al.*, 2015, p. 157).

The private sphere influences the perception of gender roles in the professional sphere. This division assigns women household responsibilities, while men are called "breadwinners". These stereotypes are the basis for the occurrence of discrimination in the recruitment and selection process. Recruiters' opinions on asking questions about family situation during a recruitment interview vary. The fear of women's frequent absence and their lower involvement in professional duties due to the burden of housework make men the preferred gender for many positions (Pokrzywa, 2019, p. 83).

In the modern labor market, we can observe a change in the nature of gender discrimination, which previously focused only on the way women were treated in traditionally male professions. In the 21st century, attention began to be paid to the interference of a given phenomenon in men's professional lives (Manzi, 2019, p. 1). In recent years, the perception of discrimination against men has developed and is becoming more common and increasing. This phenomenon is caused by the social advancement of women and the increasing number of initiatives focusing on this gender. Moreover, women can increasingly boast higher education than men (Manzi, 2019, p. 2).

The change in the perception of gender discrimination has caused men to change their approach to their family and professional roles. When taking up work in feminized professions, just like women in masculinized professions, they still have to take into account unequal treatment. The new paradigm of masculinity, on the one hand, provides the opportunity for the development of the male gender in other spheres of private and professional life than before, but on the other hand, it exposes them to the risk of being ascribed weakness and helplessness (Dudak, 2019, p. 217-228).

## **Purpose and Methodology**

The main aim of the research was to identify the experiences of young adults and their perception of gender discrimination in the recruitment and selection process. The aim was identified based on a systematic review of the literature. The research was conducted using an online survey addressed to young adults, i.e. people aged 18 to 30. During the research, the focus was on subordinating them in such a way as to achieve the main goal and find answers to the following research questions:

- Are men, young adults, more likely to be discriminated against because of their gender during a job interview than women from this group?
- Do women, more often than men, pay attention to gender-related discriminatory factors in job advertisements?
- During a recruitment interview, is the most common gender-based discrimination directed at women to suggest the possibility of getting pregnant in the near future?

The survey was made available on electronic platforms. The study involved 127 respondents out of 377, which increases the maximum error from 5% to 7%. They were mainly students of the Faculty of Economic Sciences of the University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn. The study was conducted in April 2023. Among the respondents, 98% were young adults, the remaining 2% did not participate in the further part of the study. The majority of respondents were women (72%). 23% of them were working part-time students, who constituted the largest group of respondents. Men are mostly working people (31% of male respondents). Taking into account all respondents, the largest part were working people (22%).

## **Findings**

The research shows that out of 124 young adults, 20 of them did not participate in any recruitment process. There were 12 women (13.5% of this gender) and 8 men (22.9% of this gender). These people were excluded from answering questions

about their recruitment and selection experiences. Among women, the most responses were about participation in several or a dozen recruitment processes – 58 responses (65.2% participation). The situation was similar among men. In this case 62.9% of respondents had sufficient experience to reliably answer the questions asked in the survey.

The respondents were asked to indicate the intensity of their experience related to discriminatory factors in job advertisements. For this purpose, a 5-point response scale was used, where 1 – I definitely have no experience, 2 – I rather have no experience, 3 – I have experience but it was not frequent, 4 – I have experience, most of the advertisements I read indicated such factors, 5 – such factors were definitely indicated in each advertisement, the results of the analyzes are presented in Table 1, responses were provided by 104 young adults.

Table 1

Opinion of respondents regarding their experiences regarding discriminatory factors included in job advertisements

Specification	Share in %	Factor intensity
Woman	74.0	2.32
1 – I definitely have no experience	26.0	
2 – I don’t have much experience	32.5	
3 – I have experiences, but they were not frequent	24.7	
4 – I have experience in most advertisements	16.9	
5 – I have experience, such factors were indicated in each advertisement	0	
Man	26.0	2.0
1 – I definitely have no experience	37.0	
2 – I don’t have much experience	33.3	
3 – I have experiences, but they were not frequent	22.2	
4 – I have experience in most advertisements	7.4	
5 – I have experience, such factors were indicated in each advertisement	0	

Source: own study based on research.

The intensity of the factor, both in the case of women and men, indicates little experience with discriminatory factors in job advertisements. However, this does not change the fact that the phenomenon occurred. Among women, approximately 17% have such experiences and indicate that most advertisements included information that the respondents interpreted as a sign of discrimination, over 7% of men also indicate such a phenomenon. An important declaration is the fact that 37% of surveyed men do not indicate such experiences and

26% of women also declare that when reading job advertisements they did not notice any information that could be classified as discriminatory. When such experiences were identified, they concerned the preferences for recruiting employees of a specific gender, Table 2.

Table 2

Emphasizing the required gender of a candidate for a vacant position  
in the opinion of respondents

Specification	Share in %	Factor intensity
Woman	77.0	2.88
1 – I definitely have no experience	14.0	
2 – I don't have much experience	24.6	
3 – I have experiences, but they were not frequent	22.8	
4 – I have experience in most advertisements	36.8	
5 – I have experience, such factors were indicated in each advertisement	1.8	
Man	23.0	2.71
1 – I definitely have no experience	11.8	
2 – I don't have much experience	29.4	
3 – I have experiences, but they were not frequent	41.2	
4 – I have experience in most advertisements	11.8	
5 – I have experience, such factors were indicated in each advertisement	5.9	

Source: own study based on research.

The most common discriminatory factor in job advertisements turned out to be the statement about the willingness to employ a person of a specific gender for a vacant position. The respondents had such experience and noticed statements regarding gender preferences for a specific position, both in the case of surveyed women (approx. 37%) and men (12%). Additionally, only men observed other examples of factors in job advertisements, such as:

- “discrimination on the basis of gender identity (transgender and transphobia)”;
- “specific type of beauty required”;
- “gender and appearance requirements in jobs requiring appearance”.

Research conducted for the Gender Index, cited by Pawłowska-Cyprysiak (2012, p. 17), showed the presence of only the masculine form in job advertisements, not only in the job description, but also referring directly to potential candidates. This is consistent with the respondents' answers, because the use of only the masculine gender in job titles indirectly results in women feeling that their gender is not suitable for a given vacancy.

Kamińska (2015, p. 100) also writes about discriminatory factors in job advertisements. Based on the information she has collected, she confirms the existence of gender inequalities. It shows that employers, trying to protect themselves against women's unavailability at work (pregnancy, holidays, etc.), which, of course, on the one hand can be justified but on the other hand treated as a manifestation of stereotypes, include preferences as to the gender of the candidate in job advertisements. Additionally, there are cases where the gender required for a position is provided without hesitation.

The next two questions concerned the experiences of young adults related to discrimination during a job interview or candidate selection. The results of the first of these questions are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

The phenomenon of discrimination during a recruitment interview or candidate selection – the perspective of young adults

Specification	Share in %	Factor intensity
Woman	74.0	1.79
1 – I definitely have no experience	50.6	
2 – I don't have much experience	29.9	
3 – I have experiences, but they were not frequent	10.4	
4 – I have experience in most conversations	7.8	
5 – I have experience, such factors were mentioned during each conversation	1.3	
Man	26.0	1.59
1 – I definitely have no experience	63.0	
2 – I don't have much experience	18.5	
3 – I have experiences, but they were not frequent	14.8	
4 – I have experience in most conversations	3.7	
5 – I have experience, such factors were mentioned during each conversation	0	

Source: own study based on research.

Discrimination during a recruitment interview is not commonly noticed among the respondents, and a definite lack of such experiences is declared by 51% of women and 63% of surveyed men. 9.1% of respondents believe that they have such experiences and they were carried out in most or every conversation. It should therefore be stated that the phenomenon under study is not common, but it occurs among both men and women, although with different intensity.

Detailed examples of discriminatory behavior on the part of the recruiter are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Discriminatory behavior on the part of the recruiter – experiences of young adults

Specification	Stating that the position requires a person with higher physical fitness, based solely on stature		Stating that a man or a woman is needed for this position		Suggesting the possibility of getting pregnant in the near future	
	Share in %	Factor intensity	Share in %	Factor intensity	Share in %	Factor intensity
Woman	79.2	1.53	79.2	2.58	79.2	2.39
1 – I definitely have no experience	50.0		18.4		23.7	
2 – I don't have much experience	21.1		28.9		18.4	
3 – I have experiences, but they were not frequent	5.3		5.3		13.2	
4 – I have experience in most conversations	7.9		18.4		18.4	
5 – I have experience, such factors were mentioned during each conversation	2.6		18.4		13.2	
Man	20.8	2.7	20.8	3.6	20.8	1.6
1 – I definitely have no experience	20.0		0		50.0	
2 – I don't have much experience	10.0		20.0		0	
3 – I have experiences, but they were not frequent	20.0		20.0		20.0	
4 – I have experience in most conversations	30.0		40.0		0	
5 – I have experience, such factors were mentioned during each conversation	10.0		20.0		10.0	

Source: own study based on research.

The examples presented in the table indicate the advantage of experience in the field of discriminatory behavior among men. Among women, the most common answer was the statement that a man or a woman is needed for this position (factor intensity of 2.58). However, this was not a significant difference in relation to the frequency of occurrence of this phenomenon among women, e.g. suggesting the possibility of getting pregnant in the near future (intensity – 2.39). These data confirm the conclusions of Bombiak (2016, p. 65), who, based on her research, stated that women have problems with finding employment due to employers' concerns about the possibility of the employee getting pregnant. It indicates that questions about reproductive plans or private life may appear during recruitment interviews.



Regardless of gender, respondents point to the same most common phenomena of discrimination. Respondents provided their own examples of discriminatory behavior on the part of the recruiter, which, in the opinion of the surveyed women, concerned having a child and questions about starting a family in the next five years. The men drew attention to the “notorious misgendering” and invasive questions in this regard.

After a series of questions about respondents’ experiences with discrimination in the recruitment and selection process, they were asked to indicate whether their friends had also experienced the phenomenon under study. The related results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5

The occurrence of discrimination in the recruitment and selection process among friends in the opinion of the respondents

Specification	Share in %	Factor intensity
Woman	71.8	2.87
1 – definitely not	11.2	
2 – probably not	23.6	
3 – I have friends like this, but such phenomena were not common	38.2	
4 – I have friends who have experienced discrimination in most recruitment processes	21.3	
5 – I have friends who have experienced discrimination during every recruitment process	5.6	
Man	28.2	2.66
1 – definitely not	20.0	
2 – probably not	22.9	
3 – I have friends like this, but such phenomena were not common	31.4	
4 – I have friends who have experienced discrimination in most recruitment processes	22.9	
5 – I have friends who have experienced discrimination during every recruitment process	2.9	

Source:own study based on research.

Friends of both respondents experienced the phenomenon under study, but these were not frequent experiences. When asked about the form of discrimination they most often faced, having to choose between nationality, disability, gender, race and age, the latter was most often mentioned (28%), followed by gender (23%).

The research included the issue of the effects of discrimination on the behavior of young adults, e.g. the impact of discrimination in the recruitment and selection process on the respondents’ self-esteem; 50% of respondents participated in this part of the study. The results are presented in Table 6.

Table 6

The impact of discrimination in the recruitment and selection process  
on respondents' self-esteem

Specification	Share in %	Factor intensity
Woman	79.2	2.32
1 (had a very negative impact)	7.9	
2 (had a negative impact)	57.9	
3 (had no effect)	31.6	
4 (had a positive impact)	0	
5 (had a very positive impact)	2.6	
Man	20.8	2.80
1 (had a very negative impact)	0	
2 (had a negative impact)	50.0	
3 (had no effect)	30.0	
4 (had a positive impact)	10.0	
5 (had a very positive impact)	10.0	

Source: own study based on research.

For every respondent, discrimination in recruitment and selection had a negative impact. In several cases, it did not cause any reaction from the discriminated person. However, it should be noted that it largely left unpleasant memories and negative effects, especially in the situation of women. This may mean that men are more resistant to discrimination directed at them than women.

The entire study was complemented by checking which statement regarding discrimination in the recruitment and selection process the respondents agreed with the most. 124 respondents responded, and the results are presented in Table 7.

Table 7

Respondents' opinions regarding discrimination in the recruitment and selection process

Specification	Share in %
Woman	71.8
I have no opinion	5.6
Understand and accept in certain situations	31.5
Fight it at all costs and prevent it from happening	60.7
Accept it because it is deeply rooted in our subconscious due to existing stereotypes and prejudices	2.2
Man	28.2
I have no opinion	5.7
Understand and accept in certain situations	31.4
Fight it at all costs and prevent it from happening	57.1
Accept it because it is deeply rooted in our subconscious due to existing stereotypes and prejudices	5.7

Source: own study based on research.

In the case of both surveyed women and men, approximately 60% declare their position on combating and preventing discrimination. In the case of 2% of women and approximately 6% of surveyed men, they declare that they understand the phenomenon of discrimination and accept it in specific situations. It can be concluded that despite many efforts to counteract discrimination in the recruitment and selection process, young adults are aware that this phenomenon will occur anyway.

## Conclusions

The results of the conducted research confirm that in the modern labor market, discrimination not only against women but also against men is becoming more and more common, as noted by other authors (Manzi, 2019).

The analysis of literature studies and the conducted research made it possible to formulate several conclusions about gender discrimination in the recruitment and selection process among young adults.

Both discriminatory factors in job advertisements and those appearing in the recruiter's behavior apply only to a small extent to people aged eighteen to thirty. This, however, does not mean that they do not occur, but they differ in intensity between the sexes.

Women were more likely to pay attention to discrimination in job advertisements (which is a positive answer to the second research question), while men were more likely to experience unequal treatment from the recruiter, taking into account only some of the most common examples of such behavior. This indicates an affirmative answer to the first research question.

During a job interview, women they more often had experiences with the statement that a man was needed for this position and this was the main discriminatory phenomenon. Suggestions about the possibility of getting pregnant in the near future was not the main topic, as suggested in research question no. 3.

The respondents declared that gender discrimination was not the most common type of unequal treatment among their friends. This form was in second place. However, on the podium there was unequal treatment due to age.

Despite the ubiquitous opinion about the negative impact of discrimination on recruits, there are still many cases where a given phenomenon does not cause any reaction from a young adult. Is the phenomenon in question becoming so common that the younger generation starting their experience in the labor market does not notice the problem of discrimination? Explaining this problem requires additional research and observations.

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