

# Gender discrimination still a factor in modern organizations -- 'that's what she said'

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The World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Report states, "No country in the world has yet managed to eliminate the gender gap." In the U.S., the Bureau of Labor Statistics cites women working 41 to 44 hours per week earn 84.6% of what men working similar hours earn; women working more than 60 hours per week earn only 78.3% of what men in the same time category earn. The disparity between men and women in the workplace is the subject of a recent study by Elisabeth Kelan, Ph.D., from King's College London.

Dr. Kelan found that workers acknowledge gender discrimination is possible in modern organizations, but at the same time maintain their workplaces to be gender neutral. The author notes, "gender fatigue" as the cause for workers not acknowledging that bias against women can occur. The findings are available in the September issue of the *Canadian Journal of Administrative Sciences*, published on behalf of the Administrative Sciences Association of Canada by John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

The study conducted in 2003-2004, included 26 men and women from two information communication technology (ICT) companies based in Switzerland. The companies were given assumed names for this study—"Redtech," a local 50-person Swiss company and "Bluetech," a subsidiary of a multinational enterprise, employing 3000 staff in Switzerland. At Redtech 11 men and 4 women participated in interviews and at Bluetech 6 women and 5 men were interviewed; 16 individuals were also followed on the job for several hours. The interviewees,

ranging in age from 24-54, were asked about their views on gender discrimination as well as other issues.

Employees from both companies claimed their organizations were gender neutral and that employees were evaluated based on merit. With further questioning, men and women interviewed could describe past situations where gender bias occurred against women, but limited it to happening 10 to 20 years ago, from contacts outside their own organizations (i.e. customer contacts), or to an isolated male colleague from an "older" generation. "Instead of denying gender discrimination, workers acknowledge it can happen but construct it as singular events that happened in the past, placing the onus on women to overcome such obstacles," stated Dr. Kelan.

Participants in the study displayed, what the author calls, "gender fatigue" where individuals tire of acting upon gender discrimination in spite of the fact that incidents of gender bias either occurred at one time within their organization or could occur again. "The problem with gender fatigue is that it prohibits productive discussion regarding inequalities between men and women, making gender bias difficult to address," noted Dr. Kelan. "Future studies should explore what happens to gender fatigue over time and whether practical strategies can be developed to shape the way in which people in organizations speak about gender."

More information: "Gender Fatigue: The Ideological Dilemma of [Gender](#) Neutrality and Discrimination in Organizations." Elisabeth K. Kelan. Canadian Journal of Administrative Sciences; Published Online: June 18, 2009 ([DOI: 10.1002/CJAS.106](https://doi.org/10.1002/CJAS.106)); Print Issue Date: September 2009.

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