

# Gender and racial inequalities pervasive in Oregon highway trades, new study finds

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Workplace discrimination and harassment are barriers to completing apprenticeships and obtaining successful careers in the highway trades for many women and racial/ethnic minorities in Oregon, according to a recently published study led by two Portland State professors.

Oregon has made some strides to include more [women](#) in the trade workforce, but Sociology professors Maura Kelly and Lindsey Wilkinson found that women and racial/ethnic minorities experience significantly more [workplace discrimination](#) than their white, male counterparts.

"It was like having two strikes: I'm a woman and a minority woman," one apprentice said in the study. "I don't think that the jobs that were offered to another person would've been offered to me."

Many women and racial/ethnic minorities reported receiving low-skill tasks such as flagging or sweeping, even while their supervisors were responsible for training them in heavy equipment or skilled tasks that could help them complete their apprenticeships.

"Not everyone has access to higher education, and apprenticeships leading to jobs in the construction trades offer a great alternative," Kelly said. "It's important that women and racial/ethnic minorities have the same opportunities to pursue these careers."

The Bureau of Labor and Industries in Oregon (BOLI) regulates trade

apprenticeship programs and, along with the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT), runs a Workforce Development Program to increase diversity of the workforce in the highway construction trades. However, despite rules intended to promote equality such as standardizing entry criteria and paying equal wages, a majority of apprentices indicated that harassment towards apprentices is deeply embedded into the culture of construction trades and that many apprentices and workers feared reporting incidents of harassment due to retaliation.

Kelly and Wilkinson are working closely with ODOT, BOLI and other local organizations such as Oregon Tradeswomen Inc. to evaluate programs and services aimed at increasing the number of women and people of color in the workforce, and to help create a bystander intervention program that can help decrease experiences of harassment and discrimination on job sites.

Provided by Portland State University

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