

## Demographics and Personal Characteristics as the Basis of Discrimination in Performance Appraisals

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### Abstract

This paper aims to understand demographic variables, such as gender, religious sects, age, physical attractiveness and perceived similarity as the basis of discrimination and bias in performance management in organizations of Pakistan. It also highlights the influence of discrimination on employee's motivation and performance. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 39 interviewees from the telecom, banking, education and IT sectors. Thematic analysis was carried out on the 98,330 words of data generated through these interviews. Results indicate that discrimination in terms of gender and perceived similarity was prevalent in the appraisal processes; for gender, discrimination was pro-female. Physical attractiveness was considered to be a prerequisite for several jobs; hence, favorable treatment on this basis was not labeled as discrimination by the appraisers. Also, different religious sects were found to influence implementation of the performance management process. Thus, this paper provides a country specific insight of discrimination in performance management, identifying the discriminatory factors that hold particular importance in the Pakistani culture, and hence contributes to the literature on differences in discrimination across cultures. However, the scope of this research is limited to two large cities of Pakistan with a sample of 39 interviewees. A diverse sample e.g. in smaller cities and towns, and of less developed sectors of the economy can provide further insight.

**Keywords:** Discrimination, Performance Management System, Performance Appraisal, Cross-Cultural HRM, Gender Discrimination, Convergence Vs. Divergence of HRM, Pakistan.

### 1. Introduction

Growing diversity in the workplace has increased the importance of equal opportunity and thus, discrimination in the workplace has become a widely studied phenomenon in human resources in recent years (Gunderson & Lee, 2016; Leslie, Manchester & Dahm, 2017; Rubin & Edwards, 2018; Szymanska & Rubin, 2018). Some examples of the area where work has been carried out include discrimination in hiring (Leslie et al., 2017; Villanueva-Flores, Valle & Bornay-Barrachina, 2017), the gender pay gap (Leslie et al., 2017; Sandberg, 2017), the glass ceiling effect (Acker, 2006; Baxter & Wright, 2002; Bell, McLaughlin & Sequeria, 2002; Smith, 2012), and impact of career progression and performance evaluation (Bento, White & Zacur, 2012; Hekman, Foo & Yang, 2017). Gender (Leslie et al., 2017; Maas & Gonzale, 2011), age (Snape & Redman, 2003), disability (Gunderson & Lee, 2016; Villanueva-Flores et al., 2017), race (Hekman, Foo & Yang, 2017) and physical attractiveness (Bento, White & Zacur, 2012; Cavico, Muffler & Mujtaba, 2012) are some of the commonly researched basis of discrimination.

In parallel to this, there is a body of literature on cross-cultural human resources which examines how globalization is affecting standardization of human resource practices (Azolukwam & Perkins, 2009; Huo, Huang & Napier, 2002; Rowley, Bae, Horak & Bacouel-Jentjens, 2016). While topics related to differences in HR practices across national cultures has become a part of cross-cultural literature (Nadeem, Raza, Kayani, Aziz & Nayab, 2018), discrimination have not been examined cross culturally. Thus, focusing on performance management systems, this paper examines how discrimination on the basis of various demographic characteristics varies across societal settings. Our primary objective is to understand how gender, religious sects, age, physical attractiveness and perceived similarity alter different stages of performance management system. We compare our findings with the literature, which comes predominantly from the West, to understand whether basis of discrimination vary across societies. In addition to this, we also examine the impact of discrimination on motivation and performance, if such discrimination is known to exist. By doing so, we wish to contribute to the body of knowledge on discrimination in HR, cross-cultural HR and performance management. This study was motivated by discussion with practitioners in this area

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and employers; hence we aim to provide suggestions for the practitioner community at a local and international level. Following the introduction section, the authors first provide some background material about discrimination in performance management from the international literature. This is followed by a discussion on the societal and cultural setup of Pakistan, and how this may result in positive or negative discrimination in Pakistan. The literature review section is followed by the methodology, analysis and discussion sections. Finally, the authors have made recommendations for employers and managers on how to reduce biasness when it comes to performance appraisals and have also given directions for future research.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Discrimination in Performance Management**

Performance management system is one of the most important tools of managing human resources. It is used by organizations to estimate and evaluate an individual employee's conduct and achievements for a defined time period, and also provides the basis for increments, bonuses, training and development of employees. However, because of its subjective nature, the appraisers are exposed to a vast number of biases that may affect their ability to evaluate fairly (Bento et al., 2012; Lyness & Heilman, 2006; Rubin & Edwards, 2018; Wayne & Liden, 1995).

Discussions on discrimination in performance management can be divided into two groups. The first group relates to typical biases, such as horn effect, halo effect and central tendency, which are covered extensively in the basic literature on performance management (Aguinis, 2014; Armstrong, 2009). The second group discusses discrimination based on demographics and personal characteristics, such as gender, age, ethnicity, physical appearance and perceived similarity to the appraiser (Bento et al., 2012; Cavico et al, 2012; Heilman & Stopeck 1985; Hekman, Foo & Yang, 2017; Maas & Gonzalez 2011; Settles, Buchanan & Stevie, 2010). It is critical to understand and reduce such biases and any discrimination resulting from it, as this not only affects the positivity to be gained by the system, but can also lead to considerable negative effect on the motivation level and performance of the employees (DeNisi & Pritchard 2006; Ghorpade & Chen, 1995). Such perceptions can also lead to reduced job satisfaction and organizational commitment, which in turn lead to lower level of individual performance (Hasan 2014; Malik & Aslam 2013; Poon 2004).

Gender is a widely researched basis for discrimination (Leslie et al., 2017; Maas & Gonzale, 2011). A large body of this literature has clearly established that appraisers tend to show a pro-male bias (Heckman et al., 2017; Lyness & Heilman, 2006; Maas & Gonzalez, 2011; Szymanska & Rubin, 2018). Research also explains that the gender of the appraiser as well as the appraisee has an impact on outcome of appraisal, particularly where there is more room for subjectivity (Maas & Gonzalez, 2011). However, some recent empirical research has given contradictory conclusions, suggesting that a 'gender contrast effect' occurs when a female's performance in traditional male roles exceed those predicated by typically believed stereotypes and as a result of this unexpected behavior, appraisers inflate the performance ratings of women (Millmore, Biggs & Morse, 2007). Another form of discrimination at the workplace is on the basis of an employee's age. Such discrimination occurs when an aged individual is not provided with equal employment opportunities, is paid less and denied promotions, bonuses and trainings on the basis of age grouping (Snape & Redman, 2003). Consequently, this has a negative impact on their recruitment, training and career development (Ghosheh, 2008; Kunze, Boehm & Bruch, 2011). Some explanations offered for this include that older employees are perceived to have certain undesirable characteristics, including poor health, an inflexible attitude, resistance to change and low trainability (Kunze et al., 2011).

Perceived similarity may also have a direct impact on the performance ratings. A rater who finds similarity in his personality and characteristics with a subordinate is likely to rate the subordinate positively as compared to a dissimilar subordinate (Szymanska & Rubin, 2018; Wayne & Liden, 1995). Perceived demographic similarity may also be in terms of race and gender (Strauss, Barrick & Connerley, 2001), or on the basis of ethnicity and culture (Acker, 2006). Raters are more confident in inflating the ratings of individuals belonging to their own racial and ethnic groups, while deflating ratings on these terms also takes place because of a conscious animus towards racial minorities at workplace (Hekman et al., 2017; Settles et al., 2010).

Physical attractiveness is another major factor which may play a salient role when it comes to impression formation at the workplace. Research has shown that employment decisions like selection and promotion are influenced by physical attractiveness of an individual (Cavico et al., 2012; Heilman & Stopeck, 1985; Judge, Hurst & Simon, 2008; Mahajan, 2007). Heilman and Stopeck (1985) found that for non-managerial positions, females benefitted from good looks, but in managerial positions it became a liability. When discussing the stigma of obesity, Bento et al. (2012) argued that appearance based discrimination was at play; it not only affected the rating and rewards structure of the appraisee, but also affected his/her cognitions, feelings and behaviors which may have long term impact on motivation and performance of the individual. Studies have revealed that the rater has been known to assign ratings to an individual by overlooking his or her education, experience, and competencies in favor of the visual cues (Wayne & Liden, 1995). However, sometimes appropriate dressing has a more dominant impact on employers than just physical attractiveness (Subhani & Azmat, 2012).

## **2.2 Discrimination in the Context of Pakistan**

Convergence versus divergence of HR practices across cultures is an extensively debated topic (Azolukwam & Perkins, 2009; Rowley et al., 2016). The argument revolves around the question of whether organizations are becoming dissimilar or whether there are similarities growing due to globalization of businesses and advancement of technology (Ralston, 2008). It also covers whether HR practices which are more effective in one culture, are likely to be equally effective in another culture (Khilji, 2013; Nadeem et al., 2018; Rowley et al., 2016). Extending this argument to discrimination, we are interested in understanding whether basis of discrimination in performance management, which has been studied in the West, would operate in a similar manner in the South-Asian country of Pakistan.

The national culture of a country is determined by its history, language, geographical location and religion. Pakistani culture is very distinctive, as it is shaped by rich cultural heritage, religious values, and the influence of surrounding South Asian countries (Paracha, 2015). It is a country, which, according to the annual Global Gender Gap Report (2015), has been ranked second to last for gender equality across the world, and where the rate of female activity outside the home is one of the lowest in the world. It scores the lowest in gender egalitarian in cross-cultural studies (Nadeem & Sully de Luque, 2018). Gender disparities may be persistent as women are less educated than men, their access to employment and income activities is restricted, and their health and nutritional status is lower as compared to their counterparts (Bhattacharya, 2014; Isran & Isran, 2012; Shah & Baporikar, 2013). However, Pakistan, being an Islamic Republic, functions in the context of Islamic values and law. Islam provides basic equality and equal legal rights to women (Bhattacharya, 2014). Islamic also values social justice, and respect and care for elders (Elsaman & Arafa, 2012; Syed & Ali, 2010). Further, based on cultural and religious values, previous studies have shown that age and experience is looked upon as an asset in the Pakistani culture (Mushtaq, Haider & Khan, 2015; Nadeem, 2013). Similarly, in line with religious values, physical attractiveness is not considered to be asset (Subhani & Azmat, 2012).

Regarding perceived similarity, regional grouping and religious sects are prevalent in Pakistan (Khilji, 2003; Nadeem & Kayani, 2017). The country constitutes of four main provinces, and the widely spoken languages around the country are Pashto, Sindhi, Seraiki, Punjabi and Balochi. These ethnic groups and languages create a diverse cultural scenario in Pakistan. While working in organizations within groups or under a supervisor, workers perceive ethnic diversity with less trust and respect, and prefer working with an ethnically homogenous supervisor and group (Ayub & Jehn, 2010).

It is in this cultural context that we examine whether gender, age, physical attractiveness and perceived similarity impact the process of performance management in organisations in the cities of Pakistan, and whether any discrimination was perceived by the appraisers or the appraisees. We also investigate whether and religious sects, a characteristics which is not commonly researched in the West but is important in this country's culture, results in any discrimination in the performance management process. Our objective is to understand whether discrimination in performance management exists in the Pakistani society, and whether basis of discrimination vary across societies.

### 3. Methodology

Semi structured interviews were conducted in the telecom, banking, education and IT sectors of Rawalpindi and Islamabad, focusing on organizations with an established performance management system. Another selection criterion was that the organizations should have a reasonable number of females (having at least 30% females). Appraisers, appraisees and HR specialists were contacted to share their experiences during the interviews; the achieved sample size was 39 interviews. Table 1 represents sample characteristics. Overall, 26 participants were male, and 13 were female; 20 belonged to the banking sector, 11 to the telecom sector, while the remaining to the other two sectors.

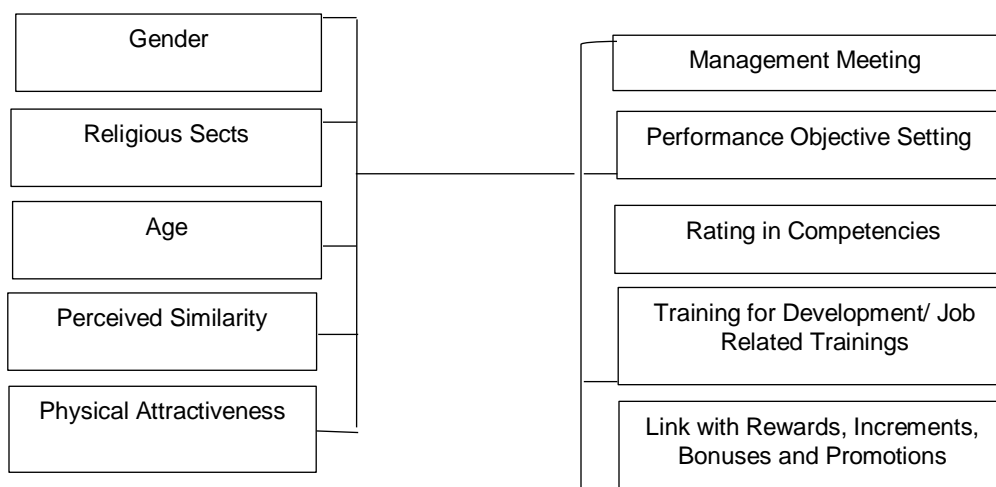
The participants were assured of confidential use of data, and interviews were recorded with prior permission. Separate, over-lapping, semi-structured interview guides were developed for the HR-specialists, appraisers and appraisees. The guide for the HR-specialists was designed to get an overview of the performance management system of each organization under study, while the remaining two guides asked questions about perceived discrimination on the basis of the five key characteristics in various stages of performance management system. The five basis of discrimination in the five performance management system stages are listed in Figure 1. Interview length varied from 20 minutes to 1 hour and 40 minutes, with an average time of 38 minutes. The initial participants were contacted by using the connections of the research group. Further participants were reached by using snowball sampling method within each organization after the first contact to identify participants for this sensitive topic. The 39 interviews were transcribed, resulting in 230 pages and 98,330 words of data. The transcriptions were manually coded and thematic analysis was carried out. The categories and sub-categories for thematic analysis were the five basis of discrimination and five performance management system areas presented in Figure 1. Also, two themes were created for any comments on motivation and performance. The coding structure is presented in Table 2.

**Table 1: Sample Characteristics of Participants**

Sector	Gender	Unit	Work Experience in current Organization	Overall Work Experience (including current)	No. of Performance Appraisals in current Organization	Recording Time	Transcript Word Count
Banking	M	Appraiser	10 M	3 Y	1	36m 10s	4,646
Banking	M	Appraiser	15 Y	15 Y	15	43m 51s	2,175
Banking	M	HR-Specialist	1 Y	5 Y	1	34m 53s	2,805
Banking	F	Appraiser	7 Y	7 Y	7	25m 45s	2,611
Banking	M	Appraiser	3 Y	13 Y	3	1h 20m 9s	6,710
Banking	M	HR-Specialist	1 Y	5 Y	1	33m 59s	3,516
Banking	M	Appraiser	4 ½ Y	4 ½ Y	4	35m 48s	2,326
Banking	M	Appraiser	4 M	20 Y	1	49m 28s	6,647
Banking	M	Appraiser	2 Y	10 Y	2	34m 27s	2,356
Banking	M	Appraiser	9 Y	9 Y	8	43m 49s	3,054
Banking	M	Appraiser	5 Y	5 Y	5	23m 30s	1,363
Banking	M	HR-Specialist	9 Y	9 Y	8	-	1,531
Banking	M	Appraiser	3 Y	3 Y	2	33m 51s	2,324
Banking	M	Appraiser	1 ½ Y	1 ½ Y	1	35m 22s	1,792
Banking	F	Appraiser	1 Y	3 Y	1	39m 3s	2,670
Banking	M	Appraiser	2 ½ Y	5 Y	2	1h 10m 42s	2,514
Banking	F	Appraiser	1 Y	1 Y	1	-	1,411
Banking	F	Appraiser	20 Y	20 Y	19	43m 51s	2,858
Banking	F	Appraiser	5 ½ Y	5 ½ Y	5	46m	1,688
Banking	F	Appraiser	3 Y	5 Y	3	54m 5s	2,447
Telecom	M	Appraiser	2 ½ Y	2 ½ Y	2	32m 20s	1,470
Telecom	M	Appraiser	4 Y	4 Y	2	19m 13s	1,482

Telecom	M	Appraisee	9 Y	9 Y	8	30m 51s	2,153
Telecom	M	Appraiser	10 Y & 3 M	10 Y & 3 M	9	20m 39s	850
Telecom	M	Appraisee	1 ½ Y	1 ½ Y	2	40m 8s	4,217
Telecom	M	Appraisee	2 Y	3 Y	2	18m 50s	1,945
Telecom	F	Appraiser	14 Y	14 Y	1	12m 8s	652
Telecom	F	Appraisee	1 Y	1 Y	1	1h 40s	3,218
Telecom	F	Appraisee	1 Y	1 Y	1	1h 40s	865
Telecom	F	Appraisee	7 M	3 Y	1	1h 40s	3,024
Telecom	F	Appraisee	3 Y	9 Y	3	24m 8s	2,828
IT	M	Appraisee	5 Y	7 Y	5	1h 1m 13s	4,600
IT	M	Appraisee	2 ½ Y	8 Y	2	34m 58s	4,708
IT	M	Appraisee	7 Y	7 Y	7	26m 48s	3,026
IT	M	Appraisee	3 M	2 Y & 3 M	1	25m 20s	2,411
Education	F	Appraisee	11 Y	11 Y	11	20m 32s	1,585
Education	F	Appraisee	4 Y	4 Y	4	34m 48s	1,197
Education	F	Appraisee	2 ½ Y	2 ½ Y	2	34m 48s	809
Education	F	Appraisee	3 Y	3 Y	3	34m 48s	1,074
						Average Time: 38m 3s	Total: 98,330

**Figure 1: Categories and Subcategories for Thematic Analysis**



**Table 2: Template for Thematic Analysis**

Description of coding structure	Code
<b>Gender</b>	
Gender and Appraisal Meeting	GAM
Gender and Objective Setting	GOS
Gender, and Training and Development	GTD
Gender, and Rating in Competencies	GRC
Gender, and Bonus and Promotion	GBP
<b>Age</b>	
Age and Appraisal Meeting	AAM
Age and Objective Setting	AOS
Age, and Training and Development	ATD
Age, and Rating in Competencies	ARC
Age, and Bonus and Promotion	ABP
<b>Religion</b>	
Religion and Appraisal Meeting	RAM

Religion and Objective Setting	ROS
Religion, and Training and Development	RTD
Religion, and Rating in Competencies	RRC
Religion, and Bonus and Promotion	RBP
<b>Perceived Similarity</b>	
Perceived Similarity and Appraisal Meeting	PSAM
Perceived Similarity and Objective Setting	PSOS
Perceived Similarity, and Training and Development	PSTD
Perceived Similarity, and Rating in Competencies	PSRC
Perceived Similarity, and Bonus and Promotion	PSBP
<b>Physical Attractiveness</b>	
Physical Attractiveness and Appraisal Meeting	PAAM
Physical Attractiveness and Objective Setting	PAOS
Physical Attractiveness, and Training and Development	PATD
Physical Attractiveness, and Rating in Competencies	PARC
Physical Attractiveness, and Bonus and Promotion	PABP
<b>Motivation</b>	MOT
<b>Performance</b>	PER
<b>Recommendations</b>	REC

#### 4. Analysis

Overall, we found some evidence of positive discrimination in favor of females and older workers. The results are discussed in the following section with a narrative array presented in Table 3.

##### 4.1 Discrimination on the Basis of Gender

A majority of the participants thought that their female colleagues were given relaxation as easy objectives and tasks were set for them; expectations were kept low; flexible working hours were given to them (*“as it is believed that they have to maintain a work-life balance”*); and more importance was given to a female’s work as compared to their counterpart’s even if she had done less work. Then at the end of the year their performance automatically increased eventually making them rated higher than their male colleagues. The findings revealed that sixty percent of the male participants were furious as to how they were treated indifferently and were given no leniency in ratings, unlike females. Many of the male participants argued that as a culture of feminism was growing in many of Pakistan’s top tier organizations, every other large-scale organization was driving towards developing females for succession planning. Surprisingly, female participants affirmed the male perception that they were given an edge when it came to performance appraisals.

A male employee from the banking sector said:

*Once, I said to my line manager that I have done this and that, he said that someone else in this organization, she knows nothing about reconciliation but she’s doing really well. I was expecting seventy percent from her and she is giving me eighty percent and I expected two hundred percent from you and you gave me one fifty percent. So, at the end expectations do matter. And I said what do you want me to do? Should I go and climb the pole to highlight myself?*

(Male, 3 years of experience, appraisee)

A related response which came from the participants was that they believed that opposite genders tended to give favors to each other, and some went on to say that given their own appraiser was a male, so he gave favors to female employees.

##### 4.2 Discrimination on the Basis of Religious Sects

A majority of the participants believed that opposite sects didn’t work well in the workplace; when an appraiser found someone from a different sect in the appraisee’s seat, there was bias or discrimination. Several participants gave examples, stating that e.g. ‘Syed Family’ and ‘Ahl-e-Tashi (name of specific sects) prefer their family. One participant went on to say that *“anyone who thinks that he is weak, he builds an army of similar (zaat/baradari) people around him or her”*.

##### 4.3 Discrimination on the Basis of Age

Almost eighty percent senior employees outrightly disagreed when asked whether discrimination occurred on the basis of age in their organization. Many commented that rather than age, performance

mattered, by using alternative words such as 'efficiency', 'capabilities', 'abilities', 'knowledge' and 'skills'. As per these interviewees, if an employee delivered an excellent performance, regardless of the fact that he or she was a junior in age, he or she would get an edge over other employees. However, they added that, as per Islamic and Pakistani traditions, the element of respect and regard always existed towards an aged employee. The remaining suggested positive bias or discrimination towards aged employees, referring to Islamic and Pakistani traditions.

#### 4.4 Discrimination on the Basis of Perceived Similarity

It is generally believed that an appraiser is more inclined to trust a person he or she thinks is similar to him or her, which affects the performance management process. In this study, a majority of the employees agreed to the statement that discrimination existed on the basis of perceived similarity. As pointed out by the respondents, similar accent, interest, strategic vision, caste, region/locality, sect and even similar political affiliation were basis of perceived similarity. A number of employees commented on how if both the employee and the manager had similar interests, they would communicate more, their understanding and comfort level with each other would be higher, and they would *"take risks together"*.

#### 4.5 Discrimination on the Basis of Physical Attractiveness

The factor for which there were mixed findings, and a difference in opinion between the appraiser and appraisee, was that of the physical attractiveness of the appraisee. Two categories of answers were recurrent. One group gave examples of how some of their colleagues who may not be called physically attractive were at the top positions, thus highlighting that what mattered was how competent one was. On the other hand, the second category were rejoicing the benefits of good looks and how it gave an edge over others, and that it counted as a skill and trait for leadership.

Overall, according to ninety percent of the appraisees, physical attractiveness played a significant role when it came to performance management and evaluation. They were of the view that sometimes the manager considers the looks, or as said by one of the employees, *"the beauty factor"*, of an employee and gives them more consideration while evaluating his or her performance. On the other hand the appraisers quoted physical attractiveness as *"professional attire"* of an individual, making it not discrimination but a necessity and a policy.

However, within discrimination on the basis of physical attractiveness, when asked about obesity, all the participants stated that obese employees were not discriminated against anywhere in Pakistan when it came to performance management. An employee remarked, *"Weight has no relation with the appraisal."*

#### 4.6 Impact of discrimination on motivation and performance

The participants believed that if the performance management system was transparent, fair and objective then it increased the motivation of the employees; a majority unanimously agreed that discrimination in performance management de-motivated employees. A number of participants commented that discrimination in performance management led to such de-motivation that employees started to lose focus on their job which badly affected the next level management as well. Some participants also suggested that if they ever faced any kind of discrimination, they will definitely lower their performance to an average level and this will consequently have a negative effect on the productivity of the organization. One of the respondents from a well reputed bank laid importance to this and said:

*When you come in the market, you have to fight everyone....be it a friendly or an unfriendly fight but you are always in a tussle, and those who don't get reward, they get de-motivated.*

(Male, 7 years of experience, appraisee)

However, a significant number of respondents had a different, more altruistic, outlook to being discriminated against in performance management; they believed that rather than de-motivating them, bad management led them to focus more on their performance, resulting in better results next year.

*I lowered down my monetary expectations but not my motivation. Motivation levels vary from person to person some people start to cry and some people start to perform better.*

(Male, 1 ½ years of experience, appraisee)

*It all depends on you that if you take it positively or negatively. You stand nowhere if you go on a negative track in a healthy competition.*

(Male, 5 years of experience, appraisee)

Another participant from a well reputed organization argued:

*If you have been working and performing quite well but you are not being rewarded justly. For once you would ignore, twice you would ignore but thrice is sheer negligence I would say.*

(Male, 5 years of experience, appraiser). Some of the respondents also believed that lowering the performance is of no use when people know that ultimately, they have to achieve their targets and if they don't, they will be fired.

**Table 3: Sample comments of the respondents on discrimination**

Categories	Comments
Gender	<i>It (discrimination in terms of gender) exists in objective setting, and year-end ratings and trainings as well. Actually the thing is, for instance, our manager says that we need to bring females forward and even though they perform badly, we need to promote them so that others (other females) can be encouraged as well.....also due to lenient ratings, rewards and increments are also affected positively for females. (Male, 8 years of experience, appraisee)</i>
	<i>In Pakistani organizations females are preferred more than males. This is hundred and one percent true. (Male, 20 years of experience, appraisee)</i>
	<i>Well, I believe that females are given more consideration. That has happened to me in the past so I can say that. I am telling you about immediate colleagues that this happens. (Female, 5 years of experience, appraiser)</i>
Religious Sects	<i>If I do not share the same faith with you (manager)...There is a chance that he might discriminate me on the basis of this. (Male, 1 ½ years of experience, appraiser)</i>
	<i>Discrimination exists but not between Muslims and Christians but in 'shias' and 'sunnis'. And 'shias' prefer 'Ahl-e-Tasheeh' more as compared to 'sunnis'. (Male, 4 ½ years of experience, appraisee)</i>
	<i>He (my job interviewer) said: 'Mola karam karay ga' (Ali will give blessings) and I replied: 'Allah karam karay ga' (Allah will give blessings)'. And then he dropped me from the list and didn't even select me for the job, let alone getting selected and then management. (Male, 10 years of experience, appraisee)</i>
Age	<i>I think that if a junior employee has all the certifications that a senior employee has in his field of work, the junior will be given an edge in performance management (as he has a better growth potential). ( Male, 7 years of experience, appraisee)</i>
	<i>Your skills take you forward not your age, but the element of respect is always present towards an aged colleague. (Male, 9 years of experience, appraiser)</i>
	<i>This (discrimination on the basis of age) is not prevalent in my company. You can get promotion whenever you perform exceptionally. As for me, this is my 3<sup>rd</sup> year here and I have been appraised twice. (Female, 5 years of experience, appraisee)</i>
Physical Attractiveness	<i>Preference will be given everywhere. It is everywhere starting from your own home. She would be more loved than the other sister in my opinion, if she is much pretty, and whenever she is going to go to university, walk around or whatever, she is going to go to a better office and get better management. This rubbish is here too much, this rubbish is too much in our country and in our society. (Male, 20 years of experience, appraisee)</i>
	<i>Look when you go to rent or purchase a home, what do you look in it? How neat is the home? If you find neatness, you are willing to pay extra as well. The same thing applies here...the neatness which is seen in your personality does have an impact (on appraisal). (Male, 10 years of experience, appraiser)</i>
	<i>The organization grooms you and makes your personality. This doesn't mean that they make you a pastry and expect no performance. (Female, 5 years of experience, appraisee)</i>
Perceived similarity	<i>At the end of the day you start drawing similarities. Let's just say that you like football and me being an appraiser like it too. Then, you start digging into it. Okay, you like playing football and....? Listening to music? And what not...so you develop a framework of that mindset with that person and it develops automatically. (Female, 3 years of experience, appraisee)</i>



	<p><i>If I differ from him (the appraiser) in ideas, he will put me on one side and for sure he will promote people who he has something common with. You see, there was a person from Kashmir over here (as appraiser), when he was sitting at a big position, there were a lot people from Azad Kashmir. (Female, 11 years of experience, appraisee)</i></p>
	<p><i>I believe there are two major types of factors in our society, first one is political and the other one is geographical. Political means with which particular political party your mind set matches or whether you are leftist or rightest? Plus where is your geographic presence? Either you are from north or west? Which area you belong to? If I am from north region I will prefer someone from north. (Male, 7 years of experience, appraisee)</i></p>

## 5. Discussion

Research on discrimination in performance management has mainly discussed typical biases such as halo, horns, central tendency effect etc., while the area of discrimination in performance management caused by demographic and social factors is less explored. This research sheds light upon these demographic and social factors by examining organizational practices and treatment of employees in the workplaces in Pakistan. It also compares the findings in Pakistan with those in the Western literature, to identify similarities and differences in discrimination in performance management.

Gender discrimination is a commonly observed and researched phenomenon across the globe (Acker, 2006; Baxter & Wright, 2002; Bell et al., 2002; Leslie et al., 2017; Smith, 2012). While some progress has been made on gender equality in the West, women are still under-represented in top management and professional positions, struggling to break the glass ceiling (Insch, McIntyre & Napier, 2008; Powell & Butterfield, 1994). Compared to many Western societies, Pakistan is a more gendered society: inequality lingers as women are less educated than men, and their mobility is strongly restricted (Shah & Baporikar, 2013); they have limited access to employment activities because of the continued societal expectation of the male role as the bread winner and female role as the nurturer (Chaudhary & Khan, 1987). However, the findings of this study were contradictory to the literature and concurred that large organizations (in the main cities) in Pakistan were more “pro-female biased” in appraisals and performance management. One possible explanation is that the sample focused on organizations which had a reasonable proportion of females, resulting in selection of organizations which are actively encouraging females to participate in the labor force. Another explanation is some recent research on pro-female bias (Hill, Upadhyay & Beekun, 2015; Leslie et al., 2017), which provide evidence that high potential women receive higher pays than their male counterparts through gender pay gap reversal because of their rarity and uniqueness. In the same lieu, women who enter the labor market in Pakistan may be supported by their managers and peers because of their rareness and uniqueness. However, more research is needed to understand this across cities and industries.

Research in the West has shown that employment decisions, like selection and promotion are influenced by the “beauty factor” (Cavico et al., 2012; Heilman & Stopeck, 1985; Mahajan, 2007). However, Islam, the dominant religion in Pakistan, does not support the context of discrimination on the basis of being physically attractive and emphasizes equality for every individual. The findings from this research presented a mixed picture. One group gave examples of how some of their colleagues who may not be called physically attractive, if seen through the lens of a Pakistani eye, were at the top positions. Some appraisers quoted physical attractiveness as “professional attire” of an individual, which should not be referred to as discrimination but a necessity and a policy. Another group argued that good looks clearly gave employees an edge over others, and that it accounted as a skill and trait for leadership. So, it can be concluded that there is a fine line between how physical attractiveness may be treated as a part of professional outlook, at least in some professions, while it may become discrimination in other circumstances. However, obesity: which is an accepted basis of discrimination in the West (Bento et al., 2012), was not supported as the basis of discrimination in this research.

In western societies, older people are generally perceived more negatively than younger people, with less favorable treatment in recruitment, promotion and training (Maurer & Rafuse, 2001). They are perceived as having certain undesirable characteristics, such as poor health, an inflexible attitude, resistance to change and low trainability; consequently, aging is an eventuality that many employees dread or fear (Pompper, 2014). However, in the Pakistani society, where respect for elders is an integral part of the cultural values (Nadeem & Sully de Luque, 2018), this study found that there were some indications of positive

discrimination in evaluation of performance in favor of the older employees. Thus, there is divergence in discrimination on the basis of age across societies.

Perceived similarity was the discrimination in both the Western literature and this study; however, the basis of perceived similarity differed significantly. Most notably, Western societies have paid limited attention to understand discrimination at workplace on the basis of religious sects, possibly because religious sects are not an important part of diversity in the West. Compared to this, religious sects, caste and creed are an integral part of the South-Asian cultures and workers prefer working within ethnically homogenous groups (Khilji, 2003; 2012). Thus, many respondents of this study reported examples of discrimination in performance management on grounds of different religious sects. In the literature, the concept of 'psychological group' is defined as a group of people who are likely to identify themselves with the same social identity and value cluster, and believe their respective group's values and practices are distinctive in comparison to those of the other group (Turner & Oakes, 1986). In Pakistan, this phenomenon was in practice as individuals colonize themselves within similar religious spheres, and favor those in the in-group.

## 6. Recommendations for Future Research and for Organizations

The scope of this research is limited to two large cities of Pakistan with a sample of 39 interviewees; this reflects the limitations of qualitative research. While the results are useful for examining the unexplored phenomenon of discrimination in performance management systems on the basis of personal characteristics of individuals, a large scale survey on the same topic can add further value. Also, cross-country comparisons of discrimination in different stages of performance management can contribute to improved understanding of this critical HR practice. Such study will make it possible to carry out a direct comparison, for example, on discrimination based on gender, age, physical attractiveness and religious sects in implementation of performance management system across societies.

Organizations in Pakistan, and in other countries, which endorse themselves as equal opportunity employers, must analyze, understand and eradicate discrimination from the performance management process. Accepting that such discrimination exists is the first towards eliminating discrimination. This should be followed by training of appraisers for removing unconscious bias, and conscious acts of discrimination. Evaluation and audit of different stages of performance management can also provide more specific insight, and thus provide specific point at which interventions can be made to decrease discrimination.

## 7. Conclusion

The findings contribute to our understanding of discrimination in performance management by providing a country specific insight of discrimination in this critical area of human resource management. It highlights how not just HR practices, but discrimination within HR practices varies between societies. Overall, within the sample of this study, there was a pro-female bias i.e. discrimination in performance management process was done in favor of females. Discrimination also existed on the basis of perceived similarity, particularly on the basis of religious sects. There were some reported favors on the basis of age, with the older employees being given more favors. Obesity was rejected as a basis of discrimination, and was not linked with physical attractiveness. However, physical attractiveness was associated with the job requirements of certain jobs, indicating possibility of an unconscious bias. Thus, noteworthy differences existed in how demographic and personal characteristics affected implementation of performance management in Pakistan vs. the West, which provide useful insights for management scholars and practitioners.

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