

# Workplace Discrimination and Employee Commitment in Rivers State Civil Service, Nigeria

W.O. OLORI

Department of Management, University of Port Harcourt

DAN-JUMBO, COMFORT. T.

Department of Hospitality Management and Tourism, University of Port Harcourt

## Abstract

The study investigated the nexus between workplace discrimination and employee commitment in the Rivers State Civil Service. A sample of 349 was determined from a population of 3791 Civil Servants in the Rivers State Civil Service. Data for the study was obtained through the utilization of a questionnaire. The Spearman's Rank Order Correlation Coefficient was used in analyzing the data with the aid of SPSS. The results indicated a significant but negative correlations among the dimensions of workplace discrimination and measures of employee commitment. This means that, to improve the level of commitment among employees, all forms of discrimination must be discouraged. It was therefore recommended, that the Civil Service Commission should formulate and implement policies that will foster peaceful co-existence among workers, and also ensure that discrimination is reduced to the barest minimum.

**Keywords:** workplace discrimination, employee commitment, employee productivity, absenteeism.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Management literature is awash with submissions about the importance of employee commitment to the well-being of the organization. Employee commitment is an essential condition for high performing organizations. It also helps to minimize the level of employee absenteeism, reduce employee turnover in the organization, and promote workers' loyalty (Dixit & Bhati, 2012). Employee commitment helps to improve the level of employees' performance. A committed employee puts his or her best on the job. Likewise, committed employees exhibit better work related behaviors (Dordevic, 2004). Employees that are committed to their organization tends to have less distraction, stay more focused on their jobs, and are receptive to change. Furthermore, committed employees find fulfillment in their jobs and are highly contented with their working conditions (Mechanic & Irefin, 2014).

In the current competitive global business environment, the importance of committed workers to both private businesses and public enterprises cannot be overemphasized. Employees are viewed as the most important organizational asset by many organizations, because they are to a large extent responsible for the success or failure of their firms (Evans, Campbell & Stonehouse, 2003). Specifically, employee commitment is very important for the civil service at a time that governments at all levels appear to be finding it difficult to pay its workforce. Governments at all levels, scholars, management experts have proposed strategies to solve human capital problems in the civil service. However, the problems persist.

The Nigerian Civil Service is confronted with several challenges, among which are: poor pay for its employees, corrupt practices by the administrators, indiscipline, frequent change of policies by government, high incidence of lateness to work (Garba & Jirgi, 2014). Similarly, Agwu (2013) corroborated the above statement, when he submitted that "a civil service with ill-defined or negative culture is usually a breeding ground for corruption, indolence, nepotism, inefficiency, lack of accountability, transparency, low productivity, misappropriation and waste of public funds". He further noted that, the lack of proper plans by the Civil Service Commission for the training and development of its employees is another factor that has hindered the performance of civil servants in the country. All these factors may have resulted to low level of commitment exhibited by workers in the civil service. Other reasons adduced for the low level of employee' commitment in the civil service include; high level of bureaucratic bottleneck in the service; ethnic and religious discrimination, and poor working condition (Agwu, 2013).

Owing to the poor performance of the Civil Service and incidence of employee turnover, there have been increased calls on the government to carry out reforms in the system (Adamade, 2009). The system is seen as wanting in the areas of health, defence, security, education, agriculture, sports, and others. These poor performance have eroded the confidence of Nigerians in the public sector. The effects of the lack of trust in the public sector can be seen in the number of Nigerians travelling abroad for medical treatment. A similar phenomenon is observable in the educational sector, where many Nigerians go abroad for better quality education (Ademola, Ogundipe & Babatunde, 2014).

Studies have been carried out to ascertain the effect workplace discrimination has on the level of employee commitment (e.g. Triana, Jayasinghe & Pieper, 2015; Messarra, 2014; Imam & Shah, 2013; Ensher,

Grant-Vallone & Donaldson, 2001). Messarra (2014) studied the effects of religious discrimination on company loyalty in Lebanese firms, and concluded that both variables correlate significantly. Likewise, Ensher, et al (2001) studied the impact perceived workplace discrimination has on employees satisfaction, commitment and organizational citizenship behavior and reported that, discrimination has a strong effect on the variables. However, there is a paucity of research on the impact of workplace discrimination on commitment in the Nigerian Civil Service (Okurame, 2009). This study therefore investigated the correlation between workplace discrimination and employee commitment in the Rivers State Civil Service.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

### Workplace Discrimination

There appears to be no general consensus among scholars regarding the definition and meaning of workplace discrimination. However, Sanchez and Brock (1996) explains workplace discrimination as a situation where a worker feels that he or she is related to in an unfriendly manner as a result of the group that he or she belongs to. The Australian Human Rights Commission has it that discrimination occurs in the workplace when a person or a set of people feel that others are being treated better than they are, they feel not wanted or have been shown less favour than others because of their personal characteristics including origin, religion, age, sex and tribe.

Similarly, Russell, Quinn, O’Riain and McGinnity (2008) submit that workplace discrimination entail meting out different treatments based on group membership that unjustly handicap another group.

Workplace discrimination could be in the form of gender, sexual, ethnic, age, and language discrimination (Jagusztyn, 2010; Brondolo, Kelly, Coakley, Gordon, Thompson, Levi, Cassells, Tobin, Sweeney, Contrada, 2005). From the foregoing, discrimination in the workplace could be defined as an individual’s feeling that he or she is being singled out and treated with disdain or disrespected because of his or her religion, ethnicity, language or perception of things. However, in this work, three types of workplace discrimination that were suggested by Jagusztyn (2010) were adopted, these are: age, gender and ethnicity discrimination.

Gender discrimination has been defined in several ways and seen from many perspectives, however, it is commonly referred to as “forming impressions and passing judgment formed on inscriptive feelings about one’s gender” (Hays & Morrow, 2013). Gender discrimination is the type of workplace discrimination that involves been treated unfavorably, or denied opportunities either by one’s colleagues or superiors as a result of the person’s sexual characteristics. It can also involve the exhibition of unwanted behaviors which are sexual in nature by colleagues or superiors which include touching, saying sexual jokes, and flaunting offensive sexual materials (Bilkis, Habib & Sharmin, 2010).

Dion (2002), in her study on the social psychology of perceived discrimination in the workplace, submitted that ethnic discrimination is a pervasive issue that exists in every organization which, if not well managed, could lead to misunderstanding among organizations’ members. In a related study, Brondolo, et al (2005) submit that, ethnic discrimination results in poor physical and mental conditions for Africans in the US.

Age discrimination in the workplace is a recurrent issue in the Nigerian work setting. It is a common practice for employers to set age limits for prospective applicants for available job openings and also set retirement age for employed staff.

War (1994) views workplace age discrimination as an act of not offering employment to an applicant, dismissing an employee from work, giving less pay, denying training, promotions or other entitlements and benefits based on age.

CIPD (2003) posited that, age discrimination can affect both young and old employees. They went further to define age discrimination as a behavior from others that disadvantages a person on grounds of age based on unverified ability of the individual irrespective of his or her knowledge, skills and abilities. Discrimination on the basis of age usually deter the progress of workers in many organizations.

According to Snape and Redman (2003), older employees are mostly discriminated against in terms of training opportunities, as they are seen to be redundant in terms of creativity, and may not be able to cope with new and advanced technology. Therefore many managers stereotyped them negatively as difficult to train, inflexible and too old (Snape & Redman, 2005). Youthism, a form of age discrimination against youths, is practiced in some organizations. Such younger employees, are mostly discriminated through exploitation in terms of lower pay and outright refusal of employment opportunity because of lack of experience (De Lucca, 2005).

### Employee Commitment

Recent studies have shown increased interest on the subject of commitment and its importance to organizations. Colakoglu, Culha and Atay (2010) asserted that, getting workers to be loyal to a company is one of the major challenges facing today’s organizations. They suggested that making employees to feel being valued and appreciated is the panacea to employee commitment.

One of the earliest definitions of employee commitment was given by Mowday, Steers and Porter (1982). They conceptualized employee commitment as an employee’s belief in his firm’s target, objectives, and

esteem, and a subsequent readiness to put in enough work for his/her firm plus a resolve to remain with the firm for a long period of time. Employee commitment was also referred to as “a bond between a worker and an employer such that the worker does not harbor any intention of leaving the firm” (Allen & Meyer, 1996). It could also be seen as the development of a strong attachment, and sense of allegiance by an employee to his or her employer. Employee commitment is the level of a worker’s physical, mental, psychological and emotional attachment towards the organization where he or she works (Redmond, 2010).

Muthueloo and Rose (2005) opine that employee commitment refers to workers inclination to agree to the stated objectives of their firms. It is also seen as a person’s trust and belief in a firm (Porter, Steers, Mowday & Boulian, 1974).

Mullins (1999) stated that there are three fundamental principles that underpin organizational commitment. These are the ideas of being attached to a firm, behaving like an organizational citizen and trust in the company’s leaders. A committed employee is said to have all the above listed characteristics and should give his or her best while at work (Martins & Nicholls, 1999). Committed employees are expected to judiciously give attention to minute details about their jobs and make sure stated goals and objectives of the firm are achieved.

A three dimensional framework was developed by Meyer and Allen (1997) specifying the measures of employee commitment. Affective commitment is the extent to which a worker identifies with a firm, company or institution. It is the emotional connection the employee has with the firm. Continuance commitment is a worker’s feeling that the cost of moving out of the company is greater than the cost of staying. Normative commitment is the perception that employees owe their organization the obligation of being committed (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Meyer & Allen, 1997).

### **Workplace Discrimination and Employee Commitment**

Research relating workplace discrimination to commitment in the workplace has been carried out by several scholars (e.g. in Sanchez & Brock, 1996; Ensher, et al 2001; Welle & Heilman, 2005; Triana, Garcia & Collola, 2010; Triana, Jayasinghe & Pieper, 2015). Welle and Heilman (2005) studied the influence of discrimination on levels of commitment of female workers, and concluded that women who experience discrimination are more likely to be less committed to the achievement of organizational goals and objectives.

Triana, et al (2015) studied the impact of perceived discrimination on employees’ work attitudes and outcomes (commitment, loyalty, organizational citizenship behaviour) and reported that it create an unwholesome consequence on workers’ level of commitment to the firm. Likewise, Triana, et al (2010) examined the correlation between racial discrimination and employees’ affective commitment among various races in the United States of America and concluded that it significantly influences workers affective commitment.

Ensher et al (2001) studied the consequences perceived discrimination in the workplace has on employees’ job satisfaction, the employees level of commitment, the citizenship behavior they display at work and grievances handling methods. They opine that perceived workplace discrimination negatively affect employees’ outcomes and work attitudes.

The following hypotheses emanating from the literature are stated below:

**Hypothesis 1:** There is no significant correlation between Age discrimination and the measures of employee commitment.

**Hypothesis 2:** There is no significant correlation between Gender discrimination and the measures of employee commitment.

**Hypothesis 3:** There is no significant correlation between Ethnic discrimination and the measures of employee commitment.

### **3. RESEARCH DESIGN**

The research design was based on the cross-sectional survey design. The target population for this study was the entire employees of the Rivers State Civil Service comprising 26 ministries, 25 agencies and 4 commissions (Civil Service Commission, 2016). However, 19 of these ministries were accessible with a population of 3781civil servants, comprising 858 junior staff, 2371 senior staff and 562 management staff. The Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample size determination table was used to obtain a sample size of 349. Thus, 349 questionnaire were administered to the respondents. 312 copies of the questionnaire were returned. However, after screening, 18 copies were not useable due to conflicting information and/or incomplete information. The remaining 294 copies were used for the analysis. The correctly filled and useable copies (294) represented 84.24% of the total number of questionnaire distributed.

#### **Questionnaire Design**

Data for this study were obtained through a questionnaire. The questionnaire was made up of two sections. The first section comprised items pertaining to the demographic details of the respondents (e.g. name, age, sex of the respondent).

The second section comprised items describing the independent variable (workplace discrimination),

dependent variable (organizational commitment) and the moderating variable (organizational culture). The items were anchored on a five-point Likert scale at both ends such that 5 = strongly agree and 1 = strongly disagree.

**Operational Measures of Variables**

The independent variable has age, gender and ethnic discrimination as dimensions. It was measured using a 27 items instrument adopted from Jagusztyń (2010) and Gonzales, et al (2015). Age discrimination was measured using 9 items adopted from Gonzales, et al (2015). Gender and ethnic discrimination have 9 statement items each adopted from Jagusztyń (2010).

The dependent variable has affective, continuance and normative commitment as its measures. It was scored through 24-item instrument, with the measures having 8 items each, adopted from Allen and Meyer (1990).

**Reliability and Validity of Instrument**

The reliability of the instrument was determined through the computation of the Cronbach’s alpha values. The items measuring the dimensions of workplace discrimination (age, gender and ethnic discrimination) returned alpha values of 0.8, 0.78, and 0.86 respectively. While the items for the measures of employee commitment (affective, continuance and normative commitment) returned values of 0.89, 0.76 and 0.84 respectively. All the Cronbach values are above the 0.7 acceptable criteria and were used for the analysis. This is in accordance with the criteria suggested by Sekaran (2000), and Nunnally (1978), which states that a scale is reliable if it returns a Cronbach’s alpha value that is equal to or greater than 0.70.

The scales adopted for this study were sourced from extant management literature. This helps to ensure content validity of the instrument (Donald, et al., 2011). Besides, construct validity of the items have been confirmed in previous studies where they were adopted.

**4. DATA ANALYSIS**

The Spearman’s Rank Order Correlation Coefficient was used to analyse the level of correlation between the dimensions of workplace discrimination (age discrimination, gender discrimination and ethnic discrimination), and the measures of employee commitment. According to Sekaran (2000), and Tabachnick and Fidell (2001) the Spearman’s Rank Order Correlation Coefficient is suitable for analyzing correlations between two variables. The technique was also used because the study made use of ordinal data (Gravetter & Wallnau, 2000).

**Hypotheses Testing**

**Hypothesis 1(H<sub>0</sub>)**

The first hypothesis states that there is no significant relationship between age discrimination and the measures of employees’ commitment. The table below shows the outcome of the analysis.

**Table 4.1.1: Correlations between Age Discrimination and the measures of Employees’ Commitment**

			Affective Commitment	Continuance Commitment	Normative Commitment
Spearman's rho	Age Discrimination	Correlation Coefficient	-.516*	-.518*	-.713**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.011	.013	.007
		N	294	294	294

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The analysis reveals negative correlations between all the measures of employee commitment with age discrimination. The table shows age discrimination is negatively correlated with affective commitment with rho = -.516, pv < .05; continuance commitment rho = -.518, pv < .05, and normative commitment rho = -.714, pv < .05 . Based on the decision rule, the hypothesis that, there is no significant relationship between age discrimination and the measures of employees’ commitment (affective, continuance and normative commitment) was rejected and the alternative accepted, showing that, age discrimination significantly but inversely relate with the measures of employee commitment.

**Hypothesis 2 (H<sub>0</sub>)**

Table 4.1.2 below shows the result from the analysis of the second hypothesis. The hypothesis states that there is no significant relationship between gender discrimination and the measures of employees’ commitment (affective, continuance, and normative commitment).

**Table 4.1.2: Correlations between Gender Discrimination and the measures of Employees' Commitment**

			Affective Commitment	Continuance Commitment	Normative Commitment
Spearman's rho	Gender Discrimination	Correlation Coefficient	-.322**	-.321**	-.309**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.000	.000
		N	294	294	294

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The analysis shows that, gender discrimination is slightly negatively correlated with all the measures of employee commitment with affective having  $\rho = -.322, p < .05$ , continuance commitment,  $\rho = -.321, p < .05$ , and normative,  $\rho = -.309, p < .05$ . Based on the analysis, the null hypothesis was rejected and its alternative accepted.

### HYPOTHESIS 3 (H<sub>3</sub>)

Table 4.1.3 shows the relationship between ethnic discrimination and the measures of employees' commitment.

**Table 4.1.3: Correlations between Ethnic Discrimination and the measures of Employee Commitment**

			Affective Commitment	Continuance Commitment	Normative Commitment
Spearman's rho	Ethnic Discrimination	Correlation Coefficient	-.806**	-.617**	-.717**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.000	.002
		N	294	294	294

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The analysis shows that, ethnic discrimination has high inverse correlations with the measures of employees' commitment. Ethnic discrimination has a strong negative correlation with affective commitment with  $\rho = -.806, p < .05$ . A similar result was obtained for the relationship between ethnic discrimination and continuance commitment with a rho value of  $-.617, p < .05$ , likewise ethnic discrimination and normative commitment showed  $\rho = -.717, p < .05$ . The formulated hypothesis was rejected.

## 5. Discussion of findings

This study focused on the relationship between workplace discrimination and employee commitment in the Rivers State Civil Service Nigeria. It was hypothesized that the dimensions of workplace discrimination do not significantly relate with the measures of employee commitment.

The analysis showed that all the dimensions of workplace discrimination (age -, gender -, and gender discrimination) are significant but negatively correlated with employee commitment, indicating that, there is inverse relationship between the two variables. Several studies have been conducted on the relationship between different dimensions of discrimination in the workplace and employee work outcomes (e.g. Griffeth, Hom & Gaertner, 2000; Triana, Garcia & Collela, 2010; Triana, Jayasinghe & Pieper, 2015). Many studies agree that employee commitment as an aspect of work outcome is inversely related with workplace discrimination. For instance, Triana, Garcia and Colella (2010) opine that, perceived discrimination in the workplace negatively influenced workers attitudes including commitment which ultimately result in higher level of employee's turnover intentions.

The above assertion is in line with the results from the analysis in this study. The results show that workplace discrimination is negatively correlated with employees' commitment, that is, the more employees feel discriminated, the less committed they become.

The results also found similarity with the work of Nunez-Smith, et al (2009), whose work was concentrated on workplace discrimination and the turnover among healthcare workers. They concluded that the high rate of employees' turnover in the American healthcare system is largely due to the feelings by the workers that they are being discriminated against.

## Conclusion

This paper examined the relationship between workplace discrimination and employee commitment. Three dimensions of workplace discrimination (age, gender and ethnic discrimination) were adopted and tested against the measures of employees' commitment. The analyses revealed that, workplace discrimination is inversely related to employee's commitment. Therefore, a higher level of discrimination will give rise to lower level of employee's commitment in the Civil Service.

Therefore, it was recommended that, the Civil Service Commission should formulate and implement policies that will eliminate of all forms of discrimination or ensure its reduction to the barest minimum. This will ensure that employees judiciously perform their assigned duties without phobia of been discriminated against

due to age, gender or ethnic origin.

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