



An Examination of Bias in the Engineering Workplace in India

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Abstract

The Society of Women Engineers, in partnership with the Center for WorkLife Law at the University of California and Hastings College of Law, explored bias reported by engineers in India. Almost 700 engineers completed a customized online survey developed to identify the existence of bias patterns in the engineering workplace. The results suggest that both men and women engineers in India experience high levels of bias, with women more likely to face gender bias and men more likely to face bias based on the region in India that they are from. This session will review the findings of the study and share best practices for implementing bias interrupters.

Key Issues

Higher levels of bias were associated with feelings of exclusion, belonging, and lower intent to stay with one's employer.

Tightrope bias had the most pervasive effect: it was strongly linked to every workplace process and outcome we studied, including hiring, performance evaluations, assignments, and intent to leave one's current employer.

An increase in Prove-It-Again bias was linked to a decrease in career satisfaction and an increase in intent to leave one's employer.

Employers who want to retain the women they hire, and want to give them equal opportunity to advance, need to care about workplace bias. In addition, employers need to assess whether Indian engineers from some regions are artificially advantaged over engineers from different regions.

Purpose of the Study

To highlight the existence and impact of bias on workplace climate

To encourage organizations to address biases in:

- Hiring
- Promotions
- Performance evaluations
- Compensation

What is Bias?

- Bias: Attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions.
- Nearly 40 years of studies document biases against women
- Few study measures bias using subjects' self-reported experience

Study Overview

Joint research conducted by
Center for WorkLife Law at the University
of California, Hastings College of the Law

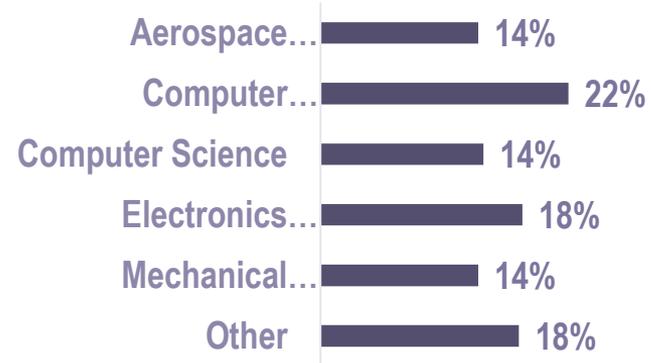
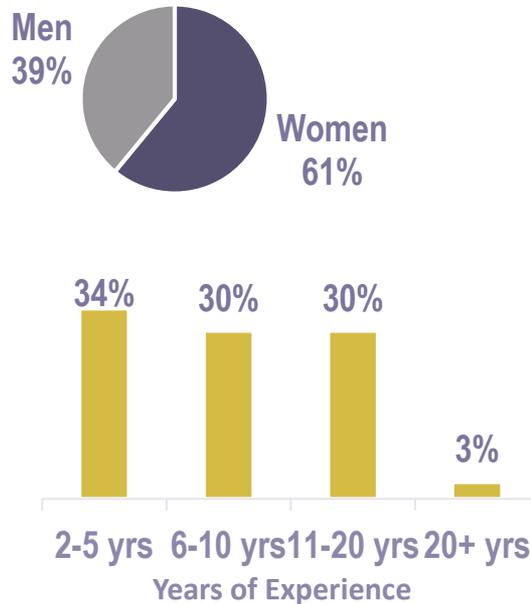
- Joan Williams
Distinguished Professor of Law, Founding Director
- Rachel Korn, Ph.D.
Director of Research on Organization Bias
Society of Women Engineers
- Roberta Rincon, Ph.D.
Senior Manager of Research
- Peter Finn
Deputy Executive Director & Chief Learning Officer

Results suggests both men and women
engineers in India experience high levels
of bias.

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Participant Demographics

Surveyed ~700 engineers primarily working for Western companies in India to identify the existence of bias patterns in the engineering workplace.



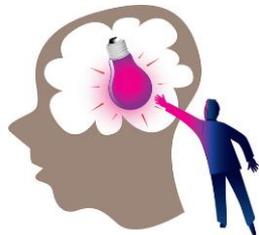
Four Bias Patterns

- **Prove-It-Again:** You repeatedly have to prove yourself, or your ideas are ignored or stolen
- **Tightrope:** You are pressured to behave a certain way
- **Maternal Wall:** Mothers are not good workers/ parents are not good workers.
- **Tug of War:** This is what it takes to get here. I went through this, why can't you?

Source: Williams, J. C. & Dempsey, R. (2014). *What works for women at work: Four patterns working women need to know*. New York, NY: NYU Press.

Pattern #1: Prove-It-Again Bias

74% of women engineers in India reported experiencing Prove-It-Again bias



48% reported that others get credit for the ideas they originally offer in meetings.

75% reported having to prove themselves over and over again to get the same level of recognition as their colleagues.



"Male colleagues ask me more questions and wish to detract me more. I have to prove it to them that I know what I am doing and that I have done my homework."



Pattern #1: Prove-It-Again → Outcomes

An increase in Prove-It-Again bias was associated with:

- A decrease in feelings of belonging at work.
- A decrease in career satisfaction.
- A decrease in enjoyment of work.
- An increase in reporting that they are considering looking for a new job elsewhere.

Pattern #2: Tightrope Bias

76% of women engineers in India reported that they were confined to a narrower range of acceptable behaviors than their colleagues.



45% feel pressure to play a traditionally feminine role at work.

45% believe that it is inappropriate for women to argue at work, even when it is business-related.



“Feeling passionately and talking about something forcefully is tied to impatience and mood swings.”

Pattern #2: Tightrope → Outcomes

An increase in Tightrope bias was associated with:

- A decrease in seeing a clear path for advancement for yourself at your organization.
- A decrease in perceptions that the assignments process was fair.
- A decrease in perceptions that diversity is supported in the workplace.
- An increase in feeling excluded at work.

Pattern #3: Maternal Wall Bias

40% of engineers in India reported that there is an attitude that mothers should work less because they should be caring for children .



60% of women engineers reported that they would have trouble getting flexible work arrangements for family care.

71% of women engineers believe people who have caregiving responsibilities have a harder time getting ahead.



Pattern #3: Maternal Wall → Outcomes

An increase in Maternal Wall bias was associated with:

- A decrease in perceptions that diversity is supported in the workplace.
- An increase in feeling excluded at work.

“Men have the wrong mentality about maternity leave. They see it as a vacation.”



“Duty of being a good daughter-in-law. After 60 years, parents are taken care of. In-laws expect their son’s wife to provide hot meals, care for the family.”

“Several times my boss asks me not to travel as I have young kids.”

Pattern #4: Tug of War Bias

74% of more senior women engineers feel that the more junior women don't understand what it takes to succeed as an engineer.



63% of junior women engineers feel as though the more senior women have just “turned into men” – not trying to change things for women.

45% of women engineers reported that they have to compete with their female colleagues to get the one “woman’s spot” available.

Pattern #4: Tug of War → Outcomes

An increase in Tug of War bias was associated with:

- A decrease in belonging.
- An increase in feeling excluded at work.
- An increase in reporting that they are considering looking for a new job elsewhere.

Women will say that another woman was promoted because of her looks."

"How can you get a maid to cook for your family? I cannot allow my family to eat food cooked by someone else."



Recommendations

Companies that support diversity must show their employees that diversity is a priority for the company.

- Ensure a budget and support staff for diversity efforts
- Make it easy for employees to participate
- Appoint diversity champions to show employees that diversity is valued by the company

Do not restrict the time that women can participate on work projects.

- Consider telecommuting options
- Schedule meetings at times when all team members can attend

Recommendations

Bias interrupters: Small changes to existing business systems and processes that interrupt bias before it happens.

1. Identify bias patterns that are present in the workplace by assessing your organizational climate.
2. Develop an objective metric to establish baselines.
3. Implement a bias interrupter.
4. Reassess the impact, and try something else if you have not yet met your

Bias interrupters involve an iterative process to get results.

SWE Research Site

www.research.swe.org



Questions? Please contact us.

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