Research Paper

Workplace Discrimination And Fostering Inclusive Practices: Strategies For Enhancing Employers Employee Relations In Nigeria, a Study Of Rivers State Ministry Of Employment Generation And Empowerment 2015-2023

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ABSTRACT

This study explores strategies to address workplace discrimination and foster inclusive practices within the Rivers State Ministry of Employment Generation and Empowerment, focusing on the period from 2015 to 2023. The aim is to enhance employer-employee relations by identifying and analyzing forms of discrimination, understanding their impact, and developing actionable strategies. Guided by 3 research questions, the research draws upon Diversity and Inclusion Theory (DIT), which emphasizes equity, respect for differences, inclusive culture, empowerment, and continuous improvement. This theoretical framework informs the study's objectives: identifying forms of discrimination related to health status, tribal favoritism, hierarchy, appearance, and religion; assessing their consequences on organizational dynamics; and proposing strategies to create a more equitable and supportive work environment. The study adopts survey research design, targeting 750 employees within the Ministry, with a sample size of 261 determined using the Taro Yamane formula. Purposive sampling was employed to select participants with relevant experiences, ensuring that diverse perspectives are captured. Data collection was facilitated through questionnaires, and analysis was conducted using percentage and mean ratings. Key findings reveal that discrimination based on health status, tribal favoritism, and appearance is prevalent, contributing to an inequitable work environment. These discriminatory practices undermine trust, communication, and collaboration, leading to decreased job satisfaction and productivity. The study concludes that addressing these issues is vital for fostering a more inclusive and effective organizational environment.Recommendations include implementing comprehensive anti-discrimination policies, promoting regular diversity and inclusion training, and strengthening employee support systems. These measures are essential for improving morale, enhancing collaboration, and ultimately boosting overall organizational performance within the Ministry.

Keywords: Workplace Discrimination, Inclusive Practices, Employer-Employee Relations

I.   INTRODUCTION

The term workplace encompasses the physical and organizational environment where employees perform their job functions. This includes offices, factories, remote work settings, and other locations where professional activities occur. In Nigeria, the concept of the workplace is significantly influenced by the country's diverse cultural and socio-economic context. Nigerian workplaces are characterized by a blend of traditional and modern practices, reflecting the country's varied ethnic, religious, and socio-economic backgrounds (Adebayo, 2021; Edewor & Aluko, 2007). This diversity often translates into unique challenges related to discrimination and inclusivity. In the Nigerian context, workplaces are not only physical spaces but also encompass the organizational culture, management practices, and societal norms that influence employee interactions and

organizational dynamics. The integration of traditional values with modern management practices creates a complex environment where issues of discrimination and inclusivity can manifest in various ways (Uche, 2010).

Discrimination in the workplace refers to the unfair treatment of employees based on personal characteristics such as race, gender, religion, ethnicity, age, or disability. This unfair treatment can manifest in various forms, including unequal pay, limited career advancement opportunities, harassment, and exclusion from decision-making processes (Ajala, 2017). In Nigeria, workplace discrimination is influenced by a range of historical, cultural, and socio-economic factors. Historically, Nigeria's colonial past has left a legacy of ethnic and racial divisions that continue to impact the workplace. The arbitrary boundaries drawn during the colonial era and the subsequent political and social tensions have contributed to persistent biases in employment practices (Edewor & Aluko, 2007). Ethnic and religious diversity, while a source of cultural richness, also introduces complexities in the workplace, where biases and prejudices can lead to discriminatory practices (Ogunyomi & Ojo, 2018). Gender discrimination is another significant issue in Nigeria's workplaces. Women often face barriers to equal pay, career advancement, and protection from harassment. Studies have highlighted that women in Nigeria are frequently underrepresented in senior management positions and face challenges such as lower wages and fewer opportunities for professional growth (Nwogwugwu & Alaka, 2015). Inclusive practices refer to the policies and actions adopted by organizations to ensure that all employees, irrespective of their background, have equal opportunities to participate, contribute, and succeed within the workplace. These practices go beyond merely addressing discrimination; they involve actively promoting diversity and creating an environment where every employee feels valued and respected (Adebayo, 2021).

In Nigeria, fostering inclusive practices is crucial for improving workplace harmony and organizational performance. Given the country's diverse ethnic and religious composition, inclusive practices can help mitigate the adverse effects of discrimination and promote a culture of respect and collaboration (Ajala, 2017). Effective inclusive practices include implementing diversity and inclusion policies, providing training on cultural competence and unconscious bias, and ensuring equal opportunities for all employees (Edewor & Aluko, 2007). Organizations that embrace inclusive practices are likely to benefit from enhanced employee morale, increased productivity, and a positive organizational reputation. Inclusivity in the workplace also contributes to social cohesion and reflects a commitment to equity and fairness (Ogunyomi & Ojo, 2018). Employee relations refer to the interactions and relationships between employers and employees within an organization. Effective employee relations are essential for maintaining a positive work environment, ensuring employee satisfaction, and achieving organizational success (Uche, 2010). In Nigeria, the dynamics of employer-employee relations are shaped by various factors, including cultural norms, labor laws, and organizational practices. Workplace discrimination and the absence of inclusive practices can strain employer-employee relations, leading to conflicts, decreased productivity, and high employee turnover. Discriminatory practices often result in lower job satisfaction, reduced motivation, and increased stress among employees. These negative outcomes can adversely affect organizational performance and contribute to a high turnover rate, which in turn impacts the stability and growth of the organization (Ajala, 2017; Nwogwugwu & Alaka, 2015). The historical and cultural context of Nigeria plays a significant role in shaping workplace dynamics. The colonial legacy of ethnic and racial divisions has left enduring impacts on employment practices and workplace relations. Nigeria's diverse ethnic and religious landscape, while a source of cultural richness, also poses challenges for achieving workplace equity and inclusivity (Edewor & Aluko, 2007). In Nigeria, the interplay of traditional values with modern organizational practices creates a unique environment where workplace discrimination and inclusivity issues are deeply rooted. For example, the influence of traditional gender roles can affect women's participation in the workforce and their advancement opportunities (Nwogwugwu & Alaka, 2015). Similarly, ethnic and religious biases can impact recruitment, promotion, and job satisfaction.

The impact of workplace discrimination in Nigeria is profound and multifaceted. Discrimination not only affects the well-being and morale of employees but also has negative consequences for organizational performance. Employees who experience discrimination often suffer from lower job satisfaction, decreased motivation, and higher levels of stress. These negative effects can lead to reduced productivity, increased absenteeism, and high employee turnover (Adebayo, 2021; Ogunyomi & Ojo, 2018). Moreover, workplace discrimination can tarnish an organization's reputation, making it difficult to attract and retain top talent. Organizations that fail to address discrimination effectively may face legal challenges, reputational damage, and diminished employee engagement. Therefore, addressing workplace discrimination and implementing inclusive practices are critical for improving organizational performance and maintaining a positive work environment (Ajala, 2017; Edewor & Aluko, 2007).

II.   STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

The Rivers State Ministry of Employment Generation and Empowerment, like many organizations in Nigeria, faces significant challenges related to workplace discrimination and the need for inclusive practices. Despite the diversity of Nigeria's socio-cultural landscape, the Ministry struggles with persistent issues of discrimination based on ethnicity, gender, religion, and other personal characteristics. These discriminatory practices have led to a range of negative outcomes, including unequal opportunities for career advancement, harassment, and exclusion of marginalized groups. The impact of these issues is evident in strained employer-employee relations, characterized by low job satisfaction, reduced employee morale, and high turnover rates. Discrimination and the lack of inclusive practices hinder the Ministry's ability to foster a supportive and equitable work environment, ultimately affecting its effectiveness in achieving its mandate. Furthermore, while various policies and legal frameworks aim to address workplace discrimination and promote inclusivity, their implementation and enforcement remain inconsistent. There is a notable gap between the theoretical provisions for promoting equality and the practical experiences of employees within the Ministry. This discrepancy underscores the need for effective strategies and practices that can bridge this gap and enhance employer-employee relations. The study seeks to address these problems by exploring the extent of workplace discrimination within the Rivers State Ministry of Employment Generation and Empowerment, evaluating the current state of inclusive practices, and proposing strategies to improve employer-employee relations. Through this examination, the study aims to contribute to the development of a more equitable and inclusive work environment in the Ministry, aligning its practices with the broader goals of fairness and organizational effectiveness.

III.   AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of the study is to develop effective strategies for addressing workplace discrimination and fostering inclusive practices within the Rivers State Ministry of Employment Generation and Empowerment from 2015 to 2023, enhancing employer-employee relations. While the objectives are to:

1. Identify and analyze forms of workplace discrimination within the Rivers State Ministry of Employment Generation and Empowerment based on health status, favoritism/tribe, hierarchy, appearance, and religion.
2. Examine the consequences of discrimination on employer-employee relations and propose methods to enhance these relationships for improved organizational effectiveness.
3. Develop strategies to address discrimination and foster inclusive practices within the workplace to create a more equitable and supportive environment.

IV.   RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1.   What are the forms of workplace discrimination within the Rivers State Ministry of Employment Generation and Empowerment based on health status, favoritism/tribe, hierarchy, appearance, and religion?
2.   How does workplace discrimination affect employer-employee relations within the Rivers State Ministry of Employment Generation and Empowerment?
3.   What strategies can be developed to address discrimination and foster inclusive practices within the workplace to create a more equitable and supportive environment?

V.   THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Diversity and Inclusion Theory (DIT) emerged from various scholarly works and practical approaches aimed at understanding and improving the dynamics of workplace diversity and inclusion. The theory encompasses perspectives from multiple disciplines, including sociology, psychology, and organizational behavior. It was notably shaped by the works of authors such as Thomas Kochman, Robert E. Quinn, Rosabeth Moss Kanter, and David A. Thomas. Thomas Kochman - Known for his work in cross-cultural communication and diversity, Kochman's research focuses on how cultural differences influence organizational behavior and interactions. His work has provided foundational insights into the role of communication in managing diversity (Kochman, 1981). Robert E. Quinn - His contributions to organizational behavior, particularly in the context of organizational culture and change, have influenced the understanding of how inclusive practices can be implemented within organizations (Quinn, 2004). Rosabeth Moss Kanter - Kanter's research on corporate culture and the impact of diversity on organizational performance has been pivotal. Her work highlights how diversity can be leveraged as a strategic asset and the barriers that often hinder inclusive practices (Kanter,1977).

David A. Thomas - Thomas's research on racial dynamics and leadership has provided critical insights into how diversity impacts managerial effectiveness and employee relations within organizations (Thomas, 1990)

Core Principles

Diversity and Inclusion Theory is built upon several core principles:

1. Equity and Fairness: Ensuring that all employees have equal access to opportunities and resources, regardless of their background or identity. This principle emphasizes the need for fair treatment and policies that address systemic inequalities.

2. Respect for Differences: Acknowledging and valuing the different perspectives, experiences, and backgrounds that employees bring to the workplace. This principle advocates for an environment where diverse viewpoints are respected and integrated into organizational practices.

3. Inclusive Culture: Creating a work environment where all employees feel a sense of belonging and are actively engaged. This involves fostering an organizational culture that supports diversity and encourages open communication.

4. Empowerment: Providing employees with the support and resources they need to succeed, which includes removing barriers to their participation and advancement. This principle focuses on enabling employees to reach their full potential.

5. Continuous Improvement: Recognizing that diversity and inclusion efforts are ongoing and require regular assessment and adaptation. Organizations should continuously evaluate their practices and make necessary adjustments to improve inclusivity.

Applications to the Study

In the context of the study "Workplace Discrimination and Fostering Inclusive Practices: Strategies for Enhancing Employer-Employee Relations in Nigeria, a Study of Rivers State Ministry of Employment Generation and Empowerment (2015-2023)," Diversity and Inclusion Theory can be applied as follows:

Identifying Forms of Workplace Discrimination:

1. Equity and Fairness: Utilize the principle of equity to identify and address various forms of discrimination based on religion, appearance, preferences, and health status. Analyze how these forms of discrimination manifest within the Ministry and affect employee experiences.

2. Analyzing the Impact of Religious Discrimination:

3. Respect for Differences: Investigate how religious discrimination impacts employee morale, satisfaction, and advancement. Apply the principle of respect for differences to understand how diverse religious backgrounds are valued or marginalized within the Ministry.

4. Assessing the Effects of Appearance-Based Discrimination:

5. Inclusive Culture: Examine how appearance-based discrimination affects employee inclusion and productivity. Assess whether the Ministry's culture supports diverse appearances and how this influences employee engagement and performance.

6. Examining Discrimination Based on Personal Preferences:

7. Empowerment: Explore the consequences of discrimination based on personal preferences and choices. Assess how such discrimination affects workplace relationships and the ability of employees to thrive and contribute effectively.

VI.   LITERATURE / EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Adeleke, T. (2017). "Impact of Workplace Discrimination on Employee Performance in Nigerian Public Sector." This research aimed to examine how discrimination affects employee performance in the Nigerian

public sector. The research questions included: How does workplace discrimination based on religion affect employee performance? How does appearance-based discrimination impact job satisfaction? The study's objectives were to identify the forms of discrimination present and analyze their effects on employee performance. The hypothesis tested was: Workplace discrimination significantly reduces employee performance. The theoretical framework was based on Social Identity Theory, which posits that individuals derive their identity from their group memberships. The methodology involved a quantitative survey of 300 employees from various ministries in Rivers State, using structured questionnaires. Findings indicated that religious and appearance-based discrimination were prevalent and negatively impacted employee performance and morale. The study concluded that workplace discrimination is a significant barrier to employee performance in the public sector. Recommendations included the implementation of strict anti-discrimination policies and regular training on diversity and inclusion.

Chukwu, E. (2018). "Strategies for Fostering Inclusive Practices in Nigerian Workplaces." This study focused on strategies to promote inclusivity in Nigerian workplaces. Research questions included: What are the effective strategies for fostering inclusion in the workplace? How do inclusive practices impact employee relations? The objectives were to identify successful inclusive strategies and assess their impact on employee relations. The hypothesis was: Inclusive workplace practices improve employee relations. The study used the Organizational Inclusion Theory, which emphasizes the importance of creating a work environment where all employees feel valued. A mixed-methods approach was adopted, combining quantitative surveys of 250 employees with qualitative interviews of 50 managers in the Rivers State Ministry of Employment Generation and Empowerment. Findings revealed that inclusive practices such as flexible working hours and diversity training significantly improved employee relations and reduced instances of discrimination. The conclusion was that fostering inclusivity leads to better employee relations and higher job satisfaction. Recommendations included regular diversity training and the establishment of employee resource groups.

Ekpenyong, J. (2020). "Religious Discrimination in Nigerian Workplaces: Effects and Mitigation Strategies." The research aimed to explore the effects of religious discrimination and how it can be mitigated in Nigerian workplaces. Research questions included: What are the effects of religious discrimination on employee morale? What strategies can mitigate religious discrimination? The objectives were to assess the impact of religious discrimination and propose mitigation strategies. The hypothesis was: Religious discrimination negatively affects employee morale. The Conflict Theory, which explains how power differentials contribute to social inequality, served as the theoretical framework. A qualitative approach was used, involving in-depth interviews with 60 employees from the Rivers State Ministry of Employment Generation and Empowerment. Findings showed that religious discrimination led to decreased morale and productivity. The study concluded that religious discrimination is detrimental to workplace harmony. Recommendations included promoting interfaith dialogue and implementing fair recruitment practices.

Okoro, A. (2021). "Health Status Discrimination in Nigerian Workplaces: Impact and Solutions." This research investigated the impact of health status discrimination on employees and potential solutions. Research questions were: How does health status discrimination affect employee productivity? What solutions can address health status discrimination? The study aimed to identify the impact and propose solutions. The hypothesis was: Health status discrimination significantly reduces employee productivity. The theoretical framework was the Equity Theory, which focuses on the fairness of treatment in the workplace. A quantitative method was employed, surveying 200 employees from various departments within the Rivers State Ministry of Employment Generation and Empowerment. Findings indicated that health status discrimination led to lower productivity and higher absenteeism. The study concluded that health status discrimination is a critical issue that needs addressing to improve employee productivity. Recommendations included the implementation of health awareness programs and the establishment of supportive policies for employees with health conditions.

Nwankwo, M. (2019). "Appearance-Based Discrimination in Nigerian Public Sector: Causes and Consequences." This study examined the causes and consequences of appearance-based discrimination in the Nigerian public sector. Research questions included: What are the causes of appearance-based discrimination? What are its consequences on employee satisfaction? The objectives were to identify the causes and analyze the consequences. The hypothesis was: Appearance-based discrimination negatively affects employee satisfaction. The theoretical framework was the Attribution Theory, which examines how individuals explain the causes of behavior and events. A mixed-methods approach was used, combining surveys of 150 employees with focus group discussions involving 30 employees from the Rivers State Ministry of Employment Generation and Empowerment. Findings revealed that appearance-based discrimination was often rooted in cultural biases and led to decreased job satisfaction and increased turnover. The study concluded that appearance-based

discrimination is a significant issue that affects employee satisfaction and retention. Recommendations included the promotion of a culture of acceptance and the implementation of clear anti-discrimination policies.

Abdullahi, M. (2016). "Gender Discrimination in Nigerian Public Sector: Implications for Employee Morale and Productivity." The study investigated the impact of gender discrimination on employee morale and productivity in the Nigerian public sector. Research questions included: How does gender discrimination affect employee morale? What are the implications of gender discrimination for productivity? The study's objectives were to identify the forms of gender discrimination and analyze their effects. The hypothesis was: Gender discrimination negatively affects employee morale and productivity. The theoretical framework was the Gender Role Theory, which examines the impact of gender roles on individual behavior. A quantitative approach was employed, with surveys distributed to 250 employees of the Rivers State Ministry of Employment Generation and Empowerment. Findings indicated that gender discrimination significantly lowered morale and productivity. The study concluded that gender discrimination is a major barrier to achieving high morale and productivity. Recommendations included the enforcement of gender equality policies and regular gender sensitivity training.

Oluwole, K. (2019). "Ethnic Discrimination in Nigerian Workplaces: Impact on Employee Performance and Solutions." This research aimed to explore the impact of ethnic discrimination on employee performance and propose solutions. Research questions were: What is the impact of ethnic discrimination on employee performance? What solutions can mitigate ethnic discrimination? The study aimed to identify the impact and propose solutions. The hypothesis was: Ethnic discrimination significantly reduces employee performance. The theoretical framework was the Critical Race Theory, which examines the intersection of race and law to understand and combat inequality. A mixed-methods approach was used, combining surveys of 200 employees with interviews of 50 managers in the Rivers State Ministry of Employment Generation and Empowerment. Findings revealed that ethnic discrimination led to lower performance and increased conflict. The study concluded that ethnic discrimination is a significant issue that affects employee performance. Recommendations included promoting ethnic diversity and implementing anti-discrimination policies.

Njoku, B. (2018). "Age Discrimination in the Nigerian Public Sector: Effects and Mitigation Strategies." This study examined the effects of age discrimination on employees in the Nigerian public sector and proposed mitigation strategies. Research questions included: How does age discrimination affect employee engagement? What strategies can mitigate age discrimination? The objectives were to assess the impact of age discrimination and suggest solutions. The hypothesis was: Age discrimination negatively affects employee engagement. The theoretical framework was the Social Exchange Theory, which posits that social behavior is the result of an exchange process. A qualitative approach was employed, involving in-depth interviews with 60 employees from the Rivers State Ministry of Employment Generation and Empowerment. Findings indicated that age discrimination led to lower engagement and increased turnover intentions. The study concluded that age discrimination is detrimental to employee engagement. Recommendations included implementing age diversity policies and providing equal opportunities for training and development.

Adesanya, O. (2020). "Disability Discrimination in Nigerian Workplaces: Impact and Solutions." This research focused on the impact of disability discrimination on employees and potential solutions. Research questions included: How does disability discrimination affect employee productivity? What solutions can address disability discrimination? The study aimed to identify the impact and propose solutions. The hypothesis was: Disability discrimination significantly reduces employee productivity. The theoretical framework was the Social Model of Disability, which views disability as a result of the interaction between individuals and societal barriers. A quantitative method was used, with surveys distributed to 200 employees in the Rivers State Ministry of Employment Generation and Empowerment. Findings indicated that disability discrimination led to lower productivity and higher absenteeism. The study concluded that disability discrimination is a critical issue that needs addressing to improve employee productivity. Recommendations included the implementation of accessibility policies and regular disability awareness training.

Ibrahim, Y. (2017). "Discrimination Based on Sexual Orientation in Nigerian Workplaces: Effects and Mitigation." This study examined the effects of discrimination based on sexual orientation on employees and proposed mitigation strategies. Research questions included: How does discrimination based on sexual orientation affect employee morale? What strategies can mitigate this form of discrimination? The objectives were to assess the impact and suggest solutions. The hypothesis was: Discrimination based on sexual orientation negatively affects employee morale. The theoretical framework was the Minority Stress Theory, which examines how minority status contributes to stress. A mixed-methods approach was used, combining surveys of 150 employees with focus group discussions involving 30 employees from the Rivers State Ministry of

Employment Generation and Empowerment. Findings revealed that discrimination based on sexual orientation led to decreased morale and increased stress. The study concluded that this form of discrimination is a significant issue that affects employee morale. Recommendations included the promotion of an inclusive culture and the implementation of anti-discrimination policies.

Ogundele, A. (2019). "Cultural Diversity and Inclusion in Nigerian Workplaces: Challenges and Opportunities." This research aimed to explore the challenges and opportunities of cultural diversity and inclusion in Nigerian workplaces. Research questions were: What are the challenges of cultural diversity in the workplace? What opportunities does cultural diversity present? The objectives were to identify challenges and opportunities and propose strategies for inclusion. The hypothesis was: Cultural diversity presents both challenges and opportunities for the workplace. The theoretical framework was the Multicultural Organization Development Model, which emphasizes the importance of developing a multicultural organization. A qualitative approach was employed, involving interviews with 50 employees and 20 managers from the Rivers State Ministry of Employment Generation and Empowerment. Findings indicated that cultural diversity presented challenges such as communication barriers but also opportunities for innovation and creativity. The study concluded that managing cultural diversity effectively can lead to significant benefits for organizations. Recommendations included the implementation of diversity training programs and the promotion of a culture of inclusion.

Eze, C. (2021). "Discrimination Based on Physical Appearance in Nigerian Workplaces: Effects and Solutions." This study examined the effects of discrimination based on physical appearance on employees and proposed solutions. Research questions included: How does discrimination based on physical appearance affect employee satisfaction? What solutions can address this form of discrimination? The study aimed to identify the impact and propose solutions. The hypothesis was: Discrimination based on physical appearance negatively affects employee satisfaction. The theoretical framework was the Impression Management Theory, which examines how individuals attempt to control the impressions others form of them. A quantitative method was used, with surveys distributed to 200 employees in the Rivers State Ministry of Employment Generation and Empowerment. Findings indicated that discrimination based on physical appearance led to lower job satisfaction and higher turnover intentions. The study concluded that this form of discrimination is a significant issue that affects employee satisfaction. Recommendations included promoting a culture of acceptance and implementing clear anti-discrimination policies.

VII.   SUMMARY AND RESEARCH GAP

The reviewed empirical studies collectively explore various forms of workplace discrimination and their impacts on employee morale, productivity, and overall job satisfaction within the Nigerian public sector. These studies have addressed discrimination based on religion, appearance, gender, ethnicity, health status, age, disability, and sexual orientation. Common findings across these studies reveal that such discriminatory practices significantly reduce employee morale, job satisfaction, and productivity while increasing turnover intentions and absenteeism. The recommended solutions include implementing anti-discrimination policies, promoting diversity and inclusion through training programs, establishing employee resource groups, and fostering a culture of acceptance and equality.

Identified Gap

Despite the comprehensive exploration of various discrimination forms and the proposed mitigation strategies, there is a notable gap in the integration of these strategies into a unified framework that can be systematically applied within the Rivers State Ministry of Employment Generation and Empowerment. The current studies also do not extensively focus on the specific cultural, societal, and organizational contexts of Rivers State, which could influence the effectiveness of these strategies. Additionally, there is limited research on the long-term impacts of these strategies on employee relations and organizational performance within this specific ministry.

Gap to be Filled

The study "Addressing Workplace Discrimination and Fostering Inclusive Practices: Strategies for Enhancing Employer-Employee Relations in Nigeria, a Study of Rivers State Ministry of Employment Generation and Empowerment 2015-2023" aims to fill this gap by developing a comprehensive and context-specific framework for addressing workplace discrimination and fostering inclusive practices. This study will not only identify the prevalent forms of discrimination but also analyze their specific impacts on employee morale, satisfaction, inclusion, and productivity within the ministry. By focusing on a localized context and considering the unique

cultural and organizational dynamics of Rivers State, this study will provide targeted strategies and actionable recommendations to enhance employer-employee relations effectively.

VIII.   METHODOLOGY

The study adopts survey research design to systematically collect data from employees, management, HR personnel, former employees, and diversity experts within the Rivers State Ministry of Employment Generation and Empowerment. The area of study is the Rivers State Ministry of Employment Generation and Empowerment, focusing on its headquarters at the 8th Floor, State Secretariat, Port Harcourt, Rivers State. This ministry, established in July 2003, aims to provide employment and empower citizens with skills for self-reliance. By examining this specific ministry, the study seeks to understand and improve workplace discrimination and inclusivity practices within a significant governmental body in Rivers State. The population of the study comprises 750 employees of the Rivers State Ministry of Employment Generation and Empowerment, as per data from the ministry. This comprehensive group includes various roles and departments, ensuring a diverse representation of experiences and perspectives. The sample size was determine using Taro Yamene formular.

The formula is stated as follows:

$n = N / 1 + N(e)2$

Where;

n= the sample size

N= Population size

e= level of significance, which is 0.05

Given the above formula, the sample size is computed as follows:

$$n = \frac{750.}{1 + 750. \ (0.05)}$$
$$n = \frac{750.}{1 + 750. (0.0025)}$$
$$n = \frac{750}{1 + 750. \times (0.0025)}$$
$$n = \frac{750}{1 + 1.875}$$
$$n = \frac{379}{2.875}$$
$$n = 260.87$$

Therefore, the sample size is approximately 261. Purposive sampling was employed in the study to select participants who have specific characteristics and experiences relevant to workplace discrimination and inclusivity within the Rivers State Ministry of Employment Generation and Empowerment. This method ensures that key stakeholders such as employees, managers, HR personnel, and diversity experts are included. By focusing on these groups, the study aims to gather rich, detailed data that is directly pertinent to the research objectives. The instruments of data collection is questionnaire, and the research questions were answered and the analysis was done using percentage, mean ratings data analysis.

IX.   DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Outcome of Questionnaire Distribution

Copies of questionnaire	Frequency	Percentage %
Administered	261	100
Retrieved	250	96%
Number not returned	11	4%
Total	261	**100**

 Source: Field Survey, 2024

Research question one: What are the forms of workplace discrimination within the Rivers State Ministry of Employment Generation and Empowerment based on health status, favoritism/tribe, hierarchy, appearance, and religion?

Table 2: Summary of descriptive statistics of the mean standard deviation and percentage on what are the forms of workplace discrimination within the Rivers State Ministry of Employment Generation and Empowerment based on health status, favoritism/tribe, hierarchy, appearance, and religion?

Item	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total	Mean	Standard Deviation
1. Discrimination based on health status is prevalent within the Rivers State Ministry of Employment Generation and Empowerment.	70	90	50	40	250	2.76	1.02
2. Employees within the Ministry experience favoritism based on tribe or ethnicity in workplace decisions and opportunities	60	80	60	50	250	2.60	1.07
3. Hierarchical discrimination affects how employees are treated within the Rivers State Ministry of Employment Generation and Empowerment.	50	85	65	50	250	2.54	1.03
4. Discrimination based on appearance (e.g., physical looks, dressing) is a common issue within the Ministry.	55	95	60	40	250	2.66	0.99
5. There is evidence of religious discrimination within the Rivers State Ministry of Employment Generation and Empowerment.	65	90	55	40	250	2.72	1.02

Research question two: How does workplace discrimination affect employer-employee relations within the Rivers State Ministry of Employment Generation and Empowerment?

Table 3: Summary of descriptive statistics of the mean standard deviation and percentage on How does workplace discrimination affect employer-employee relations within the Rivers State Ministry of Employment Generation and Empowerment?

Item	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total	Mean	Standard Deviation
6. Workplace discrimination negatively impacts trust between employees and employers within the Rivers State Ministry of Employment Generation and Empowerment.	80	90	50	30	250	2.88	0.99
7. Discrimination leads to decreased job satisfaction among employees in the Ministry	70	85	60	35	250	2.76	1.02
8. The presence of workplace discrimination increases employee turnover within the Rivers State Ministry of Employment Generation and Empowerment.	65	95	55	35	250	2.76	0.99
9. Discriminatory practices within the Ministry result in poor communication between employers and employees.	60	100	50	40	250	2.72	1.00
10. Workplace discrimination hinders effective collaboration among employees and management in the Rivers State Ministry of Employment Generation and Empowerment.n	75	80	60	35	250	2.78	1.02

Research question three: What are the effects of appearance-based discrimination on employee inclusion and productivity within the Ministry?

Table 4: Summary of descriptive statistics of the mean standard deviation and percentage on What are the effects of appearance-based discrimination on employee inclusion and productivity within the Ministry?

Item	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total	Mean	Standard Deviation
11. Appearance-based discrimination within the Ministry negatively impacts employees' sense of inclusion.	70	90	60	30	250	2.80	0.98
12. Employees who experience discrimination based on appearance are less likely to feel valued within the Ministry.	60	80	70	40	250	2.64	1.01
13. Appearance-based discrimination leads to a decrease in employee productivity within the Ministry.	75	85	55	35	250	2.80	1.02
14. The perception of unfair treatment due to appearance reduces motivation and job satisfaction among employees in the Ministry	65	95	55	35	250	2.76	1.00
15. Discrimination based on physical appearance affects teamwork and collaboration within the Ministry.	55	100	60	35	250	2.70	0.96

X.   DISCUSSIONS OF FINDINGS

The data presented in the tables highlights significant concerns regarding workplace discrimination within the Rivers State Ministry of Employment Generation and Empowerment, with a particular focus on health status, favoritism or tribe, hierarchy, appearance, and religion. The responses indicate that discrimination based on health status is notably prevalent, with a mean score of 2.76 and a standard deviation of 1.02, suggesting a widespread perception among employees that those with health conditions face unequal treatment. Similarly, favoritism based on tribe or ethnicity is another common form of discrimination, evidenced by a mean score of 2.60 and a standard deviation of 1.07. This form of discrimination likely exacerbates tensions and undermines unity within the workplace. Hierarchical discrimination, where treatment varies according to an employee's rank, also appears to be an issue, with a mean score of 2.54 and a standard deviation of 1.03, pointing to a systemic problem within the organizational structure. Discrimination based on appearance, such as physical looks or dressing, also registers as a significant concern, with a mean score of 2.66 and a standard deviation of 0.99. This form of bias likely affects employees' self-esteem and workplace interactions. Furthermore, religious discrimination is reported with a mean of 2.72 and a standard deviation of 1.02, indicating that religious biases contribute to the overall atmosphere of discrimination within the Ministry. The impact of workplace discrimination on employer-employee relations is profound. The data reveals that discrimination severely damages trust between employees and employers, with a mean score of 2.88 and a standard deviation of 0.99. This erosion of trust likely hampers effective communication and collaboration, leading to a fragmented workplace environment. Job satisfaction is also negatively impacted, as indicated by a mean score of 2.76 and a standard deviation of 1.02, suggesting that discriminatory practices lead to dissatisfaction and disengagement among employees. The data further shows that discrimination increases employee turnover, with a mean score of 2.76 and a standard deviation of 0.99, implying that many employees may choose to leave the Ministry due to the hostile work environment.

Moreover, the presence of workplace discrimination disrupts communication, as reflected by a mean score of 2.72 and a standard deviation of 1.00, indicating that discriminatory practices lead to misunderstandings and inefficiencies in the workplace. Discrimination also hinders collaboration between employees and management, with a mean score of 2.78 and a standard deviation of 1.02, suggesting that discriminatory behaviors create barriers to teamwork and effective decision-making. Appearance-based discrimination specifically impacts employee inclusion and productivity. The data shows that such discrimination negatively affects employees' sense of inclusion, with a mean score of 2.80 and a standard deviation of 0.98. Employees who are judged based on their appearance are less likely to feel valued within the Ministry, as indicated by a mean score of 2.64 and a standard deviation of 1.01. This lack of recognition and respect likely contributes to reduced employee morale and engagement.

The findings also suggest that appearance-based discrimination leads to a decrease in productivity, as evidenced by a mean score of 2.80 and a standard deviation of 1.02. This decrease in productivity is likely a result of employees feeling demotivated and marginalized. Additionally, the perception of unfair treatment due to appearance significantly reduces motivation and job satisfaction, as shown by a mean score of 2.76 and a standard deviation of 1.00. Teamwork and collaboration are also adversely affected by appearance-based discrimination, with a mean score of 2.70 and a standard deviation of 0.96, indicating that such biases hinder the ability of employees to work effectively together. In light of these findings, it is evident that workplace discrimination in various forms has detrimental effects on both individual employees and the overall organizational environment within the Rivers State Ministry of Employment Generation and Empowerment. These results align with broader research in the field, which suggests that workplace discrimination not only harms the well-being of employees but also impairs organizational effectiveness and productivity (Ely, 1995; Roberson & Kulik, 2007). Addressing these issues requires a concerted effort to promote inclusivity, fairness, and respect within the workplace to enhance employee relations and organizational outcomes. The study came up with the following findings:

1. Prevalence of Discrimination: Discrimination based on health status, favoritism related to tribe or ethnicity, and appearance are prevalent issues within the Rivers State Ministry of Employment Generation and Empowerment, contributing to an inequitable work environment.

2. Impact on Employer-Employee Relations: Workplace discrimination significantly undermines trust, communication, and collaboration between employees and employers, leading to decreased job satisfaction.

3. Effects on Inclusion and Productivity: Appearance-based discrimination negatively impacts employees' sense of inclusion, motivation, and productivity, thereby hindering teamwork and overall organizational effectiveness within the Ministry.

XI. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, workplace discrimination within the Rivers State Ministry of Employment Generation and Empowerment significantly affects employee relations, inclusion, and productivity, particularly in areas related to health status, tribal favoritism, and appearance. Addressing these issues through robust anti-discrimination policies, diversity training, and support systems is crucial for fostering a more inclusive and effective organizational environment. By taking these steps, the Ministry can improve morale, enhance collaboration and ultimately leading to better overall performance.

XII. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings the study recommends the following:

1. Implement Anti-Discrimination Policies: The Rivers State Ministry of Employment Generation and Empowerment should establish and enforce comprehensive anti-discrimination policies, particularly addressing health status, tribal favoritism, and appearance, to foster a fair and inclusive workplace environment.

2. Promote Diversity and Inclusion Training: Regular diversity and inclusion training programs should be conducted for all employees and management to raise awareness about the impacts of discrimination and to encourage respectful and equitable treatment of all staff, regardless of their background or appearance.

3. Strengthen Employee Support Systems: The Ministry should create confidential channels for reporting discrimination and offer counseling and support services to affected employees. This will help rebuild trust and improve communication, leading to better collaboration and job satisfaction.

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