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PERCEIVED GENDER DISCRIMINATION
AMONG ACADEMIC WOMEN:
PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS AND COPING

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements

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ABSTRACT

Previous research has shown that women academics often suffer from gender discrimination in their workplace. The effects that gender discrimination has on the women who experience it have rarely been studied, the research that has been carried out, is by clinicians involved with counselling women suffering from discrimination. The present study examines academic women's perceptions and experiences of gender discrimination, and the effects that gender discrimination has on women's well-being at work. The coping strategies that academic women use to deal with discrimination are also studied. The subjects were forty-seven randomly chosen female academics from Massey University. The study was conducted in two phases. Phase one consisted of a semi-structured interview. Phase two consisted of the administration of the following scales. The Work Locus of Control Scale (Spector, 1988), Warr's Well-Being and Mental Health Measures (Warr, 1990), Self-Efficacy (Wells-Parker, Miller and Topping, 1990), the Dimensions of Stress Scale (Vitaliano, Russo, Weber and Celum, 1993) and the Cybernetic Coping Scale (Edwards and Baglioni, 1993).

The majority (71%) of women in the university had experienced gender discrimination against them at some stage of their careers. The gender discrimination was of two types, individual and structural. The majority of women had experienced individual discrimination against them and structural discrimination in their favour. Academic women did not feel included in the male dominated informal networks of the university, although they were involved in their own female dominated networks. The perceived discrimination had an effect on the women personally and emotionally, on their work life, their relationships and their future aspirations. The psychometric scale data showed that the women who were familiar with discrimination were anxious and had high negative carry over from work to other situations. Women with high aspiration and/or an external locus of control had experienced the most discrimination. Women with an external locus of control were anxious and depressed. Depression and anxiety were associated with low aspiration, low competence and low self-efficacy. The majority of women coped with discrimination by trying to change the situation. There were relationships between the coping strategies, the use of devaluation as a coping strategy was associated with the use of accommodation, symptom reduction and avoidance. The use of coping strategies was also related to mental health. Women with low competence, low aspiration and who were depressed used avoidance, and women who were anxious had low competence, low aspiration and were depressed used devaluation. This study shows that academic women are experiencing gender discrimination and that although this has an impact on their well-being at work, they do cope with discrimination.

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