

## Research Article

# Gender discrimination among professional college students in Agartala, India: a cross-sectional study

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** Professional college students being at the base of the hierarchy of professional occupation may be vulnerable to harassment, discrimination and abuse regarding their gender. The present study was conducted with the objective to assess the prevalence and pattern of Gender discrimination among professional college students in Agartala, and to study their emotional response towards gender discrimination.

**Methods:** This cross-sectional study was conducted between September to November, 2015 among students of 5 randomly selected Professional colleges of Agartala. Sample size was calculated and 450 professional college students were included in the study.

**Results:** The present study revealed that the prevalence of gender discrimination among the professional college students was 12.45% with both the males and females being victims of gender discrimination (6.80% vs 5.56%, p value 0.77). There was a significant difference in the type of discrimination experienced by the male and female students (p value-0.01) and male faculties were the main perpetrators of gender discrimination. Regarding the emotional response towards gender discrimination majority of the students complained of frustration (28.57%) followed by helplessness (26.78%) and depression (23.21%).

**Conclusions:** Gender discrimination can be controlled in the college premises with collective efforts to minimize the belief that one sex has rights, leadership qualities, and academic status greater than that of the other sex.

**Keywords:** Gender discrimination, College students, Emotional stress

## INTRODUCTION

Gender discrimination refers to gender based behavior, policies and actions that adversely affect work by leading to disparate treatment or creation of an intimidating environment.<sup>1</sup> Gender equality in terms of participation in, and attainment of, education has been achieved in most of the countries worldwide and girls do have better grades and often outnumber boys among new college graduates. However, in many developing countries, students have poorer educational attainments due to discrimination they face while pursuing their professional

courses. Achieving gender equality in education will not only promote greater equality in employment outcomes but also help postpone early-marriages, reduce infant mortality rates and improve health and education of future generations.<sup>2</sup>

Professional college students being at the base of the hierarchy of professional occupation may also be vulnerable to harassment, discrimination and abuse regarding their gender. Abundant research has demonstrated gender bias in many demographic groups, but there is paucity of information on whether there is an existence of gender bias in professional colleges. Hence,

the present study was conducted with the objective to assess the prevalence and pattern of Gender discrimination among professional college students in Agartala, and to study their emotional response towards gender discrimination.

## METHODS

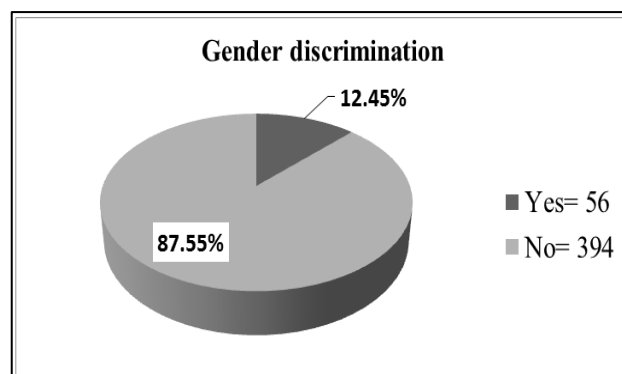
This was a cross-sectional study conducted among the students of professional colleges of Agartala from 1<sup>st</sup> September to 30<sup>th</sup> November 2015. The study included students of Professional Colleges who consented to participate in the study. Considering the prevalence of gender discrimination among professional college students to be 78% as found in a study conducted in a medical College by Hashmi AM et al, with 5% relative precision and at 5% significance level sample size has been calculated to be 434 and was rounded to 450.<sup>3</sup>

Multistage sampling method was followed for selecting the study participants. In first stage, out of 12 professional colleges 5 colleges (AGMC, RIPSAT, Techno India, College of Veterinary Science and Bhavans Institute of Science and Technology) were selected by simple random sampling. In second stage, from each college 66 students were selected by stratified random sampling. The study included the students after taking written informed consent from them. Students who were not willing to participate or were absent at the day of data collection were excluded from the study. A predesigned and pretested questionnaire was administered to the students and information was collected regarding their socio-demographic profile and gender discrimination experienced by them. Data was entered in Epi info version 7 and expressed in frequency and percentage. Statistical analysis was done by using chi square test and Fishers exact test and P value of less than 0.05 was considered to be statistically significant. The study was approved by the institutional ethics committee of Agartala Govt. Medical College.

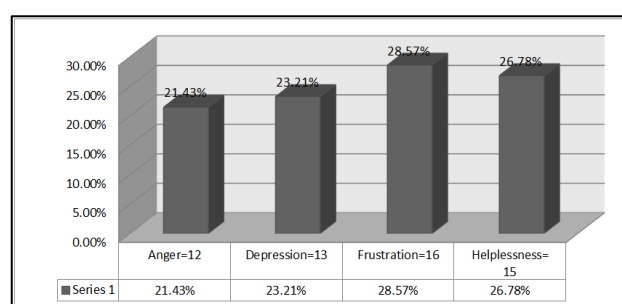
## RESULTS

The present study was conducted among 450 professional college students of Agartala.

Table 1 shows that the mean age of the respondents was  $20.50 \pm 1.93$  years with 72.20% of them belonging to age group 20-23 years. Majority of the respondents were male (57.60%) and were Hindu by religion (88.20%). Majority of the students belonged to a family where the Head of the family is a Serviceman (60%) by occupation and with a per capita income of the family being less than Rs 5000 per month (46.70%). Figure 1 shows that the prevalence of gender discrimination among the professional college students was 12.45% and both the male and female students were victims of gender discrimination (6.80% vs 5.56%, p value 0.77 using chi square test).



**Figure 1: Pie chart showing prevalence of gender discrimination among the professional college students.**



**Figure 2: Bar diagram showing emotional response to gender discrimination.**

**Table 1: Socio demographic profile of the study participants.**

		Frequency (%)
Age group (Mean age- $20.50 \pm 1.93$ yrs)	17 to 19 yrs	114 (25.30%)
	20 to 23 yrs	325 (72.20%)
	24 to 26 yrs	11 (2.40%)
Gender	Male	259 (57.60%)
	Female	191 (42.40%)
Religion	Hindu	397 (88.20%)
	Muslim	13 (2.90%)
	Christian	39 (8.70%)
	Buddhist	1 (0.20%)
Caste	ST	94 (20.90%)
	SC	77 (17.10%)
	OBC	110 (24.40%)
	UR	169 (37.60%)
Occupation of the head of the family	Unskilled worker	10 (2.20%)
	Skilled worker	20 (4.40%)
	Businessman	111 (24.70%)
	Unemployed	39 (8.70%)
	Serviceman	270 (60.00%)
Per capita Family income per month (in Rupees)	< Rs 5000	210 (46.70%)
	Rs 5000 - 10,000	151 (33.60%)
	Rs 10,001 - 15,000	52 (11.60%)
	> Rs 15,000	37 (8.20%)

Table 2 shows that the professional college students suffer from various forms of discrimination. Majority of the males were found to be victims of gender discrimination with an effect on their academic performance (41.90%). Beside, male students were also found to suffer discrimination in the form of less expectation from the faculties, getting neglected in groups, etc. On the other hand, female students suffered discrimination in the form of getting fewer opportunities in leading groups (28.00%), less chance in showing talent (20.00%), etc. The study revealed that there was a significant difference in the type of discrimination experienced by the male and female students ( $p$  value-0.01). Both the male and female students complained of

experiencing gender discrimination from the male faculties. Regarding the commonest place of discrimination 48.40% males stated that they experienced discrimination in examination room, followed by practical class (29.00%) where females used to get the preference by the faculties. However, majority of the female students experienced discrimination in ladies hostel (32%) and equal number of them complained of suffering from discrimination during examination.

Figure 2 shows the emotional response of the college students towards gender discrimination. Majority of the students complained of frustration (28.57%) followed by helplessness (26.78%) and depression (23.21%).

**Table 2: Pattern of gender discrimination among college students.**

		Male N=31 (%)	Female N=25 (%)	P value*
Type of gender discrimination	Fewer opportunities in leading groups	4 (12.90%)	7 (28.00%)	0.01
	Less chance for showing talent	3 (9.70%)	5 (20.00%)	
	Less expectation from faculties	4 (12.90%)	1 (4.00%)	
	Unethical talk	2 (6.50%)	3 (12.00%)	
	Effect on academic performance	13 (41.90%)	1 (4.00%)	
	Getting neglected in groups	4 (12.90%)	4 (16.00%)	
	Having different hostel facilities	1 (3.20%)	4 (16.00%)	
Person involved in the discrimination	Faculty members	28 (90.30%)	19 (76.00%)	0.27
	College Staffs	3 (9.70%)	6 (24.00%)	
Experiencing discrimination from-	Male	30 (96.80%)	20 (80.00%)	0.07
	Female	1 (3.20%)	5 (20.00%)	
Place of discrimination	Lecture class	3 (9.70%)	2 (8.00%)	0.05
	Practical class	9 (29.00%)	6 (24.00%)	
	During examination	15 (48.40%)	8 (32.00%)	
	Academic / Account section	3 (9.70%)	1 (4.00%)	
	Hostel	1 (3.20%)	8 (32.00%)	

\*P value calculated using Fisher's Exact test.

## DISCUSSION

The present study revealed that the prevalence of gender discrimination among the professional college students to be 12.45% with both males and females being equal victims of gender discrimination (6.80% vs 5.56%,  $p$  value 0.77). Similar finding was obtained from a study conducted in Pakistan by Hashmi AM et al among medical college students where 78% of the students were found to be victim of gender discrimination with both males and females being equally victims of gender discrimination ( $p$  value 0.20).<sup>3</sup> Again in studies conducted in US and Canada among medical college students 42% and 46% of the female medical students reported harassment during medical training.<sup>4,5</sup> Thus unlike the usual concept that females are the usual victims of gender discrimination the present study highlighted that the gender discrimination was

experienced by both boys and girls in the professional colleges in this part of the country.

The present study revealed a significant difference in the pattern of discrimination experienced by the male and female students. Majority of the female students stated that they suffered discrimination in the form of getting fewer opportunities in leading groups, less chance in showing talent, etc. Majority of the male students stated that they face discrimination during examination with female students easily getting good marks, and they experience less expectation from the faculties and get more neglected in groups compared to the girls. In the study conducted by Hashmi AM et al the most common form of gender discrimination for both males and females was denied opportunities (68.5% and 59.8% respectively), followed by neglecting students' needs and unethical talk.<sup>3</sup> In a Swedish study 59% of respondents reported at least one experience of derogatory jokes and

comments.<sup>6</sup> However, in the present study very less students experienced unethical talk as a form of discrimination.

In the present study both the male and female students complained of experiencing gender discrimination from the male faculties. However, in the study conducted by Hashmi AM et al majority of males and females suffered gender discrimination from females and the most common places of gender discrimination were teachers' offices (43.7%) followed by lecture halls (37.2%).<sup>3</sup> But the present study revealed that the commonest place of discrimination was the examination hall for both the males and female students. Regarding emotional response towards gender discrimination, the present study showed that majority of the students complained of frustration followed by helplessness and depression. However, in the study conducted by Hashmi AM et al the most common emotional response was anger, followed by frustration and helplessness.<sup>3</sup> In a survey of residents undergoing training in Canada the most frequent emotional reactions to sexual harassment were embarrassment, anger and frustration.<sup>7</sup> Hence, a similar pattern of emotional response towards gender discrimination is established in the present study as it is in different parts of the world.

## CONCLUSION

Gender discrimination can be controlled only if there is a collective effort to minimize the belief that one sex is superior to the other and that the one sex has endowments, rights, leadership qualities and academic status greater than those of the other sex. The study revealed that gender discrimination was prevalent among both the male and female professional college students of Agartala. There was a significant difference in the type of discrimination experienced by the male and female students and male faculties were the main perpetrators of gender discrimination. Gender discrimination affected academic performance and also resulted in emotional distress among the students.

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