



# Chapter 7

## Addressing Illegal Workplace Discrimination and the Interactions That Lead to Complaints in Healthcare Organizations


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### ABSTRACT

*A study of healthcare organizations found that 87% reported instances of discrimination, the highest industry rate. Illegal workplace discrimination can have many impacts, from reduced employee morale to higher recruitment and litigation costs. Healthcare organizations must address this issue because it can significantly impact their ability to provide quality patient care. Discrimination can lead to a decrease in employee morale, a decrease in productivity, and a decrease in the quality of care that is provided. It can also lead to higher turnover rates and costs associated with recruiting and training new employees. In addition, it can lead to an increase in patient complaints and a decrease in patient satisfaction. This chapter explores how leadership and organizational culture interventions can make a difference.*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Discrimination in the workplace is a pervasive problem that has been the subject of increasing attention in recent years. According to a 2017 United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) report, over 30,000 discrimination charges were filed in 2016 (EEOC, 2017). This number proves that discrimination remains a severe issue in the modern workplace, significantly impacting employee morale, productivity, and retention. In the United States, federal laws prohibit workplace discrimination based on race, color, sex, religion, national origin, age, and disability. This paper will provide an in-depth examination of illegal workplace discrimination, focusing on the legal framework that governs it, the types of discrimination that are prohibited, the remedies available to victims of discrimination, and how employers may be held liable for discrimination.

Discrimination in the healthcare industry is a severe issue that affects not only healthcare workers but also patients. According to the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), there is a “significant, disproportionate number of discrimination complaints” filed in healthcare settings (n.d). Numerous types of discrimination may occur in a healthcare setting, such as racial discrimination, gender discrimination, age discrimination, disability (Lindsay et al., 2023), discrimination, and sexual harassment. This paper will explore the prevalence of discrimination in the healthcare industry and discuss the various types of discrimination and related complaints.

Racial discrimination is a significant problem in the healthcare industry, and the EEOC reports that it is one of the most frequent types of discrimination complaints received (n.d). Research has shown that African Americans and Hispanics are more likely to experience racial discrimination in healthcare settings than whites. In a study conducted in 2018, 22% of African Americans and 18% of Hispanics reported experiencing racial discrimination in a healthcare setting, compared to only 7% of whites, Lai et al. (2018). These findings demonstrate that racial disparities in healthcare are still an issue, particularly among people of color (Snyder & Schwartz, 2019). Additionally, African Americans are more likely to experience discrimination when seeking medical care than any other racial group, Sim et al. (2021). Not only does racial discrimination in healthcare settings harm patient experience, but it also affects the quality of care they receive.

Illegal discrimination in the workplace has a high financial cost. Employees who are discriminated against are often unable to earn their total potential income due to being denied promotions, pay raises, and other opportunities. In addition, employers can be held liable for discrimination and face costly legal fees, including fines and damages (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, n.d.), leading to decreased profits and hurting a company’s reputation, decreased business, and reduced customer loyalty. The financial costs of discrimination can be exceptionally

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