

# WALKING THE TIGHTROPE

AN EXAMINATION OF BIAS IN INDIA'S  
ENGINEERING WORKPLACE

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The Center for WorkLife Law at the University of California, Hastings College of the Law, and the Society of Women Engineers conducted a large-scale study of bias experiences of Indian engineers largely working for Western companies in India. Almost 700 engineers participated.

## FOUR PATTERNS

Indian engineers reported high levels of bias, regardless of gender.

### 1 Prove-It-Again bias:

**76%** of engineers reported having to prove themselves over and over to get the same level of respect as their colleagues.

### 2 Tightrope bias:

**77%** of engineers reported that they were confined to a narrower range of acceptable behaviors than their colleagues.

### 3 Maternal Wall bias:

**40%** of engineers in India reported bias against mothers in their workplaces.

### 4 Tug of War bias:

**45%** of women reported that they have to compete with their female colleagues to get the one "woman's spot" available.

## 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.

## WORKPLACE PROCESSES

Among survey respondents:

**74%** reported bias in **assignments**

**77%** reported bias in **promotions**

**78%** reported bias in **compensation**

**76%** reported bias in **sponsorship and mentoring programs**

**67%** reported bias in **performance evaluations**

More than half of respondents:

**55%** reported that they did not feel a **strong sense of belonging to their workplace**



**58%** reported that they felt **excluded** from their colleagues



About **half of engineers** reported bias in their companies' hiring systems.



**44%** of men and **30%** of women engineers

reported bias due to the state/region they are from.



## SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Among survey respondents:

**11%**



**of women engineers** reported unwanted romantic or sexual attention or touching in the workplace.

