WALKING THE TIGHTROPE
AN EXAMINATION OF BIAS IN INDIA’S ENGINEERING WORKPLACE

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.