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Abstract

This paper examines the relationship between wage inequality and worker turnover intention. Wage inequality is measured in terms of pay disparity and discriminatory promotion, while worker turnover intention is measured in employee absenteeism and job search. This paper is designed as a theoretical review that provides a conceptual framework detailing the direction and the nature of the relationship between the variables. From the literature reviewed, it was revealed that wage inequality positively correlates with worker turnover intention. All the dimensions of wage inequality, pay disparity, and discriminatory promotion positively correlate with worker turnover intention measures of employee absenteeism and job search. The study, therefore, concludes that wage inequality predicts worker turnover intention. The study recommends that organizations should administer fair and equal pay and promotion, ensuring equal treatment of employees in wage and promotion administration in the workplace.

Keywords: *Wage, Inequality, Worker, Turnover, Intention*

1.1 Introduction

Every organization should maintain a motivated workforce to mitigate worker turnover intentions which is the symptom of employee turnover (Falope, 2017). Thus, motivating and keeping employees at work usually sustains workplace productivity and performance.

Notably, one way to maintain a motivated and passion-driven workforce is for the organization's leadership to institute a level playing field and equality of workers' welfare irrespective of sex, religion, ethnicity, color, etc. (Rouen, 2017). Hence, to avoid workers' turnover intentions, management should treat all organization members fairly and equally. Equality or inequality in an organization usually stems from several factors. Treating people equally or unequally in the workplace is associated with wage, promotion, socialization, health care, safety, etc. (Stoner et al., 2013; Rouen, 2017). Thus, for organizations' sustainable growth and development, management of the workplace should promote equality in all aspects of the firm's business activities. This is the premise upon which sustained productivity and performance will be achieved in the organization. In contrast, the pursuant of inequality and the promotion of the same in the firm's activities will negatively affect the performance of the workplace, which may lead to employees' turnover intentions and actual turnover. This situation will cause a decline in the firm's productivity and overall performance (Stoner et al., 2013; Oke & Ogunsanwo, 2018).

The concept of wage inequality at work is the process of a firm's leaders administering relative wage incentives in a discriminatory manner that affects workers' economic well-being in the workplace (Rouen, 2017). Hence, wage inequality usually impacts employees positively and has negative consequences on some workers. This imbalance of wage administration at work may create an unhealthy work environment that will lead to employee absenteeism and job search, negatively affecting productivity. The results will be turnover intentions of employees, actual turnover of staff, declining productivity, and organization performance (Stoner et al., 2013). Thus, the administration of wage inequality in the workplace may need to be revised for the progress of any organization. According to Karanja, Karanja, and Wagoki (2017), wage inequality is the differences in remuneration paid to workers in the different strata of the organization in a discriminatory manner.

This discrimination in the remuneration of employees usually leads to worker turnover intentions and other harmful factors at work. When wages are administered in a way that favors or disfavors relative sections of employees in the organization, we say such institutions are experiencing wage inequality. Wage inequality will drive the organization's absenteeism and job search as indicators of employee turnover intentions.

Worker or employee turnover intentions are simply the intentions of workers to quit the organization for competition in the industry or other sectors of the economy. This is usually a result of unhealthy working conditions, stress, discontent, and the pursuit of relatively better working conditions. Scholars also opined that a lack of job satisfaction, worker involvement, low commitment, etc., could lead to worker turnover intentions (Alshammari & Qaied, 2016). Hence, when turnover intentions manifest, some employees do not exercise the passion and the right attitude to work, and disengagement will set in, bringing down productivity at work. According to Mamun and Hasan (2017), employee turnover intentions are delineated as a situation in which employees plan to depart the organization for several factors or reasons, and this negatively influences the workplace regarding the ability to distribute the minimum required services.

1.2 Study Variables and Conceptual Framework

The predictor variable of this study is wage inequality which is divided into two dimensions; pay disparity and discriminatory promotion (Rouen, 2017). Thus, our criterion variable is worker turnover intention which is divided into two measures; employee absenteeism and job search (Researchers, 2022). The conceptual model is illustrated thus;

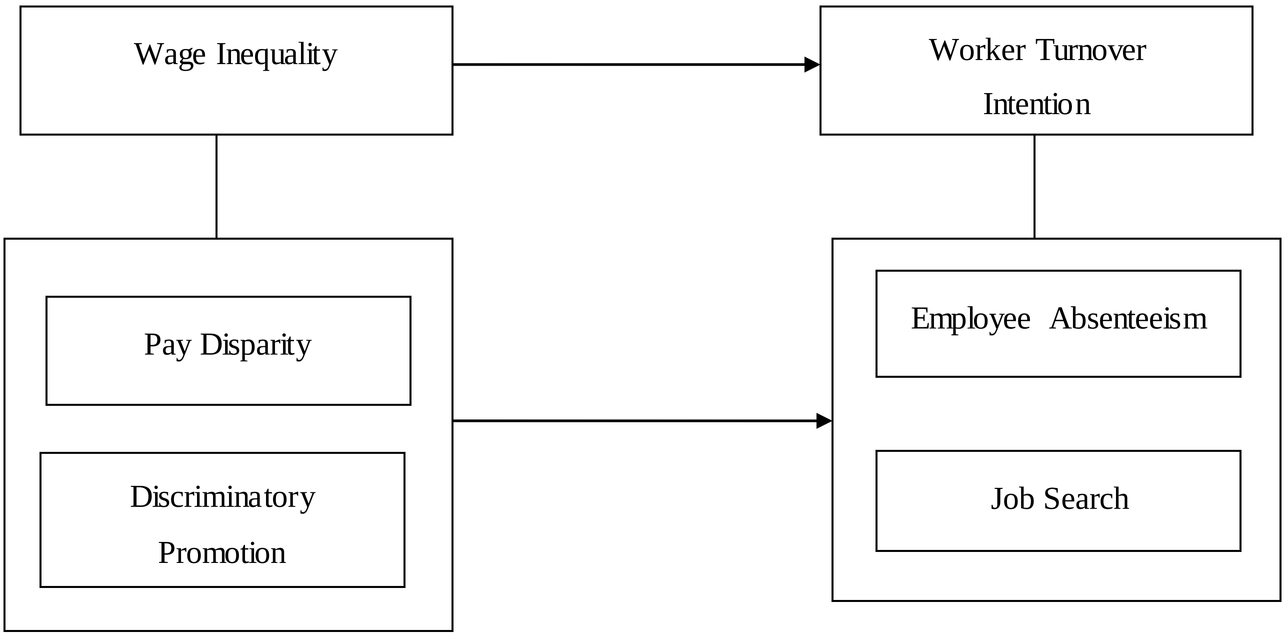

Figure 1: Conceptual framework

1.3 The Concept of Wage Inequality

The concept of wage inequality is a laudable construct in managing human capital at work. Organizations ought to be fair to all staff in terms of the administration of remuneration in the workplace, which ensures the commitment of the employees and the performance and competitiveness of the organization in their chosen industries (Karanja et al., 2017). Hence, wage inequality is a situation where pay is distributed unequally in the workplace. This is prevalent in most workplaces where management secretly or openly increases some selected staff salaries less qualified in education or work experience than others. They are also rapidly increasing executive compensation compared to most employees' remuneration. In some organizations, wage differences between employees at the upper echelon and workers at the down lines are very high. This results in a lack of commitment, bitterness, gossip, envy, conflicts, and other incivility, creating an unhealthy work environment for the employees.

According to Karanja et al. (2017), wage inequality could be defined as the unfair differences in remunerations paid to workers in the different strata of the company in a discriminatory manner. Thus, increasing the pay of some employees in contrast to others usually impacts employees' expectations about their pay and satisfaction. According to Falope (2017), wage inequality is the differentiation of employees' pay on factors unrelated to performance or merit at work. The scholar articulated that wage differences in most organizations occur due to race, gender, age, ethnicity, religion, color, etc. Wage inequality, which is the discrimination inherent in most organizations, is high. This inequality in income distribution among workers in the workplace decreases staff job satisfaction and organizational commitment and can lead to turnover intentions (Umar, 2014; Cornwell et al., 2017). Hence, wage inequality, also known as wage discrimination, is a type of employment and labor market discrimination considered by most industry watchers to be the most prevalent form of inequality practiced in the workplace. Wage inequality is the arbitrary assignment of wages or remuneration to employees predicated on factors contrasting performance and merit (Cornwell et al., 2017).

Wage inequality brings about untold consequences at work; workers' utility at work is affected by co-employees’ wages unfairly increased, which has broad labor market implications. Wage inequality in the organization reduces employees' output and attendance and reduces workers' ability to cooperate in their self-interest (Breza et al., 2016). However, it is pertinent to note that employees care about their pay levels in the workplace when making labor supply decisions. Workers are also concerned with their pay relative to their peers in the organization. Considering all these factors, the management of an organization should administer remunerations that should be fair to all staff, which will positively impact all employees and the company's progress (Breza et al., 2016; Rouen, 2017). Pay disparity or wage inequality has a company's performance implications. Wage inequality is often associated with companies with weak corporate governance and high employee turnover, where executive compensations are higher than employees' wages. Significantly, wage inequality hurts the growth of an average company (Cingano, 2014). Thus, it has negative implications both at the micro and macro levels of the economy.

Employees, for instance, will prefer to stay with an organization with more equal opportunities for stakeholders. Unequal organizations in terms of wages may lead to bad organizational policies and lower the ability of the management to put employees into control which negatively impacts the organization's progress (Couto, 2018). In order to ensure the motivation of employees for the progress of the organization, pay or wage should be of primary concern for both employers and employees. The wage substantially impacts the general living conditions and status of workers. To employers, wage and compensation represent one of the most significant cost elements in the workplace (Bruno et al., 2013). This should be managed in a way that will ensure fairness to all employees and the shareholders or employers of the organization.

1.4 Dimensions of Wage Inequality

Scholars have given wage inequality different operational definitions. According to Rouen (2017), wage inequality is operationalized into two dimensions: pay disparity and discriminatory promotion. However, other scholars see wage inequality as a unidimensional construct (Bruno et al., 2013; Umar, 2014; Breza et al., 2016). Thus, defining wage inequality as a standalone construct without sub-variables. The research adopted the definition of Rouen's (2017) wage inequality because it is more suitable for this study.

1.5 Pay Disparity

Scholars and practitioners have given the concept of pay disparity in work organizations attention. Selecting people and paying them wages higher and different from their peers with similar qualifications, knowledge, and skills is common in most organizations where corporate

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governance practice and ethics are grossly inadequate (Karanja et al., 2017). Hence, in an organization where governance rules and regulations are not well practiced, an organization may implement bad policies, including pay disparity. Pertinent to note is that pay disparity may crop up envy among employees, lower motivation and commitment, and lead to poor organizational performance (Stoner et al., 2013). People experiencing unfair pay differences in salaries and allowances at work have led to worker inadequacies in productivity, which usually negatively affects the company's productivity.

Organizations have had experiences where people with fewer qualifications and skills experience higher pay than their workers with better qualifications, knowledge, and skills (Bruno et al., 2013). This scenario usually creates a crisis in the workplace. Therefore**,** management of an organization should administer a level playing field for all staff in all its activities, including pay and compensation. This will drive better commitment and productivity and reduce envy and crisis at work (Suma & Lesha, 2013). Thus, fairness to all organization's members in pay – compensation usually leads to job satisfaction, employee engagement, and workplace effectiveness (Shahid & Azhar, 2013). According to Suma and Lesha (2013), pay disparity could be defined as the administration of unfair pay differences across members in a work organization. Notably, this pay disparity is not anchored on job performance and merit but on factors such as social and religious ties, ethnicity, gender, etc. (Stoner et al., 2013; Karanja et al., 2017). However, workplace management needs to administer pay and compensation based on superior staff performance and merit.

1.6 Discriminatory Promotion

A creditable indicator of wage inequality is discriminatory promotion. In this situation, some organization members are merely favored over their peers regarding promotion. When this happens, unfair seniority and pay rise occur, favoring some employees in contrast to those with similar skills, performance, and knowledge base (Bruno et al., 2013). Hence, a discriminatory promotion at work is the tendency of management to elevate some employees ahead of their peers. According to Mckay (2002), discriminatory promotion is the fundamental disparity that permits some employees' elevation while denying other staff in the same rank and status the same degree of elevation. It is a situation where some employees enjoy promotions and pay raises compared to their organization peers. It is important to note that promotion disparity in the workplace leads to wage inequality among employees, negatively affecting staff commitment and involvement and resulting in staff turnover intentions (Schober & Winter-Ebmer, 2011). This can also create an unhealthy work environment and stress-induced job design for the employees, leading to turnover intentions. An essential premise of discriminatory promotion is that its consequences may lead to income inequality and negatively impact the organization's growth (Cingano, 2014). Hence, executives at the management levels should have policies guided by the right culture of administering fair promotion for employees. This will drive staff motivation, work commitment, productivity, and organizational performance (Stoner et al., 2013). Thus, more than discrimination, including promotion disparity, is needed for any organization that wants a competitive advantage in its chosen industry. This is because the progress of the organization will be negatively impacted if promotion disparity is promoted at work.

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1.7 The Concept of Worker Turnover Intention

Workers' turnover intentions are likely to happen in work organizations due to several prevailing situations facing employees. Employees intend to quit the organization due to job dissatisfaction, lack of worker involvement, low commitment, etc. (Alshammari & Qaied, 2016). Hence, when the intention to leave an organization enters the mental state of employees, what manifests are; a lack of passion for the job and the organization, lack of commitment, late coming and absenteeism, frequent complaints, etc. (Mamun & Hasan, 2017). According to Mamum and Hasan (2017), employee turnover intention is delineated as a situation in which employees plan to depart the organization due to unfair treatment and negative perception of the workplace. When this happens, the total commitment and productivity of the workforce are reduced. Negative perceptions of the workplace can occur due to unequal treatment melted on employees by management. This unequal treatment can be found in remuneration or reward and compensation, promotion disparity, recognition differences, etc. (Cingano, 2014; Breza et al., 2016). Hence, these factors may inform turnover intentions in the workplace. Employee turnover intention can also manifest as a result of a worker's desire for career advancement or pursuit of greener pastures.

In order to avoid turnover intentions by employees which may graduate in actual turnover, corporate executives should see employees as the most critical asset of the workplace and should strive to retain the workforce by implementing strategies that will reduce the intention of employees to leave the organization (Kaur & Pankaj, 2013). Hence, the management of an organization should treat all employees equally and see them as the building blocks of the workplace. This will help ensure employee retention and the reduction of employee turnover intentions in the company. Pertinent to note is that since employees spend most of their time in a day at their workplaces, management is expected to make the working environment conducive for the staff so that they will optimally perform for the effectiveness and efficiency of the organization (Mbah & Ikemefuna, 2012). This will forestall staff turnover intentions; again, since personnel loss in the workplace is high, ranging from the cost of recruitment and selection, training, etc., executives should work to retain the existing workforce to maximize the return on investment on employees. Workers should be treated with utmost fairness and regard so their investment will not be lost due to employee exit (Olusegun, 2013).

Turnover intentions by employees in the workplace are associated with job stress, low quality of work life, age, tenure, and marital status. Again, employee turnover intentions are also associated with educational qualifications and skills. (Kaur & Pankaj, 2013). Hence, the more an individual employee attains higher educational qualifications, experience, and advances in age, the more likely the individual will tend to exit the workplace. Such individual employees may form the intention to leave the organization. Organizations emphasize valuable and talented employees due to the value these individuals bring to bear in the workplace. Organizations should strive to keep these employees, motivate them and keep their mental state away from turnover intentions (Alshammari et al., 2016). Thus, to avoid employee turnover, the organization's management should nurture and value its talented workforce. This will create awareness of healthy working conditions and positively drive their commitment to reducing worker turnover intentions. To ensure organizational productivity and performance, employees should be valued and treated equally and fairly; this will help reduce staff turnover intentions at work. The following section discusses the measures of worker turnover intention.

1.8 Measures of Worker Turnover Intention

The measurement of workers' turnover intentions is examined through diverse lenses. The construct is divided into different measures. Falope (2017) operationalized workers' turnover intentions into two measures: lack of commitment and job dissatisfaction. Again, Ugunal and Giritli (2021) defined employee turnover intentions into three dimensions; lack of motivation, commitment, and involvement. However, most of the studies in the literature see workers' turnover intentions as a unidimensional construct (Hayes, 2015; Mamun & Hasan, 2017). Turnover intentions could also be characterized by employee absenteeism and job search; these are the two measures that we are using for this study.

1.9 Employee Absenteeism

Employee absenteeism can be defined as the inability of a worker to resume at the stipulated time, get engaged to work, and stay till the closing hour. It is possible for personnel to resume or clock in without discharging their duties either because they left the premises after clocking in or because they are physically present but disengaged. The frequently used definition of absenteeism is when some personnel is away from scheduled work. Various authors have given diverse definitions of absenteeism; Boxall, Purcell, and Wright (2007) defined absenteeism as the proportion of work days missing through a member of staff's illness or absence in the place of work. Rafa (2017) opined that continual absenteeism is missing more than fifteen scheduled days per year. In their view, Pavithra and Peter (2017) equate absent employees to an idle machine or unoccupied workspace, with direct implications for loss and an indirect reduction in the pace of production. Absenteeism can be divided into two; intentional or unintentional. When an employee lies about sickness or makes up a story about staying away from work, it is premeditated, which should attract disciplinary action from the management.

From personal experience, I have worked with employees who lie that their father is seriously ill or that their brother had an accident and would want to take two to three days off. Their request will be approved without you knowing they have secured a job interview date in another organization. After this interview, they will return to work for one or two weeks waiting for the month's end and their salary. They will only apply for another leave after returning to work as soon as they are paid. Unintentional absenteeism occurs due to challenges beyond one's control, such as an accident, the death of a loved one, etc. Notably, all absenteeism cannot be classified as an indicator of quitting because absenteeism could result from sickness or unforeseen circumstances beyond an employee's control. These unforeseen situations could be a sudden accident, family emergency, restriction of movement in the residential area of the employee, etc. When absenteeism is unpremeditated, it cannot be equated to the intention to leave. However, when absenteeism becomes incessant, it could be a sign of dissatisfaction, resulting in an intention to quit. We will look at causes of absenteeism in the workplace which include; Unhealthy working environment; lack of adequate welfare facilities; family issues, stress, etc.

1.10 Job Search

Job search is the exploit of looking for employment opportunities due to unemployment or dissatisfaction with the current job. Unemployment includes those that lose their jobs and fresh graduates; when it comes to job hunting, there are different challenges faced by both employed and unemployed hunters (Boswell et al., 2011). Fresh graduates could be faced with a lack of experience and not getting a suitable job in their state. According to Wanberg (2012), unemployed people also tend to face issues of identity loss and financial insecurity, making the job search urgent and stressful for this group of job seekers. In comparison, employed job seekers might face the challenges of hiding their job hunting from their employers, especially when they have cordial relationships. Job search sources have been divided into two, formal and informal. The formal source of job searches entails using postings in daily newspapers, online, and other media advertisements; while informal include the use of family, friends, social contacts, etc. Wanberg, Hooft, and Csillag (2020) assert that both formal and informal job search sources are significant for job seekers because they provide the seeker with various advantages. There are many factors why people seek a new job when they are fully employed; it could be due to discontent, unhealthy organizational policies, lack of recognition, the pursuit of career advancement, etc. Some of these factors will be briefly discussed next.

When employees are discontented with their jobs, they will start to hunt for a new job, and the intention to leave the organization will crop up in their mental state (Stoner et al., 2013). This situation could be better for a growing, emerging, or developed organization. This is because the productivity and performance of the organization will be negatively affected by the dissatisfaction of employees at work (Olusegun, 2013; Hayes, 2015). Unhealthy organizational policies could also be a propeller factor for an employee's job search. Workers want to feel loved and appreciated in their place of work. When an employee perceives any form of discrimination, he/she could be discouraged; the mental signal this employee will receive could be that his/her commitment is not recognized, leading to withdrawal from work and gradual disengagement. Career advancement is another reason employed individuals seek new jobs. From personal experience, I worked in an international organization for thirteen good years as a graduate that also possessed a postgraduate degree without a single promotion, while those that were employed three to four years after I had been with the company were promoted above me even with their first degrees. Here we can see apparent organizational injustice and lack of recognition. Hence, it is pertinent for top-echelon management to consistently improve worker welfare, motivate them, and institute an organizational justice system with sound corporate governance ethics. This will forestall employee job searches and reduce their intention to leave the organization.

1.11 Wage Inequality and Worker Turnover Intention

Wage inequality and workers' turnover intentions were examined in this study. Several works of literature have proved that wage inequality is a laudable predictor of workers' turnover intentions; studies empirically validate this. Mbah and Ikemefuna (2012) examined the relationship between job satisfaction and employee turnover intentions in the context of Total Nigeria Plc. The study used chi-square, and the study's finding is that job satisfaction reduces employee turnover intentions. In contrast, job dissatisfaction predicts an increase in employee turnover intentions. In predicting turnover intentions with gender, life cycle, wage, and loyalty, Donald (2008) employed a qualitative research design. He discovered that employee turnover intentions are driven by wage inequality, life cycle, gender, and loyalty. It is important to note that inequality in staff remuneration significantly and positively predicts workers' turnover intentions. This means wage disparity in the workplace will cause affected employees to exit the company. However, where the unemployment rate is high due to a lack of jobs in an economy, inequality may not significantly affect turnover intentions (Donald, 2008).

In studying the factors affecting turnover intentions among academics in the context of Malaysia's higher educational institutions, Naiemah, Avis, Sakdam, and Razli (2017), employed the tool of

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regression analysis and discovered that wage inequality among academics affects the turnover intentions of such academics in the context of Malaysia higher educational system. This is highly supported by the work of Ainer, Subramanian, and Arokiasamy (2018); the scholars discovered that inequality of various kinds, including wage, promotion, etc., positively and significantly correlates with employee turnover intentions in the context of private universities in Malaysia. In examining the factors that influence labor turnover intentions, Asimah (2018) examined the preceding in the context of the hospitality industry in Ghana. The study employed the statistical tool of regression analysis; job dissatisfaction, lack of commitment, poor working conditions, and unfair treatment were statistically significant in predicting employee turnover intentions in the hospitality industry in Ghana. Hence, wage inequality as part of unfair treatment positively affects employee turnover intentions.

Wage inequality is a laudable turnover influence factor. This preceding was empirically examined by Belete (2018); the study used Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC), and the study's findings are that wage disparity at work positively and significantly correlates with employee turnover intentions. This implies that the administration of wage disparity in the workplace will lead to workers' turnover intentions. This is also supported by the works of Umar and Ringim (2015). The construct of turnover intention was predicted with demographic variables; Emiroghi, Akoka, and Tannuerchi (2015) examined these relationships in the context of the hotel business in Istanbul. The study made use of the T-test and ANDUA. The study's findings are that demographic factors such as age, gender, marital status, education, tenure, wage, position, and working department positively and significantly influence employee turnover intentions. Again, it was revealed in the study that wage inequality, among other factors, positively impacts worker turnover intentions in the workplace.

Ji-Young and Wang (2019) studied Job stress and turnover intention using a sample of employees in public companies in Korea. The study implored the job demands-resources (JDR) model to investigate both the effect of job stress on turnover and the process by which job stress affects employee turnover. The findings revealed that job satisfaction mediates the relationship between stress and turnover intention of the employees. Significantly, perceived organizational climate correlates with turnover intentions. Indra and Teat (2013) empirically examined the preceding in this work. The study employed survey research methodology, and the study findings are that organizational climate, such as ambiance condition, positively influences employee turnover intentions in the context of the hospitality industry in Malaysia. This is also corroborated by the works of Adeniyi (2014), who discovered that corporate restructuring, which favors and disfavors employees, significantly influences worker turnover intentions of employees in Nigerian banks.

1.12 Findings

The findings revealed that wage administration inequality across organizational members had been one of the most prevalent predictors of worker turnover intention. It was also discovered that injustice in promotion selections not based on merit had done more harm to employee retention. Lastly, the absence of rules and regulations to govern wage and promotion administration in the organization has resulted in employee dissatisfaction, leading to turnover intention and actual turnover in some cases.

1.13 Conclusion

Wage inequality is an enormous concern for organizations because of its impact on employees and organizational well-being. The consequences sometimes have led to intention to quit or actual turnover, which results in loss of competent employees, clients, productivity, and finance. This study examined the relationship between wage inequality and worker turnover intentions. From the empirical literature review results, we conclude that wage inequality has a significant relationship with workers' turnover intentions. Thus, wage inequality is a laudable predictor of employee turnover intentions in work organizations.

1.14 Recommendations

Organizations should ensure fairness and equality of wage administration across all employees. Companies should avoid pay discrimination or disparity. The management of the firm should incorporate justice and equality in administering pay among its employees. Promotion in the organization should be based on performance and merit. The organization should avoid the use of race, gender, ethnicity, religion, political affiliation etc. in the promotion of their staff. The organizations should have laid down rules and regulations governing wage administration at work. This should be driven by sound corporate governance ethics.

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