

Press release

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Doctoral Thesis: Discrimination against Men

According to the doctoral thesis by Licentiate of Administrative Sciences Mr. Pasi Malmi, approximately one-third of gender discrimination in Finland appears against men. This scenario may also gain ground in other welfare states in the near future.

A recent doctoral dissertation, inspected at the University of Lapland, Rovaniemi, Finland, shows that Finnish men face gender discrimination both in working life and outside of it. The study examined a total of 800 complaints addressed to the Finnish ombudsman for equality during the years 1997–2004 and a number of statistics concerning the gender equality situation. The study revealed that in 33 per cent of the cases, the discrimination was targeted against male employees, customers, or citizens. In many contexts, men were in the majority as targets of discrimination.

“In the female-dominated social services and healthcare organizations the probability of male employees to face gender discrimination at work seems to be 3–9 times higher than that of their female colleagues,” notes Malmi.

Another context in which men seem to be in a weaker position than women is the treatment of customers by public and private organizations. In this setting, 60 per cent of the complaints were filed by men. The study did not find any indication that men would complain more easily than women.

“The most typical example of the discriminative treatment of male customers is the special discounts and advantages that companies offer for women only,” says Malmi.

In the statistical part of his study, Licentiate Pasi Malmi shows that according to gendered statistics, the role expectations that pressure men to be successful breadwinners are a likely cause for structural discrimination.

“During each recession in Finnish history, the suicide rate of men has become five times higher than that of women. This seems to correspond with structural discrimination, which is related to gendered problems caused by role expectations and culture.”

Despite these findings, the official gender equality discourse in Finland does not recognize such a phenomenon as gender discrimination against men.

“Gender equality has been initiated by the feminist movement. It has led to a situation in which gender

equality is seen synonymous to the advancement of the status of women. This has gradually produced a tradition in equality policy that does not recognize discrimination against men or the gendered nature of men's problems," states Malmi.

Although Finland is among the most egalitarian countries in the world, according to the equality index of the UN, the status of men has not improved at the same pace as that of women. It is possible that this scenario will occur in other welfare states, such the United States, Great Britain, and other EU countries.

"One can predict that all welfare countries will gradually reach a stage at which over 50 per cent of the ministers are female. Further, many countries may have a female president. Yet, this female-oriented future does not necessarily mean that future welfare states will do anything to reduce gender discrimination against men."

One example of a widely-spread form of gender discrimination is the conscription laws of several countries. According to these laws, all men, but not women, have to enlist for the army for 6–24 months.

"If we read carefully the Universal Declaration of Human Rights we notice that such laws are in violation of human rights, as they put one gender in a disadvantaged status compared to the other."

Theoretically the research builds on administrative sciences, women's studies, discourse analysis, and memetics. The study presents a general theory of the origins and manifestations of gender discrimination. According to the theory, male-dominated organizations, networks, and discourses tend to discriminate against women, while female-dominated organizations, networks, and discourses are far more likely to discriminate against men than against women. The theory also predicts that discourses and theories based on the female point of view are likely to be 'equality blind' towards the problems of men – in a similar fashion as the androcentric sciences tend to be incapable of presenting women and femininity in a fair and egalitarian fashion.

The thesis is written and printed in English, and it is available at the Lapland University Press, publications@ulapland.fi.

About the Public Examination of the Doctoral Dissertation

The doctoral dissertation "Discrimination against Men – Appearance and Causes in the Context of a Modern Welfare State" by Licentiate of Administrative Sciences Pasi Malmi was examined at the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Lapland, Rovaniemi, Finland, on Friday, 6th of February 2009. The opponent was Professor Juhani Nikkilä (University of Oulu, Finland) and the custos was Professor Antti Syväjärvi (University of Lapland, Rovaniemi, Finland).

Information on the Doctoral Candidate

Pasi Malmi completed his Licentiate Degree of Administrative Sciences at the University of Lapland in 1995. He presently works as a consultant in the information technology sector and carries out research concurrently. Malmi is active in the board of the Finnish Men's Studies Association and vice chairman of the Men's Gender Equality Association.

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