

The Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency's research projects at a glance: Multidimensional Discrimination

Overview of the expert opinions

The Federal Anti Discrimination Agency - FADA has commissioned two expert opinions to investigate, first, the terms, concepts and court decisions related to multidimensional discrimination. Second, narrative interviews discuss whether any combinations of categories are particularly likely to result in discrimination experiences, in which spheres of life these tend to occur and which issues arise for counselling work.

Authors, titles and year of publication of the expert opinions

Prof. Dr. Susanne Baer, Melanie Bittner, Anna Lena Göttsche: *Mehrdimensionale Diskriminierung – Begriffe, Theorien und juristische Analyse (2010)* (multidimensional discrimination - terms, theories and legal analysis)

Prof. Dr. Susanne Dern, Prof. Dr. Lena Inowlocki, Prof. Dr. Dagmar Oberlies, Dr. Julia Bernstein: *Mehrdimensionale Diskriminierung – Eine empirische Untersuchung anhand von autobiografisch-narrativen Interviews (2010)* (multidimensional discrimination - an empirical analysis using autobiographical narrative interviews).

Results

The results of the legal opinion

- The grounds for discrimination that are included in the General Equal Treatment Act -AGG - “race”, ethnic origin, gender, religion or belief, disability, age and sexual orientation - reflect realities of life. These grounds for discrimination determine social opportunities, cause individuals to be stereotyped and assessed. They are categorisations.
- These categorisations are not isolated, but are intersectionally intertwined, interdependent and interlinked. Discrimination does not occur one-dimensionally, i.e. it is not based on only one ground, but exists in complex forms. Therefore, multidimensional discrimination is rather the rule. A one-dimensional view stereotypes, distorts and simplifies the actual problems on hand.
- Which legal consequences result from multidimensional discrimination has largely been unknown. The AGG does not define multidimensional discrimination.
- The analysis of selected court decisions shows that courts tend not to recognise multidimensional discrimination or do not appropriately take it into account.

Results of the empirical opinion

- While age, origin, gender and sexual orientation are mutually reinforcing dimensions, disability usually dominates life experiences and so “overrides” them. Frequently, the dimensions “age and disability” as well as “precarious living conditions and ethnic origin” co-occurred.
- The family is reported as the setting where the majority of the frequently long-lasting adverse experiences took place. At the same time, the family is cited as the most important resource in coping with discrimination.

- Individuals with a migrant background as well as gay and lesbian persons experience discrimination mainly in school. They also experience discrimination when looking for a training place or internship, an apartment or a job as well as when dealing with authorities. These experiences are frequently reported by persons with a migrant background - often compounded by discrimination on grounds of gender.
- Violence and assaults are mainly motivated by people's origin, gender and sexual orientation.
- It is alarming that people seeking advice do not always meet counselling centre staff who are appropriately qualified, i.e. who have a methodological training, reflect on their own attitudes and prejudices or factor in differences.
- Only in rare instances do advice-seeking persons take legal action. The underlying reasons are fear of further stigmatisation, doubts over the success of court action and self-blame for what happened.

Authors' recommendations for action

The authors recommend the following in respect of

Research

- the development of better methodological instruments to more fully understand multidimensional discrimination,
- the systematic consideration of multidimensional discrimination when collecting complaints-related data.

Public Relations

- the communication of multidimensional discrimination as a broad-based societal problem.

Law making and enforcement

- an open list of discrimination grounds in the AGG and countering hierarchisation of categories,
- a jurisprudentially convincing approach to sanctions where multidimensional discrimination is not considered as an add-on aspect but in light of the circumstances of each case,
- the removal of barriers to the access to law.

Social work and counselling

- guidance for affected persons in finding a counselling centre,
- training concepts for counsellors.

Implementation of positive action

- checking for intersectionality to reveal whether privileges are reproduced.

More information

- The legal opinion is accessible => [here](#), available only in German language.
- The empirical opinion is accessible => [here](#), available only in German language.

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