

## **A Study on Reporting of Sexual Harassment by Working Women in Lahore-Pakistan**

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In Pakistan, cases of sexual harassment are often reported in print and electronic media. Though, harassment Acts and Laws have been introduced but still a vast majority is reluctant to share this issue with friends, colleagues and even families. Therefore this study is designed to explore the reporting behavior of working women towards sexual harassment and to highlight responsive style of families, friends, colleagues and higher authorities on reporting the issue. Respondents were approached through purposive sampling method and data was collected from only those females who experienced workplace harassment at any stage in life. Questionnaire was used as tool of data collection. Results of the study revealed that majority women do not discuss and report the event of sexual harassment. Those who discuss and report receive negative response of family as well as from higher authorities in offices. Results further ascertained the fact that no concrete action is taken against perpetrators and if someone reports it, they did not find any satisfactory response on it. Majority respondents showed dissatisfaction upon the action taken. The government needs to properly execute women protection bills and laws in true spirit in order to provide a workplace environment that is conducive to women.

**Keywords:** sexual harassment, women victims, workplace, reporting behavior, responsive style, Lahore, Pakistan

Harassment is a social phenomenon that exists across the societies. It happens anywhere i.e. workplace, street, bus stop, or even at home (Thacker & Ferris, 1991). In every society, it is considered as a social problem (Brooks & Perot, 1991; Dziech & Weiner, 1984; Matlin, 1993; Pattinson, 1991; York, 1989). The harassment is not a new thing or occasional. It is less talked and less reported phenomenon (Fitzgerald et al., 1988). There is mostly silence on harassment which helps to aggravate the problem (Dey, 2013).

Harassment is defined by state laws which vary state by state, but in general terms it is defined as an act that irritates, threatens and due to which a person feels fear to his or her safety (USLEGAL, 2001). Harassment has various forms. Sexual harassment is one of these. Sexual harassment is immoral behavior which is considered as aggressive and intimidating (Goonesekere, 2004). It can appear in the form of oral/non-oral exploitations; to act in unethical manner to gain attention like touching; or sexual coercion like bribes and threats (Fitzgerald, Drasgow, Hulin, Gelfand & Magley, 1997).

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Mitchell, Ybarra and Korchmaros (2014) tried to explain all forms of sexual harassment by defining it as unwanted request for sexual favors, sexual advances, sexual comments and gestures. It can comprise of kissing, pinching, touching, leering, embracing, or patting. It can also include gestures, questions about a person's sexual or personal life, dirty jokes, phone calls, emails, messages, or display material which is sexual in nature (Act, M.C. 2005).

It is said that biological sex determines the risk for sexual harassment. Females are more likely to face sexual harassment than male. They experience sexual harassment frequently and in a different way (Chiodo, Wolfe, Crooks, Hughes, & Jaffe, 2009). They are more vulnerable segment of society (Lindberg, Grab, & Hyde, 2007). Sexual harassment that females face includes physical gesture like touching, grabbing and pinching (Ontario Secondary School Teacher Foundation, 1995). On the other hand male face different type of behavior such as vulgar and homosexual remarks etc. (McMaster, Connolly, Pepler, & Craig, 2002). It can also take place within the same sexes i.e. women or men can harass the other people of same sex due to their sexual orientations (Chiodo et al., 2009).

Recently sexual harassment at workplace against females has gained attention of policy makers, researchers and government authorities (Mitchell et al., 2014). It is considered that sexual harassment at workplace is one of the obstacles which destroy the success of women in their career and decreases their job satisfaction and efficiency level. (Gettman & Gelfand, 2007).

Sexual harassment at workplace is described differently in different countries and in different cultures but the common characteristic is the 'unwanted conduct of sexual nature' rejection of which can have negative employment effects on victim (Mitchel et al., 2014). Any act will be considered sexual harassment if it is sexual in nature and is unwelcomed; the victim may feel insulted and humiliated. This characteristic differ it from mutual sex relationship. It is questionable that which act is unwelcomed and sexual; the acts that cause pressure, loss of dignity, and interfere with the work performance of the victim. Similarly, the act of gaining consent for sexual relationship through fear, coercion, or threat will also constitute sexual harassment (Aloka, 2009). Torrington and Tylor, (2009) argue that sexual harassment may ranges from verbal to physical and psychological conducts which may include sexist remarks, unsuitable sexual advances, requests for sexual activity through promising rewards, or forcefully engagement in sexual activity by threat of punishment, and sexual crimes and delinquencies.

Harassment at workplace has negative effects for organizations. The harassed women lose concentration and remains absent which affect the productivity of the organization (Fitzgerald et al., 1997). Jobs of victims are affected by harassment because it decreases productivity and team work. Valuable workers may leave jobs and others may be discouraged to apply for vacancies (Crocker & Kalembra, 1999). Gutek and Koss (1993), Lindenberg et al., (2007) indicated the negative effects to both the victim and organization. According to them, harassment effects victim's psychological health due to which they leave jobs or fired for making complaints. Some others go towards absenteeism, lake of interest which leads towards low productivity, worse social relations with coworkers and high turnovers. Due to high turn overs, organizations have to replace the staff but the organizations having the reputation of sexual harassment feel it difficult to hire staff for turn overs. Sometimes, the lawsuits filed by victims against organizations result in high expenses on legal fees (ILO, 2005).

The societies try to combat harassment by establishing and implementing policies (Lindenberg et al., 2007). These policies differ from country to country because all countries perceive harassment differently. Milkovich and Boudeau (1994), Hall and Taylor (as cited in Aloka, 2009) stated that many positive measures had been taken in USA and UK to make the work environment

harassment free. These measures include Employment Law, 1970; Equal Pay Act, Sex Discrimination Act of 1975, Equal Employment Opportunity Act (EEO) and Affirmative Actions (AA). Due to these measures, women even from minorities can get compensation in case of harassment.

In Pakistan almost half of the population is women but their status in society is not good due to different reasons i.e. lack of access to education, health, employment opportunities and patriarchal system of families and injustices etc. Rigid culture and patriarchal system in Pakistan leads towards the violence against women. They are compelled to lead a very miserable life. They face dowry crimes including bride burning, kidnapping for prostitution, acid attacks, forced marriage and honor killing (Niaz, 2003). Almost 70-90% women in Pakistan face domestic violence. In Punjab province of Pakistan, 35% out of 1000 women admitted in hospitals answered that they were beaten by their husbands. During 1998-2004, 2800 women were killed in *Karo Kari* (Ali & Gavino, 2008). According to annual report of Aurat Foundation (2013), total 48023 cases of violence against women were reported during the years of 2008-13. Out of these total cases, 11729 cases were of abduction and kidnapping, 8987 of murder, 3472 domestic violence, 3916 suicide, 3260 honor killing, 5239 rape or gang rape, 726 sexual assault, 284 acid throwing and 291 were burning cases.

Pakistan is signatory to several international commitments in order to make the workplace environment harassment free. These commitments include Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). At national level, Workplace Harassment Act came into force in 2010. After eighteenth amendment in the Constitution of Islamic Republic of Pakistan, this act was adopted by Punjab government in 2012. Under this act, office of ombudsperson has been established and harassment committees have also been constituted at district level.

In Pakistan, a number of women organizations have come in front to take the challenge and had drawn attention to the problem. Although the action against the perpetrators of sexual harassment has been proposed in "The Punjab Protection against Harassment of Women at Workplace Act 2012" but females do not report the issue which shows that victims are not willing to seek professional help or advice. Therefore in this study the researcher had tried to investigate the reporting behavior of females towards sexual harassment at workplaces so that the strategies can be made to reduce the magnitude of problem in public and private sector organizations.

### **Significance of the Study**

The present study has great significance as it intends to know the reporting behavior of women victims of harassment working in different offices of Lahore city along with an aim to highlight the reporting style/format of such behaviors. It explains whether harassment is reported verbally or in written form? Further, it describes the response of family members, colleagues and friends on discussing the event of harassment with them. Moreover, it reports the action taken by higher authorities when the event is reported formally. It further speaks about the satisfaction level of the complainants on action taken by the authorities. It can also help policy makers and relevant governmental departments to know the ratio of reporting the event of workplace harassment that they can use to formulate policies and guidelines to improve the situation.

### **Objectives of the Study**

This study was designed to:-

1. Explore the reporting behavior of working women towards sexual harassment at workplace.

2. Highlight the responsive behavior/style of family, friends, colleagues and higher authorities in offices on reporting the event of sexual harassment.
3. Find out the satisfaction level of victims on action taken on reporting sexual harassment at workplaces.

### **Method**

The study was conducted to see the reporting behavior of female workers towards sexual harassment at workplaces. The operational definition of reporting behavior includes discussing and reporting the event of sexual harassment at workplace (Andersson, Cockcroft, Ansari, Khan, & Chaudhry, 2010). The study was quantitative in nature. Survey method was used to collect the data. Data was collected through multi-stage sampling procedure. At first stage, government offices situated at civil secretariat, NGOs, business organizations, academic institutions, multinational companies and administrative offices of travel agencies situated in surroundings of civil secretariat were selected on the basis of convenience. At second stage, respondents were selected through purposive sampling method. From government offices, females working in grade 9-17 were selected because already available studies were showing that female face more harassment when they are employed at junior posts (Sadruddin, 2013). From private sector, females working in field were selected as it is considered that harassment ratio is high at public dealing offices (Manke, 2014). Moreover female management or administrative staff from private organizations was also approached. Data was collected through questionnaire that was derived from "Sample Risk Assessment Questionnaire" (Employment & Immigration, 2006) and "Sexual Experience Questionnaire" (Arey & Cavanaugh, 1995; Magley, 2002). In this questionnaire, seven questions on nominal scale were measuring sexual harassment at workplace; six questions were measuring discussing the event of harassment with family, friends, colleagues etc. and action taken by them. Six questions were measuring reporting style and action taken by authorities on reporting the event. One question was measuring the satisfaction level of respondents on action taken by authorities. The questionnaire was pre-tested with 25 respondents. After preliminary data collection, changes in three questions were made to make it understandable for respondents. Total 247 females reported that they face harassment. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data. Written informed consent was gained from the respondents before data collection. The principle of confidentiality and anonymity were also followed by the researcher throughout the processes of data collection. To maintain confidentiality, the researcher developed rapport with respondents and assured them that the data will not be revealed anywhere.

### **Results**

#### **Demographics of the Respondents**

Out of 247 respondents, majority respondents (42%) were from the age group of 26-30 years. Thirty two percent belonged to the age group of 21-25. Twelve percent respondents fall in the age group of 31-35, 10% in 36-40, 3% in 41-45, and only 1% were in the age group of 46-50 years. Majority (67%) respondents were single. About 27% were married, 2 % were separated, 3% were divorced and 2% were widowed.

Majority (70%) of the respondents' work experience was 0-5 years. The respondents serving from 6-10 years were 16% while 7% respondent's service was between 11-15 years. Four percent respondents were falling in the category of 16-20 years, 3% respondents were in job from 21-25 years. 74% respondent's salary ranges from Pak Rs. 8000 to Pak Rs. 40000. 25% respondent's salary was Pak Rs. 41000 to Pak Rs. 80000 and only 1% respondents were receiving salary of more than Pak Rs. 80000.

**Table 1**  
*Frequency Distribution of Victim's Discussion on Harassment*

Discussion	<i>f</i>	%
Yes	120	48.6
No	127	51.4
Total	247	100.0

Results in table 1 shows that out of total 247 respondents who were harassed at workplace only 120 respondents discussed the incidence with others. Majority (51.4%) respondents did not discuss the situation to anyone.

**Table 2**  
*Frequency Distribution of Victims Discussing Harassment with Family, Friends, Colleagues and Public Members*

Discussing Harassment	Family		Friends		Colleagues		Public Members	
	<i>F</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Yes	52	43	83	69	40	33	2	2
No	68	57	37	31	80	67	118	98
Total	120	100	120	100	120	100	120	100

Table 2 explains whether the respondents discussed the incidence of harassment with family, friends or colleagues. Data in this table consisted on compound answers. Out of 120 respondents who discussed the incidence, 43% discussed with family members, 69% with friends, 33% with colleagues and only 2% with public members.

**Table 3**  
*Response of Family, Friends, Colleagues and Public Members on Discussing Harassment with Them*

Response	Family		Friends		Colleagues		Public Members	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Condemned	2	4	6	7	3	7	1	50
Say to leave job	25	48	3	4	3	8	0	0
Encouraged to take action	10	19	19	23	16	40	0	0
Psychological Support	9	17	45	54	13	32	0	0
Suggest to ignore	5	10	6	7	1	3	0	0
Nothing	1	2	4	5	4	10	1	50
Total	52	100	83	100	40	100	2	100

Results in table 3 tell about the response of family, friends, colleagues and public members to whom the respondents discussed the occurrence of harassment. Out of 52 respondents who discussed with family members, majority (48%) answered that their family asked to leave job, 19% said that they were encouraged taking action, 17% told that they were supported psychologically. Out of 83 respondents who discussed with friends, majority (45%) said that their friends supported them psychologically and 19% encouraged taking action. While out of 40 respondents who discussed the incidence of harassment with colleagues, 40% replied that their colleagues encouraged to take action, 32% gave psychological support and 10% suggested to ignore.

**Table 4**  
*Determinants of Reporting Harassment at Workplace*

Variable	Categories	Frequency	Percent
Reporting harassment	Yes	68	27.5
	No	179	72.5
	Total	247	100.0
Form of reporting	Verbally	29	43.0
	In Writing	26	38.0
	Both	13	19.0
	Total	68	100.0
Reporting to	Higher Authority	66	98.0
	Ombudsperson	02	02.0
	Total	68	100.0
Action taken on Reporting	Yes	50	73.5
	No	18	26.5
	Total	68	100.0

Out of 247 harassed respondents, 68 (72.5%) said that they did not report the harassment to anyone while only 27.5% answered that they reported the incidence of harassment. Out of these 68 respondents who reported the harassment, majority almost (43%) reported the situation verbally. Almost 38% reported in writing and 19% reported in both forms verbally and in writing. Sixty six respondents reported to higher authorities and only 2 respondents reported to ombudsperson. About 73.5% respondents said that action was taken on reporting while 26.5% replied that no action was taken on reporting.

**Table 5**  
*Kind of Actions Taken by Authorities on Reporting Harassment Issue*

Kind of Actions	Frequency	Percent
Issued Warning Letter	05	10
Transfer the perpetrator	05	10
Verbally Warned	20	40
Transfer the Victim	03	06
Managed to say sorry	14	28
Expelled the Perpetrator	03	06
Total	50	100

Table 5 states about kind of action taken on reporting. Out of 50 respondents who said that action was taken when they report harassment, 40% answered that the perpetrator was verbally warned. About 28% respondents said that perpetrator was asked to say sorry, 10% replied that warning letters were issued to the perpetrator and the same number of respondents said that the perpetrator was transferred. Only 06% answered that the perpetrator was expelled.

**Table 6***Satisfaction of Victims on Action Taken by Authorities against Perpetrators*

Categories	<i>f</i>	%
Not Satisfied	21	42
Satisfied	11	22
Satisfied to Some Extent	18	36
Total	50	100

Table 6 is about the satisfaction level of respondents on action taken by authority against the perpetrator. Majority of the respondents (42%) were not satisfied with the action taken by authority. 36% were satisfied to some extent and only 22% were satisfied with the action taken on reporting by the authority against the perpetrator.

### Discussion

According to the objectives of the study, this section includes discussion on some questions related to the phenomenon of sexual harassment at workplace. These questions include; did the victims discuss the event of sexual harassment at workplace? With home they discussed? What was the reaction of family, friends or colleagues on discussing the event of harassment with them? Did the victims report the occurrence of sexual harassment? If yes, to whom and what kind of action was taken against the perpetrator? Whether the victim was satisfied on the action taken against the perpetrator?

The results of the study revealed that majority women even did not discuss the incident to anyone. Those females who discussed, majority discussed with friends and with family members. It may be considered that women had the fear of negative action from family that's why they avoided discussing with any family member. The study also revealed that most of the family members asked to leave job when the incidence was discussed. On the other hand, friends provided psychological support to the victims and, colleagues encouraged the victim to take action against the perpetrator. Some of the friends, family members and colleagues suggested to ignore it. The similar results have been presented by Sadruddin (2013), in his study conducted in Karachi-Pakistan, victims avoid to discuss the event because they are afraid that they have to bear cost of it in the form of society's pressure, insult and threat, and job insecurity. In the whole world, women experience many gender related issues. They face discrimination, violence, harassment, and inequality etc. In Pakistan there are cultural constraints. Women undergo *vanni*, *sawara*, *vatta satta*, *marriage with Quran* etc. They are killed for the sake of *ghairat*. It is considered that if there is something happening wrong with female, it is losing the respect for whole family in the society (Lari, 2011). Therefore firstly women are not allowed to go outside and to do job. If some females succeeded to convince their family to do job, they are asked to leave it on experiencing any wrong behavior of bosses or colleagues in the form of sexual harassment. Therefore they prefer to discuss the event of sexual harassment to friends and colleagues instead of family members.

Further negative response was found for reporting the event of sexual harassment at workplace by the victims. Only 1/4<sup>th</sup> of the respondents said that they reported the incidence of harassment. The results of the study are supported by Aggarwal (1992), Carr, Huntley, Macquarrie and Welsh (2004) and Mahmood and Ahmad (2011) who also found negative responses in their studies in order to file harassment by victims. There may be different reasons for this behavior. It is

possible that women do not know that the behavior they are experiencing actually constitutes sexual harassment; they do not know to whom and how to report the event; or they may think that reporting it may cause discomfiture or aggravate their situation (Harris & Firestone, 1997). In a study conducted by Yasmin and Sadia (2017), some reasons for not reporting the harassment at workplace by women are recorded. According to them, in Pakistani culture, shyness of women, fear of insult or losing job could be the main reasons for not reporting the behavior of sexual harassment at workplaces. Research conducted by Sadruddin (2013) supported it wherein majority women shared that the action of reporting harassment is equivalent to losing job. Women may also think if they report the event of sexual harassment, it will raise questions about their character. It may be considered by the people that female seduced the perpetrator. It will bring disrespect for women. Ali (2010) supported the phenomenon by saying that cultural traditions of Pakistan stop women to report the event.

If some women report the case of harassment, they prefer to report it verbally and not in writing. They report only to the authorities in offices and do not go to the office of ombudsperson that is available in Punjab-Pakistan to listen the complaints of harassment at workplaces. Maybe they do not know about that available mechanism of reporting. Furthermore, victims consider that no action will be taken on their reporting. Mostly, the harasser become more fearless and continues to harassing when they know that no action will be taken against them. The results of the current study proved that most of the perpetrators were only verbally warned on reporting or just managed to say sorry. Warning letters were also issued to some of them but this was only in 10% cases. Although other actions were also taken like transfer the perpetrator but a very low number of harassers were expelled. In some cases victim was transferred which means reporting can also effect the victim.

United States Merit Systems Protection Board conducted a study in 1988. According to this study, majority respondents were in favor of enforcing penalties on perpetrator but very few number of respondents shared that such action was taken in their organizations. In the case of current study it may be possible that organizations particularly private organizations do not have clear laws and policies to address the issue of sexual harassment. In other cases if laws or policies are available, these are not implemented properly. The penalties mentioned in these policies are not imposed in their true spirit. Moreover the organizations may lack proper check and balance over the implementation status of these laws and policies. Furthermore the authoritative positions are lying with males who usually protect the males and not the female victims. Therefore the perpetrators are not proceeded and punished according to law. This phenomenon is supported by organizational model of sexual harassment presented by Hemalatha and Sundaresh (2013). In this model women are seen in the structure of the workplace and are vulnerable to sexual harassment by people in power and these people are supported by higher authorities. This model also explains that women receive less professional support from male colleagues. The reputation of company or organization may be another reason for not taking action against culprits. It is tried by the authority to resolve the matter by their own. They give verbal warnings or manage to say sorry by the perpetrator instead of taking it with higher forums as it may affect the reputation of their company.

Whatever the reason may be for not taking action against culprits of sexual harassment, it creates dissatisfaction on the part of victim. When the respondents of the current study were asked whether they were satisfied on action taken by the authority or not, majority answered that they were not satisfied. This situation may lead to other issues. It may affect the physical and psychological health of females. They may feel discomfort while working again with same people in offices. Moreover the culprits may continue to harass the victim. This may occur again and again and more

severely because the culprits know that no action will be taken against them. Moreover, the female victims will also not report as previously no concrete action was taken against the culprits.

### Conclusion

From the results of the study, it is concluded that sexual harassment at workplace is a problem which is less talked by the victims. Female victims avoid discussing it with family members because they have to face negative response of family members as a result. They prefer to discuss with friends who support them psychologically. They also avoid reporting the event. In case of reporting, they prefer to report verbally instead of in writing. They only report to the authorities in office and not to the other relevant bodies i.e. ombudsperson. It is further concluded that the culprits of sexual harassment are not preceded and punished as per law. It is managed by the authorities that the culprits say sorry to the victim or they are verbally warned. These minor penalties cannot satisfy the victims and this situation leads towards worst conditions for females to work in offices.

### Recommendations

It is therefore recommended that there should be proper mechanism to address the cases of harassment in offices particularly in private sector. Employment participation can minimize the risk of sexual harassment. For the purpose, male and females workers should be sensitized about the meaning of sexual harassment so that they can know which behaviors are harassing in nature. Trainings of male staff can sensitize them about the rights of females and also about the punishments available in law for culprits of sexual harassment. These trainings should be for whole staff from lower level to higher ups. As this study is quantitative in nature, future researchers are suggested to use qualitative method and they can study the complaints lodged by victims in the office of ombudsperson in order to see the number and nature of complaints and redressal mechanism.

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