Workplace Harassment: Psychological Effects
and Coping Strategies in Public and Private Organizations of Lahore-Pakistan

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Since last decade, as the number of working women is increased, their vulnerability to harassment has also increased all around the globe. In Pakistan, working women are also facing harassment. In this regard, present study is conducted to examine the psychological effects of harassment on women in public and private sectors and to investigate the coping strategies adopted by them. Data is collected through survey method and a sample of 300 women working in Lahore is taken through convenience sampling. Equal representation is given to both the public and private sectors. Because of sensitive nature of the study, only willing-to-participate women are approached. Questionnaire is used as tool of data collection and t-test is applied to analyze the data. Results reveal that there is more harassment in private sector as compared to public sector. In private sector, majority of harassed women are depressed and anxious at a severe level and in public sector this experience is moderate. Harassment is mostly avoided, ignored and not reported. Therefore, workplace harassment is identified as a major issue for working women in Lahore that must be addressed by government in order to ensure safe working environment for women.

Keywords: work place harassment, psychological effects, coping strategies, public private organizations, Lahore-Pakistan

Women play significant role in socio-economic development of a country. Their participation in workforce has increased due to shifting paradigm of globalization. But at the same time, their vulnerability in context of gender issues has also been increased. In one way or other, they are subjected to violence and disparities and most of the time victimized by men (Mahmood& Ahmad, 2011). This situation hampers their work productivity and create hurdle in their career development as well as socio-economic development of the country. The violence against women in the form of harassment exists at workplaces despite of the fact that most of the working organizations have employed educated people at their settings (Sadruddin, 2013).

Due to the sensitive nature of the issue, there are many misapprehensions   about the phenomenon (Ybarra, 2004). It is not easy to define the term 'harassment'. It has its basis in

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patriarchal structure and dominant behaviour of men (Dey, 2013). These male dominant behaviors are based on gender inequalities which lead towards the suppression of women (Mahmood & Ahmad, 2011).

There is not a universal definition of sexual harassment; there are different legal, sociological, psychological and feminist perspectives of it (Mcmaster, Connolly, Pepler, & Craig, 2002). But the term sexual harassment can be best defined in two categories: a priouri/legal and empirical/psychological where exact behaviours or interpretations are countless (Willness, Steel & Lee, 2007).

According to legal/ a priori definition, sexual harassment is undesirable sexual advances, request for sexual favors, or other verbal or physical acts that are sexual in nature. These behaviours are considered sexual harassment when they clearly or indirectly made a condition for someone's employment and acceptance or rejection of such behaviour by an individual is used to make employment decisions about him. The purpose of these behaviours is to interfere irrationally in the work performance of an individual or creating threatening, aggressive, or unfriendly work environment (E.E.O.C., 1980). These acts can comprise of kissing, pinching, touching, leering, embracing, or patting (Mitchell, Ybarra, & Korchmaros, 2014). It 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).

According to psychological definition, it is undesirable and unwelcomed sex related behaviour which is considered by recipient as intimidating, beyond his/her resources, or threatening his/her safety or well-being (Fitzgerald, Drasgow, Hullin, Gelfand, & Magely, 1997). According to Goonesekere (2004), sexual harassment is defined as unethical acts which are considered offensive or threating.

Almost 50% female workers in European Union Countries face sexual harassment in one way or the other (UNISON, 2008). In a survey conducted by the Australian Council of Trade Unions (2000), 54% respondents say that threatening behaviours occur at their workplace (Queensland Government, 2002). A study conducted in the United States by Merit System Protection Board (MSPB) illustrates that 44% women are experiencing sexual harassment at workplace (Lindenberg, Grabe, & Hyde, 2007). According to Paul Nyende (2000) who conducted research in Uganda, 65% of the total interviewed women experience harassment. Unluckily, no authentic and well documented evidence is available about the existence of sexual harassment in Asian countries but efforts done by these countries to alleviate sexual harassment is an indicator of existence of sexual harassment (Sadruddin, 2013).

In Pakistan few researches are carried out but they deal with the qualitative side of the issue which includes nature of sexual harassment and women's understandings about the issue. Sadruddin (2013) in his qualitative study "Sexual Harassment at Workplace in Pakistan - Issues and Remedies about the Global Issue at Managerial Sector" finds that the majority (out of 200 respondents) agrees that sexual harassment may include gazing, touching, bullying, unwanted jokes, gender biasness, verbal insult, placing arms on the shoulders, touching of hips, indecent body language, negative emails, showing porn movies etc. According to Parveen (2010), total 24119 cases of violence against

women are reported during the period of 2008-2010 out of which 520 are related to workplace harassment.

It is said that sexual harassment has negative psychological effects (Cleveland, Vescio, & Bames, 2005). Women's psychological health suffers due to this behaviour both personally and professionally (Ybarra, Espelage ,& Mitchell, 2007). Moreover, the degree of negative psychological effects is highly related to duration of harassment and the status of harasser in the organization. Long tenured harassment has severe psychological effects on victim (Gettman & Gelfand, 2007). It leads to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), anxiety and depression (Berdahl & Aquino, 2009), and sometimes results in psycho-somatic disorder (Sadruddin, 2013).

Individuals can use different styles to cope the harassment. According to Fitzgerald, Gold, Brock, and Gelfand (1999), these responses can be categorized into some externally and internally focused responses. External responses may include lodging a complaint or reporting, and seeking social support. While ignoring, avoiding, taking light are some forms of internally used coping strategies. Hunt, Davidson, Fielden, and Hoel (2007) discuss the Typology of Target Responses to Sexual harassment given by Knapp, Faley, Ekeberg, and Dubois (1997). According to this typology, the responses can be self-focused and initiator focused. Self-focused responses do not engage perpetrator while initiator focused responses do. Four modes of response (self-response, supported response, confrontation, advocacy seeking) have been discussed in this typology. Self-response includes ignoring, avoiding, going along with harassment, self-blaming; and supported response includes bringing friend with oneself, discussing, emotional counseling. Individual may threat the harasser or say to stop harassing in confrontation while reporting or seeking legal remedies fall in advocacy seeking. Sigel, Braden, Goodrich, and Perino (2003) also supported this typology.

Knapp, Faley, Ekeberg, and Dubois (1997) say that use of some specific coping style is always subject to the severity of harassment and the outcome of using this option. Several coping responses may stop the perpetrator from harassment while few others may not. When victim experiences harassment, they think to cope with it. The victim may move from one style to another if a style is not effective to stop harassment. This act continues until some suitable strategy is set up.

Women constitute almost half of the population of Pakistan, but they are more suppressed and depressed in our society, The Constitution of Islamic Republic of Pakistan gives equal rights to both the men and the women; however, in practice gender balance is missing and women are being discriminated by men. According to UNDP Human Development Report 2014, Gender Inequality Index (GII) rank of Pakistan amongst 149 countries is registered as 126th and according to the Global Gender Gap Report (2014), Pakistan's rank for Gender Gap Index is 141 amongst 142 countries (World Economic Forum, 2014).

Gender issues are particularly uncovered area of research in Pakistan. Harassment at workplace is one of these painful realities existing in the country. This gender issue is also particular and less tapped area of research in the country. In this regard, present study will add a caveat on the issue by focusing the issue of sexual harassment at workplace.

Significance of the Study

The study has significance as it examines not only the prevalence of workplace sexual harassment at Lahore but also talks about the levels of harassment being faced by women at workplaces. It also helps researchers, students and academicians to make a comparison between

public and private sectors in terms of prevalence of workplace sexual harassment. The study is also an eye opener for the policy makers to see the negative psychological consequences of harassment at victims. It shows the levels of depression and anxiety that victims suffer due to sexual harassment experience at their workplaces. One can also make a comparison between public and private sector in terms of psychological effects of harassment at different levels. The study also tells about the coping styles adopted by victims.

Objectives of the Study

Following are the main objectives of the study:-

1.   to explore the extent of sexual harassment in government and private sectors of Lahore city.
2.   to identify psychological effects of sexual harassment on female victims in government and private organizations.
3.   to investigate the coping strategies used by women who are being harassed at workplace.

Hypothesis

Following hypotheses are tested for this study:

1.   There is significant mean difference between public and private sectors in terms of existence of sexual harassment.
2.   There is significant mean difference between public and private sectors in terms of psychological effects of harassment.

Method

This study is based on quantitative research conducted in 2015. The population of the study is women working in public and private organizations of Lahore city.

Sample

A sample of 300 women (above 18 years) working in public and private organizations of Lahore was drawn from the population. Equal representation was given to both public and private sectors. The sample was selected by using non-probability method i.e. convenience sampling. As the nature of the problem is sensitive, the initial phase of pre-testing guided the researchers that all women are not ready to share their experience of harassment so only those women were approached who willingly share their views and accessibility to them has been easy for researchers.

Instruments

Questionnaire was used as tool of data collection. Questionnaire comprised total 21 questions out of which seven questions were based on nominal scale measuring sexual harassment at workplace and one question was measuring coping strategies. The content validity of these questionnaire was ensured by consulting two gender experts and further after pre-testing some modifications were done as per respondents' answers and understanding of questions. To measure depression and anxiety 4 point likert scale was used. Following instruments were used to measure depression and anxiety levels respectively.

Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ). Patient Health Questionnaire developed by Pfizer (1999) was used to measure depression. Six items from the scale were chosen to measure depression. These items were asked with relation to harassment. Moreover, items were rated as "not at all, to some extent, very much and extremely". Cronbach's alpha of the scale was 0.85.

General Anxiety Disorder-7 (**GAD-7**). GAD-7 (Spitzer, 2006) was used to measure anxiety. Total seven items were included and these rated as "not at all, to some extent, very much and extremely". Cronbach's alpha of the scale was 0.90.

Table 1 represents the alpha reliability of the instruments.

Table 1
Cronbach Alpha Reliability for Depression and Anxiety Scale

Variables	Number of Items	Chronbach Alpha
Depression/PHQ	6	0.85
Anxiety/GAD-7	7	0.90

Procedure

The tool was pre-tested with 30 respondents. On the feedback of respondents, two questions on nominal scale measuring sexual harassment were changed by using simple language and one more question regarding sexual harassment measurement was added. After that, questionnaire was administered to the rest of the sample. Owing to sensitive nature of research topic, it was difficult to get response from each woman so those women who were easily available and were willing to share their experiences were approached. Before collecting data, permission from the heads of organizations was obtained. Questionnaires were distributed in offices and data was collected from respondents after gaining written informed consent. The principle of confidentiality and anonymity was strictly observed by the researcher throughout the processes of data collection.

Results

The study conducted regarding sexual harassment and its psychological effects represent following results in terms of prevalence of sexual harassment and its psychological effects in public and private organizations.

Table 2
Prevalence of Sexual Harassment

Level of Harassment	Frequency (*f*)	Percentage (*%*)
No Harassment	65	21
Low Level of Harassment	60	20
Moderate Level of Harassment	140	47
High Level of Harassment	35	12
Total	300	100

Note. Level of sexual harassment is computed from the 7 responses. Low level= positive answer of any 1-3 questions, Moderate level=positive answer of any 4-6 questions Severe level=positive response of all 7 questions.

Table 2 explains the prevalence of sexual harassment in government and private sector. Out of 300 respondents, 65 were not harassed. Majority (47%) respondents experienced moderate level of sexual harassment, (20%) low level and (12%) experienced high level of sexual harassment.

Table 3
Cross Tabulation of Organization and Sexual Harassment

Level of Sexual Harassment	Government		Private		Total	
	F	*%*	*f*	*%*	*f*	*%*
Low	47	49	13	9	60	25
Moderate	46	47	94	68	140	60
High	4	4	31	23	35	15
Total	97	100	138	100	235	100

Table 3 depicts the sexual harassment prevalence between government and private sector organizations. Out of 235 sexually harassed women, 138 were from private sector and 97 were working in government sector. Majority (68%) out of 138 respondents in private sector was facing moderate level of sexual harassment while in government sector majority of the respondents (49%) were experiencing low level of sexual harassment.

Table 4
Comparison of Govt. and Private Sector in Terms of Depression and Anxiety

Variable	Organization	Level				Total
		No	Mild	Moderate	Severe	
Depression	Government	5	19	41	32	97
		5.20%	19.60%	42.30%	33.00%	100.00%
	Private	0	10	50	78	138
		0.00%	7.20%	36.20%	56.50%	100.00%
	Total	5	29	91	110	235
		2.10%	12.30%	38.70%	46.80%	100.00%
Anxiety	Government	5	15	46	31	97
		5.20%	15.50%	47.40%	32.00%	100.00%
	Private	0	9	41	88	138
		0.00%	6.50%	29.70%	63.80%	100.00%
	Total	5	24	87	119	235
		2.10%	10.20%	37.00%	50.60%	100.00%

Note. Levels for depression and anxiety are computed from Likert scale. For every not at all=0; to some extent=1; very much=2; extremely=3 Interpretation of total scores for depression: 1-6=Mild depression; 7-12=Moderate Depression; 13-18=Severe Depression. Interpretation of total score for Anxiety: 1-7=Mild Anxiety; 8-14=Moderate Anxiety; 15-21=Severe Anxiety.

Results in Table 4 explain how the government and private sectors differ in terms of depression and anxiety. In government sector, out of 97 sexually harassed respondents, majority (42.30%) was depressed at moderate level and 47.40% were anxious at the same level. On the other side, in private sector, out of 138 respondents 56.50% were depressed and 63.80% were anxious at severe level.

Table 5

Coping Strategies of Women Facing Sexual Harassment at Workplace

Cope by	Yes		No		Total	
	F	%	f	%	f	%
Ignoring	115	49	120	51	235	100
Avoidance	118	50	117	50	235	100
Taking Light	20	8	215	92	235	100
Joking	28	12	207	88	235	100
Confrontation Directly	46	20	189	80	235	100
Filling Lawsuit	2	1	233	99	235	100
Social Support	14	6	221	94	235	100
Reporting	68	29	167	71	235	100

Data in Table 5 indicates how women try to cope with harassment. Results include multiple responses. Majority (50%) avoids and 49% ignore the situation when they experience harassment and only 1% filed lawsuit against the perpetrator.

Table 6

Results of Independent Sample t-test for Sexual Harassment at Workplace

Variables	Government (n=97)		Private (n=138)				95 % CI		
	M	SD	M	SD	t(235)	p	LL	UL	Cohen's d
Sexual Harassment	2.56	.57	3.13	.55	-7.64	.00*	-.72	-.42	1.01

Note: 1. CI=Confidence Interval, LL=Lower Limit, UL=Upper Limit

2. Satterthwaite approximation employed due to unequal group variances.

* $p< .05$.

Independent sample t-test was conducted to see the significant mean difference between public and private sector with reference to prevalence of sexual harassment. $p=.00$, therefore, hypothesis one is accepted that there is significant mean difference between public and private sector in terms of prevalence of sexual harassment at workplace. The mean for government (2.56) is lower than the mean of private sector (3.13). Levine's test is significant which reveals that both groups do not vary equally. The effect size Cohen's d is 1.01 which is much larger than typical.

Table 7

Results of Independent Sample t-test for Psychological effects of Harassment

Variables	Government (n=97)		Private (n=138)				95 % CI		
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	t(235)	*p*	LL	UL	Cohen's d
Psychological Effects	3.08	.57	3.57	.59	-0.66	.00*	-.66	-.31	0.70

Note: CI=Confidence Interval, LL=Lower Limit, UL=Upper Limit

* *p*< .05.

Independent sample t-test was conducted to see the significant mean difference between public and private sector with reference to overall psychological effects of harassment. The results describe *p*=.00 therefore hypothesis two is accepted that there is a significant mean difference between both groups in terms of psychological effects. The mean score for private sector (3.57) is higher than that of government sector (3.08). Levine's test is not significant for which variance for both groups is equally assumed. The effect size Cohen's d is 0.70 which shows large effect size.

Discussion

The present study is conducted in Lahore city and results reveal that majority of the respondents are facing harassment at workplace. Government and private sectors are compared in this study and results highlight prevalence of more harassment in private sector than in government sector. The majority of respondents from private sector are harassed more than those working in government sector. The results of t-test showed that there is significant mean difference between both sectors in terms of prevalence of sexual harassment.

The responsible factors for this difference could be job security in government sector. In government sector, people stay at a place for long time and they do not want to earn disrespect for themselves as they have to work with the same people for a long period of time. Therefore, they try to keep themselves away from such acts of harassing women. Moreover government sector has its own defined laws, policies and procedures to tackle the issue. Recently "Punjab Protection against the Harassment of Women at the Workplace (Amendment) Acts, 2012-2016" has come into force and a platform in the form of Ombudsperson office has been provided to the victims of harassment. The perpetrators of harassment may fear that they can be punished because the platform to listen the victims is available now. It can be considered that the recent interest of government to minimize harassment at workplaces has put this sector ahead in terms of tackling harassment. Furthermore, in Pakistan people like government jobs and do not want to quit it due to pension benefits in future (Suhail, 2016). This job security leads towards the fear of job insecurity because they think that they can be dismissed if the victim reports the event of harassment. Therefore they do not dare to indulge in the act of harassing women at workplaces. On the other hand, in private sector, there is less job security (Shahid, 2013), people join and leave jobs more frequently. Before leaving or switching job they can perform such indecent acts as they know that they are leaving job soon and the organization will not/cannot do anything against them. Moreover, no laws are available in private sector to deal the issue or listen to the complaints of harassment. Therefore, the perpetrators of harassment have less fear and try to harass the female workers. According to a study conducted by Sadruddin (2013) almost 100% respondents say that there is more harassment in private sector than public sector.

In this study depression and anxiety are studied as the psychological effects of harassment. Majority respondents in government sector are anxious and depressed at moderate level. In private sector, majority respondents are depressed and anxious at severe level.

It is natural to suffer from different psychological effects on some unwanted acts or situations to which a person has to confront. Sexual harassment is totally unwanted and undesired. Therefore it is understood that the victims may be disturbed. In Pakistan women are considered the symbol of respect for whole family and if they suffer from some harassing behaviour, it is perceived that they have earned disrespect for their families (Lari, 2011). In this situation, women are worried about two types of conditions. Firstly they are worried about the incidence of harassment and secondly they are upset for the respect of family. Therefore, they do not take courage to report and bear the consequences in the form of depression and anxiety.

Few studies conducted in this area reveal that harassment negatively affects the psychology of harassed women which leads towards more tendencies to absenteeism and withdrawal behaviour. This behaviour automatically leads to negative consequences for organizations (Gutek & Koss, 1993). Popovich (1992) discusses that harassment does not occur at one time, it is a continuously occurring problem which leads towards confusion/self-blame, fear/anxiety, depression/anger, and disillusionment. Willness et al. (2007) told that harassment has negative effects on job performance. In Pakistan, Sadruddin's research conducted in 2013 proves the same phenomenon. The results of his study show that respondents who are harassed are mentally disturbed which affect their performance at workplace. The duration of harassment is an important factor in studying psychological effects. Continuous and long lasting harassment has more severe effects than short term harassment (Gettman & Gelfand, 2007).

When the respondents of the current study are asked how they cope to harassment, majority said that they avoid, ignore and do not report the harassment at work place. Only 2 out of 235 sexually harassed women filed lawsuit against the perpetrator.

It could be possible that the cultural constrains of Pakistan stop them to report the incident. It is considered that women are shy and do not have courage to report the event. Therefore, the culprits do not hesitate to harass them. Another reason may be the fear of insult or loss of job for victim. In Pakistan, majority of the population is unemployed and finding a job or a new job is very difficult task (Gillani, Rehman & Gill, 2009). In this situation, they may fear that reporting harassment can result into loss of their job (Shahid, 2013). One of the respondents of the study of Sadruddin (2013) stated that her friend is fired on reporting harassment to save the reputation of the organization. The silence on the issue is also an important factor for sexual harassment. Hamlin and Hoffman (2002) state this unreported act invites offenders to continue the offence. According to Ali (2010), Pakistani women go through three levels of issues when they face sexual harassment. First, they try to hide it due to shyness and cultural traditions. Secondly, if they intend to report, there is lack of mechanism that redresses harassment. Finally, they face victimization if they report sexual harassment.

The same results have been found in a study conducted by Magely in 2002. He found that 74.3% women tried to avoid the situation, 69.9% seek social support, 57.3% confronted the situation, and 29.5% conciliated. In another study, Aloka (2009) explains the qualitative analysis wherein almost 15% respondents say that the harassing behaviour should not be reported as it create turmoil situation. They suggest that this type of behaviour should be ignored.

Conclusion

This research is descriptive in nature which aims at studying the phenomenon of sexual harassment at workplaces in Lahore. It examines the difference between government and private sectors in terms of prevalence of harassment at workplaces, consequences of harassment on psychological health of women and how did women cope with such experiences. From the results of the study, it is concluded that harassment is a workplace problem in organizations of Lahore. The comparison between public and private sectors shows that notable prevalence of sexual harassment is found in private sector as compared to the government sector. It is further concluded from the results that harassment negatively affects psychological health of female victims. They face depression and anxiety. Moreover, negative responses are also found in reporting the case against sexual harassment at workplace.

Recommendations

After going through the literature and results of the study it is recommended that women should be sensitized about "Punjab Protection against the Harassment of Women at the Workplace (Amendment) Acts, 2012-2016" through awareness campaigns. There should also be some rules and policies in private sector to address the issue. Women should be encouraged to report the incidence of harassment for which awareness campaigns should be started by Women Development Department with collaboration of NGOs working on women rights like AASHA, Aurat Foundation etc. It is also recommended for future researchers to find out the reasons why women do not report the event while a fully-fledged act is available in the Punjab.

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