PREVALENCE AND DIMENSIONS OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT OF THE FEMALE WORKFORCE IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR ORGANIZATIONS OF PAKISTAN

JAMES ESTES, MUHAMMAD AWAIS, AHMAD SHER

Abstract

The paper deals with the sexual harassment as the unpleasant factor of present employment. Based on theoretical and empirical analysis, synthesis, meta-analysis, comparison, induction and deduction, the objective of the research is to explore quantitatively the incidence of sexual harassment among the female employees working in the public sector organizations of Pakistan, focusing on the education and health sectors. Sampling was used to collect the data from 200 contract and regular female employees from the education and health sectors of Pakistan. The results supported the hypothesis that there are significant sexual harassment incidences in the public sector organizations of Pakistan. Only 20 percent respondents were of the view that they had faced sexual harassment some time in their professional career.

Key words: sexual harassment, gender discrimination, female employees, equal employment.

Classification JEL: M12 – Personnel Management; J45 – Public Sector Labor Markets; J45 – Public Sector Labor Markets; J71 – Discrimination.

1. Introduction

The U.S. Equal Opportunity Employment Commission (EEOC) defines workplace sexual harassment as unwelcome sexual advances or conduct of a sexual nature which unreasonably interferes with the performance of a person's job or creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work environment. Disagreement continues about what specifically constitutes sexual harassment. Organizations have generally made progress in the past decades towards limiting overt forms of sexual harassment, including unwanted physical touching, recurring requests for date after the offended individual had made it clear they were not interested, and coercive threats that the harassed person could lose his or her job as a result of refusing the sexual propositions. Problems today are likely to surface around more subtle forms of sexual harassment including unwanted looks or comments, off-color jokes, items of a sexual nature such as pinups posted in the workplace, or the blurring of the line between friendly banter and harassment *(Fitzgerald et al., 1997)*.

According to Roberts in the Akron Law Review *(2015)*, apart from the legal danger of the sexual harassment, it definitely has negative impact on work environment and it also negatively affects job attitude and may lead to workers' turn off. Livingston *(1982)* in the Journal of Social Issues found that the organization's response to reports of sexual harassment is often negative or in an unhelpful way to the harassed individual. When organizational leaders make honest efforts to stop the harassment, the outcomes are much more positive *(Robbins & Stephen, 2013)*. Munson et al. *(2000)* conducted a longitudinal research to analyze the negative outcomes related to sexual harassment and concluded that respondents' disposition or response biases play a significant role in the perception of negative outcomes related to sexual harassment. The research divided the outcomes into two classes those related to psychology and those related to job itself.

Illness et al. *(2007)* elaborated the danger and demerits of sexual harassment for women. The research find sexual harassment as one of the most damaging and ubiquitous barriers to career development of women. The Meta-analysis of 41 studies shows that sexual harassment is associated with decreased job satisfaction, lower organizational commitment, and turn over,

adverse effect on physical and mental health. The research also found post-traumatic stress disorder in respondents who suffer from sexual harassment experience. The reported incidences of sexual harassment are very bad for the image of the organization especially with reference to job market.

Fitzgerald et al. *(1991)* studied the prevalence of sexual harassment in educational institutions and took a sample from 280 faculty members and 314 students to determine various dimensions of sexual harassment, and come up with five types of sexual harassment that is gender harassment, seductive behavior, sexual coercion, sexual imposition or assault and sexual bribery. The result of the study suggests that there is lack of consensus about what constitutes sexual harassment.

Rotundo et al. *(2001)* conducted research on gender differences in perceptions of sexual harassment. The authors report a meta-analysis of 62 studies of gender differences in harassment perceptions. The legal debate regarding the use of individual's standard instead of a reasonable woman's standard to evaluate sexual harassment claims is inconclusive. An earlier quantitative review combined all types of social-sexual behaviors for a single meta-analysis; the purpose of this study was to investigate whether the magnitude of the female-male difference varies by type of behavior. An overall standardized mean difference of 0.30 was found, suggesting that women perceive a broader range of social-sexual behaviors as harassing. However, the meta-analysis also found that the female-male difference was larger for behaviors that involve hostile work environment harassment, derogatory attitudes toward women, dating pressure, or physical sexual contact than sexual propositions or sexual coercion.

Bowling & Beehr *(2006)* elaborated the sexual harassment phenomenon and concluded that, workplace harassment affects the lives of many employees. Until recently it has been relatively ignored in the organizational psychology literature. First, the authors introduced an attribution- and reciprocity-based model that explained the link between harassment and its potential causes and consequences. The authors then conducted a meta-analysis to examine the potential antecedents and consequences of workplace harassment. As shown by the meta-analysis, both environmental and individual difference factors potentially contributed to harassment and harassment was negatively related to the well-being of both individual employees and their employing organizations. Furthermore, harassment contributed to the variance in many outcomes, even after controlling for 2 of the most commonly studied occupational stressors, role ambiguity and role conflict.

Magley et al. *(2013)* conducted research to look into various methods of reducing the incidence of sexual harassment in private and public sector organizations. The research shows that training plays a significant role on the subject of policies of the organizations to combat the sexual harassment and protection of victims.

The aim of paper is to analyze theoretical knowledge on sexual harassment and to explore quantitatively the incidence of sexual harassment among the female employees working in the public sector organizations of Pakistan. Paper is mostly focused on the education and health sectors. Based on collected data, the survey results confirm the hypothesis on significant sexual harassment incidences in the public sector organizations of Pakistan.

2. Theoretical background

The onset, development and maintenance of sexual offenses can be explained with the help of Integrated Theory of Sexual Offending, which states that sexual harassment occurs due to integrated effect of so many causal factors or variables. Some of these factors are related to brain development (evolution, genetic variations and neurobiology) and others factors are related to ecological environment (social and cultural environment, personal circumstances and physical environment. These all factors effect brain functioning and act as a driver of particular behavior including sexual harassment related actions. The Integrated theory of Sexual

Offending explains the symptoms arising from the interaction of neurological systems and ecological factors *(Ward et al., 2006).*

From social constructionist viewpoint, the gender and identities are constructed and perpetuated through interaction and expectations. While the sex of a person is biological, the person may socially acquire behavior and characteristics that are considered to belong to a gender *(Francis & Skelton, 2005).* The social constructionist perspective of gender can be compared to the sex role theory. While it is recognized that masculine and feminine roles are learned through socialization, with different expectations and norms connected to each role, these roles are based on the biological sex.

Further, according to sex role theory, people occupying counter-positions are in charge of reinforcing and maintaining these roles *(Connell, 1996).* According to the proponents of the social constructionist perspective of gender, there is a certain power relationship in which the social structures contribute to men as a group having power over women as a group. Steven Lukes *(2005)* explains that there are three different dimensions of power. The first dimension is Dahl's *(1957)* explanation of power: "A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do," Hence, this dimension focuses on decision-making in observable, overt conflicts over key-issues; it is possible to notice that A makes B do something that he or she does not really want. The second dimension is when A influences social and political values so that it "creates or reinforces barriers to the public airing of policy conflicts." This dimension focuses on observable, covert conflicts over issues or potential issues. Hence, the non-decision-making is also considered. The third dimension is when power is used in order to prevent conflicts from arising to the political agenda. This dimension focuses on latent conflicts, and includes decision-making as well as control over the political agenda. Through control over the political agenda and discourse, conflicting views will not be publicly aired. B will act against his or her own interests, in willing compliance with the ruling norms.

In *gender studies,* hegemonic masculinity is a concept popularized also by Connell *(2005)* of proposed practices that promote the dominant social position of men, and the subordinate social position of women. Conceptually, hegemonic masculinity proposes to explain how and why men maintain dominant social roles over women, and other gender identities, which are perceived as 'feminine' in a given society. Through hegemonic masculinity, the dominant position of men and the subordination of women, the legitimacy of the patriarchy, is maintained. While the hegemony is not maintained primarily through using violence, members benefiting from it can use violence in order to sustain their dominance. This violence may take its form of verbal abuse, harassment at the workplace, or domestic violence.

Most studies confirm that the concept of power is central to understanding sexual harassment. This seems true whether the harassment comes from the supervisor, a coworker or an employee. Sexual harassment is more likely to occur when there are large power differentials. The supervisor employee dyad best characterizes an unequal power relationship, where formal power gives the supervisor the capacity to reward and coerce. Because employees want favorable performance reviews, salary increase and the like, supervisor control resources most employees consider important and scarce. Thus sexual harassment by the boss creates the greatest difficulty for those being harassed. If there are no witnesses, it is the victim's words, which can cause even retaliation and this retaliation even, discourage other employees to come forward.

3. Sexual harassment – a Pakistani perspective

According to Pakistan Labor Force Statistics (PLFS) 2012–2013, of the country's estimated 180 million people; only 12.5 million are women, comprising 6.9% of the labor force in Pakistan. Working women can be divided into four major categories: employers, self-employed individuals, unpaid family helpers and regular employees. Women employers are just

0.1 percent of women employed, while the self-employed comprised 15.7 percent, the unpaid family helpers are 60.5 percent and the regular employees are 23.7 percent. The major of factors contributing to low employment trends for women in Pakistan include a low literacy rate, lack of mobility, social and cultural taboos, family norms, lack of support system and fear of sexual harassment.

In Pakistan different governments have attempted to bring women into the job sphere by providing different facilities and mitigating their difficulties. Among various steps one of the most significant was, 'The Protection against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act' which was enacted in 2010 to create a safe working environment for women, free of harassment, abuse and intimidation with a view toward fulfillment of their right to work with dignity. The other objectives of the act were higher productivity and a better quality of work life. Harassment is one of the biggest hurdles faced by working women preventing many who want to work from getting themselves and their families out of poverty. This Act was intended to open the path for women to participate more fully in the development of Pakistan at all levels.

This Act builds on the principles of equal opportunity for men and women and their right to earn a livelihood without fear of discrimination as stipulated in the Constitution. This act defines harassment as any unwelcome sexual advance, request for sexual favors or other verbal or written communication or physical conduct of a sexual nature, or sexually demeaning attitudes, causing interference with work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile or offensive work environment, or the attempt to punish the complainant for refusal to comply to such a request or is made a condition for employment.

The above is unacceptable behavior in the organization and at the workplace, including in any interaction or situation that is linked to official work or official activity outside the office. There are three significant manifestations of harassment in the work environment:

- Abuse of authority: a demand by a person in authority, such as a supervisor, for sexual favors in order for the complainant to keep or obtain certain job benefits, be it a wage increase, a promotion, training opportunity, a transfer or the job itself;
- Creating a hostile environment: any unwelcome sexual advance, request for sexual favors or other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature, which interferes with an individual's work performance or creates an intimidating, hostile, abusive or offensive work environment. The typical "hostile environment" claim, in general, requires finding of a pattern of offensive conduct, however, in cases where the harassment is particularly severe, such as in cases involving physical contact, a single offensive incident will constitute a violation.
- Retaliation: the refusal to grant a sexual favor can result in retaliation, which may include limiting the employee's options for future promotions or training, distorting the evaluation reports, generating gossip against the employee or other ways of limiting access to his/her rights. Such behavior is also a part of the harassment.

Shaikh *(2000)* conducted research to assess the nature and dimensions of sexual harassment among the female members of medical profession, exploring the data involving nurses. The results suggested significant harassment incidences by male physicians, patients and other staff members. As per the results of the research male physicians were identified as the major perpetrators of sexual harassment, followed by the patients and their relatives.

4. Methodology

Fitzgerald et al. *(1988)* found sexual harassment study very difficult because of the lack of consensus regarding the definition of sexual harassment and lack of standardized instrument which could be used for comparison of results. The developed instruments and methods to study sexual harassment. Lengnick-Hall *(1995)* identified following methodological problems by

exploring the literature: (a) a disturbing lack of attention to construct validity issues, (b) a weak theoretical development, (c) an overuse of cross-sectional or static approaches for studying a dynamic phenomenon, (d) an almost complete reliance on convenience samples for survey research and college student samples for experimental research, (e) an almost complete reliance on "paper people" or descriptive stimuli, (f) little or no attention paid to the potential reactivity of measures and methods used, and (g) mono-method bias (using the same instruments for measuring both independent and dependent variables).

Kamal et al. *(1997)* tested the validity of sexual experience questionnaires in Pakistani conditions and found them reliable and valid for measuring the sexual experience of the female workforce. The public sector in Pakistan is generally considered to be safe for working woman as compared to the private sector because of better job structure and security.

In order to examine the sexual harassment in the public sector organization of Pakistan a sexual experience questionnaire developed by Fitzgerald et al. *(1995)* was used; its reliability is well established. The questionnaire was distributed to 250 females working in the health, education and agriculture departments. The reasons for the selection of these departments were as follows:

- The number of female employees in health and education;
- The largest employment sector when compared to the other public sector departments.

The number of filled and returned questionnaire was 200, a response rate of 80 percent. The convenience sampling technique was used for the collection of data. Along with convenient sampling snow ball sampling was also used to identify and interview the female workers who had been sexually harassed at some stage of their career. Those females who has had been found to work with male workers were targeted for sampling. The age of the respondents was between 18 and 35.

The services of female colleagues was adapted to minimize the biasness with reference to respondents regarding the understanding of the questionnaire as the questionnaire was made to completed through face to face interviews. This was a survey type research and the results were analyzed by using descriptive statistics, mainly through percentage or frequency distribution. The questionnaire consists of simple statements and the respondents were instructed to answer either yes or no.

5. Results and discussion

The result has been analyzed through a gender and power analysis. The study uses the social constructionist theory of gender, recognizing that gender is constructed through interaction and expectations of people *(Francis & Skelton, 2005),* and Connell's *(1996)* theory of hegemonic masculinity, which explains how the patriarchy is legitimized. Further, in order to analyze the result, Allen's *(1998)* theories of power-over, power-to and power-with as well as Luke's *(2005)* theories of different dimensions of power have been used.

In order to explore the dimensions of sexual harassment among the female member of the public sector organizations, the results of the study are significant as 20 out of 200 female employees responded 'yes' with reference to encountering a sexual harassment incident, the incidence of sexual harassment was 10% among the female member of education and health department.

The three main dimensions under which sexual harassment was defined were gender discrimination, unwanted sexual attention and sexual coercion. None of the respondents reported any incidence of sexual coercion.

The main area of sexual harassment that emerged was gender discrimination with 15 female employee out of the 200 responding yes to questions describing gender discrimination; while 5 out of 200 reported unwanted sexual attention by a male colleague or

supervisor. Five female workers reported text messages from unknown individuals, believing that the view must be from male members of the organizations they serve.

The results support the hypothesis that the environment in the public sector is relatively safe for working females and the building of their careers. All the respondents who reported sexual harassment were between 20 and 35 years of age. The number of females on a contract basis reporting sexual harassment was 16 out of 20 responses. During face to face interview a new form of sexual harassment was found. This new form involved the use of cell phones, through anonymous harassment calls and other text messages involving any number of forms of harassment. The onset of sexual harassment in this new form is far more dominant when compared existing forms as depicted by the results.

The society of Pakistan is male dominated where even the discussion of sex is considered awkward especially when directly involving women. There are two factors which affect a particular behavior, environmental variation and genetic variation. The culture of the majority of the Pakistani households are such that women consider it inappropriate to discuss gender related issues with their elders so biasness in the results cannot be excluded in the study of sexual harassment in Pakistan.

Ilies et al. *(2003)* conducted meta-analysis of work-related sexual harassment in the United States. The three moderators which were used in research are: the type of survey used, the type of the work environment and sampling technique. The reported incidence rate was estimated by cumulative incidence rates reported in the literature. Results show that directly querying the respondents about whether or not they experienced sexual harassment (vs. using questionnaires that listed behaviors believed to constitute sexual harassment), and employing probability-sampling techniques (vs. convenience sampling), led to substantially lower estimates of sexual harassment incidence. In addition, the results suggest that sexual harassment is more prevalent in organizations characterized by relatively large power differentials between organizational levels. Based on more than 86,000 respondents from 55 probability samples, on average, 58% of women report having experienced potentially harassing behaviors and 24% report having experienced sexual harassment at work.

6. Conclusion

It can be concluded from the results of the research that the female workforce in Pakistani public sector organizations are not safe from sexual harassment, especially among those women whose positions require that they perform field duty with their male co-workers. The prevalence of sexual harassment is more significant in the health department than the education department. Managers in these and all other sectors have a responsibility to protect their employees from a hostile work environment, but they also need to protect themselves. Managers may be unaware that one of their employees is being sexually harassed. But being unaware does exempt them or their organizations from legal consequences.

If investigators believe that a manager should have known about the harassment, both the manager and the department must be held liable. Sexual harassment violates every sense of equality and personal autonomy. It is an abuse of status and power, and needs to be seen in the context of institutionalized male power and stopped. Hence, *effective interventions* need to address both, individuals and institutions quickly, thoroughly and harshly.

A strong support system at home, in the workplace, flexible working hours, and the establishment of a harassment free environment is critical to increasing the participation of women in the workforce. Women are entitled to equal working opportunities without fear or compromise of their self-esteem or safety. Unless Pakistan is able to change its collective thinking and provide a conducive environment for them, Pakistan's Economic growth and development will remain a distant dream as it will lose a significant well-educated and competent portion of the workforce for the future.

References:

[1] Allen, A. (1998). Power Trouble: Performativity as Critical Theory. *Constellations, 5*(4): 456–471.

[2] Allen, A. (1999). *The Power of Feminist Theory: Domination, Resistance, Solidarity.*

[3] Bowling, N. A. & Beehr, T. A. (2006). Workplace Harassment from the Victim's Perspective: A Theoretical Model and Meta-analysis. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 91*(5): 998.

[4] Connell, R. (1996). Teaching the Boys: New Research on Masculinity, and Gender Strategies for Schools. *The Teachers College Record, 98*(2): 206–235.

[5] Connell, R. W. & Messerschmidt, J. W. (2005). Hegemonic Masculinity Rethinking the Concept. *Gender & Society, 19*(6): 829–859.

[6] Connell, R. (2006). The Experience of Gender Change in Public Sector Organizations. *Gender, Work & Organization, 13*(5): 435–452.

[7] Dahl, R. A. (1957). The Concept of Power. *Behavioral Science, 2*(3): 201–215.

[8] Fitzgerald, L. F. & Ormerod, A. J. (1991). Perceptions of Sexual Harassment. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 15*(2): 281–294.

[9] Fitzgerald, L. F., Gelfand, M. J. & Drasgow, F. (1995). Measuring Sexual Harassment: Theoretical and Psychometric Advances. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology, 17*(4): 425–445.

[10] Fitzgerald, L. F., Shullman, S. L., Bailey, N., Richards, M., Swecker, J., Gold, Y. & Weitzman, L. (1988). The Incidence and Dimensions of Sexual Harassment in Academia and the Workplace. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 32*(2): 152–175.

[11] Francis, B. & Skelton, C. (2005). *Reassessing Gender and Achievement: Questioning Contemporary Key Debates.* Routledge.

[12] Ilies, R., Hauserman, N., Schwochau, S. & Stibal, J. (2003). Reported Incidence Rates of Work-related Sexual Harassment in the United States: Using Meta-analysis to Explain Reported Rate Disparities. *Personnel Psychology, 56*(3): 607–631.

[13] Kamal, A. & Tariq, N. (1997). Sexual Harassment Experience Questionnaire for Workplaces of Pakistan: Development and Validation. *Pakistan Journal of Psychological Research, 12*(1–2).

[14] Lengnick-Hall, M. L. (1995). Sexual Harassment Research: A Methodological Critique. *Personnel Psychology, 48*(4): 841–864.

[15] Livingston, J. A. (1982). Responses to Sexual Harassment on the Job: Legal, Organizational, and Individual Actions. *Journal of Social Issues, 38*(4): 5–22.

[16] Luke, C. (2005). Feminist Pedagogy Theory in Higher Education: Reflections on Power and Authority. *Feminist Critical Policy Analysis II, 172.*

[17] Lukes, S. (2004). *Power: A Radical View.* Palgrave Macmillan.

[18] Magley, V. J., Fitzgerald, L. F., Salisbury, J., Drasgow, F. R. I. T. Z. & Zickar, M. J. (2013). Changing Sexual Harassment within Organizations via Training Interventions: Suggestions and Empirical Data. *The Fulfilling Workplace: The Organization's Role in Achieving Individual and Organizational Health,* 225–246.

[19] Mulhall, J. P., King, R., Kirby, M., Hvidsten, K., Symonds, T., Bushmakin, A. G. & Cappelleri, J. C. (2008). Evaluating the Sexual Experience in Men: Validation of the Sexual Experience Questionnaire. *The Journal of Sexual Medicine, 5*(2): 365–376.

[20] Munson, L. J., Hulin, C. & Drasgow, F. (2000). Longitudinal Analysis of Dispositional Influences and Sexual Harassment: Effects on Job and Psychological Outcomes. *Personnel Psychology, 53*(1): 21–46.

[21] Robbins, S., Judge, T. A., Millett, B. & Boyle, M. (2013). *Organisational Behaviour.* Pearson Higher Education AU.

[22] Roberts, B. S. & Mann, R. A. (2015). Sexual Harassment in the Workplace: A Primer. *Akron Law Review, 29*(2): 5

[23] Rotundo, M., Nguyen, D. H. & Sackett, P. R. (2001). A Meta-analytic Review of Gender Differences in Perceptions of Sexual Harassment. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 86*(5): 914.

[24] Shaikh, M. A. (2000). Sexual Harassment in Medical Profession-Perspective from Pakistan. J*ournal Pakistan Medical Association, 50*(4): 130–131.

[25] Ward, T. & Beech, A. (2006). An Integrated Theory of Sexual Offending. *Aggression and Violent Behavior, 11*(1): 44–63.

[26] Willness, C. R., Steel, P. & Lee, K. (2007). A Meta-analysis of the Antecedents and Consequences of Workplace Sexual Harassment. *Personnel Psychology, 60*(1): 127–162.

Addresses of authors:
Prof. James P. ESTES Ph.D.
California State University
San Bernardino
USA
e-mail: jimestes@csusb.edu

Muhammad AWAIS, Ph.D.
Iqra University
Islamabad Campus
Pakistan
e-mail: ahmadsherawann@gmail.com

Ahmad SHER, Ph.D.
Iqra University
Islamabad Campus
Pakistan
e-mail: ahmadsherawann@gmail.com