

Sexual Harassment at Workplace... A Case of Banking Sector in Lahore

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Abstract: Sexual Harassment is a topic of concern throughout the world. This study investigates various elements leading to sexual harassment experience of females at workplace. The study was undertaken in a banking sector using sample of 250 females working in different branches of banks located in Lahore (Pakistan), drawn by employing three stage sampling technique comprising stratified random sampling, random sampling and criterion sampling. Data was collected through survey questionnaire which was statistically tested and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The results indicate that attractiveness, privacy in office setup and work ethics are significant predictors while organizational policy is marginally significant in aggravating or limiting the level of sexual harassment at workplace.

Key words: Sexual harassment experience • Attractiveness • Office set up • Work ethics • Organization policy • Masculinity • Job status

INTRODUCTION

Harassment is a global issue and topic of discussion due to its adverse effects on the victims, organizations and the society in general. This is not a gender specific issue but most of the research attributes women to be the victim of harassment in various societies [1-4]. This research paper intends to find various elements, which could help in eliminating or otherwise aggravating sexual harassment at workplace. The findings of this research will help organizations identify those particular elements which help in minimizing the level of sexual harassment at workplace or otherwise avoid promotion of those critical elements which contribute in aggravation of sexual harassment.

Management of sexual harassment at workplaces is an important task for all managers because sexual harassment once occurred can cause serious problems. It can create physical and psychological problems for the victim and can cause reputational harm and financial loss (in terms of low productivity and high turnover) to organizations [5]. The worst thing which an organization can face as a result of sexual harassment at workplaces is litigations in court of law. Pakistan's workplaces are also witnessing sexual harassment experiences whether in the form of staring, sexual comments, molestation and some form of unwanted

physical contact [6]. The seriousness of this issue has forced the Pakistan's Government to promulgate a new law named "*Protection against Harassment of women at work place*" in the year 2010 [7]. Now this law is in force in Pakistan but still sexual harassment remains a common complaint especially for females [8]. To safeguard the concerns of these working females at Pakistan's workplaces it is required to explore such elements which either enhancing or deterring the level of sexual harassment at workplace. The presence of law gives remedy to the victim and penalize the perpetrator and considered to be a reactive approach but this research is an effort to introduce a proactive approach for dealing with the issue of sexual harassment.

Literature Review: Besides universality of sexual harassment phenomenon researchers find it difficult to propose one standardized definition due to variation of perceptions across cultures [3, 4] because any particular action which is labeled as Sexual Harassment in one culture is thought to be enjoyable at workplace for creating fun and harmony among work groups like flirting, joking, etc. in other cultures [9-14]. Secondly worldwide there is disagreement upon various specific behaviors which constitutes sexual harassment [9, 15-17]. Pakistani law has given the following definition of sexual harassment:

“harassment” means 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; (Government 2010).

Most sexual harassment theories presented in literature firstly investigate and elaborate antecedents, causes and outcomes of sexual harassment primarily relying on the characteristics of both perpetrators and victims, secondly studying the experience of sexual harassment both for perpetrator and victim and thirdly analyzing the impact of environmental issues. These theories are classified as classical theories of sexual harassment and contemporary theories presented by Fitzgerald *et al.* and Person by Situation (PXS) Model developed by Pryor *et al.* [18]. Illinois Model of sexual harassment [19-21] and PXS Model [22, 23]. Besides these theories, four factor theory / model is considered to be the most exhaustive and comprehensive model which encompasses all previous models in one model [24] like motivation for harassing someone, internal inhibitions, external inhibitions and belief system.

A framework has been developed for this study in which various elements have been derived from four factor theory. Framework developed for this particular research is being applied on the basis of victim's approach meaning that causes of sexual harassment experience would be investigated by asking questions from those persons who are mostly victim of this behavior so the factor 2 is totally ignored as it is related with the internal resistive forces of the perpetrator. Literature mostly supports and suggests that at large females are victims of sexual harassment acts in Pakistan at workplace [25-28]. Following are elements selected to investigate that which element is the most significant predictor of sexual harassment experiences at workplace.

Element 1: Attractiveness: Attractiveness serves as a motivating force for perpetrator. This element is self-reporting from females who are being harassed and have sexual harassment experiences at workplace. How a female perceives about her own personality and presence at workplace matters a lot in determining the level of sexual harassment. If a female perceives herself to be more attractive, stylish and bold, she will consider the acts of

her male colleagues as harassing behaviors. The females who are physically attractive are perceived to be more social, dominant, warm and socially skilled [29]. Such behaviors result into the increased motivation level in certain perpetrators leading to the more sexual harassment experiences at workplace [24] so females who self-report to be more attractive are at a higher risk of sexual harassment experiences at work place [30]. It leads to the first hypothesis

Hypothesis 1: *Females who are physically attractive may experience more sexual harassment at workplace.*

Element 2: Office Setup: While studying the sexual harassment experiences at workplaces, it is pertinent to investigate about the sitting arrangements for female employees. Work environments in which female employees have a chance of privacy meaning that females are sitting in some isolated rooms, whose doors could be closed, there are minimal interference or visibility from outside have more chances of getting sexually harassed [31, 32]. This is due to the fact that this privacy in office environment provides the potential perpetrator an open opportunity to harass as there is less opportunity for anyone to witness any unwanted sexual advances, propositions, comments or looks [29, 30]. So the next hypothesis is

Hypothesis 2: *Females having privacy in office set up will experience more sexual harassment at workplace.*

Element 3: Organizational Policy: New law in Pakistan is promulgated in year 2010 [7] which imposes on all organizations a sanction to make appropriate organizational policies and grievance handling procedures for preventing sexual harassment experiences at workplace [33, 35]. Introduction of new law and awareness regarding its procedures will make women more confident to file complaint against perpetrators and as a result discouraging potential perpetrators [36]. In organizations where sexual harassment is considered to be problem and such organizations follow a systematic procedure for grievance handling, where emphasis is more on training programs from preventing sexual harassment experiences and giving firsthand knowledge to the perpetrator regarding penalties and fines imposed on such behavior and to the victims regarding the whole grievance procedure, in such systems females experience less sexual harassment [37]. So this discussion leads to next hypothesis i.e.

Hypothesis 3: Females possessing more knowledge about organizational policy regarding sexual harassment will experience less sexual harassment at workplace.

Element 4: Work Ethics: It is very essential to keep certain ethical standards at workplace. It has been highlighted that less professional organizations or workplaces where ethical standards are not followed employees are mostly engaged in various deviant behaviors, one and most important is sexual harassment at workplace [38]. It is observed from previous literature [29] that organizations observing high standards of work ethics make the prevention of sexual harassment possible at workplace. Perpetrators feel hesitant to harass anyone where ethical standards are observed in their true spirits. It gives rise to our next hypothesis.

Hypothesis 4: Females working at workplaces where work ethics are highly emphasized will experience less sexual harassment.

Element 5: Sex Role: The sex-role factor assesses the extent of masculinity or femininity of a victim based on the traditional stereotyped masculine and feminine personality traits [39]. Females high on femininity scale experience more sexual harassment than females low on masculinity scale [40, 41]. Women who exhibit more of the feminine traits are expected to be subjected to more harassment than those who fall under the masculine category and vice versa [29]. Hence it gives rise to next hypothesis

Hypothesis 5: Females with more masculine characteristics will experience less sexual harassment at workplace.

Element 6: Job Status: Females are usually perceived to be at lower hierarchical positions at workplace [42] as compared to men so they are more vulnerable to sexual harassment at workplace [15, 43, 44]. This is because any resistance on their part could be met by threats of retaliation for not being cooperative, or by promises of reward for engaging in sexual behavior. In Pakistan organizations are used to give stereotype jobs and positions to their female employees who are mostly the lower hierarchical jobs hence raising the chances of being sexually harassed[24]. Hence it gives rise to the next hypothesis:

Hypothesis 6: Females at lower level of organizational hierarchy may experience more sexual harassment at workplace.

Methodology

Sampling: Three stage sampling technique is being used by firstly making strata's like public, private, foreign and Islamic banks then 300 branches were short listed as sample through random sampling calculator and finally criterion sampling technique was employed. As victims approach is being used in this current study and literature suggests that females are most of the time victims [24-27] so in all the branches selected, questionnaires were distributed among all female employees.

Instrumentation: Attractiveness was measured on a self-rating 10 point scale where 1 represents not at all attractive and 10 represents extremely attractive. The element of office set up inquires about the level of privacy in sitting arrangements at workplace for females, visibility of the sitting area from all sides and option of shutting the door of the office cabin. The instrument of organizational policy asked questions about awareness of laws related with sexual harassment at workplace, the level of penalties imposed on perpetrator, the amount of compensation or remedies available to the victim of sexual harassment on a 5 point scale where 1 representing not having knowledge to 5 representing fully aware of the policies. The instrument used for work ethics comprises

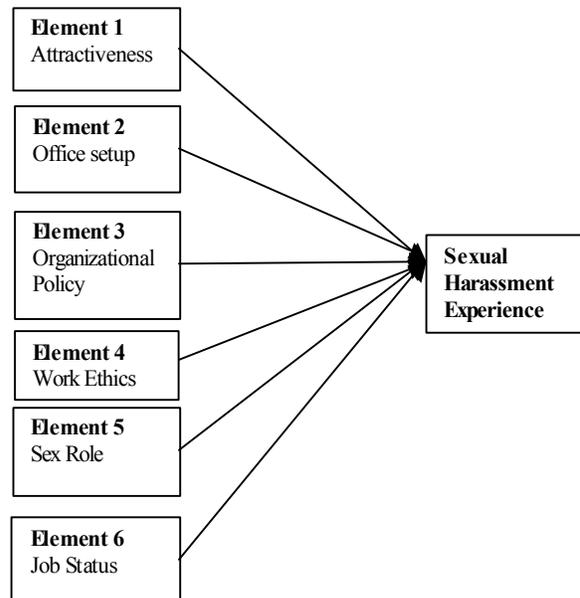


Fig. 1: Elements causing sexual harassment experience at workplace

of eight questions asked regarding use of obscene language, use of alcohol, drugs, smoking, disrespect shown to other employees, expectation of performing unrelated activities, inappropriate display of emotions and unauthorized display of emotions at work place. All the questions asked were on 5 point scale in which 1 represents never and 5 represents always. Sex role is determined by BEM Sex Role inventory scale [39]. It consists of 40 items, 20 masculine characteristics and 20 feminine characteristics. The total of feminine character is subtracted from total of masculine characteristics. The high value of positive scores represents a more feminine personality and vice versa. Job status is measured through hierarchical position within organization like clerical, officer, managerial and senior management.

Data Collection: Data is collected from female employees working in various branches of banks located in Lahore. During data collection process, respondents were assured for confidentiality of the information provided. Approximately 480 questionnaires were distributed to female bankers. From the questionnaires distributed 300 filled questionnaires was returned to the researcher. Response rate for this research is 62.5%. After processing and complete analysis of received questionnaires, 250 duly filled questionnaires were entered in the software for analysis purpose. According to various researches this sample size is adequate for interpretation of data collected through surveys at 5% margin of error [45].

Data Analysis: The interpretation of data is done by employing correlation and regression analysis. Correlation analysis is conducted with the intention to discover whether there is a statistical relationship between variables exist or not. Correlation analysis determines the direction of relationship as well as magnitude of the relationship between variables whereas regression analysis is mostly done to determine the nature of relationship between variables. Table 1 shows the reliability coefficient of instruments used by applying Cronbach Alpha.

Scales used for measuring two independent variables i.e., Attractiveness and Job Status are single item scale. Cronbach Alpha is unable to provide the reliability estimates for a single item scale [46, 47]. The scale used in this research study for measuring attractiveness was validated by [48] in which they investigated that there is highest correlation when respondents were asked about their self-perception of attractiveness ($r=.68$). This single

Table 1: Reliability Coefficients of scales used

Scale	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
Workplace Ethics	.885	8
Organization Policy	.881	4
Office Set up	.539	3
Sex Role	.918	40
Sexual Harassment Experience	.972	35

Table 2: Demographic profile of respondents

Demographic Variable	Ranges	Percentage
Age	20-30 years	71.2
	30-40 years	20.0
	40-50 years	7.2
	More than 50	1.6
Marital Status	Married	33.6
	Unmarried	61.6
	Divorced	3.2
	Widow	1.6
Education	Bachelors	20.8
	Masters	79.2
	PhD	0.00
Bank	Public	10.8
	Private/Local	74.0
	Private/multinational	2.4
	Islamic banks	12.8
Experience	1-3 years	34.4
	3-5 years	30.4
	5-10 years	26.4
	10 or more years	8.8
Salary/month	<Rs 30,000	60.0
	Rs 30-60,000	23.2
	Rs 60-1,00,000	12.8
	Rs 1,00,000 or more	4.0

Table 3: Correlation coefficients of variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Attractiveness	1						
Work Ethics	.181**	1					
Job Status	.110	.072	1				
Office Set up	.042	-.058	-.042	1			
Org Policy	.174**	.039	-.055	.382**	1		
Masculinity	.104	-.118	.082	.033	.048	1	
Harassment	.349**	.614**	.356**	-.174**	.249**	-.122**	1

item scale was further used by [29-30]. In various studies done previously [6-29-30] measurement of Job status is done with single item scale based on respondent's income or educational level. Cronbach Alpha values of single item scales are not calculated but still single item scales are considered in surveys due to their convenience [46-47].

Demographic variables which are used included age, marital status, education, nature of bank, experience and salary/month. Details of all demographic variables are given in the Table 2:

Table (3) shows the correlation coefficients of variables. It shows that work ethics and sexual harassment experience are highly correlated with each other $r=.614$. There is positive correlation of

sexual harassment experience with the variables of attractiveness, job status and masculinity. Sexual harassment experience is negatively correlated with the variables of office set up and organizational policy. Major assumptions to run the regression analysis is satisfied as correlations between variables are in acceptable range, data is normal and reliability is lying within acceptable limits so regression analysis can be run on this data.

Table (4) explains the model summary of variables after running regression analysis on SPSS. The value of R=.682 indicates the moderate degree of correlation. The value of R square shows that 46.5% of the dependent variable can be explained by the independent variables. The value of Durbin Watson shows the autocorrelation between the variables. The value close to 2 depicts that there is no auto correlation between the variables.

Table (5) indicates the statistical significance of regression model applied. The model is highly significant at p=.000 which shows that model can be used to predict the outcome variable.

Table (6) shows the value of coefficients clearly depicting that attractiveness, office setup and work ethics are significant at $p < .05$ whereas the variable of organization policy is marginally significant at $p < .10$. The sign and trends of beta value (Beta = .241) depicts that hypothesis 1 is accepted and element of attractiveness is having a highly significant relationship with the dependent variable of sexual harassment experience. It means that females who perceive themselves more attractive will experience more sexual harassment at workplace. The beta value (Beta = -.183) depicts that hypothesis 2 comprising of element of office set up is highly significant but in opposite direction meaning that females having privacy in office set ups will experience less sexual harassment at workplace. The next element of organization policy is marginally significant with the dependent variable having positive relationship as opposed to the hypothesized relationship. It means that females who possess knowledge about organization policy will experience more sexual harassment at workplace. The last element of work ethics is also significantly associated with the dependent variable but beta value gave some unexpected finding as opposed to the hypothesized relationship between the variables. It was hypothesized that there is negative relationship between work ethics and sexual harassment experience but data analysis depicts that females working at work places where ethical values are highly emphasized will experience more sexual harassment.

Table 4: Model Summary of variables

Model	R	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.682 ^a	0.465	0.4943	1.718

a. Predictors: (Constant), MAS, OFFICESETUP, job status, Attractiveness, ETHICS, ORGPOLICY

b. Dependent Variable: HARASS

Table 5: Analysis of Variance ANOVA

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	51.655	6	8.609	35.235	.000 ^a
Residual	59.373	243	.244		
Total	111.028	249			

Table 6: Coefficients

Variables	Beta	T-values	Significance
Attractiveness	.241	4.914	.000
Office Set up	-.183	-3.602	.000
Organization Policy	.080	1.551	.102
Work Ethics	.561	11.583	.000

Table 7: Elements having non-significant relationship

Variables	Beta	T-values	Significance
Job Status	-.019	-.407	.685
Masculinity	.023	.473	.637

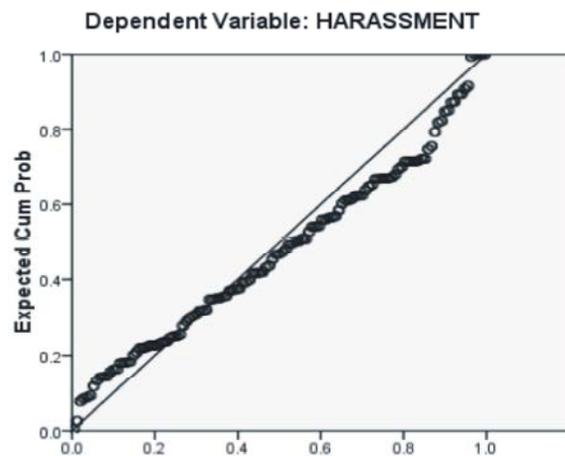


Fig. 2: Normal P-P Plot of Regression Standardized Residual

Two elements including Job status and masculinity are insignificantly related with dependent variable. The beta values shows that direction of relationship between job status and sexual harassment experience is same as hypothesized but for the element of masculinity the direction of relationship is opposite as hypothesized.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study have mixed outcomes narrating both divergent and convergent results. First hypothesis is accepted meaning that females who are more attractive or who at least perceive themselves more attractive have a higher risk of getting being sexually harassed because such type of females try to make themselves favorite, popular and dominant among their work groups resulting into a strong motivating element for perpetrator. The second hypothesis is significant but relationship is inverse to the hypothesized relationship meaning that females possessing independent offices or separate sitting arrangements minimize sexual harassment experience at workplace. This distance creates a barrier for the potential perpetrators to harass anyone. The third hypothesis is marginally significant with inverse relationship of the variables as opposed to the hypothesized relationship meaning that females possessing more knowledge about organizational policy experience more sexual harassment at workplace. It could be due to two reasons. Firstly, awareness makes females zero tolerant for such activities and secondly as in Pakistan sexual harassment laws are in their infancy stage so still these laws are unable to create fear in men for penalties and punishments. It is reported [49] that despite the enforcement of this law, sexual harassment at work places is increasing at a rapid speed. In an environment like Pakistan where rule of law is not prevalent in entire society so just having policies and awareness regarding these policies could not be a valid and significant element for lowering the sexual harassment experience at workplace.

Fourth hypothesis deals with work ethics. This study gives totally an unexpected research finding contrary to previous researches [29, 30] suggesting that the experience of sexual harassment is more in those organizations where high ethical standards are followed. In a male dominating society, it is difficult to interpret that besides other unethical acts males consider sexual harassment as unethical or not. Males consider it as their right and privilege to have an upper hand on females and consider them inferior. As data is only collected from female's respondents so interpretation is only limited to female's point of view that they perceive to be sexually harassed even if there is professional environment at their workplace. Second aspect is that high ethical standards create zero tolerance among females resulting in high level of sexual harassment experience at workplace.

The fifth hypothesis is found to be insignificant. This finding is in contradiction with previous study [29-30] where it was found that females with more feminine characteristics experience more sexual harassment and converse relationship that females with more masculine characteristics will experience less sexual harassment. It means that in Pakistan's cultural environment where males are more dominant over female gender, power plays more important role. Males take females as sex objects whether female are possessing stereotypical feminine characteristics or masculine characteristics. If males do not think any act of sexual advancement as immoral, they will try to avail every possible opportunity to sexually harass the females irrespective of their personality traits [50].

The sixth hypothesis is found to be insignificantly related to sexual harassment experience showing a somewhat convergent result as compared to previous studies. This variable is not a strong predictor as expected. It could be due to the fact that it's not always essential that females are being harassed by their superiors. At workplaces, peers, coworkers and subordinates are the more frequent harassers than supervisors [6, 42, 43]. "Organizational Power" is one of the important factors which could instigate any perpetrator but in male dominant cultures, organizational power is not only derived by hierarchical position within organization rather being male itself is a source of dominance and power over females [51, 52, 53]. Researchers suggest that females having same hierarchical position as men within organization most of the time do not enjoy the same type of power and influence so in Pakistan's culture where males are more socially dominant, females irrespective of their position are treated badly and being sexually harassed [2, 54].

CONCLUSION

This study has developed a framework of six elements to be tested in Pakistan's workplace setting based on four factor model of sexual harassment. Firstly, it was found that females who perceive themselves to be highly attractive are always more sensitive towards feeling and experiencing sexual harassment at workplace. Secondly, if females possess an office setup where there is privacy maintained and is mostly isolated from male colleagues they will experience less sexual harassment at workplace. Thirdly, having knowledge about organizational policies regarding sexual

harassment does not minimize the level of sexual harassment experiences at workplace. Fourthly, at workplaces with highly professional environment make females zero tolerant for such behaviors so their level of sexual experience increases as a result. Fifthly, masculine personality characters do not lower the sexual harassment experience of females. Lastly, lower hierarchical position does not increase sexual harassment experience at workplace.

It is required that caution should be taken while interpreting the results of this study due to various reasons. Firstly, questions asked from respondents were quite bold and culturally it was impossible to get a clear view picture regarding these variables. Secondly, some questions asked are related with memory of the respondents in which they have to recall about their experiences at different point of time. There are chances of errors like "halo effect" and "recency" in describing these occurrences and incidences. Hence effects of other elements cannot totally be ignored or undermined in determining the sexual harassment experience at workplace.

Recommendations: For future research, a longitudinal study is recommended so the data from same respondents in different time frame is collected giving valuable insight into the changes in perception of respondent's sexual harassment experience within different time frames. Secondly, some other sectors could be taken as sample because various newspaper articles reveal the fact that in Pakistan for prospective perpetrators house maids, factory workers and university students are more vulnerable and easy targets for harassments [35, 55, 56]. Thirdly, this study could be extended in other provinces including some small cities of Pakistan where sufferings of women are more as compared to women living in one of the developed cities i.e.; Lahore. It is recommended that future researchers may conduct a related study and take the sample of those females who have already reported about their sexual harassment experience. It is expected that such females will be confident enough to communicate their real life experiences regarding sexual harassment. Keeping in view the findings of this study, organizations may arrange separate sitting arrangements for females and create fear in the minds of perpetrators for penalties imposed by law.

Limitations: As this is the cross sectional study, the results of this study is just limited to the time frame on which the data is collected. There is a possibility that if

data collected from same respondents in different time settings, the results could vary and may be different from existing results. The topic of this research is quite sensitive and data collection for this issue is a difficult task. Females mostly feel reluctant to talk about this issue and feel embarrassed to tell anyone about their experience of sexual harassment. There were quite bold questions asked regarding sexual harassment experience in the questionnaire and keeping in mind the culture of Pakistani society, it was hard to get the accurate information about this. This is an empirical study; a qualitative in depth detailed study could be more informative as far as this research topic is concerned. As females in Pakistan are not aware about what actually constitutes harassment. They only consider the act of rape as harassment. Data collected is from only one sector i.e. banking sector. Banking sector is already a well-established service sector in Pakistan. There are chances that data collected from this sector may not give the clear picture of real elements of sexual harassment experience at workplace. Data is collected only from Lahore making the generalizability of findings limited. Lahore being one of the biggest cities of Pakistan differs in various cultural aspects as compared to other cities. This research study is taking the data only from females making the generalizability of the study limited to only one gender. It has ignored the male perspective and power dominance characteristics of male in our culture and its relationship with harassment issue. The study included limited elements as predictors in this study. There could be many other elements also which could lower or enhance the level of sexual harassment experience at workplace. Lastly, this study has taken into consideration the variable of sexual harassment experience as a whole. In future studies it could be investigated that particularly which type of sexual harassment (gender harassment, unwanted sexual attention and sexual coercion) is more prevalent in Pakistani society.

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