

AN ASSESSMENT OF SURVIVING STRATEGIES AMONG WORKING WOMEN EXPERIENCING WORKPLACE HARASSMENT

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Abstract

The present research investigates the coping approaches adopted by women to deal with workplace harassment. It focuses on the complex nature of coping behaviors related to harassment among three distinct groups of working women employed in (a) universities, (b) banks, and (c) the NGO sector. Employing a quantitative research design, respondents were randomly selected from the aforementioned organizations. Data were gathered through a self-administered questionnaire. One of the key difficulties encountered during the research was the reluctance of respondents to openly discuss the issue, as harassment continues to be regarded as a taboo subject in our society. Result of the study reveals that women are using different social supports along with cultural strategies and develop familial relations to handle the challenges of harassment. Cultural coping approaches appropriately reflect the structural implication on daily life to cope with the challenging situation of harassment whereas familial coping strategies represent gender specific method to cope with environment. Both strategies are supposed to reduce the risk of the harassment at work place.

Introduction

Historically workplace harassment was considered a sensitive and taboo issue that was rarely discussed openly. However, in recent years, scholars have developed an extensive body of research examining workplace harassment and its consequences for both victims and organizations (Nielsen, & Einarsen, 2018). However this research aims to explore which approaches women use to handle this issue and continue doing their jobs. A unique aspect of this study will be exploring the ways and strategies women use and how it helps them to prevent from harassment. Today in Pakistan, organizations are following western management and human resource management (HRM) practices in order to achieve their goals by practicing and promoting individualism, equality and gender equity in workplace environment where male and female employees have to work closely in teams. In contrast, collectivism, unequal relationship and gender segregation are the main principles of social organization of Pakistani society (Saher, Matloob, Ali, Batool, 2014). This mix approach is also a barrier for women as it demands free interaction among the employees at work and sometimes contributes as an important cause of harassment against women as the male employees exploit this team works

interaction as a way of exercising their superiority on women resulting in workplace harassment (Halford & Leonard, 2001).

This study discusses and contributes particularly to how working women are surviving in such environment under unfavourable circumstances. Comprehensive review of the studies has been done in this regard that how working women find the strategies to cope and still survive successfully. Some researchers have found that women use different social support means and develop familial or kinship relationship with the male colleagues in the organizations (Saher, Matloob, Ali & Batool, 2014), which helps them to handle the harassment at workplace.

Literature Review

In the past few decades, harassment was an invisible crime at work places and still socially acceptable and women themselves were blamed for this act because they have left their homes and came out for being harassed. But as much as harassment at work place is increasing it has taken serious as compare to the past (Sadrudin, 2013). Harassment at workplace reflects an imbalance of control and authority relationship among genders. The act of harassment converts work into stressful, harming, and hostile environment and make it hard for women to accomplish a real place in their careers. Harassment is the most regular type of violence taking place in Pakistani society categorized by patriarchy and gender exclusion. When a woman tries to take part in workforce and share economic responsibilities of family, she has to suffer from several kinds of harassment (Hadi, 2018).

In comparison with the western world the religious, economic and socio cultural concepts and situations of Pakistani society variegate largely. To honor women, protecting them and giving them equal rights are the provisions that are given to them by religion and constitution of Pakistan. Yet male dominance in Pakistan remains a constant pattern in all spheres of life that makes it difficult for women to reach their goals and rights (Salman, Abdullah, & Saleem, 2016).

Being a tribal system Baluchistan is a province where cultural norms and values have a strong hold on people and they strictly follow these norms. There is strong gender segregation of public and private realm; public for men and private (within home) for women. Patriarchal system and power harassment has limited the promotional opportunities for women (Khawar, 2009). Females in Baluchistan are struggling hard for their progress and somehow achieved it as they are developing educationally and taking part in economic activities. With all so called modernization women in Baluchistan still have to face serious issues of Harassment whether at workplace, at roads or at educational institutions as men are hostile towards women who take part with them for jobs (Wilson & Thompson, 2001). The basic assumption of this study is that women face double edge pressure of changing society and the existing socio cultural values of Pakistani society (Saher, Ali, & Matloob, 2014). At one hand they are struggling for their identity as professionals and on the other hand they have to fight against the harassment they face while coming out of their homes at their workplaces. There for the present study aims to explore that what measures /strategies are used by women to cope up with such problems. Government of Pakistan has highlighted the problem of harassment against women as a major issue to be addressed in order to keep women safe. And for this purpose the protection against harassment of women at the workplace act 2010 was passed and approved to protect women rights at workplace (Mahmood, & Ahmad, 2011).

Question remain that how many of women have the courage to report such cases. Instead mostly women try to use some of the coping strategies to handle harassment and continue working at a same time. In this study the focus is on exploring that how women from various working sectors cope with harassment by using certain strategies of their own to avoid, handle, tolerate and adapt with such irritating environment without affecting the honor of the family. There are several studies which propose variegated coping strategies (Qureshi, Qureshi, Taherani & Ansari, 2012).

In this study researchers proposed that there are major two types of coping strategies in the working place i.e. cultural and familial coping strategies still these coping strategies neither reduce nor eliminate harassment but it provide ways to women to survive and endure. Coping strategies provide ways to women to handle harassment and survive at workplaces was hypothesis. Workplace harassment is related with negative outcomes for women and to deal with these women try to use some ways and strategies to handle the situations, keep the honor of their families and continue their jobs .The major purpose of present research was to explore the ways women use to cope up with harassment issues at workplace.

Research Question

What coping strategies are adopted by working women in Quetta City to address workplace harassment?

Research Methodology

The aim of this research was to explore the ways and methods working women use to deal with harassment issues at work. Quantitative research approach was adopted and survey method was selected for quantitative measurement of the phenomena. Data was collected from 152 respondents from those sectors in which female participation are higher which were Universities, banks and NGOs. Simple random sample has been used and research was carried out through survey method while data was collected by using self-administrative questionnaire. The benefit of formulating structured questionnaire was that it helped the researcher to have the exact responses, answering research question and finally drawing conclusions from the responses. Therefore, in the present study, questionnaire was designed to measure the strategies which reflects the strategies to cope with the broader milieu of the province and also directly linked to the measure of the strategies which best reflects the cultural context.

Questionnaire

Rating scale for questionnaire

1. Never , 2. Rarely, 3. Often, 4. Some of the time, 5. Most of the time

Strategies to handle this challenge at workplace		1	2	3	4	5
1	I try to be reserve with my colleagues					
2	I develop familial relationship with male employees as it prevents from harassment at work place.					
3	Sometimes I try to introduce my family members (father, brother, husband) with male colleagues for social authorization.					
4	I try to build relationship with families (mother, sister,					

	and wife) of my colleagues to give a positive gesture of familial relations.					
5	I attempt to keep the norms and values with distant work relations.					
6	I always try to maintain proper dress code/dressing pattern.					
7	Issue can be handle by filing complaints to the authorities to take action.					
8	I do not show any weakness or acceptance against such behaviour.					

The coping strategy questionnaire was comprised of 8 questions. Two dimensions of strategy scale were also explored via statistical analysis. These two dimensions are as follow:

1. Cultural coping strategies
2. Familial coping strategies.

Cultural coping strategies were comprised of those questions which most appropriately reflect the structural implication on daily life to cope with the challenging situation of harassment whereas familial coping strategies denote gender specific method to cope with environment. Both strategies are supposed to reduce the risk of the harassment at work place.

Results and Discussion

The majority of the respondents normally kept distance from male colleagues (81%), dressed according to the Islamic culture (90.7%) and do not reveal their fragility or weakness (91%). However, they also think that harassment can be dealt by complaint instead of being compliant (81%).

Additionally, majority of the working women (71%) reported that they try to reserve to be safe from harassment and use it as a strategy to cope with such irritating environment. Alternatively, most of the working women try to build familial relationship (47%) by introducing their family members (47%) such as father, brother, husband etc. or try to build familial relationship with colleagues' family members (41%).

Description of coping strategies used by working women

Items	Never	Rarely	Often	SOT	MOT
I try to be reserve....	27 (17.8)	17 (11.2)	30 (19.7)	32 (21.1)	46 (30.3)
I develop familial...	46 (30.3)	35 (23.0)	28 (18.4)	21 (13.8)	22 (14.5)
Sometimes I try	48 (31.6)	33 (21.7)	22 (14.5)	29 (19.1)	20 (13.2)
I try to build	48 (31.6)	42 (27.6)	21 (13.8)	23 (15.1)	18 (11.8)
I attempt to	11 (7.2)	18 (11.8)	26 (17.1)	34 (22.4)	63 (41.4)
I always try.....	4 (2.6)	9 (5.9)	18 (11.8)	33 (21.7)	87 (57.2)
Issue can be.....	9 (5.9)	19 (12.5)	31 (20.4)	36 (23.7)	56 (36.8)
I do not show any.....	9 (5.9)	6 (3.9)	29 (19.1)	31 (20.4)	77 (50.7)

Note: SOT = Some of the time; MOT = Most of the time

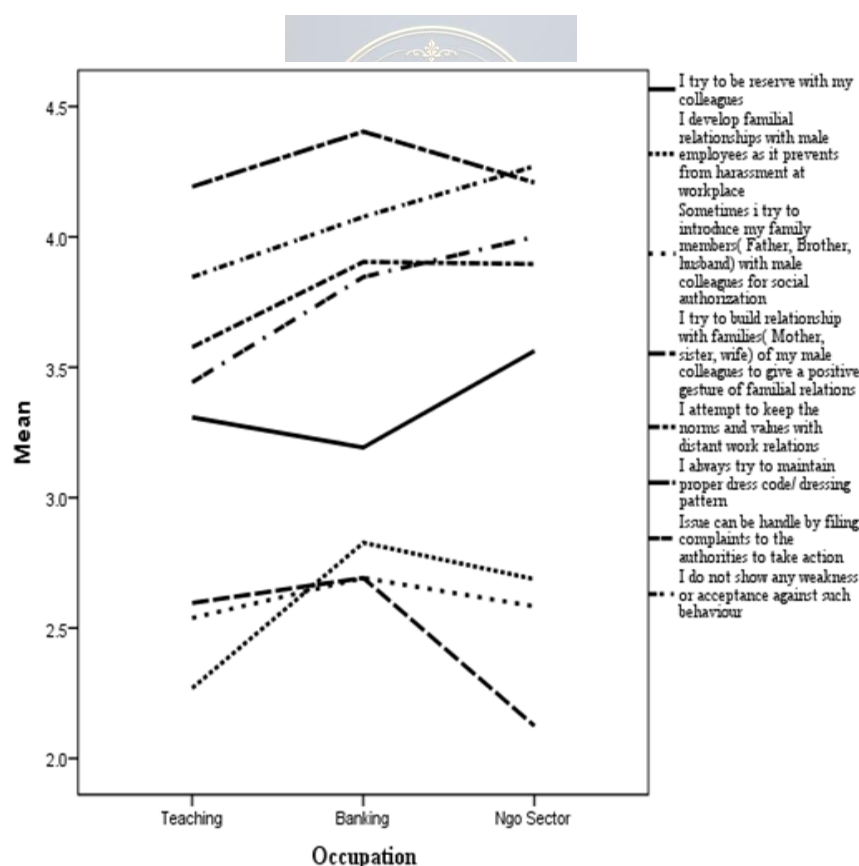


Fig.1. multiple comparisons of coping strategies across job statuses

Figure 1 showed that mean differences of various coping strategies used by working women across job status to cope with harassment. The figure showed that there is a significant difference of the use of various strategies across occupation status however it can be inferred that on

average female teachers do not frequently use almost all coping strategies. However, women working in banking sector on average have higher use of coping strategies comparing with educational and NGO sectors.

CONCLUSION

Working women have to adapt with such environment so they used several strategies. These strategies even negatively affect their mental health because the strategies' e.g. building familial relations with colleagues questions their cultural credibility. A married women refrain herself to develop familial relationships because his male partner strictly dislikes such relations. However an unmarried woman would be in a constant threat of sexual abuse by using the strategies. Furthermore, adoption of cultural strategies such as appropriate dress and being reserved may somehow reduce the probability of severe harassment but cannot eliminate it yet such females have to encounter moderate harassment. The current study adds to this literature by capturing intra individual and cross-cultural variability in sexual harassment coping, focusing on whole patterns of experience, and proposing an integrative framework that takes into account the individual employee and multiple levels of her ecological context. Researchers have explored that these cultural driven norms produced harassment and various types of harassment and coping strategies which are also culturally driven, positively affect stress and aggression of women. Working women left no choice but to be reserve and servile to cultural values. In such cultural constraints, on the one hand, they faced severe and moderate harassment and on other hand, they support their family economically or strived to be economically independent. In both of the situation, harassment is inevitable that is a sort of cultural check by patriarchic society somehow to manipulate cognition of working female. As we all know that women are playing an important role to help manage the needs of their families being economically activated. The number of working females is increseing day by day so there is need of more indebth researches to finding out the probles of working women at their workplace and after wards giving solutions that should be addreded in policy making to guard working women rights.

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