



Impact of Workplace Harassment on Stress Symptoms among Working Females in Different Organizations of Rawalpindi and Islamabad in the Year 2022

Dr Haris Kamran^{a}, Prof Asad Nizami^b, Dr Gulfam Khan Shairwani^c, Mr Zaheen Amin^d, and Ms Salika Naseem^e*

^a Resident Psychiatrist, Institute of Psychiatry, Rawalpindi, 42000, Pakistan

^a Professor and Chairman, Institute of Psychiatry, Rawalpindi, 42000, Pakistan

^c Medical Officer, Bashir Hospital, Gujrat, 50700, Pakistan

^d Clinical Psychologist, Institute of Psychiatry, Rawalpindi, 42000, Pakistan

^e Clinical Psychologist, Institute of Psychiatry, Rawalpindi, 42000, Pakistan

ABSTRACT

Background

This study examined the impact of workplace harassment on stress symptoms among working females in different organizations of Rawalpindi and Islamabad.

Materials and Methods

The data was collected through the administration of two scales, Perceived Stress Scale and Work Harassment Scale.

Results

The results indicate a positive correlation between workplace harassment and stress scale ($p < 0.05, r = 0.20$). There was a significant difference between single and married women in relation to workplace harassment and stress. Women hailing from a nuclear family system experience more stress related to workplace harassment as compared to those from a joint family system.

Conclusion

Workplace harassment can lead to stress among working females leading to other problems such as physical, psychological, and occupational impairment.

Keywords: Workplace Harassment, Stress, Working Women, Organization, Sexual Harassment

1. Introduction

According to Kadre (2018), a workplace may be a school, hospital, office, factory, a store, or any place where somebody comes to work professionally in order to earn. Workplace harassment, then, is defined as the behavior by which a person abuses their work colleague physically or verbally to make them experience pain or hurt by using offensive words, actions, or behavior, resulting in the colleague being shocked or isolated at the workplace. Skarlicki and Kulik define workplace harassment as the behavior, attitude or observation from anyone in the workplace like a colleague or controller which is aimed to bully, warn, degrade or even harm a working individual (2004).

According to Willness, Steel, and Lee (2007), harassment results in an increased risk of nervousness, stress, and post-traumatic stress disorder, while simultaneously reducing self-esteem, psychological well-being and self-confidence. Other possible causes of workplace harassment in the form of workplace bullying are related to leadership variables including job demands, role stressors, and decision authority, according to Hauge, Skogstad, and Einarsen (2007). Bowling and Beehr (2006) in a meta-analysis concluded that role ambiguity, conflict, and work constraints are among the most probable predicting factors of workplace harassment.

According to Kadre (2018) as stated to the Workplace Bullying Institute, thirty seven percent of the U.S experienced harassment in 2007. Almost eighteen percent of the harassers were colleagues and twenty four percent of the sufferers of harassment had to quit work as a consequence. Finally, forty percent of the people who are a victim of harassment stop their work, resulting in a deficit of approximately twenty one million employees in U.S. companies, which consequently face a lack of expert employees.

Another study was conducted by Hauge, Kudielka, and Kern (2004) in which they studied both the individuals responsible for workplace harassment and the situational factors indicating such an environment, accounting to emotional stress and counter-productivity in the workers. The model consisted of two thousand five hundred fifty nine Norwegian labor force. For analysis logistic regression was used. Outcomes recommended that oppression or harassment of sexual nature is the most significant and powerful indicator contributing to the maltreatment of others. Situational factors such as job differences and interpersonal conflicts significantly predicted occurrence of maltreatment or harassment. Nowadays, workplace harassment is gradually growing in Pakistan with an increase in adverse effects on female behavior and stress symptoms. Verbal workplace harassment in the form of negative comments or dirty jokes are becoming increasingly common in Pakistan, affecting the performance of working females. This adversely affects activities of daily living and compromises functioning in all domains. As the women face these, they take stress resulting in a plethora of mental and physical illnesses. Sometimes they are afraid of going out. People target women physically and mentally. It is advisable that they should always go with another female or report or tell colleagues about the period of extra hours of working, and avoid sitting for late hours in the absence of co-workers.

According to Bilgel, Aytac, and Bayram (2006), there are several prior researches on administration-centered harassment and managerial consequences. He investigates the commonness of workplace harassment and its effect on the physical condition of sufferers of maltreatment. He exposed that 55 percent of people had to endure bullying while 47 percent witnessed another person being bullied. Ahmer et al (2009) investigated workplace harassment by consultant psychiatrists of Pakistan by investigating 60 trainees or students. The majority of the respondents reported their experience of harassment in the past one year.

Iqbal and Kamal (2001) investigated the occurrence of sexual harassment surrounded by air and ground hostesses of an airline, by conducting research on a sample of 60 females, and found that the most common factors of sexual harassment included admiration of dresses, physical features, hair or structure, gazing, suggestive jokes or songs, and using pornographic objects, for instance magazines or videos. The females also said that unnecessary sexual considerations, with hidden sexual messages, desires for dates, and attempts to create romantic relationships, fondling, and inappropriate touching and calls also contributed to workplace harassment (Iqbal & Kamal, 2001).

2. Subjects and Methods

The sample of the study was (N= 100) which included demographic variables in the form of percentages and frequencies. Sample size consisted of 100 working females in different Pakistani organizations. Non-probability convenient sampling technique was used in this study. Females with age range 20-40 years were included in the study sample working in any public or private organization. The demographic sheet was used along with research questionnaires, which included age, income categorization, marital status, duration of work, and family structure.

The questionnaire that was used in this study was the Work Harassment Scale developed by Bjorkqvist, Osterman, and Hjelt-Back (1994), comprising 26 items. The study was aimed at investigating the frequency of exposure to various bullying activities at the workplace. This scale objectively allows the evaluation of bullying methods to which a worker was exposed. This scale contains a five-point rating scale. The reliability of this scale yields a very satisfactory value ($r = 0.97$).

Another questionnaire that was used was Perceived Stress Scale developed by Cohen, Kamarck, and Mermelstein (1983) aimed at measuring stress among the study participants. This scale comprises 10 items. The reliability of this scale yields a very acceptable value of $r = 0.6$. It also contains a five-point rating scale. Both of these questionnaires truly concentrate on workplace stress among females and are helpful to measure workplace harassment in Pakistani organizations. Questionnaire also includes informed consent and demographic sheet which includes information related to age, gender, education, and the job of participants as part of the data collection.

The participants were informed about the purpose of the study and their consent was taken by providing confidentiality of their information through informed consent. The sample responded to demographic sheet, the workplace harassment scale and perceived stress scale. Data was analyzed by using SPSS version 20.

3. Results

The present study examined the impact of workplace harassment on stress symptoms among working females in different organizations. The sample comprised 100 females working in different organizations of Rawalpindi and Islamabad.

Table no: 1 Demographic Variables of the Sample (N= 100)

Demographic Variables		
	F	%
<i>Age</i>		
20-25	51	51
25-30	33	84
30-35	12	96
35-40	4	100
<i>Marital Status</i>		
Single	71	71.7
Married	29	100
<i>Income Categorization</i>		
10-20	29	84
20-30	4	88
30-40	8	96
40-50	4	100
above50		
<i>Duration of Work</i>		
less than one year	19	19
1-2year	52	71
3-4year	17	88
5-6year	4	92
above 6 year	8	100
<i>Family Structure</i>		
1	51	51
2	49	100

Table no: 1 explains demographic variables of the present study. This table shows demographic variables in the form of percentages and frequencies. The demographic variables include age, income categorization, marital status, duration of work, and family structure. Age of respondents ranges between 20 and 40. The result shows that the maximum population is young and having 3 to 4 years of experience; most of them earning more than the average. The results of this table also demonstrate that most of the families are living disjointedly (in a nuclear family).

Table 2 Correlation between WHS and CPSS

Scales	1	2
WHS	-	0.202
CPSS	-	-

Note: WHS Work Harassment Scale and CPSS = Cohen Perceived Stress Scale

Table 2 shows the inter correlations between two scales. The scale shows positive correlation $P < 0.05$ at significant level. If harassment will increase then stress will also increase.

Table 3: Mean difference between Work Harassment and marital status

	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>SEM</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Pvalue</i>	<i>95% CI</i>	
								<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>
Single	71	4.00	3.052	0.362					
WHS					0.707	97	0.592	0.838	1.767
Married	28	3.54	2.631	2.631					

Note: *df*=degree of freedom, *SEM*=Std error mean, *P*=significance level= $<.05$, *CI*=Confidence level.

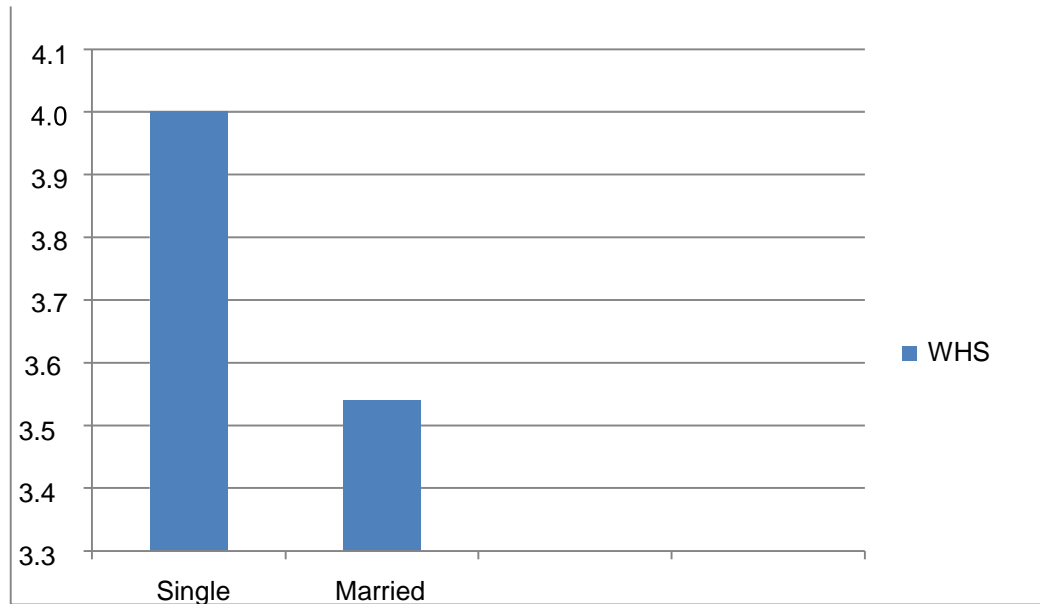


Fig. 1 – Marital status

Table 3 and Fig. 1 show that single women are harassed more than married women.

Table 4. Differences across Various Categories of Age in Relation to Work Harassment

Variable	Categories of age	N	M	S.D	F(df)	P
WHS	20-25	51	3.86	3.066	0.56 (3, 96)	0.638
	25-30	33	4.18	2.833		
	30-35	12	2.92	2.712		
	35-40	4	4.25	2.630		

Note: SD= Standard deviation, M= Mean, P=Significance level

Table 4 shows that there is a significant difference among the categorization of age in relation to work harassment in working females. All ages of females face workplace harassment at a given place.

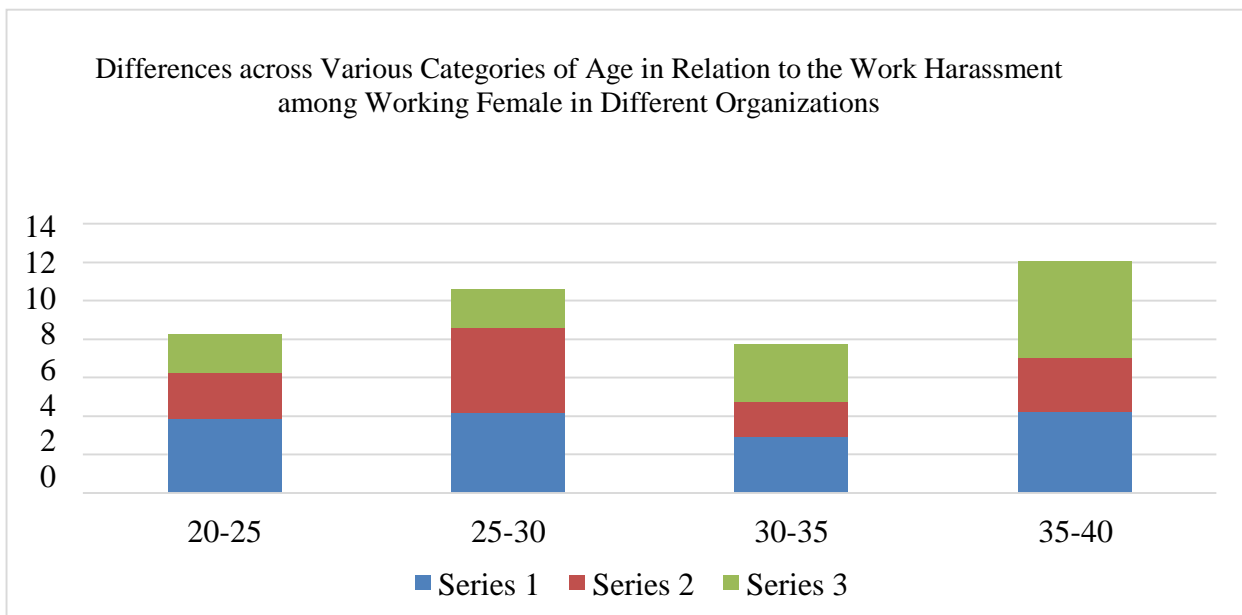


Fig. 2 – Age ranges

This figure shows that females in the 35 to 40 age range are harassed more frequently as compared to other age ranges.

Table. 5 Effect of WHS on CPSS

Variable	R ²	β	P	F(df)
Constant		(19.535 ^a)		
WHS	0.041	0.363	0.044	4.162(1,98)

Note: R square=.041: F= 4.162, P<0.05 Dependent variables: stress and independent variable work harassment.

Table 5 shows linear regression analysis for the variables. It shows that work harassment is a positive predictor of stress ($\beta=0.363$, $P<0.05$) by adding 4% variance.

4. Discussion

In Pakistan there has been an increase in the level of workplace harassment in terms of bullying, negative comments, mobbing and sexual touching, which affects female behavior negatively and also raises stress symptoms in females during the working hours. This can lead to other mental health conditions such as low self-esteem, depression, and nervousness. Physical symptoms such as abdominal discomfort and sleep problems can also be observed, along with a decline of job performance. Stress is a widespread and major problem in numerous work settings.

Workplace stress can have deleterious effects on the psychological and physical health of the workers, which hinders their capacity to persevere, maintain an enhanced service incentive as well as a high production yield. It can also lead to an increased illness, a decreased turnover, more absenteeism, and an increased risk of security related harm.

The reliability of both scales was very satisfactory, with WHS being 0.93 and CPSS being 0.6. The result indicated a positive correlation between workplace harassment and stress scale. The significance level is $p<0.05$ as shown in the table, and a positive correlation of 0.202.

The main focus of the current study is on the work harassment scale as a predictor of stress among working females in different organizations in Pakistan. Einarsen, Raknes, and Matthiesen (1994) reported that workers with long-term health conditions or disabilities are more likely than their co-workers without such health conditions or disabilities to report harassment.

The present study proposes a significant relationship between workplace harassment and stress among female workers. The scale shows positive correlation $p<0.05$ at significant level. If harassment will increase then stress will also increase. A study conducted by Denmark & Paludi (1992) on job related and psychological effects of workplace harassment among a sample of females working in two different organizations found a significant positive association between job related harassment and psychological issues, mainly stress. These findings are in line with our findings of the study, which indicate that the presence of harassment at the workplace will increase the chances of experiencing stress among the victims. Similarly, according to Vogt Yuan (2007) workplace harassment has also been associated with mental or emotional distress/pain among older employees; a further study by Payne and Doyal demonstrated that sexism and ageism can operate concurrently to harmfully influence the health of older working females (2010).

It was proposed that stress will be significantly higher in the presence of workplace harassment. The study yielded higher levels of stress at the workplace, which is consistent with Buchanan and Fitzgerald (2008), who described that harassment has also been connected to sadness, anxiety, stress, aggression, and unhappiness with work and life.

The study hypothesized that there would be a greater chance of harassment among young females than older females. The level of stress was found to be the same for the working females of all ages including young and old. These findings are relevant to the findings of Denmark & Paludi (1992), as according to them all ages of women reported harassment at the workplace without any difference among age groups.

In the present study, according to the results, the experience of workplace harassment is found to be more in females belonging to the nuclear family system as compared to the joint family system.

It was hypothesized that there would be significant differences in workplace harassment in relation to marital status. However, the result of T-test between workplace harassment and marital status showed that workplace harassment is faced by both single and married women at the same rate, and there is a minor difference in the level of stress symptom between them. The $t(100) = 0.707$ $p > 0.05$ and mean of single population is 4.00 while that of married is 3.54. The linear regression table shows analysis of variables. It shows that workplace harassment is a positive predictor of stress ($B=0.363$, $\beta=0.044$, $P<0.05$). These findings of the predicting role of workplace harassment can be counted as similar to the findings of Bano and Malik (2013), as according to their research findings, workplace harassment in the form of bullying results in lower psychological well-being which could be seen in the experiences of stress and depressive symptoms among the female employees. Another study by Hoel, Lewis, and Einarsdottir (2021) found the presence of organizational bullying and workplace harassment in work settings. They related these experiences to the lack of adequate leadership and management by the organization.

There are multiple factors, according to Ladebo, Awotunde, and AbdulSalaam-Saghir (2008) that can hinder the performance of workers and lead to stress, unhappiness, hopelessness, and violence at workplace. These include harassment and environmental obstacles in the form of organizational politics (Ladebo, Awotunde, & AbdulSalaam-Saghir, 2008). If the administration does not take steps to control harassment, Vigoda (2017) found that it may lead

to violent behavior by the working staff and, hence, can result in negative outcomes among which stress is of high significance. According to Kidwell and Martin (2005), researchers suggest a variety of strategies to be used in organizations to try to keep harassment under control in the absence of managerial codes of conduct to discourage acts of harassment or maltreatment.

There are certain limitations of the study, which include small sample size, limited time, inclusion of two cities, and only female respondents. It is recommended that further studies should be conducted which should have more participants and an increased time frame. Nevertheless, the pertinent study is deemed important as it adds new literature to the existing body of limited knowledge in workplace harassment and stress. The study has highlighted the impact of workplace harassment on stress among females which indicates that harassment at workplace highly influences the emotional, physical, and psychological well-being of female employees.

5. Conclusion

The study concludes a positive relationship between workplace harassment and stress among working females in different organizations. If work harassment increases, stress will also increase. Both scales used in this study are acceptable for social scientific research. The study sample included young females and found workplace harassment as a significant predictor of stress among working females of different organizations of Rawalpindi and Islamabad.

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