

Original Article

Workplace harassment & discrimination faced by women at District Dera Ghazi Khan

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Abstract

Background: Gender based workplace harassment has existed in one form or another ever since men and women began interacting at educational institutes or workplaces. Pakistani women are facing great difficulty in their workplace due to harassment and discrimination they face in their daily life. The aim of this study was to identify the causes and reasons of harassment among working women at Dera Ghazi Khan.

Methodology: This cross-sectional study continued for one year from 2010 to 2011, including women working at various public and private institutions of Dera Ghazi Khan (DGK). A total of 180 working women were selected through convenience sampling. Data including sociodemographic characteristics together with harassment history like type of harassment experienced, knowledge and perceptions regarding harassment was recorded through a pre-designed questionnaire. The collected data was then analyzed using SPSS Version 17.0.

Results: Based on the study results women mostly faced discrimination regarding education (23%), disability (11%), job status (8%), marital status (5%), appearance (7%) and gender-related (9%), etc. Around 98% women reported that they had experienced workplace harassment and the mode of harassment was mostly verbal i.e. 96%. Moreover, 82% women reported that the disclosure of the harassment event was not encouraged at their workplace, one of the major reasons for this was thought be the pressure from the management. Out of the total only 13.3% women were having knowledge of harassment bill passed in 2010. Loneliness, isolation and loss of interest in outings were few of the effects caused in response to workplace harassment.

Conclusion: It is evident that the workplace harassment incidences are frequent in DGK but due to societal pressures, majority remain unreported. It is recommended that females must know their rights and government must take suitable measures to build up strong anti- harassment policies in order to strengthen women in this regard.

Keywords

Workplace Harassment, Perceptions, Knowledge, Working Women, Dera Ghazi Khan

Introduction

Gender based workplace harassment has disproportionately impacted women since forever but it still under-reported¹. However, it is noticeable that most of the harassment attempts are made usually with preventive measures to avoid media spotlight, indeed, harassment on the job is an unfortunate reality². Women in Pakistan are facing great difficulties at their work place due to harassment and discrimination³. For the past two years, the escalating rate of harassment among women at workplace has shaken the world⁴. At DGK, harassment is a very sensitive issue and females at workplace despite of facing this problem avoid discussing or sharing it.

Women face discrimination and violation of their basic rights globally, as their rights were never given priority⁵. Warnalatha in his study stated that workplace harassment can be best defined as an unreasonable or unwelcoming course of action or conduct against a worker. This means any inappropriate utterance, action, gesture, body language, staring, coercion, intimidation which causes discomfort and uneasiness for workers is harassment⁶. Agency for Safety and Health at Work to European Agency (EASHW) reported that harassment also includes discrimination on the grounds of natural makeup such as sex, race, disability, migration or religion falls under the category of being harassed⁷. Moreover, any act which causes the co-worker to feel ashamed, degradation, humiliation and insult by the management, customers, clients or coworkers are all included in harassment⁷.

Sexual harassment at workplace induces negative impact on the victim, stress, self-doubt, low-self-esteem, negative mood, alcohol abuse, eating disorders and mental health disorders are the few effects observed in response to harassment⁸⁻¹⁰. Furthermore, these effects are long-lasting and can continue for as long as a year after the harassing event⁹. Harassment has been hypothesized as a females issue, although it is faced by both

males and females but among males it is to a lesser extent and is associated with fewer adverse mental outcomes as compared to females^{8,10}. It is common that people do face frequent harassment and never report¹¹, which may be due to risk associated with self-esteem, secondary victimization, blame and scrutiny¹². Such behavior is also supported by stigma theory suggesting that the victim mostly avoids sharing and discussions due to self-blame and negative judgments^{13,14}.

The prevalence of harassment might have changed since 2016 due to reporting rate and public scrutiny. Whenever such cases are scrutinized and victims are brought to the spotlight, it gives rise to two possibility. Either it might reduce the harassment rate due to the fear of punishment or the situation can backlash and the harassment rate might increase in order to maintain power^{16,17}. But the disclosure of harassment event is of utmost importance and such a disclosure would leave a positive impact for many untold stories and will bring out many females from the negative zone that an event has taken them into¹⁸. Therefore, we have conducted this study to investigate the perception of discrimination and harassment among working women in DGK and to observe the causes and consequences of harassment on female's mental health and behavior.

Methodology

This descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted over a period of one year from 2010 to 2011. Convenient sampling technique was employed for the collection of data and a total of 180 female respondents were included in the study from government and private institutions e.g. educational, finance, health, social welfare etc. The study protocol was openly discussed with each of the study participant and written informed consents were taken prior to the study. All ethical principles were followed and study was commenced in accordance with the Declaration of Helenski. Data regarding

respondents' sociodemographic characteristics and harassment history (type of harassment at workplace, harassment experience, knowledge regarding harassment bills and legal conducts, etc.) was collected via face to face interview and a questionnaire was used for record maintenance. The collected data was then analyzed using SPSS version 20 where frequency and percentages were used for data presentation.

Result

Based on the study results, the major discriminating factors were education (23%),

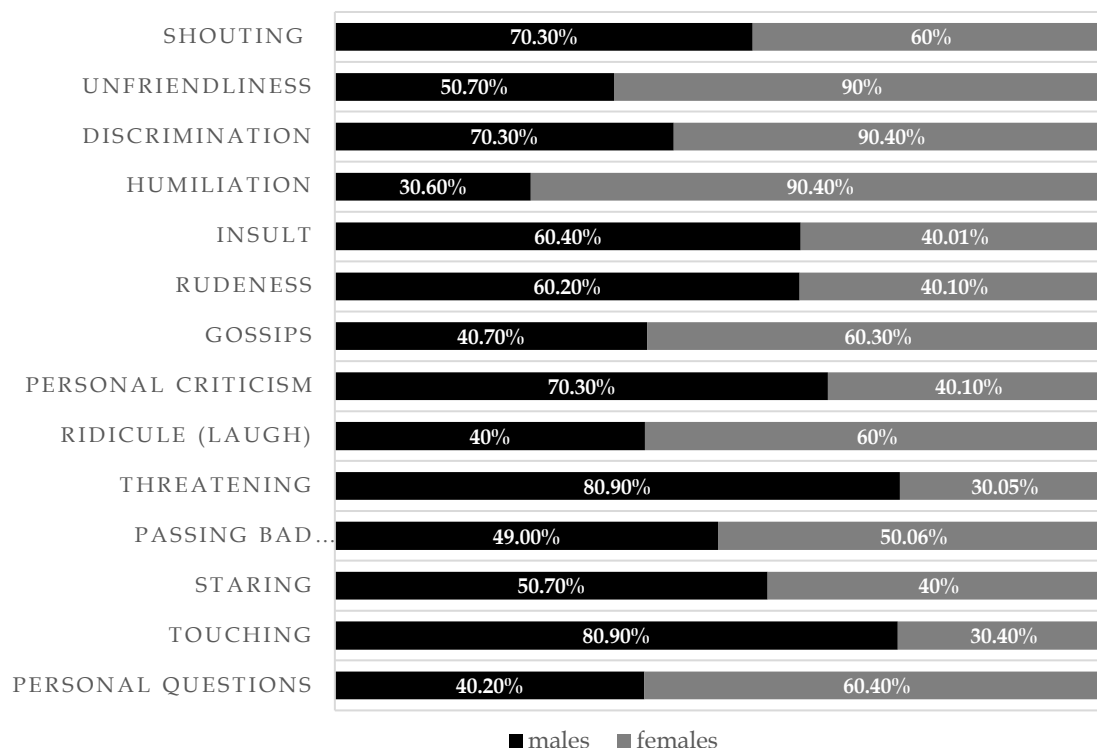
Disability (11%), Race (8%), Job Status (8%) and Ethnicity (7%) while among the less common were age, religion and gender. 176 out of 180 females faced workplace harassment mostly verbal while only 4 had no such experiences. Moreover, 23.8% reported that loneliness and isolation are among the major impacts of workplace harassment followed by aggressive behavior, losing interest in outings, losing friends and family etc. Regarding the knowledge of the harassment bill passed by the National Assembly in the year 2010, 86.6% of the respondents had no idea of it while only 13.3% had some clues.

Table 1: Factors leading to discrimination based on the perception of enrolled females.

Variables		n(%)
Discriminating factors	Education	41(23)
	Race	14(8)
	Ethnicity	13(7)
	Religion	9(5)
	Age	9(5)
	Disability	20(11)
	Gender	16(9)
	Marital Status	9(5)
	Job Status	14(8)
	Personal Appearance	13(7)
	Life Style Status	11(6)
	Hereditary makeup	11(6)
Workplace Harassment Incidence	Yes	176(98)
	No	4(2)
Types of harassment	Verbal	172(96)
	Non-Verbal	8(4)
Reported harassment incidences encouraged at workplace	Yes	32(18)
	No	148(82)
Reasons for decreased encouragement for reporting workplace harassment	Management/Employer	101(68)
	Union/ Association	23(16)
	Own family/friends	10(7)
	Colleagues	12(8)
	Any Other	2(2)
Effects of workplace harassment	Ties with the family	31(17)
	Lose your Friend	19(10.5)
	Decreased interaction with family members and relative	20(11.1)
	Loneliness/Isolation	43(23.8)
	Aggressive behavior with the family	33(18.3)
	Loss of interest in outing	25(13.8)

	None of Above	9(5)
Knowledge about the harassment bill (2010) passed by the National Assembly	Yes	24(13.3)
	No	156(86.6)

Figure 1: Nature of harassment incidences experienced by females from both genders



It was found that the females were mostly harassed by males through touching (80.9%), threatening (80.9%), discrimination and shouting (70.3%). While from the same gender, most common form of harassment was humiliation and discrimination (90.4%).

Discussion

The women-oriented campaigns and movements have held a profound impact on the harassment history recently. Although it is yet to be explored and the causalities are not proven, the current study is the first attempt to disclose the harassment rate from Dera Ghazi Khan (DGK) among working women. In our sample, 98% of the working women at DGK reported being harassed (Table 1), we conducted this research back in 2010 when the harassment rate was quite high. In comparison, a latest study reported 87% women reporting harassment at workplace. Moreover, the harassment rate from 2016 to 2018 probably due to the strict legal actions and increased disclosure frequency^{12,16}.

It is evident that sexual harassment results in negative impact on the victim’s mental health and wellbeing. Loneliness, isolation, decreased socialization and losing interest in outings were the common effects observed by the enrolled females in response harassment (Table 1). Several studies outlining the association between workplace harassment and declining self-image⁸⁻¹⁰. Consistent with our study, researches confirmed negative effect of harassment on individual’s self-image and confidence⁸⁻¹⁰. But as per the recent statistics the role of harassment in building negative self-image among working women has weakened since 2018. However, the incidence rate is still similar among the under-developed or developing areas of Pakistan

specifically due to under-reporting³. It was observed that only 18% females reported that disclosure of the harassment events was encouraged at their workplace while the remaining 82% disclosed that any such experience was not being reported and shared in their work environment and such actions were not encouraged. A similar local study reported frequent harassment incidences at the workplace and under-reporting was the major reason promoting harassment, females who are the sole breadwinner are reluctant to report any such incidences due to the fact that disclosure might result in negative judgment and termination³. As far the knowledge regarding legal rights and policies are concerned, 86.6% females were unaware of the national bill passed against harassment in the assembly. Which was similar to another study conducted in Karachi³.

For the nature and type of harassment, majority females reported verbal harassment (96%). Moreover, touching, discrimination, threatening was commonly faced by women at their workplaces from opposite gender whereas, the accusation was less against same gender (Figure 1). Our findings were contradictory in relation to other study suggesting personal harassment through comments and psychological harassment were the most common¹⁹. Unnikrishnan et. al. reposted in support to our results that verbal harassment is more common among working women²⁰. The major strength of our study was its uniqueness, as it is the first study to be reporting the workplace harassment at Dera Ghazi Khan and disclosure rate was quite satisfactory. But this research is limited to female participants only from the public and private workplace of DGK. Further studies must be conducted including large sample size in order to investigate the incidence rate all over Pakistan. Moreover, harassment faced by males must also be evaluated in order to explore and compare the perceptions of both genders regarding this immoral act.

Conclusion

It is concluded from the study results that the workplace harassment is highly prevalent in the District Dera Ghazi Khan where disclosure is not very common and is neither encouraged. It is not usually expressed due to the resulting consequences, the fear of judgment, negative self-image and self-accusation are the common factors associated with the disclosure. It is essential to educate the employees regarding workplace ethics to avoid harassment and violence. As healthy workplace environment is vital for maximum work output.

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Conflict of Interest

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