

Does Work Place Sexual Harassment Matter?

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Abstract

In the past few years, workplace environment has become diverse. The conventional employer/employee relationship of past has a different meaning to the workplace setting of today. It has brought growth economy wise, unlimited job variations, more opportunities with threats such as recession and downsizing too. At organizations, different ethical issues are found that can't be ignored and sexual harassment is still one of the major concerns. This research seeks the relationship between survey-based reports of sexual harassment at work places and its impact on job performance. The findings of this paper revealed that sexual harassment is highly-rated dilemma in organizations. It was further revealed that gestures of sexual nature of opposite sex are associated with sexually offensive comments, invitation of dates and sexual involvements.

Keywords: Workplace, Sexual harassment, Sexual aggression, Offensive comments, Job performance

1. Introduction

Offensive, embarrassing and humiliating are the words that are related to the unwanted and unwelcome behaviors of sexual natures, usually termed as sexual harassment which is becoming alarmingly common nowadays at workplaces. Most of the time, it badly affects the job performance. It is mainly related with physical, psychological and job related outcomes (Willness, Steel, & Lee, 2007). In defining sexual harassment, male and female somehow agree on to which inappropriate (extent) behaviors are considered as sexually harassing (McKinny, 1990; Brewer, 1982; Maihoff & Forrest, 1983). As compared to women, men are found to be more tolerant of the sexually harassing behavior (McKinny, 1990).

Whatever the theories are, does sexual harassment matter or not at workplaces? And if it does, then the extent to which it matters must be measured. This paper intends to find out the impact of sexual harassment on job performance of various organizations. Wilson and Thompson (2001) argue that mostly men try to impose power over women and this is because women are considered as subordinates at work and in society, they become easy victims of harassment.

2. Literature Review

Some of the administrators and supervisors usually have skeptical ideas about the occurrence of sexual harassment. According to them, it depends on the perception of an individual, how one takes an action. For instance, some individuals might take an unnecessary dinner invitation by a colleague/manager as an attempt to sexually harass and some might take it positively as a friendly gesture. The literature here is merely comprised of sexual harassment theories, how it happens at workplaces, individual and organizational characteristics related to it. Also, we have tried to find out as to how much sexual harassment is affecting the workplace setting, job satisfaction and overall performance of individuals.

2. 1. Theories Regarding Sexual Harassment

As much as sexual harassment is increasing day by day at workplaces, in institutions and even in government sectors, it is taken less leniently as ever. After the ground breaking theory presented by MacKinnon (1979), the literature of sexual harassment is following a rather similar track. Sociologists are now broadly linking sexual harassment with workplace inequalities or gender inequalities and other kinds of discriminations related to workplace (Lopez, Hodson, & Roscigno, 2009).

Theories have demonstrated that supervisors or personnel at work who possess more power at workplace are known to carry more dominance in sexual harassment than the subordinates. But even after decades of searching and studying, whether and how workplace power is impacting harassment, the reasons are still unknown (Gutek, 1985; Hendrix, Rueb, & Steel, 1998; Tong, 1984).

2. 2. Role of Telephone and Internet

Telephone is also playing an important role in this issue. Sexual harassment is done by phone especially to those who work in call centers or at reception desks. One of the studies done by German companies found men harass women and even 10% reported the threats to sexual violence also. Women get petrified and in a severe tensed situation that received these kind of calls, they described their feelings as 'disgusted and disrespected' (Sczesny & Stahlberg, 2000). Another German study revealed that out of 49 women, 50% of women and out of 51 men, 2% were sexually harassed over the telephones (Sczesny, 1997).

Similarly, harassment by means of internet is also getting popular. Women are using more internet than men (Le Claire, 2005). The percentage of women becoming the victims of online harassing has also increased. With the increase in the usage of net, number of inappropriate emails has also increased a lot (Khoo & Senn, 2004). People who cannot harass or threaten people face-to-face are now using more threatening and abusive language over the emails.

2. 3. Characteristics of Sexual Harassment at Workplace

Sexual harassment is known to occur more likely in organizations with certain characteristics (Pryor, Giedd, & Williams, 1995). Pryor, LaVite, and Stoller (1993) suggested that if the surroundings help the situation to occur, it automatically occurs, for example, if a person is responsible for sexual threatening one time, he will do it again if the system allows him to do so. According to Gutek (1985) sexual harassment is more likely to happen in organizations where all kinds of sexual harassments are common and it actually supports such acts. Sexual harassment is more common (1) in occupations/jobs where males are dominant over the females (European Commission, 1999) and (2) the fear of losing the job upon filing the complaint (Björkqvist, Österman, & Hjelt-Bäck, 1994).

2. 4. Impact of Sexual Harassment on Job Performance

There are quite adverse effects of sexual harassment like in some cases it might lead to ill health, ill performance at job and less committed to work, non-attendance and even sometimes quitting the job Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD, 2005) while Sczesny and Stahlberg's (2000) study of call centers determined that job satisfaction and job performance are extremely affected by telephone based sexual harassment. One of the studies in finding the effects of sexual harassment has shown that men and women both feel humiliated, loss of self-confidence, depressed, low self-esteem and decreased job satisfaction (Gutek, 1985).

3. Methodology

The aim of this research is to analyze the relationship between different variables in relation to sexual harassment. Primary data was collected in the form of questionnaires. The survey was carried out in different organizations based in Pakistan, UAE, Saudi Arabia, UK and USA. The sample size was of 150 respondents.

The Spearman and T-test (one sample test) were used to test the relationship among sexual harassment and job performance. By applying these tests, we found out that sexual harassment has no direct impact on job performance in all studied countries. But in Pakistan, job stress and performance decline have been caused due to sexual harassment.

4. Results and Discussions

The Statistics table below shows that for N=23, who have suffered violence in organizations, the 0.87 > 0.00 Mean of "Sexual Aggression" and "Others" results in the acceptance of the hypothesis being stated as "Sexual Harassment is the most rated violence in organizations".

Table 1: Sexual Harassment is the most rated violence in organizations

		Statistics				
Did you suffer any kind of violence?		Hold Up	Robbery	Physical Aggression	Sexual Aggression	Others
Yes	Valid	23	23	23	23	23
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0
	Mean	.22	.70	.65	.87	.87
	Median	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00
No	Valid	63	63	63	63	63
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0
	Mean	.00	.00	.00	.00	.08
	Median	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00

Table 2: Impact of Sexual Harassment on Job Performance

Hypotheses	Mean	N	Empirical Conclusion	
Frequency Distribution Test H1: Sexual Harassment is the most rated violence in organizations.(Sexual Aggression)	.87	23	Accepted	
Spearman's rho Correlation [Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)].	Correlation Coefficient(r_s)	Sig.(2-tailed)	N	Empirical Conclusion
H2: Gestures of sexual nature are associated with sexually offensive comments.	.772	.000	86	Accepted
H3: Gestures of sexual nature are associated with invitations of dates.	.788	.000	86	Accepted
H4: Gestures of sexual nature are associated with invitations for sexual involvements.	.760	.000	86	Accepted
One-Sample Test, Test Value = 4	Mean	Sig.(2-tailed)	Empirical Conclusion	
H5: Job Satisfaction is highly affected due to sexual harassment.	2.17	.000	Rejected	
H6: Professional Relationships Satisfaction is highly affected due to sexual harassment.	2.27	.000	Rejected	
H7: Psychological well-being is highly affected due to sexual harassment.	2.40	.000	Rejected	
H8: Turnover Intentions are highly affected due to sexual harassment.	2.35	.000	Rejected	
H9: Intentions to change career are highly affected due to sexual harassment.	2.41	.000	Rejected	
H10: Organizational Commitment is highly affected due to sexual harassment.	2.36	.000	Rejected	
H11: Job Stress is highly affected due to sexual harassment.	2.45	.000	Rejected	
H12: Performance is highly declined due to sexual harassment.	2.50	.000	Rejected	

A conventional way of reporting the figures of Spearman's rho Correlation in **Table 2** is as follows:

$$r_s = 0.772, 0.788, 0.760 \quad N = 86, p < 0.01$$

These results indicate that as the rating of "Your co-worker/supervisor makes gestures (signs) of a sexual nature" increases, the rating of "Your co-worker/supervisor makes sexually offensive comments", "Your supervisor asks you to go out on a date with the promise that it will help on the job" and "Your supervisor invites you for sexual involvements" also increases. This shows that above mentioned variables are directly proportional to each other, hence 'Accepting' the hypotheses.

This One-sample test has been conducted at Test Value=4 which indicates the rate of "Agree". The testing proceedings show that all hypotheses are rejected because their p value is less than 0.05, thus making the 2-tailed value significant at the 0.001 significance level.

Willness, Steel, and Lee (2007) have viewed that most of the time; sexual harassment badly affects the job performance. It is mainly related with physical, psychological and job related outcomes. Our study has also showed that despite of modernism and open-mindedness, workers still are getting harassed and due to which effectiveness on job performance is seen in Pakistan only. The present research has somehow proved this phenomenon with the results where the employees were definitely and openly harassed by their supervisors with the perception to continue their jobs.

According to the German study, out of 49 women, 50% of women and out of 51 men, 2% were sexually harassed over the telephones (Sczesny, 1997). These two channels are playing a vital role in harassing too. As the use of cell phones has increased to a tremendous level nowadays, this might also prove to be helpful for the harassers to harass the victims. One of the studies in finding the effects of sexual harassment has shown that men and women both feel humiliated, loss of self-confidence, depressed, low self-esteem and decreased job satisfaction (Gutek, 1985). The present study shows that

in Pakistan, there is a remarkable increase in job stress and performance decline but other countries are not bothered by this issue.

The best tool to eliminate sexual harassment is prevention. This can only be done through proper awareness and awareness again is done through good training programs which can prepare workers to recognize sexual advances and develop ways to deal with them. These crucial concerns of the workplace and society in this century can be eradicated by having an international alliance of organizations and to incorporate two-level interaction (employer-employee) coherently to address such issues and in order to pull out such disgusting actions, deeds and behaviors from the society in a loud manner so that an example set once cause other sick individuals to refrain from such mal-practice.

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