Perception of Sexual Harassment at Workplace, Knowledge and Attitude of Working Women towards Workplace Harassment Act 2010

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ABSTRACT
Since the inception of Pakistan, Pakistani women have lived in a world structured by strict social, cultural, religious, family and tribal customs. They are subjected to discrimination while men are socialized to dominate and suppress women in the public and private spheres. This discrimination in shape of Violence against women becomes a nationwide issue in Pakistan, cutting across all cultures, provinces, social, and age groups. Sexual harassment at workplace is the leading form of gender based violence which working women are facing today in Pakistan.

As women empowerment is the prime objective of national policy, government of Pakistan has taken significant initiatives in this regard. Various legislations have been done at national level specifically against gender based violence to eliminate violence against women from Pakistani society. To address the issue of sexual harassment at workplace, the protection against harassment of women at the workplace act 2010 has been developed and implemented. Now, comprehensive research is needed in assessing the issues, challenges faced by the women in taking the advantage from this act to see the impact of this legislation in empowering working women. Following study is a stepping-stone in investigating in this direction. This study has been designed to see the perception of sexual harassment at workplace, knowledge and attitude towards aforesaid bill. By conducting a social survey, a sample of (n=100) working women living in Lahore has been investigated through structured questionnaire. The findings of the study show a positive relationship between the perception of sexual harassment at workplace and attitude towards the protection against harassment of women at the workplace act 2010. However, they had reservations to file a case against workplace harassment. Further investigation is required to see the efficacy of this bill in preventing women from workplace harassment.

Introduction
In South Asian societies, patriarchal structures and values are deep-rooted perpetuating gender inequality. Women remained subordinated and marginalized in decision-making processes, lesser access to the resources and limited participation in social engagements in these societies over the years. Their secondary status have further reinforced by certain governmental policies which fail to acknowledge women’s rights and access to services and opportunities as compared to men (UNIFEM, 2005). This gender inequality is deemed as one of the leading factors of violence against women (UNFPA-AFPPD, 2003).

Violence against women (VAW) is defined as “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.” Thus, VAW refers to violent acts that are “primarily or exclusively committed against women” (United Nations 1993).

Sexual harassment is the primary form of the violence that women have to face in their daily lives. According to the report of World Health Organization (2009), “sexual harassment and
abuse by authority figures such as teachers, police officers or employers” is one of the significant forms of violence that working women faced today. World Bank (1993) report also elicits that out of every three women across the world, one woman has suffered violence in her lifetime. She has been harassed, beaten up, raped, assaulted, trafficked or forced to submit to harmful practices. Most of the time, the abuser is a member of the woman’s own family or someone known to her where she works. This leaves assaulted women in an atmosphere of fear, and their most of the times their lives are guaranteed only in exchange for obedience to social norms and traditions (Manderson & Bennett, 2003). Because of this fear and sense of being inferior, imposed by the traditional thoughts of a male dominated society, women are suffering immensely specially in their homes (Murthy & Smith, 2010) and workplaces.

According to the report of Commission of Inquiry for Women (1997), “Among the most lethal forces which impact women’s dignity and security are customary practices which aim at preserving female subjugation. Often defended and sanctified as cultural traditions, they are usually fiercely defended by those who practice them”. Sexual harassment at the workplace or workplace harassment is being practiced as masculine social norm in every sector where women work. Due to this practice among the masses, most of the incidents of violence against women remain underreported (Andersson et al, 2010) especially workplace harassment incidents. According to Parveen (2010), a total 24119 of violence against women cases were reported during 2008-10 among of which only 520 workplace harassment cases were filed. This shows the social acceptance of workplace harassment as no legislation has been done to address this social problem faced by women till 2010. However, some pressure has been created by the media who highlighted various workplace harassment cases in recent years.

Since Pakistani government has identified violence against women as one of the prime issues to be addressed immediately and specific measures are being taken to ensure its complete eradication. The National Policy for Development and Empowerment of Women (2002) was promulgated to promote women’s participation while declaring zero tolerance towards violence against women and girls. In this regard, the protection against harassment of women at the workplace act 2010 was passed and approved to safeguard women rights at workplace. This act is now being implemented nationwide and women could file against workplace harassment. Thus following study was designed to conduct a survey with working women in Lahore to see their perception about workplace harassment and knowledge about this act. Moreover, it was aimed to investigate the attitude of working women towards filing case against workplace harassment in assessing the efficacy of this act and other external factors that could influence women in this matter.

Defining Sexual Harassment at Workplace

Sexual harassment at workplace is among those social problems that women are being faced across the globe and much debate has been done to define it over the years. According to Sigal (2006) sexual harassment at workplace is

“Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitute sexual harassment when this conduct explicitly or implicitly affects an individual’s employment,
unreasonably interferes with an individual’s work performance, or creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work environment.”

Pradhan-Malla (2005) highlighted five basic points in defining sexual harassment that includes unwelcome sexually determined behaviour as (a) physical contact and advances; (b) a demand or request for sexual favors; (c) sexually colored remarks; (d) showing pornography; (e) any other unwelcome physical, verbal or non-verbal conduct of sexual nature. While in the protection against harassment of women at the workplace act (2010), sexual harassment at workplace has defined in the following way,

“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.”

By synthesizing the above definitions and reviewing the literature, indicators presented in table 1 were made to see the perception of working women about sexual harassment at workplace.

Table 1: Indicators of sexual harassment at workplace

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Type of Harassment</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>Touching, leering or ogling, homophobic comments, whistling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Nonverbal</td>
<td>Unwanted emails, unwanted messages on cell phone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Psychological</td>
<td>Rejection of the work on the basis of gender, unnecessary meetings to attain sexual favor, Usage of authority in demanding sexual favor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Three basic types of harassment are inferred in measuring the perception of sexual harassment at workplace that is physical, nonverbal and psychological as shown in table 1. Physical workplace harassment includes unwanted touching to the female by the male colleagues. Leering or ogling that means to look female colleagues with sexual desire by the males are often claimed by the female staff in the offices. Making homophobic comments about female colleagues are also being practiced in the offices. Whistling on female colleagues is the customary practice that male are used to do.

Psychological workplace harassment is the secondary that women faced in the workplace. Their work are rejected or appraised negatively most of the time on the basis of gender. It is also observed that male colleagues call unnecessary meetings just their female subordinate to convince them for sexual favor or relation. They are also threatened to use their authority against female subordinates in attaining favor by stopping their promotion or other matters that in their control. In majority women have faced non verbal communication in the form of unwanted emails and messages explicitly focusing their gender.
Study Design

In the following study, perception of sexual harassment at workplace was taken as independent variable whereas knowledge of sexual harassment at workplace act 2010 and their attitude towards sexual harassment at workplace were taken as dependent variables. Perception of workplace harassment was measured through the above discussed indicators while questions were asked their knowledge about workplace harassment act 2010 and their attitude towards workplace harassment.

Methodology

Pakistan is a patriarchal society where men and women are segregated in public spaces. In such a context, researching violence against women is a very sensitive issue and requires extremely careful methodological and ethical considerations (Sajid et al, 2010). While conducting research on such sensitive issues, matters of confidentiality and the safety of the respondents as well as the researcher are crucially important. To address this constraint, researcher decided to conduct a social survey since this allows respondents anonymity and more unbiased responses could be collected.

On the basis of above discussed indicators, a questionnaire was made in English and then translated in Urdu after consulting female linguist expert to filter gender biasness. This questionnaire was pre tested with sample of (n=10) and fewer changes were made on the feedback of the respondents. Snow ball technique was utilized in locating respondents from the public and private sector as well. Total 100 women were surveyed who were working in Lahore.

Findings

This section presents the information collected through the survey conducted from the women working in the area of Lahore. This study is the pioneering attempt to understand the perception of sexual harassment at workplace after the execution of workplace harassment act 2010. Thus this study specifically focus to see the relationship between perception of sexual harassment at workplace and knowledge of the protection against harassment of women at the workplace act 2010 and then their attitude towards this act.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical sexual harassment at workplace</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Do not know</th>
<th>To some extent</th>
<th>To great extent</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Touching</td>
<td>0 %</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leering</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homophobic Comments</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whistling</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1 presents responses of working women on the perception of physical sexual harassment at workplace. According to the 80 percent of the women, touching from the male colleagues considered as an act of sexual harassment while no women considered it as normal behavior. Leering was conceived as sexual harassment at great extent by 63 percent women of this study and 23 percent of the women considered it as an act of harassment to some extent. Only 3 percent of the women did not feel it as sexual harassment.

Passing out the homophobic comments on female colleagues is also considered sexual harassment by the majority of the women studied through this survey. A total of 44 percent of the women conceive it as sexual harassment to great extent whereas 30 percent of the women do not consider it as sexual harassment. Whistling is not the sexual harassment of the working women as 40 percent of the women of this study do not think it as sexual harassment, however, 37 percent of the women considers it as sexual harassment.

Table 3: Non verbal and psychological sexual harassment at workplace

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Non Verbal</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Do not know</th>
<th>To some extent</th>
<th>To great extent</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unnecessary Emails</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMSs</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Rejection</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unnecessary Meetings</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploitation through Authority</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 elicits the responses of the women on non verbal and psychological sexual harassment. In nonverbal sexual harassment, a total of 79 percent women thought unnecessary emails send by the male colleagues without any professional need as the type sexual harassment at workplace. About the sending messages on the mobile phone without reason, 44 percent of the women surveyed in this study conceived messages without any reason also an act of sexual harassment to great extent. On the other hand, a total of 27 percent of the women did not think it as sexual harassment.

About psychological sexual harassment at workplace, 79 percent of the women felt their work rejection had been made on the basis of gender because male colleagues wanted them to spend more time in offices with them. No woman in this study rejected this proposition. Women also believed that their male colleagues called unnecessary meetings for passing time with them during office hours as 59 percent of the women considered it as sexual harassment to great extent and 25 percent of the women to some extent. Findings illustrated that male colleagues used their authority to exploit female colleagues in their offices. In this study, 43 percent of the women felt that their male colleagues used their authorities to exploit female employees while 30 percent of the women rejected this proposition.
Table 4 describes the knowledge of working women about the protection of the women against sexual harassment act 2010. As table shows, a total of the 71 percent of the women knew that government had done legislation against sexual harassment at workplace but only 56 percent of the women had the knowledge that they could now report a case against sexual harassment at workplace. However, 55 percent of the women recognized sexual harassment at workplace as punishable crime.

Table 4: Knowledge about sexual harassment at workplace act 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Do not know</th>
<th>To some extent</th>
<th>To great extent</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Government have made legislation on sexual harassment</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women can now report a case against sexual harassment</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>07%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual harassment is a punishable crime now</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By analyzing data through SPSS 17, correlations were calculated between the perception of the workplace harassment and knowledge about the protection of the women against sexual harassment act 2010.

The calculated value of Pearson’s r for perception of physical sexual harassment at workplace and the knowledge about the protection of the women against sexual harassment act 2010 was 0.78. For perception of non verbal sexual harassment at workplace and the knowledge about the protection of the women against sexual harassment act 2010, the calculated Pearson’s r value was 0.69. This value(r) is calculated for the perception of psychological sexual harassment and the knowledge about the protection of the women against sexual harassment act 2010 was 0.71.

When a question was asked to the surveyed women that would they file a case against sexual harassment at workplace if they experience it in their offices. Only 20 percent of the women said that they would file a case against sexual harassment while 50 percent of the women replied that they would not file a case.

**Conclusion**

This study was explorative in nature to investigate the perception of working women about sexual harassment at workplace, knowledge of the protection against harassment of women at the workplace act 2010 and their attitude towards this act. Findings depicted a positive relationship between the perception of sexual harassment at workplace and knowledge of the protection against harassment of women at the workplace act 2010. In addition, negative responses were found in filing a case against sexual harassment at workplace. Thus further investigation is recommended to see the casus of this attitude. Inquiry is also required by
examining the socio-economic status of the working women in adopting this attitude when the legislation has been done.

References


