



## A Sociological Study on Harassment and Its Psychological Impact on Females Throughout their Livelihood

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the psychological impact of harassment status on females in the academic, workplace, and private sector as well as on their careers. The study opens policymakers' eyes to the detrimental psychological effects that harassment has on its victims. Sexual harassment is just one example of a wide range of violent behaviours and discrimination. The study comprised 10 harassed females aged 15–35 years old. To guarantee data accuracy and consistency, the participants were interviewed in Urdu, and the interviews were recorded and transcribed into English. The data was analysed using thematic analysis, and numerous procedures, including member verification, peer debriefing, and data source triangulation, were employed to verify the reliability and validity of the data. The study adhered to ethical standards, and all subjects provided informed consent. The research revealed that participants' sociological position had a psychological impact on their access to multiple places, with ethical limitations and restricted cultural influences influencing their career and academic performance. Because of their surrounding circumstances, the participants expressed emotions of embarrassment and inadequacy, which affected their self-esteem and self-doubt and caused them to get medication to overcome the depression. Parental support has been highlighted as an important element in academic achievement as well as the working environment, with emotional advice and chances for extracurricular activities all contributing to their career and success. The study suggests that sociological differences and a lack of awareness had a detrimental influence on female academic success, the workplace environment, and public place circumstances. The study suggests that more research be conducted to investigate the influence of cultural and sociological variables on female harassment during academic achievement and discrimination in multiple environments, which has always been recognised as having psychological effects.

**Key Words:** Sociological inequality, harassment, psychological impact, and female career and self-doubt.

## Introduction

Throughout history, females have experienced violence and discrimination due to their gender. Pakistan is a traditional country, and there is no trend that allows women to leave the house to seek employment. Females who speak up frequently encounter challenging circumstances at work. In other words, as a form of social control that results directly from the development of a patriarchal culture, violence against females has always been an acceptable manner for men to display their dominance. In general, sexual harassment involves a variety of unwanted activities that can be expressed verbally, physically, visually, or behaviourally. Since the previous decade, as the number of working women has increased, so has their exposure to harassment. Working women in Pakistan are also subjected to harassment. The purpose of the current study is to look at how harassment affects females psychologically in both the public and private sectors. However, females are important to a nation's socioeconomic progress. The changing paradigm of globalisation has expanded their engagement in the workforce. But at the same time, their receptivity to gender-related problems has grown. There are numerous legal, social, psychological, and feminist interpretations of sexual harassment; there is no single, universal definition of it (McMaster, Connolly, Pepler, & Craig, 2002). However, the greatest definitions of sexual harassment fall into two categories: discriminatory/legal and empirical/psychological, where there are many possible behaviours or interpretations. (Willness, Steel & Lee, 2007).

Therefore, the present study aims to examine the social factors affecting the experience of sexual harassment by women in the workplace in order to deeply examine the triple dimensions of the crime triangle. Sexual harassment is difficult to define. Several people view what is referred to as sexual harassment differently. More thorough explanations of sexual harassment can be found in the definitions that follow: "Sexual relationships without the consent of the other person; requests for sex; and any verbal or physical activity carrying a sexual connotation that can advance employment or be interpreted as a danger to women's employment (EEOC 1998). This circumstance hinders their ability to do their jobs effectively and puts challenges in the way of their professional growth and the socioeconomic progress of the nation.

Despite the fact that the majority of working organisations use educated personnel in their settings, harassment of females still occurs in the workplace (Sadruddin, 2013).

Psychologists define it as unwanted and unwelcome sex-related behaviours that the receiver perceives as stressful, beyond the scope of his or her capabilities, or as threatening their safety or well-being (Fitzgerald, Drasgow, Hullin, Gelfand, & Magely, 1997). Furthermore, both the length of the harassment and the standing of the harasser within the organisation have a significant impact on the level of the negative psychological impacts. The victim of long-term harassment suffers grave psychological consequences (Gettman & Gelfand, 2007). It causes anxiety, despair, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). It is adversely affecting working women's physical and mental health on a global scale. The negative impacts of workplace harassment can lead to nurses performing their duties with a lack of enthusiasm, attention, tolerance, and concern, which could negatively impact patients' care.

Medical facilities might be regarded as one of the workplaces where male and female personnel interact frequently. Health care facilities, including hospitals, are a part of a work environment with unique and different working conditions. These conditions include the working hours, in which male and female employees alternate shifts in the morning, evening, and night depending on their roles and relationships. Due to their employment qualities, employees often have intimate emotional ties with one another, which might foster male sexuality and sexual harassment of female workers.

Harassment is defined by law or a priori as unwanted advances, requests for sexual favours, or other verbal or physical behaviours that are sexual in character. When these actions are either explicitly or implicitly employed as a precondition for employment and an individual's approval or rejection of such behaviour is taken into account when making employment decisions, these actions are called sexual harassment. The employee is one component of workplace harassment that has not been examined, as current research has mostly concentrated on female demographics.

It's possible that biological mechanisms are to blame for the development of depression in people who experienced sexual harassment. The talk from earlier puts us closer to understanding how sexual harassment can lead to depression, anxiety, and stress. Increased academic failure and job withdrawal, intention to quit, depressive symptoms, and post-traumatic stress are all caused by sexual harassment. Harassment can have a negative effect on an individual's academic performance and reputation, as well as have a negative socioeconomic impact due to missed employee productivity and the cost of rewarding the victims financially.

### **Methodology:**

The present study sought to investigate the effects of harassment on the psychological status of females in several environments. The study used a case study technique and a qualitative research design. The research included 10 harassed females, who were chosen on the basis of their interest in participating. In-depth, semi-structured interviews in Urdu, the participants' native language, were used to collect data. The researcher, who is proficient in Urdu and English, conducted the interviews, which lasted 25 to 30 minutes.

The study aims and topics discovered in the literature review guided the development of the interview questions. The questions focused on participants' experiences with harassment, affection, psychological impact, discrimination, and other factors. The study aims and topics discovered in the literature review guided the development of the interview questions. The questions focused on participants' experiences with sociological position, career affection, daily rotten destruction, limited interactions with family and friends, and their workplace objectives and resiliency.

The interviews were verbatim transcriptions of audio recordings that the researcher had made. To ensure that the data was accurate and consistent, the researcher—who is proficient in both languages—

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transcribed the transcripts into English. The translated data were analysed using thematic analysis, which entails spotting trends and themes in the data and assessing their importance.

The researcher used a variety of techniques, such as member verification, peer debriefing, and data source triangulation, to ensure the reliability and validity of the data. To confirm the accuracy of the information and guarantee that their points of view were accurately expressed, the interview transcripts were distributed to the participants. Sharing the data and analysis with other researchers during a peer debriefing allowed for feedback and confirmed the dependability of the results. Data sources were triangulated by combining information from other sources, including interviews, field notes, and observations, to confirm the findings. Ethical concerns were taken into consideration at every stage of the study. All participants gave their free, informed consent, and their privacy was maintained. The researcher's institutional review board gave its approval to the project.

### Results:

Table 1 depicts the socioeconomic characteristics of the individuals. There were a total of 10 participants. 60% of respondents were between the ages of 26 and 35, while 40% were between the ages of 15 and 25. 40% of respondents were Inter-pass, 30% got Masters, and 20% completed their graduation; only 10% had a Matriculation degree. 60% of respondents were suffering from depression, while 40% were feeling anxiety. Only 60% of respondents' level of harassment was high, whereas 30% suffered from a moderate level of harassment and 10% from a low level of harassment. 50% of respondents took harassment lightly, while 30% ignored it, and only 20% avoided it.

Variables	Frequency
<b>Age</b>	
15-25 years	04 (40%)
26-35 years	06 (60%)
<b>Qualification</b>	
Matric	01 (10%)
Intermediate	04 (40%)
Graduation	02 (20%)
Master	03 (30%)
<b>Depression and Anxiety Scale</b>	
Depression	06 (60%)
Anxiety	04 (40%)
<b>Level of Harassment</b>	
Low Level of Harassment	01 (10%)
Moderate Level of Harassment	03 (30%)
High Level of Harassment	06 (60%)
<b>Facing Sexual Harassment at Workplace</b>	
Ignoring	03 (30%)
Avoidance	02 (20%)
Taking Light	05 (50%)

### Qualitative Findings:

To address the alarming issues of harassment and its psychological impact on females throughout their careers, at least ten case studies have been conducted in Karachi, Sindh, as mentioned below.

She was 27 years old by profession a doctor. She was about to finish the study when she got up. She was being harassed by the person she liked. He used to blackmail me through my pictures by telling me that he would edit them and then upload them on the Internet. She shared all these things with her mom,

but instead of supporting her, she called her bad names. She released that her mother wasn't going to support her, and then she decided that she must say nothing to no one. But this is not fair. Old, likeminded people need to be counselled regarding the family support of kids.

***"I was being harassed by the person whom I liked. He used to blackmail me through my pictures by telling me that he would edit them and then upload them on the Internet. Old likeminded people need to be counselled regarding the family support of kids." – P1***

She was a 30-year-old working woman. She works for a multinational company. For the first time, she was being harassed when she was on the way back home. It was confusing for her that she could not share it with everyone at home. It made her sick for a couple of days because she was being tortured mentally. Then she decided to share it with her parents. They have decided that she must not go to university because we belong to a poor family and we cannot bear to be defamed in society.

***"I harassed on the way back home. I became mentally tortured for a couple of days. Parents have decided that you must not go to university because we belong to a poor family and we cannot bear to be defamed in the society." – P2***

She was 25 years old. She was being harassed by one of her cousins. Who used to drop her off at her work station; it was Sunday around 3 o'clock. The family was out for the weekend. When he came to her room, she was lying on her bed. He made her unconscious, and he raped her. She tried to share it with her brother, but she could not because they live in a joint family and she did not want the separation in the family. But now that she can realize that she must tell them, the time has passed.

***"I was being harassed by one of my cousins." When he entered my room, I was lying on my bed. He made me unconscious, and he raped me." – P3***

She was 32 years old, and she's the only one who works for the survival of her kid; her husband died of stomach cancer a few months ago. It was March 2020 (the era of pandemic COVID-19), and she was being harassed by the company's van driver along with his friend. After her husband's death, she used to live with her parents, but when she let them know about the harassment, they separated her by telling her that they were no longer her parents. They do not have any kind of relationship with her. She used to go to a psychiatrist for the treatment, but she could not bear the expenses.

***"I was being harassed by the company's van driver along with his friend. Due to harassment related to sharing, my parents had me separated. I used to go to a psychiatrist for the treatment, but I could not bear the expenses." – P4***

She was 24 years old and working in one of the leading banks in the country. It's her second job. We live in a male-dominated society where women have no right to say anything. She was new to her job when she was tortured by her colleague during working hours. She took it as a sudden touch, but it was not, it began happening on a daily basis, so she decided to tell her parents as she did. They suggest she resign from there and search for another job. But the issue is not switching from one job to another. It is an issue for society. She used to go to the hospital for the behavior therapist, but it did not work.

***"I was new to my job when I was touched by my colleague during working hours. But the issue is not switching from one job to another. It is an issue of society." – P5***

She was 26 years old and a law school graduate. She was 15 years old when, for the first time, I was raped by one of my family members. He made a video clip of her, and due to that video clip, he used to rape her many times. She could not bear this torture for a long time, and she decided to talk with her parents, which she did. They could make her understand, but they did not. And it became his routine to rape. She started taking pills without a doctor's prescription because they made her mentally tortured. By

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gender, she was a transgender woman. We have no place in society. She decided to study for herself and for people like her. Everyone should stand up for his or her rights.

***"I was 15 years old when for the first time I was raped by one of my family members. Due to mental torture, we started talking pills. Everyone should stand up for his or her rights."—P6***

She was 30 years old belonged to tribal areas of KPK. It is very difficult to share the very personal based incidents but due to fact in the society. It was her first time when she was traveling to Islamabad along with her parents for the summer vacation. The traveling root to Islamabad were less than 15 hours. She was lying on my bus set and there was a person who was setting behind her. For the first time he touched her but she was thinking that it was just a coincident. But after few minutes it was happening again and again. She could not share it to the parents due to the social respect in the society but now she can realize that it was a big mistake she must told her parents but due to the age factor she could not told them. It still makes her feel bad. All these are the parts of society but all women need to stand together for their right.

***" It still makes me feel bad. All these are the parts of society but all women need to stand together for their right. " – P7***

A 26-year-old female has been sexually harassed two times. She said that she might look happy in front, but inside the fear is still burning her. She was harassed for the first time when she was in tenth grade. She was coming back to her home after completing her dental appointment. The bus was full, but a man offered to sit beside her. She casually sat beside her. Her mother got a seat far from mine, and she was out of sight. First he put his hand on her tight; she thought it was a mistake, so she moved away, but he did it again and again and fell on her once purposefully. She was scared, but to her luck, she got a seat immediately in front and near her mom. She wanted to tell her, but she couldn't. The second time happened recently when her uncle visited her home. She was only meeting him for the second time. She felt it strange when she kissed her hand immediately when he came. She thought he was expressing his love towards her, but when she was sitting beside him and he put his hand on her back and kept on rubbing, then put his hand on her thigh, she felt awkward. She came back to her room. Then he came into her room and hugged her; she felt irritated and disgusted. She ran out of her home and sat on the 10th floor steps where no one could find her. This incident made her feel insecure and anxious. She wants to tell her family, but she is scared that if she does, she might lose her independence.

***"At the age of 10, having been sexually harassed two times, she might look happy in front, but inside the fear is still burning her. I want to tell my family to become scared because of this because I might lose my independence." – P8***

She was 27 years old belonged to a very religious family. She hesitated to share it but concise it by saying this. She was harassed by one of her cousin when she along with her mom and sister went to their house. We stayed at their house for one night and at the mid night he came to the room where she along with her little sister were sleeping. He tried his best to harass her and at the last he emotionally black mailed her by telling this that our family are religious and they will kill both of us. Due to the age she was afraid too and she could not tell her parents. The reason behind this is that being religious is good but none of the parents should make strict rules to their kids. They should be friendly and they must listen their kids. They should support them.

***"Due to the age I was afraid too and couldn't share with my parents. They should be friendly and they must listen their kids." – P9***

She 26-year-old, basically from FATA. Right now she was working as a managing position with an International Company based in Pakistan. It makes her stronger when she shares about personal harassment case with the someone else because she wants that no one should face such incidents. She was

in 12 standards when it (harassment) happened. She used to go to college by local transport. It happened in the Bus by physical touch. My father was physically paralyzed because of pillage attack, and her mom used to go to work for feeding us. she was only the one to support my family in their old age. Being a single person to support her family. I decided to go for the counseling. I went to one of my teacher. He makes me understand about the male dominant society.

*"I was in 12 standards became harassed. I was only the one to support my family in their old age. Being a single person to support my family." – P10*

#### **Discussion:**

The findings of this qualitative study conducted in Karachi, Sindh, show that harassment has become an alarming issue that has created a psychological impact on women throughout their careers. There aren't many studies done in Pakistan, but those that are done focus on the qualitative aspect of the problem, including the type of sexual assault and how women experience the problem. Although women make up over half of the population of Pakistan, they are more mistreated and depressed in our society. However, while the Islamic Republic of Pakistan's constitution guarantees equal rights for men and women, in reality there is no gender parity and men discriminate against women.

The results of the current study, which was carried out in Karachi, show that the majority of respondents' experience workplace harassment. In Pakistan, research on gender issues has received particularly little attention. One of these harsh realities that exists in the country is job harassment. Another unique and understudied topic of inquiry in the nation is gender issues. Because there is now a platform where the victims may be heard, the assaulters may be afraid that they will be punished. It can be said that this sector is ahead in terms of preventing harassment due to the government's recent emphasis on reducing harassment at work. Also, due to the future benefits of pensions, Pakistanis prefer government employment and do not want to leave it (Suhail, 2016). Because they believe they could be fired if the victim reports the harassment incident, this sense of job security breeds a fear of employment insecurity. The act of harassing women at work is therefore forbidden by them. Yet, there is less job stability in the private sector. As they are aware that they will soon be departing or changing jobs and that their employer will not or cannot take any action against them, they can commit such immoral behaviours before leaving or switching jobs. Furthermore, there are no laws in the private sector to address the problem or take accusations of harassment into consideration. As a result, the harassers are less afraid and more likely to target female employees.

The psychological impacts of harassment are examined in this study, along with depression and anxiety. It is normal to have various psychological impacts as a result of some unpleasant behaviors or circumstances that one must deal with. Sexual harassment is utterly unacceptable. It is therefore understood that the victims might be troubled. In Pakistan, women are seen as the embodiment of the family's respect, and if they are subjected to harassment, it is thought that they have earned this disdain. Women in this position are concerned about two different problems. They are concerned about the likelihood of harassment first, and then they are anxious about losing the respect of their family. As a result, they lack the courage to speak up and suffer the effects of despair and anxiety.

Several studies in this field have shown that harassment has a negative impact on harassed women's psyche, which increases their propensity for absenteeism and withdrawing from social interactions. It's possible that Pakistan's cultural restrictions prevent them from reporting the occurrence. Women are thought to be timid and lack the bravery to report an incident. Hence, the offenders don't think twice about intimidating them. The victim's fear of being humiliated or losing their job could be another factor. Sexual harassment is also influenced by people's silence on the subject.

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## Conclusion:

The Pakistani culture's restrictions can prevent them from reporting the occurrence. It is believed that women are timid and lack the guts to report an incident. As a result, the offenders do not think twice about threatening them. Another factor can be the victim's fear of being humiliated or losing their job. Sexual harassment also has a lot to do with people's silence on the subject. According to a few studies in this field, harassment has a detrimental psychological impact on harassed women, which increases their propensity for absenteeism and withdrawing from social interactions.

This descriptive study of the topic of workplace harassment in Karachi, Sindh, tries to better understand it. The prevalence of workplace harassment, its effects on women's psychological health, and how women handled such situations were all compared across the public and private sectors. According to the study's findings, harassment in the workplace is a concern. The findings further support the conclusion that harassment has a negative impact on the mental health of female victims. They deal with anxiety and despair. Negative reactions are also observed when cases of workplace sexual harassment are reported.

## Recommendations:

The present study suggests a number of potential directions for further investigation. Future quantitative research may need to be modified. Results from surveys with more diverse ethnic representation may differ from those groups whose levels of marital status vary more widely than in the current study.

- The government should develop and implement public policies and plans aimed at improving educational facilities and providing more affordable and accessible educational opportunities to reduce the constraints on parents' choices in sending their children to school.
- The level of despair and anxiety should be focused which experienced by victims of sexual harassment at work.
- Future scholars are advised to look into the reasons why women do not disclose the incident even if a full-fledged legislation is available in the Sindh Province.
- Also, one can compare the psychological effects of harassment at various levels in the public and commercial sectors.
- The government should develop and implement public policies and plans aimed as well as strategies at decreasing the harassment factors.
- Making a comparison between the public and private sectors in terms of the incidence of workplace harassment is also helpful for scholars, researchers, and students.

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