

# Addressing Workplace Harassment in Pakistan: Building a Safe and Inclusive Environment

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## ABSTRACT

Globalization has resulted in more women participating in the workforce, but it has also led to an alarming increase in human rights violations. A persistent issue in the modern workplace is harassment. Workplace harassment takes many forms, including verbal abuse, physical assault, discrimination, and sexual misconduct. It creates hostile and offensive experiences for individuals and groups, despite being illegal in many places. This not only hampers productivity and job satisfaction but also harms employees' mental and physical health. Organizations have a moral and legal duty to address workplace harassment. Organizations should promote awareness of the legal and ethical consequences of sexual harassment through dialogue, leadership support, and accessible resources. Key strategies to combat workplace harassment include clear policies, training, inclusive culture, strong legal frameworks, victim support, monitoring, and collaboration. Implementing these strategies creates safe and thriving workplaces. This article focuses on workplace harassment, particularly sexual harassment against women. It highlights the prevalence of harassment, its various forms, and the challenges women face in addressing it. The article emphasizes the need for societal and governmental recognition to effectively combat workplace harassment. It also explores global and regional prevalence of workplace harassment, its consequences, and strategies for prevention.

**Keywords:** *Sexual harassment, workplace sexual harassment, Pakistan.*

## INTRODUCTION

The globalization process has led to more women participating in the workforce. However, alongside this progress, there has been a concerning increase in human rights violations, particularly against women. Workplace harassment remains a significant form of gender discrimination and a persistent issue for women [1]. When women enter the workforce, they often face unwelcome sexual attention in the form of suggestive remarks, physical advances, and requests for sexual favors [2]. Inappropriate behaviors like sexual comments, physical touching, and assaults are unfortunately common occurrences in work environments [3]. This unfortunate reality sheds light on the challenges faced by women in the workforce today. Harassment incidents can occur in government and private offices, schools, colleges, universities, factories, and any other workplace. Despite the existence of laws aimed at protecting women from sexual harassment and degrading treatment at work, they continue to experience physical, sexual, verbal, and emotional abuse. Many work environments remain toxic, failing to deter perpetrators and perpetuating a cycle of humiliation and victimization [4]. It is crucial to recognize the pervasiveness of harassment, as without acknowledgment from both the state and society, effectively addressing the issue and creating a safe environment, especially for women and girls, becomes challenging. This review aims to clarify what constitutes

workplace harassment, explore factors contributing to its prevalence, and offer recommendations to combat this issue.

## METHODS

A comprehensive literature search was conducted to identify relevant studies on sexual harassment at the workplace in Pakistan. The search aimed to gather empirical research findings and theoretical insights related to this topic. Electronic databases, including PubMed, Scopus, Pakmedinet, Google Scholar, Web of Science, and PsycINFO, were systematically searched. The search strategy utilized a combination of keywords and phrases related to sexual harassment, workplace harassment, and the Pakistani context.

The search terms used included “sexual harassment in Pakistan”, “workplace harassment”, “sexual misconduct”, “work environment”, and “organizational culture”. The search strategy aimed to cast a wide net to ensure a comprehensive retrieval of relevant literature. The search was not limited by the publication date, allowing for inclusiveness of both older and more recent studies. However, the search was restricted to studies published in the English.

Study selection followed a predetermined set of inclusion and exclusion criteria. Studies were included if they focused on sexual harassment at the workplace in Pakistan, provided empirical research findings or theoretical insights, were published in peer-reviewed journals, and were available in English. Studies that examined sexual harassment in other contexts or did not

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meet the specified criteria were excluded. The analysis of the reviewed literature involved a narrative synthesis approach. Key findings from the included studies were summarized and synthesized to identify recurring themes and patterns related to sexual harassment at the workplace in Pakistan. The narrative synthesis provided an overview of the current state of knowledge on this topic, highlighting important insights and gaps in the existing literature. The article was organized in response to the subsequent inquiries: What constitutes harassment and what are the characteristics of harassment in the workplace? What is the global and regional prevalence of harassment in the workplace? What are the factors responsible for its prevalence? What is the prevalence, and what are the consequences? What are some efficacious strategies to address this pervasive concern?

Our article was organized into five sections, to provide a logical flow, starting with an introduction and definition of workplace harassment, followed by an exploration of its causes, prevalence, consequences, and strategies for combating it.

In Section 1, we will define workplace harassment and delve into the various actions and behaviors that constitute it. Section 2 will focus on understanding the underlying causes of workplace harassment, including power dynamics, gender inequality, organizational culture, and individual attitudes. Moving on to Section 3, we will explore the global and regional prevalence of workplace harassment, examining how it varies across different cultures and regions, with a particular focus on Pakistan and relevant statistics and studies. Section 4 will shed light on the consequences of workplace harassment, considering the psychological, physical, and professional impacts on victims, as well as the broader consequences for individuals, organizations, and society. Finally, in Section 5, we will provide strategies to combat workplace harassment effectively, emphasizing the importance of organizational policies, training programs, and awareness campaigns. We will also highlight the role of leadership, workplace culture, and accountability in creating environments free from harassment.

## DISCUSSION

Women's challenges and concerns persist in various parts of the world despite increased participation in different fields. While rules and regulations regarding sexual abuse and harassment in the workplace have been established, these crimes continue to create numerous problems that hinder women's ability to work [5].

### Defining Workplace Harassment

Before delving into the strategies to address workplace harassment, it is crucial to establish a clear understanding of what constitutes harassment.

### Harassment

The UN defines harassment as any unpleasant or offensive behavior, whether verbal, physical, or visual, that targets a person or group based on protected characteristics like race, gender, religion, age, disability, or sexual orientation. It can involve verbal abuse, insulting comments, bullying, intimidation, or unwanted advances [6].

Workplace harassment can occur in any location, including work-related events outside of the workplace and work-related travel. The same or different genders, coworkers, clients/customers, or bosses can all be victims of illegal workplace harassment. Recognizing harassment is the first step to prevention and reparation. To do this, one must understand and distinguish harassment from sexual harassment.

Workplace harassment, including sexual harassment, is a common issue across various occupations and industries.

### Sexual Harassment

The United States' Equal Employment Opportunity Commission [EEOC] defines sexual harassment as unwanted sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, or other verbal or physical behavior of a sexual nature that hinders a person's employment or work performance and creates a hostile or offensive work environment [7].

The EEOC categorizes sexual harassment into two main types: hostile environment and *quid pro quo* harassment. Hostile environment harassment refers to a form of workplace harassment where the conduct, actions, or behavior of individuals or a work environment create an intimidating, offensive, or hostile atmosphere for an employee. This type of harassment is typically based on protected characteristics such as gender, race, religion, national origin, age, disability, or sexual orientation. The conduct may include offensive jokes, derogatory comments, unwelcome advances, or other behavior that interferes with an individual's ability to perform their job effectively and creates an environment that is intimidating, hostile, or abusive [7].

The most commonly recognized type is *quid pro quo*, which comes from the Latin term meaning "this for that". *Quid pro quo* harassment occurs when a person is subjected to or refuses immoral requests from a harasser that are directly tied to employment decisions. These decisions can include promotions, compensation, benefits, performance evaluations, and other conditions. In *quid pro quo* harassment, the harasser uses threats or promises of employment outcomes to coerce sexual favors [1]. The Protection against Harassment of Women at Workplace Act 2010 defines sexual harassment as any unwanted behavior, sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, or sexually demeaning attitudes that interfere with work performance, create an intimidating,

hostile, or offensive work environment, or attempt to punish the complainant for refusing to comply.

The harasser can be the victim's supervisor, an employer's representative, a supervisor from a different department, a coworker, or even a non-employee, and the victim doesn't have to be the person directly targeted by the harassment [8].

According to the International Labour Organization [ILO], sexual harassment involves any unwelcome, unreasonable, and offensive conduct of a sexual nature or conduct based on sex that affects the dignity of both women and men. It includes situations where a person's response to such conduct is used as a basis for making job-related decisions and creates an intimidating, hostile, or degrading work environment for the recipient. This type of harassment can be seen as a means for men to exert social control and confine women to the private sphere [9].

### **Verbal vs. Physical Harassment**

Verbal sexual harassment includes both written and spoken expressions of sexual comments, jokes, or approaches. The content exhibits an aggressive nature, characterized by explicit sexual remarks, provocative humor, and derogatory assertions [3]. Physical sexual harassment refers to the act of engaging in unwelcome sexual contact or advances. It includes acts of offensive physical contact and sexual assault. Both forms of harassment infringe upon individuals' privacy, foster an antagonistic atmosphere, and inflict pain onto their victims. It is imperative to confront and prevent instances of physical and verbal sexual harassment in order to foster an environment that is safe and courteous for all individuals [10].

### **Harassers/Perpetrators and Victims**

Sexual harassment encompasses a range of genders, roles, and relationships within the workplace. Perpetrators can include men, such as coworkers, managers, clients, and individuals in positions of power. While less common, women can also engage in sexual harassment. Additionally, friends or coworkers at the same level can harass one another, and supervisors or managers may also be responsible [1-3]. Women are often the most frequent targets of harassment, experiencing it from both men and women in various roles. Men can also be victims of sexual harassment, although it may be underreported. Transgender individuals may face harassment based on their sexual orientation or gender identity. Certain power dynamics and dependencies within the workplace can make some individuals more vulnerable to experiencing harassment [11].

### **Recognizing Different Behaviors**

Some forms of workplace harassment, like well-intentioned teasing, are legal but nevertheless troublesome. When harassment becomes severe or widespread enough to

create a hostile or abusive work environment that makes it hard to perform job duties, it becomes criminal. A single serious occurrence or numerous incidents might generate a hostile environment. No one should have to tolerate harassment in either scenario [11].

Teasing, even if intended to be lighthearted, can have negative consequences in the workplace. For instance, mocking or joking about personal traits such as weight, height, or wardrobe choices can create an unpleasant work environment. Similarly, making jokes or statements that reinforce gender or cultural stereotypes may perpetuate biases and make people feel uncomfortable or excluded [4]. Moreover, assigning inappropriate nicknames or labels to coworkers can be offensive and make individuals feel singled out. Constant teasing or humiliation can erode self-esteem and contribute to a toxic workplace atmosphere [6].

### **#MeToo**

The #MeToo movement since 2017 has helped broaden the definition of workplace sexual harassment and promote accountability, respect, and equality [12].

The movement has raised awareness of unprofessional and unethical sexual behavior at work, redefining workplace sexual harassment.

#MeToo has changed workplace sexual harassment definitions. It has empowered sexual harassment victims to speak up by raising awareness of their experiences. A more inclusive definition of sexual harassment has resulted. Sexual harassment comprises not only blatant sexual propositions or coercion but also a variety of behaviors that create a hostile or intimidating workplace, according to the movement. This enlarged definition acknowledges power dynamics, gender inequities, and the pervasiveness of sexual harassment in different forms, such as verbal abuse, non-consensual contact, unwelcome comments, and gender-based denigration. In addition, #MeToo has stressed consent, respect, and decency in the workplace. It has challenged the idea that certain workplace behaviors are acceptable, revealing their negative effects on well-being, career advancement, and work atmosphere [12].

### **Understanding the Etiology of Workplace Harassment**

Sexual harassment is a form of gender-based violence that affects women globally. It is influenced by a combination of individual, social, and organizational factors. Individual variables, such as the level of psychological or legal awareness among individuals, can impact their understanding of what constitutes sexual harassment and their willingness to report incidents.

A comprehensive understanding of sexual harassment requires considering the multifaceted nature of the problem and examining the interplay of various individual, social, and organizational elements.

## Gender Inequality

According to the findings of Hadi *et al.* [13], gender inequality contributes to the prevalence of workplace harassment through various mechanisms. Firstly, power imbalances resulting from gender disparities in senior positions and decision-making authority enable individuals in positions of power, often men, to exploit and harass those with less power, particularly women. Secondly, gender stereotypes and biases perpetuate unequal treatment and objectification of women, creating an environment where harassment is more likely to occur [6]. Organizational cultures that tolerate or overlook harassment further reinforce gender inequality and contribute to its prevalence [12]. Moreover, economic dependence on men due to gender inequality makes women more vulnerable to harassment and less likely to report incidents for fear of retaliation or job loss [8]. Workplace sexual harassment is caused by power imbalances between genders, especially in patriarchal nations like Pakistan. Sexual harassment is common for women who defy established norms and take on economic responsibility [13].

## Under Reporting

Underreporting refers to not fully or accurately disclosing information when reporting data or incidents [13]. Hadi *et al.* reported that sexual harassment cases are often under-reported due to fear of social stigma, judgment, and embarrassment. Victims worry about damaging their own reputation and that of their families. They also fear reprisal and retaliation, such as losing their jobs or facing unfavorable references. Gender-biased institutions and a weak judicial system contribute to the problem, as organizations may suppress reports, and victims struggle to prove verbal harassment. These factors create barriers that discourage victims from speaking out and seeking justice [13].

In a study by Zeighami *et al.* on Iranian nurses, barriers to reporting sexual harassment included organizational and legal obstacles, family pressures, and personal factors [14].

According to Hall *et al.* [15], a significant number of victims of sexual harassment choose not to speak out, with only a small fraction taking action against the perpetrators. However, there is evidence suggesting a changing trend, as a survey revealed an increase in the number of formal reports. The percentage of victims making reports rose from 16% to 20%, indicating a positive shift in the culture surrounding reporting sexual harassment [16]. Nevertheless, research indicates that reporting incidents of sexual harassment does not always result in resolution. Only 45% of those who made reports among the 20% of victims indicated that the harassment ended, and out of that 45%, only 74% expressed satisfaction with the outcome of their complaints. Additionally, 29% of victims faced re-victimization and demotion as a consequence of reporting. These factors contribute to the reluctance of victims to come forward, with four out of five cases

remaining unreported. Other reasons for underreporting include the fear of job loss, re-victimization, and the prospect of undergoing embarrassing investigations [16].

## The Prevalence of Workplace Harassment

The prevalence of workplace harassment varies across countries, industries, and organizations. It can take various forms, such as sexual and psychological harassment.

## Global Prevalence and Magnitude of the Problem

Sexual harassment in the workplace is a prevalent issue in both developed and developing countries. Studies indicate that a significant number of women experience sexual harassment in various countries. Estimates suggest that between 30 to 50 percent of women in the European Union, 50 percent in the United Kingdom, and 25 percent in the United States endure sexual harassment at work [17]. The prevalence of workplace harassment varies across countries and industries, and it is influenced by cultural, social, and organizational factors [13]. Studies conducted in different regions have produced varying results, making it challenging to establish a universally accurate prevalence rate. According to a 2017 report by the International Labour Organization (ILO), it was estimated that around 1 in 3 workers globally had experienced workplace harassment. The report also highlighted that women are more likely to experience sexual harassment [8]. A more recent survey conducted by the International Labor Organization (ILO), Gallup, and the Lloyd's Register Foundation (LRF) found that approximately 23% of workers worldwide have experienced workplace violence and harassment, including physical, verbal, or sexual forms. The report was based on conversations with around 75,000 employees aged 15 and above in 121 countries and territories in 2021 as part of the Lloyd's Register Foundation World Risk Poll [18]. Shockingly, only about half of the victims globally disclosed their experiences to someone else, often after enduring multiple incidents of abuse and harassment. The most commonly cited reasons for not reporting were concerns about their reputation and a belief that the reporting process would be futile [18]. These figures may not capture the full extent of workplace harassment, as many cases go unreported due to fear of retaliation, stigma, or a lack of awareness about reporting mechanisms. Moreover, the understanding and definition of workplace harassment can vary across countries, making comparisons and data collection challenging [6].

Hadi *et al.* reported that in Pakistan's gender-segregated society, women are discouraged from interacting with men in public spaces, and those who do are often judged negatively by the community. However, professional women, particularly leaders, are required to communicate with their male colleagues and subordinates for work-related matters. The study highlighted that the professional relationships between

men and women are frequently misunderstood and misinterpreted by their colleagues due to prevailing gender norms that fail to differentiate between professional and personal interactions. These norms create an environment where men, taking advantage of cultural settings, engage in harassment towards their female colleagues or subordinates [13].

### **The Situation in Pakistan**

Sexual harassment affects women and men worldwide, especially in Pakistan.

However, limited data makes it difficult to assess the prevalence and magnitude of workplace sexual harassment in Pakistan. Despite workplace sexual harassment and humiliating treatment regulations, women still face physical, sexual, verbal, and emotional abuse [18]. Despite legislation empowering women to confront mistreatment, toxic professional settings persist, perpetuating a cycle of humiliation and victimisation [19]. Many Pakistani women work in hostile circumstances and encounter abuse. Women who speak out face several difficulties in their pursuit of justice, normalising workplace harassment [20]. According to the Alliance against Sexual Harassment, a Pakistani non-profit, 93% of women in the private and public sectors report experiencing workplace harassment [21]. Pakistan's Federal Ombudsman Secretariat for Protection against Harassment at Workplace reported 2,169 harassment complaints in the government sector between 2018 and 2022. These complaints included 582 female and 148 male complaints. The private sector saw 994 female and 445 male complaints. The Aurat Foundation, a Pakistani women's rights organization, found that 90% of working women in Pakistan have experienced workplace harassment. Another Gallup Pakistan survey indicated that 70% of urban women and 93% of rural women have experienced workplace sexual harassment. These statistics show that sexual harassment is widespread in Pakistan, emphasizing the need for awareness, prevention, and effective reporting [13].

Cultural influences, gender inequality, low education and awareness, patriarchal traditions, and socioeconomic factors contribute to workplace harassment of women in Pakistan.

Workplace harassment is a significant issue in Pakistan, affecting both men and women. It includes various forms of mistreatment such as sexual harassment, verbal abuse, discrimination, and bullying. The system for addressing harassment, discrimination, victimisation, and humiliation of women is flawed. Current mechanisms lack comprehensiveness and strength. Due to systemic inefficiencies and a lack of openness and responsibility for public and private institutions and organizations, women's harassment perpetuates without effective response [1]. Pakistan needed an anti-harassment law because most women and girls are harassed. Pakistani harassment taboos hindered the establishment of

such a law [5]. A weak judicial system has allowed harassment to go unchecked and discouraged women from public participation. Civil society, women's groups, and international organizations have fought for changes to ensure Pakistani women can live with dignity, respect, and their constitutionally protected human rights as equal citizens. In 2010, women lawmakers introduced and passed the anti-harassment law due to its urgency [9].

Sexual harassment awareness and legislation like the Protection against Harassment of Women at Workplace Act 2010 try to curb it and offer a structure for reporting and reparation. However, we must continue to create safer and more inclusive workplaces, raise awareness, promote gender equality, and prevent and confront workplace sexual harassment.

### **Legal Framework for Workplace Sexual Harassment in Pakistan**

The legal framework to address workplace harassment in Pakistan is provided by the Protection against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act 2010, which applies to both public and private sector organizations. Sexual harassment is prevalent in the workplace and victims can file complaints with their employers or the established ombudsman. Reporting mechanisms require organizations to establish internal complaint committees responsible for receiving, investigating, and resolving complaints [1]. Pakistan's main workplace harassment regulation is the Protection against Harassment of Women at Workplace Act 2010. The law compels public and private employers to form a harassment committee with at least three members, including one woman. The committee handles complaints, employee rights education, and workplace harassment awareness [9].

### **Protection against Workplace Harassment of Women Act 2010**

Pakistani laws protect women from workplace and public harassment. Sexual harassment of women, whether in person, online, or privately, is illegal under the Pakistan Penal Code. Organizations must evaluate supervisor authority to prevent power abuse.

In addition to policies, businesses could promote equality by creating an inclusive environment. Direct or indirect harassment supporters may be prosecuted under the Pakistan Penal Code 1860.

The Protection against Harassment of Women at Workplace Act 2010 in Pakistan requires organizations to form a three-person investigation committee to investigate workplace harassment accusations. One committee member must be female. Section 2[H] of the Act defines workplace harassment as unsolicited sexual approaches, requests for sexual favors, or any verbal or physical action that interferes with work performance or creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive atmosphere for coworkers. Such offences can result in censure,

temporary promotion or increment stoppage, reduction in rank, compulsory retirement, removal from service, dismissal, or fines [22].

Under Section 509 of the Pakistan Penal Code 1860, those who demand sexual favors and use annoying verbal or nonverbal communication can be imprisoned for three years, fined, or both.

Employers must post notices of employee rights and complaint procedures. Within three months, complaints must be lodged, and the committee must investigate within 90 days. If harassment is found, the committee may recommend counselling, transfer, or termination. Three years in prison and a PKR 500,000 fine are possible penalties. The Pakistan Penal Code and Pakistan Electronic Crimes Act 2016 both handle harassment [1].

### The Consequences of Workplace Harassment

Sexual harassment can have significant consequences on individuals, organizations, and society as a whole. Here are some of the consequences associated with sexual harassment:

#### Impact on Individuals

Sexual harassment has a substantial impact on work performance. According to the findings of Berdahl and Moore, the enduring consequences of victimisation can extend over an extended period of time [23]. They observed a decline in productivity, alterations in career paths, diminished job satisfaction, and emotional distress as a result of workplace harassment. In their study, Wang *et al.* [24]. found that sexual harassment results in decreased work exertion, unfinished tasks, and diminished productivity. Furthermore, victims also encounter challenges in interpersonal relationships inside the workplace, leading to increased withdrawal.

Goba-Malinga [25] documented instances in which victims attributed responsibility for the incident to themselves and subsequently faced termination from their employment.

According to Barker [26], a prevalent issue among the victims was work discontent, which subsequently led to elevated rates of absenteeism and voluntary turnover. Consequently, this phenomenon contributed to an increase in staff turnover rates. Hutagalung and Ishak reported in their study almost 2.8 million individuals had quit their employment as a result of sexual harassment. This, in turn, leads to stress, sicknesses, and destabilisation inside the organization [27].

Einarsen, Hoel, and Notelaers [28] conducted a study that examined the experiences of individuals who have been subjected to sexual harassment and the subsequent effects on their professional environments. The study revealed that victims expressed a range of adverse feelings, such as distress, apprehension, exasperation, and other similar sentiments. Previous studies have reported comparable results, suggesting

that individuals of both genders had adverse affective states, including self-blame, shame, diminished self-worth, and harm to interpersonal connections [29]. Bryant-Davis, Chung, and Tillman [30]. conducted a study which found that 45% of women who experienced harassment reported experiencing sentiments of mistrust, while 30% reported feeling angry. A total of 10% of the participants indicated experiencing emotions of powerlessness and insecurity. Chechak and Csiernik [31]. conducted a study which revealed that a proportion of 10% of employees reported instances of despair and anxiousness, whilst 15% reported having sentiments of distrust. Extensive research has been conducted on the adverse psychological consequences associated with sexual harassment. According to Shannon, Rospenda, and Richman [32], empirical evidence indicates that self-esteem plays a crucial role in one's holistic state of well-being. Research has indicated a correlation between instances of sexual violence and a decrease in self-esteem [33]. Harassment victims typically exhibit diminished self-esteem in comparison to individuals who have not experienced harassment. Moreover, within the context of large corporations, individuals who have encountered instances of serious sexual violence frequently attribute responsibility to themselves, resulting in additional declines in their self-esteem [34]. Furthermore, those who have been subjected to sexual harassment often suffer from depression [35]. According to Bryant-Davis, Chung, and Tillman [30], there exists a twofold increase in the likelihood of depression diagnosis among some victims in comparison to victims of physical violence. According to a study conducted by Stockdale, Logan, and Weston [36], it was shown that 30% of those who had previously suffered trauma had symptoms of serious depression. Additionally, it is worth noting that post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a frequently observed outcome. The experience of violence can have adverse consequences on the health of individuals who are targeted [36]. According to Einarsen and Nielsen [34], individuals who have experienced sexual harassment in the past have elevated levels of sadness and dramatically increased rates of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Moreover, individuals who have experienced sexual harassment are more prone to participating in substance addiction. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) functions as an intermediary, impairing the physical well-being of sufferers through its physiological effects [35]. It is crucial to comprehend the bio-psychological mechanisms by which post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) impacts health, and available research suggests the participation of the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis. The HPA axis and hormonal regulation are disrupted by chronic and acute stress reactions induced by harassment, resulting in adverse effects on physical health [37]. Finally, those who have been subjected to sexual harassment may have suicidal inclinations, which can vary from occasional contemplation of death

to severe instances [29, 34]. A research conducted in the United States revealed that those who experienced sexual harassment were more susceptible to suicide [33]. Furthermore, sexual harassment can lead to many adverse effects such as muscular pains, headaches, fatigue, nausea, disturbances in sleep patterns, and headaches [38].

### Impact on Organizations

The occurrence of sexual harassment within organizations has substantial ramifications, impacting the mental and physical welfare of employees while also fostering a detrimental organizational culture. According to a poll done by Campbell and Wasco, [39] 17% of workers regarded sexual harassment as a significant issue, whilst almost 60% believed it to be of lesser importance. Only 1% of employees did not regard it as a significant issue. The adverse influence of sexual harassment on the whole organizational culture is evident through its psychological and physical impacts [36], resulting in a stressful atmosphere for all employees. Studies have demonstrated that these occurrences have an impact not only on the individuals who are affected but also on all staff members inside the company [28]. It is possible for victims to form unfavorable judgements of the organization's commitment to their welfare, resulting in a decline in trust and loyalty towards both the organization and its management. Consequently, this might lead to a decline in production and a rise in absenteeism. Furthermore, Stockdale [36] revealed that harassment plays a significant role in fostering adverse workplace relationships. According to Chechak and Csiernik, [31] the failure to adequately manage incidences of harassment not only incurs financial expenses for the organization but also engenders differences among employees. Consequently, companies frequently encounter a rise in psychosomatic ailments among their workforce, including sleep disturbances, migraines, and gastrointestinal disorders. Moreover, previous research has demonstrated that the occurrence of harassment episodes can serve as a reliable measure of employee turnover rates [32].

### Impact on Society

Sexual harassment in the workplace has profound implications for various aspects of society. It perpetuates gender inequalities by creating an unsafe and disempowering environment for women and marginalized groups, reinforcing power imbalances and impeding progress towards gender equality. Additionally, it has economic consequences as victims of sexual harassment may face barriers in career advancement and job opportunities, contributing to the gender pay gap and impeding workforce diversity and inclusion [26]. Moreover, sexual harassment imposes societal costs by limiting individuals' potential, hindering productivity, and perpetuating a culture of discrimination and injustice. It erodes trust in institutions and undermines

social cohesion [31]. To effectively address and prevent sexual harassment, comprehensive measures such as education, awareness campaigns, strong policies, and effective reporting mechanisms are necessary. It is crucial to foster respectful, inclusive, and safe work environments that promote equality, dignity, and the overall well-being of all individuals.

### Combating Workplace Harassment: Preventing, Minimizing and Resolving

Taking action against workplace harassment is vital. Workplace harassment takes many forms and affects everyone. To address and resolve workplace harassment, first understand its various forms. Documenting, reporting, and seeking support helps resolve issues and safeguard rights.

The government assumes a pivotal role in tackling sexual harassment through the implementation of legislation aimed at preventing such occurrences and providing assistance to victims. Organizations bear a responsibility to address and mitigate instances of sexual harassment. According to existing research, various characteristics, including co-worker solidarity, supervisor harmony, workplace anonymity, and the physicality of the task, have been identified as potential contributors to the reduction of harassment events [36]. According to Chamberlain *et al.* [40] colleagues and superiors have the capacity to serve as guardians against threats by offering assistance and intervening in cases of harassment. The establishment of a work-group culture and atmosphere that promotes solidarity among employees might also play a role in mitigating instances of harassment. Within these settings, employees have a higher level of commitment towards the welfare of their colleagues and are inclined to take action and provide assistance to those who have been harmed [41]. In addition, organizations have the ability to establish training programs that cover various stages of sexual harassment, equipping staff with the essential knowledge and abilities to prevent and handle such occurrences [42]. Nevertheless, recent studies indicate that the exclusive focus on augmenting the amount and diversity of sexual harassment training programs may not yield optimal results. Indeed, it has been seen that inadequately planned training programs might result in unanticipated adverse consequences, such as heightened sensitivity and behaviors that deviate from the desired objectives [43]. Alternatively, organizations should prioritize the task of inspiring managers to acquire knowledge and implement strategies. According to Goldberg, Rawski, and Perry [44], research has indicated that the degree of organizational acceptance towards sexual harassment is contingent upon the level of incentive to acquire knowledge and effectively tackle the matter. Hence, cultivating an environment of zero tolerance towards sexual harassment necessitates pushing managers to actively participate in acquiring knowledge and implementing suitable actions.

## Recommendations for Developing Effective Anti-Harassment Programs

A comprehensive anti-harassment program is a crucial step in preventing and addressing harassment. Drawing from various sources such as the EEOC guidelines, professional standards in human resource management, and HR research, Benton *et al.* [45] recommend the following components for an effective anti-harassment program:

1. Clearly defined anti-harassment policy.
2. Explicitly stated behaviors that are considered harassment and are prohibited.
3. A complaint procedure that actively encourages employees to report instances of harassment.
4. Protections for individuals who file complaints and witnesses against any form of retaliation.
5. An investigative approach that respects the privacy of both the alleged victim and the accused, ensuring confidentiality as much as possible.
6. Regular training for managers and employees to raise awareness and reinforce the organization's stance on harassment.
7. Mechanisms and processes to swiftly address and halt ongoing harassment, as well as appropriate remedial and disciplinary measures for offenders [45].

## Recommendations for Implementing Effective Anti-Harassment Programs

Firstly, it is important to formalize the anti-harassment policy and ensure it includes well-defined key elements. Clear and regular communication of the policy is crucial, including distribution to all employees and relevant third parties, with records documenting the dissemination process. The policy should be written in language that is easily understandable, and translations should be provided for employees with limited English fluency. The explanation of prohibited conduct should cover all forms of harassment, not just sexual harassment, and provide detailed examples for each type. The complaint process should be easily accessible, with clear instructions on how to report harassment and explanations of how reported information will be handled. It is essential to have a separate policy addressing anti-retaliation to assure victims that reporting harassment will not result in adverse consequences. Investigations should be prompt, thorough, and impartial, adhering to due-process principles and employing trained personnel. Anti-harassment training should be provided to all employees, utilizing interactive and engaging techniques, with periodic re-training sessions. Specialized training should be offered to supervisors responsible for enforcing the policy, and legal counsel can be involved in the development and delivery of training. Finally,

appropriate corrective and remedial actions should be taken based on investigation outcomes, with notifications provided to all parties involved, including the complainant and harasser, and follow-up measures to ensure the harassment has ceased [46].

## Promoting Reporting and Support

Generating a culture that supports employees in reporting harassment is crucial. Many victims are afraid of retaliation or that their accusations will be ignored [4]. Companies must provide confidential reporting channels like hotlines or anonymous reporting systems and guarantee employees that their concerns will be handled with care. Counselling and support networks can also help harassment victims cope emotionally [47].

## CONCLUSION

Workplace harassment manifests in a variety of ways and has the potential to impact individuals universally. In order to effectively address and resolve workplace harassment, it is crucial to first comprehend and identify its diverse manifestations.

Organizations should ensure that their personnel are cognizant of the legal and ethical ramifications associated with sexual harassment in the workplace. This can be accomplished through the promotion of continuous dialogues, assistance to leaders in dealing with the matter at the team level, and provision of readily available resources and training.

The way forward in addressing workplace harassment, particularly sexual harassment, involves several key strategies. These strategies include establishing clear policies and reporting mechanisms, increasing awareness and training, fostering a positive and inclusive organizational culture, strengthening legal frameworks and enforcement, supporting and empowering victims, regular monitoring and evaluation, and fostering collaboration and partnerships. By implementing these strategies, organizations and societies can create safe and respectful workplaces where individuals can thrive without fear of harassment.

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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