

A Qualitative study on Sexual Harassment Experiences of men in Pakistan

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Abstract- The stereotypical gender roles have suggested that sexual harassment can mostly be studied within the feminine contexts, which may potentially invalidate any such claims made by the men present in the society since they are mostly portrayed as perpetrators during such situations. However, sexual harassment of men may generally disregard power differentials among the genders. Hence, this article aims at exploring the experiences of sexual harassment in public places among men as young adults and how often they have experienced it, also to find their coping strategies using just world belief, and resilience. This article would aid in addressing probable explanations and impacting effects of the underreported occurrences of men facing sexual harassment and attempts to highlight the need of having gender neutral laws to facilitate the victims, their families, local bodies and mental health practitioners as this abuse might make these individuals vulnerable to the acute stress disorder and anxiety disorders if its experienced for a long period of time and goes unaddressed.

Index Terms- Sexual harassment, Men, Just world belief, Coping, resilience

I. INTRODUCTION

The sexual harassment of men is an understudied phenomenon that needs to be explored within the sexual harassment context as well (Ferreira et al., 2023). In terms of the sexual harassment of men, Gutek's (1985), study found that men were more likely to interpret "social-sexual" behavior as nonthreatening, on the other hand, women considered these behaviors as a threat and they felt offended. Men also considered such behaviors as harassment which women did not considered threatening, such conducts include women's verbal remarks on men (for instance,

"men are pigs"). Men are also labeled un-masculine (e.g. 'fag' or 'pussy') when they do not gossip about women with their other male colleagues (Fitzgerald et al., 1997). Sexual harassment of men, as well as same-sex harassment, is also a matter of concern and there is a need to consider the harassment of gays and lesbians (Woods & Lucas, 1993).

Lee (2000), noted that sexual harassment of men by men/women is as widespread or physically threatening as the workplace sexual harassment of women by men however; it is demonstrated that heterosexual men can encounter workplace sexual harassment perpetrated by men or women and this experience is harmful to men. Many men who have experienced sexual coercion have committed suicide. Stanko and Hobdell's (1993), conducted 33 interviews from men participants; Respondents reported that it is also becoming common for men to face violence. Ten respondents reported that it had totally changed their personality after facing sexual violence. Other participants also indicated that it affects them negatively, leaving them with feelings of anger, vulnerability, fear, and mistrust.

Schnoll et al. (2015), suggested that by sexually harassing same-sex colleagues, the offenders'

reputation as a suitable match for opposite gender may be enhanced. In comparison, opposite-sex harassment may represent a need to express sexual attraction or romantic interest. However, owing to teenagers' immature coping abilities in opposite-sex relationships, they unwittingly sexually exploit their peers in an effort to draw attention to themselves as potential romantic partners. Kennair and Bendixen (2012), noted that same sex harassment is more prevalent in comparison to opposite sex harassment in men. However, the motive behind sexual harassment is short term physical relation with other individual and this perception increased the same sex attraction to release their sexual frustration.

Harassment, a commonly negative experience of life for a person, involves physical, verbal, sexual, or emotional behavior, which is intended to harm an individual. An experience of harassment has a negative impact on an individual's life (Lim & Cortina, 2005). The limited evidence to date suggests that internal coping strategies are the most prevalent form of coping among victims. Women cope with sexual harassment by employing internal coping which they find easy in comparison to confronting the harasser or reporting, engaging in self-blame, or making benign attributions (i.e., assuming that the harasser meant well) for the harassment (Fairchild & Rudman, 2008). Moreover, study suggest avoidance is the first common strategy used by both sexes (Sigmon et al., 1997).

One of the effective coping mechanisms is self-blaming which is also called personal belief in a

just world. Evaluating the attack of sexual victimization, it can be said that mostly victims found their own actions linking to sexual assault for instance not being careful enough to avoid the incident. According to attribution theory, beliefs about one's character are stable (i.e., resistant to change), global, internal attributions (Weiner, 1985). Self-blame attributions are common responses in sexual victimization (Breitenbecher, 2006; Choi, 2024).

Current study

The present study comprised of the interviews from men participants. It was assumed that there will be difference between the experiences and understanding of sexual harassment among men and women. In Pakistan, understanding of sexual harassment experiences of men is not much (see Anila, 1995). Interviews were carried out during field work in order to devise and understand the perspective of men. However, personal interviews were conducted only from men participants in order to explore and investigate the sexual harassment phenomena among men participants. Furthermore, Pakistani society is considered to be a male dominant society that's why men participants were focused for personal face to face interviews.

Method

Sample for sharing Personal Experiences

A total of 10 male participants were approached but only six interviews were conducted with an age range of 21-25 years old in order to explore the phenomena of sexual harassment in public places. The 4

participants out of 10 refused to get interviewed after they were briefed about the aim of the research, as they were not comfortable sharing their personal experiences with researchers. Participants have had varied educational levels. The participants belonged to different segments of society, for instance, their qualification was graduation and post-graduation. Conversely, all participants were unmarried and residents of Islamabad.

Interview Protocol

The semi-structured interview guide was prepared by the researchers, and it was prepared after reviewing the existing literature and consulting the subject experts. The questions were related to knowledge and academic literature produced and experiences of sexual harassment.

Procedure

The modes of conducting interviews were face to face. Each interviewee was briefed about research topic and its nature, their consent was asked before recording and initiating formal interview, rapport building was taken into consideration. The information recorded was transcribed for further analysis and comparison. Content analysis is carried out on this data.

Results

Participants reported their experiences of sexual harassment faced in the past six months. Similarly, the respondents explained how they understood sexual harassment and what did sexual harassment meant for them. Being a man, a superior in Patriarchal society.

Vignettes

Case 1

xyz is 22 years old boy from central Punjab studying at a government university in Islamabad. xyz is very much vocal against sexual violence and shared his experience of harassment during traveling from his hometown to Islamabad. While traveling, a man was sitting next to him who was trying to touch him continuously in a seductive manner, bearing continuous touch for an hour after that xyz gave a cold gaze to a man so that he can stop touching him. When he didn't stop touching him the respondent complaint to the hostess about a man and change his sitting.

Case 2

Yyz is 25 years old boy from Peshawar studying and has been practicing law in Islamabad for two years. He shared the incident of sexual harassment which he encountered in a cafe, as he further explained his perpetrator was a woman who was in mid-40s and she passed smiles and gave her number while passing by. She gave her number by touching on the chest area of a yyz. He makes fun while explaining the incidents as he enjoys the women's touch. He also shared his viewpoint that the perpetrator was a woman that's why he enjoyed the whole incident.

Case 3

Zzz is 21 years old boy from kpk (Mardan) studying management sciences in Islamabad. He has experienced sexual harassment from someone higher authority and shared his incident that he went to a parade where one of the high-security officials tried to

touch him and give gestures which showed he was interested in a sexual encounter with him. Zzz explained he ignored him multiple times but then to stop his touching and gestures he gives him a cold stare to stop the sexual harassment incident. He further added that one should respond and fight back to teach the lesson.

Discussion

Sexual harassment of men. The interviewees agreed that men also experience sexual harassment in their life and nowadays men are also vulnerable to sexual victimization. They accepted the fact that they are one of those victims, and also mentioned that the societal laws related to sexual harassment support the female gender more as compared to men. Twenty-five of the participants reported that women can also perpetuate and harass men but when women harasses men, then these men may take it lightly and make fun of those incidents. Contrary, when men harass men, it becomes a matter of pride because it shows the other person is trying to dominate you. Three of the participants reported that, they stared aggressively at their perpetrator so that they can show his aggression. Five participants reported that men to men harassment makes them angry as perpetrators wanted sexual contact with them even after the first encounter. Men consider gender harassment as fun until these things get severe and it violates their and workplace norms (Hurt, Wiener, Russell, & Mannen, 1999). When it gets severe they see this as a sign of powerlessness because being a victim of sexual harassment decrease their confidence and previous studies also indicate that sexual harassment by peers or subordinates can be

seen as an attempt to gain power or equalize the power differences between the harasser and the victim (O'Connell & Korabik, 2000). One of the participants, belonging from Khyber Pakhtun Khuwa (KPK), a province in Pakistan reported that there is a lot of respect for women. Participant further stated that in KPK, women wear veil and do not roam around or go outside unnecessarily. When these women are less available in public places then these frustrated men harass men and make sexual contact to decrease their frustration but for the individuals who experience this abuse, they might become a subject to getting fearful while being questioned for their strength and courage by themselves. This may in return cause feelings of guilt and low self-esteem, and in extreme cases might take the victims towards suicidality.

Just world belief. The participants believed that they are not responsible for harassment and reported negative attitude towards just world belief for their self but when it comes to women they had different point of views as they believed that women should be careful with these matters. It appeared as if they believed that society is responsible for sexual harassment. More than half of the participants reported that family and teachers are accountable for such situations as both the families and the teachers resist in teaching sex education or explain this matter to children openly. They may consider such discussions as being awkward or taboo. Furthermore, Pakistan is based on a patriarchal system (Ferdoos, 2005), which does have some advantages and disadvantages in their own way, for instance during the interviews, three of the participants commented

that women who behave extra nicely and show some gestures towards men are more vulnerable to sexual harassment (see also, Anila, 1995). Most studies showed that men blame victims to a larger extent than women (Grubb & Harrower, 2009).

Participants also stated that they grew up in a conservative society and if any woman is dressed provocatively then she would be more prone to become a victim of sexual harassment. These statements of participants during formal interviews indicated that how strongly they believe in Just World Belief. Previous literature showed that men are also more likely to attribute blame to victims (Anila, & Ansari, 1992; Rubin & Borgers, 1990). This statement lets us ponder and explain that there is a need to explore just world belief in victims of sexual harassment

Coping with harassment. Nowadays, the concept of coping with harassment is a popular topic of discussion. There are different concepts of coping with harassment such as coping internally and externally. There are training centers where the martial art experts train the girls in order to make them physically stronger and teach them how to deal with perpetrators.

Similarly, participants reported that, the victims often felt guilt and helplessness after an incident of sexual harassment but they also explained that it depends on age. They also reported that they took sexual harassment seriously and tried to solve the problem by facing the perpetrator. One of the participants said that he reported the bus conductor, driver and told them to change either his seat or his

perpetrator's seat otherwise he will slap the man if he touches him again while few of the participants who were harassed by women enjoyed the incident of sexual harassment. Research also explains that women are more likely than men to perceive sexual touching as sexual harassment, and they may perceive such touching as a threat, whereas men might view sexual contact as a compliment and might not mind or take sexual comments as sexual harassment (Gutek, 1985).

Resilience. They all reported that they are completely fine after experiencing any such incident and convinced that victims should show aggression towards perpetrators. Participants also stated that a shut-up call is very important to make the other person realize that they will not take their behavior lightly and will fight back. One argument for this conclusion may be that sexual harassment is more connected to women's guilt and shame among women since sexual harassment is seen primarily as a feminine phenomenon (Street et al., 2007). Participants also reported that they should fight and bounce back by showing high resilience when they face sexual harassment. Few participants mentioned that they had also showed a severe reaction to stop the harassment with them. This highlights that just world belief, resilience and coping serve as major variables along with taking men as sample participants to conduct future researches based on sexual harassment.

II. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, men also face sexual harassment in today's world and they cope differently in comparison to women. Pakistani society is a patriarchal society in which men rule and have authority, so complaining about harassment or being harassed can be considered to be seen as powerless and helpless. These victims need immediate attention of the local bodies,

mental health practitioners and guardians in order to help the victims of sexual harassment to address those encounters and work towards finding closure.

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