

DEVELOPMENT OF AN INDIGENOUS SEXUAL HARASSMENT ATTRIBUTION QUESTIONNAIRE FOR PAKISTAN

Anila, Zafar Afaq Ansari, & Naeem Tariq

*National Institute of Psychology
Quaid-i-Azam University,
Islamabad, Pakistan*

In order to develop an indigenous Sexual Harassment Attribution Questionnaire (SHAQ) for Pakistan to measure the attribution of responsibility for sexual harassment a number of strategies were used for producing the initial item pool. These included individual interviews and group discussions. The statements generated from these sources were content analyzed and converted into scenarios. After psychometric evaluation 15 scenarios were selected. Coefficient alpha of this questionnaire was found to be .74. Although additional research is needed to further clarify the validity and reliability of the SHAQ, the questionnaire holds promise as an instrument for exploring the attitudes and perceptions of individuals about the incidents of sexual harassment in Pakistani society.

Sexual harassment is a serious though not an exclusive social problem for working women and female students. Recognized as a social issue in the mid 1970s, there has been an explosion of interest, litigation and research involving sexual harassment. A generally acceptable definition remains, however, unavailable (Fitzgerald, 1990). One of the earliest definitions quoted throughout literature is given by Farley (1978), who defined it as:

Unsolicited, non-reciprocal male behaviour that asserts a woman's sex role over her function as a worker. It can be any or all of the following: staring at, commenting upon or touching a woman's body; repeating non-reciprocated propositions for dates; demands for sexual intercourse; and rape (p.68).

Anila (1990) reports that in Pakistan, the most frequent kinds of sexual harassments faced by females are unwanted sexual comments, lewd remarks about face and figure, staring, brushing against a female's body, pinching, following in a car or a bike, and snatching

the *dupatta* (female head and body gear). Usually, a woman experiences this when she is unescorted by male companions or when she is with other females. These incidents occur at public places, e.g., markets, bus stops, cinema halls, girls college gates, co-education institutions and also at workplaces. The prevalence of sexual harassment seems to be related to the status of women in the Pakistani society. The anticipation of such incidence and the desire to avoid them may influence a women's freedom in general. This problem is compounded because women are made to feel responsible for their own victimization by being told that if a man harasses them, it is because they have been doing something to provoke him (Anila, 1991; Zaidi, 1994).

Interest in the problem of sexual harassment has led to the development of a number of instruments in the West. Fitzgerald (1990) observed that the initial efforts for research on sexual harassment were confined to survey type investigations with open-ended questions through which investigators attempted to identify significant variables related to sexual harassment. Crull (1982) prepared a report on the experiences of 92 women victims of sexual harassment. He identified types of behaviours and experiences that appeared to typify the phenomenon (cited in Fitzgerald, 1990). Similarly, Till (1980) classified responses to his open-ended survey of harassment into behaviours belonging to five types or levels, each one indicating progressively greater severity. Benson and Thompson (1982) presented a definition of sexual harassment developed by the Working Women United Institute (1978) to the female university students and asked them whether they had ever been sexually harassed, if so, to describe the incident. Responses were classified into seven categories, ranging from body language and undue attention, to sexual bribery. Somewhat more structured approaches included that of Wilson and Kraus (1983) who presented their subjects with the seven types of harassment behaviour identified by the Project on the Status and Education of Women. They asked their subjects to report the number of professors who had committed any of these. Adams, Kottke and Padgitt (1983) took a similar approach, albeit with a slightly different list, while Maihoff and Forest (1983) asked subjects about only four behaviours three of which were extremely severe. Lott, Reilly and Howard (1982) asked students not only about sexual insults (both verbal and non-verbal), threats or bribery, or sexual assault that they themselves had experienced, but also if they had ever

heard of such incidents happening to others. To study sexual harassment at workplaces, Jensen and Gutek (1982) used structured interviews conducted by telephone to elicit information about six behaviours (sexual comments, sexual looks or gestures, sexual and non-sexual touching, coerced dating, and sexual relations).

Research in the area of sexual harassment has been difficult to conduct because, at times, the incidences of sexual harassment are so subtle that a large number of women who experience such behaviour fail to recognize, label or report their experiences to others (Meek & Lynch, 1983). This is one of the main reason of non-reporting of such events. Another reason is the difficulty in deciding whom to attribute the responsibility of sexual harassment: the male, the female, or both. The research findings indicate that a very salient factor that may have an effect on the attribution of responsibility for experiences like sexual harassment could be traditional or modern sex role attitudes held by the attributor (Jensen & Gutek, 1982; Valentine-French & Radtke, 1989) and information about the victim of sexual harassment and rape (Borgida & White, 1978; Feldman-Summers & Lindner, 1976; Smith, Keating, Hester, & Mitchell, 1976).

In reviewing of several studies carried out in the West (e.g., Adams, Kottke, & Padgitt, 1983; Benson & Thompson, 1982; Crull, 1982; Gutek, 1985; Gutek, Morasch, & Cohen, 1983; Jensen & Gutek, 1982; Maihoff & Forest, 1983; Reilly, Carpenter, Dull, & Bartlett, 1982; Till, 1980; U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, 1981), it is apparent that the issues of validity and reliability have not been sufficiently addressed to. Neither does any study report a test retest correlation coefficient nor an internal consistency coefficient. Another drawback of these studies is that the researchers does not ensure that whether different subjects have interpreted the items in the same manner or not. For example, Till (1980) has utilized the term "sexual harassment" and asked women whether or not they have been harassed. In the study of U.S. Merit System Protection Board (1981) cover letters were used along with a list of behaviours to be considered as harassment, while Gutek (1985) did not use the term harassment, but asked women to determine whether the touching was meant to be sexual, or the comments were meant to be insulting. Thus these different procedures introduce errors in the measurement of harassment. As suggested by Gutek, Morasch and Cohen (1983) individual differences exists in the perceptions of what constitutes

sexual harassment, therefore, asking respondents whether they have been harassed, or labelling behaviours as harassment and asking whether a respondent has experienced them resulted in errors of measurement.

Sufficient attention has also not been paid on the content validity of the instruments. Many studies give no rationale for the behaviours they have chosen to include while others include a statement to effect that these items were chosen because they had been used in previous research. Examination of the studies suggest that some tap a rather narrow spectrum of behaviour (e.g., Maihoff & Forest, 1983), while others tried to list each area but did not include multiple items to measure each area (e.g., Reilly et al., 1982), suggesting that they may not have been adequately sampled and measured.

A few studies carried out in Pakistan have dealt only with the qualitative aspects of the phenomenon of sexual harassment (Anila, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1994; Shah, 1994; Zaidi, 1994). So far no attempt has been made for the measurement of the construct. This article describes the development of an indigenous instrument Sexual Harassment Attribution Questionnaire (SHAQ) for measurement of the direction of attribution of responsibility for sexual harassment: either to male or to female, or to both of them. In the process of development attempts have been made to avoid the drawbacks of the Western studies.

Development of the Questionnaire

The items of SHAQ were generated through two sources: individual interviews and group discussions. After that the items were analysed and screened through various stages of the development of the questionnaire. These stages are described below.

Individual Interviews

Qualitative data were generated to get an insight into the problem of sexual harassment among females in Pakistan. For this, the first author carried out detailed individual interviews with 10 male and 10 female students of Rawalpindi Medical College taken at random. The following aspects of sexual harassment were discovered from the interviews: (a) Nature of sexual harassment in Pakistan consist of

staring, unwanted sexual comments, physical contact (e.g., brushing against, squeezing or pinching), etc. (b) Sexual harassment occurs most frequently in co-education institutions, public places (e.g., bus stops, markets, stadium, cinema halls and parks), females college gates, etc. (c) Harassers include mostly males of all ages belonging to different socio-economic strata of society. (d) Victims of sexual harassment are mostly those females who attract attention by indecent dress and make up and by their own behaviour such as giggling, style of walking, etc. However those who are decent and sober and who do not indulge in these kinds of behaviours may also at times become victims of sexual harassment. (e) Motives of harassers and reasons for sexual harassment are usually to show off, to attract attention, or/and for fun etc. (f) Common reactions of victims to sexual harassment include ignoring, giving verbal and facial expression of liking or disliking, avoiding the situation, self-blaming, etc. (g) Most of the research respondents, both male and female, reported that they would ignore the situation.

Group Discussions

Three group discussions each with 4 to 5 volunteer female students were carried out by the first author in three different departments of Quaid-i-Azam University. These discussions centred around aspects mentioned in the qualitative study with greater stress on questions about personal experiences of sexual harassment. They were also asked to describe incidents of sexual harassment that they had seen or heard about. The students were assured that their identity would remain confidential. Each group session took about one and a half hour.

Items

The data collected through individual interviews and group discussions were then content analyzed and different categories of sexual harassment were made. On the basis of these categories an item pool was constructed in which all items were written in behavioral terms such as: Have you ever been in a situation where some male, for example, constantly stares at you and makes you feel uncomfortable, or harasses you sexually, etc. Attempt was made to avoid ambiguity in terminology and to develop a full range of items measuring each form of sexual harassment. The item pool was

constructed for the measurement of the occurrence of different incidents of sexual harassment. The questionnaire consisting of 23 items was administered to 50 female Quaid-i-Azam University students taken at random (excluding the students who had participated in the group discussions). The respondents were instructed to also suggest additional items on the basis of their experiences. The items with the highest frequencies were selected for making the scenarios.

Scenarios

In order to validate the information collected from the above sources, 20 female university students were asked to write down all the incidents in which they had experienced sexual harassment. They were asked to write as much about the incidents as they could. As the scenarios are the best measure of attributions therefore those items of the item pool which were endorsed most frequently by the students and the most frequent incidents written by female students were selected and converted in the form of scenarios.

Final Selection of Scenarios

In the final questionnaire the factors related to the victim (girl) which can affect the perceptions were not mentioned in the scenarios. This was guided by many researchers (e.g., Calhoun, Selby, Cann, & Keller, 1978; Jensen & Gutek, 1982; Jones & Aronson, 1973; Kanekar & Vaz, 1988; Seligmen, Brickman, & Koulack, 1977; Terpstra & Baker, 1986; Valentine-French & Radtke, 1989) who found that certain factors related to the victim affect the perception and the attribution of the responsibility for the incidents of sexual harassment, and of rape. Some of these factors are: (a) the perceived reasons for being outside the home (whether she is out from her home for some genuine reason, for enjoyment or for attracting boys); (b) physical attractiveness (whether she is above average, average or below average in physical attractiveness); (c) age (whether she is young, old, or middle aged); (d) appearance (whether her dress is traditional or modern); (e) social status (whether she is a student, working woman, professional, labourer, or housewife etc.); (f) marital status (whether she is married, unmarried, separated, or divorcee etc.); (g) socio-economic status (whether she belongs to lower, middle or upper socio-economic class); and (viii) relationship with the offender (whether she personally knows the offender, has any

relationship with the offender or not).

The two factors were constant in every scenario: the girl is alone (even if the place is crowded) and the boy always approaches the girl. The affective element or feelings of both the girl and the boy was not mentioned in the scenarios, therefore the scenarios were ambiguous about whether the sexual harassment had occurred or not. Sixteen such scenarios were selected.

First Administration of Questionnaire

In order to check the face validity and intensity of sexual harassment in the scenarios, they were presented to randomly selected 40 female Quaid-e-Azam University students. The subjects were asked to read the scenarios and indicate whether or not they perceived each incident to be sexually harassing and if so, arrange the scenarios according to the seriousness of sexual harassment from one indicating the least serious to 16, indicating most serious. The mean score was calculated for each scenario. It was found that two scenarios had the mean value of 4, indicating that they were equal in seriousness of sexual harassment. Therefore only one of them was selected and the other dropped. Thus this final version contained 15 scenarios.

Second Administration of Questionnaire

After rearranging the items from the least serious to the most serious in sexual harassment, the scenarios were administered to 20 male and 20 female university students, taken at random. In this final questionnaire the scenarios were not labelled as sexual harassment, rather these were labelled as normal incidents in our daily lives. The subjects were to indicate who bears responsibility for each of the incidents i.e., whether the girl is responsible, the boy is responsible or both are responsible. The results indicated that the scenarios were not biased for one gender, rather were somewhat ambiguous and open to interpretation. The frequency of responses given by male and female students was calculated. Thus, the respondents seemed to perceive each scenario according to his/her own pre-disposition about the reasons for such incidents as indicated by Sears, Peplau, Freedman, and Taylor (1988). Thus the final version of SHAQ was

developed with 15 scenarios (see Appendix A).

Each scenario depicts a boy approaching a girl. The items describe incidents representative of the following categories of behaviour: (a) verbalization (e.g., compliments, comments or jokes and vulgar songs); (b) body language (e.g., staring, standing too close, blinking of eyes and flying kisses); (c) physical advances (e.g., deliberate touching such as patting, pinching, nudging and brushing against); and (d) written or electronic communication (e.g., phone calls and love letters).

Determination of Alpha Reliability Index

A sample of 200 students was randomly selected from Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad ($N=100$, 50 males, 50 females), and University of the Punjab, Lahore ($N=100$, 50 males, 50 females) in order to measure the reliability of the questionnaire. For this purpose internal consistency technique (Cronbach alpha) was used. The alpha reliability was found to be .74.

DISCUSSION

The indigenous Sexual Harassment Attribution Questionnaire (SHAQ) developed to assess the attribution of responsibility for the incidents of sexual harassment in Pakistan is the first instrument of its kind developed in the country. All the items are collected empirically from the women and thus these are based on their first hand experiences. Being indigenous SHAQ is quite different from the instruments developed in the West.

During the construction of SHAQ, attempt has been made to include the full range of potentially harassing behaviours. The items are written with enough details to ensure that all respondents understand them clearly. The internal consistency of SHAQ seems to be acceptable, although further research is needed to examine reliability and internal consistency using additional samples. Further research is also needed to investigate construct validity of SHAQ, and its relationship with some other measures of sexually harassing behaviour.

To conclude one may observe that prevalence of incidents of sexual harassment in any society are dependent upon the attitudes of people of that society. The attitudes could be changed by providing ample information about what really happens in such incidents, and by changing specific beliefs about a behaviour and its consequences. The SHAQ may help in conducting studies in this regard and thus can play a role in programs designed to alleviate sexually harassing behaviours.

REFERENCES

- Adams, J. W., Kottke, J. L., & Padgitt, J. S. (1983). Sexual harassment of university students. *Journal of College Student Personnel, 24*, 484-490.
- Anila. (1990). *Perception of sexual harassment among a group of male and female medical college students*. Unpublished manuscript, Quaid-i-Azam University, National Institute of Psychology, Islamabad.
- Anila. (1991, October). *Sexual harassment: Myths versus women's reality*. Paper presented at the 8th International Conference of Pakistan Psychological Association, Islamabad.
- Anila. (1992). *Attribution of responsibility for sexual harassment as related to sex role attitudes*. Unpublished M.Phil thesis. Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad.
- Anila. (1994, January). Sexual harassment in the university campus. *NIP Newsletter*, pp. 2-3.
- Benson, D. J., & Thompson, G. E. (1982). Sexual harassment on a university campus: The confluence of authority relations, sexual interest and gender gratification. *Social Problems, 29*, 236-251.
- Borgida, E., & White, P. (1978). Social perception of rape victims *Law and Human Behaviour, 2*, 339-352.

- Calhoun, L. G., Selby, J. W., Cann, A., & Keller, G. T. (1978). The effect of victim physical attractiveness and sex of respondent on social reactions to victims of rape. *British Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 17, 191-192.
- Crull P. (1982). Stress effects of sexual harassment on the job: Implications for counselling. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 52, 539-544.
- Farley, L. (1978). *Sexual shakedown : The sexual harassment of women on the job*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Fitzgerald, L. F. (1990). Sexual harassment: The definition and measurement of a construct. In M. Paludi (Ed.), *Ivory power: Sexual harassment in academia* (pp. 21-44). New York: Suny.
- Feldman-Summers, S., & Lindner, K. (1976). Perceptions of victims and defendants in criminal assault cases. *Criminal Justice and Behaviour*, 3, 135-140.
- Gutek, B. A. (1985). *Sex and the workplace*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.
- Gutek, B. A., Morasch, B., & Cohen, A.G. (1983). Interpreting social sexual behaviour in a work setting. *Journal of Vocational Behaviour*, 22, 30-48.
- Jensen, I. W., & Gutek, B. A. (1982). Attribution and assignment of responsibility in sexual harassment. *Journal of Social Issues*, 38(4),121-136.
- Jones, C., & Aronson, E. (1973). Attribution of fault to a rape victim as a function of respectability of the victim. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 26, 415-419.
- Kanekar, S., & Vaz, L. (1988). Attribution of causal and moral responsibility to a victim of rape. *British Journal of Social Psychology*. 20, 165-170.

- Lott, B., Reilly, M. E., & Howard, D. R. (1982). Sexual assault and harassment: A campus community case study. *Signs: A Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 8, 296-319.
- Maihoff, N., & Forest, L. (1983). Sexual harassment in higher education: An assessment study. *Journal of the NAWDAC*, 46, 3-8.
- Meek, P.M., & Lynch, A.Q. (1983). Establishing an informal grievance procedure for cases of sexual harassment of students. *Journal of the NAWDAC*, 46(2), 30-33.
- Project on the Status and Education of Women.(1978). *Sexual harassment: A hidden issue*. Washington: Association of American Colleges.
- Reilly, T., Carpenter, S., Dull, V., & Bartlett, K. (1982). The factorial survey technique: An approach to defining sexual harassment on campus. *Journal of Social Issues*, 38, 99-110.
- Sears, D. O., Peplau, A., Freedman, J. L., & Taylor, S. E. (1988). *Social psychology* (6th ed.). New jersey: Prentice-Hall International.
- Seligmen, C., Brickman, J., & Koulack, D. (1977). Rape and physical attractiveness: Assigning responsibility to victims. *Journal of Personality*, 45, 554-563.
- Shah, N. (1994, January). Diary of a working woman. *Newsline*, pp. 32-33.
- Smith, R. E., Keating, J. P., Hester, R. K., & Mitchell, H. E. (1976). Role and justice considerations in the attribution of responsibility to a rape victim. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 10, 346-357.
- Terpstra, D. E., & Baker, D. D. (1986). A framework for the study of sexual harassment. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*, 7, 17-34.

- Till, F. J. (1980). *Sexual harassment: A report on the sexual harassment of students*. Washington: National Advisory Council on Women's Educational Programs.
- U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board (1981). *Sexual harassment of federal workers: Is it a problem?* Washington: United States Government Printing Office.
- Valentine-French, S., & Radtke, H. L. (1989). Attributions of responsibility for an incident of sexual harassment in a university setting. *Sex Roles*, 21 (718), 545-555.
- Wilson, K. R., & Kraus, L. A. (1983). Sexual harassment in the university. *Journal of College Students Personnel*, 24, 219-224.
- Working Women United Institute. (1978). *Responses of fair employment practices agencies to sexual harassment complaints: A report and recommendations*. New York: Working Women United Institute, Research Series Report No.2.
- Zaidi, F. (1994, January). Sexual harassment: The working women's dilemma. *Newsline*, pp.28-45.

Appendix 'A'**SEXUAL HARASSMENT ATTRIBUTION QUESTIONNAIRE**

1. In a wedding function a girl is standing alone, a boy approaches her and starts praising her.
 2. A boy and a girl work together in the same office. The boy keeps on coming to girl's room on different pretexts.
 3. A boy talks to a girl on phone in a lewd manner.
 4. A boy gives a folded piece of paper to a girl who is passing by when she opened it, it was a love letter.
 5. A girl is driving a car alone. Another car went by, a boy in that car gave a flying kiss to the girl.
 6. A boy threw ink from a pen on a girl who is passing by.
 7. A girl is going alone on a road in the evening. A boy coming from the other side winks at her.
 8. A girl is walking alone on a road. She felt that a boy is constantly staring at her.
 9. A girl is chatting with some boys in a party. During the conversation one of the boy starts telling a dirty joke.
 10. A girl is walking about in an exhibition. Suddenly a boy comes running and collides with her.
 11. A boy and a girl are standing on a bus stop. Finding her alone, the boy starts whistling and singing a vulgar song.
 12. While shopping in the market, a girl is nudged by a passing boy.
 13. A girl is walking on a road, a boy on motorbike starts circling around her.
 14. In a bus which was full of passengers, a boy pinches a girl from the behind.
 15. A girl is walking on the street, a boy riding a bike snatches her duppata.
-