

Sexual Harassment and Coping Strategies Used by Female Domestic Workers

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The present research was designed to explore the relationship between sexual harassment and coping strategies used by domestic female workers. The research also aimed to explore the differences based on different demographic variables (i.e., age, marital status, working status of family, religion, and residence) in relation to variables. Respondents included 100 female domestic workers, from different slum areas of Islamabad and Rawalpindi. Age range of the domestic female workers was from 12-43 years ($M = 23.43$, $SD = 5.85$). Convenient sampling technique was used to collect data by using Sexual Harassment Experiences Questionnaire (Kamal & Tariq, 1997) and Coping Strategies with Harassment (Kamal & Tariq, 1997). Results indicated that gender harassment and unwanted sexual attention were the most common experienced types of sexual harassment. The results provided evidence of negative relationship of sexual harassment with internal coping strategies and positive relationship with avoidance as external coping strategy. Age was found to be negatively related to the internal focused coping strategies and positively related with the external focused coping strategies. Married female domestic workers were experiencing higher frequency of sexual harassment as compared to unmarried female domestic workers.

Keywords: Sexual harassment, coping strategies, domestic female workers.

Sexual harassment has been defined as any unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, or other physical and expressive behavior of a sexual nature (Aluede, 2000). It has also been described as recurring and unwelcome sexual remarks, gestures, or physical contact at workplaces or other places, and is related to not only sexuality but any type of unwanted sexual advances at workplace (Menon et al., 2009) including uneven distribution of power in work settings (Lee, Song, & Kim, 2011).

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According to Fitzgerald (1992), sexual harassment is prevalent in all types of organization regardless of their nature and level. Generally, sexual harassment is talked about in the context of the workplace having clear-cut status differences between females' secretarial staff and male management, reinforced by the informal expectations that the female workers must present themselves in an attractive way; however, there are many other examples of sexual harassment (Grauerholz, 1989). Furthermore, Gutek and Morasch (1982) suggested that sexual harassment can be an outcome of male aggression about a woman doing a job or it can be a consequence from the segregation of women in male dominated occupations. The harasser may be in the same status job as the women involved or in a lower status job than the worker against which the unwanted attention is directed. In the latter cases, harassment can be used as a weapon to undermine the authority of women supervisors, managers, and tutors. The common feature is that the action is unwanted by the women. Thus, sexual harassment is often a demonstration of power over the recipient or is intended to challenge, segregate, and damage that person as a worker (Carothers & Crull, 1984; Wolshok, 1981).

In Pakistani culture, women's independence is impacted by the expectations of sexual harassment occurrences and a way to avoid these instances. This problem is aggrieved by making women feel responsible for their own abuse by being told that if a man harasses them, it is because some of their own behavior that must have instigated men (Anila, 1998; Zaidi, 1994). In a research on sexual harassment at university settings, Anila (1998) described that occurrences of sexual harassment become an obstacle to women's educational goals. Most of the female students do not take admission in coeducation academic institutions purely for the reason that they felt uncomfortable in these institutions. Furthermore, women even feel scared to move about in the university campus without a friend conveying them.

The biological model is based on several postulations about sexual behaviour at the workplace. Firstly, this perspective believes that due to having stronger sex drive, men have tendency to behave aggressively towards women without any biased intention (Tangri, Burt, & Johnson, 1982). Secondly, natural attraction between two sexes makes them to participate in sexually focused behavior at workplace. Abid (2007) further reported that unwanted sexual attention is the most common type of sexual harassment experienced by female students, teachers, and support staff. On the other hand, sexual coercion is less common among the types of sexual harassment experienced by women students, teachers, and support staff.

According to Fitzgerald (1990), women manage sexually harassing situations by responding in two ways, which are generally categorized as external or internal in nature. The internal strategies characterize efforts to manage the affects and cognitions linked with the incident; while, the external strategies focus on the situation itself.

Raj (2005) asserted that domestic household workers reported most severe problem that they face in their profession is the sexual harassment by the male employers. Female domestic workers are more vulnerable to become target of sexual abuse due to their low position in social hierarchy (Cock, 1980). Moreover, power imbalance due to class or race between employer and domestic worker puts worker in more susceptible scenario to face sexual harassment and sometimes violence from the employer. Similarly, many female domestic workers found job in cities or countries far away from their homes; resultantly, they often accept living with their employers despite the risk of being abused and the lack of legal or social support if abuse happens (Mkandawire-Valhmu, Robriguez, Ammar & Nemoto, 2009). Mkandawire-Valhmu (2010), in a research done in Malawi, established that domestic workers experience verbal abuse as well as physical abuse at their workplace. The inequalities, gender and race in work environment put them at greater risk for facing abuse.

Research reveals that because of physical nature of work, these domestic workers suffer from related health problems such as joint and back problems (Dinat & Peberdy, 2007; Mkandawire-Valhmu, 2010). Due to lack of time, getting appropriate health care becomes a challenge for them.

The purpose of the present study is to explore the relationship between experience of sexual harassment and coping strategies employed by domestic female workers. Present research also aims to explore differences in sexual harassment experience and the coping strategies that are transpired with them, with reference to age and marital status. Numerous studies have been done on these variables in other countries (Brooks & Perot, 1991; Dzeich & Weiner, 1993; Pattinson, 1991; York, 1989). In Pakistan, there are available evidences of sexual harassment and coping strategies (Anila, 1998); however, domestic female workers have not been focused in the context of their experiences of sexual harassment. In addition, sexual harassment is a much common issue faced by women domestic workers and they are compelled to do work due to financial problems; whereas they are not formally equipped to handle the problem of sexual harassment at workplace.

In Pakistan, women are in large numbers hired as domestic workers, which is an unregulated and disorganized form of work. The domestic worker's key duties comprise cooking, cleaning, providing care for old and taking care of the children. There is no fixed wage structure for full-time, live-in or part-time domestic workers and it varies according to localities, economic status of employer, and the type of work performed. There is no formal contract and these workers generally find jobs through their relatives, friends and neighbors, and relatives who are themselves working as domestic workers. Furthermore, the study of various demographic variables such as age, marital status, working hours, number of houses they work, total family members, income level, and occupation of husband/parents are also included in the present exploration. Therefore, the objective of present research is to determine the prevalence of sexual harassment in domestic female workers and to uncover the coping strategies that they use to combat sexual harassment they experience.

Hypotheses

To achieve the above-mentioned objectives of the present research, several hypotheses were formulated. These are listed below:

1. Sexual harassment will be positively related to the external focused coping strategies and negatively associated with the internal focused coping strategies among domestic female workers.
2. Age of the domestic female workers will be negatively associated with the internal focus coping strategies and positively correlated to external focus coping strategies.
3. Unmarried domestic female workers would have more experience of sexual harassment experience at workplace as compared to married domestic female workers.

Method

Sample

The present study is a co-relational research. A convenient sample ($N = 100$) of domestic workers was acquired from Islamabad and Rawalpindi. Participants were recruited from the local slum areas that is, Mehrabadi, Paris colony F-7, and France colony F-6, Islamabad where many domestic workers were residing. The age of the sample participants ranged from 12-43 years ($M = 23.43$, $SD = 5.85$). Detailed demographic characteristics are given in Table 1.

Table 1
Demographic Characteristics of the Sample (N=100)

Demographics	<i>f</i> (%)
Marital status	
Unmarried	57(57.0)
Married	43(43.0)
Total number of family members	
1-8	62(62.0)
9-15	38(38.0)
With whom you go to workplace?	
Alone	54(54.0)
With someone	46(46.0)
Work status of parents/husband	
Working	83(83.0)
Non-working	17(17.0)
Do you take your child with you at workplace?	
Yes	10(10.0)
No	90(90.0)
Where do you live?	
Own-house	91(91.0)
At workplace	9(9.0)

Table 1 presents the distribution of the sample of domestic female workers based on their marital status, family members, whom they go to work with, work status of parents/husband, whether they carry their child with them, residential area, and religion. Table shows that majority of the respondents were unmarried, with average of up to eight family members, and they mostly go to their workplace on their own. In addition, parents (in case of unmarried respondents) or spouses (in case of married respondents) are also employed and earning; while 90% of the respondents do not carry their child/children with them when going for the domestic work.

Instruments

Sexual Harassment Experience Questionnaire (SHE-Q; Kamal & Tariq, 1997). The SHEQ was originally developed by Fitzgerald (1990); while in this study translated version (Anila, 1998) was used. It was a 4-point rating scale having response options ranged from (1) *never* to (4) *very frequently*. The total scores of the 35 items of SHEQ can thus range from 35 to 140 and high score on SHEQ indicated that the individual experiences high frequency of sexual harassment and vice versa. Anila (1998) reported alpha coefficient of .78 for the total scale; whereas in the present study, alpha coefficient of .84 was found for the SHEQ.

Coping with Harassment Questionnaire (CHQ; Kamal & Tariq, 1997). CHQ consisted of 50 items originally developed by Fitzgerald (1990) and translated by Kamal and Tariq (1997). In the present study, Urdu version of the CHQ was used. CHQ could be responded on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *Strongly disagree* (1) to *Strongly agree* (5). CHQ comprised of two coping strategies that is Internally Focused Coping Strategies (Detachment, Denial, Relabeling, Illusory Control, and Endurance), and Externally Focused Coping Strategies (Avoidance, Assertion/Confrontation, Seeking Institutional/Organizational Relief, Social Support, and Appeasement). In the CHQ, these coping strategies were divided into ten subscales with five items in each scale; while subscales of Relabeling and Appeasement constituted 6 and 4 items; respectively. In the present study, alpha coefficient of .97 was found for Internally Focused Coping Strategies Subscale and .95 for Externally Focused Coping Strategies Subscale.

Procedure

Initial permission was acquired from the domestic female workers for their willingness to participate in the present research. Participants were requested to mention the research to their female family members and friends who might be interested in participating. Each domestic female worker was briefed about the purpose of the study and their consent to participate was obtained. Participants were guaranteed that their information would be kept confidential and would be utilized for research purpose only. Each participant responded to the questionnaire of sexual harassment and coping strategies and demographic sheet. Instructions were given verbally to the participants so that they could respond correctly, and their full participation was encouraged. The researcher responded to the queries of the female domestic workers and took measures to maintain the confidentiality. In the end, respondents were kindly thanked for their valuable participation in the study.

Results

Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to determine the relationship between variables of the study. Independent sample *t*-test was used to find the differences among domestic female workers on study variables along different demographics variables.

Table 2

Correlation Matrix for Study Variables (N = 100)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
1. SHEQ	-	.80**	.85***	.76**	.10	-.18	-.22*	-.21*	-.15	-.01	-.19	.21*	.18	.18	.16	.17	.09	.14
2. GH		-	.69**	.66**	.06	-.14	-.19*	-.19*	-.15	-.08	-.17	.15	.16	.15	.16	.14	.14	.13
3. USA			-	.49**	.07	-.17	-.21*	-.20*	-.16	.01	-.18	.19	.17	.17	.15	.17	.08	.12
4. SC				-	.12	-.08	-.06	-.05	-.01	.01	-.04	.13	.06	.05	.05	.05	-.03	.08
5. CHQ					-	-.77***	-.72**	-.65**	-.73**	-.74**	-.57**	.70**	.71**	.68**	.62**	.60**	.79**	.50**
6. DET						-	.67**	.77**	.58**	.52**	.66**	-.75**	-.56**	-.45**	-.75**	-.74**	-.70**	-.42**
7. DNL							-	.69**	.71**	.48**	.58**	-.53**	-.67**	-.77**	-.45**	-.65**	-.73**	-.54**
8. RLB								-	.64**	.54**	.69**	-.71**	-.58**	-.58**	-.77**	-.57**	-.77**	-.55**
9. IC									-	.61**	.66**	-.75**	-.65**	-.67**	-.63**	-.47**	-.71**	-.65**
10. EDU										-	.60**	-.36*	-.64**	-.58**	-.70**	-.61**	-.47**	-.33**
11. IFS											-	-.59**	-.49**	-.69**	-.78**	-.78**	-.62**	-.65**
12. AVD												-	.69**	.77**	.66**	.67**	.50**	.53*
13. CFT													-	.59**	.57**	.59**	.42**	.49**
14. SOR														-	.73**	.66**	.46**	.45**
15. SS															-	.58**	.51**	.51**
16. APM																-	.69**	.44**
17. EFS																	-	.45**
18. AGE																		-

Note. SHEQ = Sexual Harassment Experience Questionnaire; GH = Gender Harassment; USA = Unwanted Sexual Attention; SC = Sexual Coercion; CHQ=Coping With Harassment Questionnaire; DET=Detachment; DNL=Denial; RLB= Relabeling; IC=Illusory Control; EDU = Endurance; IFS = Internal Focused Coping Strategies; AVD= Avoidance; CFT=Confrontation; SOR= Seeking Organizational Relief; SS= Social Support; APM=Appraisal; EFS = External Focused Coping Strategies.

* $p < .01$. ** $p < .00$.

Table 2 shows the values of Person Product Moment correlation among the variables of the study. Results show that sexual harassment has significant negative relationship with denial, relabeling, and significant positive association with avoidance. Results presented in Table 2 also reveals that age is significantly negatively related with internal focused coping strategies (along with its dimensions) and have significant positive relationship with external focused coping strategies (as well as its components); however, age is not related to sexual harassment and its components.

The mean value for sexual harassment ($M = 82.95$, $SD = 11.7$) is high revealing that domestic female workers face high sexual harassment experience at workplace. The mean values of subscales of sexual harassment experience scale demonstrate that unwanted sexual attention has the highest mean ($M = 43.54$, $SD = 13.26$) indicating some adjustment problems at workplace, while the mean for gender harassment is relatively low ($M = 32.45$, $SD = 10.19$), and sexual coercion has the lowest mean ($M = 21.93$, $SD = 9.87$). Overall, domestic female workers displayed more use of internal focused coping strategies ($M = 32.22$, $SD = 12.01$) as compared to external focused coping styles ($M = 24.68$, $SD = 10.22$).

Table 3 illustrates differences in study variables based on participants' related demographic variables. Results show that married workers scored high on sexual harassment and external focused coping strategies; whereas, unmarried domestic female workers scored high on internal focused coping strategies. Working status of parent/husband do not make domestic workers to experience different intensity of sexual harassment, however, it made a difference in coping strategies used by workers. Those having working parent/husband scored high on external focused coping; while, workers having non-working parent/husband scored high on internal focused coping strategies. Female workers who went to work with someone, scored high on internal focused coping strategies as compared to those who went alone. On the other hand, domestic female workers who went alone scored high on external focused coping strategies. These two groups do not differ in their sexual harassment experiences. Domestic female workers who take their children along with them at work scored high on external focused coping strategies and women who do not accompany their child along with them scored high on internal focused coping strategies. These two groups do not differ in their sexual harassment experiences. Domestic female workers who reside at their own houses scored high on external focused coping strategies; while those, who have residence at workplace scored high on internal focused coping strategies.

Table 3
Differences on Demographics among Domestic Female Workers in Relation to Study Variables (N=100)

Variables	M	SD	M	SD	t(98)	p	CI 95% Cohen's		
							LL	UL	d
Marital Status	Single (n = 57)		Married (n = 43)						
SHE	80.96	11.94	85.58	11.06	2.97	.05	2.25	4.02	0.40
IFC	93.84	19.55	70.93	23.29	6.26	.00	1.90	7.20	1.06
EFC	52.45	23.33	80.32	27.78	7.38	.00	-7.28	-2.74	1.08
Work Status of Parent / Husband	Working (n = 83)		Non-working (n = 17)						
SHE	83.25	11.29	81.47	14.00	0.56	.57	-4.44	8.00	0.13
IFC	81.53	24.06	96.00	20.35	5.31	.00	-6.81	-2.05	0.64
EFC	67.42	28.83	49.88	24.30	6.34	.00	2.67	9.43	0.65
Accompanying to Work	Alone (n = 54)		With someone (n = 46)						
SHE	82.98	12.65	82.91	10.70	0.02	.97	-4.63	4.76	0.02
IFC	79.51	24.69	89.23	22.30	8.05	.00	-9.10	-0.31	0.41
EFC	70.24	29.55	57.63	26.51	8.22	.00	1.37	23.8	0.44
Carrying Child at Work place	With child (n = 10)		Without child (n = 90)						
SHE	80.20	12.76	83.25	11.65	0.77	.43	-1.83	4.72	0.01
IFC	66.00	20.44	85.98	23.63	8.56	.00	-5.44	-1.53	0.90
EFC	85.70	22.54	62.07	28.51	9.52	.00	2.08	8.15	0.91
Residential Status	Personal house (n = 91)		Live at workplace (n = 9)						
SHE	82.97	11.74	82.66	12.37	0.07	.94	-7.87	8.49	0.04
IFC	81.97	24.24	98.33	22.91	8.75	.00	-8.47	-2.23	1.32
EFC	66.80	29.08	40.55	24.92	9.69	.00	1.89	5.59	1.25

Note. SHE = Sexual Harassment Experience; IFC = Internal Focused Coping Strategies; EFC = External Focused Coping Strategies.

Discussion

The present research aimed to explore the relationship between sexual harassment and coping strategies among domestic female workers and also intended to examine the role of various demographic groups in relation to study variables.

Results showed that the mean values of descriptive statistics show that mean of gender harassment and unwanted sexual attention

is high as compared to sexual coercion. This is in line with the previous findings (Abid, 2007; Fitzgerald et al., 1993; Gelfand, Fitzgerald, & Drasgow, 1995; Kamal & Tariq, 1997), according to which the most common type of sexual harassment experienced by women is unwanted sexual and attention/gender harassment; while sexual coercion is the least common type of sexual harassment experienced by women. Results further showed that internal focused strategies are employed more than external focused strategies. According to the previous researches (Fitzgerald et al., 1995; Paludi & Barickman, 1998), the finding indicated that female use internally-focused responses more frequently than external responses to deal with sexual harassment. The reason might be that domestic female workers using internally focused responses made cognitive efforts to ignore the reality of the situation, particularly in mild harassment situations; perhaps, the non-confrontational approach might be influenced by socio-cultural values, commitment with their work, and perpetrator power status.

Findings also indicated that sexual harassment is partially related with few components of the coping with harassment; hence offering partial support for the first hypothesis. Some of the results are in line with the previous literature (Kamal & Tariq, 1997) according to which the women with experiences of sexual harassment employed more external focused coping strategies as compared to internal focused coping strategies. The results of non-significant relationship of sexual harassment with external and internal coping strategies might be justified with the reason that victims of sexual harassment are likely to use eclectic strategies to cope with sexual harassment.

The second hypothesis assuming an inverse relationship between age and sexual harassment experiences is not supported. Many studies report that experiences of sexual harassment are not limited to younger women only (Farley, 1978). It seems that by initiating sexual attention, the objective of the male workers is not to initiate courtship as explained by biological models (Tangri et al., 1982). As men are inclined to make women of all ages as their target of sexual harassment, their motivation could be just to undermine and degrade their female coworkers. As explained by organizational power model (Bularzik, 1978, MacKinnon, 1979), men use harassment as a weapon to undermine the authority of women as a coworker. Some studies have found that, during their work, domestic workers sometimes experience violence from their employers. This is because of the power dynamics that exist between the female worker and her employer (Cohen, 2000; Mkandawire-Valhmu et al., 2009). According to O'Connell and Korabik (2000), sexual harassment is not

related to age in that both the youngest and the middle aged are particularly vulnerable. Through this logical reasoning, sexual harassment is a common problem among domestic female workers of all ages.

The result of current research shows significant negative relationship between age and internal focused coping strategies and significant positive relationship with external focused coping strategies which did not support the hypothesis. The reason of the results might be that older women become more resistant towards advances of sexual harassment. However, it has been reported that external focused coping strategies are positively related to age, as the age increases women become more assertive and they use the externally focused coping strategies. Thus, their typical coping profile excludes strategies that could put their jobs at risk in any way.

Results further showed that high frequency of sexual harassment is reported by married domestic female workers as compared to unmarried domestic female workers. The findings of present research are quite contradictory with the previous literature, for instance, according to Fitzgerald and Ormerod (1991) marital status is related to the experiences of sexual harassment, with unmarried women more often experiencing harassment than other (married or widowed) women (Coles, 1986; Fain & Anderton, 1987; Ryan & Kenig, 1991; Schneider, 1982). Gutek (1985) also reported that married women and widows report fewer experiences of sexual harassment than single or divorced women. The reason of this contradictory finding might be the low socio-economic conditions of married domestic female workers used to bear the harassment issues. Similarly, it has also been found that low income class adolescents are most vulnerable to harassment, only because many of them must work to support their families (O'Connell, & Korabik, 2000).

Domestic female workers take sexual harassment as a part of their job, because they are not having enough knowledge about harassment bill passed by the Pakistan Supreme Court. Results of the present study revealed significant differences in both groups, women who go for work alone used internal focused strategies; whereas, domestic female workers who go with someone to work mostly used external focused strategies. Sexual harassment has non-significant relationship with both comparing groups. Reason can be that women who went alone to work do not have any social support, so they are not able to confront the harasser; as a result, they internalize harassment issues, whereas those who went for work with someone have feelings of security and social support, so they mostly used external focused strategies to cope harassment.

Limitations and Suggestions

As it is a cross sectional study and individual differences exists between the participants so, generalizing these results in the local population is an issue. To study the changes corresponding sexual harassment and coping related issues, longitudinal studies should be planned. This study is unique because of its sample that is domestic female workers. The results remain preliminary and to a great extent may offer an exploratory basis of the phenomena. Questionnaire was lengthy and time consuming and comprised of personal questions for which the participants would be hesitant to answer honestly and many of them refused because of length of questionnaire that is why high social desirability is reflected in the present sample. It is suggested to build good rapport with participants before data collection and to use short measures or pure qualitative approach to investigate fragile experiences. Small sample size may also limit the generalizability of the findings. This was also seen in the results that maximum participants showed socially desirable responses specifically related to their personal issue. To overcome this problem, it is suggested to include measures related to social desirability to determine its effect on responding.

Implications

This research would prove beneficial in different areas of human life. Sexual harassment and coping strategies are two vital phenomena playing their roles in every facets of human life. Being aware of sexual harassment and its effects on the victims is major implication of this research. Research was focused on the sexual harassment problems and coping strategies employed by domestic female worker. Domestic female workers should be educated about their rights to deal this harassment issues. This research also will be helpful for organizations whether governmental or nongovernmental in understanding how domestic female workers are influenced by sexual harassment and how it is affecting them psychologically and socially. NGOs that are working for women issues may address this dilemma related to sexual harassment and its related psychological problems at governmental level so that government can take immediate action to provide them security and other social services. Majority of domestic female workers are less educated, they had to quit studies. Hence, there should be schools for them so that they can also become the productive part of this society.

Conclusion

This research is focused on sexual harassment experience and coping strategies among domestic female workers. Analyses show that sexual harassment is significantly negatively related with internally focused strategies (denial and relabeling) and significantly positively related with external focused coping strategies (avoidance). This shows that with increasing sexual harassment, female domestic workers employ more external and less internal coping strategies.

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