



## WORKPLACE HARASSMENT AMONG WOMEN EMPLOYEES: A PILOT STUDY

<sup>1</sup>Dr. Asha P. Shetty\* and <sup>2</sup>Nithyashree B. V.

<sup>1</sup>Professor and HOD Dept of Paediatric Nursing Yenepoya Nursing College Yenepoya University, Deralakatte Mangalore 575018, Karnataka, India.

<sup>2</sup>Lecturer, Dept of Community Health Nursing Yenepoya Nursing College Yenepoya University, Deralakatte Mangalore 575018, Karnataka, India.

**\*Corresponding Author: Dr. Asha P. Shetty**

Professor and HOD Dept of Paediatric Nursing Yenepoya Nursing College Yenepoya University, Deralakatte Mangalore 575018, Karnataka, India.

Article Received on 12/02/2017

Article Revised on 03/03/2017

Article Accepted on 23/03/2017

### ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** The number of workplace harassment claims filed during recent years has increased dramatically. It can take many forms and is known by many other names such as “workplace abuse” “workplace mistreatment” etc. Workplace harassment of any kind such as either emotional or physical has numerous negative consequences associated with it. Despite this, very little is known about the workplace harassment in organizations with regard to women. Moreover, the women employees hesitate to report if they experience the workplace harassment with the fear of transfer or dismissal from the work. **The objective** of this paper is to determine the workplace harassment among Women employees. **Methods:** Non experimental – cross sectional exploratory survey approach with quantitative design was adopted. Samples constitute female employees, 20-60 years of age working for minimum 6 hours in an institution selected by random sampling. Data was collected by using demographic tool and workplace harassment experience tool developed by the investigator which was validated and found to be reliable. The institutional Ethics committee approval is obtained and individual subject consent was also obtained. **Result:** Data collected from 69 female employees indicated that majority (45.2%) of them belonged to nuclear family; 47.9 % were unmarried; more than 50% of them had more than three years of work experience; 45.2% were on temporary employment; 50% were working in private sector; 45% had professional education and were earning more than 38,600/- per month. Results indicated that 52.1% of the female employees had occasional harassment and 35.6% reported no harassment. Area wise analysis indicated that female employees expressed harassment in physical, psychological, work related, verbal and sexual areas. **Conclusion:** Based on the study finding it is concluded that workplace harassment is prevalent among female employees. Wide ranging types of harassment included physical, personal, psychological, work related and sexual as well. It was also evident from the female employees that “no harassment” doesn’t indicate absence of workplace harassment rather the employees hesitate to report such experiences with fear of facing further consequences. **Implications:** Study has implications to develop strategies to strengthen the female workforce in institutions and to create awareness particularly among female employees among work place harassment and women empowerment.

**KEYWORDS:** Women Harassment, Employees, workplace.

### INTRODUCTION

The workplace harassment is widely prevalent problem in India. Workplace harassment includes different types of discrimination and acts of violation that are not confined to one specific group. It is known by many other names such as “mobbing”, “workplace bullying”, “workplace mistreatment”, “workplace aggression” and “workplace abuse”.<sup>[1]</sup> Harassment encompasses all types of offensive behavior which is intended to upset or show disgrace to another individual. Any behavior of a person, a group of people, colleagues, neighbors and even the boss or supervisor are also included in harassment and these are all punishable offense.<sup>[2]</sup>

Working women not only face problems in workplace also on their way to and from workplace as well. According to a new Action aid research more than four in 10 women (41%) in India experience harassment or violence before the age of 19. The four nation survey conducted by the international women and child rights NGO also revealed that women experience harassment for the first time at a very young age with 6% of them experiencing it before the age of 10 in India.<sup>[3]</sup> Women of all ages irrespective of their occupation and level of income experience harassment in workplace. It can happen to any women rather than any specific type of women. Women face discrimination from childhood,

especially in communities where there is a preference for the male child.<sup>[4]</sup>

A cross sectional study carried out at Municipal Corporation limits of Mangalore, a coastal city in Karnataka state, India revealed that out of 160 working women interviewed, about 28.8% of them were harassed; majority (47.8%) of the respondents were harassed within one year of joining their employment. The perceived reasons for harassment were – them being more efficient than their male colleagues (45.7%), followed by them being beautiful (23.9%). The type of harassment was mostly verbal (67.4%) followed by physical (23.9%) in nature. Among the respondents who were harassed, 52.2% had complained and the most common mode of complaint was spoken (83.4%).<sup>[5]</sup>

The number of workplace harassment claims filed in particular to the women during recent years has increased dramatically. Some individuals may feel that ‘harassment’ means only “sexual harassment”, it has become clear that in today’s work environment the term is much broader than that. Harassment is a costly proposition for employers. It can result in low morale, absenteeism, reduced productivity, employee turnover, and damages and litigation costs.<sup>[6]</sup>

According to Fitzgerald and Ormerod, women of all age groups report experiencing harassment.<sup>[7]</sup> A study conducted among U S women physicians reported ever experiencing gender based harassment indicating that harassment differ among individuals based on experiences and sensitivity which may have professional and personal consequences.<sup>[8]</sup>

An India Spend analysis of available data and conversations with working women showed that there was an increase in reported cases of harassment to 2015. Between 2014 and 2015, cases of sexual harassment within office premises more than doubled –from 57 to 119- according to National Crime Records Bureau data. There has also been a 51% rise in sexual harassment cases at other places related to work from 469 in 2014 to 714 in 2015. Between 2013 and 2014, the National commission for women reported 35% increase in complaints from 249 to 336, according to a December 2014 reply filed in the Lok Sabha.<sup>[9]</sup>

## RESULTS

**Table 1. Sample characteristics**

n=69

Sl no	Sample characteristics	Frequency f	Percentages %
1	Age in years		
	a. 21-25	34	49.3
	b. 26-30	19	27.5
	c. 31-35	4	5.8
	d. 36-40	7	10.1
	e. 41-45	2	2.9
	f. 46&above	3	4.3

Harassment of women at workplace continues to be the complex arena. Though the phenomenon is widely prevalent it has been extremely difficult to elicit the information from women employees with respect to the societal concerns. On the other hand lack of understanding in distinct explicit behaviors which women may consistently perceive as harassment for being female. The aim of the present study is to determine the workplace harassment among women employees.

## METHODOLOGY

A non experimental – cross sectional exploratory survey approach with quantitative design was used. Subjects constituted women employees, of 20-60 years of age working for minimum 6 hours in selected institution. Subjects were selected based on random sampling technique. The women employees those with less than one year of work experience were excluded from the study and those willing to participate in the study only were included for data collection. The ethical clearance was obtained by Institutional Review Board of the University. The purpose of the study was explained to the subjects and individual written informed consent was obtained before collecting the data from the subjects. Data was collected from a selected institution in Mangaluru.

Data for the study was collected by using the tool socio demographic proforma and workplace harassment rating scale developed by the investigators. The workplace harassment rating scale consisted total of 40 items distributed in terms of physical, personal, psychological, verbal, work related and sexual harassment. The maximum score was 200, which was arbitrarily categorized and interpreted as score <40 =no harassment, 41-80 = occasional harassment, 81-120=mild harassment, 121-160= moderate harassment and score above 161 indicated severe harassment. Tools were validated and checked for reliability (Cronbach’s alpha r=0.98). The English version of the tool was translated to Kannada version and checked for the language validity. After pretesting of the tools it was revealed that the tools were in simple language and were able to elicit the data required. The time taken to complete the tool was 15 minutes.

2	Type of family		
	a. Nuclear	36	52.17
	b. joint	30	43.48
	c. Extended	1	1.44
	d. Single parent	1	2.89
3	Marital Status		
	a. Married	31	44.9
	b. Unmarried	35	50.7
	c. Widow/widower	3	4.3
4	Educational Status		
	a. Professional	34	49.3
	b. Graduate/Postgraduate	28	40.6
	c. Intermediate/PUC/10+2/diploma	7	10.1
5.	Type of employment		
	a. Permanent	26	37.7
	b. Temporary	35	50.7
	c. Probationary	5	7.2
	d. Contract Basis	3	4.3

The indicates that larger number of women employees (49.3%) belonged to age group 21-25. Among them 52.17% belonged to nuclear family and 43.48% from

joint family. Nearly half of the subjects were unmarried; had professional qualification and were working based on temporary basis.

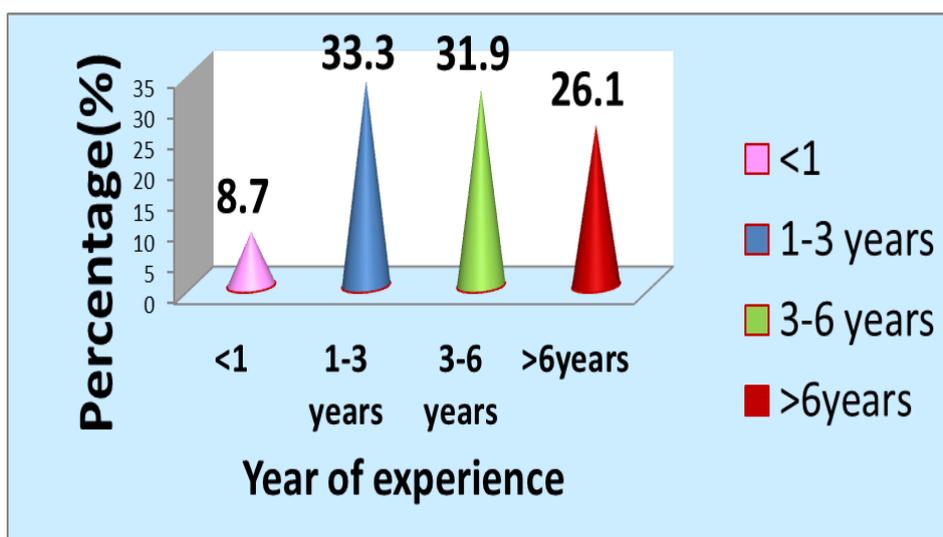


Figure1. Cylindrical diagram on years of experience.

As indicated in the figure 1 highest percentage of subjects had 1-3 years of experience, 31.9% had 3-6 years experience and 26.1% had more than 6 years of experience.

Data also revealed that 37.7% of the subjects were drawing monthly income more than Rs. 38,000/-

#### Experience of Harassment among women employees

The data revealed that 55.1% of them reported occasional harassment and 7.2% reported mild workplace harassment, whereas 37.3% reported no harassment. None of the study subjects reported either severe or moderate harassment.

Table 2 Area wise harassment score

Areas	N	Minimum score	Maximum score	Mean $\pm$ sd
Personal	69	6	21	10.15 $\pm$ 3.66
Verbal	69	3	11	4.11 $\pm$ 1.85
Physical	69	3	9	3.76 $\pm$ 1.35
Sexual	69	8	18	8.47 $\pm$ 1.66
Work related	69	7	25	10.56 $\pm$ 4.13
Psychological	69	11	34	15.17 $\pm$ 6.74

The data presented indicates that mean score of harassment was higher in psychological area ( $15.17 \pm 6.74$ ) in comparison to the other areas. The least of the mean score was in the physical harassment area ( $3.76 \pm 1.35$ ).

Further the association between the socio demographic variables and the level of harassment indicated that there was a significant association between harassment and the level of education, indicating the harassment was more among those with lower educational qualification. ( $\chi^2_{(4)} = 0.005$ ).

## DISCUSSION

The study findings revealed that 55.1% of them reported occasional harassment and 7.2% reported mild workplace harassment. The results also indicates that nearly 50% of the subjects were below 25 years of age and were working based on contract basis. It is possible that younger women with no permanent job may perceive the workplace requirement as harassment. The findings of the study coincides with the four nation survey conducted by the international women and child rights NGO<sup>3</sup>. However 37.3% reported no harassment and none of the study subjects reported either severe or moderate harassment. It doesn't indicate absence of workplace harassment rather the women employees hesitate to report such experiences with fear of facing further consequences and the repercussions. These findings are in congruence with the results according to a survey conducted by the Indian Bar Association in 2017 of 6,047 respondents that 70% working women don't report sexual harassment at workplace.<sup>[9]</sup>

Area wise harassment score indicated that highest mean score ( $15.17 \pm 6.74$ ) was in the area of psychological harassment followed by work related ( $10.56 \pm 4.13$ ) and personal harassment ( $10.15 \pm 3.66$ ). These findings are contradictory to the findings revealed by Unnikrishnan B., Rekha T et.al.<sup>[5]</sup>, that majority (67.3%) of harassment was verbal in manner whereas 22.7% were physical. In the present study the least of the mean score was in the physical harassment area ( $3.76 \pm 1.35$ ).

Study findings also indicate that there was a statistically significant association between the level of harassment and the level of education, indicating the harassment was more among those with lower educational qualification. ( $\chi^2_{(4)} = 0.005$ ). It could be that women experience harassment is based on the their sensitivity to the experience which would reflect the personal consequences.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the study findings it is concluded that workplace harassment among is a prevalent problem. Women employees hesitate to report workplace harassment fearing the consequences despite the existing problems.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The investigator sincerely acknowledges the support given by the Yenepoya University for seed grant. Sincere gratitude to study participants.

**Conflicts of interest:** None.

## REFERENCE

1. Harassment by employer: what actions can you take? Available from: <http://www.chakreview.com/Social-issues/Harassment-by-employer-what-actions-can-youtake>.
2. International Labour Office, International Council of Nurses, World Health Organization, Public services International, Joint Programme on workplace violence in the Health Sector. Geneva 2002, (Online) 2016 Cited on Dec. 2016; Available from URL:<http://www.icn/proof3b.screen.pdf>.
3. The TIMES OF INDIA Saturday, November 26, page 1: '41% of Indian women face violence before 19'.
4. Ulasi I. Gender bias in access to healthcare in Nigeria: A study of end-stage renal disease. *Trop Doct.* 2008; 38: 50–2. [PubMed].
5. Unnikrishnan B., Rekha T., Ganesh Kumar, Reshmi B., Mithra P. and Sanjeev B. Harassment among Women at Workplace: A Cross-Sectional Study in Coastal South India. *Indian Journal of Community Medicine*.
6. Harassment by employer: what actions can you take? Available from: <http://www.chakreview.com/Social-issues/Harassment-by-employer-what-actions-can-youtake>.
7. Fitzgerald, L F. Assessing strategies for coping with harassment: A theoretical empirical approach. Paper presented at the Midwinter conference of the Association for women in Psychology, Tempe, AZ.
8. Frank E., Brogan D., Schiffman M. Prevalence and correlates of harassment among US women physicians. *Arch Intern Med.* 1998; 158: 352-358.
9. The TIMES OF INDIA Sunday March 5, 2017, page 6: "70% working women don't report sexual harassment at workplace".