



Exploring Sexual Harassment and Students' Academic Performance: A Case Study of Business Schools of Peshawar City

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Abstract: Business schools appear to be under-researched when it comes to sexual harassment. Because of the hesitancy of victims to report their experiences, sexual harassment in academia is often a hidden issue. In the last few years, the media and research have paid great attention to it, and the general public is becoming more aware of it. This research work aimed to find out the students' knowledge about sexual harassment, the types faced by students, and further, evaluate up to what extent sexual harassment impedes the academic performance of students. The study also aimed to find various elements leading to the sexual harassment experience of males and females in the classroom. The data of this qualitative study are collected through 30 semi-structured interviews from students of public and private business schools in Peshawar city. The study investigates the effect of sexual harassment on the academic performance of students. The results indicate that it affects the mental health and morale of students and it leads to dissatisfaction. Hence, there is a crucial need to develop sustainable systems to redress the structure through anti-sexual harassment policies.

Introduction

According to the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index Report 2020, Pakistan is rated 151 out of 153 nations worldwide. This is exacerbated by Pakistan's overall rating dropping from 112 in 2006 to 151 in 2020, with the country constantly scoring poorly on all gender-related indicators. Pakistan's rank in terms of educational attainment has declined from 110 in 2006 to 143 in 2020, while its position in terms of economic involvement and opportunity has declined from 112 to 150. These numbers are adequate to demonstrate that the country has done dismally in terms of gender parity and that

it is continuing in the wrong direction (Tara & Ahsan, 2020).

Sexual harassment is closely related to the issue of inequality and discrimination since it prohibits women from having equal access to economic opportunities, education, and work. In recent years, particularly in the context of the worldwide 'Me Too' movement, harassment has garnered notoriety in Pakistan, where, despite the pervasiveness of the problem, reporting and punishment remain exceedingly low (Ali et al., 2022). Despite the backlash, this movement has raised hundreds of new questions about how harassment-related issues should be addressed,

recorded, investigated, and, most importantly, presented at various professional and educational institutions in Pakistan (Imtiaz & Kamal, 2021).

Sexual harassment is creating a serious problem in universities (Lichty & Campbell, 2012). The issue of who harasses male lecturers and female students is yet undefined. It is difficult for females to report sexual harassment as a lot of societal factors; such are patriarchy and lack of response to victims (Gillander & Stein, 2019). Sexual harassment has negative psychological, and physiological effects on students. Besides this, it leads to poor academic performance of the student (Haider & Vaseer, 2013).

There are many universities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, numerous cases have been recognized of inappropriate behavior, because of the Pashtoon culture and male dominance females are not disclosing the truth, which they have confronted or acknowledged during their education (Naz & Ahmad, 2012). After numerous cases of sexual harassment faced by female students, some of the universities have chosen to decrease the energy of internal analysts to handle the issue of provocation and misuse of understudies by University faculty. The college has intended to set up a different division to direct examinations and contract the important staff. This decision will help in eradicating sexual harassment cases (Ahmer et al., 2010).

The government of Pakistan introduced the first women's protection law in 2006, named the "Women Protection Act". Due to the increasing number of sexual harassment cases, the governments of Pakistan compel to introduce the law in 2010 by the name of "Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace" and "Prevention of anti-women Practices" in 2011. However, sexual harassment can be eliminated from the classrooms by the enforcement of laws and proper implementation of policies.

There is a crucial need to control sexual harassment at the higher education level because

many serious problems can occur due to sexual harassment. It can create physical and psychological problems for the students, management, and quality of education (Magley, 1997). Sexual harassment has remained an across-the-board issue in Pakistan. The problem of sexual harassment has particularly been high among university students and faculty (López et al., 2020). Inappropriate behavior has remained a reason for increasing cases of harassment.

Harassment has particularly been high among male & female students in the co-education system (Bayar & Uçanok, 2012). When it comes to sexual harassment, business schools tend to be under-researched. Sexual harassment in academia is frequently a hidden issue due to victims' reluctance to report their experiences. The media and researchers have devoted close attention to it in recent years, and the general public is becoming more aware of it. This study sought to determine students' understanding of sexual harassment, the forms of sexual harassment experienced by students, and the extent to which sexual harassment impedes a student's academic performance.

Research Question

The research questions that are addressed in the study are as follows:

- What is sexual harassment from students' perspective?
- To what extent does sexual harassment impede the academic performance of students?
- How we can minimize sexual harassment in business schools?

Research Objectives

The objectives of the study are as follows:

- To find out the students' knowledge about sexual harassment, and the types faced by business school students.
- To evaluate to what extent sexual harassment impedes the academic performance of a student.

- To recommendations will be proposed to overcome sexual harassment in business schools.

Research Methodology

A qualitative methodology was used because qualitative research gives an in-depth perspective of the phenomena (Hu et al., 2021). The population of this study was students of business schools 19 years or above. A sample of thirty students was selected from public and private business schools in Peshawar city. The sample of 30 students was taken from the Institute of the Management Studies University of Peshawar, Institute of Management Sciences Peshawar, Peshawar Business School, Brains College University, Islamia College University, and City University of Science and Information Technology, Peshawar. The students were selected using the snowball sampling technique. The semi-structured interviews were conducted because the concept of sexual harassment and its effects cannot be easily found without face-to-face discussion. Appointments were taken by students and they were informed through email and call about the interview timing. Interviews were conducted on the university's premises. During the interview, they were assured that their name and identity will be kept confidential. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. After transcribing the interviews, the codes were derived from the transcribed interviews. The content analysis was used, after open and axial coding the themes were derived to analyze the data. And in the end, the data was analyzed and interpreted.

Literature Review

Sexual harassment is a form of humiliating, intimidating, or any kind of unwelcome sexual behavior (Russell, 1984). There are various kinds of sexual harassment, for instance, flirting, catcalling, sexual favors, and unwanted compliments. Women are suffering more due to less empowerment (Fitzgerald et al., 1999). Sexual harassment is a kind of school violence

that tries to frighten, humiliate, and victimize students with physical, psychological, and cyber-based sexual tactics (López et al., 2020). Reciprocal response and mutual interest define socially acceptable sexual behavior, because, in every society, where there is an interaction between males and females, some level of sexual attraction is expected (Bakken, 1994).

Till (1980) classified sexual harassment into five main categories: seductive behavior, sexual bribery, gender harassment, sexual imposition or assault, and sexual coercion. Furthermore, the author explained that these five categories be assumed to be a level of harassment because these were present in that era. However, mentioned that these can be further explained in other future studies according to their culture, era, and location.

Benson & Thomson (1982) examine that a study of sexual harassment in every organization has not been done, because of any proper definition and measurement of sexual harassment. U.S Merit System Protection Board (USMSPB 1981, 1987) presented sexual harassment with the proper checklist which includes seven factors i.e., suggestive looks, catcalling, pressure for dates, deliberate touching, unwelcome sexual remarks, telephone calls, attempted or completed rape, and unwelcome letters.

Fitzgerald et al., (1995) worked on the Sexual Experiences Questionnaire (SEQ), the first attempt to measure the frequency of sexual harassment in a manner that met traditional psychometric standards. Based on the original SEQ designed for the content of Till's (1980), in which they have developed five dimensions via different items based on the literature and searches that have been done by major subject experts. A Full Sexual experiences questionnaire was developed in strictly behavioral terms and standard format. They instructed all respondents to circle the response according to their own experience which is closely related to their experiences on the measurement scale more than

once, once or never. There are many studies (e.g., Beere, 1990, Arvey & Cavanaugh, 1995 ;) that have applied SEQ with different numbers, cultures, languages, areas, occupational organisations, and educational settings.

Gruber (1992) recommended sexual harassment-specific types composed of 11 categories which are organized in three main orders: verbal remarks, nonverbal displays, and requests remarks. Each of these categories contains a subset of the 11 types of sexual harassment (e.g., relational advances, sexual advances, subtle pressure/advances, and verbal requests composed of sexual bribery) which Gruber arranged in decreasing order of severity.

Sadrudin, (2013) conducted a phenomenological study on sexual harassment at the workplace. The study was limited to the participants of private and public workplaces in Karachi. The study suggests strong policies and provides training to women. The author suggests education and empowerment as a tool to overcome this challenge. Women are facing such issues because they are unaware of their rights.

Burgess et al., (1986) report the discoveries of an examination of the self-detailed occurrences of inappropriate behavior of understudies in four logical fields. There were 1178 respondents, 2% the men and 17% of the women, revealed were sexually harassed by their teachers. The aftereffects of the cross-unthinkable investigation show that of the 101 composed depictions of inappropriate behavior, 38 are accounted for at or before secondary school. Notwithstanding, a precise examination of these composed portrayals shows that there is no "sort" of sexual behavior encounter that can be put more on one level of tutoring than one another. The outcomes additionally recommend that as women proceed with their training their odds of experiencing inappropriate behavior from educators are probably going to increment.

Stockdale et al., (2004) stated that there is no proper definition of sexual harassment because

of differing perceptions, religions, and cultures across the world. The theoretical work on sexual harassment was done for the first time in the 1980s by till when the systematic map was developed which attempt to find out various kinds of sexual harassment.

McGinley, (2019) explains the role of schools in supporting gender-based harassment and peer sex among students, as well as the role of the law in holding schools accountable for their negligent and willful actions in condoning it. The first section of the research looks at evidence of gender-based harassment in schools. The second section of the study examines the issue through the perspective of masculinities theory, explaining how societal concepts of masculinity provide incentives for boys (and some girls) to participate in sex- and gender-based harassment among their peers.

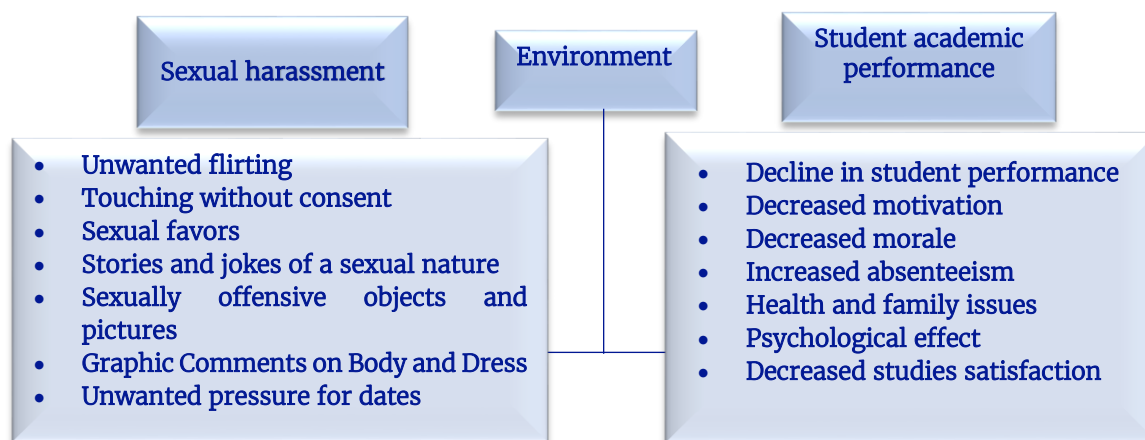
López et al., (2020) indicated in the study that sexual harassment has been increasingly common in recent years, affecting many students. In Chile's primary and middle schools, there is minimal understanding of peer sexual harassment. Social discrimination based on sexism, ableism, and racism exists. Schools must implement inclusive school climate rules that allow all kids to feel comfortable in the classroom.

Conceptual Framework

Sexual harassment is any verbal or physical conduct of sexual nature such as abuse, touching, flirting, and rape (Mutalip & Mohamed, 2012). Student academic performance means the working capacity and growing interest of students in academics, including student satisfaction and morale (Poropat, 2009). There are two concepts: sexual harassment and student academic performance. The indicators of sexual harassment are unwanted flirting, touching without consent, sexual favors, stories and jokes of a sexual nature, sexually offensive objects and pictures, graphic comments on the body and dress, and unwanted pressure for dates.

While the indicators of student academic performance are, a decline in student performance, decreased motivation, decreased morale, increased absenteeism, health and family issues, psychological effects, and

decreased study satisfaction. And there is a concept of support which plays a pivotal role in sexual harassment and students' academic performance.



Many physiological and sociological theories are developed to explain the effects of sexual harassment or abuse on human health and academic performance. Many students are facing a wide range of devastating effects of sexual harassment, which impedes their educational life and academic performance (Collins, 1997). The target of sexual harassment may have experienced Anger, fear, self-consciousness, or embarrassment. They also face difficulty sleeping and a loss of appetite (Cohen, 2005).

This study is based on the social learning and behavioral change theory. According to social learning theory, social conduct is learned through seeing and copying the behavior of others. As an alternative to the previous work of fellow psychologist B.F. Skinner noted for his effect on behaviorism, psychologist Albert Bandura created the social learning theory External link. While behavioral psychology focuses on how the environment and reinforcement influence behavior, Bandura proposed that individuals might learn behavior by observing others (Lian et al., 2022).

The graphic comments on body and dress can minimize her academic performance and can

increase absenteeism (Viner et al., 2020). Students who faced such situations at their educational institutions were less apt to consider returning to university. Sexually harassed students have reported absenteeism, and dropped classes to avoid a hostile environment (Bennett et al., 2007). Sexual harassment has a bad effect on student academic performance. Due to fear of punishment Performance of students suffers. Students start losing interest in their studies. The student finds it very hard to concentrate on their studies (Kheswa & Notole, 2014).

The concept of the environment has strongly affected the sexual harassment and academic performance of students (Cantalupo, 2019). The environment plays an important role in the academic performance of students. A hostile environment characterized by pervasive sexual harassment can make students uncomfortable (Street et al., 2007).

Findings and Analysis

Sexual harassment is a crime against humanity (Mael, 1998). Harassment in classrooms is a crime that creates an unhealthy environment for

learning and education. The response of this study was well aware of sexual harassment and its impacts on economic and social and individual lives (Leach & Humphreys, 2007). Many of the

participants were asked whether they know about sexual harassment and whether they face such a situation, the majority of the respondents reveal that somehow, they faced such situations.

Table

S. No	Name Of the Institution	No of Respondents
1	Institute of Management Studies, University of Peshawar.	7 Respondents
2	Institute of Management Sciences, Peshawar.	5 Respondents
3	Peshawar Business School, Peshawar.	5 Respondents
4	Brains College University, Peshawar.	4 Respondents
5	City University of Science and Information Technology.	5 Respondents
6	Iqra National University, Peshawar	4 Respondents
		Total: 30 Respondents

Sexual harassment harms the education system, organizations, and overall society (Collins, 2004). A sexually harassed student may not feel safe in such an environment they have a problem studying or paying attention in the classroom. They are no longer performing well in class. As their engagement dwindled, they began to avoid particular areas on campus. They no longer attend group study sessions or seminars. They begin to consider skipping a class, altering their major, or even leaving university (Collins, 1997). Sexual harassment includes unwanted flirting with female students affecting students psychologically. This psychological effect includes anxiety, depression, and sleeplessness. Stories and jokes of a sexual nature can decrease student morale and study satisfaction level, in the same way, sexual favors can decrease student motivation levels (MacKinnon, 1979).

One of the responses defined sexual harassment as:

"Harassment in the form of abuse affects one's performance badly due to another person's incorrect behavior or acts."

The result shows that sexual harassment has momentous effects on students' academic performance. Several respondents reported that they were exposed to sexual harassment on the university campus. The performance of students is impeded by sexual harassment which has a

devastating effect on education. After the students facing such a situation find it hard to start their education at the same place they lose their interest in studies (Lichty & Campbell, 2012). The absenteeism and high dropout ratio of females from universities is due to an unsafe environment. It has been found that women are the chief victims of sexual harassment.

"I was sexually harassed but, I never reported it because of the fear of the power of the precipitator. They threaten me and I don't want to take any risks. The best option, after all, was to choose my academic career. I am almost going to graduate. I didn't want to create any mess. As a girl, I have lots of responsibilities and many people are associated with me. I don't want my family to stop me from going to university. I need my degree." ----- Said, respondent

Students in the universities of Peshawar received bad grades as a result of sexual harassment. Teachers abuse their authority for a variety of reasons, including fear of punishment and unfavorable student performance evaluations. The sexually assaulted individual was dissatisfied with their school career. Dissatisfaction, physical disease, and mental health issues are all consequences of sexual harassment. The student may acquire emotional issues and become angry as a result of the social, educational, and psychological repercussions.

Female victims become susceptible and often grow enraged at their offenders or all males around them (Black & Gold, 2008).

One of the respondents said:

"The vast majority of my lecturers during my student career were men, so I had many sexual fantasies about them and an interracial relationship with another during my time as a student. Another lecturer turned me away when I attempted to have a sexual relationship with him. Sometimes my feelings of attraction indeed influenced my course choices: If a teacher was enthusiastic and "turned me on" to a subject, I might choose to take it". ---- Said, respondent

The study also finds out interesting facts that not only men sexually harass women, but some women also harass men to get good grades and favors. Some of the students create such relationships with teachers and other officials. The situation depicts the gloomy picture of an unhealthy environment.

Some of the students blamed the hostile environment for such type of unethical activities. Gender harassment is related to hostile work or education. The environment of every place differs from each other, and not following the proper customs and traditions creates some problems. The mindset of people plays an important role in sexual cases.

"Even in pretty modern major cities of Pakistan, such as Karachi and Islamabad, I can walk alone in a Western dress in certain areas of the city without being censured and accosted for not being traditionally veiled and cloaked, but in Peshawar, I cannot go outside without properly covered dress and veil due to the tradition of "Parda." The truth is that the environment is crucial. --- said the respondent

One of the students narrated a story:

"When I was a third-semester university student, I was taught by numerous male professors, including one who had been "sacked" by a university tribunal after allegations of unwelcome sexual interest

toward female students. The lecturer was accused of chasing a female student who warned him repeatedly that his attempts were unwanted. Even though his wife objected when he told her about his pursuit of the student, he rationalized it by claiming that his marriage was monotonous and he needed some excitement in his life. The professor was acting normally, and he was attempting to seduce his female pupils by taking advantage of the "perks of being a professor. It is intimated that there would be no one to listen to professors' fusty old thoughts and theories if it weren't for adoring female students. The respondent also argued that business schools did not use the proper check and balance mechanism. They are less concerned about their business studies and future."

One of the respondents disagrees and comments that it depends on a person's ethical values and customs until and unless we do not allow people they cannot be harassed or harm us.

"I make my environment. I came to university daily and study with lots of my classmates, but not even a single man ever teased or harassed me, because when a woman is empowered and she knows her right rights and boundaries. Unless or until a woman is empowered it is not likely to take place at any organization or institution." --- said the respondent

When the participants of the study were asked which methods and tactics, they use to handle the sexual harassment situation many of them believed that complaining or ignoring is the best possible solution to such cases.

Following were the important themes derived from the responses:

- i. leave the place immediately
- ii. Ignoring
- iii. Absenteeism
- iv. Peaceful Dialogue with HR
- v. Kick the sensitive part of that person
- vi. Scream hard
- vii. Go straight to the family or parents of those men/women to complain

The respondents suggest that a person facing such a situation should ignore taking any action

on the spot if they are trying to be physical either scream harder or run away and try to leave that place as soon as possible. They should directly consult the administration immediately and submit a complaint against that person. They can, later on, leave that place so that they will not harm or any act of revenge cannot be planned.

Conclusion & Recommendation

Sexual harassment is an issue of global concern. It has many adverse consequences on society as a whole. Sexual harassment in educational places is a serious problem that needs to be addressed. It has been found that most victims are women (Ali et al., 2022). It impedes the academic performance of the students. Sexual harassment is a crime against humanity. Sexual harassment affected students psychologically and sociologically. It not only affects mental health, but the student also lost their morale and it leads to dissatisfaction.

There are specific laws policies and proper mechanisms of enforcement in developed countries, while in Pakistan it is still a taboo topic (Haider & Vaseer, 2013). In the past, it was just women victims of harassment in societies, but due to various changes in the environment, males are also affected and experiencing harassment, However, due to the increasing manifestation of social vices poor policies and an unsafe environment universities are producing poor quality graduates (Wilson, 2000).

Sexual harassment is commonly practised by the top management and officials having more power in an organization or institution. People are facing sexual harassment in workplaces and classrooms due to many reasons, which impacted their working performance (Gruber, 1992). Many the researchers believe that the problem of sexual harassment is increasing due to less empowered women in our society, but at the same time, many studies show that not only women the men also face such situations. This indicated that sexual harassment is not limited to one gender only (Haider & Vaseer, 2013).

This study's respondents were largely young people between the ages of 19 and 24. According to the conclusions of this study, both male and female students are subjected to sexual harassment on campus.

There are some recommendations to overcome this menace:

- There should be more legislation to protect students from sexual harassment.
- The presence of the policy and how to use the grievance system, as well as the definition of sexual harassment, should be made known to all sectors of the higher education institution. When the first-year female and male students arrive at school, these efforts should be focused specifically on them. All students should be provided with clear standards about campus safety and facilities.
- The Department of Human Resources, which is in charge of planning and implementation, should assume responsibility for sexual harassment training for employees and students, and a budget should be set aside for this purpose to ensure successful implementation.
- Perpetrators should be punished publicly for this heinous crime.
- The perpetrator should be suspended to avoid such situations in academic places.
- There must be awareness campaigns; non-governmental organizations can play their role in this regard. The Media enlighten campaign should be carried out.

Limitations of the Study and Future Directions

The limitation of this study is that it is a case study of business schools of Peshawar city only. The sample size was limited due to the sensitivity of the issue as many of the students were reluctant to disclose their harassment experiences. However, the findings might still be useful in providing a baseline for comparing students' perceptions of sexual harassment

across other schools. It may also be used as a starting point for future research on the subject. Future research can find out the sexual harassment perceptions of students in technical higher education institutions and can make a statistical analysis of data as the current study used only qualitative techniques.

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