RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WORKPLACE HARASSMENT AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS AMONG SALES GIRLS IN PAKISTAN: MODERATING ROLE OF COPING

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to find out the relationship between Workplace Harassment, Coping Strategies and Psychological Distress among Sales Girls in Pakistan. Data of 130 participants was collected from different shopping malls of Lahore city. The age range of the participants was 18 to 35 years (M= 22.88, SD=3.42). NAQ-R, Brief COPE Inventory and Kessler Psychological Distress Scale were used to collect data from participants. The findings indicated significant positive relationship between workplace harassment and psychological distress. Workplace harassment has significant positive relationship with problem focused coping. Avoidant emotional coping is also significantly and positively correlated with PD. Coping strategies moderate between the workplace harassment and psychological distress among sales girls. The issue of workplace harassment has broad consequences. At any organizational level workplace harassment creates unpleasant working environment and also effects on their psychological health. To manage this problem of harassment, women take support of different coping strategies. The positive relationship of avoidant coping strategy with psychological distress explains that women feel hesitate to report so they try to avoid the situation that could affect their psychological health.

Keywords. Workplace Harassment, Coping Strategies, Psychological Distress, Sales Girls

Introduction

Workplace harassment or workplace bullying may take several different forms, it tends to be physical, verbal, nonverbal, sexual, socially detaching, aberrant social control, corrupting treatment, or attitudinal. In Pakistan women are considered the symbol of respect for whole family and if they suffer from some harassing behavior, it is perceived that they have earned disrespect for their families (Lari, 2011). The harassment of employees has been less overtly investigated however some previous researches showed it as significant problem the employees faced especially women during the course of their jobs (Harris & Daunt, 2013) and it leads to distress, disruption and workplace conflict (Murphy, et. al, 2015). Psychological distress refers to non-specific symptoms of stress, anxiety and depression. People can utilize various styles to cope for workplace harassment. Individuals can use different styles to cope the harassment. The coping process has been viewed primarily as a response to the emotional reactions stirred by a stressful person-environment encounter (Folkman & Lazarus, 1988; Long, et al, .1992). According to Fitzgerald, et al., (1999), these responses can be categorized into some externally and internally focused responses. External responses may include lodging a complaint or reporting, and seeking social support. While ignoring, avoiding, taking light are some forms of internally used coping strategies. Workplace harassment could be considered as a stressful event which could negatively impact on those involved (Hunter & Boyle, 2002). With regards to the relationship between psychological distress and the coping strategies utilized by victims a greater reliance on coping strategies was thus associated with greater psychological distress. (Endler et al., 1998; Gullone et al., 2001; Ireland et al., 2005)

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Literature Review

A study conducted by Ali and Hira (2018) the connection between customer's connected social stressors and mental health among sales girls by examining the elements of working of sales girls at the specific employment with the customer. Pearson correlation and regression analysis was utilized and the outcomes showed that costumer related social stressors was viewed as essentially contrarily relationship with enthusiastic prosperity and social prosperity while sexual harassment was found to be significantly negatively correlated with Social Wellbeing and Psychological Wellbeing. Sexual Harassment, Customer Related Social stressors and Interaction term of both were found to be negative and significant predictors of psychological wellbeing.

A correlational study was conducted by Shahid and Farooq in 2020 to evaluate the relationship among workplace harassment, work over-burden, and psychological distress in female cops. It was guessed that there would be a positive connection between workplace harassment, work over-burden, and psychological distress. The sample included 100 female cops with age range from 21-40 years chose from various police headquarters and preparing focuses of Lahore by utilizing purposive testing strategy. Correlational examination uncovered that workplace harassment was positively correlated with work over-burden and psychological distress. A study was conducted by Gilani and Waqar (2018) to find out the connection between sexual harassment and coping strategies used by domestic female workers. Respondents included 100 female homegrown laborers, from various ghetto spaces of Islamabad and Rawalpindi. Results demonstrated that sexual harassment and undesirable sexual consideration were the most widely recognized experienced sorts of inappropriate behavior. The results provided evidence of negative relationship of sexual harassment with internal coping strategies and positive relationship with avoidance as external coping strategy.

A study was conducted by Yasmeen and Jabeen in 2017 with respect to sexual harassment and its psychological effects represent following results in terms of prevalence of sexual harassment and its psychological effects in public and private organizations. The majority of respondents from private sector are harassed more than those working in government sector and results reveal that majority of the respondents are facing harassment at workplace. Government and private sectors are compared in this study and results highlight prevalence of more harassment in private sector than in government sector. The majority of respondents from private sector are harassed more than those working in government sector. The results of t-test showed that there is significant mean difference between both sectors in terms of prevalence of sexual harassment. In this study depression and anxiety was studied as the psychological effects of harassment. Majority respondents in government sector are anxious and depressed at moderate level. In private sector, majority respondents are depressed and anxious at severe level. This study was conducted to explore ways of dealing with stress as a mediator in connection between workplace harassing and work fulfillment among specialists. Control investigation uncovered that no singular way of dealing with stress moderate in connection among harassing and occupation fulfillment. Consequences of Independent example t-test showed that female specialists working in open clinics face seriously harassing. The aftereffects of the current exploration have suggestions to give understanding to give the adequate mental assurance to specialists to deliver great work execution. (Malik and Bano 2016)

A study by Shahzad and Malik (2014) on workplace violence in nurses revealed that the majority of the nurses experienced hostile behavior and verbal abuse frequently. Malik and Farooqi (2014) found that women facing workplace harassment had a greater chance of developing PTSD symptoms. A study was conducted by Gilani and Waqar (2018) to find out the connection between sexual harassment and coping strategies used by domestic female workers. Respondents included 100 female homegrown laborers, from various ghetto spaces of Islamabad and Rawalpindi. Results demonstrated that sexual harassment and undesirable sexual consideration were the most widely recognized experienced sorts of inappropriate behavior. The results provided evidence of negative relationship of sexual harassment with internal coping strategies and positive relationship with avoidance as external coping strategy.

A study conducted by Richmana, et al using data from a two-wave survey of university employees (*N*=2038), we addressed the extent to which active coping was utilized by harassed and abused employees, whether coping impacted on the continuation or cessation of harassment and abuse. Results shows Active coping had no significant impact on the ability to end harassing or abusive experiences. Moreover, the use of problem-focused coping that was unsuccessful predicted some drinking outcomes for both men and women, controlling for Wave 1 drinking and socio demographic characteristics.

Material and method

Sample

130 Participants were selected through purposive sampling from different Shopping Malls of Lahore. Female between the age group of 18 years to 35 years (M= 22.88, SD=3.42). Only those sales girls who had been working at shopping mall since at least 6 months were recruited in the sample. The sales girls who were performing their job at shopping malls of proper organization or company.

Hypothesis 1: There would be positive relationship between Workplace harassment, Coping Strategies and Psychological Distress among Sales Girls.

Hypothesis 2: Coping Strategies is likely to moderate the relationship between workplace harassment and psychological distress among sales girl.
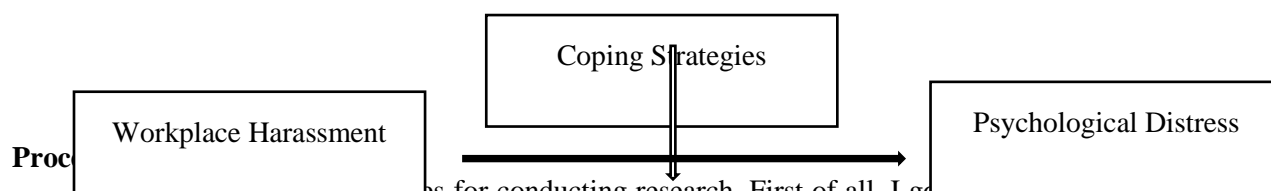
Processing ... es for conducting research. First of all, I got permission from my head of department. Subjects were sales girls who will volunteers for the research. Then, I had taken inform consent from sales girls that participate in research. I had given them informed consents and three questionnaires.

Measures

Negative Act Questionnaire-Revised (NAQ-R)

It was used to measure workplace harassment. It was developed by Einarsen et al. (2009) consisting of 22 items which measure various negative acts on workplace. A five-point Likert scale from never to daily was used in that scale. Total scores were computed by adding the responses on all items.

The Brief Cope

The Brief COPE (Carver, 1997) has 28 items and it contains 14 subscales which are combined more specifically into 3 subscales that were used in present study. Problem focused coping, active emotional coping and avoidant emotional coping. Internal reliabilities of these subscales are .80, .81, .80 respectively.

Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10)

This scale is widely recommended as the measure of psychological distress. The scale consisted of 10 statements about negative emotions and every item is rated on a five-point scale. The scale can be used as a brief instrument to identify people's level of distress. Total scores were computed by adding the responses on all items. Item example is "During the last 30 days, about how often did you feel nervous".

Result and Discussion

Inter-Correlation among Study Variables

Table 1

Summary of inter-correlation, Mean and Standard deviation for the scores on study Workplace Harassment, Coping strategies and Psychological Distress for the total sample of sales girls(N=130)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1.WPH	--	.44***	.11	.11	.20*
2. PFC	--	--	.12	.21	.19
3. AEC	--	--	--	.57	.27
4. AVEC	--	--	--	--	.42***
5.PD	--	--	--	--	--

*Note, *p<.05; ***p<0.001, M=Mean, SD = Standard Deviation; WPH= Workplace Harassment, PFC=Problem Focused Coping; AEC= Active Emotional Coping; AVEC= Avoidant Emotional Coping; PD= Psychological Distress*

The result indicated that WPH has significantly correlated with psychological distress r (130) = .20, <.001. WPH also showed strong positive correlation with PFC, r (130) = .44, <.001, whereas, AVEC strong positive correlation with psychological Distress, r (130) =.42, <.001.

These results also confirm that coping strategies likely to mediate the relationship between workplace harassment and psychological distress.

Table 2
Moderation Analysis
Multiple Regression Analysis on Coping Strategies as moderator between workplace harassment and psychological distress among sales girls (N= 130)

Variables	B	ΔR^2
Step I		
Workplace harassment	.20*	.03*
Step II		
Coping Strategies	.37***	.15***
Step III		
WPH X CP	-.36***	.25***

*Note.*p>.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001*

Finding revealed that the model I explained 3 percent variance in psychological distress with F (1, 128) = 5.37, p >.05. Model I also show that workplace harassment is significant predictor of psychological distress. In step II coping strategies was added to assess prediction of psychological distress. Moreover, Model II explained 15 percent variance in psychological distress with F (1, 127) =18.73, p<.001. In next step interaction of workplace harassment wand coping strategies was added and result showed that interaction was significant and negative predictor of psychological distress and explained 25 percent variance in psychological distress with F (1, 126)= 18.01, p,<001. So, findings highlighted that coping strategies is playing significant moderating role in between workplace harassment and psychological distress.

Taken together, the results indicated that more workplace harassment in workplace is likely to suffer more psychological distress by sales girls. Further who used more avoidant emotional coping is likely to suffer more psychological distress.

Discussion

The study was conducted in Pakistan, for indigenous study of determine the relationship between workplace harassment, coping strategies and psychological distress among sales girls.

It is hypothesized that there would be significant positive relationship between Workplace harassment, Coping Strategies and Psychological distress among sales girls. Findings of the current study have shown that hypothesis is accepted and study's result matched with previous results Wolfe, et al., (1998) who found significant positive relationship between workplace harassment and mental distress. There is sufficient empirical evidence, which suggest that being harassed in the workplace setting is associated with mental distress (Hansen et al. 2006; Niedhammer, et al, 2006; Rayner, et al., 2002; Skarlicki & Kilick, 2005; Vartia, 2001; Zapf, et al., 1996). The previous research findings suggest that victimization and unfair treatment caused by the hostile and violent behavior of colleagues and other individuals may produce high level of distress and symptoms of PTSD (Creamer, 2000).

Some studies have included similar items in their bullying scales, such as rumours and saying nasty things behind someone's back, e.g., Zapf et al. (1996). Nasty teasing as well as gossip and rumours were used in the Einarsen and Raknes (1997) study and Rayner (1997) used malicious rumor. In the studies of Einarsen et al. and Zapf et al., spreading rumors were in fact the most often used bullying behavior. So, although current study includes only two different potential bullying behaviors, these are probably relatively frequent bullying behaviors, and the respondents may very well have been subjected to more negative acts than the ones we have asked about.

A study was conducted on workplace bullying and coping strategies in which result indicated significant positive relationship between workplace bullying and active emotional coping strategies and between workplace bullying avoidant coping strategies. (Sadia & Shehnaz 2016). Avoidant coping is also used in workplace setting, means simply to avoid the stressful situation. (Smith & Sulsky, 1995).

The results indicate that people who are subjected to negative acts do not use problem solving as a coping strategy as often as people who are not subjected to such negative acts. This result partly agrees with what Niedl (1996) found in his interview study of the process of coping with bullying. He found that the respondents used a sequence of coping strategies when bullied, often beginning with problem solving. When this did not work they tended to react with other forms of coping. Since we asked about exposure to negative acts in the past 12 months we can assume that this had been going on for some time, at least for some of the respondents, and they may have given up trying to solve the problem. Problem solving strategies are used in order to find solutions to problems or possible ways of acting that help control a situation. They can also help gain some personal control of a situation (Folkman, 1997). However, problem solving strategies are mainly used in situations where people believe that they can do something constructive to help the situation (Mirdal, 1990). Being subjected to negative acts in the workplace may be such a situation where a person finds it more difficult to solve a problem than when not being subjected to negative acts. When subjected to negative acts and bullying the respondents also may feel out of control and in a situation they cannot escape. Being in such a situation can lead to a feeling of helplessness (Flannery, 1987). Feeling helpless may also lead to other coping strategies than problem solving. Another explanation could be that, since a superior bullied almost half of the bullied respondents, it would make it difficult for these respondents to defend themselves. In other studies, part of the definition of bullying is that individuals have to be in a situation where they are unable to defend themselves against bullying (Einarsen, 2000). In such situations they might find strategies other than problem solving to cope with the situation, such as thinking about something else, accepting the situation,

or concentrating on areas with no problems. We have called this avoidance. Coping by avoidance is one of the most common ways for people to deal with stress (Folkman & Lazarus, 1991). The respondents subjected to bullying in this study seem to seek support more often than respondents exposed somewhat to slander and teasing contrary to findings in other studies. We do not know whether they get the support, though. Rayner (1997) found in her study that fewer respondents subjected to bullying tended to seek support from colleagues than non-bullied respondents.

With regards to the relationship between psychological distress and the coping strategies utilized by prisoners, emotional and avoidance coping strategies showed significant and moderate positive correlations with depression, anxiety and stress. A greater reliance on these coping strategies was thus associated with greater psychological distress. These results are consistent with previous research into emotional coping strategies (Endler et al., 1998; Gullone et al., 2001; Ireland et al., 2005).

It is also hypothesize that Coping Strategies is probably going to moderate the relation of workplace harassment and psychological distress among sales. Discoveries of the current review have shown that survival methods are intervening the relationship of work [lace harassment. Study's result coordinated with past writing. Coping Strategies might be utilized as a moderator when an individual attempts to deal with a harassment act which he\she is presented to. The seriousness of the harassing conduct and the upsetting state of the casualty might conclude the kind of survival method utilized by the person in question (Edward & Holden, 2003; Olafsson, 2004).

This study also has some limitations. There is a need to further ensure the fairness of participant responses when they are responding at their workplace. There is a need to focus on experimental studies in organizational settings to tap fair and just responses. A methodological limitation of the current research is that there are many brands outlets in Lahore city did not allow their staff to participate in the current research project. As a result, it was extremely difficult to draw the probability sample from all the brands outlet of Lahore city of Pakistan which might have threatened the internal validity of this research project

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