

# "Long-Term Impacts of Workplace Harassment with a Special Focus on Women Employees"

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### Abstract

**Purpose:** The purpose of the research is to evaluate the long-term impacts of Workplace harassment for women employees.

**Methodology:** For the current study, 3 women who have earlier faced workplace harassment have been chosen for interviewing through confidence sampling where 6 questions related to the topic were asked.

**Findings:** The findings are that women employees have to face a lot of harassment at the workplace which has a major impact on their self-esteem, confidence, career growth, self-esteem, confidence. Organisations need to focus on the establishing support system and strategies for preventing and solving such issues.

**Keywords:** Sexual harassment, women, psychological impact, workplace culture, anti-harassment policy, self-esteem, confidence, anxiety, depression, career.

### Introduction

#### Background

Workplace harassment is one of the common topics yet not a well-researched one. Workplace harassment is a significant issue that employees go through which is so often underreported that it makes it difficult to get addressed (Goldberg, 2020). The concept of workplace harassment can be defined as a broad spectrum of unwelcome behaviours, actions and communication within the workplace that employees go through. It may involve unwelcome conduct based on race, colour, religion, sex, age and many other factors (Ochieng and Kamau, 2021). Harassment at the workplace is not limited to inappropriate behaviour but also consists of actions that undermine a healthy and respectful work environment.

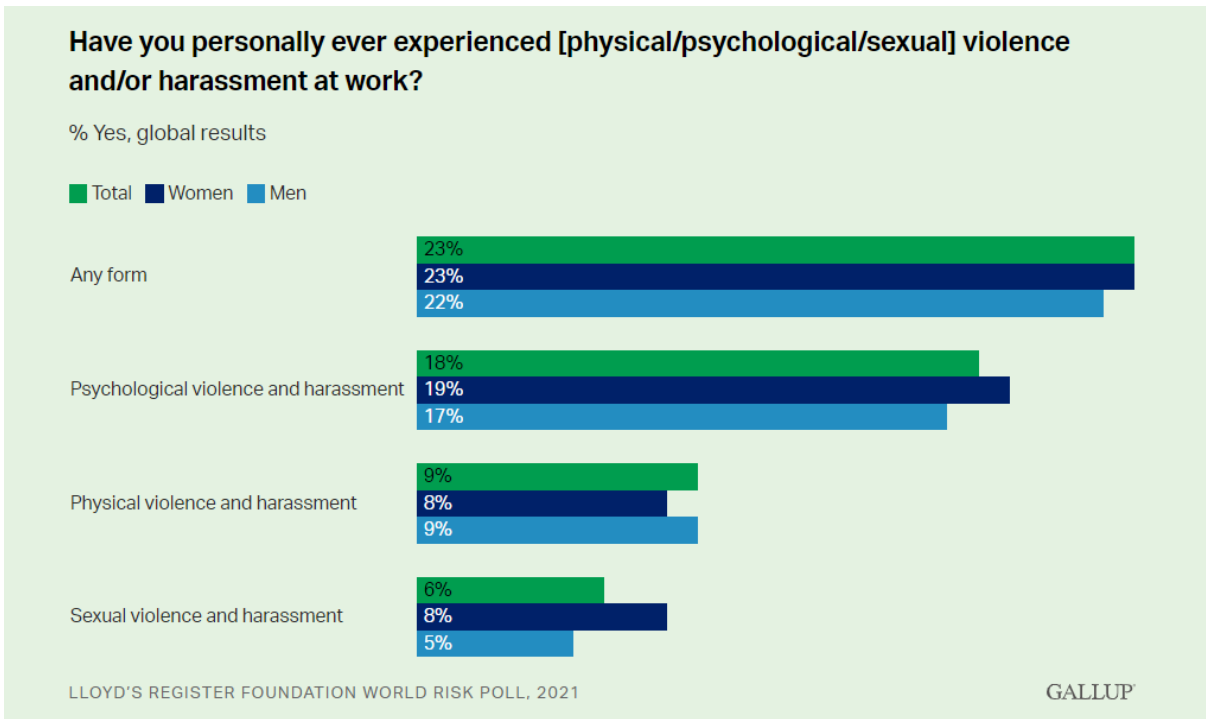


Figure 1: Gallup Survey Reports  
(Source: News.gallup, 2022)

As per the reports of Gallup, a survey was conducted among 74,000 workers in 121 countries and territories that resulted in one out of five employed people facing workplace harassment worldwide. Around 23% have experienced one or more forms of violence or harassment at work (News.gallup, 2022). Understanding several factors, one of the most common types of workplace harassment happens against women. This is based on gender and might take serious forms like sexual harassment, gender-based discrimination, and bullying. It has been seen that around 18% of employed people have faced psychological violence and harassment, 9% faced physical violence and harassment and 6% of employed people have experienced sexual violence and harassment which includes 8% of women and 5% of men (News.gallup, 2022). Workplace harassment has a major impact on employees, especially women in terms of psychological and emotional, physical health, economic security and career advancements. It can be said that harassment against women in the workplace is a pervasive issue which requires comprehensive and sustained efforts to address.

### ***Research aim and objectives***

The research aims to analyse the long-term impacts of Workplace harassment on women employees

The research objectives are as follows:

- To explore how workplace harassment influences the overall workplace culture and environment
- To investigate the long-term psychological impacts of workplace harassment on women employees
- To examine how workplace harassment affects the career progression of women
- To recommend strategies for preventing and mitigating the long-term impacts of Workplace harassment on women

### ***Research questions***

- How does workplace harassment influence the overall workplace culture and environment?
- What are the long-term psychological impacts of workplace harassment on women employees?
- How does workplace harassment affect the career progression of women?
- What are the strategies that the workplace can adopt to create safer Workplace environments for employees, especially women?

### ***Research rationale***

Workplace harassment being an issue which has not been as thoroughly researched as other workplace issues, has a major long-term impact, particularly for women employees. Psychological effects such as anxiety, depression, and reduced self-esteem are often seen among women when they go through such harassment. These issues have a direct impact on their decreased job satisfaction and impaired professional growth. Victims of workplace harassment may develop a fear of similar environments leading to creating a hindrance in their career advancement. Besides, the impact on physical health can also not be ignored as it can deteriorate due to chronic stress and lead to insomnia and hypertension. With such issues being faced, it also has a major impact financially leading to financial burdens and career stagnation.

### ***Significance of the study***

Investigating the long-term impacts of Workplace harassment on women employees is so important for fostering equitable workplaces. The research shall highlight the enduring psychological, physical, financial and professional consequences that victims had to face leading to the urgent need for effective interventions. By highlighting the issue, workplaces can adopt strategies, policy development to create a safer work environment for employees and promote supportive organisational cultures, and enhance mental health resources. This research shall not only understand the long-term impact but will also contribute towards gaining insights on gender-based violence and discrimination that takes place and can take initiatives in ensuring safer and more inclusive work environments for every employee.

## **Review of literature**

Workplace harassment, especially against women, has a major and enduring effect on individuals and organisations. The literature review focuses on exploring the long-term impacts of such harassment on women employees, considering mental and physical health, career progression, job satisfaction, economic consequences and overall well-being. Through examination of different studies, the review highlights types and forms of harassment, its impact on self-esteem, confidence, and overall well-being of women, mentorship and support networks in resolving such issues, financial and economic consequences and essentiality of POSH awareness among women and organisations. Understanding these shall help in developing effective strategies and policies for creating a safer and more equitable work environment for women.

### ***Types and Forms of Workplace Harassment***

Workplace harassment may or may not have any kind of physical evidence, but it can also not be denied. There are different types and forms of workplace harassment that employees face. It can be said that sexual harassment is one of the most common types of workplace harassment that is often unreported because of the overwhelming shame that victims receive (Armitage, 2022). It is one of the most heinous crimes that happens in the workplace where not only women but men are also experienced to be victims. A person belonging to any gender can be the victim of sexual harassment. These are often seen in the case of getting job benefits like promotions or salary increments. Verbal investments are where the victim faces an ongoing battle of destruction which impacts their overall health and career equally. This type of workplace harassment is very common where often seniors get into demeaning slurs, give offensive gestures, and unwarranted criticisms (Avillion and Mitus, 2023). Psychological harassment is similar to verbal harassment where it is considered more covert and consists of tactics. Victims of psychological harm face a lot of mental pressure which gets converted into mental breakdowns, low self-esteem, under confidence and undermining themselves (Ruiz, 2021). It can consist of threatening behaviour and manipulation where an instilling fear is gathered within leading to the culprit begin to be deceitful to the victim and have domination and control over employees, especially women.

Digital harassment commonly known as cyberbullying is also a new form of workplace harassment. It can be said that Harassing or bullying an individual through digital platforms is considered to be cyber harassment (Abarna *et al.* 2022). It also involves cyberstalking where employees are being kept under persistent and unwanted digital surveillance. Physical harassment in the workplace can have different degrees where improper touching of clothing, skin or any physical assaults or damaging physical property is considered as physical harassment (Svensson, 2020). It has been seen that people who belong to gender minorities or women employees face such harassment at work. In such cases, the culprit becomes a part of the harasser through the form of jokes. Discrimination can take place based on many factors such as race, gender, age, colour, origin and others (Lang and Spitzer, 2020). This type of workplace harassment is common where employees are discriminated against and negatively treated. These can involve offensive comments of race or ethnicity, unequal treatment, age-based harassment, discriminatory behaviour towards individuals with disabilities, derogatory comments on women and stereotyping them.

### ***The impact of workplace harassment on self-esteem, confidence, and overall well-being of women***

Workplace harassment has profound negative effects on the self-esteem, confidence, and overall well-being of women employees. As opined by Bryant (2020), when female employees face harassment at the workplace they are more likely to see decreased self-worth. Women are often seen to be blamed for any type of harassment that takes place and also consider themselves responsible for the ill-treatment that takes place at the workplace which leads to diminished self-esteem. There is a feeling of inadequacy where persistent harassment faced by women makes them question their professional abilities and values, leading to lower self-confidence (Work *et al.* 2021). It has also been witnessed that because of workplace harassment and ill-treatment, women often face fear and anxiety that makes it difficult to focus and perform effectively at work. Most workplace harassment is often unreported because of the fear of humiliation or loss of jobs. Porter (2020) stated that Fear of retaliation can prevent women from reporting harassment and thus diminish their sense of empowerment and control.

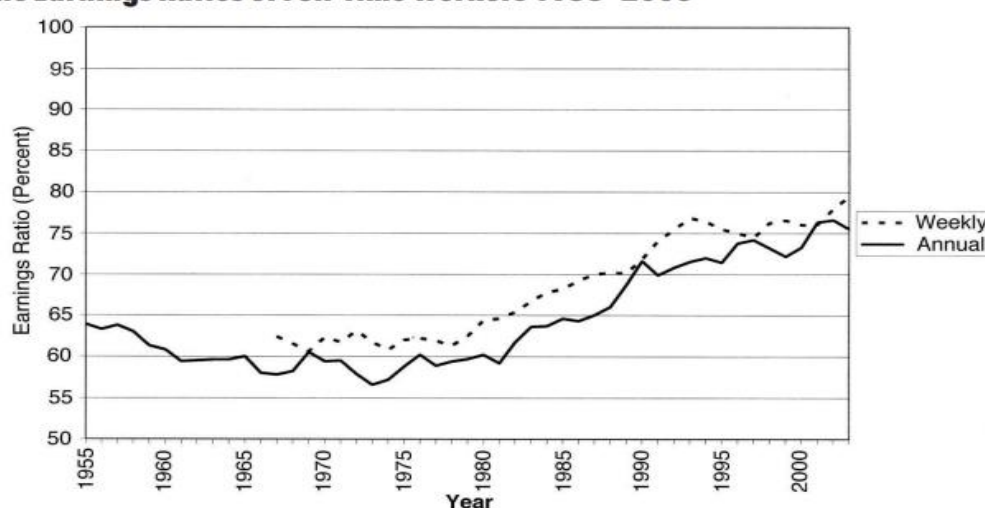
It also has a major impact on mental and physical health leading to chronic stress, anxiety, and depression with signs of post-traumatic stress disorder in various cases. Overall well-being includes physical health where women can also face physical symptoms such as headaches, digestive issues, fatigue, sleep disturbances and other serious chronic health

conditions like cardiovascular disease and hypertension. Węziak-Białowolska *et al.* (2020) stated that because of harassment, there is a major impact on social well being too where women can often withdraw themselves from any type of social interaction leading to social isolation. The overall impact on job satisfaction and professional life cannot also be ignored leading to major drawbacks.

### ***Economic consequences of Workplace harassment for women***

It can be said that though society is progressing, there are still certain loopholes where women are demeaned. This act of demeaning women based on gender has been continuing for ages and currently is taking the form of harassment. While women face different types of harassment in the workplace, it has major economic consequences too (Raj *et al.* 2020). With women face workplace harassment, it often leads to loss of income. Women might leave or be forced out of their jobs because of the harassment that leads to immediate loss of income. Because of discriminatory harassment that is common for women, there are many instances where they have to work for much lower wages in comparison to industry standards, education degrees and work experience. Having a gender pay gap is also a part of discriminatory harassment. As opined by Blau and Kahn (2020), Women continue to earn considerably less than men on average.

### **Female-to-Male Earnings Ratios of Full-Time Workers 1955–2003**



**Figure 2: The gender pay gap**  
(Source: Blau and Kahn, 2020)

It has also been seen that with such harassment, women often fall behind in terms of career advancements. Harassment can lead to women avoiding promotions or career opportunities because of the fear of further harassment. Harassment can also force women to change their jobs frequently, creating disruption in their career trajectory and thus leading to lower lifetime earnings (Schultheiss, 2020). With all types of hassle that harassed women have to face financially, it impacts their work performance too. Anxiety and stress that come with harassment leads to a reduction of focus and efficiency at work thus impacting the overall performance and productivity.

### ***The Role of Mentorship and Support Networks in helping women navigate harassment experience***

When women face harassment in the workplace, it often becomes difficult for them to cope with it. It is important to get professional help and for that taking help from mentors and support networks contributes to navigating the issue. Mentoring is considered a powerful development tool which helps in getting answers to the questions that need solutions (Hussey and Campbell-Meier, 2021). Mentors have the capability of offering valuable advice based on their own experiences and thus can help female employees take necessary steps in navigating complex situations like harassment. With The help of advice from mentors, employees can gain insights on career advancement and strategies that they can apply in their workplace for maintaining professional growth and fighting challenging environments (Barinua and Ibe,

2022). They are also capable of being emotionally supportive and advocating and providing empowerment by speaking up and taking action against harassment.

It is also important to have a support system at the workplace where with support networks, they can provide female employees with a safe space where women can share their experiences without fear of judgement or retaliation. Support networks such as anti-harassment boards can help harassed employees take necessary steps and the support networks are there to guide them in getting the correct path (Khan, 2021). They also have the capability of guiding victims with resources such as legal assistance, counselling services, and organisational policies that are available.

### ***Understanding POSH Awareness***

Prevention of Sexual Harassment also known as POSH is an important concept that employees should be aware of. POSH refers to the laws, policies, and awareness programs that are designed to prevent and address sexual harassment in the workplace (Kotwal and Narendran, 2022). It is essential to focus on creating POSH awareness among employees where it is important to create safe and respectful work environments for employees and a working environment that is free from harassment and discrimination. The Protection from Harassment Act is a legal protection against harassment that takes place in workplaces (Sarma, 2022). Every employee must have awareness regarding the legalities one can take action for any type of sexual harassment taking place in the workplace. This can be done by organisations where regular training sessions for employees at all levels should be provided to educate them about sexual harassment, their rights, and the procedures for reporting harassment.

### ***Application of theories***

#### ***Attribution Theory***

Attribution theory can be defined as the way ordinary people explain the causes of behaviour or an event. The theory deals with people who focus on social perceivers using information to start at a causal explanation regarding any situation that happens. This is one of the theories which explains and provides insights into workplace harassment among women. As per Heider's Theory of Attribution, he attempted to solve one of the core philosophical problems of phenomenology: the relation between sensory information and real objects (Malle, 2022). There have been two distinguishing that have been done: the attribution of outcomes to causal factors and the attribution of intentional actions to the actor's motives.

#### ***Social Role Theory***

The concept of Social Role Theory can be defined as treating differently on one's gender either women or men into roles and stating the primary origin of sex-differentiated social behaviour. It is expected that people should be primarily focused on their gender and based on that societal expectations and norms regarding behaviours, attitudes, and activities should be executed. As opined by Kaur *et al.* (2023), Social role theory divides attributes and beliefs associated with gender roles largely into communal and agentic attributes.

### ***Literature gap***

Workplace harassment can have significant long-term impacts on employees, especially on women employees. These impacts often extend beyond the immediate work environment, further impacting mental health, career progression, and overall well-being. Despite there being several studies on workplace harassment, there are still remaining gaps concerning the long-term impacts of such harassment on women employees. Most of the studies are based on psychological, emotional and physical consequences, but there is very limited research on economic consequences, career progression and economic stability. This gap has to be fixed through studies based on exploring various dimensions related to women facing workplace harassment.

### **Research Methodology**

#### ***Research approach***

The planning and procedure which is followed for training research by the researcher is called the research approach. There are two types of research approaches: deductive and inductive. The deductive approach focuses on starting with a

theory and later testing it through observations (Okoli, 2023). On the other hand, an inductive approach helps in collecting and analysing data for developing theories through data patterns and observations. For the present study, inductive research has been chosen over deductive research. The inductive approach is considered as exploratory in nature and helps in generating new theories and insights from the data collected (Makri and Neely, 2021). Through the use of the approach, it shall help in contributing towards the important investigation on sensitive issues like workplace harassment. Inductive research shall also help in gaining insights into the personal experiences and the impacts of workplace harassment on women as employees. Thus, it will provide a flexible, in-depth and participant centred perspective to uncover insights on the under-researched issue.

### ***Research philosophy***

Research philosophy is the belief regarding the way data should be gathered, analysed and used. Interpretivism and positivism are the two types of research philosophy. Positivism is a paradigm that relies on reason by objective observations and measurements (Alharahsheh and Pius, 2020). Interpretivism is the philosophy that focuses on a naturalistic approach for collecting data. In the current study, interpretivism research philosophy has been chosen. Interpretivist philosophy has a important value because of its emphasis on subjective phenomena (Pervin and Mokhtar, 2022). Use of this philosophy contributes towards studying topics such as workplace harassment, where emotional impacts of such issues on women employees are considered for the research. Interpretivism allows deep exploration of the context in which workplace harassment occurs which influences the experiences and impacts on women.

### ***Research method***

Research methods can be defined as the strategies which are adopted in the research for the collection of data or evidence for analysis is known as research method. The Mono method and mixed method are the two types of research methods among which the mono method has been chosen in the current study. Mono method is the use of a single research method for conducting the study while a mixed method includes collecting and analysing data through both quantitative and qualitative research (Nanthagopan, 2021). With the use of the mono method, a clearer direction can be provided to the data drawn on workplace harassment. In addition, the mono method shall help in providing in-depth insights into personal experiences and narratives on how workplace harassment has been impactful on women employees.

### ***Sampling technique and Sample size***

It can be said that choosing the appropriate sample technique is an important aspect of successful and reliable research. There are different types of sampling techniques such as Simple random sampling, Systematic sampling, Stratified sampling, Cluster sampling, Convenience sampling and others. In the current research, convenience random sampling shall be chosen. Convenience sampling involves a non-probability sampling method where samples are chosen based on the researcher's suitability and access (Stratton, 2021).

The measure of the number of individual samples that are used in research is called sample size (Lakens, 2022). For the current study, the sample size that has been chosen is 3. Three individual women employees who have faced workplace harassment shall be involved in the research where 5 questions will be asked to the participants through Google Forms.

### ***Data collection***

The process that is followed for collecting data is called data collection. Primary and secondary are the two types of data collection methods. In primary data collection, fresh data is collected from first-hand sources. On the other hand, secondary data collection involves collecting data from already existing sources. In the present study, the type of data collection that has been chosen is primary. This is because primary data collection helps in gaining more accurate and reliable data based on the topic as they come from direct sources. It can be said that using primary data helps researchers in collecting data that specifically addresses the research questions and objectives of the study. In the current study, through primary data collection, information related to the long-term impacts of workplace harassment on women employees can be gathered in specific contexts and nuances of the issue.

### ***Data analysis***

The collected data is used for further interpretation and evaluation and the process is known as data analysis. Qualitative and quantitative are the two types of data analysis. In the case of qualitative, non-numerical data are further analysed based on description and deep understanding of the subject being researched through in-depth observations (Moalusi, 2020). On the other hand, quantitative analysis includes the evaluation of numerical data for understanding the research objectives and answering research questions. In the present study, qualitative data analysis has been chosen for analysing the long-term impacts of Workplace harassment for women employees.

### ***Ethical considerations***

For the current study, all the ethical considerations have been followed and the participants who were involved in the research have not been asked any personal questions. No personal information regarding their name or contact details has been asked and their identity has been kept anonymous. Besides, all the information shared in the research has been appropriately referenced and cited. All the information has been used from authentic and genuine resources and plagiarism has also been maintained through the research.

## **Results**

### ***Interview Questions***

#### *Question 1*

**Can you describe any experiences you've had with harassment or inappropriate behaviour during a work placement?**

3 responses

It was during my internship dyas, a senior colleague frequently made inappropriate comments about my appearance. As I have an Asian appearance, he along with his friends used to make fun of me. The harassment I faced based on racial discrimination was unimaginable

I had one male colleague, we both joined our workplace on the same day and even our qualifications were also the same. Despite that, my team leader always used to pass over projects to him. Despite him being late for work and irregular on his task. And yes i confronted him, but in return i bhare, i am a woman, and i should be thankful that at least i am getting the chance of working with men in the same office. Just imagine!!!!

Years ago, a male colleague often made sexist remarks and undermined my contributions. Even used to touch me without my consent. I feared reporting it would harm my job prospects. This experience damaged my confidence

**Figure 3: Can you describe any experiences you've had with harassment or inappropriate behaviour during a Workplace?**

(Source: Google Forms)

*Question 2*

**In what ways has the experience of workplace harassment affected your mental and emotional well-being over time?**

3 responses

This type of torture was really unbearable for me as it was just the start of my career. This left me with anxiety and a constant sense of insecurity in my workplace. I stopped going out and kept myself isolated.

Imagine how someone will feel. A person with potential is less prioritised just because she is a woman? Being constantly undermined or passed over for opportunities has damaged me from inside.

You will not believe how my self-esteem got doomed after years of harassment. It had enduring impacts on my mental health, leading to bouts of depression and anxiety.

**Figure 4: In what ways has the experience of workplace harassment affected your mental and emotional well-being over time?**

(Source: Google Forms)

*Question 3*

**How has the organisation's response to your harassment complaint?**

3 responses

Well that's a different story, hahaha.... Since I was just in my internship stage, my complainant was just marked as irrelevant and baseless. It was the HR who said to me, that's how corporate life is.

Whom to complain about? My team leader was the one who kept on harassing me based on my gender. And any complaint I shall be doing shall be done through the team leader. That's how the organisational policy was

Well, I was lucky here. My senior was really nice to me. Well, I guess because she was also a woman and also a part of the company's anti-harassment cell. She made sure the BOD knows what female candidates are facing. The organisation took my complaint seriously, investigated thoroughly, and took disciplinary action against him.

**Figure 5: How has the organisation responded to your harassment complaint?**

(Source: Google Forms)



Question 4

**Did your workplace harassment have had any impact on career trajectory and professional aspirations?**

3 responses

- Well, yes it did. The harassment I faced made me reconsider my career path, leading me to switch industries.
- This significantly altered my career trajectory. I started avoiding leadership roles and certain industries where I felt unsafe. I felt undervalued and discouraged. It took me years to rebuild my professional career.
- It actually stalled my career growth. I became hesitant to take on new challenges or speak up in meetings

**Figure 6: Did your workplace harassment have any impact on your career trajectory and professional aspirations?**  
(Source: Google Forms)

Question 5

**Did you feel there were any support systems available when you encountered this behaviour?**

3 responses

- No, absolutely not. As I already said, HR was not at all supportive. I felt isolated with no proper support systems in place.
- At the time, there were no effective support systems available. The company's policies were unclear and had to suffer and handle everything alone.
- Yes, we had an anti-harassment cell. It helped me a lot.

**Figure 7: Did you feel there were any support systems available when you encountered this behaviour?**  
(Source: Google Forms)

Question 6

**Does workplace harassment impacts workplace culture and environment?**

3 responses

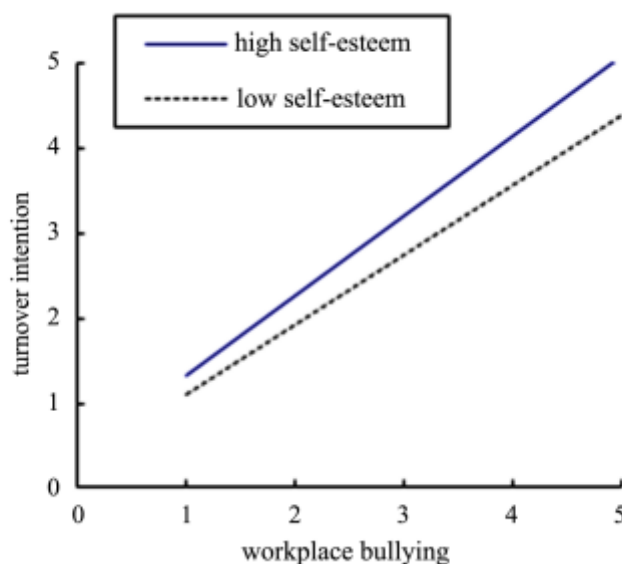
- Definitely, Workplace harassment deeply affects culture and morale as it creates fear and erodes trust which leads to toxic environment hampering productivity and employee retention
- Absolutely, harassment changes everything. It makes it hard for women to feel valued or safe, thus impacting both their personal well-being and professional growth.
- Yes, it's devastating. Workplace harmony vanishes, damages reputations, and diminishes loyalty.

**Figure 8: Does workplace harassment impact workplace culture and environment?**  
(Source: Google Forms)

### Qualitative analysis

#### *Impact of workplace harassment on cover time*

It can be said that workplace harassment has a major impact on the well-being of individuals. As per Participant 1, it has been seen that she faced a lot of anxiety and a constant sense of insecurity at her workplace. As per the reports of the US, workplace mistreatment is more common among women than among men. Statistics indicate that the generalised workplace mistreatment prevalence rate is 55% for women and 30% for men. Most of the mistreatments are from supervisors or seniors (Burns, 2022). This can be seen in the answer of Participant 1 where because of her looks, discriminatory racial harassment has been faced. On the other hand, not only seniors, there are examples of subordinates or colleagues who mistreat women and are the perpetrators. Because of such harassment that women employees have to go through, they feel more stressed, depressed, anxious, sleep disturbances, and burnout. Participant 2 has significantly answered where the type of mistreatment has damaged her from the inside. It has also been seen that because of harassment, women start becoming introverted, anxious, dependent upon others and also become approval seekers. On the contrary, Wu *et al.* (2020) stated that because of workplace bullying, leads to increased state anxiety. In addition, as per the ego depletion theory, garments or bullying can generate attitudes and behaviours consistent with negative psychological burdens in the face of situational and temporary emotional responses. In addition, participant 3 highlighted the pressure on one's self-esteem which ruptures because of years of harassment.



**Figure 9: The moderating effect of self-esteem**

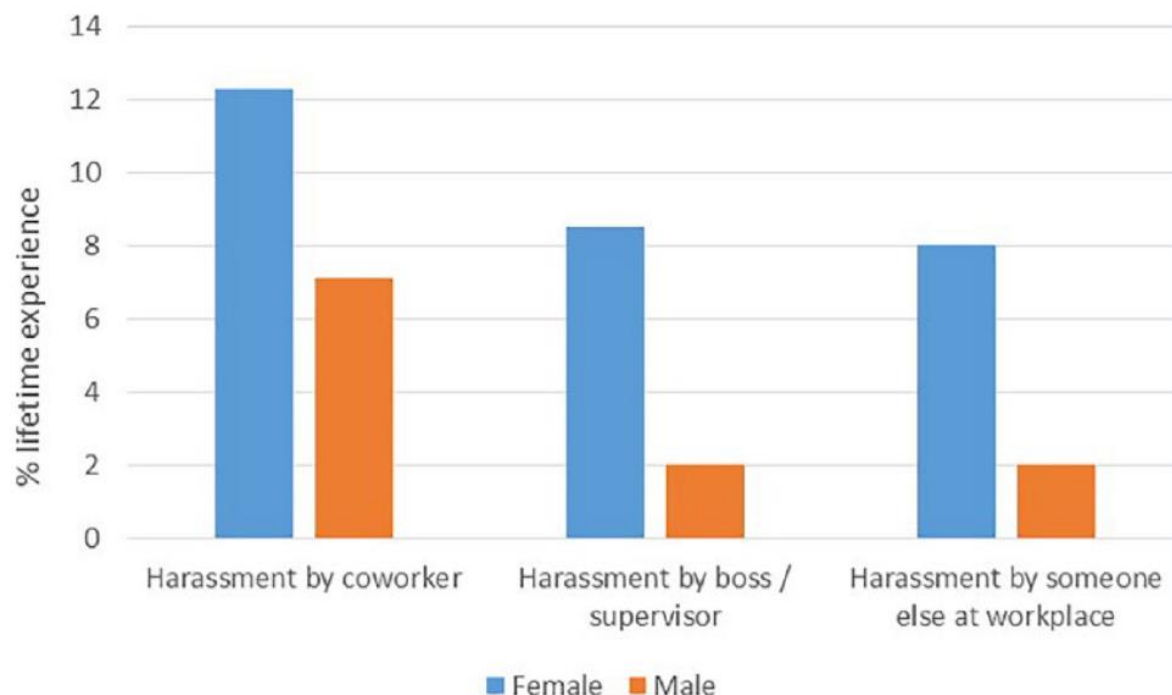
(Source: Li *et al.* 2020)

The above figure shows that the more workplace bullying happens, the higher the graph of low esteem increases. This is because people who have lower self-esteem are normally hesitant to self-disclose and try to maintain satisfying relationships and also become a target or victim of bullying (Li *et al.* 2020).

#### *Organisational responses to harassment complaint*

Organisations play an important role in helping employees who are facing harassment at the workplace. It can be said that organisations should focus on satisfying harassment in the workplace as it might have several negative consequences associated with it (Hodgins *et al.* 2020). It means employees who are more likely to face bullying have one way to stop it and this contribution is done by the higher authorities of the organisation. Participant 1 highlighted that she received no such positive response from the organisation, but blamed herself, underlying her complaints, to be irrelevant and baseless. It is often seen that organisations do not take employee harassment especially female employees' complaints seriously because of a lack of awareness among the employers too. Despite complaining there is relatively little that the

organisation does when harassments are reported. On the other hand, participant 2 indicated that her team leader was the harasser where because of being a woman all her responsibilities and projects were shifted to a male colleague. This is known as a lack of gender parity. As opined by Raj *et al.* (2020), Gender harassment as a form of sexual harassment involves verbal and nonverbal behaviours that denigrate individuals based on their gender or via their sexualisation or sexual objectification, which creates a hostile work environment even for those who are not direct targets.



**Figure 10: 2018 report of Employees reporting workplace harassment**

(Source: Raj *et al.* 2020)

The above figure shows that harassment of females has been more in comparison to men. It also indicates that most of the harassment has been done by coworkers rather than by the boss or someone else at the workplace.

Based on the answer of Participant 3, it can be evaluated that there are certain organisations which provide a positive response towards harassment complaints. It can be said that there should always be good while responding to such complaints (Hoel and Einarsen, 2020). This is because such responses, contribute towards employee wellbeing, increased productivity, lower turnover rates and employee retention, good reputation, as a part of ethical responsibility and contribute towards improved organisational culture.

#### *Workplace harassment impacts workplace culture and environment*

It can be said that the impact of workplace harassment is huge in terms of organisational culture and working environment. Based upon the answer of Participant 1, it has been seen that workplace culture and morale get affected and also create fear and erode trust. As opined by İbiloğlu (2020), Harassment creates an atmosphere of fear and mistrust among employees and contributes towards damaged relationships. Victims might fear retaliation if they report harassment, it can cause secrecy and isolation (Ford *et al.* 2021). Since workplace culture gets ruined, employees especially females feel undervalued and unsafe this has been answered by Participant 2. It can be evaluated that Witnessing or experiencing harassment contributes to lowering morale. This also has constant stress and anxiety which impacts their overall well-being and ability to perform. Based on the answer of Participant 3, it can be evaluated that workplace harassment or bullying impacts an organisation's reputation, destroys harmony and diminishes loyalty. News of harassment or bullying can damage an organisation's reputation and the negative publicity can deter potential clients, customers, and business partners (Von Bergen and Bressler, 2023). Workplace harmony gets ruined when the overall working environment becomes toxic and employees feel unsafe and undervalued. Thus, mistreating employees not only

directly impacts organisational culture but the employees become disengaged from their work leading to high turnover and erosion of trust.

#### *Impact of workplace harassment on career trajectory and professional aspirations*

One of the major long-term impacts of workplace harassment that takes place on employees especially women is their sudden change in career trajectory and professional aspirations. As per the answer of Participant 1, it can be evaluated that because of the harassment that she faced, she had to reconsider her career path and also had to switch industries. As opined by Porter (2020), Victims of harassment sometimes avoid applying for promotions or new opportunities due to fear of harassment or retaliation. This is because harassment dooms one's own self-esteem and confidence. It also leads to changing someone's career path and switching frequent jobs.

On the other hand, participant 2 faced the issue where her career growth became stagnant as she feared leadership roles and certain industries. It can be seen that hostile work environments and subtle biases still exist even in the 21st century (Williams *et al.* 2020). Women who are less capable than men are often considered and this demeaning of employees based on their gender creates fear of taking the lead. Women face obstacles to their advancement and are not given leadership roles. Women who experience microaggressions are three times more likely to think about quitting their jobs and four times more likely to almost always be burned out (Mckinsey, 2023).

From the perspective of Participant 3, it can be evaluated that harassment or workplace bullying leads to stagnant career growth and one might become hesitant in taking up challenges and being presentable in front of an audience. As stated by Folke *et al.* (2020), Women who experience harassment often avoid new roles and responsibilities. It also impacts their confidence and makes them less likely to volunteer for challenging tasks.

#### *Support systems at the workplace for solving workplace harassments*

Based on the responses gathered from participants 1 and 2, it can be evaluated that the organisation the women worked for had no support systems available for encountering the ill treatments that were faced. It can be said that creating effective support systems in the workplace helps in addressing and solving workplace harassment that women have to go through (Dobbin and Kalev, 2020). It is crucial in fostering a safe and respectful environment. There are organisations where there is no type of support system that can help victims employees in reporting harassment, especially in small companies and startups. The reason behind it can be a lack of awareness, resource constraints, cultural and organisational barriers and fear of retaliation. As opined by Ranganathan *et al.* (2021), Some organisations might not have an appropriate understanding of the prevalence and impact of harassment. It can also be because of improper training of both employees and management. On the other hand, participant 3 shared her experience, where the workplace had an anti-harassment cell which helped her in coping with the issue. The anti-harassment cell is a dedicated team which works to prevent, address, and resolve issues related to harassment (Yang and Katz, 2023). With the help of the cell, it contributes to fostering a safe and respectful workplace environment for all employees, especially women.

### **Discussion**

- ***To explore how workplace harassment influences the overall workplace culture and environment***

Based on the findings it can be evaluated that workplace harassment impacts organisational culture and environment. When an organisation gets a bad reputation regarding harassment and mistreatment towards female employees, it leads to decreased employee morale. Employees facing such mistreatment at the workplace are more likely to create a culture of fear and anxiety, leading to decreased morale. Reputation is also another factor which is heavily impacted as organisations which are known for workplace harassment can develop a negative reputation can lead to affecting their ability to attract new talent and customers. The overall atmosphere of the workplace gets ruined and thus no female employees can be retained in the organisation.

- ***To investigate the long-term psychological impacts of workplace harassment on women employees***

Focusing on the long-term psychological impacts of workplace harassment on women employees, it can be evaluated that when an individual is a sufferer from workplace harassment, it not only impacts one's professional aspect, but has a major effect on their self-esteem, confidence, and overall well-being. Using the attribution theory, it can be announced that when a female employee goes through such harassment, which may be sexual, discriminatory or any type of bias, others

often try to make judgments based on their mindset. As Participant 1 indicated complaining about harassment cannot always be simple, it is often blamed on women or neglected. The theory suggests that individuals may attribute blame to the victim of harassment. This often leads to circumstances where women are afraid of reporting and defamation. This also contributes towards impacting victims' psychology leading to loss of confidence, feelings of inadequacy, fear of retaliation and various other post-traumatic stress disorders.

- ***To examine how workplace harassment affects the career progression of women***

With such harassment being faced by female employees, it has a major impact on their career progression where in most cases women leave jobs, have to work at lower wages and are also victims of the gender pay gap. Linking with social role theory, it can be evaluated that women have to face gender stereotyping. Traditional gender roles often depict women as submissive, nurturing, and less assertive, making them target differently. Also, organisations having male-dominating hierarchies force women to stay submissive and are not provided with equal opportunities as men do. As per the response of Participant 2 where a male colleague was given more preference than her, it depicts the harsh reality of women working in corporations. Thus, because of harassment related to sexual objectification and discrimination, women have no choice but to switch job profiles, look for less men dominating industries and also have to face stagnant career growth.

## **Conclusion**

Thus, from the overall research, it can be concluded that workplace harassment is one of the major issues that employees especially women face while working outside. Workplace harassment is a serious concern which requires immediate attention for better overcoming. Although most women employees experience this kind of harassment, it is still taboo to talk about it. Women become hesitant in talking about such harassment for fear of shame and also objectively indicate the same due to fear of the consequences of losing their jobs. The findings reveal that harassment leads to chronic stress, anxiety, depression, and diminished self-esteem, severely affecting victims' professional and personal lives. The study also focused on providing evidence of harassment's impact on workplace culture and environment and the need to have support styles at the workplace to address and prevent it. Creating awareness, implementing training programs and fostering a culture of respect and inclusivity are small steps that organisations can take to mitigate these impacts.

## **Future research scope**

The topic "Long-Term Impacts of Workplace Harassment with a Special Focus on Women Employees" widens future study scope on various other aspects that are interconnected to the topic. More understanding of specific impacts on mental health, physical health, career progression and coping mechanisms can be evaluated. Besides, the current research also has several promising directions that can be focused on for future research. Areas include comparative cross-cultural studies where from different cultural contexts, understanding of societal norms and cultural attitudes towards gender and harassment has a long-term impact can be evaluated. In addition, tracking the psychological, physical, and career-related impacts of harassment over decades can also be undertaken through longitudinal research. The main focus on anti-harassment policies, training programs, and support mechanisms can be provided that are important for mitigating long-term impacts and fostering safer work environments for female employees. By exploring these future research scopes, researchers can have an understanding of workplace harassment's long-term impacts on women.

## **Limitations**

*Sensitivity of the Topic:* One of the major constraints that has been faced includes discussing sensitive topics. Talking about harassment with the participants distressed them as they had to recall their past terrible experiences.

*Time constraints:* While conducting primary qualitative, there was a requirement for more time. Time has been a major limitation as more time would have contributed to more detailed research.

*Sample size:* The sample size selected was 3 which was also a limitation as a smaller sample size includes low statistical power, chances of sample error and biases.

## Recommendations

With the long-term impact that women employees have to go through because of workplace harassment and mistreatment, it is essential to adopt certain strategies by organisations to prevent and mitigate such situations. Some of the recommendations can be provided as follows:

- Development of a comprehensive anti-harassment policy: Every organisation needs to develop an anti-harassment policy to prevent such issues from happening in the workplace. The anti-harassment policy shall describe all types of workplace harassment and should also be included in the company's Code of Conduct (Mujtaba and Kuzak, 2023). This strategy shall allow in exploring the type of behaviour which is expected from the employees and also to understand the consequences of the harassment to the harasser.
- Providing thorough training to the employees: training is one of the steps that organisations can take to avoid harassment in the workplace. Providing training sessions to employees shall help in evaluating harassment awareness among each (Robotham and Cortina, 2021). This can be considered as a great opportunity to communicate with anti-harassment policy and also provide employees with sexual harassment training and discriminatory action training to both employers and employees for better prevention.
- Establishing a fair and clear complaint process: when harassment is faced, the employee needs to know the way to file a complaint and be sure that the organisation will take immediate action (Hoel and Einarsen, 2020). It is essential to establish the process of complaint transparently where employees will be ensured that their complaints will be fully investigated and necessary steps regarding the culprit will be taken.
- Ensuring easy access to communication channels: There should also be easy access to communication channels that employees can use to report inappropriate behaviour (Hoel and Einarsen, 2020).

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## Appendices

### *Appendix 1: Interview Questions*

1. Can you describe any experiences you've had with harassment or inappropriate behaviour during a Workplace?
2. In what ways has the experience of workplace harassment affected your mental and emotional well-being over time?
3. How has the organisation's response to your harassment complaint?
4. Did your workplace harassment have had any impact on career trajectory and professional aspirations?
5. Did you feel there were any support systems available when you encountered this behaviour?
6. Does workplace harassment impact workplace culture and environment?