

Unraveling Harassment: An In-depth Exploration and Mitigation Strategies in KP Universities

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Abstract:

Higher education is essential for human capital development and socio-economic growth. However, rising harassment cases in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa universities, particularly involving male teachers exploiting female students, are alarming. Despite global recognition of harassment as a civil rights violation since the 1970s, research in Pakistan remains limited. Effective solutions require anti-harassment training, improved reporting systems, and cultural shifts. Key recommendations include leadership commitment, policy monitoring, HR-student collaboration, third-party involvement, and linking complaint platforms to the ombudsman. Curriculum changes and continuous education are also necessary to foster safer, more inclusive university environments.

Key words:

Higher Education, Harassment, Power Dynamics, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Cultural Change

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Introduction

Higher education plays a crucial part in developing human capital and fostering the socio-economic and sustainable growth of a nation. Unfortunately, recent years have seen a rise in cases of harassment within universities, causing serious concerns for students and their families. This misconduct often involves individuals in positions of power, such as teachers, students, and peers, leading to situations where the harasser can intimidate and mistreat the victim, particularly in teacher-student relationships. Male teachers taking advantage of female students under the guise of academic projects is a common occurrence.

Educational institutions are meant to be safe environments for students, yet the prevalence of harassment cases reported in various universities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa highlights the issue, with sex-for-grades being a particularly widespread form of harassment. Globally, the concept of harassment was legally recognized in the US in the 1970s as a violation of civil rights, barring discrimination based on sex, race, religion, and national origin. The fight against harassment has since gained momentum, with women advocating for equal and secure spaces for all. Central to feminist activism is the acknowledgment that harassment is intertwined with power dynamics, perpetuating discrimination, privilege, and inequality. It is crucial to consider the intersectionality of race, class, and sexual harassment in this context.

Harassment is a prevalent issue in Pakistan, with children, youth, and women being particularly vulnerable to such misconduct. However, research on this topic in Pakistan remains limited, underscoring the importance of further exploration in this area. Youth are often targets of harassment, yet there is a lack of comprehensive studies focusing on universities specifically. This underscores the necessity of delving deeper into this subject, making it a pertinent choice for research endeavors.

Problem Statement

Recently, cases of harassment have surfaced in various universities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, creating havoc in society. Harassment is ingrained

in higher education, where students, faculty, and officials are all affected by it. Preventing harassment from occurring is far preferable to remedying its consequences. We need to take a proactive approach against systematic harassment. It is imperative to analyze the factors responsible for it and identify the gaps in policies and practices for mitigating this unwanted and unfavorable harassment in universities across the province.

Scope of the Study

This study focuses on the prevalent situation of harassment in universities of KP, its causes, and its effects on education and individuals. It also examines the legal framework and redressal mechanisms and their effectiveness. The study will critically analyze the existing policies and strategies and suggest pragmatic approaches for mitigating harassment in universities of KP.

Literature Review

Harassment research originated in the 1970s in Scandinavian countries, gaining significant attention in 1982 after three boys aged 10-14 from Norway attempted suicide due to harassment. This tragic event prompted a nationwide campaign in Norwegian schools to address and combat the issue effectively (Olweus, 1993). Similarly, Japan, the Netherlands, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia saw an increase in research funding and public awareness regarding harassment in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

The definition of harassment has been approached in various ways. Olweus (1996) illustrates harassment as repeated negative actions towards a victimized student by their peers, emphasizing the power imbalance between the victim and the harasser based on status, size, and strength.

Research by Reed et al. (2019) revealed that 32% of students aged 12-18 reported experiencing harassment in the previous academic year. An analysis by Iranzo, Buelga, Cava, and Ortega-Baron (2019) indicated a high occurrence rate of harassment among youth, approximately 35%. Furthermore, studies have shown that most harassment incidents happen inside educational institutions, including schools, colleges, and universities, with cyber harassment often perpetrated by students' peers

(Gaffney, Farrington, & Ttofi, 2019).

The impact of harassment extends beyond physical and psychological health, affecting academic performance, class attendance, and even leading to students' withdrawal from educational settings (Gaffney, Farrington, & Ttofi, 2019).

Cognizant of the available research on this subject, it can be inferred that while substantial research has been conducted in this area, it is still in its initial stages in the Pakistani context. Therefore, it is crucial to document cases of traditional and cyber harassment faced by university students and examine the effects of these experiences on their academic performance and potential substance exploitation.

Methodology of the Study

1. Study is mostly based on qualitative secondary Data.
2. Some primary Data (university students) has also been used.
3. Analytical tools used include situational analysis, legal/institutional analysis, gap analysis, and cause and effect analysis.

What is Harassment

The Human Rights Act defines harassment as a “*course of vexatious comment or conduct that is known or ought reasonably to be known to be unwelcome.*” Harassment is a type of discrimination that occurs when an individual is subjected to unwelcome, offensive, or humiliating comments or actions. It is essential that there is a connection between the harassing behavior and the individual's protected characteristics, known as prohibited grounds. Typically, harassment involves a pattern of behavior over time, although isolated incidents can also be considered harassment. **OR** Harassment and discrimination encompass any unwelcome remarks or critical behaviors based on religion, gender, family or marital status, race, age, place of origin, political belief, disability, individual characteristics, performance, place, training, social skills, benefits allocation, reward, job duties, and training. Such behavior creates a hostile, aggressive, or offensive work environment. The severity of harassment can vary from minor incidents to more severe cases. It is important to note that the absence of complaints does not necessarily

indicate a workplace free from harassment or discrimination.

Harassment and discrimination refer to unwelcome remarks or critical behaviors targeting religion, gender, family or marital status, race, age, place of origin, political belief, ancestry, disability, personal characteristics, performance, position, training, social skills, benefits allocation, compensation, job duties, and training. These actions contribute to a threatening, aggressive, or offensive work environment. The level of harassment can range from less severe incidents to more serious cases. It is crucial to understand that the lack of complaints does not guarantee a harassment-free or discrimination-free workplace.

Harassment refers to persistent and regular unwanted actions directed towards a victim by either an individual or a group of individuals. These actions can range from making racial slurs to making annoying or malicious comments, but they must occur repeatedly to be considered harassment. Harassment is against the law, and a victim has the right to seek a restraining order against the person responsible. Sexual harassment encompasses three distinct types of behavior:

1. Gender harassment, which involves displaying sexist anger and engaging in crude behavior.
2. Uninvited sexual attention, which includes unwelcome oral or physical sexual advances.
3. Sexual coercion, which occurs when someone conditions favorable treatment in a professional or educational setting on engaging in sexual activity.

Types of harassment

Although many people think of sexual harassment when they hear the term, sexual harassment is just one form of harassing behavior. Harassment often occurs as a result of discrimination based on a variety of attributes, including gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, and race. Types of harassment that may occur in the workplace and in other situations include the following.

1. Discriminatory harassment occurs when a harasser resorts to physical or non-physical abuse towards another individual simply because they are perceived as different.
2. Harassment based on religion involves making jokes or comments about

- a victim's religion.
3. Power harassment arises from a significant power difference between the victim and the offender. The harasser uses their position to coerce the victim into unwanted acts.
 4. Psychological harassment involves offenders engaging in various behaviors such as spreading false reports about the victim, making threatening gestures, forcing the victim to perform unwanted tasks, and interfering with their private lives through persistent irritation.
 5. Sexual harassment occurs when the offender makes repeated sexual advances towards the victim despite knowing they are unwelcome, as evidenced by the victim's clear discomfort.
 6. Online harassment involves victimizing individuals through the internet using tactics such as blackmail.

Historical Background

Harassment research originated in the 1970s in Scandinavian countries. However, in 1982, the issue gained significant attention when three boys aged 10-14 from Norway attempted suicide due to harassment. This tragic event prompted a nationwide campaign to address and resolve the problem in Norwegian schools (Olweus, 1993). Similarly, countries such as Japan, the Netherlands, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia saw increased research funding and public awareness regarding harassment in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Causes of Harassment

1. Studies have indicated that organizations characterized by significant power disparities are more prone to experiencing higher rates of sexual harassment compared to organizations with smaller power differentials (Ilies et al., 2003; NASEM, 2018; O'Callaghan et al., 2021; Sutton et al., 2021). This phenomenon is particularly evident in educational institutions where a substantial power gap exists between students and teachers. Furthermore, research has demonstrated that when power imbalances are exploited and sexual harassment occurs, the repercussions can be more detrimental than harassment perpetrated by individuals of equal power. Those who encounter sexual harassment from individuals with greater power tend to endure more severe consequences, including depression, emotional

exhaustion, and compromised physical well-being (NASEM, 2018).

2. The internet has brought about a number of unintended consequences, one of which is the ability for harassers to remain anonymous and target their victims with ease. One method that offenders employ is stealing the victim's photos from their social media profiles and manipulating them into offensive and unsettling images, which are then used as leverage against the victim. As a result, the victim is often coerced into complying with the harasser's demands due to the blackmail tactics employed.
3. Cultural norms and values in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are also major factors in harassment in universities. For example, the concept of "izzat" (honor) is highly esteemed, and any conduct perceived as bringing shame to the family or community is strongly discouraged. This leads to the silencing of harassment victims out of fear of ruining their reputation or that of their families.
4. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, like other areas of Pakistan, operates within a patriarchal society where men hold primary power and authority. This power dynamic can lead to the harassment of women, as men may feel entitled to exert control over female students.
5. Despite efforts to promote gender equality, a significant gap remains between men and women in our society, particularly in education. This inequality can contribute to the harassment of women, as they may be seen as inferior or less deserving of respect and dignity.
6. Inadequate education and awareness about sexual harassment and appropriate conduct can contribute to its prevalence in universities. Many students may not fully understand what constitutes harassment or how to report it, leading to a culture of silence and impunity.
7. Universities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa may lack adequate mechanisms for addressing and preventing harassment. This can include inadequate policies, ineffective reporting procedures, and a failure to provide support services for victims.

Impact of Harassment

Psychological: Harassment has the potential to severely impact an individual's mental well-being, leading the victim to experience feelings of insecurity related to their physical appearance or the quality of their work. Perpetrators of harassment employ various tactics to undermine their victims, including spreading false rumors, making threatening gestures, assigning degrading tasks, and invading their privacy through stalking. Such degrading and intimidating conduct can result in lasting negative consequences on the victim's psyche, prompting them to doubt their aspirations, self-worth, and eventually succumb to profound depression. This, in turn, hampers their capacity to concentrate on their academic pursuits and affects their overall performance.

Social: Harassment also has a significant impact on the social life of the victim. People in our society often view them as culprits rather than offering support. They are avoided at many occasions and are subject to negative judgments. This attitude can make victims feel as if they are the actual culprits.

Legal and Institutional analysis

The Protection against Harassment of Women at Workplace Act, 2010 (annexed) is the primary legislation in Pakistan for preventing harassment in workplaces, including universities. This law provides a legal framework for preventing and addressing harassment, including sexual harassment, in educational institutions. Inspired by this, the Higher Education Commission (HEC) has also adopted an anti-harassment policy for universities and educational institutions across the country. Universities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have their own policies and mechanisms in place to address harassment. These policies are aligned with the Protection against Harassment of Women at Workplace Act, 2010, and provide specific procedures for reporting, investigating, and resolving harassment complaints.

Under the Protection against Harassment of Women at Workplace Act, 2010, each province in Pakistan, including Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, is required to establish an ombudsperson office to address harassment complaints. These offices are responsible for receiving, investigating, and

resolving complaints related to harassment in educational institutions and other workplaces.

Under this policy, educational institutions and universities have established Internal Complaints Committees (ICCs) to handle harassment complaints internally. These committees consist of members who are responsible for conducting impartial investigations and recommending appropriate actions in response to complaints.

Besides, all universities are required to conduct gender sensitization and awareness programs to educate students, faculty, and staff about issues related to harassment, its impacts, and the available mechanisms for reporting and seeking redress. They are also required to provide training and capacity-building sessions for members of the ICCs, faculty, staff, and students to effectively handle harassment complaints and create a safer environment on campus. It is essential for students, faculty, and staff to familiarize themselves with the relevant policies and procedures in place at their respective universities to address harassment effectively. Unfortunately, this is often limited to paperwork. According to a survey conducted for this study, a sample of 74 students (both male and female) was taken from three main public sector universities: the University of Peshawar, Agriculture University Peshawar, and Islamia College University Peshawar. It was quite astonishing that

Legal Framework at International and National level

The 1973 Constitution, unlike its predecessors, includes comprehensive provisions for the well-being of women. The 1973 Constitution not only protects women's fundamental rights but also provides guidelines, known as principles of policy, for the state to enact future laws related to women.

Despite the lack of practical efforts to improve the situation of women in Pakistan, the Pakistan Women's Rights Committee was established in 1976, nearly three decades after independence. This committee, consisting of 14 members with the Attorney General as its leader, was tasked with reviewing existing laws related to women in Pakistan and proposing recommendations for their advancement. In 1985, the Commission on the Status of Women was formed with 15 members and Begum Zari Sarfraz as its head. The third attempt to improve the status of women in Pakistan

was made in 1994 with the establishment of the Commission of Inquiry for Women. This commission, comprised of 10 members with Mr. Justice Nasir Aslam Zahid as its chairman, was responsible for reviewing existing laws and recommending measures to enhance the status of women in Pakistan. It stressed the need for institutions to promptly address incidents of gender discrimination, as Pakistan is obligated under the International Convention on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights to align its domestic legislation with international standards. It is pertinent to mention that Article 7 of the convention recognizes the right of women to fair working conditions and reiterates that women should not be sexually harassed in their places of work.

International conventions signed by Pakistan

- International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination – signed 1966.
- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights – signed 2008
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights – signed 2004.
- Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment – signed 2008.
- Convention on the Rights of the Child – signed 1990.
- Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution, and Child Pornography – signed 2011.
- Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities – signed 2011.

Being a signatory to these conventions, Pakistan is obligated to gender-sensitize its laws. Thus, the following laws and rules have been framed over time.

General Laws (Pakistan Penal Code)

- **Section 510:** If a drunken person appears in a public place, causing annoyance to any individual, they can be punished with imprisonment, a fine, or both.
- **Section 509:** If a person labels any woman, utters disrespectful words, or behaves offensively through gestures, they are liable to a punishment of up to three years, a fine, or both.
- **Section 366A:** If a girl under the age of 18 is induced or forced to

perform sexual intercourse, the offender is liable to a punishment of up to 10 years and a fine.

- **Section 509:** If a person demands sexual favors and uses verbal or non-verbal communication to cause any form of annoyance, they are liable to a punishment of up to three years, a fine, or both.
- **Section 509:** If a person makes a false accusation of fornication against any woman, they are liable to five years in prison along with a fine.
- **Section 354A:** If a person assaults a woman using criminal force, strips off her clothes, and exposes her to public view, they are liable to punishment by death or imprisonment for life, along with a fine.
- **Section 294:** If a person uses indecent or vulgar language in a public place with the intention to offend, they are liable to a punishment of up to three years, along with a fine.

Local/Special Laws/policies

- The Higher Education Commission, Policy on Protection Against Sexual Harassment in Higher Education Institutions (Effective July 1, 2020)
- Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act 2010, & Act 2022 - Amendment
- Enacted January 24, 2022, this amendment expands the definition of workplaces to encompass both formal and informal settings, bringing it closer to the definition set out in the 2019 ILO Violence and Harassment Convention (C190), which Pakistan has not ratified.
- The bill was drafted by the Federal Ministry of Human Rights with extensive input from women's rights groups and lawyers. The amendments aimed to ensure and facilitate increased participation of women in the workforce and address the shortcomings present in the existing law.
- The definition of harassment has been broadened. The law not only protects individuals against workplace harassment of a physical nature but also covers other forms of harassment and gender discrimination at the workplace.

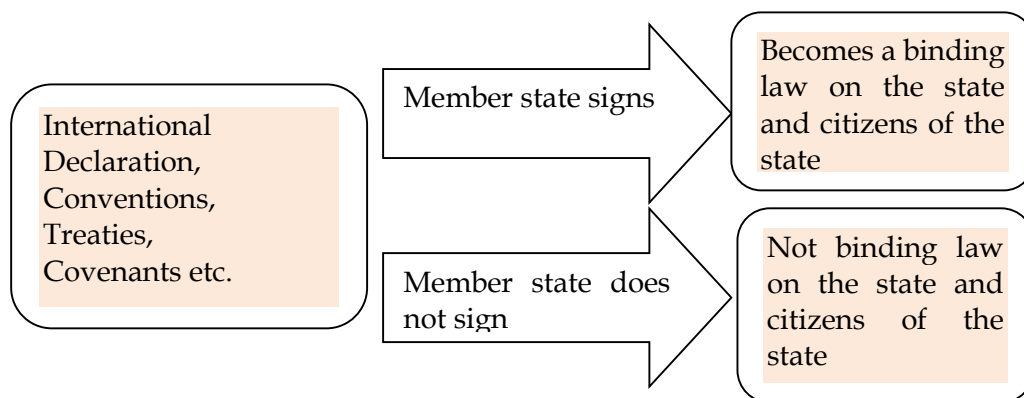
Resolution No. 48/104 of the General Assembly on the Declaration of Violence Against Women not only defines violence against women but also encompasses sexual harassment, emphasizing its prohibition in

workplaces and educational institutions. Articles 2(b) and 4(d-f) call upon authorities to implement penal, civil, or other administrative actions, along with preventive measures, to eradicate such behavior. Similarly, CEDAW is considered a significant step toward safeguarding women's rights, particularly in cases of sexual harassment.

Articles 7-16 of the mentioned convention clearly require state parties to take effective measures to eliminate discriminatory treatment against women in all aspects of life. The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union has made extensive provisions for the prohibition of discriminatory treatment against women and has strengthened this position through a series of directives addressing sexual harassment.

Regarding guidelines for legislation on this subject, it is suggested that the United Nations and regional treaties can serve as guiding principles. The positive aspect is that sexual harassment has been recognized as a form of discrimination against women, as demonstrated in the Beijing Platform for Action. This platform emphasizes the responsibility of governments and employers to promptly adhere to its provisions by enacting legislation and implementing anti-harassment measures. Since the dawn of independence from colonial rule, Pakistan has been working to gender-sensitize its laws.

The way Legal Systems works in a Country:

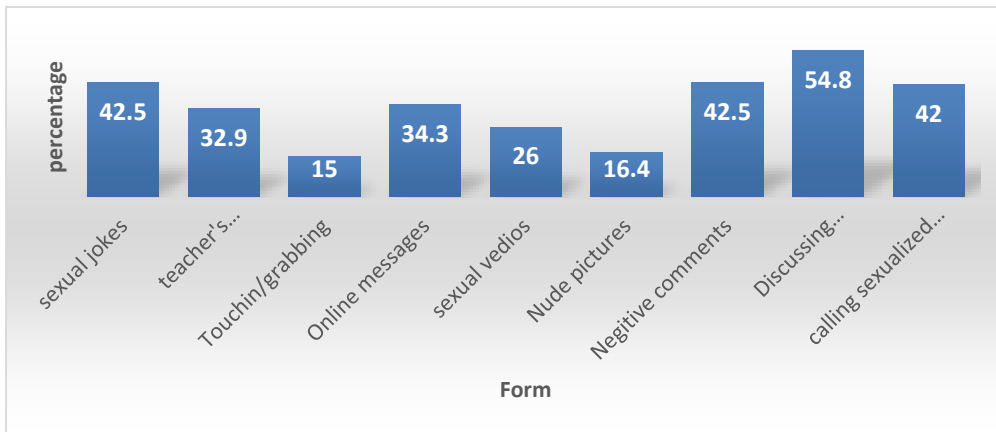


Situational analysis

Harassment events are increasing in universities in KP with each passing day. The nature of these events varies in magnitude and the response to

them. However, what is reported is only the tip of the iceberg. Many incidents occur without being reported. In a survey conducted for the purpose of this study, 100% of students (male and female) mentioned that harassment exists in their universities in one form or another, as pointed out in the questionnaire. Specifically, 78% indicated that they experienced direct harassment. Among the surveyed females, 23.7% reported personally experiencing harassment, while 21.9% of male students also mentioned being harassed at the university. However, only a few cases have surfaced publicly, such as the harassment incidents at Gomel University DIK. Similarly, according to the University of Peshawar, only eight cases have been reported in the past three years. "Since 2017, we have only received eight complaints at the University of Peshawar. None of them are against the faculty," claimed Dr. Abdur Rauf, head of the harassment committee at the university. Similarly, a Grade 18 lecturer at Khyber Medical University (KMU) in Peshawar was dismissed following a judgment of guilt in a case of sexual harassment by the university's Anti-Harassment Committee. These cases came to light due to significant debate on social media, mainstream media coverage, and a protest campaign led by Amna Ashfaq, a student from the Department of Political Science, which compelled the authorities to take notice (Munawar, 2021).

Table.1 showing percentage data of component wise harassment



Only 37.5% of those who said they had been harassed reported the event. Of those reports, half were settled through compromise, two were resolved by the committee, and one is still pending. This indicates that the issue is not taken seriously when it occurs.

Victims often choose not to report harassment due to fear of dishonoring their families or fear of retaliation.

According to sources from the Ombudsperson's office in Peshawar, they have received around 50 cases from Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan, Islamia University Peshawar, Abasyn University Peshawar, and other public and private universities in KP so far. This number is very small compared to the actual occurrences and perceptions on the ground. The main reason for this low number of registered cases is that the ombudsperson is not well known to students. When asked about the Ombudsperson, 100% of students were unaware of its existence and had no idea about it. This lack of awareness is not their fault, as neither the Ombudsperson's office nor the universities have adequately informed students. Most astonishingly, no university has posted any information about harassment and the ombudsperson on their website. It is only through social media that some students have become aware of the issue. Only 16.4% of students reported knowing about it due to their universities' awareness programs, which again shows that university efforts in this regard are minimal.

Context of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

Pakistan, especially Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, is a male-dominated society where women are considered subordinate citizens (Ferdoos, 2005). Consequently, women spend most of their time at home and, due to purdah (veil), have limited exposure to male strangers. Confronting the 'male world' can thus be a traumatic experience for them (Syed et al., 2005; Shaheed, 1990). Many women have never been alone in a bank, a government office, a bookshop, or even a hospital (Ferdoos, 2005). The inability to interact with male strangers is closely linked to the purdah system, which is based on the absence of concepts for mixed social interactions and views relationships between non-mahram (non-blood-related) men and women as predominantly sexual (Ferdoos, 2005).

Religion is a significant element of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa society. According to the country's constitution, Islam is the state religion. The Objective Resolution, defined as 'the ground norm of Pakistan,' was an introduction to the successive constitutions of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan in 1956, 1962, and 1973 (Patel, 1991). Although Pakistan has laws, policies, and strategies for mitigating harassment, much work remains to

address this issue effectively. Furthermore, culture plays an important role in perpetuating gender stereotypes.

Issues and Challenges

The Male-Female Ratio: According to research conducted by Parker (2018), 49% of women perceive sexual harassment as common in male-dominated workplaces, while 33% believe it is prevalent in female-dominated workplaces. The majority of offenders were identified as male. Similarly, data from the EEOC reveals that 7,600 cases of sexual harassment were reported by men in 2019, with reports indicating that the perpetrator was typically male. In universities throughout KP, males outnumber females, increasing the risk of females being targeted.

Fear: Fear acts as a hindrance to personal growth and impedes progress. For instance, many female students from traditional Pathan families refrain from speaking out against instances of harassment due to the fear of tarnishing their family's reputation.

Power Differential: The primary reason for harassment is the power difference that exists between students and faculty. In the student-staff situation, the harasser holds a position of authority, enabling them to use force and punish their victims. This power dynamic compels the victim to remain silent, fearing seclusion, victim-blaming, negative impacts on their grades, and harm to their family's "honor."

Violence and Male Self-Perception: Regrettably, there is a prevalent issue of aggressive and violent behavior towards women in the province. The societal role of men has remained relatively unchanged compared to that of women, largely due to the patriarchal nature of society. This has fostered a belief among people that men are inherently more powerful and capable than women. The poisonous self-perception of some men is a direct result of this societal mindset, leading them to feel threatened by female education and the pursuit of economic equality for women. This distorted mindset can manifest in acts of sexual harassment as a misguided attempt to protect their own social status.

Credibility and Victim-Blaming: Victim-blaming is a highly significant issue that needs to be addressed. It is often observed that the majority of harassers

hold authoritative positions, which gives them more credibility compared to their subordinates or students (the victims). Furthermore, victims of sexual assault are unfairly blamed for their choice of clothing, their association with individuals of the opposite gender, and are unjustly labeled by society as 'used,' while the focus should be on holding the offender accountable for their actions. Consequently, by remaining silent and failing to bring the perpetrators to justice, those involved become no different from the harasser. This perpetuates an ongoing cycle of injustice within our society.

No Reporting: Various factors contribute to the lack of reporting, such as the apprehension of humiliation, the dread of public exposure, and occasionally the influence of certain individuals or acquaintances who encourage silence. As a result, no one comes forward to reveal the identities of the perpetrators.

Rapid Deforestation and Soil Erosion: Rapid deforestation in watershed areas compounds the problem by removing barriers to soil erosion. Due to soil erosion, the topmost fertile layer of soil is lost, leading to additional problems such as the silting up of dams, which decreases their lifespan. Moreover, tree logs and timber, transported during heavy floods, cause damage to infrastructure, especially bridges, by striking with full force.

Conclusion

Universities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are currently grappling with the issue of harassment, as studies indicate that it is exacerbated by factors such as the male-controlled nature of society, prevailing religious and traditional beliefs, and a pervasive sense of fear. Distress has consistently played a significant role, making it difficult to effectively address harassment cases or prevent the misuse of laws in the current environment. We have observed that harassment not only impacts the well-being of victims on individual, societal, and holistic levels, but has also become normalized to the point of being seen as discretionary in certain circles. The male-centric structure further exacerbates the victim's vulnerability by linking female virtue to family honor, leading to the victim being shamed rather than the perpetrator. Additionally, toxic standards of masculinity discourage male victims from seeking help, as they fear it may compromise their masculinity. The religious emphasis on modesty places the burden on victims to guard their honor and social status, further highlighting the gender biases in Pakistan's institutions and the weaknesses in its judicial system. It has become apparent that despite the existence of strict corporate policies against harassment in Pakistan, these policies are often not put into practice. Those in positions of authority tend to overpower or restrain reported incidents in order to protect the reputation of the institution, allowing the misconduct to continue without consequences. Furthermore, confidentiality agreements in settlement cases make it easy for perpetrators to move to other organizations while hiding their past convictions. Research also revealed that victims are more likely to face negative consequences for reporting such events rather than receiving the necessary support. Governing bodies responsible for addressing complaints showed negligence and often hindered inquiries by failing to recognize the seriousness of the situation.

The paper concluded that the most effective approach to addressing harassment is through the implementation of comprehensive anti-harassment training, bystander training, and the use of positive reinforcement to address the behavior of offenders. Human Resource departments should also develop improved reporting systems. Independent commissions should be established in locations separate from police premises to handle harassment cases. Additionally, it is crucial for legislation and laws to be properly enforced in order to protect human rights. The paper acknowledges the importance of instilling change from a young age, recognizing that

knowledge is a key factor in driving change. Therefore, changes in the curriculum are essential for cultivating a future generation of individuals who are open-minded and tolerant. Since academic frameworks often reflect and reinforce societal norms, it is evident that the most significant change that can combat harassment is a shift in cultural norms.

The current situation regarding handling such issues is extremely disheartening for those affected, as they have become accustomed to enduring harassment without speaking up. Perpetrators use derogatory language to refer to females and their bodies, and students feel that their complaints go unnoticed. This normalization of harassment has reached alarming levels, with many students facing mistreatment under the guise of friendly interactions with teachers who hold authority. Consequently, students often feel fearful, compromise their self-respect, and remain silent. The lack of reporting and awareness only worsens the situation. It is imperative to address this issue by implementing development and training programs, seminars, and educational materials to raise awareness and prevent further instances of harassment.

Recommendations

Based on the above discussion, the following recommendations are presented for mitigating harassment in universities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa:

Monitoring and Evaluation: Pre-emptive Approach

Introducing policies is not enough; there should be a proper mechanism for monitoring the prevalence of harassment. This includes conducting regular surveys across the university to understand the perceptions and safety of all stakeholders and continuously adjusting the policies accordingly.

Ownership of the Leader:

Senior leadership must establish a culture of respect and inclusivity from the top down. This involves clearly communicating a commitment to zero tolerance for harassment of any kind. They should create confidential and accessible channels for reporting incidents of harassment. All reports must be taken seriously, with thorough investigations conducted and appropriate disciplinary steps taken if necessary.

Continuous improvement:

Preventing harassment requires constant attention and effort. Senior leaders should regularly assess the effectiveness of their policies and practices, solicit feedback from employees, and make adjustments as needed to ensure that the organization remains a safe and inclusive environment for all.

Education and Training:

Providing regular training sessions on harassment prevention and timely intervention equips employees with the knowledge and skills to identify, address, and report instances of harassment. Universities should ensure that these training programs are comprehensive, engaging, and accessible to all staff and students. There should be illustrative posters for awareness and guidance for those who face harassment, whether they are students or staff members. Regular sessions in collaboration with governmental and non-governmental organizations are required to sensitize all stakeholders. The administrative head should lead in this regard by emphasizing the issue in all speeches and meetings. The official website should also display a slogan of zero tolerance against harassment.

Students-HR relationship: collaborative approach

It is imperative for a collaborative effort between students and the Human Resource departments of universities to enhance reporting systems and establish a secure environment for individuals to report incidents of sexual harassment. Clear guidelines outlining the definition of harassment, prohibited behaviors, and the corresponding disciplinary actions must be provided by HR. Each report of harassment should be treated confidentially to safeguard the victim from any direct consequences. The Human Resource department should invest in training an adequate number of staff members to serve as complaint officers, empowered to enforce disciplinary measures and offer counseling to both the victim and the offender. This demonstration of commitment by the administration will play a crucial role in eliminating institutional harassment by challenging existing norms.

Negative reinforcement: social approach

Most universities offer comprehensive training to staff on addressing instances of sexual harassment through presentations and manuals, but these methods often fall short. Therefore, universities should consider implementing a strategy of undesirable reinforcement when dealing with colleagues (perpetrators) involved in sexual harassment incidents. While it may initially seem uncomfortable to provide negative feedback to a coworker, proper training on communication techniques can help the perpetrator understand their wrongdoing in a non-confrontational manner and decrease the likelihood of future incidents. Taking a stand against sexual harassment not only boosts confidence and a sense of justice among employees but also fosters a safe and supportive work environment that enhances overall performance. Bystander training is essential in achieving this goal, focusing on educating individuals on recognizing the issue, addressing it, supporting the victim, and effectively intervening to prevent further harassment.

Third party utilization:

In order to guarantee the security and safety of victims in harassment cases, utilizing a third-party entity, such as an ombudsman, has proven to be effective. These third-party organizations offer anonymous reporting systems and possess the necessary expertise to handle such cases, thereby providing protection on behalf of the victim's university. Following their investigation, these third-party entities present a range of options and solutions to universities, including the termination of the harasser's contract or the issuance of warning letters, among others. However, the success of this approach ultimately hinges on the employer's commitment to the well-being of their students, rather than prioritizing the reputation of the university.

Linking all complaint platforms with Ombudsman office:

Occasionally, students may feel hesitant to trust the redressal system at the university level due to the fact that they are all part of the same university community, potentially leading to a bias towards their peers. This can result in instances of harassment going unreported. To address this issue, it is recommended that the ombudsman office be integrated with all complaint platforms, allowing complainants to directly submit their cases to the ombudsman for thorough investigation. Not only will this approach help in providing satisfaction to the victim throughout the process, but it will also

serve as a mechanism to hold all parties involved accountable. Additionally, it will contribute to ensuring the safety and security of the victim.

Curricula change: Psychological approach

Lastly, it is imperative to instill a sense of change among the younger generation, recognizing knowledge as a crucial element for transformation. Modifying educational curricula plays a vital role in shaping future individuals as unbiased and tolerant citizens. Change originates from within a society, and since academic contexts reflect and reinforce social, traditional, and cultural values, it is essential for Pakistan's educational interventions to be based on principles that advocate for equality, thereby satisfying the masses and fundamentally altering existing biased perspectives. Moving forward, education must transition from mere endorsement to interactive learning environments that foster individuals capable of drawing logical conclusions, finding more satisfactory solutions to global issues, and resisting manipulation. These individuals should possess the ability to adapt to change and maintain rationality when necessary. The most significant change contributing to the eradication of harassment is a transformation in cultural norms.

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