

Examining the Mediating Role of Job Stress in the Relationship between sexual Harassment on Job and Turnover Intention Among Women in Pakistani Service Sectors

Syeda Mahera Husain

Faculty of Business, Economics and Accountancy, Universiti Malaysia Sabah

Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia

Yen Phin Ng* (Corresponding author)

Faculty of Business, Economics and Accountancy, Universiti Malaysia Sabah

Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia

Email: ngyenphin@ums.edu.my

Oscar Dousin* (Corresponding author)

Faculty of Business, Economics and Accountancy, Universiti Malaysia Sabah

Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia

E-mail: odousin@ums.edu.my/ oscardousin@gmail.com

Received: Jul. 23, 2024 Accepted: Sep. 14, 2024 Online published: Aug. 30, 2025

doi:10.5296/ijhrs.v15i2.22087

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5296/ijhrs.v15i2.22087>

Abstract

Sexual harassment in public places of Pakistan is a social problem. In Pakistan, a good number of studies have been conducted on sexual harassment of women; however, they are based in educational institutes and educational institutions and Hospitals. This research examined effect of sexual harassment on female workers in service sector of Pakistan (Banking and Airline industry). It further discusses the relationship of sexual harassment with Job stress and employee turnover. The mediating effect shown of Job stress between and

employee turnover intention and sexual harassment has also been discussed in detailed. The sample was 268 using questionnaires which were collected from female workers working in the two head offices of these organizations. Based on quantitative research approach the data analysis is done by using IBM SPSS Statistics 22 and Smart PLS software version 3.0. The results indicated that there is a significant harassment found in these two organizations as all 3 hypotheses are significantly correlated at $p < 0.01$. This study also reinforces the idea that due to unpleasant working conditions employees can suffer from job stress which ultimately leads towards turnover.

Keywords: Sexual Harassment, Job stress, Employee Turnover Intention, Woman Workers

1. Introduction

One of the topics that has generated more public discussion during the past several decades is sexual harassment. Both on people and society, it has significant and pervasive effects (Rezvani et al., 2020). Sexual harassment is a lawful term that refers to unsolicited verbal or physical behavior of a sexual nature. According to official records and academic studies, sexual harassment is a widespread issue that is becoming worse every day (United Nation, 2015) whereas, in Pakistan, sexual harassment in public places is a social issue (Klasen, 1994). Many generations of Pakistani women have experienced sexual harassment and other forms of discrimination in Asia. Despite numerous changes to Pakistan's constitution, the nation has failed to advance the economic and political rights meant for women (Delavande & Zafar, 2013). Despite, so many alterations in the constitution of Pakistan, the country has failed to improve the economic and political rights intended for females.

Prior study showed that 93% of Pakistani women have reported experiencing some type of sexual harassment at work (Sarwar & Nauman, 2011). According to other studies, every Pakistani woman has likely experienced harassment at some point in her life, both at work and in public. (Yousaf, 2014; Yousaf & Mehmood, 2012). In addition, to identifying variables like job stress and turnover intention and how they can have a significant negative impact on both employees and organizations in terms of financial and emotional aspects, this research will concentrate on the prevalence of sexual harassment in Pakistani workplaces and occupational opportunities.

Unfortunately, in terms of Pakistan's working environment, the human resource department function in most organizations had remained restricted to transactional issues like hiring and firing, salaries, promotions, and so on, but not those pertaining development and motivation of employees in particular to gender. Many countries in the subcontinent have given the right to a safe environment free from sexual harassment, and it is a duty of HRM to find such issues. This research will focus on Sexual Harassment prevailing in Pakistani organizations. Earlier, it has been studied that services sector in Pakistan contributes the major share in the economic activity of country and it has been increased from 39 percent of GDP in the years (1960-61) to 53.3 percent of GDP in the years (2009-10), therefore it is the largest contributor in the GDP of the country (Ahmed and Ahsan, 2011). According to Arshadi, & Damiri, (2013), workplace stress has been a widespread issue for human resource managers, and it is becoming a more prevalent aspect of modern life. Job stress and concerns with work-life

balance are important factors in turnover rates, which have been a major challenge for management for many years and are still a big issue for organizations today. Islam et al. (2018) investigated that higher percent of employees in the police workforce in Punjab province of Pakistan, willing to quit the job due to highly stressful environment.

In Pakistan, services sector is highly diversified. Our focused study area for this study mainly consists of distributive and producer services (one organization from each). Asian Development Bank Report (2008) signifies that more job opportunities were created in these two sectors due to increased diversification of the economy in recent years. These two sectors have greatly influenced Pakistani growth and occupations, and there are a lot of female workers here.

2. Literature review

The fourth world conference was called by the United Nations 1995 with a focus on issues affecting women. It was claimed that a significant percentage of women who leave their homes for work or other reasons experience violence in a variety of settings, including the workplace, the street, and public transportation. Benazir Bhutto, the then-prime minister of Pakistan, attended this meeting and spoke extensively about violence against women. As time goes on, the subject of sexual harassment is "coming out of the closet". Many companies all over the world are already beginning to acknowledge that the problem of sexual harassment is real and that it may have an impact on their operations. People today struggle to achieve financial independence and security, and both men and women are paid well for their work. Due to recent labor regulations, sexual harassment victims do have legal options, which is why they are having the guts to come forward and file complaints (Vyas, 2018). Employee morale might suffer as a result of sexual harassment at work, which can also cause stress on the body and mind and psychological trauma.

Additionally, businesses experience harm in the form of decreased performance and expense increases. Yahaya et al. (2012) concluded that a systems approach to designing a training program that addresses the root causes, involving all employees from all levels, and provides skills for dealing with this issue can encourage a pleasant working atmosphere. Forbes (2015) investigated job stress as solely responsible for up to 8% of countrywide spending on healthcare in US. Another study done by Australian researcher between the years (2010 -2015) approximately investigated that 91% of workers' compensation claims involving a mental health condition were associated to job stress. Some of the common reasons causing mental stress are characterized as work harassment (27%) work pressure (31%) exposure to workplace or occupational violence (14%). The external variables in the work environment, which might be mental, emotional, physical, or social, are known as stress in the context of work life. Job stress must be studied and addressed in organizations since it adversely impacts employees' physical and mental health (Rana and Munir, 2011).

On the other hand, turnover intention is defined as the degree of likelihood that an employee will leave an organization (Lin & Huang, 2021). Sexual harassment pushes many women out of jobs and likely impact their career achievements (McLaughlin et. al, 2017). Several studies are linked with the voluntary and involuntary professional interruptions to substantial earning

losses (Brand, 2015; Couch et. al., 2010; Theunissen et al., 2011). United Kingdom estimates losses reported ranging from 14 to 25 percent are those who suffer mass layoffs (Hijzen et al., 2010). Job displacement is a triggering and stressful life event that involves a sequence of experiences from being joblessness, to job search, reemployment, retaining and in between all sexual harassment may be a main scarring event that interrupts “the usual trajectory of steady jobs with career ladders that normally propels wage growth. Thus, hypothesis 1 is formulated as below:

H1: There will be a significant positive relationship between sexual harassment and job stress in female employees

Women are frequently the victims of sexual harassment and abuse around the world. According to clinical psychologists, sexual harassment victims may exhibit triggering symptoms of sadness, anxiety, and even post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). According to several researchers, victims who have harassment problems early in their careers may experience persistent depressed symptoms. Sometimes, sexual harassment manifests as a trauma that is extremely difficult to deal with, and the mental health effects become so severe that the victim experiences physical symptoms including muscular aches, headaches, and elevated blood or sugar levels (Spector, 2013). Therefore, we proposed the following hypothesis:

H2: There will be significant positive relationship between job stress and turnover intention in female employees.

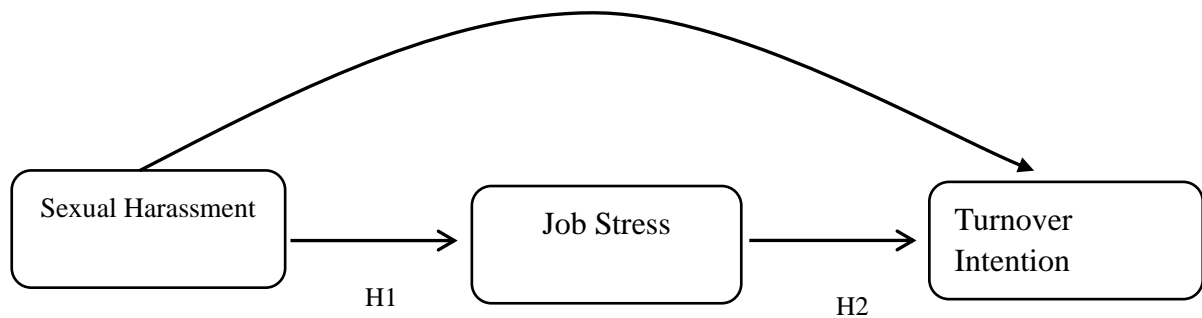
Khatri and Budhwar (2001) stated that employees, particularly those in the banking sector, must be given a proper and balanced job to complete that should be stress-free, have a positive work environment, and the roles must be clearly defined in order to avoid role conflict and turnover if they are to survive and succeed in today's competitive world. Workers cannot perform better if they are stressed. Their relationship with the organization will be affected by the job stress and employees will not pleasantly perform in organizational success and prosperity and may tend to leave (Iman et. al., 2019). The degree of stress among employees is raised by mergers, firings, re-organizations, changes in technology, and downsizing in businesses as a result of the ongoing growth of competition. As a result, there is currently a lot of research being done on the subject of job stress. Based on this review, hypothesis 3 is postulated:

H3: There will be a significantly positive relationship between sexual harassment and turnover intention mediated by job stress in the female employees.

Coworkers' unwanted sexual activity creates unfriendly and unpleasant working environments in a variety of organizational settings, which indirectly pressures employees to quit their jobs. When women are subjected to harassment, they can experience severe mental and physical repercussions. They also frequently experience an uncomfortable position at work, which affects their performance and leads to their termination. Equal Rights Advocates (2003).

3. Methodology

The study was conducted using a quantitative research methodology, which entails gathering data and converting it into numerical form so that conclusions can be drawn by using statistical techniques. We'll employ close ended survey questions A total of 268 respondents were used in this study, and data analysis was performed. Age, year of service, and marital status are the main characteristics of the respondents evaluated in this study. All the responders were working women. Procedures used for data analysis contains principal component analysis (PCA) and PLS-SEM Structural model. The framework developed by analyzing feminist and organizational theories emphasizes sexual harassment as a form of power, gendered job markets, and unequal pay scales, which lowers employee turnover and job stress (Hong, 2016). Furthermore, the approaches are illustrated by a framework in Figure 1.



Adapted from: (Iman, Shah and Raza, 2014; Bano & Malik, 2013)

Principal component analysis

All measurement variables are entered to perform a principal component analysis (PCA). The findings revealed that 18.87 percent of the variance can be explained by a single component in the unrotated factor solution.

Structural Model Evaluation: First Order Constructs

The assessment of the structural model, the path coefficients are obtained for the structural model of relationships which testing the hypothesized relationships among the constructs. The hypotheses of the research models are tested using bootstrapping procedure with 5000 subsamples, which has recommended guidelines from (Chin, 1998; Hair et al., 2011). The significance of the path coefficients is based on the t-value.

Table 2. Significance Testing Results of Structural Model

Path	Beta (β)	Strd.Error (SE)	T-Value*	Decision
Sexual Harassment -> Job Stress	0.114	0.049	2.90	Accepted

Job Stress -> turnover intention	0.558	0.045	12.44	Accepted
Mediating Effect				
Sexual Harassment >Job Stress > turnover intention	0.080	0.028	2.87	Accepted

The results shown above suggested that all 3 hypotheses are accepted, H1 significant result investigates that there is a positive relationship between sexual harassment and job stress with significance of $\beta=0.114$ and $t=2.09$ at $p<0.01$ which indicates that employee get stressed if organization have sexual harassment issues. Similarly, H2 indicates the relationship between job stress and employee intention to quit the organization with $\beta=0.558$ and $t=12.44$ at $p<0.01$. Furthermore, For H3, the relationship between sexual harassment and turnover intention mediated the job stress shows a significant relation with the $\beta=0.08$ and $t=2.87$ at $p<0.01$ which indicates that if there is sexual harassment in the organization employees will have job stress and due to which there will have be a turnover at work place.

5. Discussion, Limitations of Study and Conclusion

The findings of this study offer significant insights into the adverse effects of sexual harassment in the workplace, particularly in its relationship with job stress and employee turnover intention. Consistent with prior literature (e.g., Vyas, 2018; Yahaya et al., 2012), the results support the hypothesized model that sexual harassment has a direct and significant positive relationship with job stress and job stress, in turn, is a strong predictor of turnover intention. These results are in alignment with empirical work suggesting that sexual harassment leads to emotional distress, reduced job satisfaction, and decreased organizational commitment (Spector, 2013; Rana & Munir, 2011). Furthermore, the mediating effect of job stress in the relationship between sexual harassment and turnover intention reveals an important mechanism: that sexual harassment indirectly influences employees' decisions to leave their jobs by increasing their psychological burden. This supports previous claims that mental stress resulting from workplace mistreatment can escalate to broader organizational issues such as high attrition rates, reduced morale, and compromised performance (Iman et al., 2014). The findings underscore that workplace harassment not only affects individual victims but also bears costs for organizations through increased turnover and associated financial implications (Hijzen et al., 2010). This study further validates the idea that women, particularly in male-dominated or hierarchically rigid organizations, may experience heightened vulnerability to harassment, which is often exacerbated by limited access to grievance mechanisms and fears of retaliation. This is in line with McLaughlin et. al. (2017), who found that such experiences not only disrupt career progression but also erode long-term psychological resilience.

However, despite the meaningful insights provided, several limitations warrant consideration.

First, the study relied on self-reported questionnaires to collect data on sensitive topics such as sexual harassment, which may have led to underreporting or response bias. Female employees may have hesitated to disclose their experiences candidly due to concerns about confidentiality, fear of stigma, or mistrust in the research process. Such reservations are not uncommon, as highlighted in prior research that notes the prevalence of silence surrounding harassment in professional settings (Equal Rights Advocates, 2003). Second, the scope of the study was constrained due to organizational barriers. The reluctance of senior female managers to participate, along with inconsistent human resource policies across firms, limited the comprehensiveness of the data. Consequently, the study could not account for cross-organizational variations in policy implementation or the influence of organizational culture on harassment reporting and resolution mechanisms. These contextual factors could serve as moderating variables in future research. Another limitation pertains to the methodological approach. While the structural model demonstrated good explanatory power—especially with the strong path coefficient from job stress to turnover intention—only a modest amount of variance (18.87%) was explained by the principal component analysis. This suggests that there are likely other significant factors (e.g., organizational justice, leadership support, workplace civility) contributing to turnover intentions that were not captured in this study.

Despite these limitations, the implications of this study are both practical and theoretical. Practically, organizations must recognize sexual harassment as not only a legal and ethical concern but also a critical occupational stressor with tangible effects on retention and employee well-being. Investing in clear anti-harassment policies, confidential reporting channels, and psychological support programs can mitigate the cascading effects of workplace mistreatment. Theoretically, the findings contribute to the literature by empirically confirming the mediating role of job stress in the relationship between sexual harassment and turnover intention. This integrated framework aligns with stressor-strain-outcome models in occupational psychology, emphasizing the need to understand not just the presence of workplace harassment, but also its psychological pathways.

In conclusion, this study reinforces the pressing need for proactive organizational strategies that prevent sexual harassment and address its psychological consequences. Without such interventions, affected employees are likely to experience heightened stress and, ultimately, seek employment elsewhere posing a significant threat to organizational stability, inclusivity, and performance. Future research should adopt mixed-method or longitudinal designs to further explore these dynamics and test intervention strategies in diverse organizational contexts

References

- Ahmed, A., & Ahsan, H. (2011). Contribution of services sector in the economy of Pakistan. Working Papers & Research Reports, 2011.
- Arshadi, N., & Damiri, H. (2013). The relationship of job stress with turnover intention and job performance: Moderating role of OBSE. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 84, 706–710.

- Bano, S., & Malik, S. (2013). Impact of workplace bullying on organizational outcome. *Pakistan Journal of Commerce and Social Sciences*, 7(3), 618–627.
- Brand, J. E. (2015). The far-reaching impact of job loss and unemployment. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 41, 359–375.
- Chin, W. W. (1998). The partial least squares approach to structural equation modeling. In G. A. Marcoulides (Ed.), *Modern methods for business research* (Vol. 295, pp. 295–336). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Couch, K. A., & Placzek, D. W. (2010). Earnings losses of displaced workers revisited. *The American Economic Review*, 100, 572–589.
- Delavande, A., & Zafar, B. (2013). Gender discrimination and social identity: Experimental evidence from urban Pakistan. *FRB of New York Staff Report* (No. 593).
- Equal Rights Advocate. (2003). Sexual harassment: Effects. <http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/svaw/harassment/explore/4effects.htm>
- Forbes. (2015). Workplace stress responsible for up to \$190B in annual U.S. healthcare costs. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/hbsworkingknowledge/2015/01/26/workplace-stress-responsible-for-up-to-190-billion-in-annual-u-s-healthcare-costs/#605b47ba235a>
- Hair, J. F., Ringle, C. M., & Sarstedt, M. (2011). PLS-SEM: Indeed a silver bullet. *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, 19(2), 139–152.
- Hong, J. P. (2016). Gender differences in somatic symptoms and current suicidal risk in outpatients with major depressive disorder. *Psychiatry Investigation*, 13(6), 609–616.
- Imam, A., Shah, F. T., & Raza, A. (2014). Mediating role of job stress between workplace discrimination (gender discrimination-glass ceiling) and employee attitudinal outcomes (job satisfaction and motivation) in banking sector of Pakistan. *Middle East Journal of Scientific Research*, 19, 401–411.
- Islam, T., Ahmad, R., Ahmed, I., & Ahmer, Z. (2019). Police work-family nexus, work engagement and turnover intention. *Policing: An International Journal*.
- Klasen, S. (1994). “Missing women” reconsidered. *World Development*, 22(7), 1061–1071.
- Lin, C. Y., & Huang, C. K. (2021). Employee turnover intentions and job performance from a planned change: The effects of an organizational learning culture and job satisfaction. *International Journal of Manpower*, 42(3), 409–423.
- McLaughlin, H., Uggen, C., & Blackstone, A. (2017). The economic and career effects of sexual harassment on working women. *Gender & Society*, 31(3), 333–358.
- Rana, B., & Munir, K. (2011, April 1). Impact of stressors on the performance of employees. Munich Personal RePEc Archive. <https://mpra.ub.uni-uenchen.de/id/eprint/32729>
- Sarwar, F., & Nauman, B. (2011, December). Antecedents and experience of sexual harassment at individual and group level. In 3rd SAICON International Conference on

Management, Business (Vol. 29).

Spector, J. (2013). The hidden health effects of sexual harassment. NBC News. <https://www.nbcnews.com/better/health/hidden-health-effects-sexual-harassment-ncna810416>

United Nations. (2015). The world's women: Trends and statistics. New York: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Statistics Division.

Vyas, S. (2018). Sexual harassment cause stress: Its effects & consequences. *International Journal of Research and Scientific Innovation (IJRSI)*, 5(1). ISSN 2321–2705.

Yahaya, A., Ing, T. C., Lee, G. M., Yahaya, N., Boon, Y., Hashim, S., Taat, S., & Jesus, S. K. C. I. (2012). The impact of workplace bullying on work performance. *Archives des Sciences*, 65(4), 18–28.

Yousaf, R. (2014). Professional perception of the harassment of women in the workplaces and of its impact on well-being. *Journal of Research in Gender Studies*, 4(1), 806–818.

Yousaf, R., & Mahmood, N. (2012). Women's professional competence: An effect of harassment at workplace.

Copyright Disclaimer

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).