

PERCEPTION OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT AT WORKPLACE, KNOWLEDGE OF WORKING WOMEN TOWARDS WORKPLACE HARASSMENT ACT 2010

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to explore the experiences of sexual harassment among the working females of Peshawar, their response against the harassment and their awareness about the Workplace Harassment Act 2010.

In a cross sectional survey, a sample of 153 working women from six different professions (Doctors, Nurses, Teachers, Students, Bankers and Police) in Peshawar was selected following convenient sampling technique and were investigated through structured questionnaire. The results revealed that harassment is routinely practiced at workplace in Peshawar. Generally sexual harassment was identified as a major problem faced by the students. Overall, unwelcome appreciation of their figure and dress received the highest response. Most of the respondents claimed to have faced gender harassment more commonly as compared to sexual coercion. Regarding reaction to harassment, most of the females gave no response; few resisted and ran from the site while very few shouted for help. Half of the respondents were aware of Work Place Harassment Act 2010 and 16.34% said that act was displayed in their workplace.

Negative responses found in filing a case against sexual harassment at workplace showed that there is a culture of acceptance regarding such harassment, combined with a lack of awareness of how to effectively deal with. The results show a possibility of significant under-reporting of sexual harassment. The research suggests strict penalties to curb the growing number of cases of gender harassment.

Keywords: Sexual harassment Experiences, Workplace, Harassment Policy of Pakistan, Awareness of the law

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the world, working people are reporting general and sexual harassment at their workplaces. Despite all the efforts for prevention, the problem is continuing and adversely affecting the mental and physical health of working women across the globe.¹

A study revealed that victims of harassment face issues of depression, anxiety and lack of confidence in their lives.² Fitzgerald et al.² found out that almost 60% females face sexual harassment in one way or the other, but, how a person perceives sexual harassment depends upon many factors as York³ states that sexual harassment perception is purely a subjective phenomenon. Steven has divided sexual harassment into two broad categories: quid pro quo harassment and hostile environment. Quid pro quo is Latin for "this for that", and it is the most common form of sexual harassment. This type of harassment occurs when "submission to or rejection of such conduct is used as the basis for employment decisions affecting such

individual". The other, Hostile environment, is a type of sexual harassment that creates "an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work environment". If the victim tries to stop the harassment, and is negatively impacted by it, such as termination, denied employment, or demoted, then this would constitute as hostile environment. Another example would be if the harassment makes the victims work performance suffer due to the emotional duress caused⁴.

In Europe, majority of workers subjected to Sexual harassment are women⁵. In general, approximately 30 - 50% of women have experienced some form of sexual harassment. The highest incidence rates were found in the national surveys carried out in Austria (80%), Germany (72%), and Luxembourg (80%)⁶.

Asian women are equally exposed to sexual harassment at workplace. In Japan, a study found that out of 2254 women respondents, two third were sexually harassed, 11 % had experienced quid pro quo and 45 % had been subjected to hostile working environment. In Bangladesh, large scale of women's entry into paid labor force has increased incidences of sexual harassment. In Nepal 53.8% of women employees reported that they have faced the problem of sexual harassment in their workplaces.⁷

Inequalities in the position of men and women exist in nearly all societies and sexual harassment at work is a clear manifestation of unequal power relations. Sexual harassment is also used as a tool to discourage

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women who may be seen to be competing for power⁷.

The area of sexual harassment of women at workplace in Arab countries is not well studied. The limited literature on this subject suggests that sexual harassment may be common but underreported⁸. A review of the literature reveals the ongoing debate regarding the legitimate roles of Muslim women in their respective societies and their participation in public life. The culturally derived concepts of honor and shame in Islamic and Arabic societies are focused on women and restrict their participation in public life. The cultural context has led to assumptions that, firstly, sexual harassment might be the price women in Muslim societies will pay for joining the mixed gender workplace and, secondly, that such women, if harassed, would remain silent due to fear of loss of their own and their families' honour and likely societal victimization.^{9,10,11}

Though the international agencies have been consistently drawing attention towards the existence of sexual harassment across countries in the world; it continues to be a neglected area in Asia. UNDP (2010) report¹¹.

In Pakistan, although women are being welcomed in the organizations across the country but the traditional settings are still male dominated and women tend to face resistance in getting accepted as equals in the organizations¹².

Misbah, while studying sexual harassment perception among nurses of Sindh suggested the possibility of a high level of under reporting of sexual harassment. She further commented that unsafe working environment was the major cause of acute shortage of nurses in Sindh, Pakistan¹³.

Syed noted that sexual harassment towards female teachers is growing in terms of murmuring unethical clichés and singing filthy songs¹⁴.

Whilst there is literature on workplace harassment in other parts of Pakistan^{15,16,17}, there is a dearth of information in KP, Pakistan.

The study is aimed at to explore the level of understanding and perception of sexual harassment among the working women of Peshawar, victim's response towards workplace Harassment and awareness as well as effectiveness of workplace Harassment Act to minimize and control the harassment incidents.

Objectives

- 1) To know the magnitude and nature of sexual harassment at work places.
- 2) To find out the response of working women to harassment.
- 3) To check the level of awareness of working women to Workplace Harassment Act 2010.

METHODOLOGY

Setting: The study respondents were from 6 different professions i.e. Doctors, Nurses, Teachers, Students, Bankers and Police. The following workplaces were chosen for the study:

Hayatabad Medical Complex Peshawar (HMC), Khyber Girls Medical College Peshawar (KGMC), IQRA University Peshawar, Forward Girls College Peshawar, Women Police Station-Police Lines, Peshawar, United Bank, National Bank of Pakistan, Muslim Commercial Bank, Punjab Bank, Women Bank, Alfaisal Bank,

A Cross sectional survey with (n=153) was conducted with a duration of six months from January 2015 to August 2015.

The sample was selected following convenient sampling technique.

RESULTS

Table 1: Sample description

Field	Frequency	Percent
Doctors	26	17
Nurses	25	16.3
Police	22	14.4
Teachers	23	15
Students	32	20.9
Bankers	25	16.3
Total	153	100

Table 2: Awareness of act

	Frequency	Percent
yes	73	47.7
No	80	52.3
Total	153	100.0

Table 3: Source of awareness

	Frequency	Percent
electronic media	49	32.0
print media	12	7.8
social network	17	11.1
heard from someone	18	11.8
Total	96	62.7
Missing System	57	37.3
Total	153	100.0

Table 4: workplace harassment Act displayed in office

	Frequency	Percent
yes	25	16.3
No	128	83.7
Total	153	100

Table 5: Would you ever try the harasser in court?

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	51	33.3
No	17	11.1
dont know	85	55.6
Total	153	100

Table 6: Satisfaction with the law

	Frequency	Percent
yes	54	35.3
No	99	64.7
Total	153	100.0

Table 7: Measures for harassment prevention

	Frequency	Percent
creating awareness about law	23	15
strict implementation of law	50	32.7
by making punishments more severe	63	41.2
by avoiding public places	17	11.1
Total	153	100

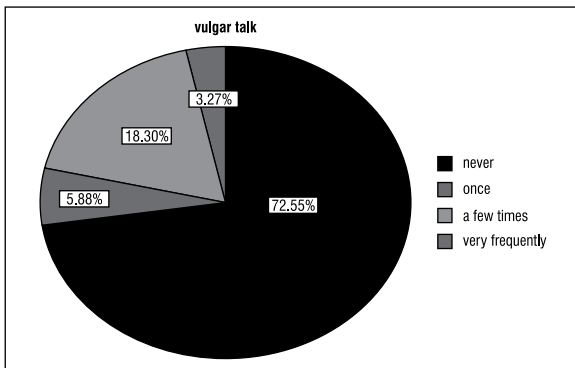


Figure 1: Had a vulgar talk

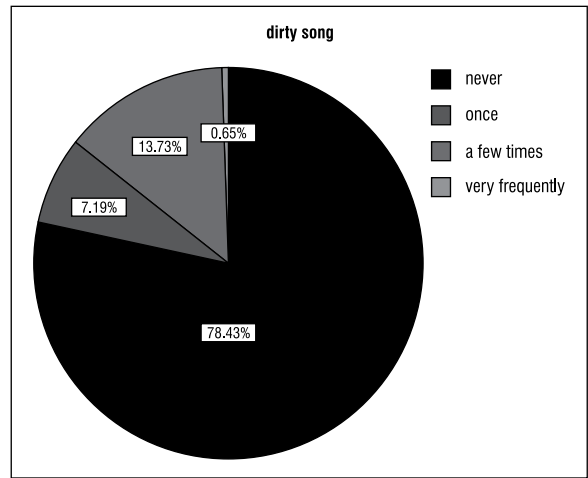


Figure 2: Sang you dirty songs

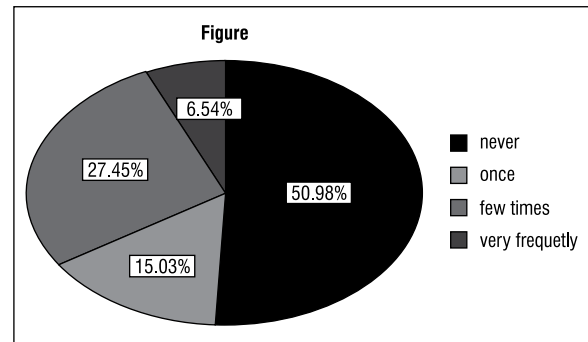


Figure 3: Appreciated your figure

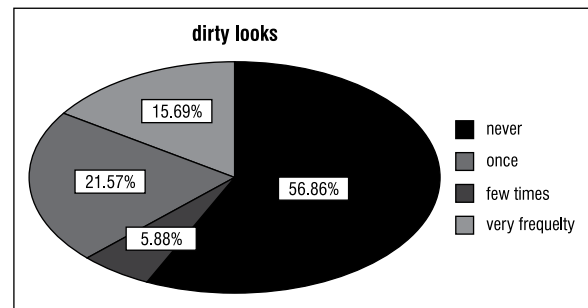


Figure 4: Gave you dirty looks

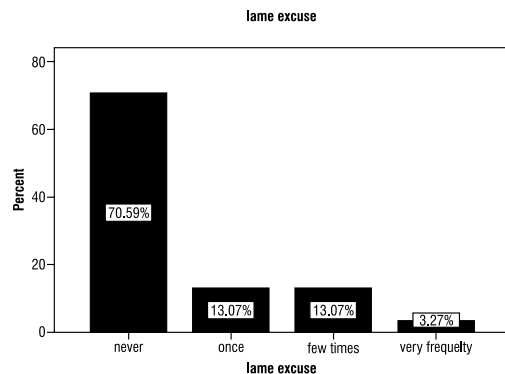


Figure 5: made you sit through lame excuses

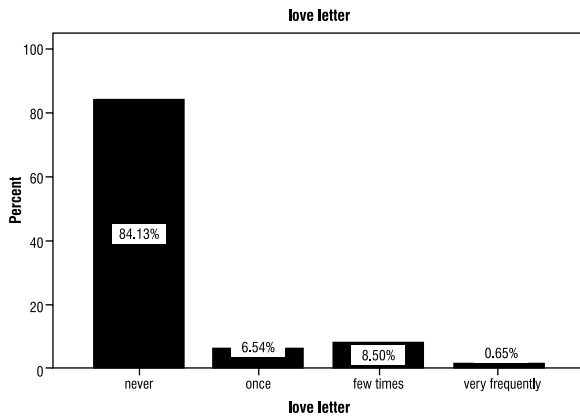


Figure 6: gave you love letters
outing

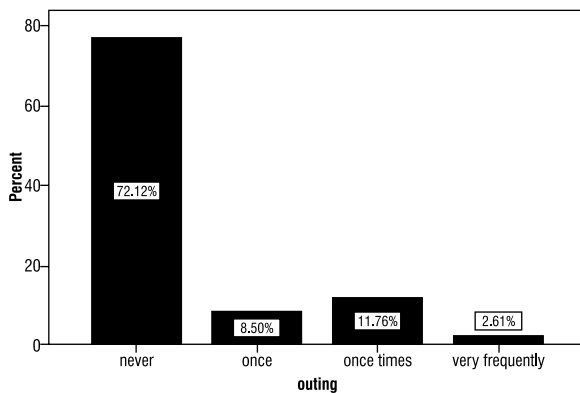


Figure 7: asked you to go with him for outing

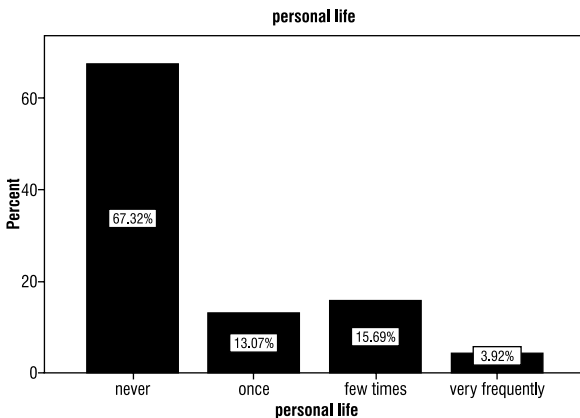


Figure 8: asked you about personal life

DISCUSSION

Based upon our findings, 83.7% students faced some sort of harassment at workplace. It may be because of the fact that there is a culture of acceptance of harassing behaviors in general, combined with a lack of awareness to effectively manage it, which may be the reason for taking no steps against the culprits. Previous studies reveal that almost 60% of female students faced some form of sexual harassment^{12,13}. In another study 50-70 % of female students experienced harassment¹⁷.

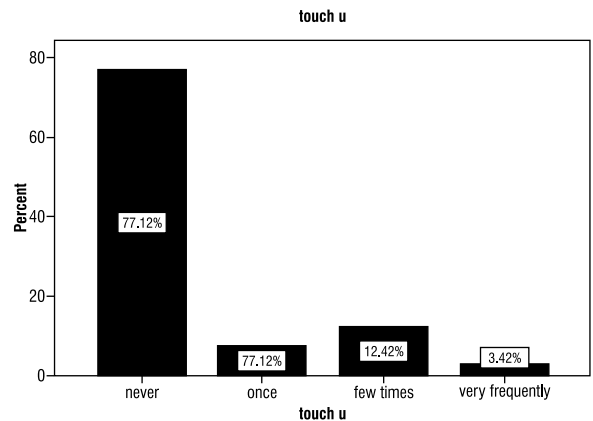


Figure 9: tried to touch you
Kiss u

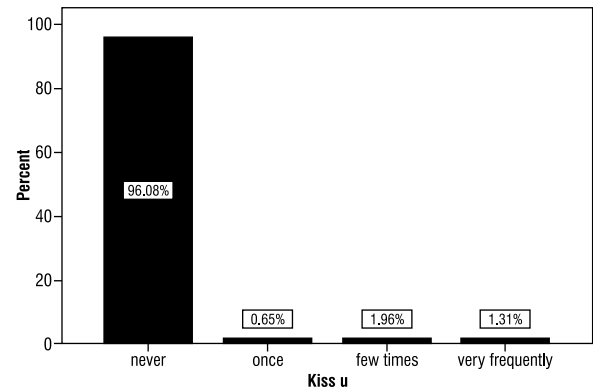


Figure 10: tried to kiss you

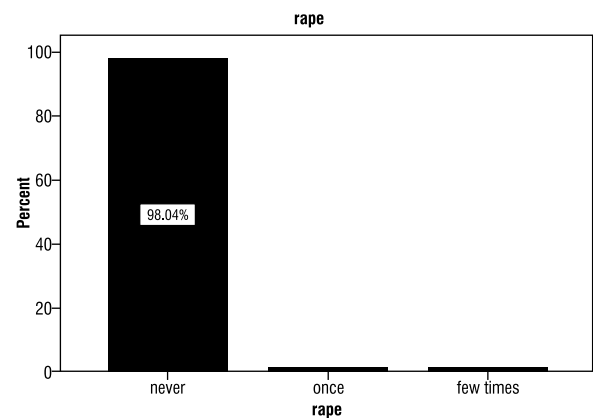


Figure 11: tried to rape you

Doctors and Bankers were found to have experienced least sexual harassment. The reasons might be that some women have gradually reached higher positions, where their junior employees were unable to harass them⁹.

Item number 05 i.e. “appreciate their figure and dress” received highest response (49%) overall in terms of harassment. Among the respondents 6.5% claimed that they faced it very frequently; 27.5 & 15% answered they faced it a few times and once respectively. In western countries it was reported⁶ that this type

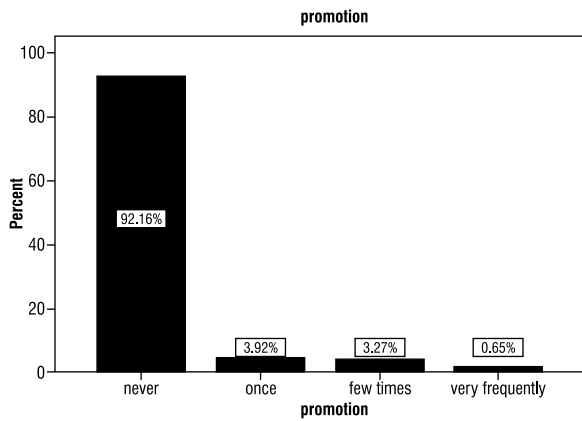


Figure 12: offered you promotion

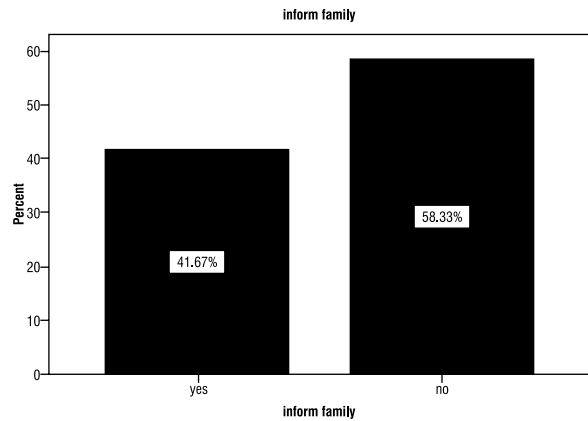


Figure 15: Response of the harasser

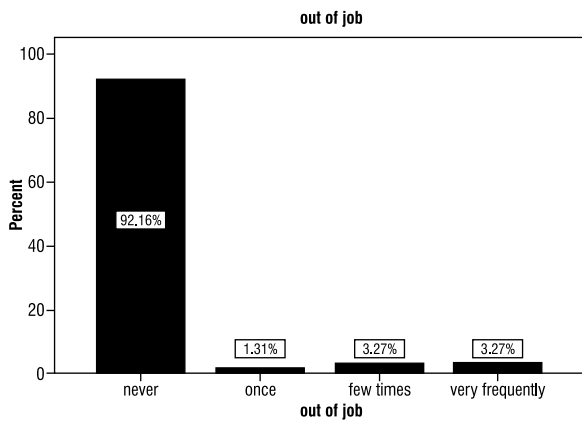


Figure 13: threatened you to fire from the job

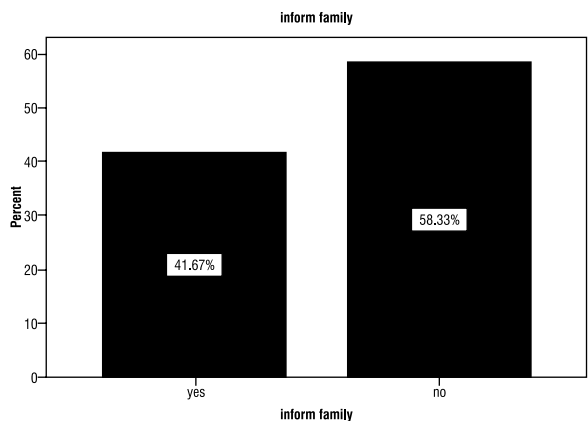


Figure 16: was the family informed?

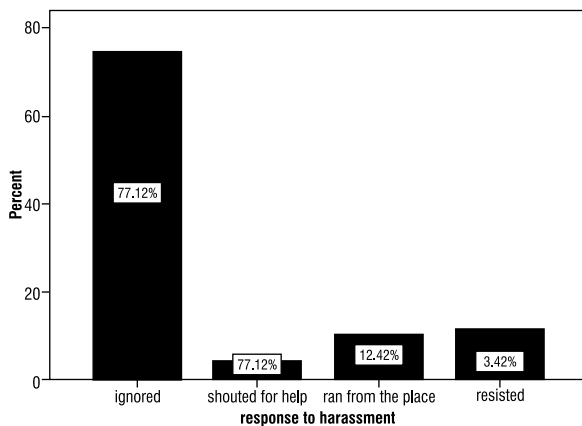


Figure 14: Your response to harassment

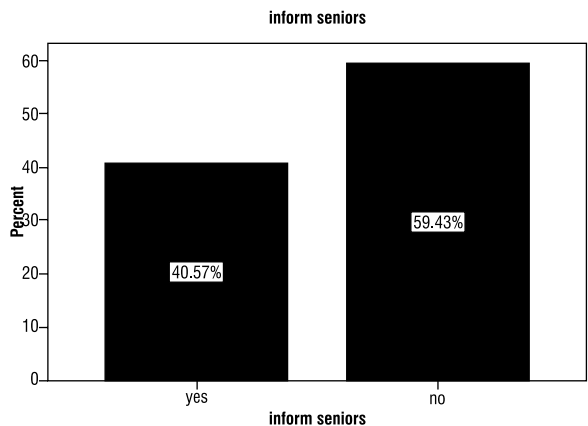


Figure 17: were the seniors informed?

“appreciation of dress and figure” of harassment is the second common type with 23% to 60% women having faced it; it was highest in UK with 60% and lowest in Luxembourg. In the same research⁶ it was mentioned that within the verbal forms of harassment, ‘sexual jokes’ were the most frequently experienced (56-81%), while percentage in our research was 27.5%. The reasons could be less frequent interactions between men and women in our relatively conservative society^{12, 13, 14}.

‘Being stared with dirty looks’ was reported by 41.9% respondents comparable to other studies^{8,16,17}.

Rape was reported by 2% respondents in our study. In a Muslim society this number is a serious problem. The prevalence of rape at workplaces in Europe is also claimed to be 1-4%^{5, 6}.

Threats of disadvantages of refusing sexual involvement or other form of Quid Pro Quo were expe-

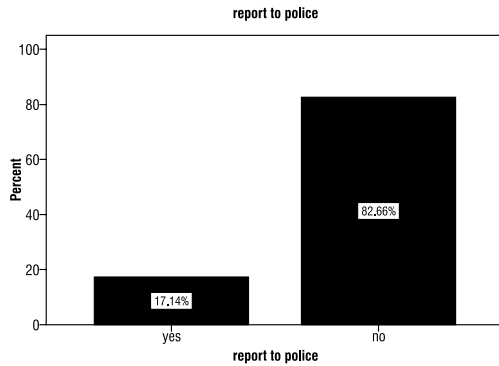


Figure 18: was the case reported to police?

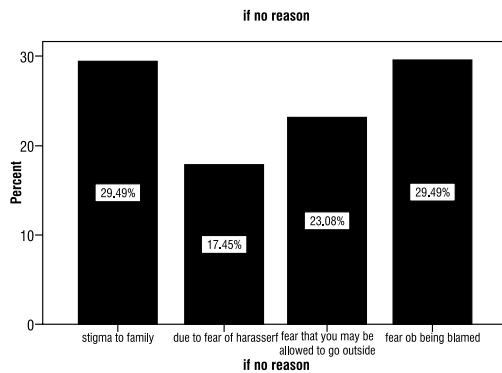


Figure 19: reasons for not informing any one

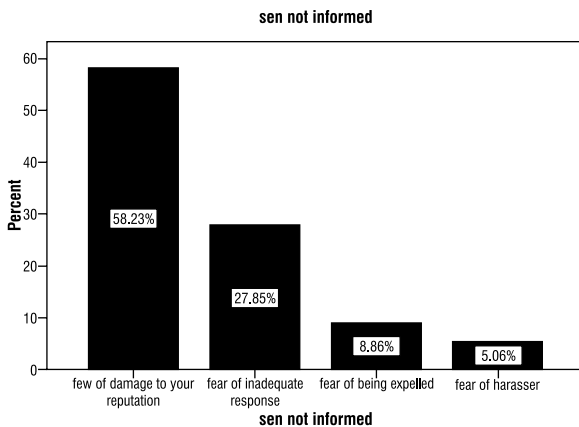


Figure 20: reasons for not informing seniors

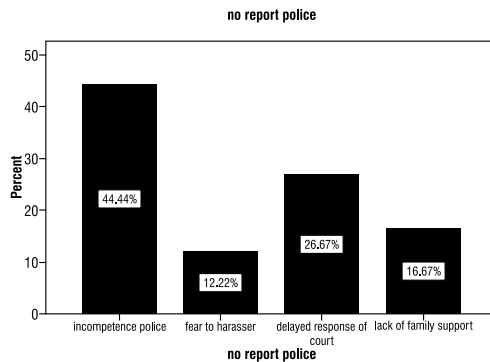


Figure 21: reasons for not informing police

rienced by 0.7% to 3% of the respondents as opposed to a previous study⁶ in European Union where the percentage was 10 to 26% and also in a study conducted in Japan where 11% had experienced Quid Pro Quo and 45% experienced hostile environment⁵.

Regarding response to the harassment, 73.34% of the females gave no response as per this research, 11.5% resisted 10.62% ran from the site while very few, only 3.54% shouted for help. According to a survey² in Canada 26.3% said they never responded to sexual harassment in a way that they "felt really proud of", yet 30.4% of respondents identified doing something to confront the harasser. Nearly one-third (32.8%) reported responding to sexual harassment "sometimes" and 77% said that when they do not respond, they are "scared it will escalate". The majority (89%) said they would respond to sexual harassment and "put the harasser in their place" if they could do so without compromising their safety. The reason behind giving no response in our setup may be mainly due to fear of stigma to family or being blamed^{15, 16}. Some studies suggests that women with higher levels of self-esteem or other positive evaluations of self tend to be more likely to make formal reports of sexual harassment incidents¹⁷.

52.29% of the respondents were aware of Work Place Harassment Act 2010 and 16.34% said that act was displayed in their workplace. In another study it was 5% and 2 % respectively¹⁶.

CONCLUSION

Findings depict considerable magnitude of harassment. Most women tend to ignore the harassing behavior. Main reasons for not filing a case against sexual harassment was fear of stigma to the family. There was a lack of awareness among the masses regarding the workplace harassment act.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, awareness should be increased about the rights given to women in the Act and Punishment be made more severe to make this Act more effective.

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