



RESEARCH PAPER

Perceptions of Sexual Harassment in Higher Education Institutions: A Gender Analysis

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PAPER INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Received: July 27, 2021</p> <p>Accepted: October 15, 2021</p> <p>Online: October 20, 2021</p> <p>Keywords: Gender Differences, Higher Educational Institutions Sexual Harassment</p> <p>*Corresponding Author:</p> <p>nayab.javed@lcwu.edu.pk</p>	<p>Sexual harassment is a social issue which is present in every society, globally, which interferes in an individual's social and professional life. It happens almost everywhere i.e. at workplaces, public places or institutes as well. The focus of the present study was to explore the differences of male and female students' perception of sexual harassment. This study was a quantitative research. Sample of the study included of 400 students (200 males and 200 females) from two government and two private universities. In the present study, Sexual Harassment Perception Questionnaire (SHPQ) was used to find out these differences in perceptions as every person has his own view for different situations. The study revealed the significant differences in perception of students. Study showed that both genders perceived that female students get more harassed than male students. The factors that affect the perception frequently were gender and age. The findings recommended that regulations for sexual harassment should be implemented in universities; laws should be made for sexual harassment in higher education institutes. Students should be aware of sexual harassment through seminars, self-defense classes and awareness campaigns. And every institute should have a counseling center for the better mental health of students.</p>

Introduction

Sexual harassment is any unwanted and inappropriate act of a sexual nature, whether verbal or physical (EEOC, 2017). Sexual harassment has been associated with stigmatization, which is an issue in itself for every individual.

According to Witkoswska and Menckel (2005) it has been seen that women get more harassed by men. Female students perceive that they experience sexual harassment more than men, most of which is gender based and verbal for example; sexist behavior, sex jokes etc. 75% female students of college claimed to be sexually harassed by men (Crittenden, 2009).

Many cases of sexual harassment in HEI in Pakistan were seen in past years. According to the Dawn News (2019) in a Karachi university, a case of a female student's harassment against a male teacher was reported. After a legal hearing, the decision on sexual harassment case was dismissed due to less evidence, and both teacher and female student were found guilty. Looking at sexual harassment in HEIs worldwide, UK universities also face the problem of discrimination and sexual transgression frequently. Many university students and employees have been told to remain silent against sexual harassment acts in order not to get suspended from universities (Croxford, 2019).

The issue of sexual harassment in HEIs is noteworthy. There are various studies that have explored the prevalence of sexual harassment in HEIs. However, not enough researches on students' perception of sexual harassment have been done worldwide, especially in Pakistan (Ilyas, 2018). According to Menon (2014), men more likely believe that sexual harassment is majorly present in educational institutes and that men consider harassment as a serious issue in institutes.

This research is aimed to investigate the difference between male and female students about their views on sexual harassment, its common types present in universities. The results of this research can be a source of addition to the literature with new directions; this research might be significant for the human rights activists, students, citizens and policy makers who can make new policies for higher education institutes. This study can be the source of awareness for the university students, through this they can understand and view sexual harassment in different directions properly.

Literature Review

Recent years have shown immense interest of people in sexual harassment. There are researches that indicate that although sexual harassment has an effect on both men and women, the negative outcome for women is more than for men.

Kelley and Parsons (2000) investigated incidents of sexual harassment in Major Coast East University, according to which students perceived that sexual harassment did exist in the university and women were often the victims, being sexually harassed by their male professors. Kalof et al. (2001) explored why students were mostly harassed by their college faculty and found that a majority of it was based on race and gender. Professors harassed their female students more and blackmailed them for sexual favors in return for their grades. Not only is it common in HEIs but sexual harassment is also found in medical schools. Literature showed that female students were mostly the victims of sexual harassment. A study by White (2000) on sexual harassment of medical students in Australia indicated that sexual harassment exists in universities and female students faced more sexual harassment.

Due to the increase in sexual harassment, most students now have an idea of what sexual harassment is. They have a knowledge and awareness about the situations which involve sexual harassment. In Australian universities, both male and female students were shown a visual display of situations and were asked to mark those as harassing or non-

harassing. Female students showed more types of sexual harassment as compared to male students (Menon et al., 2014).

A study explored experiences and perceptions of sexual harassment in higher education institutes which showed that females experienced more harassment than men in American universities. Women reported sexual harassment at higher rates while men perceived sexual harassment based on sexuality (Reason & Rankin, 2006). Rotundo, Nguyen and Sackett (2001) worked on a meta-analytical research to explore gender differences in perception of sexual harassment which revealed that females viewed situations and behaviors more harassing than male students. Female students are more likely to be harassed and are more sensitive to harassment. But there are studies which showed that both female and male students showed less tolerance towards sexual harassment.

Another study of Witkoswska and Menckel (2005) in Swedish schools showed that 49% of female students perceived gender harassment as a serious issue and were mostly harassed on the basis of their gender. Gender harassment was perceived as more common than other types of harassment. Bursik and Gefter (2011) conducted a study to identify the perceptions of sexual harassment in the academic context of U.S., according to which male and female students perceived that when the harasser was at higher rank or had more power, the situation was considered more as sexual harassment. Female victims were seen fragile while male perpetrators were seen as perpetrators.

According to Studzińska, (2015) the gender differences in perception of sexual harassment were explored in UK universities between male and female students. The results indicated that female students perceived sexual coercion and unwanted sexual attention as sexual harassment more, for example. forced sexual acts and sexual favors.

Very few literatures have shown that boys can be victims of sexual harassment too, even when there are many cases. A cross-sectional study was conducted to identify harassment of students. Results showed that 52% students were harassed. Most of which was verbal harassment in which male students were more likely to be harassed (Ahmer & Yousafzai et al., 2008).

Theoretical Framework

There are many theories related to sexual harassment. A theory by Fitzgerald, Gelfand and Drasgow (1995) of sexual harassment called "Measuring sexual harassment: theoretical and psychometric advances" states that; sexual harassment is a stable behavioral construct, which is different from but related to growing legal designs. This may include gender harassment, unwanted sexual attention, and sexual coercion. The theory was designed to investigate the dimensions and extent of sexual harassment in higher education and the workplace. They stated that sexual harassment has 3 types: 1) Gender harassment, 2) unwanted sexual attention (sexual coercion) and 3) unwanted sexual advancement. Sexual harassment can be of any nature i.e. physical, verbal, non-verbal and unwanted etc.

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference in male and female perception of sexual harassment and its sub scales (Gender Harassment, Sexual Coercion, Sexual Advancement).

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference in different age groups in perception of sexual harassment and its sub scales (Gender Harassment, Sexual Coercion, Sexual Advancement).

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant difference in between Public and Private Universities in perception of sexual harassment and its sub scales (Gender Harassment, Sexual Coercion, Sexual Advancement).

Material and Methods

Survey research method was used in this study to explore the gender perception of sexual harassment in higher education institutions. The population of this study was based on students from four (4) universities i.e. two public and two private universities.

Convenience sampling was used in this study for the data collection. A sample of $n = 400$ university students (200 males and 200 females) were selected. From which 200 students (100 males and 100 females) were chosen from public universities i.e. Punjab University and Government College University, and 200 (100 females and 100 males) were selected from 2 private universities i.e. University of Lahore and Lahore Medical and Dental College. Selected sample of students belonged to the following fields of study; Science, IT, Social Science and Arts. Age range of sample was from 20 to 40 years including any student of Honors, Masters, MPhil, PhD and Diploma.

Structured questionnaire was used as a tool in this study. Sexual Harassment Perception Questionnaire (SHPQ) by Manuel (2017) was adapted for the data collection after taking permission from the author to explore the perception of students about sexual harassment. Subscales were added to the questionnaire which were; 1) Gender Harassment 2) Sexual Coercion 3) Sexual Advancement. The questionnaire included 18 items (questions).

The questionnaire was designed with measures on a Likert scale, each item ranging from 1 to 5 (e.g., 1 – “Definitely not considered as a sexual harassment”, 2 – “Should not be considered as a sexual harassment”, 3 – “Not sure”, 4 – “Should be considered as a sexual harassment”, 5 – “Definitely considered as a sexual harassment”) for participants to choose their preferred options.

Manuel (2017) found the Cronbach coefficient alpha to be internally reliable and the questionnaire instrument therefore reached an acceptable level. However, according to the present study the Cronbach coefficient alpha was .955.

Results and Discussion

Table 1
Demographic characteristics of respondents

Variables	<i>f</i>
Gender	
Male	200
Female	200
Age	
20-25	339
26-30	39
31-35	17
36-40	5
Marital Status	
Single	298
Engaged	58
Married	41
Divorced	3
Level of Education	
Honors	257
Masters	117
M.Phil.	20
Ph.D.	6
Field of Study	
Science	246
Social science	104
Arts	36
IT	14

Table 2
Independent sample t test measuring gender wise differences in perception of sexual harassment (N = 400)

	Male (<i>n</i> = 200)		Female (<i>n</i> = 200)		<i>t</i> (<i>df</i>)	95% Confidence interval of the Difference		<i>P</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>	
Sexual Harassment	59.62	17.403	70.34	16.691	-6.290(397)	-14.007	-7.373	.000

According to the results of independent sample t test there was a significant difference between males and females in perception of sexual harassment. Results revealed that scores of female students ($M = 70.34$, $SD = 16.691$) were higher than male students ($M = 59.62$, $SD = 17.403$) in perception of sexual harassment.

Table 3

Independent sample t test measuring differences in perception of subscales of sexual harassment including gender harassment, sexual coercion and sexual advancement based on gender (N = 400)

	Male (n = 200)		Female (n = 200)		t(df)	95% Confidence interval of the Difference		
	M	SD	M	SD		LL	UL	P
Gender Harassment	16.05	5.517	19.28	5.239	-5.995(397)	-4.283	-2.167	.000
Sexual Coercion	16.83	5.303	19.38	5.171	-4.878(398)	-3.585	-1.525	.000
Sexual Advancement	26.74	8.275	3.69	7.471	-6.273(398)	-6.495	-3.395	.000

The results indicated that there was a significant difference in students' perception of Gender harassment $t(397) = -5.995, p = .000$. Results also revealed that scores for female students' perception (M=19.28, SD=5.239) of gender harassment were more than scores of male students (M=16.05, SD=5.517).

According to the results of Independent Sample t test there was a significant difference between male and female students in perception of Sexual Coercion $t(398) = -4.878, p = .000$. It showed that female students (M = 19.38, SD = 5.171) perceived the situations as sexual coercion more than male students (M = 16.83, SD = 5.303).

Results showed that there was a significant difference in students' perception of Sexual Advancement, $t(398) = -6.273, p = .000$. Results also revealed that scores for female students' perception (M=31.69, SD=7.471) of sexual advancement were more than scores of male students (M=26.74, SD=8.275). Sexual advancement scores were higher than that of Gender Harassment and Sexual Coercion.

According to the 1st hypothesis "there is a significant difference in male and female perception of sexual harassment, gender harassment, sexual coercion and sexual advancement". The hypothesis was accepted as the results showed a significant difference, as female students perceived various attitudes as sexual harassment more than male students. According to the findings, female students get more harassed than male students.

Table 4
Analysis of Variance measuring difference in different age groups in perception of sexual harassment (N = 400)

	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Between Groups	3367.126	3	1122.375	3.589	.014
Within Groups	123847.671	396	312.747		
Total	127214.797	399			

Note: Age groups were from 20-25, 25-30, 31-35, and 35-40.

*F value significant at $p < .05$

Results showed that the scores of perception of sexual harassment differed significantly among different age groups $F = 3.589, p = .014$. Further this was analyzed in the

post hoc Tukey's HSD comparison. Analysis of variance showed that the effect of age on perception of sexual harassment was significant. The results indicated that students' of age 26-30 ($M=72.38$, $SD= 17.215$) scored higher than students' of age 20-25 ($M=63.80$, $SD=17.936$) i.e. students' in age 25 to 30 perceived the given situations as sexual harassment more than in age 20 to 25.

Table 5
Analysis of Variance measuring significant difference in students' perception of Gender Harassment in different age groups. (N = 400)

		SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Gender Harassment	Between Groups	248.389	3	82.796	2.663	.048
	Within Groups	12311.049	396	31.089		
	Total	12559.438	399			

Note: Age groups were from 20-25, 25-30, 31-35, and 36-40.

*F value significant at $p < .05$

According to the analysis of variance there were statistical differences in students' perception of Gender Harassment in different age groups $F(3, 399) = 2.663$, $p = .048$. The results indicated that scores of people of between ages 26-30 ($M = 19.46$, $SD = 5.707$) were higher than other ages i.e. age 21-25 ($M = 17.40$, $SD = 5.640$) age 31-35 ($M = 19.59$, $SD = 4.139$) and age 36-40 ($M = 15.00$, $SD = 3.391$).

Table 6
One-way ANOVA measuring significant difference in students' perception of Sexual Coercion in different age groups. (N = 400)

		SS	df	MS	F	Sig
Sexual Coercion	Between Groups	296.438	3	98.813	3.471	.016
	Within Groups	11274.359	398	28.471		
	Total	11570.797	399			

Note: Age groups were from 20-25, 25-30, 31-35, and 36-40.

*F value significant at $p < .05$

According to the results of One-way ANOVA there were significant differences in students' perception of Sexual Coercion in different age groups $F(3, 399) = 3.471$, $p = .016$. Scores for students between ages 26 to 30 ($M = 20.44$, $SD = 5.210$) were higher than other ages i.e. age 21-25 ($M = 17.75$, $SD = 5.373$) age 31-35 ($M = 19.65$, $SD = 5.098$) and age 36-40 ($M = 18.60$, $SD = 4.159$).

Table 7
Analysis of Variance measuring significant difference in students' perception of Sexual Advancement in different age groups (N = 400).

		SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Sexual Advancement	Between Groups	707.257	3	235.752	3.527	.015
	Within Groups	26471.681	396	66.848		
	Total	27178.937	399			

Note: Age groups were from 20-25, 25-30, 31-35, and 35-40.

*F value significant at $p < .05$

According to the analysis of variance there were significant differences in students' perception of Sexual Advancement in different age groups $F(3, 399) = 3.527, p = .015$. Further, after applying post hoc test it was seen that scores of students from age 20 to 30 ($M = -3.832, SD = 1.382$) were higher and the difference between these ages were significant.

The 2nd hypothesis i.e. "There is a significant difference in different age groups in perception of sexual harassment, gender harassment, sexual coercion and sexual advancement." was accepted because results showed a significant difference in age groups. As students between ages 20 to 30 got more harassed than that of other ages.

Table 8
Independent sample t test measuring student's perception of sexual harassment between Public and Private Universities (N = 400)

	Private ($n = 200$)		Public ($n = 200$)		$t(df)$	95% Confidence interval of the Difference		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>	<i>P</i>
Sexual Harassment	67.53	13.626	62.43	20.989	2.879(398)	1.616	8.574	.004

* $p < .05$

Results of independent sample t test revealed that there was a significant difference between Private and Public universities $t(398) = 2.879, P = 0.004$ (two-tailed). Overall, results showed that students' from private universities ($M = 67.53, SD = 13.626$) scored higher in perception of sexual harassment than students' from public universities ($M = 62.43, SD = 20.989$).

Table 9
Independent sample t test measuring student's perception of gender harassment, sexual coercion and sexual advancement between Public and Private Universities (N = 400)

	Private ($n = 200$)		Public ($n = 200$)		$t(df)$	95% Confidence interval of the Difference		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>	<i>P</i>

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t(df)</i>	<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>	<i>P</i>
Gender Harassment	18.33	4.613	17.00	3.698	2.394(398)	.238	2.432	017
Sexual Coercion	18.71	4.569	17.50	6.043	2.268(398)	.162	2.268	.024
Sexual Advancement	30.49	6.439	27.94	9.584	3.117(398)	.948	4.150	.002

Results of independent sample t test revealed that there was a significant difference in perception of gender harassment between Private and Public universities $t(398) = 2.394$, $P = 0.017$ (two-tailed). Overall, results showed that students' from private universities ($M = 18.33$, $SD = 4.613$) scored higher in perception of gender harassment than students' from public universities ($M = 17.0$, $SD = 3.698$).

Results of independent sample t test revealed that there was a significant difference in perception of sexual coercion between Private and Public universities $t(398) = 2.268$, $P = 0.024$ (two-tailed). Overall, results showed that students' from private universities ($M = 18.71$, $SD = 4.569$) scored higher in perception of sexual coercion than students' from public universities ($M = 17.50$, $SD = 6.043$).

Results of independent sample t test revealed that there was a significant difference in perception of sexual advancement between Private and Public universities $t(398) = 3.117$, $P = 0.002$ (two-tailed). Overall, results showed that students' from private universities ($M = 30.49$, $SD = 6.439$) scored higher in perception of sexual advancement than students' from public universities ($M = 27.94$, $SD = 9.584$).

According to the 3rd hypothesis "There is a significant difference in students' perception of sexual harassment, gender harassment, sexual coercion and sexual advancement, between Public and Private higher education institutes". it was shown that sexual harassment existed in private universities' more than public universities. Based on the findings the hypothesis was accepted in the present study.

Discussion

The present research was conducted to explore the gender differences in perception of sexual harassment in higher education institutions. All hypotheses were drawn under the light of previous literature.

The first hypothesis was that there is no significant difference in male and female perception of sexual harassment but the results revealed significant difference. It means that there is a significant difference between male and female perception of sexual harassment. Results showed that females' perception of sexual harassment was higher than males' perception. Another finding according to Rotundo, Nguyen and Sackett, (2001)

showed that there is a difference in male and female perception of sexual harassment and females perceived more sexual harassment in behaviors as compared to men. A study also showed that not only females but also male were the victims of sexual harassment and they also perceived they were harassed more (Zeira, Astor & Benbenishty, 2002).

The next hypothesis is that there is no significant difference in male and female perception of Gender Harassment. It was rejected because results showed a significant difference. The scores of female perception of gender harassment are found higher it means that females perceive gender harassment more than males do. The hypothesis was found true in previous findings. Linda Kalof, Kimberly Eby, Jennifer Metheson and Rob Kroska, (2001) found that 40% female and 28.7% male perceived that they were harassed on the bases of their gender i.e. female were more harassed on the base of their sexuality more than men do. According to the findings of Witkoswska and Menckel (2005) 49% female students perceived Gender harassment as a serious issue and were mostly harassed on the bases of their gender.

The next hypothesis is that there is no significant difference in male and female perception of Sexual Coercion. The hypothesis was rejected because the results showed a significant difference. Results revealed that the scores of female perception are higher than male perception. The present findings are supported by Studzińska (2015) who explored that there was difference between male and female perception of sexual coercion. They perceived sexual coercion as sexual harassment. Female were found less tolerant for sexual coercion than men. Another study found that 90% medical students perceived that they were harassed most of which was sexual coercion, i.e. pressurized for sexual favors. Female students were mostly perceived to be harassed (Iftekhhar, Tawfiq & Barabie, 2014).

The next hypothesis is that there is no significant difference in male and female perception of Sexual Advancement. It was not found true. The results revealed the significant difference in perception of sexual advancement based on gender (male, female). The present hypothesis is supported by Osman (2004) who found that there was gender difference (male, female) in perception of sexual advancement. Women's' perception for sexual advancement was higher as compared of male perception and mostly it was physical and verbal harassment which they considered as sexual advancement.

The next hypothesis is that there is no significant difference in different age groups in perception of sexual harassment but it was rejected because the results showed a significant difference. It means that according to the results there is a difference in age groups in perception of sexual harassment. The scores for people of young age (20-30) were higher than those of old age (31-40). The present findings are supported by Vohlídalová (2011) who explored that younger students perceived to be more harassed than older students in universities.

The next hypothesis is that there is no significant difference in different age groups in perception of Gender harassment. The hypothesis was not found true because results revealed that there is a significant difference. This hypothesis is supported by the previous finding. It was shown that people perceived that mostly older people in their 40s harassed

more and younger people less than age 40 were likely to be more harassed. Harassment was mostly based on their sexuality i.e. they were harassed on the basis of their gender (Lee, Song & Kim, 2011).

The next hypothesis is that there is no significant difference in different age groups in perception of Sexual Coercion but results revealed that there was a significant difference. It means that there is a difference in people from different age groups perceives sexual coercion differently. This hypothesis is supported by previous finding. According to the study, younger people perceived that they were harassed more and they named it as sexual coercion. They were forced to do things they did not like (Ajuwon, Jimoh, Olley & Akintola, 2001).

The next hypothesis is that there is no significant difference in different age groups in perception of Sexual Advancement. This hypothesis was rejected because results showed a significant difference in age groups. The scores of age from 20 to 30 were higher than age 31-40. The present finding is supported by Osman (2004) who found that there was difference (age difference) in perception of sexual advancement. Younger students perceived to be more harassed sexually i.e. by sexual jokes or physical advancement than older ones.

The next hypothesis is that there is no significant difference in student's perception of sexual harassment between Public and Private Universities. This hypothesis was rejected. The results indicate that there is a significant difference in students' (male, female) perception of sexual harassment between public and private universities. Results revealed that students of private universities perceived more to be sexually harassment than students in public universities. The present finding is supported by a previous study in which 57% students perceived they were sexually harassed in private universities more (Ahmer & Yousafzai et al., 2008). Researcher did not find more studies which support this hypothesis maybe because this hypothesis is a unique one and researchers did not added this hypothesis as a variable in their studies.

The next hypothesis is that there is no significant difference in student's perception of gender harassment between public and private universities. This hypothesis was rejected because results showed a significant difference. Results revealed a difference between student's perception from public and private universities. This hypothesis was supported by previous finding by Witkoswska and Menckel (2005) in which it was seen that students mostly were harassed on the bases of their gender and they called it gender discrimination or harassment. And it was found in private high schools more than public high schools. Another study by Anna Studzińska (2015) explored that students in both private and public universities did not find gender harassment as sexual harassment. A study supported the present hypothesis in which it was shown that medical private students perceived they were harassed on the basis of their gender or sexuality more (White, 2000). Another study supported this hypothesis in which it explored that students were mostly harassed by their gender (Nora et al., 2002).

The next hypothesis is that there is no significant difference in student's perception of sexual coercion between public and private universities. This hypothesis was rejected because results showed a significant difference. Results revealed a difference between student's perception from public and private universities. This study is supported by a previous study in which the researcher explored that mostly students in universities perceived they were harassed which included sexual favors and pressure mostly (Menon et al., 2014). Another finding supported the present hypothesis in which it was seen that students belonged to private universities indicated that they were harassed more in a way that they were asked for physical favors and relationships. They considered sexual coercion as more harassing (Studzińska, 2015).

The next hypothesis is that there is no significant difference in student's perception of sexual advancement between public and private universities but results revealed the significant difference. It means that there is a difference in student's perception of sexual advancement between public and private universities. The present hypothesis is supported by a previous study in which students perceived they were sexually harassed more in verbal and physical behavior in private universities (Ahmer & Yousafzai et al., 2008).

Conclusion

The aim of this study is to provide information on students' perception about sexual harassment and difference between male and females' perception on sexual harassment in higher education institutes. The present study indicates that students are now well aware of sexual harassment and have a proper understanding of what situation is sexual harassment and what not is. Students believe that sexual harassment does exist in university and the common type of it is verbal harassment. In Pakistani context sexual harassment is equal to shame to face and it is mostly hidden or invisible.

Recommendations

To reduce sexual harassment from higher education institutes here are some recommendations;

- There should be anti-harassment cells in every university whether it's private or government.
- Awareness campaigns and sessions should be held in universities to get a proper understanding of sexual harassment.
- Self-defence classes should be a part of academia.
- Government should make policies and laws for sexual harassment in Academia.

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