



**RESEARCH PAPER**

**Problems and Consequences of Whistle Blowing: Single Instrumental Case Study of a Whistle Blower in Public Sector Institution in Punjab, Pakistan**

<sup>1</sup>Dr. Beenish Ijaz Butt <sup>2</sup>Dr. Nargis Abbas Mirza <sup>3</sup>Dr. Uzma Ashiq

1. Incharge/Assistant Professor, Department of Social Work, University of Sargodha, Punjab, Pakistan
2. Assistant Professor, Department of Education, University of Sargodha, Punjab, Pakistan
3. Assistant Professor, Department of Social Work, University of Sargodha, Punjab, Pakistan

PAPER INFO	ABSTRACT
<p><b>Received:</b> February 29, 2022</p> <p><b>Accepted:</b> April 10, 2022</p> <p><b>Online:</b> April 15, 2022</p> <p><b>Keywords:</b> Case Study Method, Hydra-Headed Administrative System, Qualitative Research, Whistle Blower Protection, Whistle Blowing,</p> <p><b>*Corresponding Author</b></p> <p>beenish.ijaz@uo.s.edu.pk</p>	<p>The actions of whistleblowers are potentially beneficial in a developed society but it may not be the case in a developing and underdeveloped society. In a developing society like Pakistan, the scenario of whistle blowing is very much different from the other countries. In an atmosphere of massive corruption, citizens have low confidence in public sector organizations when they are in a need to report wrong doings to the authorities. But one, who takes an initiation for it, has to face certain problems and consequences. This paper aims at investigating the problems and consequences of a whistle blower in a public sector organization at micro level. To explain the said issue, this study was conducted by using qualitative case study method and involved the study of a case in real life. The single instrumental case study was conducted with a woman (daily-wage employee) in a public sector university. The overall procedure for conducting a case study was opted from Creswell's model (Creswell, 2013). Major derived themes from data were catch 22, hydra-headed administrative system, whistle blower protection and individual problems. It is concluded that in the absence of a proper mechanism for whistle blowing, one has to face the consequences so the researchers suggests that every institution might address the said issues by legislating and implementing whistle blowing to secure the whistle blower rights.</p>

**Introduction**

Whistle blowing was not a familiar term for many academicians, researchers or scholars till it was coined by Ralph Nader (1974) who coined the term whistle blowing and shifted its connotation from negative to positive. Whistle blowing involves the disclosure or speaking about any wrongdoing by the employees, regarding any kind of illegal acts by the authorities or any employee (Lewis, 1995; Miceli & Near, 1992) and whistle blower is one who speaks about wrong doings. The term combines "whistle," a device used to alert or call attention to, and "blower," referencing the person issuing the alert by the blowing of the whistle. This term "Whistle-blowing" has roots in sports, as a warning by the officials who whistle to prohibit a foul (Abbas & Ashiq, 2020). However, in an organizational setup, it is not always welcomed. Organizations do not acknowledge this act as an acceptable and positive activity. Even organizations react or may react in diverse dimensions upon whistle blowing. There is an obvious chance of retaliation; hence employees hesitate and avoid raising their voice (Premeaux and Bedeian, 2003). In result the whistle-blowers become vulnerable by the organization and its members (Dworkin and Baucus, 1998). Hence it is not

risk free action and one faces certain consequences upon reporting wrong doing. It brings difficulties and stress in the form of punishments such as loss of job, legal consequences and even threats of one's safety (Putriana & Prihatiningtias, 2018; Bjorkelo, 2013).

But it is important to mention that when wrong doing is not reported in the organizational setup, there appears an atmosphere of corruption and one it starts it travels in the roots of the society. It is not easy to remove embezzlement from a society with a magic wand. In this scenario, a whistle blower takes a responsibility of whistling; even where his/her role is not recognized. In Pakistan, without recognition employees report the wrong doings which they spectate in their organization. Consequently embezzlement by someone is reported but whistle blower is not awarded rather he/she is punished for this act. This starts the problems and consequences which are faced by the whistle blowers in their organizations.

Despite all, it is important to mention that the phenomenon exists in different organization among its employees; whether they are a regular employee or on contract or daily-wage basis. This research is inspired by an incident that happened with a daily-wage employee in a public sector university and compelled the researcher to investigate the consequences of whistle blowing at individual level. The vignette of the study is as follow.

### **Vignette**

The incident occurred on the campus of a public sector university of Punjab (name and place is kept confidential as per respondent's right of confidentiality) which has several departments including teaching departments, hostels and non- teaching units; having gazetted and non-gazette staff. They are employed as regular and daily wages base employees in these units. It happened with a daily wage non-gazette staff some time ago. The incident that provoked this study occurred with a girl of 20 years old who was working in a hostel on daily wages base. I allotted her a fictitious name as ATR. She was accused of theft; a few bottles of shampoo were recovered from her cupboard. There was a noise of her theft all around. Administrators were the first to react to this incident. Her mother was called upon and on her request no legal action was taken. But ATR was fired from the job with no monthly dues. She left the institution with tears in her eyes. After a couple of weeks, the respondent met me in a shop and wanted to tell me about the whole incident happened. Upon my request, she was ready to give me an interview for the single instrumental case study.

Time and venue were decided as per her comfort and availability and she promised to meet me after two days. On the interview day, she came an hour late but after fifteen minutes of her arrival she was comfortable to talk about the incident. She told that her co-worker used to neglect her duty. She explained that her co-worker used to come late, leaving early and not entering the required data properly. Eventually ATR has to complete the left work instead of her co-worker. One day she had a fight with her co-worker and she refused to do her work and she informed her that she will complaint about her. She told that she complained verbally to a senior co-worker but it was in vain. There was no procedure through which she could complain about problem to authorities. Further she had no one who could be a witness of the complaint. She also told that in the meanwhile, she was accused of theft as a punishment of her pointing out the non-dutiful person and eventually she faced the loss of job.

This arise the research question that what were the problems and consequences that a whistle blower has to face individually in a public sector organization? This paper aims at

investigating the problems and consequences of a whistle blower through a single case instrumental study in a public sector organization.

### **Literature Review**

There is remarkable literature found on whistle blowing which highlights the importance of this phenomenon. Committed employees of an organization report it as they consider it their moral responsibility for doing it (Dozier & Miceli, 1994). It is considered as an important factor leading to certain decisions in an organization (Brewer and Selden, 1998). Additionally, whistle blowers are important for an organization as due to their effort wrong doing practices and behaviors are corrected (Lewis, 1995). Huang (2005) is of the view that whistle blowers should be supported while raising voices in their organization.

The consequences of whistle blowing have also been a core interest of the researchers. Reporting wrong doing in the organization is looked at as betrayal, and disrepute of organization (Gobert & Punch, 2000). This relates to the reality that whistle blowers are upset and disturbed not due to reporting but because of reaction of the organization (Bucka & Kleiner, 2001); only a few get some support from their organization after reporting (Pershing, 2003). Whistle blowers are even called as a trouble maker (Near, 2004) and get no help by their colleagues that is why some people avoid it (Rennie & Crosby, 2002). Such discouraging attitude leads to noncooperation of the colleagues when protection of whistle blower is required (Mesmer & Viswesvaran, 2005). Hence, whistle blowing is largely dependent upon the group values profound in his/ her community (Near & Miceli, 1994). Researchers are of the view that when whistle blowing is not recognized in an organization, whistle blower is spectated as a criminal (Pittroff, 2016) and is punished severely. Under such circumstances, where whistle blowing is punished, there is an ethical silence. Hence the issue of whistle blowing is still controversial due to the faced consequences that employees should report or not? When they should report and how they can do it (Abbas & Ashiq, 2020).

In different societies where there is no legal protection for the whistle blowers, they face certain consequences. In absence of such system, whistle blowing cannot be flourished and embezzlement grows in the organizations. People are scared of whistle blowing due of the high costs related with it (Elias, 2008) and are discouraged when they see whistle blowers caught up in different consequences (Lewis, 1995). This indicates the loss of potential of whistle blowers just because of the nonexistence of a system that guarantees check and balance in a society (Bashir et al, 2011).

Moreover whistle blowers' security is also one of the alarming issues as they speak about sensitive information. They should be treated as an honest employee (Lindblom, 2007). But contrary to all this, they face negative consequences upon raising their voice against wrongdoings. Usually such consequences brings stress in their life and leads to fear of retaliation, legal confrontation, loss of job, loss of benefits at retirement and even in some cases, they confront life threats after reporting (Putriana & Prihatiningtias, 2018).

### **Material and Methods**

To explain the said issue, this study was conducted by using qualitative case study method and involved the study of a whistle blower. Case study research involves the study of a case in real life or contemporary context (Yin, 2009). Amongst the types of case studies, the single instrumental case study was selected. In single instrumental case study, researcher focuses the issue and selects a bounded case to illustrate the issue (Stake, 1995). The case study of a daily-wage woman employee was selected in a public sector university. The overall procedure for conducting a case study was opted from Creswell's model

(Creswell, 2013). Under this model, problems and consequences of a whistle blower were identified as an issue and single instrumental case study approach was selected. The researchers made explicit that they will not involve in theft investigation and limited our study to the reactions and problems of the whistle blower only. This study was consistent with exploratory qualitative case study design (Yin, 2009) which was selected because models and variables were not available for assessing the problems of a daily wage basis whistle blower in higher education institution. This study is also bounded by a single case.

Firstly a semi-structured interview guide was drafted which consisted of generative questions (Flick, 2014) like, what has happened since the event that you have been involved in? Which problems you confronted after this event? What are the mechanisms of whistle blowing in your institution that supported or resisted you? Followed by purposeful sampling, in-depth interview was conducted with some generative interview questions. Time and venue were decided as per the comfort and availability of the respondent. The interview lasted for two hours and ten minutes. The interview was first transcribed and data was analyzed by following embedded analysis of a specific aspect of a case (Yin, 2009). Major themes and discussion derived from data were presented to reach a conclusion.

## **Results and Discussion**

This article is a single instrumental case study of a daily-wage woman employee in a public sector university who faced the problems being a whistle blower. Themes emerging from the in-depth interview are explained below.

### **Theme-I- Becoming a whistle blower: duty or allegation**

Usually, a whistleblower is an employee of an organization who reports about a wrongdoing to the authorities, being consistently or at that time happening in his/her organization. But becoming a whistle blower is not so easy. Sometimes they have to face a problematic situation. Questioning about the event that happened in the institution, the respondent opined that,

*I was a daily-wage basis worker in the girls' hostel. I had two other co-workers who had same duty and designation. We had a shared room for staying in hostel when we had to perform a morning or night duty. There were cupboards in it where we used to keep our personal stuff. One of my co-workers was idle, she used to neglect her duty, used to come late, leaving early and not entering the required data properly. During duty hours, she used to take rest in the room, eventually there were gaps in data entry of the institution. One day I had a fight with her and she refused to do her work. I said her that I will complaint about you. I complained verbally to a senior co-worker but it was in vain. But I did not remain silent and told the administration as well.*

*I decided to be a whistle blower but I faced a problematic situation for which only solution is denied by the circumstance inherent in the problem. Before the senior management listens to my complaint seriously, my co-worker accused me that I had stolen the stuff of the hostel students. My cupboard was checked and three shampoo bottles were recovered from there. My co-worker kept it there by herself and complaint about it after wards.*

*I complaint about her idleness just because she is not fulfilling her duty and beneficiaries suffer; moreover there may be problems when official work will not be dutifully done. But instead of paying attention to my complaint, my co-worker played all the above said drama to defame me and to lose the confidence of management in me. They called my mother and said that police will be called upon. My mother extremely requested them to not to take a*

*legal action then management fired me from my job without any monthly dues. No one around me spoke for me.*

*I am just thinking about it that it all happened to me just because I became a whistle blower, I pointed out wrong doing in my institution; then I think becoming a whistle blower is not a duty rather an allegation here.*

It was the suffering of the whistle blower in her institution. She had no fear when she reported wrong doing but consequences were shocking not only for her but also for her family. Her dutifulness changed in accusation.

### **Theme-II- Hydra-headed System**

In an institution where there is no mechanism of a registration of a complaint, the victim has to face problems of the system. The respondent opined that

*I had no mechanism to report it. What I did was all based on reporting unofficially with people around me. Because of this I faced problems. I had no protection when I complained, I was accused of theft, I was defamed and was expelled from my job. I realized the fact when there was no mechanism, then what could protect me? I had to face this all. People say it is fate but for me it is the consequence of becoming a whistle blower.*

*The system in my organization contained many problems and difficulties when I reported as a whistle blower. It seems to be hydra headed as firstly I shared the problem with my close circle then with other employees but all of them created problem for me. This system is incomplete, has many flaws and lacks a proper whistle blowing mechanism in short it is like "more holes than a Swiss cheese".*

In the absence of a system of reporting wrong doing, there is no support for the whistle blower in an organization. He/she is considered as a problem maker there and faces resistance in any case.

### **Theme-III- Post whistle blowing problems**

Asking about post whistle blowing incident problems, the respondent told that after the whole incident, she was jobless and faced certain post whistle blowing problems. She said

*After I was jobless and poor again, I faced individual problems also. There was stress, denial and fear on my part regarding what has happened with me. My mother requested in my institution to not to take any legal action about me as she was feared that the family will have to face the breakup of my engagement when this news will spread in my village. My mother took me back to home; seeming she was more stressed than me.*

*Still I am in depression and think about the whole incident. I think whistle blower has to face all this and it is their fate.*

Loss of someone's job is not the only post whistle blowing problem; rather it brings personal problems like fear and depression for the whistle blower. Loneliness and sadness also encompassed her after this incident.

### **Discussion**

Whistle blowers blow the whistle when they are in play ground; similarly whistle blowers report wrong doings in the institution in their institution. But in an organizational setup where there is no mechanism for reporting wrong doing, they face certain

consequences. In absence of such system, whistle blowing cannot be flourished and embezzlement grows in the organizations. People hesitate to report misconducts and are scared of whistle blowing due of the high costs related with it. They are discouraged when they see the treatment with the whistle blowers caught up in different penalties. This indicates the loss of potential of whistle blowers just because of the nonexistence of a system that guarantees check and balance in a society. This kind of system makes a whistle blower an accused person.

### **Conclusion and Suggestions**

To conclude, the whistle blowers are not successful in their efforts to report wrong doings, not because they were not strong enough to curb the problem, but because the institutions did not focus enough on policy formulation for “whistle blowing” and developing mechanisms for its implementation. Under this scenario, even when a citizen blows the whistle; she or he has to face certain problems and consequences being a whistle blower in a public sector organization.

Implementation mechanism also requires check and balance. As in the presence of policy, implementation mechanism is the hands of different individuals and they may promulgate it in their own style. There may be involvement of embezzlement, nepotism, bribery and even commendations. Again whistle blower can be victimized under such circumstances.

The authorities in an organization needs to address the said issue by policy formulation for whistle blowing and needs to actively monitor the said issue in true letter and spirit.

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