

Research Paper: The Relationship between Demographic Factors and the Incidence of Sexual Harassment of Working Women



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ABSTRACT

Background: Unlike other workplace hazards that are impersonal in nature, sexual harassment is one of the dangers that have personal nature. Women have always been exposed to sexual harassment. Most researches in sexual harassment often were concentrated on the characteristics of those who commit sexual harassment and often less focused on the predictors of sexual harassment in the workplace.

Methods: The overall design of this study was cross-sectional. It deals with the relationship between demographic factors and the incidence of sexual harassment of working women. Participants of this study are working women between 21-40 years old who had been exposed to sexual harassment in the last 12 months in Tehran and the sample group was selected among 120 working women in this population by using purposive sampling. The subjects in this study completed the Sexual Experiences Questionnaire (SEQ, Fitzgerald, 1988) and the multi-choice questionnaire for demographic factors and then regression analysis and t-test were used to evaluate the research hypotheses.

Results: The results of the study showed that age ($F= 2.29$), income level ($F= 1.219$), occupational position ($F= 0.59$), work experience ($F= 0.48$), marital status ($F= 0.68$), and educational level ($F= 0.39$) form the variances associated with demographic data which all factors have a significant relationship with sexual harassment.

Conclusion: It seems that having specific demographic factors will provide the tendency of sexual harassment occurrence.

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Introduction

Issue of sexual harassment was considered as a social problem by researchers after 20th century. Despite the legislative emphasis to prevent the occurrence of sexual harassment against women in the workplace, some people believe that the issue of sexual harassment involves just few women. Such images and confusions make it difficult for women to speak up about sexual harassment, because it may lead to their harm and blame. Typically when women have started to speak out against sexual harassment, they have been excommunicated, discredited, isolated and accused of misunderstandings. Despite these uncertainties, studies indicated the prevalence of this phenomenon in workplaces [1]. Over the past 20 years, researchers of different disciplines have provided range of theories which discuss the current disparities between two opposite sexes in workplace and educational places. In general, these models have focused on the interaction between three of the following:

- 1- Available factors on community-level which affect working environment.
- 2- Factors which inherently exist in work environment such as differences in hierarchy and power, interac-

tions between working groups and employees and the interests in the level of key decision makers.

- 3 - Factors in the individual level such as motivation, attitude, personality and individual coping strategies.

It seems that studies of Fitzgerald and colleagues [2] in this area are able to explain the psychological aspect of sexual harassment perfectly. Figure 1 represents influencing factors on the occurrence of sexual harassment according to Fitzgerald's theory. Fitzgerald et al have categorized various experiences of sexual harassment in three groups:

- 1- Harassment based on sex (female or male) which includes behaviors and general attitudes toward kind of gender that transfer the annoying and humiliating comments, or unfair treatment toward individuals solely because of their sex.
- 2- Unwanted (undesirable) sexual attention: This type of abuse is categorized from unwanted, inappropriate and offensive physical or verbal sexual assistance to impose, threaten and assault or enormity.
- 3- Imposed or forced sex: implies request or forced sexual act by means of promise of reward or threat of punishment.

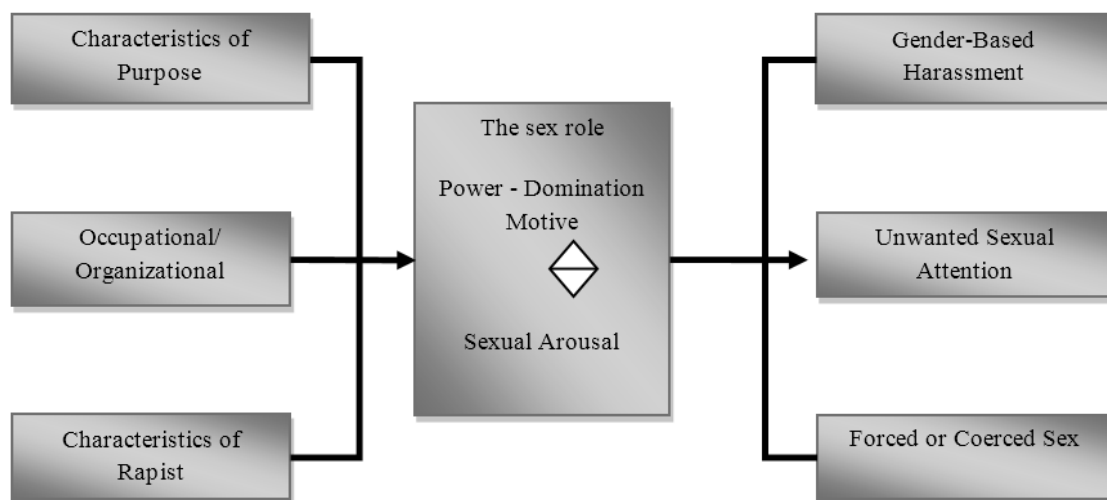


Figure 1. Influencing factors for occurrence of sexual harassment

Sexual harassment depends on various factors. Here three major factors have been identified as the backgrounds of sexual harassment. These predisposing factors are:

- 1- Characteristics of purpose: from such features, gen-

der, age and marital status can be named that have been considered in the reports of sexual harassment. For example, many young single women are more likely to be harassed [3].

- 2- Occupational/Organizational characteristics: Sev-

eral studies have shown that the number of women in occupations that their number isn't proportional with the number of men. For example, researches have shown that women in non-traditional occupations (fewer number of female employees) and traditionally female occupations (women more than men) will experience more sexual harassment [4].

3- Offender characteristics: Studies about sexual violence have shown that people who commit it are often ordinary people who have patriarchal traditional sexual attitudes which are imprinted by rape myth acceptance and negative attitudes toward women rather than having perverse personality characteristics[5]The issue that how much the demographic factors (age, work experience, employment position, income level, marital status, educational level) of sexually abused women affect sexual abuse and rate and extent of sexual harassment in the workplace lead the researcher to investigate in this area. The aim of this study was to examine the relationship between demographic factors and the incidence of sexual harassment of working women in Tehran city in 2011.

Methods

This is cross-sectional study which was conducted after the approval and permission of the authorities related to the target groups. This study was conducted on working women between the 21-40 years old who had been sexually harassed during the past 12 months in Tehran city and sample of 120 working women were selected by purposive sampling. This is kind of non-probability sampling in which the researcher regarding the research's goal and facilities can choose sample by meaningful and purposive method. The research is carried out in several Tehran's districts. Due to the lack of available statistics and the sensitivity of issue and also likelihood of sufficient participation questionnaires were distributed among eligible working women after the necessary explanations about the importance of the project and ensuring the confidentiality regarding to the response without mentioning code and name. the research was conducted outside the office space and public places such as parks and even in urban subway transit stations of Tehran because this study is about work environment in order to response items easily about the work environment .All subjects participated in the study with full satisfaction and necessary explanations have been presented for prevention of any problem to response items. Regarding the purposes of this study, the Sexual Experience Questionnaire (SEQ, Fitzgerald, 1988) and multi-choice questionnaire for demographic data were used.

A) Sexual Experience Questionnaire: The Sexual Experience Questionnaire (SEQ, 1988) was developed by Fitzgerald et al. In order to assess the incidence and prevalence of sexual harassment examine three distinct areas: 1- Sexual coercion including the use of force for sex in return for job promotion2- Unwanted sexual attention of wide range of verbal and nonverbal behaviors which are offensive, unwanted and non-reciprocal.3- Sexual harassment may include range of verbal and nonverbal behaviors which sex is not the purpose of insults, hostile, degrading remarks and attitudes regarding to gender of the person such as sexual character, slander, sarcasm, sexual gestures, displaying or distributing pornographic or obscene pictures, threaten, intimidate, or act of violence. The questionnaire contains 21 items with 3 options includes zero (I've never been sexually harass), 1 (once I've been sexually abused), 2 (more than once been sexually harass my case) . People are asked about unwanted sexual experiences in the past 12 months [6].B) Demographic data include age, income level, occupational position, work experience; marital status and educational level were asked by multi-choice questionnaire. Internal consistency of the scale Sexual Experience Questionnaire : Fitzgerald et al (1998) obtained 0.92 for the internal consistency on sample of 1700 students, in addition the test - retest stability coefficient was more than 2 weeks (0.86). For the present study, the Cronbach's alpha was used for reliability of this questionnaire. Thus, 20 questionnaires were distributed among the individuals and between the pre-test data were collected during the pre-test and Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated 0.87 [7].The research's literature about sexual harassment, sexual experience for questionnaire of Fitzgerald (1988) was translated into Persian language to check the validity of the study and its validity was confirmed by 4 experts. In this study, statistical analysis was performed by using SPSS-14 software. Demographic characteristics of descriptive statistics (frequency and percentage) and inferential statistics, and regression were used to examine data.

The study's protocol was approved by the ethics review committees of the Clinical Research Center and director of the Center for Women's Participation of Allameh Tabataba'i . Also, all subjects participated by full satisfaction in this study.

Results

In this study 120 abused women participated that 27(22.5%) individuals with 21-24 years old,55(45.8%) individuals with 25-28 years old, 31(25.8%) individuals with 29-33 years old, 5(4.2%) individuals with 33-36

years old, and 2 (1.7%) individuals with 37-40 years old, educational level in this sample as 36 (30%) people had diploma, 25 individuals with upper diploma degree (% 20.8), 57 individuals with bachelor (47.5%) and 2 indi-

viduals with had MA and Ph.D. (2.8%). In this group, 75 subjects were single (62.5%), 31 were married (% 25.8) and 14 were divorced (% 11.66). Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of participants in this study.

Table 1. Demographic profile of female victims of sexual harassment participating in the study (n = 120)

Specifications	Percent	Frequency
Age group (years)		
21-24 years	22.5	27
25-28 years	45.8	55
29-32 years	25.8	31
33-36 years	4.2	5
37-40 years	1.7	2
Level of education		
Diploma	30	36
Associate Degree	20.7	25
Bachelor	46.5	57
Masterand PHD	2.8	2
Marital Status		
Single	62.5	75
Married	25.8	31
Divorced	11.7	14
Occupational Position in the event of sexual harassment		
Down	46.6	56
Average	40.8	49
Top	12.6	15

According to Table 2, there is significant relationship between 1) age and sexual harassment, 2) educational level and amount of sexual harassment, 3) income level and amount of sexual harassment, 4) job status and sexual harassment, 5) sexual harassment and marital status that single people are more at risk of sexual harassment, 6) The hypothesis that the low level of work experience is significant at higher risk of sexual abuse.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to examine the relationship between demographic factors and the incidence of sexual harassment of working women in Tehran city in 2011 that it may be able to pay for basic research projects to improve the working environment for women's satisfaction. The results showed that there is a significant relationship between age and sexual harassment that is not consistent with research of Oconnell and Korabik [8] but this result is consistent with of Reese and Lindenberg [9] and Douglas [10]. The research by Oconnell and Korabik indicated that sexual abuse has not relationship with age and also young and middle-aged women are vulnerable against sexual

harassment.

While the Douglas's research has shown that women are more likely to sexually harass victims among younger employees in lower ages. Lindbergh's study which entitled as "impacts of education on sexually harass" and Michigan conducted study which entitled as "gender, age and sexual harassment". Present study has shown that gender and age are important factors that influence on sexual abuse. Results showed that there is differences between men and women in their perceptions and attitudes toward sexually harass supportive policies and practices. Moreover, there is a great difference between different age groups. Every age group has its own behavioral features. Females older than 40 years are more likely to report sexual harassment and policies. Formal complaints are more supportive and welcoming but women less than 40 years are less against sexual assaults and less likely report what happened. Younger women may be less support and sexual harassment will not accept therefore, less likely to report sexual harassment. Among men, persons above 50 years more likely to have committed sexual harassment against women. They believe that

education about behaviors such as sexual harassment can more measures to reduce sexual harassment, but less than 30 years of sexual abuse do not understand a lot of information of the policies to deal with this problem. In these studies, who were aged 25 to 28 years reported more sexual abuse, and then those aged 29 to 32 years and those 21 to 24 years. Persons aged 33 to 36 years and are at least 37 to 40 years who reported sexual abuse. In explanation of this study can be said that to have less support of younger women do not have the behavior of workplace of the about verbal and non-verbal sexual nature it so it was not seriously considered or ignored. Results showed that there is no correlation between educational level and sexual harassment and this is consistent with research of O'Connell [8] and Wagner [11]. O'Connell's research showed that women with higher levels of education are more likely to report sexual harassment and prevent it from occurring while women are with less education are more or less aware of these issues. Klomegah's research also showed that the levels of education and income level, assets and are more on women and decent jobs and the level of violence are less on men.

Individuals can capitalize on social relations and social network support to meet their needs. Matter how broader social relationships, access to supportive resources and problem of male violence women are forced to endure conditions and can be used to support the resources to defend and not to give up violence. This study indicates that individuals with BA have reported sexual harassment more than those who with diploma and upper diploma levels are secondary to those in the ranks of those who have educated more than the Bachelor of sexual harassment. In explanation of assumption it can be said that they have a lower level of education are more in the incidence of sexual harassment, but because of access to resources increases support is members of sexual abuse of a lower under legal report and fear of being fired from a job that makes accurate reporting of sexual abuse and that's why people who are not present at lower levels of education (diploma and degree) were reported in caution sexually assaulting. Results showed that there is significant relationship between income level and sexual abuse. Research by Good (12) is not consistent and also this is consistent with research of Wagner [11]. Investigation by Good revealed that level of violence against women would be lessened by men less in high level of assets.

Wagner's researches also showed that less income level and high job status are reporting more sexual abuse. This study suggests that most sexual abuse among low-income people is between (101 to 300

dollars), and then there are people who have moderate income (300 to 500 dollars). people are the third grade with less than 100 dollars and those who earn more than 500 dollars are in fourth place at the level of income. This study examined sample of individuals who have low levels of income in terms of revenue (under 100 dollars) and had no income, and requires more extensive research. Research was conclusions showed that there is significant relationship between job status and sexual abuse which is consistent with some researches [8, 13-15]. Investigation shows that women who had less social support or occupational status are less than the men to be sexually abused. Research of Scandura & Ragines showed that position of women with blue-collar jobs (down position) have encountered sexual harassment than women who were employed in white-collar jobs (top position). Because the patriarchal culture in blue-collar jobs, and the cause of inappropriate sexual behavior is higher by men. Finally, people who sexually abuse tolerate or condone it and are more likely to be involved with it. It is consistent with research of Gutek which indicates more communication with members of the opposite sex as men and women have experienced sexual abuse more likely to be worked obviously. Women in non-traditional occupations that require them to deal with men more increases likely to hurt them. O'Connell and Korabik showed that there is positive relationship between male dominated environment and sexual harassment of women and they experienced more sexual harassment. They showed that women with less social support and job sites are less exposed to more sexual harassment by men who are nonverbal or verbal data.

The study also suggests that if individuals have low occupational status they are more exposed to sexual harassment and also sexual harassment will be reduced in higher job status. It can be said, no matter how much job status is in the lower level of social and legal protection to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace is reduced as a result people are forced to endure the conditions in the work environment. There is a significant relationship between sexual harassment on marital status of individuals that this result is consistent with O'Connell's study [8], Zygmund and Denton [16]. Research shows that unmarried and divorced people than married individuals are at risk of sexual abuse than married people. In this study show single people are more sexually harass and divorced. Hypothesis can explain that young single people because of their social support and bonds is less than the married group and most are victims of sexual harassment in the workplace, but because the study was limited to divorced women requires further investigation. Results showed

there is significant relationship between the experience of sexual harassment in the study of Sadeghi and Rajab-Larijani [17] as the study of the social sciences and hurt implies that the female sex work, low work experience, marital status and employment base show low incidence of women sexual harassment at work. According to the study people with less than one year work experience reported more sexual harassment. It explains that individuals who are less likely to be fired from workplace record high and low levels of access to social and legal protection of individuals at greater risk of sexual abuse. Limitations in research were lack of control group inability to generalize the findings to other sexually abused women, and we suggest for further research. The study of sexual harassment in evaluation of organizational factors on reduction of sexual harassment shows impact of education on the experience of sexual harassment in the workplace.

Conclusion

According to the results, it appears that young women are victims of sexual abuse than older women with low average degree; low-income level, unmarried, low level job and work experience. But the below suggestions were recommended to understand more about risk factors and steps to improve the status quo sexual harassment: 1- Assessment of sexual harassment in the workplace, job separation, 2 - Evaluation of social and psychological effects of sexual abuse on victims' future career and life, 3 - Longitudinal studies about education and sexual harassment of women working in the training of the extent of sexual harassment in the workplace, 4 - Study about impact of the work environment (public, private), the incidence of sexual harassment, initiation of sexual harassment, sexual abuse perpetrator characteristics.

Ethical Considerations

Compliance with ethical guidelines

This research is taken from the research plan of the Researchers and Elites Club of the North Khorasan University of Medical Sciences and Health Services, which has the moral identity of IR.IAU.NKUMS. REC.1397.103.

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Authors' contributions

Study design: Fatemeh Behzadfar, Hossein Eskandari, Hassan Khani; Data collection and analysis: Fatemeh Behzadfar, Hossein Eskandari, Narges Zamani, Mahmood Golzari, Hassan Khani; Manuscript preparation: Fatemeh Behzadfar, Hossein Eskandari, Narges Zamani, Mahmood Golzari, Hassan Khani.

Conflict of interest

The authors declared no conflict of interest.

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