

## Original Investigation

# Sexual Harassment and its Impact in Females at Workplace in Dhanusha District, Madhesh Province, Nepal

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## ABSTRACT

**INTRODUCTION:** The violence of sexual harassment at workplace is problematic issue in the community for females. It has a direct bearing on the workplace productivity as well as the development of the society. Therefore, this study was conducted to assess the effects of sexual harassment on health and daily performances of female employees. **MATERIALS AND METHODS:** Descriptive study was carried out in Dhanusha district of Madhesh province of Nepal from March, 2022 to April 2022. The study was conducted in different organizations (workplace) situated in Dhanusha district which were selected purposely. The sample size was 120 working females. Banks, schools, hospitals, and shopping centres were the selected female working places in this study. Face to face interview was conducted through structured questionnaire for the 120 females who gave the permission for interview. **RESULTS:** The present study demonstrated that 61.67 % respondents exhibited to possess the knowledge about sexual harassment however, 38.33% of the female respondents demonstrated to be unaware about sexual harassment at their workplace. Among the total numbers of female participating in the research, 29% of the females had experienced the incidence of sexual harassment. Majority of respondents (25.71%) working efficacy had reduced after being suffered from sexual harassment and 5.71% had changed their job. 5.71% females suffered from headache and body ache, 5.71% suffered from high blood pressure, 22.86% suffered from anorexia, 20% suffered from restlessness/insomnia, 17.14% suffered from fatigue, 14.29% suffered from anxiety, 11.43% faced depression and 2.86% had lost their body weight. **CONCLUSIONS:** Sexual harassment for females at work place affects them physically as well as mentally. Therefore, awareness programme should be conducted time to time and anti-sexual harassment policy should be implemented at workplace.

**Keywords:** Female, physical, sexual harassment, workers, workplace



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## INTRODUCTION

Sexual harassment arises when people are targets of unwanted sexual comments, sexual gestures or sexual activities. Sexual harassment occurs in different forms as, verbal sexual harassment, physical aggressive sexual harassment, cyber sexual harassment, sexual violence and sexual assaults. Sexual harassment at workplace is an extension of violence in everyday life and is sex discrimination. It constitutes a gross violation of women's right to equality and dignity. It has its roots in patriarchy and its attendant perception that men are superior to women and that some forms of violence against women are acceptable [1]. An employee gets uncomfortable when unfriendly environment at workplace is characterized by pervasive sexual harassment. The serious effects of sexual harassment at the workplace are often understated and thus it negatively impacts the equal rights of women. Not only does it impact her, it has a direct bearing on the

workplace productivity as well as the development of the society and their physical and mental health. Therefore, this study was conducted to assess the effects of sexual harassment on health and daily performances of female employees.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

## Study design and setting

A descriptive study was carried out in Dhanusha district of Madhesh province of Nepal from March 2022 to April 2022 at different organizations (working places) situated in Dhanusha district. The working places considered for this study were banks, schools, hospitals, and shopping centres in the district.

## Participants, sample size and sampling technique:

Females working at different organizations (working places) situated in Dhanusha district were selected as the study participants. The sample size of 120 working females

was determined based on the basis of prevalence of 82%, that women experienced at least one form of sexual harassment, with 7% of allowable error and 5% of non-response [2]. The study sites were selected by simple random sampling from banks, schools, hospitals, and shopping centers as per the list obtained from the sub-metropolitan city, Janakpurdham at first step. Then, the study participants were selected by convenient sampling. Only the females who gave the permission for the interview were included in the study.

**Data collection procedure and study variables**

Face-face interview was done through research instrument. The research instrument was semi-structured questionnaire and it consisted of two parts. First part consisted of questions for the organizational details which included sociodemographic characteristics such as age, sex, marital status, education and profession of study participants. Second part included questions on knowledge, sexual harassment experienced by working females and its impact on job, mental health and physical health.

**Statistical analysis and data management**

The data was analyzed using SPSS software. Analysis of personal information and other responses was done in sums of frequency (f) and percentage (%). Chi- square ( $\chi^2$ ) test for independence was used to investigate association between the knowledge on sexual harassment at workplace and female workers at 5% level of significance.

**Ethical consideration**

Ethical approval was taken from Janaki Medical College and Teaching Hospital, Janakpurdham, Nepal. Informed consent was taken from each subjects. Subjects were assured for the anonymity and confidentiality of the information and allowed to refuse to participate in the study at any time if they wished to.

**RESULTS**

Out of 120 sample, majority of the participants (44.17%) were in the age group of 25-35 years, 50.83% of the respondents were married, 30.88% were working as bank employees and 50% had an intermediate level (higher Secondary) of literacy (Table 1). More than one fourth (29%) of the females experienced sexual harassment in their work places (Figure-1).

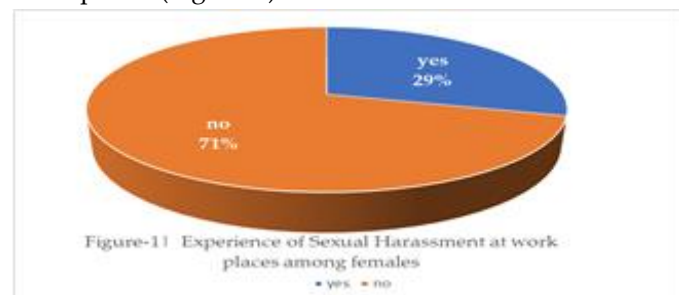


Figure-11 Experience of Sexual Harassment at work places among females

**Table 1|** Socio-demographic characteristics of study participants (n=120)

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Age</b>		
<25 years	37	30.88
25-35 years	53	44.17
35-45 years	25	20.83
45-55 years	5	4.17
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Married	61	50.83
Unmarried	48	40.00
Divorced	03	02.50
Widow	05	04.17
Separate	03	02.50
<b>Profession</b>		
Bank Employees	37	30.88
School Teachers	34	28.33
Nurses	35	29.17
Sales Girls	14	11.67
<b>Educational Levels</b>		
SLC or SEE	37	30.88
Higher Secondary	60	50.00
Graduate and above	23	19.17

Majority females (61.67%) had knowledge of sexual harassment and 38.33% had no knowledge about sexual harassment. Majority of the females (36.7%) responded that power and position of male at workplace was the major cause of sexual harassment (Table 2).

**Table 2|** Knowledge and causes of sexual harassment (n=120)

Knowledge on Sexual Harassment	N	%
Yes	74	61.67
No.	46	38.33
<b>Cause of Sexual Harassment</b>		
Lack of effective law	24	20.00
Lack of Awareness training/Education	29	24.20
Power/Position of male	44	36.70
Opportunity/Attitude of male toward female	23	19.20

Age group (p=0.011), types of profession (p<0.0001), and educational levels (p=0.008) were significantly associated with sexual harassment whereas association with marital status was found to be insignificant (p=0.933) (Table 3).

One fourth (25.71%) of the females had reduce efficacy, 22.86 % tried to avoid certain areas of workplace, 17.57% tended to change work pattern significantly, 11.43% hurried for duty off, 8.53% arrived late and 8.57% considered to change the job due to sexual harassment (Table 4). Similarly, 5.71% suffered from headache and body ache, 5.71% suffered from high blood pressure, 22.86% suffered from anorexia, 20% suffered from restlessness/insomnia, 17.14% suffered from fatigue, 14.29% suffered from anxiety, 11.43% faced depression and 2.86% lost their body weight.

**Table 3** | Socio-demographic characteristics of study participants according to experience of sexual harassment (n=120)

Characteristics	Experience of sexual Harassment		Chi square	p-value
	Yes (n=35)	No (n=85)		
<b>Age group</b>			8.86	
<25 years	17 (45.95%)	20 (54.05%)	37	0.011
25-35 years	9(16.98%)	44(83.02%)	53	
>35 years	9(30.00%)	21(70.00%)	30	
<b>Marital Status</b>				
Married	18(29.51%)	43 (70.49%)		
Unmarried*	17(28.81%)	42(71.19%)	0.007	0.933
<b>Profession</b>				
Bank Employees	2 (5.41%)	35(94.59%)		
School Teachers	5 (14.71 %)	29 (85.29%)	39.86	< 0.0001
Nurses	16(45.71%)	19 (54.29%)		
Sales Girls	12(85.71%)	2 (14.29%)		
<b>Educational Levels</b>				
SLC or SEE	9 (24.32%)	28 (75.68%)		
Higher secondary (Intermediate)	12(20.00%)	48(80.00%)	14.04	0.008
Graduate and above	14(60.87%)	9(39.13%)		

\*Divorced/widow/separated

**Table 4** | Impact of sexual harassment on daily performances (N= 35)

	No.	Percentage
Consider changing job	5	14.29
Try to avoid certain areas of workplace	8	22.86
Reduce efficiency	9	25.71
Change work pattern significantly	6	17.14
Hurry for duty off	4	11.43
Arrival late	3	8.57
<b>Total</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>100.00</b>

**Table 5** | Physical & Psychological Effects of sexual harassment

	No.	Percentage
Headache and body ache	2	5.71
Weight loss	1	2.86
High blood Pressure	2	5.71
Fatigue	6	17.14
Anorexia	8	22.86
Insomnia	7	20.00
Anxiety	5	14.29
Depression	4	11.43
<b>Total</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>100.00</b>

## DISCUSSION

This study was conducted in Janakpurdhama, Dhanusha of Nepal in females who were working in various positions in private and government offices with an objective to assess the sexual harassment situations and its impact on health and working performance. Although, if anyone is convicted of committing sexual harassment against an employee or customer, one shall be liable to punishment, considering nature of an offense, with imprisonment not exceeding six months or with fine not exceeding fifty thousand rupees or with both [3]. This study revealed that considerable proportion (29.0%) of female workers suffered from various type of sexual harassment by their co-worker in working area. A study conducted at Kathmandu, shows 82% of the females faced any type of sexual harassment [2], which is greater than our finding. This difference might be due to socio-cultural environment as still culture of silence exists in the study region and Terai belt of Nepal. We found that 45.95% of

the females below 25 years of age were sexually harassed, as this age is more vulnerable and unaware about the requirement of jobs, which is similar to the findings of the study conducted in Municipal Corporation limits of Mangalore, a coastal city in Karnataka state [4]. In this study, more than one fourth (29.51%) married and one fourth (28.81%) unmarried females were harassed sexually. Similar results were seen in the study conducted for sexual harassment in public transportation among female students in Kathmandu valley [5]. This study also exposed the association of sexual harassment and their profession, wherein 85.71% sales girls, followed by 45.71% nurses, 14.71% school teacher and 5.41% bank employees were harassed, which is statistically significant. Similar study has done in educational sector of Peshawar, Pakistan [6]. This study also showed the association of educational level and sexual harassment, wherein 60.87% females with graduation and above degree were harassed followed by 24.32% females with lower education level (SLC or SEE), while about one fourth (20%) females with

higher secondary education level faced sexual harassment [2]. Sexual harassment is not only a moral issue, it is also an issues of female right, dignity and humiliation; socio-economic reputation. It can make serious impact on their personal life, their physical and mental health and daily performance. This study exposed the impact of sexual harassment wherein, 25.71% of the females has reduced efficiency on work, followed by 22.86% of the females who tried to avoid certain areas of workplace and 14.29% of the females considered changing their job, while the remaining 11.43% and 8.57% of the females hurried for duty off and arrived late respectively. Similarity, findings were observed in the study conducted in Kathmandu which showed the impact of sexual harassment in public transport among the female health science students [7]. Physical and emotional health are closely linked. When victims of sexual harassment experience mental and emotional problems, it often leads to physical health issues, such as loss of appetite, headaches, weight fluctuations, and sleep disturbances. Sleep disturbances can in turn lead to other serious health problems, such as hormonal imbalance, an increased risk of high blood pressure, and a weakened immune system [8]. According to this study, the impact on female's physical health due to sexual harassment was anorexia (22.86%), insomnia (20%), fatigue (17.14%), high blood pressure (5.71 %), and headache and body ache (5.71%). Similar study was

carried out in six carpet factories of Kathmandu Valley [9]. Sexual harassment can have significant impact on a woman's mental health. It can lead to feelings of anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem. Females who experience sexual harassment may also experience symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, such as intrusive memories, avoidance of situations that remind them of the experience, and difficulty concentrating [10]. In this study we found that there is negative association between sexual harassment and mental health on the sexually harassed females. 14.29% of the sexually harassed females experienced anxiety and 11.43% females experienced depression. Similar findings were exposed in the study for the impact of sexual harassment on depressive symptoms during the early occupational career in society and mental health [11,12].

## CONCLUSIONS

This study shows sexual harassment among the females at their workplace in Dhanusha district. Female workers are victimized physically and mentally at their work place, and hence sexual harassment is a prevalent as well as problematic issue in the community for female workers in government and private sectors. Therefore, awareness programme should be conducted from time to time and anti-sexual harassment policy should be implemented at workplace.

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**Author Contributions:** Concept and design: L.J., S.S.G. and P.S; Statistical analysis: L.J., S.S.G.; Writing of the manuscript: L.J., S.S.G., P.S., P.K.Y., and V.KK; Data collection: L.J., S.S.G., P.S., P.K.Y., and V.KK; Revision and

editing: L.J., S.S.G., P.S., P.K.Y., and V.KK. All authors have contributed equally for the concept and design, statistical analysis, writing of the manuscript, data collection, revision and editing. All authors have read and agreed with the contents of the final manuscript towards publication.

**Data Availability:** Data will be available upon request to corresponding authors after valid reason

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