PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF HARASSMENT OF WOMEN

MOHAMMAD AQIB

"ASSISTANT PROFESSOR, PSIT COLLEGE OF LAW, KANPUR (UTTAR PRADESH)"

SUMIT MAHESHWARI

"ASSISTANT PROFESSOR, DEPARTMENT OF LAW, PRESTIGE INSTITUTE OF MANAGEMENT AND RESEARCH, INDORE (MADHYA PRADESH)"

Abstract-

This study article examines the varied psychological ramifications of female harassment, providing light on the significant and long-term impacts on victims' mental health. The study investigates several types of harassment, such as verbal, physical, and online harassment, and compares their effects on women's psychological health. The research paper discusses frequent psychological repercussions such anxiety, sadness, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and low self-esteem, as well as the possible long-term implications on general mental health. Furthermore, the study investigates the influence of socioeconomic and cultural variables in declining the psychological effects of harassment on women. It investigates how cultural norms, victim-blaming attitudes, and a lack of support systems contribute to the psychological suffering. The study also takes into account intersectionality, recognising that the psychological consequences may differ depending on characteristics such as race, socioeconomic background, and sexual orientation. Finally, the study emphasises the critical need for comprehensive initiatives to address and prevent harassment, highlighting the need of raising awareness, and enacting legislative measures to protect women from psychological injury. The findings of this study give vital insights to the continuing conversation on gender-based harassment and lay the groundwork for future research and policy development aimed at promoting the psychological well-being amongst women.

Keywords: Women, psychological repercussions, Verbal Harassment, Physical harassment, and internet harassment.

1. Introduction-

Abuse and harassment are important concerns affecting India and the rest of the globe. People may face sexual abuse in addition to regular harassment at work or home. Despite all efforts to eradicate harassment and its negative influence on a person's mental health and well-being, the problem exists and will never go away. Depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, suicidal ideation, adjustment challenges, and phobias can

all have serious mental health consequences. Working women who are sexually harassed are four to nine times more likely to experience depression than those who do not. Sexual harassment is a major stressor in the workplace, affecting people's psychological well-being, job performance, and confidence. It is also associated with higher depressed symptoms. Harassment can negatively impact a person's psychological health, performance, motivation, and tolerance for work. It can also lead to depression. Harassment is a prolonged stressor that can negatively impact a victim's physical and mental well-being. Stress (MK and Balamurugan, 2023).

2. Definition of Harassment: -

Harassment refers to a pattern of unwanted conduct, whether verbal, non-verbal, physical, or visual, that has the purpose of creating an intimidating, hostile, unsafe or offensive environment. This behaviour can be based on various factors such as race, sex, religion, disability, age, or any other protected characteristic, and it interferes with an individual's well-being and ability to perform their job or participate in activities.

3. Types of Harassment: -

a. Verbal Harassment-

Verbal harassment is a form of non-physical harassment that causes employees to feel uncomfortable, embarrassed, threatened, or frightened. Most of the time, people find it difficult to recognise verbal harassment due to varying reactions from other co-workers. The most prevalent kinds of verbal abuse are Making improper jokes, comments, taunting, or asking sexually oriented questions, Unwanted sexual approaches, and sexual favours, inquiring about the sexual preference or history of a coworker at work, gossiping and distributing false information on someone Use aggressive language and rude name-calling, Making disparaging remarks about someone's dress, appearance, or personal behaviour.

b. Physical Harassment-

Physical harassment refers to any unwelcome physical touch or activities that produce pain, discomfort, or fear in the recipient. This form of harassment can take place in a variety of situations, including the workplace, schools, public venues, and personal relationships. Physical harassment is a significant breach of personal boundaries that may result in legal action. Physical harassment not only violates personal boundaries, but it may also have serious emotional and psychological implications for the victim.

c. Sexual Harassment-

As per the provisions of Indian Penal Code, 1860 "Sexual harassment and punishment for sexual harassment—

(1) Aman committing any of the following acts--

(i) physical contact and advances involving unwelcome and explicit sexual overtures; or

(ii) a demand or request for sexual favours; or

(iii) showing pornography against the will of a woman; or

(iv) making sexually coloured remarks,

shall be guilty of the offence of sexual harassment.

(2) Any man who commits the offence specified in clause (i) or clause (ii) or clause (iii) of sub-section (1) shall be punished with rigorous imprisonment for a term which may extend to three years, or with fine, or with both.

(3) Any man who commits the offence specified in clause (iv) of sub-section (1) shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to one year, or with fine, or with both" (*Indian Penal Code of 1860*, Act No. 45 of 1860, § 354A).

d. **Online Harassment-**: Cyber stalking is on the rise, and women and children are the most common targets. Cyber stalking is the use of the Internet to harass or abuse someone. A cyber stalker does not pose a direct physical danger to a victim, but instead monitors the victim's online behaviour to acquire information and make threats through various types of verbal intimidation. The anonymity of online engagement minimises the possibility of identification, making cyber stalking more widespread than physical stalking (Sankhwar and Chaturvedi, 2018).

4. Psychological consequences:

a. **Anxiety -** Harassment can cause anxiety in women. Harassment may have a significant influence on a person's mental and emotional health, including emotions of dread, powerlessness, and insecurity. When women are harassed verbally, physically, or online, it may cause a continual state of worry and anxiety. They may become hyper-vigilant, always anticipating potential dangers or occurrences. This persistent tension might result in anxiety disorders such as generalised anxiety disorder.

b. **Depression:** Women may experience depression as a result of harassment. Harassment can create severe emotional anguish and feelings of powerlessness, resulting in a detrimental influence on mental health. Women who have been harassed may internalise feelings of shame, remorse, and worthlessness, which can lead to the development of depression. Constant harassment can cause a lack of interest in activities, social disengagement, and long-term emotions of melancholy or pessimism (Houle et al., 2011).

c. **Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder-** Harassment towards women might lead to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Harassment may be a distressing event that undermines one's feeling of safety and well-being. Women who have been harassed may acquire PTSD as a consequence of the disturbing and intrusive memories, flashbacks, nightmares, and powerful emotional reactions that accompany the traumatic incident. The continual terror, anxiety, and hypervigilance associated with PTSD can have a substantial impact on a woman's everyday life, relationships, and overall mental health. According to the study, women are about twice as likely as males to suffer PTSD in their lifetime.

d. **Low-Self-Esteem- Harassment** can reduce women's self-esteem and confidence. Women who are harassed may internalise negative attitudes about themselves and their value, leading to a drop in self-esteem. They may begin to doubt their talents and feel weak, reducing their self-esteem. Women who are

subjected to harassment on a regular basis may feel powerless and despairing about their life. This can also cause a woman to retreat from social situations, reducing her self-esteem and confidence.

4. Societal and Cultural Factors:

a. **Victim Blaming Attitude of Society:** The root cause of harassment in society is victim blaming. Multiple reasons, in a variety of contexts, contribute to this problem. For example, respectable men who would not dare to do such acts of harassment feel that all of their colleagues would not as well, which is not always the case. Furthermore, given the sensitive nature of the crime and its serious ramifications, the male controlling behavior would remain silent in order to protect the harasser within the 'bro' culture. Furthermore, after being harassed, the victims are blamed for their attire, enjoying the opposite gender's company, and being stigmatized as 'used' by society, ignoring the reality that the perpetrator committed the crime. As a result, remaining silent and refusing to bring the criminals to justice will reduce the persons engaged to the status of harassers. This perpetuates a never-ending cycle of unfairness in our society.

b. **Lack of Support Mechanism:** Limited awareness of legal rights is a key barrier to resolving sexual harassment in the workplace. Here's a summary of how this difficulty affects reporting and redress mechanisms:

- *Limited Legal Knowledge*: Victims and witnesses may be uninformed of their harassment-related legal rights. They may be uninformed of the specific laws, norms, and procedures protecting them from harassment. Individuals without experience may fail to recognize and properly identify situations of harassment, as well as understand the applicable legal remedies and reporting processes.

- *Barriers to Reporting:* Victims who do not aware their legal rights may have difficulty reporting instances of harassment. They may not know who to call or where to file a complaint. Furthermore, they may be uninformed of reporting dates and procedures, causing delays or missed opportunities for redress.

- *Limited Access to Legal Information:* Some people may not have easy access to legal information or tools that can assist them understand their rights and the legal options for dealing with harassment. This can be especially difficult for marginalised or disadvantaged groups, who may face extra obstacles owing to socioeconomic circumstances or a lack of representation.

- *Inadequate Training and Education:* Insufficient training and education on harassment rules and rights might lead to a lack of knowledge among women.

- *Language and Literacy Barriers:* Language and literacy challenges might exacerbate lack of understanding of legal rights. Legal information and resources may not be available in languages that all women can understand. Furthermore, persons with poor literacy skills may fail to understand complicated legal jargon, limiting their capacity to traverse the reporting and redressal procedure.

5. Intersectionality and Harassment:

a. *Socioeconomic status contributes to harassment against women.* Women with lower socioeconomic standing are more likely to be harassed because of their vulnerable and disadvantaged situation. They may be more prone to work in industries or occupations with a greater rate of harassment, such as low-wage service jobs or informal work. Furthermore, women with lower socioeconomic position may have restricted access to tools and support networks that might assist them in addressing and reporting incidents of harassment. Furthermore, the power dynamics that underpin socioeconomic inequality might contribute to women's harassment. Men in higher positions with more financial security may use their authority to harass women in lower socioeconomic statuses, knowing that these women are more reliant on their work or financial assistance. According to studies, women from lower socioeconomic origins are more likely to face harassment. They may be more prone to work in industries or occupations with a greater rate of harassment, such as low-wage service jobs or informal work. Furthermore, women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds may have restricted access to tools and support networks that might assist them in addressing and reporting incidents of harassment.

b. *Differential societal views contribute to harassment of women.* According to studies, women are more susceptible to harassment. This is because women frequently lack authority, are in more vulnerable and insecure positions, lack self-confidence, and have been socialized to suffer silently. This cultural mindset creates a society in which women are more prone to become victims of harassment. Furthermore, social conservatism and the need to comply to society standards contribute to women's failure to report harassment. Furthermore, a lack of gender sensitization and sex education in society reinforces detrimental views towards women and leads to a culture that tolerates harassment. The purpose of this research is not to draw attention to exploited individuals, but rather to emphasis the factors that lead to such vile displays of power and want. Sexual harassment is, above all, an indicator of power dynamics - women are significantly more likely to be victims of inappropriate behavior precisely because they require force more frequently than men, are in more helpless and untrustworthy positions, require fearlessness, or have been conditioned to endure in silence.

c. *Economic disparities:* Economic differences contribute to harassment against women. Because of uneven access to resources and opportunity, women are frequently placed in more vulnerable and unsafe social situations. This weakness exposes them to harassment and exploitation. Women's capacity to leave abusive circumstances and seek treatment is limited by a lack of financial means. Furthermore, economic differences can exacerbate power asymmetries between men and women, with males having more influence over resources and decision-making. Men can use this power difference to impose authority and control over women, resulting in harassment and exploitation.

6. Conclusion-

Abuse not only increases the risk of depression, but also contributes to other mental health issues. Abuse, both sexual and psychological, has been linked to a higher likelihood of adult depression. Trauma-focused cognitive-behavioral therapy should be the first line of treatment for abused children and adults,

with an emphasis on identifying the role of trauma-related symptoms. Psychiatrists that deal with survivors of abuse recognize the impact of abuse on mental and physical health, and offer trauma-focused treatment as needed.

Evidence-based treatment should be delivered. Psychotherapists should be aware that survivors of sexual assault often have numerous health issues. More study is needed to determine how abuse history affects victims' responses to therapy for common disorders. Examining the abuse history of a patient might shed light on the underlying causes of symptoms. To effectively treat depression, psychological therapy must address the underlying reasons of abuse at all stages of life, including psychological, physical, and sexual abuse (MK and Balamurugan, 2023).

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