

WORKPLACE HARASSMENT: CAUSES AND WAY FORWARD

OUTLINE

1- Introduction.

Thesis statement: Workplace harassment is a prevailing global issue. It stems from abuse of authority and other factors rooted in organizational culture. Through legal and awareness initiatives, a toxic workplace can be transformed into growth-oriented one.

2- Workplace Harassment: A Reality.

3- Causes of Workplace Harassment.

a- Homogenous workplace.

b- Power Imbalance rooted in hierarchical structure.

c- Toxic permissive workplace environment.

d- Weak Policy enforcement.

e- Isolated workplaces.

f- Cultural and societal issues.

4- Consequences of Workplace Harassment.

a- Psychological and physical harm to victim.

b- Loss of human and financial capital of the organization.

c- Impact on workplace climate.

5- Way Forward:

a- Policy formation and legal enforcement.

b- Leadership accountability and positive role models.

c- Specify roles and responsibilities of each actor

d- Compensations over victimization.

e- Creating safe and inclusive environments

6- Guidance, Trainings, and awareness

6- Conclusion.

Recently, a news was circulating about reinstatement of an employee unlawfully terminated by the organization. Federal Ombudsperson of Pakistan overturned the dismissal of Ms Zainab Zahra Awan who was terminated while on duly sanctioned maternity leave. The organization was barring the employee from her right to lawful employment and maternity leave. Everyday numerous cases of workplace harassment are brought into public notice. Some-times in the form of terminations of employment, some time of suicides and other times of rape. Workplace harassment has become a reality attached to employment. The causes of its prevalence include homogenous workplace with power imbalances, toxic workplace environments, isolated workplaces, weak policy enforcement, and cultural and societal issues. Harassment at workplace has drastic consequences on the mental and physical health of victim. Also, it strips the organization of its human and financial capital and reputation in market place. However, through policy formation and strict adherence to implementation of that policy can keep a check on harassment cases at workplace. Moreover, leadership accountability, positive role models, specifying roles and responsibilities, prioritizing compensation over victimization, creating

safe inclusive environments, and through guidance, training, and awareness, this social evil can be curtailed.

Workplace harassment is a prevailing global issue. It stems from abuse of authority and other factors rooted in organizational culture. Through legal and awareness initiatives, a toxic workplace can be transformed into growth-oriented one.

The prevalence of workplace harassment is a matter of concern in current time. Workplace harassment is a single or repetitive action or behavior aimed at an individual or group to cause physical, psychological, sexual or economic harm (International Labour Organization). It can be a verbal or physical attack aimed at undermining his safety in a particular working environment. Forms of workplace harassment include weaponized documentation, public insults and humiliation, verbal abuse, abusive work practices, slave code, stalking, intimidation, or sexual violence etc. The types of workplace harassment include physical harm, psychological harm, sexual, economic harm, and gender based violence. According to a report of International Labor Organization (2022), one out of five persons have experienced workplace harassment at least once in their lifetime globally. Hence, workplace harassment has become a reality which is difficult to separate from employment.

Harassment at workplace is the consequence of some root causes deeply embedded in the workplace culture. One of such factor is homogenous workplace - w^t it is a workplace where a

particular group prevails as majority due to shared characteristics which can be age group, gender or caste. Minorities are seen as threat to disrupt the balance. This provides a gap for majority to humiliate, exploit and discriminate minority. As in Pakistan, it was found that ~~Ethnic~~ Christians and other sanitary workers (minorities) faced systemic discrimination and caste based exclusion. (Amnesty International; 2025) Therefore, ~~the~~ homogenous workplaces create a majority versus minority mindset which becomes a factor promoting harassment at workplace against minorities.

Besides homogenous workplace, power imbalances rooted in hierarchical structures of an organization is also a causal factor of workplace harassment. The hierarchies introduce a power imbalance with authority having supreme command over subordinates. This provides the authority with an opportunity to misuse their power. It can be in the form of bullying, holding back information, public humiliation etc. According to a survey, employees reported that seventy-five percent of those who bully at workplace are bosses. This shows that power imbalances at a workplace can provide an opportunity to abuse the delegated power and result in workplace harassment.