

THE INCIDENCE OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT: A PRELIMINARY REPORT

MAHMOOD NAZAR MOHAMED, SABITHA MARICAN,
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Abstract: The study of sexual harassment has not gained its momentum in this country, as most studies are at its preliminary stage. This study also investigates the incidence of sexual harassment but more confined to the northern region of the country. A total of 52 respondents participated by answering the Utara Sexual Harassment Perception Questionnaire (USHPQ) developed by Sabitha (1999) based on indicators used in Soutar (1977), Reese et al., (1997) and Fitzgerald (1991). Four categories of SH were used; visual, verbal, non-verbal, and physical. Respondents views and experiences were grouped into the following categories; acts which are very disturbing, acts which are disturbing and acts which are not considered as sexual disturbing. Differences in perception between men and women were noted and discussed.

INTRODUCTION

The issue on sexual harassment has only recently gain some serious attention from researchers, academicians, policy makers and the public. More than two decades ago, this phenomenon did not even have a name. The first mentioned of it were from case studies in the mid 70's. Despite its invisible existence, sexual harassment has always plagued women for years because society considered it more of a private problem rather than a public issue (Weeks, Bokes & Garbino, 1996).

Public recognition of the phenomenon became more prominent because sexual harassment has always been there. In fact, it is everywhere; at the work place, in public place, on transit transport and all possible location that one can think of. However, this does not happen until the end of the 70's when MacKinnon warned that "the unnamed should not be taken for the non-existence" (1979), add this has spurred public reactions to the issue. Since sexual harassment concerns the issue of a public nature, then it should be curbed. In fact, public recognition of the problem began with the increasing awareness of sexual harassment in the work place, and it was mostly

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through the efforts of women in the work force that the problem became more and more recognized by society at large (Sabitha, 2000a; 2000b).

OBJECTIVES

Since the study on sexual harassment is still at its infancy stage in this country, the research team decided to adopt a descriptive and exploratory approach to establish some pertinent baseline data on the subject matter.

For that purpose, the actual study which was funded by the IRPA mechanism aims to address the following issues. First, it sought to determine the operational definition and scope of sexual harassment at the workplace. Secondly, it aim to determine the perception, thus identifying the sensitivity to sexual harassment among public administrators in Malaysia. Third, it intend to identify the incidence of sexual harassment among public administrators in Malaysia. Finally, it also intend to identify, the effects of sexual harassment on the individual.

However, for this paper, it will report the findings of the preliminary study, which focuses on some of the psychometric properties of USHPQ and some incidence of sexual harassment experienced by the respondent.

This study is imperative at this juncture since there has not been any specific act, code or statute against sexual harassment in the country. There is only an organizational guideline for sexual harassment (Sabitha, 1999a; 1999b). Thus the present study will serve as an input for policy makers on the issue of sexual harassment. As for public sector administrators, it will increase their awareness and understanding of what constitutes sexual harassment at the workplace, in order to deal with the matter more

effectively, and to work towards the formulation of a more holistic guideline towards the prevention of the incident.

METHODOLOGY

The study focuses on administrators in the public sector. Though sexual harassment happens across all level of the organization but finally it is up to the public administrators to handle such matter. As shown by past studies (Spann, 1980; Weeks et al., 1986; Power, 1993), potential harassers may perceive that they are free to harass it management is seen to tolerate or condone such behavior. Sexual harassment may be more likely to occur in situations where it is perceived as socially permissible. So the perceived attitudes of local work group leader may provide an important index of the local norm (Larwood, Szwajkowski, & Rose, 1988, 1989). Organization which tolerates sexual harassment tend to have personnel problems in general (Standroff, 1992). As it is, the present problem is that 90% of the workers do not understand a common definition of sexual harassment (Laabs, 1995).

Only public sector administrators were included in this study since there is no basal line of comparison between private and public sector in view of the present study. The main reason is that the rules and regulation in the public sector in view of the present study. The main reason is that the rules and regulation in the public sectors is governed by the Malaysian General Order. The private sector works on a variety of rules and regulation based on their own in house policy of each sector. Industries are also on their own in house policy or regulation towards sexual harassment issue. As researchers (Arvey, 1995; Davidson, 1990) pointed out one should thoroughly analyse their organizational context and develop items appropriated to the population of interest. This was the basis for choosing the public sector and thus, developing the specific measure of sexual harassment suitable for this sector is quite imperative.

Therefore, this study focus on the public, as it can act as a reference to the private sector with regards to behaviors and policies in overcoming sexual harassment at work. Thus, it will also provide a minimum standard that each private should have and not going below the standard required or existing in the public sector.

Two approaches were employed for this preliminary stage. First, the study uses Focus Group Discussion (FDG) to confirm and strengthen the research instrument, i.e. the Utara Sexual Harassment Perception Questionnaire (USHPQ). This instrument was formulated by Sabitha (1999a) based on indicators used by Soutar (1977), Reese et al. (1997) and Fitzgerald (1991).

Secondly, the USHPQ, together with some demographical enquires were distributed to a sample of 52 respondents from selected enforcement agencies, educational institutions and service agencies in the states of Kedah and Perlis. The identities of the respondents were not know to the researchers, as for random selection were carried out at the organizational level.

This study focused on four categories of sexual harassment; for example, physical, verbal, non-verbal and visual harassment. Physical harassment included body private, body not private, patting, pinching and sexual intercourse (Table 1). Secondly, verbal harassment included comments on one's appearance, pressure for date, sexual jokes and sexual remarks (Table 2). Meanwhile, over familiarization, whistling and dress-code were categorized as nonverbal harassment (Table 3). Finally, visual harassment consist of pin ups, letter and computer graphics (Table 4).

Table 1: Physical Items

No. Items	Items
1	Body Private
2	Body Not Private
3	Patting
4	Kisses
5	Hugs
6	Pinching
7	Brushing
8	Standing Close
13	Intimate
21	Demands
29	Sexual Intercourse (physically)

Table 2: Verbal Items

No. Items	Items
10	Comments On Appearance
11	Pressure For Date
12	Stay Late
16	Sexual Jokes
18	Cloth
19	Body
20	Sexual Practices
22	Sexual Co-op
24	Telephone
28	Sex Life
30	Sexual Intercourse (verbally)
32	Put Down
34	Offensive To Women
35	Conversations About Men
36	Sexual Remarks
37	Sexual Rumors
38	Sexual Innuendo's
39	Using Words Patronizing
40	Promotion Intimate
42	Morals

Table 3: Non-verbal Items

No. Items	Items
9	Over Familiar
14	Suggestive Looks
15	Ogling
25	Whistling
27	Dress Code
31	Treated Differently
33	Sex Gestures
41	Work Related Ideas

Table 4: Visual Items

No. Items	Items
17	Pinups
23	Letter
26	Computer

RESULTS

The profile of the respondents are as follows: 44.2% male; 55.8% female; majority (98.1%) are Malays and Muslim; 82.4% are married; 15.7% single and 2% were divorced; 58.7% is in the A occupational category (administration and professional), 41.3% in B job category; the average age is 34.8 years; 24 is the age of the youngest and 49 is the age of the oldest respondent; on the average, their monthly salary is RM1,504.72 (range is 530.00 – 4,300.00); they worked as civil servants from 1-26 years (mean is 9.6 years) with a range of 2 to 32 years to retire (mean 18.65 years); 50% with degree, 22% are SPM holders.

Reliability and validity tests were performed on the categories of USHPQ. Alpha values obtained on all four categories were on the high end (0.91 – 0.96) with overall value for USHPQ at 0.9817 (Table 5).

Table 5: Reliability Analysis of USHPQ

VB	n	No. item	Alpha
Verbal	45	20	0.9658
Physical	45	11	0.9589
Non-verbal	44	8	0.9162
Visual	49	3	0.9349
USHPQ	40	42	0.9817

Face validity was performed by a panel of administrators, legal officers and social workers who had handled some cases or complaints related to sexual harassment at their work place. This was done in a Focus Group Discussion format. The panel agreed in principle with all the 44 items in USHPQ as indicative of SH items with minor modifications and adjustments.

Convergent validity was also performed by correlating each categories of USHPQ with each other and highly significant correlation were obtained (Table 6). This lends evidence that all categories measure the same construct, i.e. sexual harassment.

Table 6: Inter-correlations Between Categories of USHPQ

	Physical	Visual	Verbal	Non-verbal
USHPQ	0.951	0.938	0.987	0.962
Physical	-	0.894	0.915	0.871
Visual		-	0.929	0.886
Verbal			-	0.934

Further, item-total correlations was performed on each item with the total score of each category, Positive, high and significant correlations were obtain for all categories.

From a total of 52 respondents which was sample for this preliminary study, it was found that 37 respondents have been harassed, 21 were women and 15 were men.

This study recorded the respondent's views about what was construed as a "very disturbing act" of sexual harassment. Result indicated that 84.0% viewed "verbally forcing subject into having sexual intercourse" as very disturbing act, followed by "implied reward or better treatment for sexual co-operation", "co-worker spread sexual rumors about yourself to others", and "physically forcing subject into having sexual intercourse" compared to other actions (Table 7).

Table 7: Act which are VERY Disturbing

No. Item	Items	Frequency	Percents
29	Sexual intercourse (verbally)	42	84.0
22	Sexual co-op	40	80.0
37	Sexual rumors	39	78.0
29	Sexual intercourse	39	78.0
1	(physically)	39	76.5
21	Body private	38	76.0
38	Demands	38	74.5
4	Sexual innuendoes	37	74.0
41	Kisses	33	66.0
15	Morals	33	63.5
	Ogling		

N=52

The study also recorded the perception of respondents towards what is termed as a disturbing act of sexual harassment. A total of 42.0% of the respondent chose "treated differently because one is a woman/man", "mistreated, slighted, or ignored", "not dressed according to the normal dress code as stated by the organization or out of the

norm", "made offensive sexual remarks about one self to others" and "whistling and making cat calls" as acts which are disturbing (Table 8).

Table 8: Act which are Disturbing

No. Item	Items	Frequency	Percents
31	Treated differently	42	84.0
27	Dress code	40	80.0
36	Sexual remarks	39	78.0
25	Whistling	39	78.0
41	Work-related ideas	39	76.5
14	Suggestive looks	38	76.0
9	Over familiar	38	74.5
16	Sexual jokes	37	74.0
17	Pinups	33	66.0
2	Body not private	33	63.5

N=52

This study also found that there were such acts of sexual harassment that were not very disturbing. Result found that 32.7% stated "pressure for date" is considered as not a very disturbing act, followed by "comments on appearance", "patting" and "over familiar" (Table 9). A total of 30.0% of respondent viewed "promotion-intimate" is not disturbing at all, "patting" (24.5%) and "work-related ideas" (24.0%) (Table 10).

Table 9: Act which are NOT VERY Disturbing

No. item	Items	Frequency	Percents
11	Pressure for date	17	32.7
10	Comments on appearance	16	30.8
3	Patting	10	20.4
9	Over familiar	10	20.4
40	Promotion-intimate	10	20.0
41	Work-related ideas	9	13.0
20	Sexual practices	9	17.6
35	Conversations about men	8	16.3
19	Body	8	15.7
2	Body not private	8	15.7

N=52

Table 10: Act which are NOT Disturbing At All

No. item	Items	Frequency	Percents
40	Promotion intimate	15	30.0
3	Patting	12	24.5
41	Work-related ideas	12	24.0
2	Body not private	12	23.5
10	Comments on appearance	12	23.1
35	Conversations about men	10	20.4
11	Pressure for date	10	19.2
9	Over familiar	9	18.4
13	Intimate	9	18.4
34	Offensive to women	9	18.4

N=52

Furthermore, according to the experiences of women who has been sexual harassed, it was found that the experiences which were termed as harassing are "standing too close comfort", "pressure for dates such as drinks, dinners", "sexual jokes, stories or language" as compared to other actions. On the other hand, women who were sexually harassed by men stated that the usual harassing action are like using words which are patronizing, mostly referring to private bodily parts and intimacy if compared to women who experience sexual harassment by their same gender. For this group, harassment were generally related to pinching, kisses and hugs (Table 11-Table 13).

Table 11: Experiences of Sexually Harassed Women

No. item	Items	Frequency	Percents
8	Standing close	12	57.1
10	Comments on appearance	12	57.1
11	Pressure for date	11	52.4
16	Sexual jokes	11	52.4
3	Patting	10	50.0
1	Body not private	9	42.7
6	Pinching	9	42.9
14	Suggestive looks	9	42.9
19	Body	8	38.1
39	Using words patronizing	8	38.1

N=21

Table 12: Experiences of Women Sexually Harassed by Men

No. item	Items	Frequency	Percents
39	Using words patronizing	8	100.0
13	Intimate	3	100.0
1	Body private	3	100.0
24	Whistling	3	100.0
25	Computer	3	100.0
34	Offensive to women	3	100.0
23	Letter	2	100.0
29	Sexual intercourse	2	100.0
14	(physically)	8	88.9
18	Suggestive looks Cloth	7	87.5

N=21

Table 13: Experiences of Women Sexually Harassed by Women

No. item	Items	Frequency	Percents
6	Pinching	8	88.9
4	Kisses	4	80.0
5	Hugs	3	75.0
37	Sexual rumors	2	66.7
3	Patting	5	50.0
27	Dress code	2	50.0
40	Promotion intimate	2	50.0
12	Stay late	2	50.0
33	Sexual gesture	1	50.0
41	Work-related ideas	2	33.3

N=21

Interestingly, the study also recorded the experience of sexually harassed men and it was found that they usually complain of patting, sexual jokes and pressure for dates, as compared to other harassing experience. Specifically, for men who had experienced sexual harassment by women, it was found that pinching, comments on dress code and suggestive looks were more frequently reported compared to men who experienced sexual harassment by the same gender group. In this context, the study showed that

sexual remarks are the most common form of sexually harassing act (Table 14-Table 16).

Table 14: Experiences of Sexually Harassed Men

No. item	Items	Frequency	Percents
3	Patting	14	87.5
16	Sexual jokes	13	81.3
11	Pressure for date	12	75.0
14	Suggestive looks	10	66.7
8	Standing close	10	62.5
2	Body not private	10	62.5
19	Body	10	62.5
10	Comments on appearance	10	62.5
9	Over familiar	9	60.0
6	Pinching	9	56.3

N=16

Table 15: Experiences of Men Sexually Harassed by Men

No. item	Items	Frequency	Percents
36	Sexual remarks	3	100
1	Body private	4	80.0
5	Hugs	5	71.4
16	Sexual jokes	8	66.7
33	Sex gestures	2	66.7
2	Body not private	6	60.0
34	Offensive to women	3	60.0
20	Sexual practice	3	60.0
11	Pressure for date	6	54.5
3	Patting	7	53.8

N=16

Table 16: Experiences of Men Sexually Harassed by Women

No. item	Items	Frequency	Percents
26	Dress code	4	100.0
23	Demands	1	100.0
24	Sexual co-op	1	100.0
25	Letter	1	100.0
29	Sexual intercourse	1	100.0
30	(physically)	1	1000.0
6	Sexual intercourse (verbally)	7	77.8
40	Pinching	3	75.0
32	Using words patronizing	3	60.0
13	Put down	2	50.0
	Intimate		

N=16

In conclusion, this study found that the experience of sexual harassment is not only confined to women but also widely experienced by men. Acts considered to be "very harassing" are mainly those of physical in nature, and acts which are not very disturbing are mostly verbal and visual related.

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