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**SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE:  
MEDIATING EFFECT OF PSYCHOLOGICAL CAPITAL**

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**ABSTRACT**

Diversity in the workforce has no longer been an option but an inevitable feature of today's organization dealing with diverse customers and markets in the wave of globalization. Gender diverse workforce is increasingly considered a competitive advantage for an organization, however various issues have also been associated with this change including the issue of sexual harassment. This study has examined the phenomenon of sexual harassment among nurses of public sector hospitals in Pakistan and its effect on their performance by taking psychological capital as a mediator in the relationship between sexual harassment and employee performance. Sample included nurses working in four different hospitals of Lahore. Sample size consisted of 182 nurses serving as Staff and Charge Nurse. The study was quantitative in nature and entailed cross sectional method of research. For this purpose, self-administered questionnaires were used to collect data. Findings of the study were found to be in favor of our proposed hypotheses.

Results exhibited the negative effect of sexual harassment on employee performance and PsyCap was proved to mediate the relationship. Keeping in view the findings, recommendations have been also offered to combat sexual harassment and its consequences at workplaces.

*Keywords:* Employee Performance, Health Sector, Psychological Capital, Sexual Harassment.

## **INTRODUCTION**

A gradual increase in diversity of the workforce, especially gender diversity, has been noted in the recent years owing to various policy interventions such as Equal Employment Opportunity and Affirmative Actions. More and more females are entering into the workforce and serving in a large number of professions along with their male counterparts. As a new entrant, in the professional workplaces, women face a number of issues and an important one is sexual harassment (Naveed, Tharani & Alwani, 2010).

There are various definitions of sexual harassment which describe the fundamental nature of harassment as an unwanted, uninvited, unpleasant and undesirable sexual behavior that affect the capacity of an employee to perform certain task or a duty. Harassment can be classified as sexual behavior that is verbal (e.g., intimacy proposals, offensive remarks and sexual jokes) or nonverbal behavior (e.g., showing or referring to sexual objects or materials, sexually evocative expressions, or exposure of body parts) (Hamlin & Hoffman, 2002).

Sexual harassment is considered to be more prevalent in health sector or medical services, specifically among nurses. For example, about 70% in the United Kingdom (Finnis & Robbins, 1992); 63% of nurses serving in hospitals of Turkey (Kisa, Dziegielewski & Ates, 2002); 91% of nurses doing practice and those nurses who are studying in Israel (Bronner et al., 2003); and 53.3% of nurses studying in Turkey (Celik & Bayraktar, 2004) have reported that

they have experienced sexual harassment in various forms from men working in different jobs. Nursing has been considered a suitable career for women because it has always been related to feminine attributes, like empathy, warmth and care. However, this reflection might also be affecting nurses for being more exposed to sexual harassment (Celik & Bayraktar, 2004; Kisa & Dziegielewski, 1996).

Sexual harassment against nurses is mostly practiced by doctors, administration personnel, and colleagues (Bronner et al., 2003; Madison, 1997). The issue of sexual harassment has been reported by the nurses working in the Pakistani hospitals who feel that they are harassed being a female working in the male world (Shamim, 1998). In Pakistan, the National Policy for Development and Empowerment of Women was initiated in 2002 to encourage women's involvement in development of the country and declared zero tolerance towards harassment and violence against women (Mahmood & Ahmad, 2010). A comprehensive law named, The Protection against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act (2010), has also been passed. This law was approved with an intention to address the issue of sexual harassment and protecting women's rights at the workplaces. However, this law is considered merely a piece of paper (Sadrudin, 2013) and not implemented in true spirit. Internationally, although Pakistan is a participant of several forums to protect women rights but the component of practical implementation is missing (Sadrudin, 2013).

According to the literature, sexual harassment results in diminution in employee's performance, productivity and organizational commitment. Other job-oriented factors which are affected by sexual harassment are weak team relationships, lowered performance of teams, cognitive complexities (e.g., diversion), increased team conflicts, low justice perceptions and

requirements to over-perform to earn recognition and respect within the work environment (Parker & Griffin, 2002).

According to Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (2005), the adverse effects on harassment victims include low job performance, lack of commitment, illness, increase in absenteeism and it even sometimes lead to employee turnover. Sczesny and Stahlberg's (2000), in their research on call centers revealed that telephone based sexual harassment have an extreme impact on job satisfaction and job performance of an employee.

Advocates of positive organizational behavior in the extant literature have suggested focusing on employee happiness in an organization (Luthans & Youssaf, 2007), as the positive and constructive psychological factors evidently serve to enhance the strengths of individuals rather than their weaknesses (Luthans, 2002). This thoughtful phenomenon has resulted in inventing the term psychological capital (PsyCap) (Avey, Luthans, & Youssef, 2010). PsyCap is constructed of four components, i-e., hope, self-efficacy, resilience and optimism (Luthans, Youssef & Avolio, 2007).

According to researchers, a blend of the features of PsyCap moves in a direction which leads to improving individual performance within the workplace (Luthans & Youssef, 2004). The four facets of PsyCap mutually generate a vital component for the dynamic workplace setting (Avey et al., 2010). These positive capacities are vital for generating high quality performance and boosting individual morale at the workplace (Stajkovic, 2006).

Most frequently researched variable in the literature of Psychological Capital is performance in diverse professions like, manufacturing, sales and innovation. In order to study the concept of performance in detail, a comprehensive research on performance was conducted by Campbell et al., (1993), which suggests that predictors of performance consist of 1-

supporting peers and team performance, 2- verbal and written analogies, 3- maintaining discipline, 4- task knowledge, 5- task completion ability, 6- leadership, 7- productive effort, 8- apposite administration. PsyCap links by indicating employee performance and the element of individual effort. Usually, employee performance is enhanced when they work harder to attain their objectives. Employees with positive PsyCap are passionate to put extra efforts in achievement of their goals (Fox & Spector, 1999).

Mostly those workers who hold significant levels of PsyCap are engaged in organization citizenship behavior (OCB), an important facet of employee performance (Wright & Bonett, 2007). According to a research study, psychological capital has a positive impact on job satisfaction, well-being, organizational commitment and job performance of employees (Walumbwa, Peterson, Avolio & Hartnell, 2010; Fariborz, Ahmadreza & Zahra, 2013). PsyCap has been considered as positive factor contributing to prevent anxiety, depression, stress and turnover (Fariborz, Ahmadreza & Zahra, 2013). Moreover, psychological capital has been proved to be a mediating factor in relationship between supportive organizational climate and employee performance (Luthans, Norman, Avolio & Avey, 2008). Wang et al., (2012) found that psychological capital acts as a mediator between work family conflict and job burnout among nurses in China.

The employees who face sexual harassment at workplaces are affected psychologically and sometimes physically which results in higher stress levels. Clearly, the workers who have high PsyCap are more elastic towards stressors, disturbing behavior, (such as sexual harassment) and obstruction (Masten and Reed, 2002).

According to a research on Chinese nurses, it was found that nurses, who possess higher levels of PsyCap covering self-efficacy, optimism, resiliency, and hope, would usually face

lower levels of stress or burnout. When nurses are confident about their work, have positive attitudes and have increased levels of patience and flexibility, there will be minimal chance of their physical, emotional and psychological exhaustion (Peng, Jiang, Zhang, Xiao, Song, Feng, et al., 2013).

Resilience appears as the most important factor to combat situations like sexual harassment. Resilience is the capability of a person to confidently and positively face harsh conditions, such that those employees with high resilience recuperate effortlessly from frustration. This flexibility can help an individual to endure emotional or psychological exhaustion caused by sexual harassment in a better way (Jackson, Firtko and Edenborough, 2007).

This empirical research study was aimed to analyze the effect of sexual harassment on employee performance and investigate the mediating effect of psychological capital (PsyCap) in the relationship between sexual harassment and employee performance. To the best of researcher's knowledge, although numerous researches on sexual harassment and employee performance have been carried out in the past but the mediating role of psychological capital between this relationship is under researched. Therefore, the research has attempted to fill this gap.

## **RATIONALE OF THE STUDY**

The findings of study would contribute towards the field of research pertaining to sexual harassment at the workplace and its effect on employee performance. It may also help practitioners working in health sector to acknowledge the existence of sexual harassment in their organizations and to take appropriate measures to prevent sexual harassment and ultimately improve the performance of nurses. Also, by analyzing mediating effect of Psychological Capital

(PsyCap), practitioners may be guided to take measures for training of their employees, to capitalize on PsyCap. The study can prove beneficial for our society in a way that it may assist the women working in health sector and facing sexual harassment in any form, on daily basis, to acknowledge the way to fight this menace and improve their individual well-being as well as performance at work.

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The research was aimed to measure the level of sexual harassment among nurses working in the public-sector hospitals in Pakistan, to determine the performance of nurses and the relationship between the sexual harassment and employee performance. Also, this research study is intended to investigate the mediating effect of Psychological capital (PsyCap) in sexual harassment and employee performance relationship.

## **RESEARCH HYPOTHESES**

**Hypothesis 1:** Sexual harassment will be negatively related with employee performance.

**Hypothesis 2:** Psychological Capital will mediate the relationship between sexual harassment and employee performance.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN**

Quantitative research methodology was considered appropriate to investigate the relationship among the variables under study using cross sectional/survey method because the study required data for only one point in time to validate the relationship of sexual harassment, employee performance and PsyCap. Population of the study consisted of nurses serving in public sector hospitals of Lahore.

## **SAMPLING**

A two-stage sampling was done for collecting the primary data of the study. In the first stage, four hospitals of Lahore were selected at random and then all the nurses working in those hospitals were approached to get maximum number of responses. 182 nurses responded back through filled questionnaires which constituted the sample of this study. Sample size of 182 is fair quantity to run statistical tests as according to Central Limit Theorem (CTL), if the sample size is adequately large (usually  $n > 30$ ), the distribution of sample means will be normally distributed (Anderson, 2010). Data were gathered from four different hospitals located in Lahore including Mayo hospital, Jinnah Hospital, Services Hospital and Lahore General Hospital.

## **MEASURES**

A revised 12 item Psychological Capital Questionnaire (PCQ: Luthans et al., 2007) was used to measure psychological capital. The internal reliability of Psychological Capital measure is .86. For measuring the Sexual Harassment, a 17 item scale of Fitzgerald (1995) was used and the responses were taken on a 5 point likert scale. Reliability is 0.94. A measurement tool by William and Anderson (1991), measuring supervisor rated job performance was used to measure the employee performance. Reliability for this scale was .72.

## **DATA COLLECTION TOOL**

The data were collected through a self-administered questionnaire which was a composite of three scales measuring sexual harassment, employee performance and psychological capital. Participants were approached individually after taking consent from their department heads. They completed their questionnaires during their working hours in respective hospitals.



Participants were made sure about their anonymity and were thanked after they completed questionnaires.

## RESULTS

The descriptive statistics of the independent variable (sexual harassment) shows almost the same number of respondents in each category (Table 1) i-e, low (30.8%), moderate (34.1%), and high (35.2%). It can be observed that not a single respondent has reported of being never harassed sexually and almost 69% respondents reported to have harassed from moderate to high level which validates the earlier reports about the high level of sexual harassment of nurses.

Table 1

*Level of Sexual Harassment*

Level of Sexual Harassment	Frequency	Percent
High	64	35.2
Low	56	30.8
Moderate	62	34.1
Total	182	100.0

The frequencies of the dependent variable, employee performance (Table 2) shows a large number of respondents in moderate category, (57.1%). However, 20 out of 182 respondents are good performers and 58 of them are rated as poor performers. A tendency towards average rating is evident in the results, which is a common feature of employee evaluation reports.

Table 2

*Level of Employee Performance*

Level of Employee Performance	Frequency	Percent
Good	20	11.0
Moderate	104	57.1
Poor	58	31.9
Total	182	100.0

If we look at the level of sexual harassment in different designations of nurses, it appears that respondents with designation of staff nurse which is one level lower than head nurse are experiencing more sexual harassment, i-e., 140 out of 182. On the other hand, head nurse account for only 23% of total respondents facing sexual harassment (Table 3). This shows that nurses at lower designation, i-e, staff nurse, are experiencing sexual harassment more than the head nurse. A Chi-Square test of Independence was performed to examine the relationship between designation of respondents and the level of sexual harassment they are experiencing (Table 4). The relationship between these variables is significant,  $X^2(2, 182) = 8.70, p < 0.05$ . The result suggests that there is an association between designation and level of sexual harassment among respondents. The variation in the level of sexual harassment among staff nurse and head nurse apparently indicates the effect of power dynamics on the phenomena of sexual harassment. Apparently, the harassment is directed more towards the junior levels of the hierarchy.

Table 3

*Crosstabulation: Sexual Harassment \* Designation*

		Designation		Total	
		Staff Nurse	Head Nurse		
Sexual Harassment	High	Count	50	14	64
		% within Designation	35.7%	33.3%	35.2%
	Low	Count	36	20	56
		% within Designation	25.7%	47.6%	30.8%
Moderate	Count	54	8	62	
	% within Designation	38.6%	19.0%	34.1%	
Total	Count	140	42	182	
	% within Designation	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

Table 4

*Chi-Square Tests*

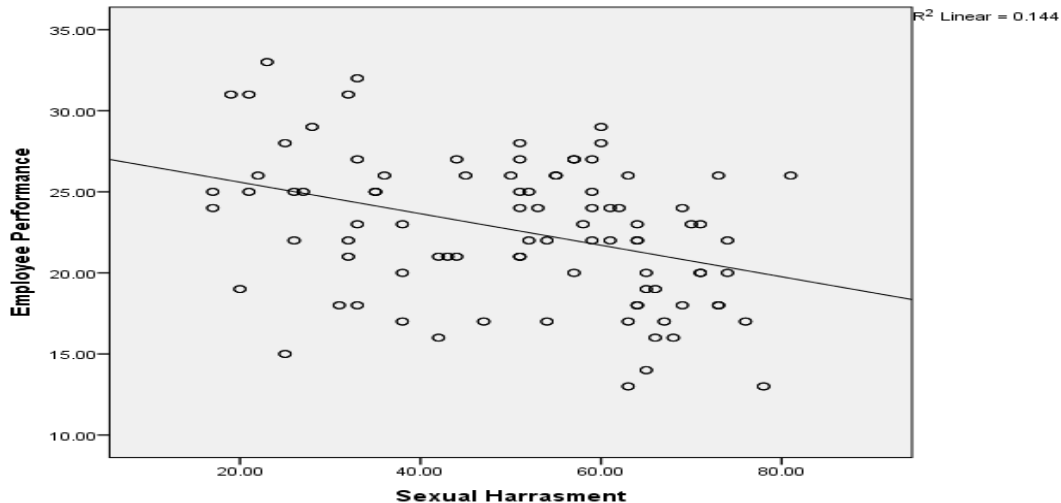
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	8.705 <sup>a</sup>	2	.013
Likelihood Ratio	8.713	2	.013
N of Valid Cases	182		

## SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE

Pearson's  $r$  was computed to assess the relationship between sexual harassment and employee performance. Results showed that there is a significant negative correlation between the two variables ( $r = -0.380$ ,  $n = 182$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ).

A scatter plot summarizes the results (Figure 1). According to which, the performance line is high at zero sexual harassment and gradually slopes downwards as the level of sexual harassment increases, which means that sexual harassment and employee performance have a negative relationship. However, the relationship strength between variables is determined through dots. In the figure, the dots are not densely positioned in one place, instead they are almost scattered away from each other which means that strength of relationship between sexual

harassment and employee performance is low to moderate but not too weak as they are not much widely scattered.



*Figure 1.* Scatter Plot: Sexual Harassment\* Employee Performance

It can be concluded from the value of Pearson's  $r$  that the sexual harassment is negatively related to employee performance which means that increase in sexual harassment decreases the employee performance. Hence, hypothesis 1 of the study has been accepted.

### **PSYCHOLOGICAL CAPITAL AS A MEDIATOR BETWEEN SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE**

The mediation model illustrated in Figure 2 consists of three variables: sexual harassment (X), psychological capital (M), and employee performance (Y).

Regression analysis was used to investigate the mediation of psychological capital between the relationship of sexual harassment and employee performance. Results indicated that sexual harassment was a significant predictor of PsyCap (path a),  $b = -.162$ ,  $t(180) = -3.49$ ,  $p = 0.0006$  (Table 5), and that PsyCap was significant predictor of employee performance (path b),  $b$

= .249,  $t(179) = 11.60$ ,  $p = 0.00$  (Table 6). The result of total effect of sexual harassment on employee performance is also significant (path c),  $b = -.097$ ,  $t(180) = -5.50$ ,  $p = 0.000$  (Table 8). This total effect includes both direct and indirect effects of sexual harassment on employee performance. The direct effect proves sexual harassment as significant predictor of employee performance (path c'),  $b = -.057$ ,  $t(179) = -4.10$ ,  $p = 0.001$  (Table 7). Results of indirect effect of sexual harassment on employee performance, i-e; through PsyCap as a mediator, showed that indirect coefficient was significant,  $b = -.04$ ,  $SE = .012$ ,  $95\% CI = -.065, -.018$  (Table 9). Psychological capital explained .06 points of decreased performance as a result of sexual harassment.

Table 5

*Model: X variable predicts M – path a*

	B	SE	T	P
Constant	58.6541	2.4759	23.6897	.0000
Sexual Harassment	-.1622	.0464	-3.4932	.0006

Table 6

*Model: M variable predicts Y – path b*

	B	SE	T	P
Constant	12.9135	1.4483	8.9163	.0000
PsyCap	.2493	.0215	11.6044	.0000

Table 7

*Model: Direct effect of X on Y – path c'*

	B	SE	t	P
Constant	12.9135	1.4483	8.9163	.0000
Sexual Harassment	-.0568	.0138	-4.1064	.0001

Table 8

*Model: Total effect of X on Y– path c*

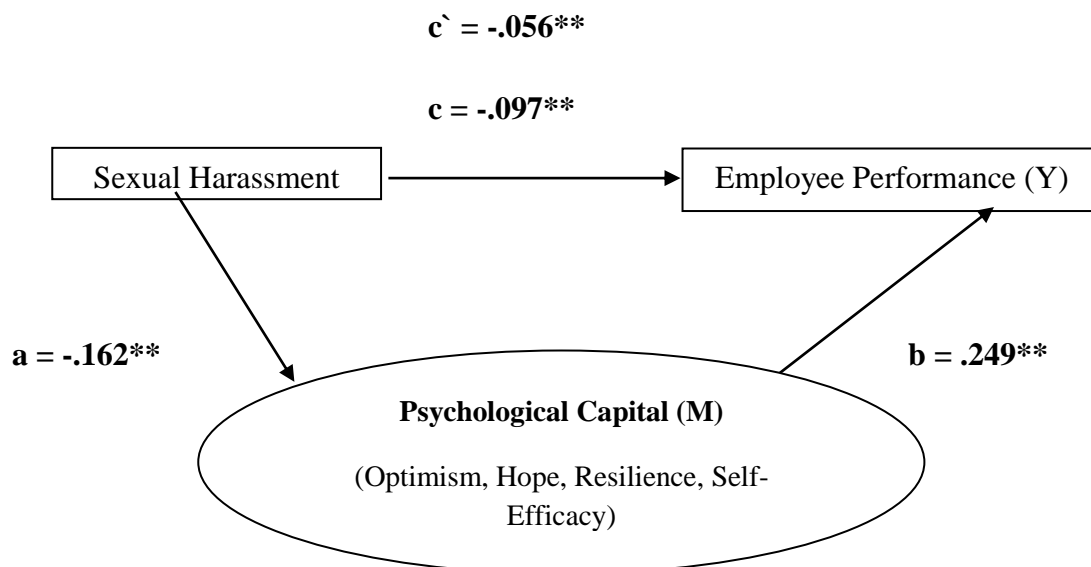
	B	SE	T	P
Constant	27.5378	.9422	29.2284	.0000
Sexual Harassment	-.0972	.0177	-5.5033	.0000

Table 9

*Model: Indirect effect of X on Y*

	Effect	SE	LLCI	ULCI
Sexual Harassment	-.0404	.0123	-.0650	-.0177

Thus, PsyCap significantly mediated the relationship between sexual harassment and employee performance. The direct pathways between sexual harassment and employee performance (path c) remained significant when PsyCap was included in the model as a mediator (Figure 2). It can be concluded that there exists a mediating effect of psychological capital (PsyCap) in relationship between sexual harassment and employee performance such that the occurrence of sexual harassment will affect psychological capital which in turn will lower employee’s performance. Hence, hypothesis 2 of the study has been accepted.



*Figure 2.* Conceptual model of the mediating role of psychological capital in relationship between sexual harassment and employee performance.

Path a = Sexual harassment predicting PsyCap

Path b = PsyCap predicting Employee Performance

Path c = Total effect of Sexual Harassment on Employee Performance

Path c' = Direct effect of Sexual Harassment on Employee Performance

## **DISCUSSION**

An association between designation and the incidence of sexual harassment was found in this study where the level of sexual harassment was higher among the nurses of lower cadre. Haruna, Adaja, Joseph, Samson and Gabriel (2016) suggested that women working in lower cadre experience more sexual harassment as a result of which their work productivity is affected. Such finding clearly points at the contributions of power relationships in the incidence of sexual harassment.

According to the primary data of this research, nurses do experience sexual harassment at the workplace; however, the extent of sexual harassment varies according to their level in the organization's hierarchy. All of the respondents have reported being sexually harassed at some point in their career, which is consistent with the result of the study of Bronner et al. (2003) who found that in Israel, nurses experience different levels of sexual harassment at their workplaces. Profession of nursing is mostly adopted by women due to its feminist attributes, which might be responsible for their being sexually harassed. According to Lunenburg (2010), abuse and misuse of authority and power causes sexual harassment. In this case, nurses usually have a subordinate position of medical staff following their guidelines for patient care and related tasks. The

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subordinate status of nurses apparently makes them vulnerable to a greater incidence of sexual harassment.

Findings of the research also revealed that sexual harassment is negatively related to employee performance, as the increase in sexual harassment results in decrease in employee performance. This result is consistent with the result of the study by Sczesny and Stahlberg's (2000) who argued that sexual harassment has an adverse effect on job satisfaction and job performance of an employee. Also, the findings are supported by Faley (1994) who suggested that sexual harassment impacts performance of an employee through increased stress at work.

According to the findings of this research, the PsyCap of an employee significantly mediates the relationship between sexual harassment and their performance. This result can be explained through the study of Khan, Begum and Shaheen (2015) who found that 50.7% victims of sexual harassment are affected psychologically, due to which their work performance and physical health are affected. According to Avey, Luthans and Jensen (2009) and Zhao and Zhang (2010), PsyCap is significantly inversely related to the symptoms of fear of career development, job stress resulting from workload, relationship with peers and colleagues and work family balance. In a study by Avey et al. (2009) on US employees comprising different nature of jobs in different industries, it was found that PsyCap works against forms of distress and sufferings which arise out of job demands or other workplace factors, thus suppressing anxiety and discomfort. According to this finding, employees who possess higher levels of PsyCap have a positive and constructive stance towards their future and have greater self-belief of confidently dealing with challenges at workplace. Also, Laschinger et al. (2013) studied that resilience,



which is a sub construct of PsyCap, proved to play a vital and protective role in easing out stress in graduate nurses who faced uncivil behaviors at workplace.

## **CONCLUSION**

The research study supported the prevalence of sexual harassment among nurses. It has been concluded that almost 70% of nurses experienced sexual harassment from moderate to high levels. In our study, there was not even a single respondent who reported being never sexually harassed. Effect of sexual harassment on employee performance was found to be negative, which means that the incidents of sexual harassment decrease employee performance. Those employees who experience sexual harassment get affected by it both psychologically and physically which ultimately hampers their job tasks and they find it hard to perform well on the job (Subhani & Azmat, 2012).

Another important aspect of our research study was to analyze the mediating effect of psychological capital (PsyCap) in relationship between sexual harassment and employee performance such that the occurrence of sexual harassment will affect psychological capital which in turn will lower employee's performance. According to our research results, psychological capital mediated the relationship between sexual harassment and employee performance.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

In view of the evidence of negative effects of sexual harassment on employee performance which is not favorable for the organizational effectiveness or personal well-being of the nurses, it is recommended that corrective measures need to be taken to eradicate such ill practices from the society. For example, along with nursing education, nurse educators should

guide and teach students how to identify and deal with workplace misbehaviors such as sexual harassment (Celik & Celik, 2007). Also, nurses should collectively stand against the behavior of sexual harassment and take action instead of being scared and suffering from it alone, which would discourage sexual harassers to some extent.

As discussed in initial chapters, Government of Pakistan is taking measures to eradicate activities like sexual harassment from organizations by passing laws and acts in this regard. However, practical measures still need to be taken for implementation of these laws. Celik and Celik, (2007) suggests that adequate procedures, proper education, check on and specific policy of “no tolerance” at organizational level are required to limit sexual harassment and to take control over consequences caused by it.

Also, according to our research results, sexual harassment does affect the PsyCap among nurses, which in turn has an effect on their performance. In order to develop employee’s PsyCap, organizations should invest in developing training programs with plans to boost PsyCap and help to integrate into other programs of performance management and human resource development (Peterson, Avolio, Luthans, Walumbwa and Zhang, 2011). Moreover, Walumbwa et al. (2010) suggested that role modeling of PsyCap by leaders is significant in developing higher level psychological capital in followers. Therefore, it is imperative for head of nurses to role model psychological capital at workplace which will ultimately motivate their subordinates to improve their level of psychological capital.

## LIMITATIONS

The research has been conducted on public sector hospitals of Lahore, Pakistan which is mainly constituted of nurses serving on positions at BPS-16 and BPS-17, hence the generalizability of findings may suffer from the following limitations:

- a) Research data is restricted to only one city of Pakistan. It should be extended to public sector hospitals of different cities in order to analyze overall trend of sexual harassment in Pakistan.
- b) The experiences of the nurses serving in private sector hospitals may be different from the public-sector employees studied in this research.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

It is recommended for future researchers to consider qualitative research methods in order to attain detailed and comprehensive analysis of what types of sexual harassment are faced by the victims. As it has been observed in this research that sexual harassment significantly affects employee performance, next step should be taken to identify the different types of sexual harassment faced by nurses and out of these what are the most common types. This information will aid in introducing different coping strategies against sexual harassment.

Furthermore, future researchers may also focus on other sectors or groups of people which have not been given much attention in this regard like, students in colleges, universities and madrassas, maids or servants working at home.

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