



Unravelling Recent Patterns of Workplace Abuse Among Working Women: A Thorough Exploration

Ms. Simran Seth, Assistant Professor, Vasant Kanya Mahavidyalaya, BHU, Varanasi, India

Abstract

The societal narrative has long cast women as inherently weaker and inferior to their male counterparts, relegating them to the confines of household chores, caregiving, and nurturing roles. This traditional perspective has fostered a belief that women's abuse predominantly transpires within their domestic spheres, perpetuated by their dependency on male family members. However, it's imperative to acknowledge that abuse doesn't confine itself to the home; workplaces too become arenas for such misconduct. Workplace abuse directed at women takes on multifaceted forms. These abuses undermine not only the well-being and dignity of the victims but also erode the very fabric of organizational productivity. A harmonious and equitable workplace environment holds paramount significance for personal development and collective organizational effectiveness. Strikingly, the ramifications of a disgruntled female workforce can extend beyond the office walls, straining family relationships and community cohesion. Consequently, delving into the contemporary manifestations of workplace abuse becomes a necessity. By understanding the emerging patterns, we can shed light on the subtle yet pervasive maltreatment that often goes unnoticed

Keywords- Abuse, Bullying, Harassment, Women, Working Women

Introduction

Employment, whether in formal job settings or informal roles, holds immense significance for individual survival and meeting familial needs (Gender Equality at the Heart of Decent Work, n.d.). In the contemporary era characterized by globalization (Pan & Yang, n.d.) and digitalization, the collaboration of both men and women is imperative to drive national progress. An adage emphasizes that a vehicle with one wheel cannot journey far; likewise, the advancement of a nation necessitates the collective efforts of both genders. However, a notable concern persists – the participation of women in the workforce remains lower than that of men. Data extracted from the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) for the period of July 2021 to June 2022 reveals that 29.4% of women aged 15 to 59 were engaged in India's workforce during 2021-22. This contrasts with the preceding year's figure of 29.8%. On the other hand, there was an enhancement in men's Labor Force Participation Rate (LFPR), which increased from 80.1% in 2020-21 to 80.7% in 2021-22 (Dhamija & Chawla, 2023). This disparity can be attributed to multifaceted factors. In the context of India, the discourse surrounding declining trends primarily centers on four main factors: 1) the increasing enrollment of young women in education; 2) the scarcity of job prospects; 3) the influence of household income on participation; and 4) the way measurement is conducted (Verick, 2014). Another factor that discourages women from active and enduring participation in the workplace is the prevalence of workplace abuse, which is often orchestrated by colleagues, supervisors, and other individuals.

Workplace abuse represents a significant and intricate concern. It inflicts both psychological and physical harm on individuals (Gender-Based Violence in the World of Work, n.d.). However, its impact extends beyond the individual, as an unsupportive and unsatisfactory work culture can curtail motivation, resulting in a decline in organizational productivity. Consequently, this issue detrimentally affects both the individual and the organization. The workplace serves as a fertile ground for various forms of abuse. In bureaucratic and other hierarchical setups that function based

on established rules and managerial power dynamics, a culture of bullying can persist unless the organization maintains a high level of transparency, preventing the nurturing of such behavior (Willock & Street, 2014). There are many terms that may be used as an alternative for abuse like bullying (Gillen et al., n.d.) and workplace violence (Gibbs et al., 2019). In this paper, the researcher has employed these terms interchangeably. Workplace bullying entails the recurring provision of unfavorable treatment to an individual by one or more persons in the professional environment. This treatment, deemed unreasonable and unsuitable within workplace norms, encompasses actions that threaten, insult, diminish, or shame a worker, potentially in the presence of colleagues, clients, or patrons (Workplace Bullying, n.d.).

“The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) defines Workplace violence as any physical assault, threatening behavior, or verbal abuse occurring in the work setting. The World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Council of Nurses (ICN) defines workplace violence as incidents where staff are abused, threatened, or assaulted in circumstances related to their work” (Definitions of Workplace Violence, 2020).

Workplace violence may take the form of physical violence, sexual violence, emotional abuse, and economic violence (Gibbs et al., 2019). Both genders can experience workplace abuse, but the frequency of such mistreatment is greater among women than men (Tziner et al., 2023; Zewude & Habtegiorgis, 2021). Globally, 35 percent of women experience direct violence within the workplace. Among these instances, approximately 40 to 50 percent involve unwelcome sexual advances, physical contact, or other manifestations of sexual harassment (Gender-Based Violence in the World of Work, n.d.). A study conducted by the Workplace Bullying Institute (2018), which discovered that 60% of American workers have encountered workplace bullying; a research study by the European Union Agency for Safety and Health at Work (2019), revealing that 55% of European workers have experienced workplace harassment; and an examination by the Australian Human Rights Commission (2020), finding that 40% of Australian workers have faced workplace bullying (Tziner et al., 2023). In India, that percentage is reported to be as high as 46% or even 55% (Praslova et al., 2022). Hence, to comprehend the prevalence of workplace abuses, it is imperative to examine the contemporary patterns of such abuses. This comprehensive exploration of recent workplace abuse trends among working women will furnish us with a lucid understanding.

Review of Literature

S.NO	Paper Title	Authors	Objectives	Findings
1.	Workplace Violence in Bangladesh's Garment Industry	(Gibbs et al., 2019)	To investigate the factors linked with the encounter or observation of workplace violence by female employees in eight garment factories in Bangladesh.	Hierarchical attitudes toward employees play a crucial role in shaping instances of workplace violence.
2.	Sexual harassment and Generalized Workplace Abuse among University Employees: Prevalence and Mental Health Correlates	(Richman et al., 1998a)	This research postulated that interpersonal stressors within the workplace, encompassing sexual harassment and widespread workplace mistreatment, hold substantial prevalence and hold significant correlations with mental health outcomes.	The data reveals a significant prevalence of harassment and mistreatment. Among faculty members, females encountered higher rates, whereas among clerical and service workers, males faced elevated rates. Notably, generalized abuse surpassed specific instances of harassment across all groups. Both forms harassment and abuse demonstrated meaningful associations with various mental health outcomes for both men and women.
3.	Verbal Abuse in the Workplace: The Unfolding Phenomenon	(Cabillo & Daño, 2020a)	The researcher gained a comprehensive insight into the real-life encounters of nurses who faced verbal abuse within their workplace.	The study's findings unveiled themes arising from participants' real-life encounters. Within the destructive experiences, respondents reported immediate harm to their reputation and profession, as negative words eroded their self-esteem and disillusioned them. In devalued experiences, key informants sensed humiliation and degradation, feeling themselves as insignificant. The

				nurses subjected to verbal abuse in melancholic experiences expressed sadness and bewilderment, pondering their actions that triggered the attacks.
4.	Sista Abuse: The Prevalence of Black-on Black Female Bullying in the Workplace?	(Willock & Street, 2014)	The author employed a biopsychological framework to investigate the foundational aspects of workplace bullying behavior.	Existing literature indicates that workplace bullying is often attributed to insufficient organizational transparency, enabling such incidents to persist without hindrance.
5.	Workplace Cyber Abuse: Challenges and Implications for Management	(D'Souza et al., 2020)	The aim is to recognize cyber abuse patterns, understand responses to cyber abuse, and pinpoint obstacles to reporting and effective organizational intervention.	Almost half of the participants encountered multiple forms of cyber abuse. Victimization patterns exhibited gender disparities: males faced a higher proportion of cyberbullying, whereas females encountered cyber discrimination, sexual harassment, and stalking more frequently. A significant number of respondents endured repeated cyber abuse from the same source over days and months, with around two-thirds facing abuse on public platforms. Many did not report abuse within their organization due to organizational inaction, unclear reporting channels, a weak reporting culture, fear of further victimization, and associated stigma.

Research Objectives

- 1) To identify the recent patterns of workplace abuse among working women.

Research Methodology

The present research relies on secondary data from sources such as books, academic journals, websites, and papers to gather information about the workplace abuse among working women.

Recent Patterns of Workplace Abuse Among Working Women

1) Sexual Harassment

The workplace is a dynamic environment where both men and women must collaborate harmoniously to ensure the organization's effectiveness and productivity. However, instances of sexual harassment not only adversely affect the victim's mental and physical health but also impede the growth and progress of the organization. Sexual harassment encompasses any one or a combination of the subsequent undesirable actions or behaviors whether explicit or implied (Towards a New Dawn Government of India Ministry of Women and Child Development, 2015). It encompasses unwanted sexual advances, requests for sexual favors and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature. It includes unsolicited sexual propositions, appeals for sexual favors, and additional verbal or physical actions of a sexual character. Women experience a higher frequency of sexual harassment than men (Richman et al., 1998b; Tziner et al., 2023; Zewude & Habtegiorgis, 2021). Towards a New Dawn Government of India Ministry of Women and Child Development (2015) outlines 17 components of workplace sexual harassment, encompassing actions such as: "making sexually suggestive comments or insinuations; delivering serious or recurrent offensive comments, including body-related teasing; sharing offensive jokes or remarks; presenting inappropriate questions, recommendations, or comments about an individual's intimate life; displaying offensive images, posters, multimedia messages, text messages, WhatsApp, or emails with sexist or other offensive content; using intimidation, threats, or coercion for sexual favors; extending unwelcome social invitations with sexual undertones commonly known as flirting; initiating unwarranted physical contact, like touching or pinching, and unwarranted caressing, kissing, or fondling,

against the individual's will; invading personal space; engaging in stalking; misusing authority or power to coerce sexual favors under threat of job loss or performance damage; falsely accusing and undermining an individual privately for sexual favors; manipulating an individual's reputation by spreading rumors about their private life; employing threats, intimidation, or retribution against an employee who speaks up about unwelcome behaviors with sexual undertones; and making unwelcome sexual advances, which may or may not be accompanied by explicit or implicit promises or threats". This form of abuse can manifest in two distinct ways. The first is referred to as "quid pro quo," where an employee is pressured into performing a sexual act that could impact their job if they decline. The second form arises from hostile work environments, where the victim is subjected to intimidating and humiliating treatment (A Silent "Colleague": Violence against Women in the Workplace, 2017).

2) Verbal Abuse

Verbal abuse poses a substantial challenge in a workplace environment, causing adverse effects on women's physical, psychological, and social well-being. According to Philippine Statistics Authority (2017) "verbal abuse as harsh and insulting language directed at a person resulting to loss of self-esteem and public dignity"(Cabillo & Daño, 2020b). The Health and Safety Executive define verbal abuse as "any remark made to or about a client which may reasonably be perceived to be demeaning, disrespectful, humiliating, intimidating, racist, sexist, homophobic, ageist or blasphemous" (Howells,2000). According to Cabillo and Dano, verbal abuse manifests through actions such as yelling, screaming, shouting, intimidating, and blaming. Moreover, it involves assigning blame, utilizing sarcastic comments with the deliberate purpose of belittling and demeaning, delivering severe and poignant remarks to undermine an individual's self-esteem, publicly insulting, or belittling someone, and employing statements intended to instill fear, exert control, and manipulate the victim (Gordon, 2022).

3) Emotional and Psychological Abuse

Emotional workplace abuse encompasses either interpersonal or depersonalized mistreatment, which can be internal or external to the work environment (Tziner et al., 2023). Not only do physical and verbal abuse cause harm to women, but they can also lead to psychological and emotional abuse, which in turn can negatively affect women. This can result in feelings of anger, frustration, stress, anxiety, and depression, ultimately impacting both their family and work performance in an adverse manner. Moreover, the psychological abuse experienced by women in the workplace can erode their self-esteem, self-confidence, and overall sense of well-being. Emotional and psychological abuse present challenging forms of mistreatment to identify, as they permeate daily interactions. In contrast to physical abuse, there are typically no distinct isolated instances or evident physical signs to reference. This subtle nature of abuse can make it difficult to pinpoint, as it operates through persistent behaviors, undermining an individual's emotional well-being and mental health. This hostile environment can lead to a cycle of distress, hindering their professional growth and personal contentment. Psychological abuse encompasses behaviors such as bullying and mobbing, which involves group-based psychological harassment (Violence on the Job - a Global Problem, 1998). Two more major forms of emotional and psychological abuse i.e., isolation and gaslighting (Emotional and Psychological Abuse, 2021). Isolating women from significant tasks and consistently favoring men for these roles creates a challenging environment where women's advancement is hindered despite their equal hard work alongside men. This disparity not only undermines their prospects for promotion but also gives rise to feelings of tension, depression, and anxiety among women. These emotional struggles, in turn, cast a shadow over their family and work performance, perpetuating a cycle of stress that extends beyond the workplace. This unequal treatment can also foster a sense of injustice and low morale among female employees, impacting their overall job satisfaction and motivation to excel. The concept of "gaslighting" signifies a recurring behavior where the abuser deliberately contradicts known facts or events, leading you to doubt your perception of reality. The abuser frequently distorts your feelings, words, and encounters to manipulate you, fostering uncertainty in your judgment, memory, and even your sanity (Emotional and Psychological Abuse, 2021).

4) Physical Abuse

Physical abuse is one of the major problems seen in workplace. Physical violence is defined as “the use of physical force against another person or group that results in physical, sexual, or psychological harm. Physical violence includes beating, kicking, slapping, stabbing, shooting, pushing, biting, and pinching, among others” (Alhassan et al., 2023). Workplace violence has a direct correlation with diminishing job satisfaction, burnout, feelings of humiliation and guilt, emotional strain, the inclination to leave one's job, and an elevated rate of staff turnover (Kafle et al., 2022). Particularly, when we focus on instances of physical violence, it becomes evident that they exert a profound influence on diminishing job satisfaction and intensifying the desire to seek alternative employment. Many women refrain from discussing, sharing, or reporting such instances of violence due to the fear of reputation damage or job loss. Addressing physical violence takes on added significance in the context of women, given its potential to not only immediately impact their well-being but also to perpetuate a series of negative consequences within the work environment and beyond.

5) Cyber Abuse

Cyber abuse emerging among working women constitutes a novel manifestation of workplace mistreatment, inflicting psychological and emotional damage. This contemporary form of abuse is distinct, propelled by digital platforms, and carries the potential to profoundly affect women's well-being. The insidious nature of cyber abuse introduces a distinct layer of harm, as it can permeate personal and professional spheres simultaneously. As per the National Crime Prevention Council (NCP) of the United States, cyber-bullying is defined as the deliberate utilization of digital platforms, such as the Internet, cell phones, or other electronic devices, to transmit text or messages with the intention of causing harm or humiliation to another individual (Karthikeyan, 2020). Workplace cyberbullying targeting women can be characterized as a situation where a female employee is systematically and intentionally subjected to negative behaviors such as bullying or harassment. This conduct typically occurs through verbal or digital abuse using tools or online platforms associated with their professional duties (e.g., phones, email, websites, and social media). As a result of this situation, working women encounter difficulties in effectively countering these actions, leading to feelings of embarrassment and significant psychological distress (Karthikeyan, 2020). The different types of cyber abuse found among working women are- Cyber stalking, doxing, trolling, cyber bullying, hate speech, public shaming, and intimidation/ threats.

In the context of women, examples of cyberbullying at workplace are manifold. These include the exchange of offensive emails or email threats that may appear innocuous on the surface but carry underlying tones of bullying. For instance, a manager could employ emails to inundate a female employee with an excessive workload, a disparity not extended to her male counterparts. Another form involves disseminating defamatory gossip on blogs and social media platforms, often unbeknownst to the targeted individual. Additionally, cyberbullying can manifest through threats or offensive comments delivered via SMS text messages on mobile phones. The realm of email-based harassment and the online exposure of private and personal details about women further compounds this issue. It's imperative to recognize that cyberbullying has diverse avenues, thereby necessitating comprehensive strategies to safeguard women's emotional well-being and professional dignity. Addressing cyberbullying can pose challenges for employers, primarily because it often occurs beyond traditional work hours or outside the physical workplace compared to more conventional forms of bullying (Tackling Bullying at Work A UNISON Guide for Safety Reps, n.d.). This situation causes more mental health issues for women, leading to a decrease in their productivity.

6) Economic Abuse

Economic abuse stands as a significant manifestation of violence against women. Despite performing work on par with their male counterparts, women often receive unequal compensation. This disparity is further exacerbated by extended work hours without commensurate opportunities for promotion, as compared to their male colleagues. Such circumstances demoralize women and contribute to a decline in their societal standing. Economic violence encompasses various forms, such as limited access to funds and credit, exerting control over healthcare, employment, education, and agricultural resources. In workplace settings, excessive workload coupled with inadequate pay, and exploitation through unpaid labor beyond their contractual obligations. Some also face instances of fraud, theft, and unlawful actions such as forced closure of worksites by certain

individuals. This multifaceted issue points to a range of challenges that women encounter, underscoring the necessity for equitable treatment and protection in both economic and professional spheres (Fawole, 2008).

7) Incivility

“Incivility is low-intensity, interpersonal, deviant behavior. Offenders scorn their targets, doubt their judgment, and address them unprofessionally with rudeness and disrespect” (Tziner et al., 2023). This leads to heightened psychological distress among working women. This concept underscores the significance of promoting a respectful and supportive work environment, as incivility's impact extends beyond its immediate occurrence, affecting both the individual's well-being and overall workplace dynamics. Managerial adoption of incivility adversely impacts subordinates' morale, diverting their focus from work. Such behavior can diminish job satisfaction and compel employees to consider job changes. Promoting a respectful environment is pivotal for fostering positive workplace dynamics and enhancing overall performance. A surprising revelation emerges as women indicated encountering higher levels of incivility from their fellow female colleagues than from their male counterparts (Ambrose, 2018).

Conclusion

Women have grappled with a multitude of challenges in their pursuit of self-reliance and parity with their male counterparts. Due to various reforms, feminist advocacy, and governmental endeavors, women's participation has gained ground, though not yet achieving complete parity with men. However, upon entering the workforce, women confront a disheartening reality: they face different forms of abuse. While abuse is not confined to any gender, women bear a disproportionately heavy burden, raising a grave concern. The spectrum of abuses faced by women in the professional realm encompasses sexual harassment, verbal abuse, emotional and psychological abuse, cyber abuse, economic abuse, and manifestations of incivility. These abuses exert a toll, not only on women's mental resilience, social equilibrium, and economic autonomy, but also reverberate across job satisfaction and overall family well-being. Importantly, the ramifications extend to organizational productivity. So, an urgent need arises: the formulation of robust strategies aimed at eradicating such abuses. This would open pathways for women to lead lives imbued with greater contentment and fulfillment.

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