



RESEARCH PAPER

Sexual Harassment and Quality of Life among Agriculture Farmworker in Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this study is to delve into the experiences of sexual harassment and its link to the quality of life among agricultural farmworkers in Pakistan. A significant research void is present in psychological studies examining the impact of sexual harassment on the well-being of farmworkers, especially across various regions, lifestyles, traditions, and cultures. Qualitative research method with thematic analysis was carried out through interviews conducted with 10 female and 10 male farmworkers in rural Punjab. Results explain the spectrum of sexual harassment experienced by agricultural workers, impacting their well-being and the efficacy of legal safeguards due to existing law and enforcement limitations. Women workers face heightened difficulties and gender-related bias, while male colleagues often hide harassment incidents due to social standing and concerns. Immediate measures from policymakers, institutions, and society are essential to cultivate a harassment-free setting, guarantee labor rights, and improve the overall well-being of these individuals.

KEYWORDS Sexual Harassment (SH), Quality of Life (QOL), Male and Female Agricultural Farmworkers

Introduction

Sexual Harassment are indeed widespread problems that have far-reaching consequences. This behavior can cause immense pain and suffering for the individuals who experience them, often leading to psychological, emotional, and physical harm (Kearl, 2015).

When the word sexual harassment comes to mind for many individuals, the common assumption is that the target is only a woman, and the harasser is always a male holding a power position. While the scenario indeed characterizes a significant portion of sexual harassment instances, it's essential to organize that is not the sole manifestation of such misconduct. Men can also fall victim to sexual harassment, experiencing it from both women and other men. Smith et. al., (2018) found that approximately 43% of the male experiencing sexual harassment at some point in their lives. The statistical indicates that the issue of sexual harassment is not exclusive to any one gender and that men can also be victims of such behavior.

Currently, the issue of sexual harassment within Pakistan's agricultural sector remains largely unexplored, resulting in a scarcity of literature addressing sexual harassment faced by agricultural workers. Despite working outdoors, these farmworkers are often unseen due to their isolation in remote areas. Farming's serene image contrasts with its high fatality rate in the economy (McCurdy & Carroll, 2000). Language and cultural barriers contribute to farmworkers' limited political influence, and interactions with law enforcement and immigration authorities can be daunting. Despite these challenges, they play a vital role in producing much of the world's food. Sexual violence is a significant concern for farmworkers, with women being particularly vulnerable.

The essence of quality of life was beautifully articulated by Szalai (1980). It was then that he saw that quality of life. While you're doing well, your quality of life (QOL) is good

(i.e., your wants and needs are satisfied). To the contrary, if things aren't going well for you, your quality of life will suffer (i.e., your wants and needs are not satisfied). QOL is commonly interchanged with "well-being" (Rice, 1984). Farmworkers play a vital role in sustaining Pakistan's agricultural sector, contributing significantly to food production and the economy. However, their well-being and quality of life have often been overlooked or inadequately understood (Rashidi, 2004 & Zafar, 2005).

Literature Review

Shaukat (2016) highlighted how working conditions can marginalize farm laborers, leaving them vulnerable to various forms of exploitation in open workspaces, including unpaid labor, harassment, and threats of bondage. Chaudhary (2021) echoed these concerns, noting deep-rooted bondage and exploitation in Pakistan's agricultural sector, particularly in interior Sindh and southern Punjab. This not only impacts farm workers but also their families. Bondage involves labor trade, discipline, and private confinement by landlords. Disturbingly, reports also indicate instances of sexual assault against female farm workers by police and landlords.

Most of the work in agriculture is performed in remote open fields, where farm labourers are mostly separated from others. The arrangement of work is primarily short-term even with an informal documentation or managed by labour contractors. Large number of fixed and inspection jobs are held by men who tend to exert power and coercive actions over those who have low status or rank (FAO, 2010).

In studies of adult sexual harassment, gender plays a crucial role as an explanatory variable. Gender inequality is deeply ingrained in South Asian societies, particularly affecting women who are often marginalized and given lesser importance in decision-making. This inequality stands as a prominent contributor to violence against women (UNFPA- AFPPD, 2003; Kominers, 2015)

Social and cultural norms also tend to enhance the incidence of assault and harassment via shame and secrecy, stigmatization, and an improper sense of entitlement. Last but not the least, conditions of widespread poverty and vulnerability in farm workers tend to disable those who are experiencing SH and assault directly and prevents witnesses from stepping forward (Henry & Adams, 2018).

Steiner (2019) found that Oxfam's interviews with farmworkers in Brazil, India, and the United States exposed poor pay, harsh conditions, and gender discrimination, particularly in farms producing tea, fruit, and vegetables for global grocery chains. Oxfam's study of 50 tea estates in Assam, India, revealed serious health issues due to lack of sanitation and clean water. Half of the laborers questioned were receiving government-issued ration cards due to low wages.

Zimmer (2021) discovered that in the agricultural sector, around 50% of female workers encountered harassment, and a significant number acknowledged gender inequality. Just half of the harassment incidents are reported, with only a portion of those leading to any form of reprimand for the offenders. This approach fosters survivor fears of retaliation, perpetuating the perception that their work environment's seriousness about their situation is lacking.

Workplace sexual harassment (SH) is widespread. A Chinese study assessed SH prevalence among psychiatric nurses and its connection to their quality of life (QOL). Among 2124 nurses, 1449 were analyzed from 10 psychiatric hospitals across China. SH had infrequent associations with psychological, physical, social, and environmental QOL domains. Logistic regression indicated less experienced nurses were more susceptible to SH (Zeng et al., 2020).

Theoretical Models of Present Study

Within the organizational model framework, power emerges as a fundamental element in understanding sexual harassment (Cleveland & Kurst, 1993). Consequently, sexual harassment ensues because of the advantages stemming from power dynamics and authoritative relationships in hierarchical establishments (Gruber, 1992).

The Sex Role Spillover model, as outlined by Nieva and Gutek (1981), explains how gender roles can improperly extend into the workplace, introducing attitudes and expectations that are usually unrelated to the professional environment. When gender-induced shifts occur in the organizational hierarchy, conventional notions of acceptable behaviors and roles for men and women can be disrupted.

Learned helplessness (Overmier & Seligman, 1967; Seligman, 1974) involves perceiving uncontrollable negative outcomes despite efforts. In the case of farmworkers facing sexual harassment, their reluctance to report stems from the belief that complaints yield no results or harm. Facing repeated harassment, they feel powerless to intervene, leading to a cycle of accepting harassment as inevitable in their work environment.

Quality of life analyses commonly employ the bottom-up theory (Diener 1984). This theory posits that life satisfaction is composed of various components; an idea introduced by Diener (1984). Applying this theory to assess farmworkers' well-being provides a comprehensive view of their experiences. Recognizing the multiple dimensions shaping their life satisfaction enables policymakers and organizations to enhance their overall quality of life and promote fairer work settings.

Material and Method

Research Design

This qualitative approach allows participants to openly share their experiences, embracing subjectivity and constructing meaning within a specific socio-cultural context. The approach acknowledges the reality through intersubjectivity (Lazard & McAvoy, 2020).

Sample

Participants aged seventeen to sixty, actively engaged in rice paddies work in Gujranwala district for 3 to 20 years, were purposively sampled, with 10 females and 10 males from diverse regions of Punjab, Pakistan.

Procedure

The university overseeing this research granted ethical approval for the study. All participants joined voluntarily. Consent forms and Demographic Information sheets were provided to participants. They were informed of their right to take breaks and decline questions during the interview. In instances of heightened emotions, participants were given space and time to recover by the examiner before deciding whether to proceed. The interview setting prioritized participants' comfort and safety, aligning with their preferences. Conducted in Urdu/Punjabi, semi-structured interviews employed translated study documents to ensure language precision. Interviews, spanning 40 to 60 minutes, were audio and video recorded for transcription and translation. The process diligently upheld confidentiality and followed ethical principles.

Data Analysis

Data was transcribed verbatim. Thematic Analysis, based on Braun and Clark's (2006) approach, was employed. Steps included translating interviews, identifying sub-themes, elevating them to initial themes, and grouping into major themes. Latent and semantic coding was applied to capture explicit meanings, phrases, keywords, and underlying implications (Braun & Clark, 2006).

Results and Discussion

The result Table of male and female farmworker's semi-structured in-depth interviews are below. The table include three major themes after initial theme to sub theme, with frequency of initial theme.

Table 1
Male Participants' Characteristics (N=10)

Major Theme	Subtheme	Initial Theme	Frequency		
Sexual Harassment	Non-Verbal Harassment	Staring	5		
		Looking with bad intentions	6		
		Throwing kisses	5		
	Verbal Harassment	Defame	6		
		Remarks	6		
		Verbally abuses	6		
		Physical Harassment	Torture	7	
	quid pro quo		Forceful Rape	9	
			Physically torture	9	
			Hugging	8	
			Physical abuse	7	
			Repetitively asked for sex	7	
			Lure the prey with luxurious items	10	
Get money after sexual work or sexually assaulted			10		
Lured by either eatables or by car ride			10		
Threat of losing work			10		
Landlord with power			10		
Reason of SH	Power	Put the blame on the victim	9		
Quality of life	Poverty	Hand to mouth	10		
		No washroom	7		
		No saving	10		
		Generation after generation bound to work due to loans	7		
		Nothing to eat at home	10		
		Mental & emotional health		Fear	9
				Tensed	9
Embarrassed	8				
Shame	10				
Cry	8				
Learned Helplessness		Feeling of weakness	10		
		Fear of workless	10		
		No other choice	10		

		Fear of the loss of status in society	10
		Accept destiny	10
		Passive approach toward life	10
		Fear of hunger	10
		Can't speak against authorities	10
Application of Law	Knowledge of Law	Lack of knowledge about labor law	10
		Lack of knowledge about sexual harassment	10
	Law and enforcement	Law is not for justice	10
		Police aides with rich party	7
		Police insults victims	7

Table 2
Female Participants' Characteristics (N=10)

Major theme	Subtheme	Initial Theme	Frequency	
Sexual Harassment	Verbal Harassment	Dirty Names and jokes	8	
		Sexual comments	10	
		jokes on mothers feeding children in fields	4	
		Rough, vulgar language and words	10	
		Scold us		
		Yell at us	7	
		Unwanted words	10	
		Get insulted for speaking out of line	3	
		Non-Verbal Harassment	Staring	10
			Men enjoy our working position	9
	Standing in close	6		
	Uncomfortable touching			
	Watching uncovered or wet body parts	10		
	Physical Harassment	Suddenly Touching	8	
		Rapped	4	
		Uncomfortable touching	10	
		Forcible Sexual advances	8	
	Quid Pro Qui	Ask for sexual favours in return of f money	7	
		Companions giving Sexual favours	2	
Quality of Life	Poverty	Nothing to eat	10	
		Barely afford meals and house expenses	10	
		Lack of mineral water supply	10	

	Poor living condition	10
	No refrigerator	7
	Unable to feed family and children	10
Lack of facilities	No fan, no light	8
	Unable to register the name of kids	6
	Lack of medical treatment during work	10
	Work with newborn kids	7
	Bear all type of weather	10
	No transportation facility	10
Learned Helplessness	Feeling of powerless	10
	Fear of loss of job	10
	Must work no other choice	10
	Can't help others.	7
	Passive approach toward life	10
	Fear of hunger	10
	Bear everything	10
Application of SH Law	No application of laws of sexual harassment	10
	Injustice/ Lack of Justice	10
	No knowledge of SH laws	6
	Stay silent in face of injustice.	10
	Can't go for legal help	10

Discussion

The current research delves into instances of sexual harassment within Pakistan's agricultural sector. Semi-structured interviews were employed, reaching thematic saturation, to achieve the aforementioned aim among both male and female farmworkers. The study sheds light on the origins and repercussions of sexual harassment, as well as delving into work-related outcomes and the overall quality of life experienced by agricultural laborers.

The study's main thrust centered on sexual harassment, subsequently divided into distinct subcategories including the underlying triggers, diverse manifestations, and the aftermath of such instances.

Male Participant no. 2 also confirmed that victims of SH victims are poor people. He reported that *"Those who are poor...They are sexually assaulted."*

Farm workers commonly report experiencing various forms of sexual harassment in the workplace, including verbal, nonverbal, physical, and quid pro quo. The results align with prior research conducted by Doyle (2021), who identified these types of sexual harassment as the most prevalent in workplace settings. Male farmworkers have reported instances of same-sex sexual harassment, while female workers have identified hostile working environment sexual harassment and quid pro quo as significant forms of sexual harassment in the workplace.

The findings are in congruous with previous findings. Knapp and Kustis (2000) reported that the overwhelming majority of same-sex sexual harassment involves men harassing other men. A recent, nationally representative survey found that 43% of men

reported experiencing sexual harassment (Chatterjee 2018), and the percentage of charges filed by men increased 15.3% from 1997 to 2011 (Quick & McFayden, 2017). Fully 21% of men and 3% of women employed by the federal government have reported experiencing sexual harassment from same-gender harassers (U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board 1981, 1995), although these figures greatly underestimate incident rates because as many as 94% of victims do not report being harassed, in part because the majority of those who do experience retaliation upon reporting their harassment.

Female participant stated that *"I've pulled my sweatpants up to my knees and knotted my shirt to keep it raised. Despite these changes, our clothes still become damp when we bend down. The men behind us appear to be amused by the situation, sometimes even repositioning themselves to sit in our line of sight."*

They engage in physical abuse and coercion, as described by another participant: *"No matter the situation, they subject us to physical abuse and force. They resort to hitting us, and their threats are relentless"* (Participant 5).

Regarding sexual harassment, victims most frequently encounter "unwanted physical contact, touching," although the prevalence of such incidents differs. Physical forms of sexual harassment comprise 60% to 90% of reported cases (Cela, 2015).

Male participant no 3 who was victim of sexual harassment reported *"Sometimes I want to cry when people sexually harasses then I want to cry like why they are doing this to us or others"*.

Female participants also highlighted major form of sexual harassment as follows. While reporting hostile environment they face at work Participant no. 1 reported that *"In the workplace, I often feel as if I'm in a jungle, surrounded by others who treat me like threatening animals."*

Male Participant no. 8 also confirmed this by pointing out the reason that *"It (sexual assault/sexual harassment) happens to physically torture someone or Incitement to do wrong. And why it happens the reason is that the working class are oppressed and compelled. They fulfil their valid and invalid wishes."*

The issue of bonded labour is identified as a significant contributor to financial challenges that can result in instances of sexual harassment. Participant no. 8 reported *"We take advance from these people, and we cannot pay them back with our whole life. That is why our generation after generation serves them...They do all sort of mean stuff. They did it with me as well. We think that we are compelled due to our poverty and our loan...We do labour. Our children will do labour (Interviewer: I mean your wish.) We wish that we get educated, Tomorrow we will be young. And we will have kids and we would want them to be educated. But we have been unable to get education how will our children get educated. Our parents have become old in this condition, and we will also and so will our children."*

According to male farm workers, individuals who have experienced sexual harassment exhibit a range of emotional and mental health concerns. While some may exhibit severe emotional distress, others may remain composed. The results are congruent with those documented by Scarce (1997), indicating that there exists no standard spectrum of emotional or psychological reactions to such occurrences among males. The speaker additionally stated that the spectrum of reactions exhibited by individuals who have experienced such occurrences spans from maintaining emotional composure to experiencing a state of near emotional collapse in certain instances.

When questioned for quality of life of farm workers both male and female have reported different versions. Participant no 8 reported *"We've experienced days of inflation*

when we struggle to cover the electricity bill, and we find ourselves with no food at home. Our house is rented, and even basic facilities like a restroom are absent."

Participant no. 5 *"I once witnessed a woman giving birth while working. We created a makeshift shelter from our belongings, and she had to give birth while sitting in the water among the agricultural crops."*

Male participant while reporting on financial issues that majorly effects on their quality of life. Participant no 2 reported *"...because we need to earn as it is necessity, to run house expenditure, for food and drink".* Female participant no. 5 reported *"Poverty sometimes leads to situations where there is no food to eat. Children go to bed hungry."* While reporting on lack of necessities. Male Participant no 8 reported *"Many times we have seen such days due to inflation when we are unable to pay electricity bill. And there is nothing to eat at home and house is also on rent. There is no washroom."*

The concept of Bottom-up theory posits that the general assessment of life satisfaction is dependent on evaluations made in diverse life domains, including but not limited to family life, social life, leisure life, financial life, community life, and spiritual life. To clarify, assessments of various aspects of life, particularly those deemed significant, have an impact on the overall assessment of one's life. If an individual regards work-life as highly significant, it is probable that their comprehensive assessment of life will be impacted by their evaluation of work-life. In brief, Bottom-up theories of subjective well-being (SWB) posit that the aggregate of individual components contributes to the overall assessment of life satisfaction. In accordance with Heady's (2014) findings, it can be posited that self-reported measures of life satisfaction are indicative of a composite evaluation of satisfaction across various domains of life. Malik (2016) highlighted an often-overlooked issue faced by agricultural farm workers in Pakistan. The hidden aspect of poverty takes the form of bonded labor, a debt bondage system where labor is used to repay loans (Churchill & Guérin, 2004; Malik, 2016). In his article, Malik (2016) discussed how bonded labor leads to frequent assaults by landlords and supervisors on their laborers.

Additionally, it's important to highlight that both male and female agricultural laborers have encountered feelings of powerlessness, which stands as a notable determinant for such incidents. Drawing from the theory of learned helplessness (Overmier & Seligman, 1967), individuals exposed to sexual harassment tend to perceive it because of the work environment that lies beyond their control. The act of refraining from lodging a complaint against the perpetrator or choosing not to openly confront the sexual harasser can be interpreted as instances of acquired passivity or learned helplessness. Passive reactions to sexual harassment might entail tolerating its persistence, conceding to the harasser's demands, or acquiescing to their requests. According to the perspectives of Overmier and Seligman (1967) as well as Seligman (1974), the concept of learned helplessness stems from an individual's perception of losing personal agency over their capacity to influence their surroundings. This perception breeds the belief that, regardless of their efforts, they are unable to avert undesirable or dissatisfying outcomes. As previously mentioned, learned helplessness represents a psychological phenomenon wherein individuals adopt the belief that future victimization is inevitable or beyond prevention.

Male Participant no. 2 reported that *"They are poor and get confused. In order to save themselves from Further shame they migrate and leave their household. Neither they go to the police nor to hospital for treatment because they are terrified."*

The lack of awareness regarding the law was corroborated by the study participants. Individuals who possessed knowledge on the matter retorted that its implementation has not been observed in relation to Pakistan. According to Bell et al. (2014), an individual's decision to report an incident of sexual harassment may be influenced by various factors, such as fear of retaliation, lack of belief, inaction, and loss of privacy.

Female farm workers have reported that *"People refrain from filing complaints because they fear losing their respect, money, and ultimately, receiving no justice."* (Participant no 10).

Participant no. 5 reported *"We don't know anything about it."*

Male Participant 3 who witnessed victim of SH reported *"Because he was afraid of his family and society finding out about this incident also, he did not wanted to get shamed."*

Female participants reported same details. For instance, Participant no. 7 reported *"If we share this with anyone, their response is often 'What can we do?'"*.

Regarding female farm workers, their reported findings are consistent with previous research. According to research, it has been found that women are more prone to expressing that they have experienced emotional consequences because of being subjected to harassment in a hostile environment (Terpstra & Cook, 1985; United States Merit Systems Protection Board (USMSPB),1988).

According to organisational theory, sexual harassment is primarily linked to the concept of power (Cleveland & Kurst,1993). This implies that sexual harassment is a consequence of the power dynamics and authority relations that exist within hierarchical organisations (Gruber, 1992).

The conditions and structural aspects of a working environment can create opportunities for, or implicitly promote, instances of harassment that are rooted in workplace norms, gender bias, and power dynamics between male and female employees.

Conclusion

This study illuminates the widespread problem of sexual harassment in Pakistan's agricultural sector. It delves into the factors that trigger, manifest, and result from harassment, emphasizing the impact of economic hardships, power dynamics, and the phenomenon of learned helplessness. Female farmworkers have encountered greater physical challenges and gender discrimination during their agriculture work, whereas male farmworkers often conceal instances of sexual harassment due to social status and societal fears. This study has not only exposed the dire reality of sexual harassment within Pakistan's agricultural sector but also highlighted the broader challenges faced by farmworkers in terms of their well-being and quality of life. It calls for immediate attention from policymakers, organizations, and society to create an environment that is free from harassment, supports the rights of laborers, and enhances their overall quality of life.

Practice Implication

There is a dearth of researchers with psychology backgrounds addressing the sexual harassment and poor quality of life of farmworkers, particularly male and female workers from diverse regions with varying lifestyles, traditions, and cultures. In underdeveloped countries like Pakistan, selection criteria for farmworkers lack specificity due to low wages.

Research outcomes would be used for educational purposes, including articles, presentations, and policy proposals. Results will be shared through reviewed articles and PowerPoint presentations, reaching stakeholders like landlords, supervisors, educators, officials, mental health professionals, and global farmworkers' families, especially in Pakistan. Recognizing the importance of female farmworkers, the Pakistani government should create policies for their well-being, including paid maternity leave, education, and food support, while addressing social inequalities.

The Ministry of Human Rights should invest in research addressing the roots and impacts of sexual harassment, aiding policy formulation. At the provincial level, efforts should protect male and female farmworkers' rights against inequality, injustice, and harassment, both at work and home.

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