



## Sexual Harassment and Management Behaviour at the Workplace

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**Abstract:** This paper aims to unravel the personality attributes of victims and perpetrators of sexual harassment that had occurred at the workplace. It also discusses how the issue of sexual harassment can be resolved and how proper policy strategies can be implemented at the workplace. A social-metric method was used to collect and analyse data. The results showed that victims were endowed with a moderate level of the personality attributes while perpetrators were generally endowed with low level personality attributes such as being uncomfortable most of the time, being less confident and they have less self-worth.

Keywords: sexual harassment, management behaviour, policy implementation

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### INTRODUCTION

After her resignation from one institution, Nisha (pseudonym) was employed as a lecturer at a private college of education located in Malaysia. Nisha was a young and attractive female employee with a cute personality. Her presence can turn heads and make everyone want to look at her. When she makes an entrance into her office, her male and female co-workers (lecturers) often stare at her, captivated by her personality and appearance. Nisha's personality can be described as dynamic and structured as noted in people who are uniquely affected by their cognition, motivation and behaviour, in various situations.

Her work performance was good, in fact, better than her colleagues to the extent that some of her female co-workers had even complained to the management that she was creating trouble at work and that she was not good at her performance. This politicking activity of her co-workers turned Nisha into a victim of the workplace to the point that the management began to take the decision to terminate her services. Nisha is an innocent worker who has a good attitude and work performance but unfortunately for her, the organisation she worked for, was not on her side.

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## **THE CASE OF ONE SUPERIOR'S SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND IMMORAL BEHAVIOUR ON A FEMALE WORKER**

This case describes the effect of a superior's sexual harassment and immoral behavior towards a female worker at the workplace. The event took place at one of the private institutions of higher learning in Malaysia, hereby termed as college X. The female staff who joined the institution became a threat to the other staff because she had been outstanding in her work performance. Consequently, her male superior began developing feelings for her. In the first few weeks of her employment, everything went well, at par to her expectations and she felt happy and contented with everyone's interactions with her. Her working climate was really challenging for her but she cooperated with her colleagues to get work done. She also felt that she had learnt a lot from the new enriching experiences. After spending some time with her colleagues or, in this sense, teammates, she began to sense an awkwardness about her male superior. She did not know what the exact issue was but she was able to gather a vague sense of understanding after her fellow team members began talking about the superior and making friendly warnings about his behaviour to the rest of the team. Despite these friendly warnings, she did not try in any possible way to get to know what the exact issue was because she did not feel the necessity to learn about his personal characteristics or attitude. For her, it was enough and acceptable that in the working environment, the superior behaves in a professional manner that is acceptable and suitable for work. She also believed that the superior would have a certain degree of moral towards the other staff. However, one day, she discovered that the superior's communication with her did not make sense to her. In fact, it was weird. For several days, the superior had been preying on her and finding faults with her, calling her to his office for unnecessary communications. This made the staff felt uncomfortable. In order to stay away from being called upon by the superior, the female staff then used strategies to ignore this situation imposed by the superior. She occupied herself with other tasks such as having discussions with students or having various interactions with other lecturers. Although the female staff was very uncomfortable, she did not want to report the situation to the management due to certain circumstances. Instead, she chose to discuss this issue with her team mates. Unfortunately for her, the situation worsened and the management decided to terminate the victim (female worker) and not the harasser (male perpetrator).

This case allows us to view the issuance of power. In this context, it can be seen that the superior carried the "power to control" (quid pro quo behaviour) the female employee who was the victim. Here, the superior who was holding a position displayed the ability to perform indecent acts against the female worker within the organisation. In this case of sexual harassment, the victim must outline four elements to prove the existence of a quid pro quo behaviour, namely: (1) victim, whether male or female, was subjected to the insured, (2) victim received unwanted sexual harassment, (3) complaints of harassment based on sex and sexual matters, and (4) complaints made by workers who are victims which will affect the rights of an employee.

Quid pro quo behaviour is the absolute of management behaviour on sexual harassment at the workplace. Employers and supervisors have the power to hire and fire workers based on the influence of power. Thus, the power available to them such as promotion

and pay remuneration in employment is their right in an organisation, particularly in the private sector. This power may serve as an advantage for the employers and supervisors to do something indecent to the employees. In such a situation, female workers often become victims and very often, passive sufferers, due to the management's behavior which has a tendency to change due to the environment. For instance, a threat of harassment that occurs between fellow employees or due to organisational politics can influence management's behavior, either to defend or ignore.

Harassment is a common feature in the workplace. It is a form of behaviour which one afflicts on another so as to impose physical or verbal abuse or humiliation that offends over a period of time. To some extent, harassment may also involve using words and making gestures about sexual activities. These sexual activities may encompass touch, comments on the physical appearance of the person, using signals and obscene language or any movement that raises concerns for the victim.

In situations where a female worker is employed under the supervision of a female superior, rarely do such issues arise. Alternatively, there would also be no issue if the worker was a man working under a male supervisor. Most cases of sexual harassment have noted that the "accused says he/she was sexually abused solely based on gender". From this statement, it can be deduced that the organisational climate is one of the elements that can affect change in management behaviour at the workplace. Current organisational structure suggests that most of the top management are males. In organisations where there are competitive female colleagues, where most male workers find it extremely difficult to accept a woman as their competitor who is ranked equally (Farley, 1978). The occurrence where the management's behaviour poses a problem in the workplace is when it is related to the work employment opportunities offered to women. Today's world showed that more and more women are being employed in industries which used to be dominated by men. More and more women are as capable if not more competent than some of their male counterparts in the respective fields such as engineering, medicine, aviation, business, law and so on. This threat can indirectly affect the status of the male workers. To safeguard their positions, some male workers are willing to assert the practice of sexual harassment on female workers as a way of demeaning them.

## **PERSONALITY ATTRIBUTES OF VICTIMS AND PERPETRATORS**

Focusing on the aim to identify the personality attributes of the victims and the perpetrators at the workplace so as to understand sexual harassment and management behaviour better, the socio-metric method was applied. Table 1 displays the personality attributes of the victims of sexual harassment and the perpetrators who engaged in it.

Table 1: Personality attributes of the victims and perpetrators of sexual harassment

Types of Personality	Victims			Mean	Standard Deviation
	High Level (%)	Medium Level (%)	Low Level (%)		
Aggressive	4	57	39	3.92	1.86
Analytical	14	45	42	3.98	2.60
Autonomy	8	29	62	3.22	2.05
Leaning	4	37	59	3.24	1.97
Extrovert	22	37	41	4.62	5.51
Intellectual	31	45	24	5.38	2.60
Introvert	18	55	27	4.64	2.30
Multiple	12	49	39	4.58	2.20
Endurance	39	43	18	2.90	2.31
Controlling	14	22	65	5.68	2.49
Help	4	22	75	2.50	2.12
Support	14	49	37	4.26	2.12
Structure	6	12	82	2.46	2.07
Achievement	10	26	65	3.26	2.14

  

Types of Personality	Perpetrators			Mean	Standard Deviation
	High Level (%)	Medium Level (%)	Low Level (%)		
Aggressive	0	0	100	6.12	1.86
Analytical	40	47	13	6.19	2.60
Autonomy	49	45	6	6.76	2.05
Leaning	45	47	9	6.25	1.97
Extrovert	43	45	13	6.40	5.51
Intellectual	36	55	9	5.74	2.60
Introvert	28	57	15	5.42	2.30
Multiple	12	49	39	6.02	2.20
Endurance	39	43	18	6.87	2.31
Self-criticism	36	57	6	8.04	1.78
Controlling	34	51	15	5.38	2.49
Help	62	30	9	6.36	2.12
Support	28	60	13	5.55	2.12
Structure	62	30	9	6.72	2.07
Achievement	57	38	4	7.06	2.14

(Source: Authors' own)

As can be noted from the table, most of the victims tend to have low level personality attributes and some possess moderate levels. Table 1 also indicates that many perpetrators also possess a moderate level of personality types but the overall assessment suggests that most of the perpetrators were at the low level. It appears that

perpetrators of sexual harassment do not feel comfortable most of the time; they are often less confident and they have less self-worth.

### **POLICY IMPLICATION**

Based on the above scenario, it can be deduced that employees who become a victim of sexual harassment caused by the immoral behavior of others at the workplace can address this problem to the labour court duly. They need to convey this harassment to the management. This is because sexual harassment is any unwanted behaviour consisting of verbal, non-verbal, visual, psychological or physical acts on reasonable grounds, and is/are perceived by the receiver (victim) as a condition of a sexual nature on employment, or is on reasonable grounds, perceived by the receiver (victim) as a violation of the dignity or humiliation or threats against him/her, but has no direct links to his/her work. As a receiver of this reception, the victim may be in a situation where the sexual harassment is inflicted either from a man onto a woman, from a man onto a man, from woman onto a woman or from a woman onto a man.

In any work policies, no officer can perform any form of sexual harassment towards another employee or staff by approaching the person and behaving in a sexual manner, by demanding for sexual favours from the person, by uttering any word, make any noise or signal or indicate any article or photo so that the word or sound heard, or the signal or object or image being viewed by the person interferes with his/her humility and feelings. As a result of this provision, the head of the department, upon receipt of a complaint, shall be responsible for the following: (i) receive complaints about the sexual harassment by an officer, here, the complaints shall be classified as confidential, (ii) make official records of all complaints received, (iii) conduct an investigation to confirm whether the matter reported is justified or not, (iv) report the results of the investigation of sexual harassment to the Disciplinary Committee, and (v) keep a record of all complaints received, the latest of the complaints and a follow-up is required. As a final point, a person who is guilty of committing sexual harassment can receive any one or a combination of any or more of the following penalties as specified to resolve this problem: warning and disciplinary penalties in accordance with Act 605 (Act Statutory Bodies Tattertib and Surcharges, 2000).

### **CONCLUSION**

Sexual harassment can have a severe impact on people's behaviour when it occurs at the workplace. Therefore, it is necessary that organisations be more proactive such as being more defensive for employees instead of being reactive and to be more response driven by taking the initiatives to develop effective sexual harassment policies and procedures. Sexual harassment can be prevented and eradicated most effectively if there is a joint effort between the employers and labor unions. Internal mechanisms for preventing and eradicating sexual harassment can be organised and built together. Union participation can contribute to a stronger employee commitment into adopting and complying with the mechanism. Trade unions have a clear role in helping to create an environment that is free from sexual harassment. Trade unions can also contribute to the prevention of sexual harassment by raising more awareness and sensitivity among union members. In doing so, the union is ensuring that the behavior of its union members is being

monitored and this can help to alleviate the problem of sexual harassment. Trade unions should also work with employers in implementing promotional programmes and education so as to create a work culture and a work environment that is safe and healthy. Through this, every employee (without calculating the position or status of his/her dignity) is respected and free from any form of harassment, humiliation, and threats of a sexual nature.

In Malaysia, sexual harassment at the workplace is still a fuzzy area to be decided. Thus far, there is no clear statistics to determine the extent and the seriousness of sexual harassment within the country. It also appears that data on sexual harassment in the workplace in Malaysia is still undeveloped. However, the Ministry of Human Resources has taken several steps to address this issue. One of these is by introducing the code of practice for the workplace. It is called, ‘The Prevention and Eradication of Sexual Harassment in the Workplace’. This code of practice is of great benefit to employers and employees because it raises the awareness of sexual harassment among employees; it emphasises on the negative behavior occurring at the workplace and it also offers some steps that can be taken to address the issue. This proactiveness of the ministry can help to eradicate the problem of sexual harassment more effectively.

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. What are the effects of sexual harassment at the workplace?
2. How can management prevent sexual harassment at the workplace?
3. Based on your understanding, discuss how a management’s behavior can be implemented in resolving sexual harassment at the workplace, in terms of the organisational perspective and the Islamic perspective.

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### **CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

The authors declare that no conflict of interest affecting the publishing of this case paper because the respective peoples' name and organization are not mentioned in the case.

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