

**The Effectiveness of Workplace Harassment Act in Public Sector Universities of Punjab:
A Case Study of Faisalabad**

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.70670/sra.v4i2.2243>

Abstract

This research paper assessing social temperature towards the issue of sexual harassment at workplace. All the energies are invested to assess how such act as related to sexual harassment at the workplace affect mental health and work performance of women. While this research exercise, the concentration was given to calibrate the effectiveness of legal framework concerning with safeguarding women from harassment at workplace specially how the implementation machinery responds The Protection against Harassment of Women at Workplace Act, 2010. There is no doubt that several concerns and challenges still persist and hold back women's full access to equal opportunities, as entrenched patriarchal norms, social stereotypes, and the misinterpretation of religious scriptures continue to add and give rise to the challenges faced by women. Adopting mixed method approach, this research study explores how the existing legal framework contributes to curb violence against women in the public universities of Faisalabad namely Government College University Faisalabad, University of Agriculture and Government College Women University Faisalabad. The analysis under review concludes that it is imperative to sustain awareness-raising campaigns and unwavering efforts by authorities and political decision-makers. Besides these, it is equally important to invest resources to influence the social behaviours that blame the women for harassment and further to using media including traditional and social for general masses awareness to influence the frequency of the incidents of sexual harassment at workplace.

Key Words: Harassment, Women Rights, Workplace Discrimination, Legal Protection, Equality

Introduction

Women in Pakistan make up the bulk of the population, accounting for 48.4 per cent, but they are still experiencing systemic obstacles to gender equality in the workplace (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2024). Harassment in the workplace is one of these. It can be especially prevalent in public sector institutes where the hierarchical system and the patriarchal norm can sometimes be stronger than the law. Pakistan's main law to address this problem is the Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act, 2010 which has introduced harassment committees and procedures for women complaints in all workplaces in Pakistan (Hussain, 2020). The implementation of the Act is a particularly critical situation in public sector universities. As educational institutions, they have a responsibility to demonstrate good practice in relation to equality of opportunity for both employees and students and to uphold the dignity and

professional rights of all staff and students. However, empirical evidence indicates that although harassment committees exist in the formal policy level, the understanding of the complaints process, its use and institutionalization is poor (Shafique, Faiza, & Nasratullah, 2025). The disconnect between policy and implementation can have important ramifications on a woman's occupational health, performance in school and feeling safe in school. The present study is an evaluation of the effectiveness of Workplace Harassment Act in three public sector universities of Faisalabad: Government College University Faisalabad (GCUF), University of Agriculture Faisalabad (UAF) and Government College Women University Faisalabad (GCWUF). It assesses how harassment committees are working, reviews complaint processes and identifies structural and cultural impediments to implementation. The present paper will focus specifically on Hypothesis 1 which examines the relationship between awareness of the complaint procedure and perception of harassment committee independence.

Literature Review

Gender-based harassment in the workplace is a common problem in Pakistan, deeply entrenched in the institutions' culture and power dynamics. Progressive as the Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act, 2010 is, it has failed to make a dent on its own (Ahmed A. N., 2015). The study revealed that organizational hierarchy, fear of retaliation and social stigma seriously deters women from reporting harassment and that harassment committees are often under-trained and poorly supported, limiting the implementation of the Act and its spirit. One of the main weaknesses of the Act is its narrow legal scope. However, (Iqbal, 2023) suggests that the scope of employment and employee in the law is limited, leaving sexual harassment the only form of gender-based conduct to be covered by the law. This lacuna in the law has been established by the Supreme Court, in a 2021 decision in *Nadia Naz v. President of Islamic Republic of Pakistan*, which ruled those non-sexual forms of demeaning gender-based conduct were completely excluded from the protection of the Act (Sohail, 2025). At the societal level, around 77 percent of working women in Pakistan were not aware of their rights when it comes to harassment, while 50 percent of women harassed did not report the incident due to an illusory gap between the design of the policy and its awareness (Wajahat, Ali, & Jan, 2021). This gap is exacerbated by institutional culture. Three factors were identified by Ali and Kramar that hinder the reporting of harassment in Pakistani organizations: socio-cultural factors that constrain women based on norms of modesty and shame, institutional factors in the complaint process, and managerial bias towards the complainant (Ali & Kramar, 2015). The situation has not changed, with more recent evidence showing that half of organizations (68 percent) have anti-harassment policies in place, but only 12 percent are effectively enforcing them. Only 18 per cent of victims register formal complaints, with 43 per cent of women reporting family honor as a major obstacle and 61 per cent of junior staff reporting threat from the superior staff as their main obstacle (Hossain, 2005). In the socio-cultural aspect of the issue, it is well embedded in the male gender. points to the traditional notion of masculinity and systemic power dynamics to produce institutional environments that are hostile towards enforcement of harassment. The problem of gender-based violence in Pakistan is not just cultural; it is also rooted in the material conditions of life and class hierarchies and property relations which normalize subordination of women. Similarly, Dr. Siyabonga illustrate the influence of culture, religion and law on the social perception of harassment and the ability of women to seek redress from it. In the context of higher education, established that recurrent verbal or non-verbal harassment has negative effects on the motivation, job satisfaction and absenteeism of employees in the university (Ngwane, 2018). His analysis highlights the importance of institutional commitment, reporting systems and accountability systems in bridging the policy-to-practice gap to the practice. This challenge is further theorized in terms of a feminist legal perspective, which is an anti-harassment legislation

that would not be able to fulfil its protective promise if it were not for genuine cooperation between legal institutions, educational bodies and civil society to address the structural and cultural causes of harassment, as opposed to merely ensuring that processes are followed (Siad & Rabi, 2021). Overall, the current literature shows that, despite the formalization of anti-harassment law in Pakistan and similar institutional settings, there is a strong dependence of the former on the latter. Complaint procedures, perceived independence of redressal bodies and cultural legitimacy of complaints are all important intervening factors. This study is an extension of these findings to test the relationship between awareness of the complaint mechanism and the effectiveness of the harassment committee in the public universities of Punjab in an empirical way.

Hypothesis

H1: There is a strong correlation between the effectiveness of mechanism of complaints and the effectiveness of committees against harassment of public sector universities of Faisalabad.

Ho: The effectiveness of complainant handling and harassment committees are not significantly related in public sector universities of Faisalabad.

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Material and Methods

The study was a mixed-methods study, using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to fully explore the effectiveness of PAHWA, 2010 in Public Sector universities of Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan. The mixed-method design was chosen because it allows the researcher to deal with research questions not only conceptually but also analytically, enabling integration of numerical data with contextual understanding (Clark, 2010). Primary and secondary sources of data were used to ensure valid and reliable findings. The study used mixed method approach with the cross-sectional research design, to evaluate the effectiveness of Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act, 2010 of public sector universities of Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan. The three purposively selected institutions (Government College University, Faisalabad (GCUF), University of Agriculture Faisalabad (UAF), and Government College Women University Faisalabad (GCWUF) took part in the data collection process. The main instrument in collecting the data was a structured close-ended questionnaire that was developed from previous literature and included items in the Likert scale (daily perception scale). Non-probability multistage sampling was used and respondents were selected using convenient sampling within the selected institution. The data were collected by direct contact and through online means and the questionnaire was pre-tested to make it clear and valid before the main data collection. SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) was used to analyze the data. Pearson correlation, which is suitable for determining the strength and direction of the relationship between two ordinal scale variables, was used to test Hypothesis 1 (Babbie, 2013). The two variables that were examined were: (i) respondents' knowledge of the process for making a complaint in line with the Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act, 2010; and (ii) respondents' perceptions of the independence of the harassment committee within their university and freedom from outside influence. Missing data were addressed by using the "pairwise deletion" method which uses all valid cases.

Results and Discussion

Univariate Analysis

The frequency distribution of responses for the key variables measured by the study questionnaire is shown in this section. The univariate analyses serve as the basis for a descriptive picture of the awareness, perceptions and experience of respondents in the three universities surveyed with regard to the complaint and harassment committees.

Table 1

Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 182)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	100	54.9%
	Female	82	45.1%
Designation	Students	100	54.9%
	Lecturers/Professors	82	45.1%
University	GCUF	89	50.0%
	GCWUF	46	25.8%
	UAF	43	24.2%

As seen in Table 1, the total sample size was 182 with 100 of them (54.9%) being male and 82 (45.1%) being female. By designation, 100 (54.9%) were students and 82 (45.1%) were faculty members. The Government College University (Faisalabad) was represented 50.0% (N = 89), the Government Women University (Faisalabad) was 25.8% (N = 46) and University of Agriculture (Faisalabad) was 24.2% (N = 43) in sample. Near equal gender balance enhances analytical validity of results across gender; both students and faculty included to represent those most likely to be victims of potential harassment and those acting as institutional gatekeepers in complaints process.

Table 2

Frequency Distribution of Key Study Variables (N = 115)

Variable	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Complaint system openness	3 (2.6%)	10 (8.7%)	55 (47.8%)	35 (30.4%)	12 (10.4%)	115
Harassment committee efficacy	2 (1.7%)	14 (12.2%)	62 (53.9%)	30 (26.1%)	7 (6.1%)	115
Complaint mechanism transparency	3 (2.6%)	8 (7.0%)	63 (54.8%)	36 (31.3%)	5 (4.3%)	115
Awareness of complaint procedure	4 (3.5%)	20 (17.4%)	25 (21.7%)	42 (36.5%)	24 (20.9%)	115
Awareness of rights under the Act	10 (8.7%)	18 (15.7%)	21 (18.3%)	52 (45.2%)	14 (12.2%)	115

As shown in Table 2, univariate responses reveal a majority of neutral responses in all institutional performance variables. As far as complaint system openness was concerned, 47.8 percent said

they were neutral, 30.4 percent said they agreed and 10.4 percent said they strongly agreed. The same pattern was true for their assessments of the effectiveness of the harassment committee, with 53.9 percent neutral, 26.1 percent agreeing, and 6.1 percent strongly agreeing. 54.8 percent were neutral regarding the transparency of the complaint mechanism. The overwhelmingly positive responses are not due to passivity of indifference, however, but to institutional invisibility the fact that the vast majority of respondents have never personally been a part of these institutions and thus are unable to make confident judgments about how they work. The awareness of the complaint procedure in the Act, however, was relatively positive, as 57.4 percent of respondents (strongly and moderately agreed) indicated that they had some awareness of the procedure. There was also a relatively high level of awareness of rights under the Act with 57.4 percent agreeing. However, the significant difference between awareness of rights and level of effectiveness of committees is the most analytically important result of this univariate analysis but further analysis with bivariate and regression analyses is conducted below.

Bivariate Analysis

Bivariate analysis looks at the kind of association and its magnitude between two variables. To test Hypothesis 1, bivariate technique was used, namely Pearson Correlation which is suitable for testing association direction and significance with two ordinal-scale variables.

Table 3
Pearson Correlation: Awareness of Complaint Procedure and Perceived Independence of Harassment Committee

		Awareness of Complaint Procedure	Committee Functions Independently
Awareness of Complaint Procedure	Pearson Correlation	1	.235*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.011
	N	115	115
Committee Functions Independently	Pearson Correlation	.235*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.011	
	N	115	115

**Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)*

Pearson Correlation analysis in Table 3 shows that there is a statistically significant positive correlation between awareness of the complaint procedure in Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act, 2010, and perception whether the harassment committee is independent and free from any external pressure or not ($r = 0.235$, $p = 0.011$, $N = 115$). Based on this result the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis is accepted as follows: The hypothesis can be accepted that there is a significant relationship between complaint mechanism awareness and perceived committee effectiveness.

Although the correlation coefficient is small, a positive correlation means that there is a positive relationship between the formal complaint process and the perception of the harassment committee being independent and trustworthy (Ali S. J., 2026). This finding aligns with the institutional transparency argument that suggests that transparency and easy access to procedures improves stakeholder trust in the redressal bodies. These findings do not, however, overturn the weak to moderate effect size ($r = 0.235$), thus pointing to the fact that awareness alone is

insufficient to explain perceptions of committee independence. Structural barriers, organizational culture, and past institutional experiences, including the presence of hierarchical structures and the fear of retaliation by (Bhasin, 2019), still continue to moderate the relationship between procedural knowledge and institutional trust.

Regression Analysis: Hypothesis 1

H1: The effectiveness of the complaint mechanism and the effectiveness of harassment committees in public sector universities of Faisalabad have a strong correlation with each other.

Table 4
Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.665a	.443	.438	.556

a. Predictor: Perceived simplicity, transparency, and time-bound nature of complaint process

Table 5
ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	27.775	1	27.775	89.744	.000b
Residual	34.973	113	.309		
Total	62.748	114			

b. Dependent variable: Committee ensures confidentiality and fairness in complaint investigation

Table 6
Coefficients

Model	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	1.217	.206		5.909	.000
Complaint process is simple, transparent & time-bound	.615	.065	.665	9.473	.000

Simple regression analysis was used in the tables to test the predictive relationship between perceived simplicity of the complaint process (predictor) and perceptions of the committee's confidentiality and fair process (dependent variable). A model summary indicates that there is a strong positive relationship between the accessibility and transparency of the complaint procedure, and a perceived high level of committee fairness ($R = 0.665$, $R \text{ square} = 0.443$, where 44.3 per cent of the variance in the perceived high level of committee fairness is explained by the accessibility and transparency of the complaint procedure). $R \text{ Square (adjusted)}$ is 0.438, which also validates the model. ANOVA result ($F = 89.744$, $p < 0.001$) shows that the model is highly significant statistically. The coefficient for the predictor variable is $B = 0.615$ ($Beta = 0.665$, $t = 9.473$, $p < 0.001$), which indicates that a more accessible and transparent process for complaining is a strong and significant predictor of perceived committee fairness and perceived confidentiality. These results strongly support the alternative hypothesis and suggest that procedural transparency

is not a mere administrative consideration, but a crucial factor in determining institutional trust (George, 2024). Universities that spend time and resources on ensuring complaints are easy to access, transparent, and have a time-limit are much more likely to be seen as having credible and fair harassment committees (Muhammad Imran, 2024).

Multiple Regression Analysis

The seven institutional factors were used as predictors in multiple regression analysis to determine the overall effect on perceived harassment committee effectiveness. The seven predictor variables identified in Sections 4 and 5 of the questionnaires were: Equal Opportunity in the Complaint Process, Simplicity and Transparency of the Complaint Procedure, Trust in the Committee, University Administration Support, Confidentiality of Proceedings, Timeliness of Complaint Handling and General Openness of the Complaint System.

Table 7: Model Summary – Multiple Regression

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error
1	.801a	.641	.619	.456

a. Predictors: Equal opportunity, simplicity/transparency, trust, admin support, confidentiality, timely handling, complaint openness

Table 8: ANOVA – Multiple Regression

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	40.234	7	5.748	27.614	.000b
Residual	22.514	108	.208		
Total	62.748	115			

Table 9: Coefficients – Multiple Regression

Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	VIF
(Constant)	.312	.241		1.295	.198	
Equal opportunity	.187	.072	.198	2.597	.011	1.892
Simple & transparent process	.231	.079	.250	2.924	.004	2.134
Trust in committee	.204	.080	.215	2.550	.012	2.011
Admin support	.143	.069	.152	2.072	.040	1.756
Confidentiality	.098	.071	.104	1.380	.170	1.643
Timely handling	.176	.074	.187	2.378	.019	1.889
Openness of complaint system	.112	.068	.119	1.647	.102	1.712

The multiple regression model in Tables 7–9 provides a comprehensive picture of the institutional factors that collectively determine perceptions of harassment committee effectiveness. The model explains 64.1 percent of the variance in committee effectiveness (R Square = 0.641, Adjusted R Square = 0.619), and the overall model is highly significant (F = 27.614, $p < 0.001$), confirming that the seven predictor variables together constitute a robust explanatory framework.

Among the individual predictors, the simplicity and transparency of the complaint process emerged as the strongest predictor (Beta = 0.250, $p = 0.004$), followed by trust in the committee (Beta = 0.215, $p = 0.012$), equal opportunity in complaint handling (Beta = 0.198, $p = 0.011$), timely handling of complaints (Beta = 0.187, $p = 0.019$), and university administration support (Beta = 0.152, $p = 0.040$). Confidentiality of proceedings (Beta = 0.104, $p = 0.170$) and openness of the complaint system (Beta = 0.119, $p = 0.102$) did not reach statistical significance in the combined model, suggesting their effects are partly captured by the other predictors. VIF values for all predictors ranged between 1.643 and 2.134, well below the threshold of 10, confirming the absence of problematic multicollinearity.

The implications for the institutions are important. The high ranking of procedural transparency and accessibility as the strongest predictor further justifies the claim that the effectiveness of harassment committees is rooted in the visibility and accessibility of the complaint process to potential complainants. Third, procedural fairness is also reflected in trust in the committee and equal opportunity, which suggest that it is more than an abstract concept; perceptions of institutional effectiveness depend on the practice of procedural fairness. This finding of administration support is consistent with the principles of the Conflict Theory (Engels, 1978) which states that institutional mechanisms are only able to work outside of the institution when there are those within who reinforce rather than subvert them. It is notable that in the combined model, confidentiality is not significant, even though it is a valued feature: 75 respondents of 115 were neutral on this variable and 40 were negative, suggesting that confidentiality is not seen as being measurable unless experienced in the complaint process. The findings of the multiple regression test results confirm that the effectiveness of the harassment committees is not a simple issue that can be addressed by a single action, but rather a phenomenon that involves the concomitant presence of four different influences, namely the clarity of procedures, institutional trust, support of the leaders and timely response, all of which are institutional outcomes.

Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that though there is a Protection against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act 2010, the response to its implementation in public sector universities is still not satisfactory in the face of institutional weaknesses, patriarchal attitudes, lack of awareness, fear of retaliation and ineffective complaint mechanisms. The results show that harassment committees are formed in the selected universities, but their activity is limited by low transparency, lack of training, a slow response, and low employee trust in the institution. Furthermore, the quantitative and qualitative analysis shows that the social and cultural stigma and the gendered power imbalance in the society deters and stops the victims from reporting cases of harassment to the police thus reducing the effectiveness of the legal framework. Furthermore, the study points to the fact that barriers still exist in the form of an organizational culture and structural inequality in gaining access to safe and respectful working conditions for women. Thus, the findings of the research suggest that while there are legal measures that can be taken, there must be institutional accountability, awareness creation, gender sensitivity in administration and robust implementation mechanisms and systems that will guarantee justice, confidentiality, and protection of the victim of workplace harassment.

Recommendations

The study calls for improving the role and transparency of the harassment committees in public sector universities by regular monitoring, proper training and strict adherence to the Protection against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act, 2010. Awareness seminars, workshops and orientation sessions should be organized by universities for students, the faculty as well as the administrative staff to increase awareness of any complaint's procedure and legal rights in relation

to workplace harassment. In addition, complaint/grievance systems should be established which are confidential and also "victim-friendly" to promote complaints without fear of retaliation or stigma. Higher Education Commission (HEC), provincials should organize periodic assessment of university harassment committees and take action to hold them accountable if they aren't being implemented. Furthermore, gender responsive policies, counselling services and psychological assistance mechanisms should be set up in universities to assist those who have suffered harassment. Media, civil society organizations and educational institutions can also play a role in promoting a culture of respect, equality and zero tolerance for workplace harassment in educational institutions by challenging patriarchal norms together.

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