

## Empowerment of Nurses and Other Professional Women to Stand up, when Faced with Workplace Sexual Harassment

Yasin I\*, Bux K, Naz A

School of Nursing and Midwifery, Aga Khan University, Karachi, Pakistan

### ABSTRACT

Workplace sexual harassment is a devastating issue in worldwide. Incidences of sexual harassment have been substantially reported by the women from all walks of life, who has exposed to any kind of sexual misconduct during their job hours. In any health care organization, nurses are more prone to victimize the sexual harassment due to unprivileged professional reputes, and the nature of clinical services, which performed by them. Sexual harassment has quite a lot of the detrimental impacts for victims include, physical and psychological trauma, financial challenges, lack of job satisfaction, low morale, and even career ruination. As women are the soul of a nation, so keeping in view this immoral issue every organization should make all the possible efforts, to provide their women's employees' safe and secure working environment. This paper presents a scholarly analysis of an issue encountered in a health care organization, based on a scenario of a nurse who has sexually harassed by one of her colleagues.

**Keywords:** Sexual harassment; Sexual violence; Sexual abuse; Health care organization; Health care settings; Nurses; Victims; Nursing profession; Workplace; Work environment

### INTRODUCTION

Workplace violence in any health care organizations is the most nagging problem throughout the world. The workplace violence was reported, such kind of certain offended assault within the employees like intimidation, stalking, beating, sexual harassment and rape [1]. Similarly, Mohamed and Baig [2] state that sexual assault can ensue in many ways like non-consensual physical touching, persistent demand for dating, grabbing, hugging, stalking or staring, and supposed to chat in a sexually offensive language.

In the health care professionals, nurses are at greater risk for workplace violence. It has been reported that one third of nurses globally have experienced vicious physical behavior, bullying and sexual harassment, and about two-thirds reported nonphysical violence. A quantitative review is reported the estimated violence incidences alike, 36.4% for physical violent behavior, 66.9% nonphysical violence, 39.7% of bullying, 25% of sexual harassment, and with 32.7% reported any form of the offensive assault [3]. When nurses are being sexually harassed, they get suffered in the state of mental anguish, which may prompt the

high level of burnout, nurses' turnover and inefficient care delivery [4]. According to Willness et al. [5] sexual harassment has been reported as one of the most ethical atrocious behavior which has been facing quite a lot of women at work place. As a result of this vicious violence most of the women lost their employment and as well as long life they face their career obliteration.

### SCENARIO

This incidence of sexual harassment has been reported in a private tertiary care hospital in Pakistan. In the Operation Room (OR), a male nurse had attempted to harass a female nurse sexually. The male nurse was a leading person on the night shift and he sent to female nurse in Central Sterile Supply Room (CSSR) for checking expiries of surgical items. After a while, he also followed her in CSSR, initially he started to talk with her about assigning tasks, and then he moved very close to her and gripped her very forcefully. She supposed to do resistance, but he gripped her very relentless way, furiously shut down the door, and started the sexual fondling with her. Initially she became anxious, but later on she showed a gallant react, started to cry

\*Corresponding author: Iqra Yasin, School of Nursing and Midwifery, Aga Khan University, Karachi, Pakistan, Tel: +92 307-6823953; E-mail: iqraishan@gmail.com

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loudly and hitting the door very forcefully. Then the male nurse opened the door saying this that you should not share this with anyone otherwise it will extremely bad.

However, by this offensive incidence, the female nurse gets scared and feels threatened and disgraced. So far, she put 24 hours resign to escape out this emotional traumatic state. The manager asked the reason for resignation, but she did not tell anything. The news of her resignation was very shocking for everyone. Because she belongs to a poor family and her earning contribution was very needed for her family. Although, one of her close friend insisted her to know the reason for resignation. Initially, she hesitated, but later on she shared with her friend all about this erotic humiliation. Her friend encouraged her that you must share with manager about this incidence. So, after a lot of enforcement and courageous support of her friend, the victimize staff shared all about this incidence with the unit manager. Manager consoled her and said that give me all the details of this incident in writing form, then surely I will forward this case to higher management for taking strict action. Subsequently, this case was forwarded to the hospital legal and ethical committee. The ethical and legal committee was investigated both of them and collected all the relevant evidences regarding the incidence. On the basis of evidences and statements initially, the administration suspended to the male nurse, then finally he was terminated from the job, when it was approved that he victimized the female health care professional for his sexual enjoyment.

## ANALYSIS OF THE ISSUE IN PAKISTANI CONTEXT

In Pakistan, Islam is the dominant religion and according to Islamic perspective any kind of sexual harassment and rape is considered a sinful act. Similarly, the Holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) has forbidden certain unethical conduct that can lead to an offensive sexual abuse. Although, it also includes in Islamic religious boundaries that the people of opposite sexes must have followed certain limitations while sitting and contacting each other in any circumstances [2]. Women are most victimized person of sexual harassment in the Pakistani context. It has been asserted that women's oppressed status and less authoritarian power in the society is the main reason of a higher ratio of female sexual violence [2]. A Pakistani study illustrated that workplace sexual harassment is very frequently reported in Pakistan. Moreover, the same study enlightens that sexual exploitation devastatingly impacts on a women's life to carry out their job with gratification, most of them lost their job and even they spoil their entire career [6].

## MY POSITION

In any health care settings, sexual harassment within the co-workers is a serious mortifying offense, as well as it leads to misconduct of the organizational ethics. The organizational ethics have the key concept to evaluate the employees' right and wrong practices in the context of professional code of ethics, job honesty, organizational safety, and employees' ethical behavior towards their colleagues and consumers [7]. The organization should make sure, that any of the employees' rights should not

be destitute in the response of human respect, dignity, safety and protection of ethical and moral values. Moreover, women employees should aware of their ethical and legal rights and boundaries in terms of their professional code of conduct while working in an organization. Women are the soul of a nation so they should be provided safe and sound environment in their personal and professional state of life [8]. However, nurses are the essence of any health care organization, because nurses honestly put forward their maximum efforts to take care of sick and injured persons. They work day and night to provide maximum comfort to their patients even if they are in the state of sickness. According to the ethical and legal viewpoint, nurses need to put forward their thoughtful efforts in regard of such offensive deeds, and they should raise their voices against the confrontation of any sexual assault or sexual exploitation in any circumstances [6].

## COUNTER ARGUMENTS

In any health care organization, sexual harassment is one of the very bad-tempered and demeaning conducts by, which quite a lot of female employees were exploited routinely during their job hours. However, this disgraceful offense reveals a bitter truth that reflects a lot of negative consequences for a female in the family as well as in the society [6]. However, women should inspire to get empowerment against such offensive harassment, and encourage them to raise their voices in response to facing any kind of sexual harassment. The women can be shielded and empowering by means of several ways. They should encourage going forward for legal protest once they are being harassed by someone. They get aware about the national act against protection of workplace harassment. In terms of hinders to empowering the women, lack of awareness is the utmost reason behind to keep quiet the women after being they were harassed at the workplace. Moreover, unfortunately our society has created certain strict boxes around girls which don't allow them to speak out openly again sexual harassment in any circumstances. Therefore, sometimes the women forced to keep silent for family honor and so-called social slandering.

Roche et al. [9] any kind of workplace harassment leads to several detrimental impacts for nurses as well as organization, including decreased job satisfaction, increased mental depression, deprived quality of patient care, and loss of organizational productivity and repute. The victims of sexual assault have suffered in a lot of humiliating and emotional disturbances like feelings of disgust, guilt, aggression, disparity, lack of concentration on work, and low self-esteem.

In the context of personal ethics, it is the foremost ethical and moral right of every individual, that they should act with others to see all the aspects of human dignity, respect and safety [10]. In the light of professional ethics in above referring incidence, the male health care professional violated the personal as well as professional ethics. According to a professional code of ethics, nurses should work collaboratively and cooperatively and they should behave each other with respect and dignity. Moreover, under the umbrella of professionalism, while working together in an organization each employee is accountable for any action

which put into jeopardy the safe practices in terms to misconducting the professional code of ethics [11].

In the lenses of ethical and moral theories, I suppose, to argue that workplace virtue ethics were cleaved in the above mentioned scenario. The workplace virtue ethics refers a set of moral and ethical conducts, those who all the employees should oblige to follow them every day in any state of contact both in and out of workplace. The virtue ethics focuses the employees' behavior in term of compassion, trustworthiness, responsibility, and honesty, etc. Moreover, the workplace virtue ethics based on three main ethical stances like normative ethics, deontology and consequentialism. Normative ethics focus on the overt behavior of employees with each other, deontology see the professional obligation and code of conducts of all the employees and consequentialism mainly spotlight on all arising possible consequences based on the wrong and unethical conduct of an employee [12].

The organizational ethics are based on emerging policies and procedures that are more focus on the protection of the employees' ethical and moral rights. The organizational ethics facilitate to the organizational boards or committees for ensuring the protection of their employees' basic rights [7]. In the light of above scenario the organization should work on exploring the possible reasons, that why the male health care professionals are frequently supposed to violate the professional and ethical boundaries in attempting the sexual harassment with the co-workers. Although, the literature reveals that many of the reasons are which enforce the men for committing sexual assaulting behavior. One of the reasons is mentally frustrated as when they suffer in certain crisis of their life, then in order to get rid from such life disparities they end up doing an unacceptable act. Moreover, there are some other highlighting aspects those who spoil the males towards commencing the sexual abuse like, gender dominance, professional authority, emotional ice age, matrimonial disharmony, divorce, addiction of alcohol or any other substance, and one-sided sexual attraction towards female colleagues.

## POSSIBLE CONSEQUENCES

My viewpoint is strongly in favor of the empowerment of the nurses and all the professional women, which face any kind of workplace harassment. In fact, it has quite a lot of devastating impact on nurses' personal and professional life. It has a great demoralizing impact on the global status of the nursing profession, nurses' job satisfaction, quality of patient care and the organizational reputation. Moreover, the victims of sexual assault have endured quite a lot of humiliating and emotional disturbances like feelings of disgust, guilt, aggression, and disparity, lack of work concentration, low self-esteem and even loss of job [9].

The sexual violence has been considered a major unethical and immoral issue in a health care setting. Sexual harassment in any organization should not be acceptable regardless of the power issues or any other reasons. Hence, the organization should take very strict disciplinary actions against the employees, which violated the professional ethics in any context. Moreover, incidences of workplace violence, mainly the sexual assault with

female colleagues had reported very higher in Pakistan even though, quite a lot of incidences were not reported, documented and even published [6,13]. So every organization should be encouraged to all the female employees for reporting and highlighting any kind of unethical atrocious workplace harassment for the best of the employees, the organization and as well as for the society.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Preventions are the key steps to ultimately to reduce the incidence rate of workplace sexual harassment. The organization should arrange the workshops and training programs to educate their employees regarding religious, ethical, professional and legal boundaries which they must followed to work in that organization. Women employees should be provided special training and practices to prevent and deal with any kind of sexual violence. Moreover, they should be encouraged for immediate reporting of sexual harassment, which is most effective weapon to fight against workplace sexual harassment. The organization should establish and strictly follow the Workplace Violence Policy with Zero Tolerance. Moreover, the organization should set up an electronic alarm system to ensure the employees' safety and security during duty hours. At the time of joining, in orientation program all new welcoming employees should informed about the existing policies and procedures to notify any kind of sexual workplace harassment. They should also inform about the national legal act against workplace sexual harassment [13,14].

Regular programs and sessions should be arranged to educate the employees' for fostering the strong, respectful, positive and non-threatening relationships at the workplace and make sure that all the female employees' have knowledge, awareness and skills for handling sexual harassments [15]. The organization should follow annually appraisal survey to make sure the employees' job satisfaction and even try to explore the stress and uncertainties of employees regarding their job. The organization should encourage the female professionals to the immediate reporting of any kind of the sexual violence to prevent from everlasting harmful effects on victims, their families, organization, society and as well as for the nation [13].

## CONCLUSION

Worldwide, nursing profession is facing a lot of challenges due to high incidence of workplace violence. In any health care settings, nurses' sexual harassment is a deep-rooted and devastating issue. It causes serious humiliating impacts on victims' physical, psychological and social life and eventually they were ended up with post-traumatic stress syndrome. Nurses are the essence of any health care organization. So they have right to work with respect and dignity in a safe environment to put their maximum efforts to providing the safe and quality care to their patients. These are the key steps to reduce the threats of sexual harassment within the co-workers includes: timely reporting of incidence, education and training programs to deal the workplace sexual harassment. Moreover, the organization should establish some affirm policies, and make obligatory for

all the employees to strictly follow them, in regard to forward a step again prevention of workplace sexual harassment.

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