



Challenges at Workplace: A Case study of Non-Standard Female Workers in Retail Sector of Pakistan

Misbah Parveen¹, Muhammad Mohsin Khan², Sumaira Andleeb³

¹ MPhil Scholar Department of Sociology & Criminology University of Sargodha

² Lecturer Department of Sociology & Criminology University of Sargodha

³ PhD Scholar, Business Administration, MAJU University

ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received:	July	31, 2022
Revised:	Aug	28, 2022
Accepted:	Sep	11, 2022
Available Online:	Sep	30, 2022

Keywords: Non-Standard Employment, Harassment, Bullying, Mental Stress, Physical Fatigue, Exploitation, Wellbeing

Funding:

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

ABSTRACT

The participation of women in paid employment has been increased recently. More and more women are participating in paid employment due to the increased informal labor market. The primary goal of this qualitative research study was to explore that what were the challenges a non-standard female worker had been facing at their workplace? The researcher conducted in-depth interviews, with the help of an interview guide. The researcher keenly took care of all the ethical considerations and took field notes of the observations during the interview. The sample was collected by using purposive sampling technique by keeping in front the purpose of study. The study illustrated thematic analysis to analyze the data. Women were participating in non-standard employment in the retail sector to improve their economic status but such employments were followed by many offensive behaviors at workplaces as well. Women were facing problems such as harassment, bullying, mental stress, physical fatigue and exploitation on a daily basis. These problems were lowering their efficiency and adversely affect their wellbeing. Women's experiences of going through such problems are considered to highlight the issues and reduce them to zero.

© 2022 The Authors, Published by CISSMP. This is an Open Access article under the Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial 4.0

Corresponding Author's Email: Misbah.Parveen00@gmail.com

Citation: Parveen, Khan, & Andleeb. (2022). Challenges at Workplace: A Case study of Non-Standard Female Workers in Retail Sector of Pakistan. *Contemporary issues in social sciences and management practices*, 1(1), 24-34.

1. Introduction

Non-standard and other informal labor market has been increased in the past few decades. The participation of women in such non-standard employments has been dramatically increased especially in developing countries. Women are integrating in the paid labor market to improve their economic status. But such employments are having dark sides as well. Women working in such

employments had to encounter many problems at workplace on daily basis. The problems faced by women in retail sector of Sargodha are considered in this study. These problems are acting as a barrier to women participation in paid labor market and highly discouraging. Women working in retail sector are suffering from many negative workplace behaviors i.e. physical fatigue, mental stress, bullying, harassment, exploitation etc. Such problems must be monitored and eradicated to encourage women participation in paid employment and ensure their development.

Bullying is also one of the well-known problems faced by workers at workplaces. It includes behaviors such as intimidation, public humiliation, offensive name-calling, social exclusion, and unwanted physical contact. It has the potential to undermine the integrity and confidence of employees and lowers their efficiency. People who have been bullied report that it affects them physically and mentally, with stress, depression, and lowered self-esteem are the most common claims of victims. In extreme cases, bullied employees may require counseling or psychiatric treatment (Niedl, 1996). A survey of 3,024 employees of Scandinavian study also showed that around 27 % of workers reported that they face bullying on weekly basis, from the previous 6 months of their working lives (Agervold, 2007).

Harassment is one of the inflaming issues that are continuously being addressed in last few decades. Harassment is very common in work places and it leads to many other problems. In Finland, victims of harassment reported higher levels of anxiety, depression and aggression than other workers. The victims showed evidences of posttraumatic stress disorder (Bjorkqvist et al. 1994). In the report 27 % of municipal employees were going through extreme conflict at workplace, 16 % people reported being bullied, and 37 % of the people witnessed their colleagues being bullied (Varhama and Bjorkqvist, 2004).

The study aims at the studying the experiences of women in terms of the problems faced by them working in retail sector as a non-standard employee. Following are the objectives of the study:

- The physical and psychological problems faced by women at workplace while working in retail sector.
- Highlight the toxic behaviors that are problematic for women working in retail sector and lowers their efficiency.

Research Questions:

Following are the research questions of the study:

- What are the main problems faced by the women working in retail sector as a non-standard employee?
- What are the experiences of women facing negative behaviors at workplaces and their outcome on their productivity?

2. Literature Review

Due to increase in globalization in last few decades, the dynamics of labor market have been changed. Non-standard employments and work arrangements have received growing attention over the past decade (Barker & Christensen, 1998; Belous, 1998; Carre, Ferber, Golden, & Herzenberg, 2001). While non-standard work is attractive to some people, contingent and part-

time workers receive lower average pay and benefits, and a majority of contingent workers would prefer more permanent employment (Blank, 1998; Hipple, 2001). Temporary agency employment grew even in the tight labor markets of the late 1990s, allowing employers to avoid raising wages for regular workers in high-skilled occupations, and facilitating the use of more “risky” workers in low-skilled occupations (Houseman, 2001, Houseman, Kalleberg, & Erickcek, 2001).

There are both positive and negative aspects of such non-standard employments. The women had to encounter many negative aspects and problems at their workplace for example bullying, violence, harassment and toxicity along with different forms of organizational misbehaviors and mistreatments etc. (Baillien et al. 2008, Ackroyd 2009, Andersson and Pearson 1999, Frost 1999, Hecker 2007, Hutchinson et al. 2009, Boddy 2006, Barling et al. 2009). It is well acknowledged that facing such types of negative behaviors at workplace harm employees’ physical as well as emotional well-being. It may increase stress and anxiety including slowdown of workers efficiency as well as their commitment to the organization (Salin 2003, Hecker 2007, Schat and Kelloway 2003). Due to the harm to workers: they often quit their jobs, are unable to work properly, sometimes fall a victim of chronic and acute health issues, consider themselves trapped under continuous influence of unpleasant working environments, some people even end up taking their own lives if continuously exposed to such toxicity for extensive periods of time (Einarsen 1999, Dawn et al. 2003, Hecker 2007, Hockley 2003, Hoel et al. 2002; Mayhew et al. 2004).

Including nurses, secretaries, teachers, police officers, physiotherapists and even priests, a Swedish grounded theory study also confirmed the fact that such negative experiences at workplaces causes internal and incurable scars, and results in severe negative mental and emotional outcomes for the victims among which anxiety, sleeplessness, despair, mood swings, depression and fear are very common (Hallberg & Strandmark, 2006). Stress is also one of the problems faced by workers at workplace. It is a concept with no consistent definition (Bacchus, 2008). Stress is a highly subjective phenomenon as things that are distressful for some people can be pleasurable for others. Stress gives birth to many other physical and mental problems. It can cause physiological changes to the body as well as changes in behavior, mood, and emotions. Although stress is more likely to be associated with unpleasant threats, it is not always harmful, since increased stress can result in increased productivity sometimes as well (Gardiner & Kosmitzki 2011).

Negative behaviors at workplaces give birth to significant occupational health and safety risks for employers all over the world. There are considerable international evidences to confirm the facts that they stifle productivity and jeopardize workers physical health and emotional wellbeing, undermine family life, and it also destroys careers of workers and productive relationships at workplace (e.g., Hockley 2003, Janson et al. 2009, Duffy and Sperry 2007, Strandmark and Hallberg 2006). The experiencing sexual harassment and its leading harms are well evident in literature. Sexual harassment leads to feelings of dissatisfaction. It reduces job

satisfaction, feelings of job competence, and organizational commitment, along with heightening job stress, work withdrawal, and intentions to quit the job (Barling, Rogers, Kelloway, 2001).

The outcomes of harassment extend beyond the workplace itself as reflected in reductions in the physical and emotional well-being of sexual harassment survivors (Barling et al., 2001; Gruber & Bjorn, 1982; Holland et al., 2016; Nielsen et al., 2010). Evidence indicates that going through harassment in the workplace by a supervisor or another person in a position of power can potentially have more harmful consequences for victims than being harassed by someone without the power imbalance (Hershcovis and Barling 2010). Sexual harassment impedes women's careers by introducing financial stress and interfering with career attainment, often due to switching jobs to escape such treatment (McLaughlin, Uggen, & Blackstone, 2017).

3.0 Methodology of the study

In order to address the problems experienced by women working in retail sector, qualitative research methodology was adopted to have a deep insight into their experiences of offensive behaviors at workplaces. Because the problems such as stress and harassment are subjective in nature so phenomenology was applied as research design to have a deeper insight into the subjective experiences of women (Bacchus, 2008). In-depth interviews of 8 participants were conducted by the researcher to study the lived experiences of suffering offensive behaviors at workplaces. Epistemologically the research is embedded in interpretivism approach because it keeps in front the narratives of the participants taking part in the study.

The data was collected through in-depth interviewing participants. The data was analyzed by thematic analysis that is one of the most frequently used qualitative data analysis techniques. The coding procedure followed three stages. At beginning, the selective coding was done to make sense of the data and condense it into preliminary categories. The by axial coding, the links were generated and the codes were connected and categorized. At the final stage, the data was organized and analyzed through selective coding.

4.0 Results

Following are the themes and their analysis according to the data collected and analyzed through coding:

Negative Behaviors at Workplace

This theme illustrates that the negative impacts of non-standard employment on the participants. What consequences and forms of challenges participants have to go through because of working in retail sector. Keeping in view this themes, five main groups are mentioned below, which were the impacts of cyber bullying as they are; physical fatigue, mental stress, exploitation and harassment.

Physical Fatigue:

Most of the workers were going through physical fatigue because their job was breathtaking. Sometimes they have to take medical assistance to keep healthy and continue

working.

A participant said:

“... Long working hours and continuous standing creates cramps in my legs...”

(Participant 05)

Another participant said with a heavy voice:

“... I can't stand for so long but I have to... My body often goes numb because of that...”

(Participant 01)

Another participant stated with a sigh:

“... On busy days, the work is overloaded... I have to take pain killer drugs...” (Participant

02)

After taking a little pause she sighed and said:

“... Sometimes I got dizzy because of weakness at work and my eyes got teary because I have no other option...” (Participant 07)

Mental Stress:

Non-standard job doesn't only have impact on person's life style or affect the employee physically. The temporary nature of job also gives stress, mental illness and anxiety. Every participant reported that they had to go through stress and anxiety because of long working hours. Busy days were more troublesome than the regular ones.

As one of the participants said:

“...What could one feel at that time, hopeless and helpless... it was unbearable... but bared perfectly... not being able to complaint is haunting sometimes... but in the end, its all the part of job...” (Participant 01)

Another participant mentioned:

“... Sometimes it becomes very difficult to maintain your confidence because of insecurity of job... It is stressful though...” (Participant 03)

Another participant reported:

“... I feel like shouting on the inside and calm on the outside...” (Participant 05)

A participant stated:

“... The working area is indeed a working area... not a home that gives you security...”

(Participant 04)

Bullying:

Some of the participants also reported that they even have to go through bullying at work place. Some of the senior persons had created monopoly at the working area. The participants had to bear their dirty politics. As one of the participants said:

“... I felt like a suspect at the time... They (co-workers) are continuously searching for an opportunity to supersede you... They wanted to see you going down... The working area sometimes feels just like a crime scene (Smile)... You are always supposed to behave well and act like a machine... Not allowed to complain... Not even a genuine one...”

(Participant 05)

Another participant said:

“... Some senior members bully the junior one... I am a victim too...” (Participant 07)

A participant stated:

“... It’s a common thing for new workers to go through bullying at first...” (Participant 08)

Exploitation:

While addressing the negative aspects of the experiences of participants working in non-standard employment, many of them claimed some degree of exploitation. 4 out of 8 participants had faced exploitation and preferences of male workers over them. As one of the participants said:

“... Male workers are paid more than female workers...” (Participant 02)

Another participant said:

“... Male workers are paid on time and we have to wait...” (Participant 04)

A participant mentioned in her interview:

“... Women are scolded more than men if something goes wrong...” (Participant 06)

Harassment:

It is one of the common problems faced by all of the participants. All of the 8 participants claimed that they had experience some form of harassment at the work area or the way to work. They all claimed that they had faced rude and abusive behavior of customers as well. As one of the participants said:

“... They pass the comments knowing nothing about our situation... They just know saying, not understanding... But we can’t do anything so we just let it pass... Dropping your ears to such shits doesn’t worth your ears... So welcome positivity with open arms and kick the negativity far away... (She laughed out loud) ...” (Participant 02)

A participant said with a smile:

“... They are going to stare you from head to toe and then evaluate your body proportions...” (Participant 05)

Another participant said:

“... They pass the comments knowing nothing about our situation... They just know saying, not understanding... But we can’t do anything so we just let it pass... Putting your ears to such shits doesn’t worth your ears... So welcome positivity with open arms and kick the negativity far away... (She laughed out loud) ...” (Participant 03)

With wrinkles on her head one of the participants said:

“... They just pass some abusive comments and go. They ruin all of my day. The feeling of being helplessness at that time haunts me inside...” (Participant 07)

5. Summary and conclusion

The research studies the offensive behavior that the women had to experience while working in the retail sector as a non-standard worker. Women had to bear a lot of sufferings and problems to be a part of paid employment. The participants of the study elaborated a lot of abusive behaviors that they encounter on daily basis on the workplaces. They highlighted the problems of physical fatigue, mental stress, long working hours, harassment, bullying and exploitation. These

were very common problems and they were bringing many negative outcomes to the physical and mental wellbeing of the participants. Harassment was one the behavior that every participant had gone through on almost daily basis. These problems are becoming a source of reduced efficiency and productivity of the participants. Women were continuously struggling to somehow tackle such problems and not bothered by them but this is not the solution. These problems must be addressed and removed from the very roots. Such problems are bringing feelings of anxiety, stress and fear in the participants. Women must be provided with a safe environment at the workplace to increase their productivity and their participation in paid employment must be encouraged.

Recommendations

It is well documented that the participation of women in any kind of paid employment is important in their development and reduce gender-based disparities. Women participation in labor market is a source of reduction in dependencies and a step towards their empowerment. By keeping in front, the experiences of women and findings of the study followings are some of the recommendations:

- The participation of women must be encouraged and all the hindrances in forms of offensive workplace behaviors must be eradicated.
- Harassment is increasing day by day and it creates many other psychological imbalances. Harassment in all of its types must be considered strictly and should be removed.
- Exploitation should be discouraged to ensure gender equality. Everyone should be treated equally despite of gender or any other trait.
- All kind of bullying, either it comes from supervisor or anyone in power must be monitored and lowered to zero to avoid all of its psychological outcomes as well.

Authors Contribution

Misbah Parveen: Conceived the presented idea and developed the theory literature search, study design, drafting and data analysis

Muhammad Mohsin Khan: Literature search, data collection,

Sumaira Andleeb: Methodology, proofreading and editing

Conflict of Interests/Disclosures

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest w.r.t this article's research, authorship, and/or publication.

References

Ackroyd, S. (2009). Even More Misbehaviour? Presentation at The Centre of Management and Organisation Studies. Sydney: University of Technology.

Agervold, M. (2007). Bullying at work. A discussion of definitions and prevalence, based on an empirical study. *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology*, 48, 161–172.

- Andersson, L. M., & Pearson, C. M. (1999). Tit for tat? The spiralling effect of incivility in the workplace. *Academy of Management Review*, 24(43), 452–471.
- Bacchus, D. (2008). Coping with work-related stress: A study of the use of coping resources among professional Black women. *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Diversity in Social Work*, 77(1), 60-81.
- Baillien, E., Neyens, I., & De Witte, H. (2008). Organizational, team related and job related risk factors for bullying, violence and sexual harassment in the workplace: a qualitative study. *International Journal of Organisational Behaviour*, 13(2), 132–146.
- Barker, K., & Christensen, K. (Eds.). (1998). *Contingent work: American employment relations in transition*. Ithaca, NY: ILR Press.
- Barling, J. A., Rogers, G., & Kelloway, E. K. (2001). Behind closed doors: In-home workers' experience of sexual harassment and workplace violence. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 6, 255–269. <https://doi.org/10.1037/1076-8998.6.3.255>
- Barling, J., Dupré, K. E., & Kelloway, E. K. (2009). Predicting workplace aggression and violence. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 60(1), 671–92.
- Barling, J., Dupré, K. E., & Kelloway, E. K. (2009). Predicting workplace aggression and violence. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 60(1), 671–92.
- Belous, R. S. (1998). The rise of the contingent workforce: growth of temporary, part-time, and subcontracted employment. *Looking Ahead*, 19(1), 2–24.
- Bjorkvist, K., Osterman, K., & Hjelt-Back, M. (1994). Aggression among university employees. *Aggressive Behaviour*, 20, 173–184.
- Blank, R. (1998). Contingent work in a changing labor market. In R. Freeman, & P. Gottschalk (Eds.), *Generating jobs: How to increase demand for less-skilled workers* (pp. 258–294). New York: Sage.
- Boddy, C. R. (2006). The dark side of management decisions: organisational psychopaths. *Management decisions*, 44(10), 1461–1475.
- Carre, F., Ferber, M., Golden, L., & Herzberg, S. (Eds.). (2001). *Nonstandard work: The nature and challenges of emerging employment arrangements*. Champaign, IL: Industrial Relations Research Association.
- Chan, D. K.-S., Chow, S. Y., Lam, C. B., & Cheung, S. F. (2008). Examining the job-related, psychological, and physical outcomes of workplace sexual harassment: A meta-analytic review. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 32, 362–376. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-6402.2008.00451.x>

- Dawn, J., Cowie, H., & Ananiadou, K. (2003). Perceptions and experience of workplace bullying in five different working populations. *Aggressive Behavior*, 29(6), 489–496.
- Duffy, M., & Sperry, L. (2007). Workplace mobbing: individual and family health consequences. *The Family Journal*, 15(4), 398–404.
- Einarsen, S. (1999). The nature and causes of bullying at work. *International Journal of Manpower*, 20(1/2), 16–27.
- Frost, P. J. (1999). Why compassion counts! *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 8(2), 127–133.
- Gardiner, H. W., & Kosmitzki, C. (2011). *Lives across cultures: Cross-cultural human development* (5th ed.). New York, NY: Allyn & Bacon.
- Gettman, H. J., & Gelfand, M. J. (2007). When the customer shouldn't be king: Antecedents and consequences of sexual harassment by clients and customers. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 92, 757–770. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.92.3.757>
- Gruber, J. E., & Bjorn, L. (1982). Blue-collar blues: The sexual harassment of women autoworkers. *Work and Occupations*, 9, 271–298. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2F0730888482009003002>
- Hallberg, L. R.-M., & Strandmark, M. K. (2006). Health consequences of workplace bullying: experiences from the perspective of employees in the public service sector. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-being*, 1(2), 109–119.
- Hecker, T. E. (2007). Workplace mobbing: a discussion for librarians. *Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 33(4), 439–445.
- Hecker, T. E. (2007). Workplace mobbing: a discussion for librarians. *Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 33(4), 439–445.
- Hecker, T. E. (2007). Workplace mobbing: a discussion for librarians. *Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 33(4), 439–445.
- Herscovis, M. Sandy and Julian Barling. 2010. “Towards a multi-foci approach to workplace aggression: A meta-analytic review of outcomes from different perpetrators.” *Journal of Organizational Behavior*. January. Vol. 31, no. 1. p. 24–44.
- Hipple, S. (2001). Contingent work in the late 1990s. *Monthly Labor Review*, 123(3), 3–27
- Hockley, C. (2003). The impact of workplace violence on third party victims: a mental health perspective. *Australian e-Journal for the Advancement of Mental Health*, 2(2), 108–118.
- Hockley, C. (2003). The impact of workplace violence on third party victims: a mental health perspective. *Australian e-Journal for the Advancement of Mental Health*, 2(2), 108–118.

- Hoel, H., Zapf, D., & Cooper, C. (2002). Workplace bullying and stress. *Research in Occupational Stress and Well Being*, 2(1), 293–333.
- Holland, K. J., Rabelo, V. C., Gustafson, A. M., Seabrook, R. C., & Cortina, L. M. (2016). Sexual harassment against men: Examining the roles of feminist activism, sexuality, and organizational context. *Psychology of Men & Masculinity*, 17(1), 17–29. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0039151>
- Houseman, S. (2001). Why employers use flexible staffing arrangements: evidence from an employer survey. *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, 55, 149–170.
- Houseman, S., Kalleberg, A., & Erickcek, G. (2001). The role of temporary help employment in tight labor markets. Kalamazoo, MI: Upjohn Institute Working Paper No. 01–73.
- Hutchinson, M., Vickers, M. H., Jackson, D., & Wilkes, L. (2009). The worse you behave, the more you seem to be rewarded! Bullying in nursing as organizational corruption. *Employee Responsibilities and Rights Journal*, 21(3), 213–230.
- Janson, G. R., Carney, J. V., Hazler, R. J., & Oh, I. (2009). Bystanders' reactions to witnessing repetitive abuse experiences. *Journal of Counselling and Development*, 87(3), 319–326.
- Mayhew, C., McCarthy, P., Chappell, D., Quinlan, M., Barker, M., & Sheehan, M. (2004). Measuring the extent of impact from occupational violence and bullying on traumatised workers. *Employee Responsibilities and Rights Journal*, 16(3), 117–134.
- Mueller, C. W., De Coster, S., & Estes, S. B. (2001). Sexual harassment in the workplace: Unintended consequences of modern social control in organizations. *Work and Occupations*, 28, 411–446. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2F0730888401028004003>
- Niedl, K. (1996). Mobbing and well-being. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 5, 239 – 249.
- Nielsen, M. B., Bjorkelo, B., Notelaers, G., & Einarsen, S. (2010). Sexual harassment: Prevalence, outcomes, and gender differences assessed by three different estimation methods. *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma*, 19, 252–274. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10926771003705056>
- Salin, D. (2003a). Bullying and organisational politics in competitive and rapidly changing work environments. *International Journal of Management and Decision Making*, 4, 35–46.
- Schat, A. C. H., & Kelloway, E. K. (2003). Reducing the adverse consequences of workplace aggression and violence: the buffering effects of organizational support. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 8(2), 110–122.

- Strandmark, K. M., & Hallberg, L. R.-M. (2006). Health consequences of workplace bullying: experiences of employees in the public service sector. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Wellbeing*, 1, 109–119.
- Varhama, L. M., & Bjorkqvist, K. (2004). Conflicts, workplace bullying and burnout: problems among municipal employees. *Psychological Reports*, 94, 116–124.
- Willness, C. R., Steel, P., & Lee, K. (2007). A meta-analysis of the antecedents and consequences of workplace sexual harassment. *Personnel Psychology*, 60, 127–162. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1744-6570.2007.00067.x>