



Equity And Accountability: Harassment And Electronic Crimes at Workplace in Pakistan, Its Physio-Psychological Effect on Victims, And Role of Legislative Initiatives to Prevent the Curse

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ABSTRACT

Electronic crimes, such as cyberbullying are major contributors to workplace harassment in Pakistan, affecting the mental and physical health of victims. Such crimes create a toxic work environment, reducing productivity. Harassment in Pakistan is a societal issue that, with its deep-rooted cultural, institutional, and legislative difficulties, is ever-prevalent. This has not only undermined the self-respect and well-being of victims but also has caused deep physio-psychological effects. Individuals of workplace harassment experience a series of physical as well as psychological symptoms such as anxiety, stress-related disorders, depression, and weakened self-esteem leading to declined job satisfaction, increased absenteeism, and lower performance causing great

challenges for individuals and organizations. The socio-cultural perspective of Pakistan, with its gender norms and ordered structures, worsens the problem, especially for women and downgraded groups. The harassment incidents are usually underreported due to social humiliation, insufficient support systems, and fear of revenge. Also, lack of training and awareness on workplace conduct and the rights of workers cause a culture of liberty for criminals. To address the harassment challenges, Pakistan has taken legislative initiatives like the Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act, of 2010. The Act supports handling complaints and sets out punishments for culprits of harassment. However, despite the legislative measures, and awareness programs the effective execution/implementation of laws remained a major challenge due to which harassment is rapidly prevailing in Pakistani society, particularly targeting women and poor people populations. Most organizations lack the essential infrastructure and/or commitment to completely obey these guidelines. Therefore, there is a need for continuous training and education to nurture a workplace culture that upholds equality and respect. Supporting networks for the victims and cybercrime awareness campaigns can play an important role in inspiring more individuals to come forward for justice. Enhancing the capacity of institutions to implement these laws, promoting gender-sensitive training, and fostering an inclusive workplace culture is crucial for mitigating the physio-psychological impacts of harassment and ensuring a safe and equitable work environment for all employees. Existing legislation addresses cybercrime and harassment, but stronger policies are needed to protect workers better. This paper explores the impact of electronic crimes on workplace harassment and legislative efforts to address these issues.

Keywords: Harassment, physio-psychological effects, cybercrime, workplaces, legislative initiatives.

1. INTRODUCTION

Electronic crimes have now emerged as a significant factor in the harassment of employees at workplaces in Pakistan, and thus have added to the psychological and physiological effects on the victims. Cyberbullying, online stalking, and other types of electronic harassment have become more common with the rapid growth of technology, creating new challenges for both employees and

employers. Harassment, in its numerous forms and shapes, has become a substantial societal issue in Pakistan, perpetuating inequalities and infringing upon individuals' rights to safety and dignity. This problem is deeply entrenched in cultural norms, institutional shortcomings, and power imbalances, and it occurs in workplaces, public areas, and online environments, disproportionately impacting women and marginalized groups. Despite legislative measures and social awareness campaigns, the problem persists, highlighting the

urgent need for comprehensive strategies to combat it effectively [1-2]. Gender inequality has long been entrenched in Pakistan's patriarchal society, confining women to subordinate roles and perpetuating power imbalances. The patriarchal framework and cultural norms that prioritize male dominance and control foster an environment conducive to various forms of harassment, including physical assault, verbal abuse, coercion, and sexual violence. These behaviors not only violate fundamental human rights but also perpetuate cycles of fear, silence, and impunity, thereby impeding progress toward gender equality and social justice. Pakistan has established legal frameworks aimed at addressing the pervasive issue of harassment. A significant measure in this effort is the Protection against Harassment of Women at Workplace Act, of 2010. However, the effectiveness of these legal measures is compromised by implementation gaps, low awareness, and cultural barriers, leaving many victims without a voice or recourse [3-5]. The rise of technology has worsened the problem, with cyber harassment emerging as a widespread and insidious form of abuse ever recorded [6]. Online platforms provide perpetrators with anonymity and a broad reach, enabling behaviors such as cyberbullying, revenge porn, and online stalking, especially in recent years [7]. Comprehensive legislative reforms and digital literacy initiatives are essential, as the lack of robust digital laws and enforcement mechanisms makes individuals, particularly women and marginalized communities, more vulnerable in the digital realm. Electronic crimes not

only result in the mental and emotional degradation of victims but describe the complicated nature of harassment, including workplace, cyber, and street, perspectives, and discover its effect on persons' mental health as well as their physical well-being requirement of wide-ranging strategies, such as support services, education, and jurisdictional changes, to address the root reasons and advance an inclusive society that values each person equally.

2. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Harassment in Pakistan is deeply rooted in the country's cultural and societal framework, with origins that trace back centuries. The issue has been worsened by gender inequality, power imbalances, and the absence of effective legal remedies, fostering a culture of silence and impunity for offenders. Traditional norms and patriarchal structures significantly influence attitudes towards harassment, often downplaying its severity and placing the responsibility on the victims. Pakistan's societal dynamics are fundamentally shaped by gender inequality, as women have historically been sidelined and denied equal rights and opportunities [9]. Rigid gender roles dictated by patriarchal conventions condemn women to subservient roles in both the public and private domains [6]. In addition to restricting women's autonomy and agency, this power disparity promotes a culture of male entitlement and domination in which harassment is frequently accepted as

innocuous behavior [10-11]. The absence of robust legal remedies exacerbates the problem, as current laws frequently fall short of offering sufficient protection for harassment victims [12]. Although Pakistan has enacted laws such as the Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act of 2010 and the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act of 2016, the enforcement mechanisms are weak, allowing perpetrators to often evade punishment [13-14]. The culture of impunity not only emboldens harassers but also deters victims from seeking justice, fearing retribution or social stigma. It might be difficult for victims to come forward and report abuse when there is a culture of silence surrounding harassment due to traditional conventions. Social stigmas, anxiety about being shunned, and worries about ruining one's reputation frequently deter people from coming forward, which feeds the cycle of abuse and silence [15-17].

3. LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Pakistan has made significant efforts to combat harassment through legislative measures and policies designed to protect individuals from various forms of abuse and discrimination [16]. Two key legislative enactments addressing

this issue are the Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act 2010 and the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act 2016. The Protection Against Harassment of Women in the Workplace Act of 2010 is a landmark piece of legislation that aims to establish a legal framework for addressing workplace harassment [14]. This statute requires employers to create internal mechanisms for handling complaints, including the formation of investigation committees, and provides a broad definition of harassment. To ensure a safer and more welcoming workplace environment for women, it outlines penalties for violations, including fines and imprisonment [15-16]. Similarly, the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act 2016 introduced significant changes to Pakistan's Penal Code to address various forms of harassment and violence against women (see Table 1). These amendments expanded the definition of sexual harassment, introduced stricter penalties for offenses such as stalking and cyber-harassment, and established special courts to expedite trials related to gender-based violence [17-18]. By enhancing legal protections and increasing penalties for offenders, these amendments aim to deter harassment and improve access to justice for victims [19].

Table 1: Legal Framework for Harassment in Pakistan

Aspect	Reference	Details
Workplace Harassment Act, 2010.	[20]	The Act provides a framework to address and prevent harassment at workplaces.
Pakistan Penal Code (PPC)	[21]	PPC includes numerous provisions associated with harassment i.e.sections on assault, sexual harassment, and intimidation.
Constitutional Provisions	[23]	This Constitution guarantees essential rights i.e. non-discrimination the right to equality and dignity, before the law.
Domestic Violence Act, 2012	[24]	It includes provisions to protect individuals from harassment and abuse within domestic settings.
Cyber Harassment Act, 2016	[25]	This Act helps to prevent cyber harassment cases like online stalking, sending private images, and offensive communication.
Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2010	[26]	This revision introduced special provisions associated with harassment and stalking, improving the legal framework to tackle these issues effectively.
Sexual Harassment in Educational Institutions	[27]	The HEC has issued a sound policy to protect against sexual harassment in higher education institutions.
Human Rights Commission of Pakistan	[28]	The HRCMP monitors and advocates against harassment, and provides resources and support to victims.

Despite these legislative efforts, there remain significant gaps in the implementation and enforcement of Pakistan's anti-harassment laws. A lack of awareness about legal rights and available remedies, coupled with cultural norms that discourage reporting, contributes to a culture of underreporting and impunity for offenders [28]. Additionally, challenges such as inadequate funding, judicial delays, and corruption hinder the effectiveness of existing legal mechanisms in addressing harassment [28].

Moreover, while the legal framework primarily focuses on protecting women from harassment, other marginalized groups including men, transgender individuals, and persons with disabilities face unique challenges and barriers in accessing justice. The absence of inclusive policies and support services further exacerbates their vulnerability to harassment and discrimination [27-28].

Ongoing initiatives are required to raise awareness, strengthen the legal framework for preventing harassment, and promote accountability at all societal levels to address these

shortcomings. Civil society organizations, legal experts, and government authorities must collaborate to ensure prompt and impartial investigations and prosecutions of harassment cases, streamline complaint mechanisms, and provide training on anti-harassment laws [28]. Pakistan has made significant efforts to combat harassment through legislative measures and policies designed to protect individuals from various forms of abuse and discrimination [29]. Two key legislative enactments addressing this issue are the protection against harassment of Women at the Workplace Act 2010 and the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act 2016 [26-28].

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4. WORKPLACE HARASSMENT

In Workplace harassment is a significant and prevalent issue in Pakistan, affecting a considerable number of individuals, particularly women, who face various forms of abuse, discrimination, and intimidation in their professional environments. Due to the widespread nature of harassment, the workplace—which ideally should be a place of productivity, respect, and collaboration—often becomes a place of antagonism and exploitation [28].

One of the primary factors contributing to the prevalence of workplace harassment in Pakistan is the lack of awareness among employees regarding their rights and avenues for recourse. Many individuals, especially those from marginalized communities, are either unaware of the legal protections available to them or feel powerless to challenge abusive behavior due to societal norms that prioritize hierarchy and authority [30, 31].

Moreover, insufficient grievance procedures exacerbate the problem by failing to provide adequate support and redress for those who have been harassed. Many businesses and

organizations lack robust policies and processes for addressing harassment complaints, which erodes public confidence in the system and deters victims from reporting incidents [32].

Fear of retaliation is another significant barrier to reporting workplace harassment in Pakistan. Victims may be reluctant to speak out against their harassers due to fears of losing their jobs, facing further abuse, or damaging their professional reputation. The power dynamics inherent in many workplaces on globe, where perpetrators may hold positions of authority or influence, further compound this fear and discourage individuals from seeking justice [34].

This creates a vicious cycle of harassment in Pakistani workplaces, where abusive behavior remains unchecked and perpetrators face few consequences for their actions due to underreporting and a culture of impunity. This not only perpetuates a toxic work environment but also undermines workers' productivity and well-being, especially for women who are more likely than men to experience harassment due to their gender [35].

To effectively address workplace harassment, concerted efforts are required to raise awareness about employees' rights, establish robust grievance mechanisms, and promote a culture of zero tolerance for harassment in all workplaces. Training programs on harassment prevention and response should be mandatory for both employers and employees, and support

services should be readily available to victims who come forward with their experiences [34]. Additionally, it is imperative to reinforce legal reforms and enforcement procedures to ensure that perpetrators are held accountable and that victims receive prompt and impartial justice. It is the responsibility of businesses and organizations to create safe, inclusive workplaces free from harassment and discrimination, where all workers are treated with respect and dignity [36].

5. EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Harassment in educational institutions is a pressing concern in Pakistan, impacting students, teachers, and staff members across all levels of the education system. Instances of bullying, sexual harassment, and cyberbullying are widespread, creating a hostile learning environment that undermines academic achievement and personal development [37].

In Pakistani schools and universities, bullying is a common kind of harassment in which students are frequently the targets of peer social exclusion, physical assault, and verbal abuse. Bullying victims may suffer from low self-esteem, poor academic performance, and general health as a result of bullying conduct [38]. Despite initiatives to combat bullying, such as awareness programs and anti-bullying legislation, many educational institutions find it difficult to stop bullying before it starts and to deal with

it when it does, leaving students open to more abuse [27].

Sexual harassment is another pervasive issue in Pakistani educational institutions, affecting students, teachers, and staff members alike. Instances of unwanted advances, inappropriate comments, and physical harassment are commonly reported, creating an unsafe and intimidating environment for victims. The power dynamics inherent in educational settings, where teachers and administrators hold authority over students, can exacerbate the problem by enabling perpetrators to exploit their positions of power and influence [30].

Cyberbullying, facilitated by the widespread use of digital technology and social media platforms, has emerged as a significant threat to students' safety and well-being in Pakistani educational institutions [29-32]. Online harassment, including trolling, cyberstalking, and the dissemination of harmful content, can have serious consequences for victims, leading to psychological distress, social isolation, and academic disengagement. Despite efforts to promote digital literacy and cyber safety, many students remain vulnerable to online harassment due to a lack of awareness and inadequate support systems [34].

In addition to undermining students' rights to a secure and encouraging learning environment, the pervasiveness of harassment in educational institutions impedes both their academic and personal growth.

Harassment victims may struggle with anxiety, despair, and low self-esteem, which can make them less motivated and involved in school activities [39]. Furthermore, students who are afraid of harassment may refrain from asking for assistance or from taking part in extracurricular activities, which would isolate them even more from their peers and reduce their social and academic chances [42-43].

To address harassment in educational institutions effectively, comprehensive strategies are needed to promote a culture of respect, inclusion, and accountability. Schools and colleges must implement clear policies and procedures for preventing and responding to incidents of harassment, including training programs for staff and students on recognizing and addressing abusive behavior [40-41]. Additionally, support services should be readily available to victims, providing them with the resources and assistance they need to report harassment and access appropriate interventions [44].

6. PUBLIC SPACES

Public spaces in Pakistan, such as streets, markets, and transportation hubs, are plagued by a persistent issue of harassment, presenting significant challenges to the safety and well-being of women and marginalized groups. Instances of catcalling, groping, and verbal abuse are regrettably common, undermining individuals' sense of security and restricting their mobility

and access to essential services [36-38]. Women, in particular, face disproportionate levels of harassment in public spaces. As they go about their daily routines—whether running errands, taking a walk, or commuting to work—they are frequently exposed to risks affecting both their physical and mental safety. The normalization of street harassment has led women to adopt a culture of vigilance and dread, often altering their behavior and attire to avoid unwanted attention or harassment [44-45].

Socially marginalized groups, including ethnic minorities, transgender individuals, and people with disabilities, are more likely to encounter harassment and discrimination in public settings. This exacerbates their marginalization and social exclusion. Hate crimes and targeted violence against these groups often remain unpunished, perpetuating cycles of injustice and oppression [40]. The widespread harassment in public spaces not only infringes upon individuals' rights to safety and dignity but also hinders their full participation in public life and access to essential services. Women and marginalized groups may feel compelled to restrict their movements or avoid certain areas, thereby reinforcing patterns of segregation and exclusion in urban environments [43].

Addressing harassment in public spaces requires a comprehensive strategy that encompasses community-based interventions, awareness-raising

efforts, and legislative measures. Strengthening legal safeguards and enforcement mechanisms is crucial to ensure that victims receive justice and support while holding offenders accountable [44].

Public awareness campaigns play a critical role in challenging cultural norms and beliefs that perpetuate victim-blaming and harassment. Such efforts are vital for changing cultural narratives and empowering individuals to speak out against harassment, promoting respect, consent, and gender equality.

Community-based interventions, such as bystander intervention training and neighborhood watch programs, are effective in encouraging residents to take action against harassment. By fostering collaboration and solidarity among community members, these initiatives contribute to making public spaces safer for everyone [42-46].

7. ONLINE HARASSMENT

The expansion of digital platforms in Pakistan has resulted in a troubling increase in online harassment. Social media, messaging applications, and online forums have become fertile ground for abusive conduct [47]. Cyberbullying, trolling, and the non-consensual dissemination of personal information represent significant threats to individuals' safety, privacy, and well-being, underscoring the urgent need for effective strategies to address online harassment.

In Pakistan, cyberbullying—defined as

the use of electronic communication to harass, threaten, or intimidate individuals is a prevalent form of online abuse. Victims of cyberbullying may endure targeted harassment, threats, or disparaging comments through messaging apps, social networking sites, or online forums. The anonymity provided by online platforms often emboldens perpetrators, leading to psychological distress, social isolation, and even self-harm among victims [48-49].

Trolling is another prevalent form of online harassment, characterized by deliberate attempts to offend or provoke individuals by making insulting or inflammatory remarks. Trolls may target individuals based on their gender, race, religion, or political beliefs, utilizing internet platforms to spread hate speech, falsehoods, and hostility. The cumulative impact of trolling can be profoundly detrimental, not only to individual victims but also to the broader online community, as it perpetuates a culture of toxicity and division. The non-consensual sharing of personal information, often referred to as doxxing, presents a severe threat to individuals' privacy and safety online. Perpetrators may exploit sensitive personal details, such as home addresses, phone numbers, or intimate photographs, to harass, blackmail, or intimidate their victims. The rise in doxxing incidents in Pakistan highlights the need for enhanced legal protections and enforcement mechanisms to prevent the

unauthorized dissemination of personal information [38-1].

Online harassment adversely affects individuals' mental health, social relationships, and career prospects, in addition to its digital repercussions. Victims may experience anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which can diminish their self-esteem, productivity, and overall quality of life. Moreover, the fear of online harassment may limit individuals' engagement with social media, online forums, and other digital spaces [49-50].

To effectively tackle online harassment, policymakers, technology companies, civil society organizations, and online communities must collaborate. Legislative reforms should prioritize the protection of online freedoms and rights, including freedom of speech, privacy, and protection from harassment [50]. Technology companies must implement robust measures to prevent and address online harassment, such as content moderation, user reporting systems, and algorithmic interventions to detect and eliminate abusive content.

Public awareness campaigns are vital for educating individuals about online safety, digital literacy, and responsible online behavior. By promoting positive online norms and encouraging bystander intervention, these campaigns empower individuals to recognize and address online harassment effectively. Additionally, community-based support networks

and helplines can provide victims with essential resources and assistance, helping them navigate the digital landscape safely and seek redress for their experiences [48].

8. CULTURAL NORMS AND STIGMA

In Pakistan, cultural norms and societal attitudes often contribute to the normalization of harassment and the stigmatization of victims, which creates significant obstacles to addressing the issue effectively. Practices such as victim-blaming, slut-shaming, and the trivialization of harassment perpetuate a cycle of abuse and impunity, undermining efforts to foster safer environments for individuals of all genders, ethnicities, and social statuses [51-52]. Victim-blaming, which transfers the burden of proof from the harasser to the victim, is a prevalent cultural practice that supports harassment. Victims of harassment often face undue scrutiny, judgment, and denial due to social norms that imply their demeanor, attire, or actions somehow invited or provoked the abuse. This mindset not only absolves offenders of responsibility but also silences victims, making it more challenging for them to seek help or justice [52]. Another damaging societal standard is slut-shaming, which involves labeling individuals—particularly women—as immoral or unattractive based on their perceived sexual behavior or dress sense. Victims of harassment may encounter slut-

shaming regardless of their actual behavior or attire, exacerbating their trauma and marginalization. The stigmatization of women who report harassment reinforces patriarchal norms that prioritize male authority and control over female autonomy and agency [53].

The trivialization of harassment is also widespread in Pakistani society, where incidents of abuse are often minimized or dismissed as insignificant. Remarks such as "boys will be boys" or "she was asking for it" downplay the severity of harassment and reinforce harmful gender stereotypes, perpetuating a culture of entitlement and impunity among perpetrators. By normalizing abusive behavior and trivializing its impact, society perpetuates a cycle of abuse that allows harassment to persist unchecked [53]. The stigma associated with harassment further complicates efforts to address the issue effectively, as victims may fear social ostracism, retaliation, or additional victimization if they come forward. The shame and embarrassment of being a harassment victim can deter individuals from seeking support or reporting abuse, resulting in underreporting and a culture of silence that perpetuates impunity for perpetrators [52-53]. To combat these cultural norms and the stigma surrounding harassment, concerted efforts are required to promote gender equality, respect for diversity, and zero tolerance for abuse across all societal sectors. Public awareness campaigns, educational

programs, and community-based interventions can all contribute to dispelling negative preconceptions, enhancing understanding of harassment's effects, and empowering individuals to report abuse [53].

9. IMPACT ON MENTAL HEALTH

Harassment, whether encountered in the workplace, educational settings, public environments, or online, can result in profound and enduring psychological effects on its victims, leading to a spectrum of mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and various other trauma-related conditions. The pervasive and insidious nature of harassment can undermine victims' sense of safety, autonomy, and self-worth, leaving enduring marks on their mental and emotional well-being [51-53]. A prevalent psychological impact of harassment is anxiety, which is marked by persistent feelings of fear, worry, and apprehension. Victims may experience elevated levels of anxiety due to the continual threat of abuse and the unpredictability of when or where it may occur. This pervasive anxiety can substantially disrupt individuals' daily functioning, affecting their concentration, sleep, and engagement in social activities.

Depression is another common mental health condition among those who experience harassment, characterized by persistent feelings of melancholy, hopelessness, and despair. Being targeted, demeaned, or excluded can erode a victim's sense of self-worth, leading to feelings of isolation, estrangement, and despair. Untreated

depression can adversely affect personal relationships, overall quality of life, and physical health [54]. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a particularly severe psychological consequence of harassment, often triggered by exposure to traumatic events or situations. Victims of harassment may suffer from intrusive thoughts, flashbacks, nightmares, and hyperarousal, among other PTSD symptoms, which can significantly impair their ability to function and handle daily responsibilities. The psychological trauma linked to harassment can have long-lasting effects on individuals' relationships, work life, and overall well-being.

In addition to these specific mental health conditions, harassment victims may also experience a variety of other psychological symptoms and difficulties, such as diminished self-esteem, feelings of shame or guilt, distrust of others, and challenges in regulating emotions. These symptoms can further intensify the impact of harassment on individuals' mental health and well-being, creating a cycle of distress and impairment.

Moreover, the fear of harassment can significantly affect individuals' freedom of expression and participation in public life. Victims might hesitate to speak out or assert themselves due to concerns about retaliation or further victimization, leading to self-censorship, social withdrawal, and disengagement from civic and social activities. This self-imposed silence not only perpetuates the cycle of harassment but also deprives individuals of their fundamental rights to freedom of speech, expression, and participation [55]. To effectively address the detrimental effects of

harassment on mental health, victims must have access to a comprehensive range of support services, including therapy, religious meditation counseling, and trauma-informed treatment. Promoting healing and recovery requires fostering secure, supportive environments where victims feel empowered to seek assistance. Recognizing the significant psychological toll that harassment can have on both individuals and communities, efforts to prevent and combat harassment must prioritize mental health and well-being [56].

10. ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY TO CONTROL HARASSMENT

Implementing digital surveillance systems in workplaces and public spaces can significantly deter harassment. These systems, including CCTV cameras and AI-driven monitoring tools, enhance real-time detection and documentation of incidents, providing robust evidence for legal and organizational actions (See Table 2). Mobile applications designed to report harassment incidents empower victims by providing an accessible and discreet platform to seek help (See Table 2). Apps like "SafeCity" enable users to report harassment anonymously, which not only helps authorities in tracking hotspots but also raises public awareness and responsiveness [57-58]. Online training modules and educational platforms can play a pivotal role in preventing harassment. These tools educate employees, students, and the general public about their rights, the legal repercussions of harassment, and effective ways to intervene and support victims. Virtual reality (VR) training

can simulate harassment scenarios, enhancing empathy and preparedness (See Table 2). Social media platforms serve as powerful tools for spreading awareness and mobilizing public support against harassment [59-61]. Hashtags like #MeToo have amplified

victims' voices, fostered a global conversation and prompted legislative and organizational changes. Social media campaigns can de-stigmatize reporting and encourage community action against harassment [62-63].

Table 2: Role of Technology in Controlling Harassment

Technology	References	Application in Controlling Harassment
Surveillance Systems	[64]	Installation of monitoring systems and CCTV cameras in private and public places to detect and record cases of harassment.
Mobile Applications	[65]	Mobile Apps are planned to report incidents of harassment, provide resources, and link users to care services.
Wearable Devices	[66]	Wearable technology prepared with emergency alert systems like pendants or smart bracelets etc.
Social Media Platforms	[67]	It is used to launch awareness campaigns, mobilizing support, or reporting against harassment incidents.
Data Analytics	[68]	These Analyze data trends to recognize hotspots and harassment patterns.
Online Reporting Portals	[69]	Organizational or government websites to report harassment and call up support services.
Blockchain Technology	[70]	Guaranteeing the privacy and integrity of data associated with harassment cases.
Artificial Intelligence (AI)	[71]	These are AI-based tools to detect and/or prevent online harassment i.e. automated reporting or filtering of abusive content.
Virtual Reality (VR)	[72]	Training programs for employees and bystanders on how to respond against harassment.
Geolocation Services	[73]	These are tools that let persons share the location in real-time with reliable contacts.

11. SUGGESTIONS: HOW TO CONTROL THE MISUSE OF HARASSMENT LEGISLATION

Ensuring thorough and impartial investigations into allegations, with clear guidelines, and timelines, and using evidence-based methods, credible witnesses and documentation can help to control the misuse of harassment legislation. For this, there is a need to

introduce penalties for false or malicious complaints ensure penalties are proportionate to the offense, and motivate genuine victim reporting. Educate people about the legislation, its intent, and the consequences of misuse, clarifying the differences between harassment and other forms of conflict. Promote gender sensitivity and respect using different media channels to reach a wider audience, highlighting the importance of truthful reporting. The

government should establish committees (having members expert in law, social work, and psychology) to review harassment cases and ensure transparency/accountability application of the law. Provide counseling/ support for both victims and accused to address reputational damage, trauma, and emotional impact. The terms "harassment" and "sexual harassment" must be defined and illustrated using examples to prevent misinterpretation. Training authorities should provide

training (covering evidence collection, investigation techniques, and legal aspects) for police, judges, and other executives who handle harassment cases. Moreover, authorities should offer mediation services to resolve disputes/ conflicts without resorting to legal action. Furthermore, tracking and analyzing data on harassment cases (identifying trends, patterns, and areas for improvement) to identify trends and improve responses to develop policies and programs (See Table 3).

Table 3: Controlling the Misuse of Harassment Legislation

Approach	References	Description
Strict Evidentiary Standards	[75]	Applying strict proof requirements for claims, i.e. digital evidence, documented incidents, and witness testimonies.
Clear Definition of Harassment	[74]	Forming precise legal descriptions and conditions for what is considered harassment to stop ambiguous or broad interpretations.
Legal Safeguards	[76]	Introduce legal safeguards to protect against false blames, like penalties for malevolent and/or baseless claims.
Training and Awareness Programs	[77]	Provide training for law implementing, workplace, and judiciary administrators to correctly understand and implement harassment laws.
Independent Review Boards	[78]	Establish independent review boards and/or oversight bodies that can assess the handling of harassment cases and confirm fairness.
Public Awareness Campaigns	[79]	Arrange campaigns to teach the public about the true use of harassment laws and the results of misuse.
Support Systems for the Accused	[80]	Ensure access to legal support and counseling to individuals suspected of harassment and ensure sure protection of their rights and self-respect.

These suggestions aim to strike a balance between supporting victims of harassment and preventing the misuse of legislation, ensuring a fair and just system for all.

12. PHYSIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL TREATMENT AND SUPPORT STRATEGIES

Harassment may have a deep physio-psychological effect on victims, causing severe physical health problems with psychological and mental distress. Harassment activates the stress response mechanism of the body which results in the release of stress hormones i.e. adrenaline and cortisol to prepare the body to fight the stress by instant action, however, once the stress becomes chronic, which

usually happens in cases of constant harassment leads to long-lasting psychological and physiological issues [81-83]. Physiologically, sufferers of harassment experience a range of clinical symptoms like chronic headaches, gastrointestinal issues, upset sleep patterns, and muscle tension (See Table 4). The unceasing activated stress response may result in raised blood pressure, cardiovascular problems, and a weak immune system causing individuals more prone to disease challenges and worsening psychological issues.

Psychologically, harassment may lead to mental illnesses i.e. post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, and depression (See Table 4). Patients experience feelings of low self-esteem, helplessness, and untiring fear/paranoia, especially in situations similar to wherever the harassment happened severely affecting routine life, social relations, and work performance [85-86]. The humiliation and shame linked with being a victim usually result in social isolation, further intensifying mental health problems.

Mitigating the physio-psychological influence of harassment needs a widespread approach including social, psychological, and medical support. Medical support is therefore needed to manage symptoms of hypertension, depression, and anxiety. A range of Beta-blockers is available to treat physiological symptoms of stress i.e.

elevated blood pressure, whilst antidepressants can help to relieve the symptoms of anxiety and depression [87-89].

Psychological treatment is also essential to address the effect of harassment on mental health. For this, Cognitive-behavioral therapy i.e. CBT is mostly effective, helping the harassed patients to develop survival strategies and delete negative thoughts. CBT can help decrease the physiological stress response by changing cognitive patterns that cause fear and anxiety. Moreover, therapies like mindfulness-based stress reduction i.e. MBSR can help patients to focus on the existing moment/situation, hence, reducing stress through controlled breathing exercises and meditation [See Table 5]. Social support from family, friends, and other support groups can also play a pivotal role in the recovery process by providing practical advice, and emotional support to help the patient to feel less lonely. In some cases, legal action against culprits can deliver a sense of justice and cessation of pain, leading to the healing process [85]. The workplace's role in arranging training programs and the development of strong anti-harassment policies is important to prevent future incidents. Combining medical treatment, supportive social networks, and therapy, patients can work towards recovery and redeem control over their routine lives.

Table 4: Psychological Effects of Harassment on Victims and Remedies

Psychological Effect	Researchers	Description	Remedies
Anxiety	[90]	Persistent feelings of worry, nervousness, or unease, are often accompanied by physical symptoms.	Cognitive-behavioral therapy i.e. CBT includes relaxation techniques and mindfulness practices etc.
Depression	[91]	A common mental health disorder characterized by persistent sadness and loss of interest.	Psychotherapy, support groups, and medication i.e. antidepressants.
Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)	[92]	A condition activated by feeling or observing a shocking event, with symptoms such as severe anxiety and flashbacks.	Trauma-focused therapy e.g., EMDR, grounding techniques, and medication etc.
Decreased Self-Esteem	[93-94]	A drop in confidence and self-worth leads to feelings of shortfall.	Constructive self-affirmations, psychotherapy, self-esteem workshops
Social Withdrawal	[95-96]	Affinity to escape social interactions and isolated life cut off from others.	Social skills training, supportive social networks, gradual exposure to social situations
Fear and Hypervigilance	[97]	An improved state of awareness and an intensified sense of fear, especially in comparable situations.	Safety planning, therapy to reduce hyperattention, and confidence training.
Guilt and Shame	[98]	Feelings of guilt or shame, often irrational, about the harassment incident.	Cognitive restructuring, self-compassion exercises, therapeutic dialogue
Sleep Disturbances	[99-100]	Issues such as nightmares, insomnia, or difficulty in maintaining sleep.	Sleep hygiene practices, cognitive behavioral therapy for insomnia (CBT-I), medication
Substance Abuse	[101-102]	Increased dependence on compounds like alcohol and/or drugs to manage the emotional pain.	Addiction counseling, meetings with peer support groups or recovery programs,
Decreased Job Satisfaction	[99-102]	job dissatisfaction and engagement, often leading to decreased productivity.	Career counseling, workplace interventions, employee assistance programs
Difficulty Concentrating	[103]	Challenges in focusing or maintaining attention on tasks, often due to intrusive thoughts.	Concentration exercises, stress management techniques, therapy
Physical Symptoms	[102-103]	Manifestation of psychological distress in physical forms, such as headaches, stomach issues, and chronic pain.	Medical consultation, stress management strategies, therapy

Table 5: Physiological Effects of Harassment on Victims and Their Treatment

Physiological Effect	References	Description	Treatment
Increased Heart Rate	[104-107]	Increased heart rate because of stress/anxiety.	Stress management using beta-blockers or relaxation exercises
Elevated Blood Pressure	[108-114]	Higher blood pressure due to prolonged stress.	Changes in Lifestyle i.e. exercise, diet, etc., or antihypertensive medications or mindfulness practices.
Hyperventilation	[108-114]	Fast breathing or dyspnea, due to anxiety attacks.	Breathing exercises, CBT, and anti-anxiety medicines.
Gastrointestinal Disturbances	[108-114]	Nausea, abdominal pain, and/or irritable bowel syndrome.	Use of probiotics in the diet, stress reduction stress, and medical treatment for IBS (irritable bowel syndrome).
Chronic Fatigue	[108-114]	Continuous feeling of fatigue or exhaustion, which is not released by rest.	Physical activity, sleep hygiene, balanced diet, following necessary medical conditions
Muscle Tension	[108-114]	Continuous muscle tightness, particularly in the neck region, shoulder area, and back.	Physical therapy, massage therapy, regular exercise, stress management techniques
Immune System Suppression	[108-114]	Suppressed immune functions result in susceptibility to diseases.	Regular exercise, adequate sleep, healthy diet, and stress management
Skin Conditions	[108-114]	Skin problems such as acne, psoriasis, or eczema, are intensified by stress.	Dermatological treatments, keeping up a good skincare routine, and stress management
Appetite Changes	[108-114]	Rise and fall in appetite causing emaciation and/or overweight.	Consult a nutritionist, use a balanced diet, treating basic psychological and emotional issues.
Sleep Disturbances	[108-114]	Nightmares, insomnia, and/or difficulty maintaining sleep.	Sleep hygiene, cognitive behavioral therapy for insomnia (CBT-I), medication if necessary
Headaches	[108-114]	Frequent tension headaches or migraines related to stress.	Pain relief medications, relaxation techniques, stress management strategies
Cardiovascular Issues	[108-114]	Symptoms such as chest pain or palpitations, may be stress-related.	Medical evaluation, stress management techniques, regular physical activity, healthy diet

13. ROLE OF MEDIA AND CIVIL SOCIETY TO ADDRESS/CONTROL HARASSMENT CASES

Media outlets and civil society organizations are pivotal in addressing harassment by raising awareness, advocating for policy reform, and providing support services for victims. They engage in campaigns, produce documentaries, and lead grassroots initiatives to challenge societal norms and hold perpetrators accountable, thus contributing to broader efforts aimed at creating safer and more inclusive communities.

Media outlets are vital platforms for increasing awareness about harassment and its effects on individuals and society. Through investigative journalism, feature articles, and opinion pieces, the media can spotlight the prevalence of harassment across various environments, including workplaces, educational institutions, public spaces, and online platforms. By amplifying the voices of survivors and experts, media coverage helps destigmatize harassment and promotes public discourse on the need for reform [107].

The production of documentaries and motion pictures is also crucial in highlighting harassment and its consequences.

Documentaries humanize the issue and foster empathy and understanding among viewers by providing survivors with a platform to share their experiences. Additionally, film festivals and screening events can act as catalysts for social change by initiating conversations about harassment and its impact on individuals and communities.

Civil society organizations (CSOs) play a significant role in advocating for legislative changes and providing support to individuals who have experienced harassment. Through lobbying, research, and public engagement, CSOs influence the development and implementation of laws and policies designed to prevent and address harassment. They also offer direct support to victims, including counseling, legal assistance, and advocacy services, aiding survivors in navigating the complexities of reporting and seeking justice.

Campaigns and grassroots initiatives led by CSOs are crucial in challenging societal norms and attitudes that perpetuate harassment and victim-blaming. By organizing rallies, workshops, and community events, CSOs mobilize public support for anti-harassment efforts and empower individuals to speak out against abuse. Grassroots initiatives such as bystander intervention training and community patrols also play a key role in preventing harassment and fostering safer environments for all.

Moreover, collaboration between civil society organizations and media outlets enhances their ability to advocate for change and raise awareness about harassment. By working together on campaigns, creating educational resources, and organizing events, they can extend their reach and impact. Joint efforts ensure that survivors' voices are heard and that their experiences inform advocacy and policy initiatives. In short, media outlets and civil society organizations are essential in combating harassment by promoting legislative change, providing victim support services, and increasing public awareness. Their collaborative efforts

challenge societal norms, hold perpetrators accountable, and contribute to the creation of safer and more inclusive communities

14. CONCLUSION

Tackling harassment in Pakistan demands a multidimensional approach that includes legislative reforms, better enforcement mechanisms, awareness-raising efforts, and community involvement. The general nature of harassment across various settings i.e. from workplaces and/or educational institutes to public places and online platforms, requires widespread strategies/policies that can address root causes, challenge social norms, and empower persons to speak out against abuse. For victims of harassment to have access to legal rights and opportunities for redress, legislative measures are necessary. Culprits can be held responsible for their acts by passing new legislation to fill safety loopholes and strengthening current legislation. Better enforcement methods are also required to guarantee that laws are properly applied and that offenders are held accountable for their actions. This entails educating law enforcement officials, setting up dedicated divisions to deal with harassment cases, and offering victims support services through the court system. Awareness-raising efforts are crucial to challenge cultural norms and attitudes that perpetuate harassment and victim-blaming. Media outlets, civil society organizations, and educational

institutions can play key roles in raising awareness about the prevalence and impact of harassment, educating the public about their rights and responsibilities, and promoting positive social norms that reject abuse and discrimination. By amplifying the voices of survivors and experts, these efforts help destigmatize the issue of harassment and foster empathy and understanding among the public. To establish a culture of respect and accountability and bring about long-lasting change, community mobilization is necessary. Community-based groups, youth-led movements, and grassroots endeavors have the potential to galvanize public backing for anti-harassment campaigns, enable abused victims to voice their concerns, and ensure that those responsible for abuse face consequences. Through the involvement of a wide range of stakeholders, such as religious leaders, lawmakers, and community members, these initiatives have the potential to accelerate change and establish more secure and welcoming environments for everyone. Combating harassment in Pakistan necessitates a multipronged team effort from the public community, media, government, and civil society to challenge cultural norms, enhance enforcement procedures, empower survivors, legislative changes, and foster a culture of respect and accountability to create a society where harassment is not tolerated, and all individuals can live and work free from fear and discrimination.

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