



FIELD WORK HARASSMENT AGAINST WOMEN JOURNALISTS IN
ISLAMABAD

Rehana Gulzar , Dr Neelam Farid

^{1,2}Department of Sociology, International Islamic University Islamabad

rehanagulzar.iiui6@gmail.com

neelam.farid@iiu.edu.pk

ABSTRACT

The present study targets the theme of fieldwork harassment of women journalists in Islamabad and places it in the broad context of Pakistan's socio-cultural and professional landscape. Women reporters are also harassed, both physically and psychologically, and this affects their safety, self-confidence, and careers. Even in the presence of laws, there are weak links in the system, including cultural impracticability, which promotes a culture of silence and underreporting. The study used a qualitative design and was based on face-to-face, in-depth interviews with female reporters serving in various media companies in Islamabad. Thematic analysis was employed, which retrieved accounts from the women explaining how they were harassed at work, as well as in the field. The research was especially keen on the socioeconomic backgrounds, forms of harassment, coping methods, and responses to the situation by the institutions. The results indicate that male dominance and cultural barriers are the significant sources of harassment that foster an environment of discrimination and intimidation. Respondents complained of mental pressure, loss of confidence, and stagnation in their careers, as harassment often scared women away from taking their careers in journalism seriously.

Furthermore, underreporting became the primary concern, as several reporters did not file a complaint due to stigma, fear of retaliation, and gaps in organizational support. Strict adherence to laws and poor supporting systems worsen the situation. The study has concluded that combating the harassment of women journalists requires an approach on multiple levels: enforcing workplace protection laws, sensitizing media organizations, providing a support system, and addressing cultural biases. By lending a voice to the female journalists, the current thesis will contribute to the debates on the prevalence of violence based on gender and equality in the Pakistani media industry.

Keywords: *Women journalists, harassment, Islamabad, qualitative research, thematic analysis, gender inequality.*

Introduction

Journalism is commonly referred to as the backbone of any democratic society, and the environment in which journalists, particularly women, work in Pakistan is bedeviled with structural inequalities, gender bias, and systematic harassment. Particularly, women journalists operating in the field experience an increased level of vulnerability that extends beyond the workplace environment (Jamil, 2020). In Islamabad, where a lot of the political and media action in Pakistan is centered, these issues become even more accentuated. Women journalists, in performing their professional duties, are often faced with the aspects of harassment in all its physical, verbal, and psychological forms, including unwanted comments, intimidation, threats, and sexual advances (UNESCO, 2021). Such experiences foster a hostile setting that not only has a detrimental effect on the safety of women but also curtails their right to express themselves and climb up the professional ladder.

Context and Problem Statement

Harassment is a broad term used to refer to unwanted behavior's that embarrass, threaten, or offend a person on grounds of gender, social, cultural, and personal identity. In the Pakistani media landscape, bullying does not involve only physical attacks, but also includes more subtle forms, e.g., staring, unwanted touching, or patronizing remarks toward female reporters. Such activities have become ingrained in patriarchal frameworks that prevail in news institutions and perpetuate gender inequalities at the expense of women (Bhatti & Ali, 2022). As a result,

women journalists in Islamabad live, as it were, under dual pressure to perform in a competitive newsroom, as well as to deal with daily experiences of harassment that impact their personal dignity and psychological well-being. The tendency of the harassment to persist is also an indication of policy and enforcement gaps. Although workplace harassment laws exist in Pakistan, most media organizations do not provide proper reporting and restitution channels (Hadi, 2022). In most cases, journalist's mention that even when formal complaints are made, there are either weak responses or none at all, and the culture of impunity is encouraged (Jamil, 2023).

The outcome is underrepresentation: in this study, only 8 percent of respondents reported filing complaints, and almost 58 percent chose to remain silent due to fear of stigma and punishment. This silence not only continues the cycle of harassment but also adds to the so-called chilling effect that prevents women from becoming fully immersed in journalism (Bhatti & Ali, 2022). The security and equality of women in journalism are of utmost importance not only to gender justice but also to the integrity of the media as a whole in Pakistan. The scholars argue that the absence, marginalization, or silencing of women can undermine the diversity and democratic nature of journalism (Aslam, Malik, & Khan, 2023). Harassment not only impacts the individuals affected but also undermines press freedom, minimizes diversity in the profession, and erodes the reputation of media institutions (Iqbal, 2022). In war-torn areas or when reporting politically sensitive matters, the danger increases tenfold, whereby female journalists frequently face threats, physical assaults, and forced exile (Jamil, 2020). The existence of such realities highlights the need to approach harassment as a systemic or structural issue, rather than merely a personal problem.

This study is significant for Islamabad, which is also the country's political capital, and female journalists typically engage with politicians, the state, and law enforcement agencies. This encapsulates their experiences into the bigger picture of gender inequalities embedded in Pakistani society. The paper complements the existing literature on the harassment of women journalists by contextualizing the issue within a sociological framework, which takes into account not only personal experiences but also socio-economic status and cultural barriers, as well as institutional ineptness. In this way, it points out the human and structural aspects of the issue.

Guided by the above context, this study pursues the following objectives:

1. To examine the **socio-economic background** of women journalists in Islamabad.
2. To investigate the **consequences of physical and psychological harassment** on their professional and personal lives.
3. To explore the **extent of underreporting** and reasons for silence among women journalists.
4. To analyze the **institutional and cultural barriers** that perpetuate harassment in media organizations.

These initiatives align with the broader goal of prioritizing the experiences of women, giving them representation and a voice in academic and policy domains (Clarke & Braun, 2013).

The understanding of this study is grounded in feminist thinking, which views harassment as a gendered consequence of power dynamics in the workplace and other social contexts (Harding, 1991). Women experience harassment within the context of cultural norms, socio-economic status, and the actions of institutions, which all influence their ability to be disciplined and open to harassment. This lens enables the researcher to situate individual stories of harassment within the broader context of gender inequality and patriarchy in organizations. Additionally, the research employs thematic analysis to elucidate the lived experiences of the respondents, as it involves the exploration of patterns, narratives, and meanings within qualitative data (Braun &

Clarke, 2013). The study is both empirical and theoretical, providing new insights into the issue of harassment as a social phenomenon, with a particular focus on the voices of women journalists.

Literature review

This concern of harassment of women journalists has been well articulated in various literature, because of the interplay of gendered power systems with professional vulnerability in the media field. In Pakistan, where patriarchal values still reign in cultural, political, and institutional domains, women journalists encounter greater difficulties of a different sort that transcend workplace discrimination to pose a threat to both their physical and mental well-being. Literature points out that harassment is not isolated incidents but rather a structural activity which is woven by rooted gender hierarchies and normalization of discriminatory behaviors at workplaces (Jamil, 2020). This male dominance within media institutions is not only culturally but also organizationally supported, which makes harassment a commonplace experience for a female reporter that is often ignored through silence, stigmatization, or inefficiency by the media institutions (Bhatti & Ali, 2022).

The studies in international and regional settings (South Asia) reveal multiple ways of harassment of the female media workers, and they vary between subtle intimidation and outspoken physical abuse. The range of behavior in Pakistan encompasses verbal abuse, inappropriate physical contact, internet trolling, and even death threats when women speak on such topics as politics and gender-based violence (Iqbal, 2022). These activities operate within a framework of systemic injustices that perpetuate fear and erode professional proficiency. The cultural background is an aggravating factor, where bullying is commonly downplayed as an individual issue instead of a systemic issue, which causes victims to hesitate to report (Hadi, 2022). Field studies evidence proves that underreporting is a persistent aspect; the majority of female journalists use silence as a result of fear of reprisal, stigmatization, and the absence of an organizational safety net.

Feminist philosophers opine that sexual harassment at the workplace should not be derived from random acts but forms of power that perpetuate the subordination of women. (Harding, 1991). In media organizations, this power disadvantage also influences media structures, perpetuating male dominance and marginalizing the voices of women. As society researchers like Faith (2022) point out, harassment needs to be examined within the context of gender disparities, as the cultural stigma and motivations propagated by the patriarchal systematize women, keeping them out of the frame of the streets and their careers. This strategy emphasizes the systemic aspect of the issue: harassment is not an issue of interpersonal improper behavior, but a means of maintaining the gendered hierarchy that inhibits women's mobility, confidence, and career advancement in the workplace.

At the international level, the study has also examined the intimidating effect of persecution on making women journalists reluctant to pursue their careers. As Chadha, Steiner, Vitak, and Ashktorab (2020) found out, female journalists are more likely to constrain themselves by not reporting certain things, engaging less in public, or quitting journalism altogether. Similarly, Amnesty International (2019) observed that women media professionals tend to modify or diminish their audience contact as a result of abuse, and this phenomenon leads to media discourse uniformity. These results align with the Pakistani context, in which harassment has always been cited as a barrier to women participating in the news business (Jamil, 2023). This chill environment curtails not only the careers of individual journalists but also the democratic essence of journalism, as the voice and narrative of women remain undermined in our society. The literature also shows that harassment has huge psychological and social implications. The empirical research demonstrates that women facing systematic harassment experience

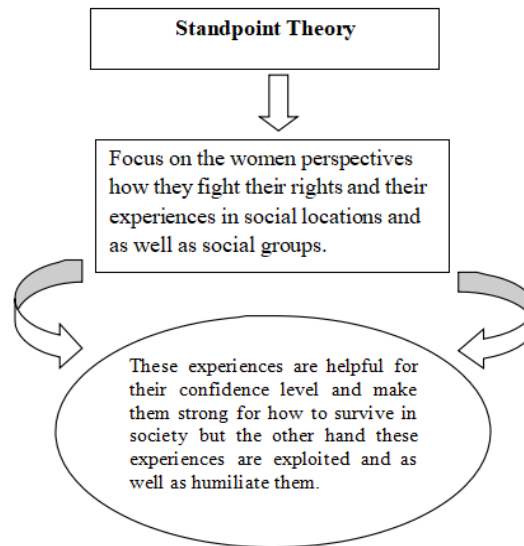


increased stress and anxiety and low self-esteem, which often accumulate in their lives beyond the workplace (Aslam, Malik, & Khan, 2023). The research conducted in the media sector of Pakistan has attributed that harassment invokes a sense of social withdrawal, humiliation, and a lack of willingness to be given an assignment on a high-profile or field posting. These experiences are echoed in international literature, which highlights how harassment in the workplace compromises female agency, interferes with career advancement, and perpetuates institutional-level inequality, as noted by Diana Harrigan (Fraser & Martineau-Searle, 2018). The current studies also indicate institutional infeasibilities of dealing with harassment. Pakistan has passed protection laws in the workplace, although enforcement has been erratic. According to Hadi (2022), many enterprises do not have official manifestos or do not adhere to them in practice, which deprives women of effective channels of complaint. Whether complaints are lodged or not, the responses of an organization tend to downplay the matter or place blame on the victim, which deters reporting (Bhatti & Ali, 2022). Such institutional loopholes continue to foster a culture of impunity, allowing harassment to persist unchecked. The lack of a secure mechanism is also indicative of how existing legal provisions cannot fill the gap without organizational commitment and cultural change (Digital Rights Foundation, 2017).

Harassment in journalism, in general, can deter women from entering the profession or drive them out, and also influences how the news is created and consumed. Research presented by Jamil (2020, 2023) suggests that the underrepresentation of women journalists, whether due to intimidation or the presence of barriers, compromises the sensitivity and inclusiveness of news coverage. This exclusion has repercussions for society since it limits the voices of women regarding issues in the country, emphasizing gender inequality. Such dynamics are further established by the cultural stigma widely present about harassment, as women are depicted as less believable or professional when they address the subject of their abuse (Bhatti & Ali, 2022).

The thematic analysis of the available literature reveals that harassment is not an isolated case, but a systemic issue that can only be addressed through structural intervention. It has been critical that a multi-stranded approach, interrupting legal enforcement, organizational modifications, and cultural factors, needs to be incorporated. Clarke and Braun (2013), for example, claim that the qualitative experiences of being harassed can also provide valuable insights into lived experiences, which can be used to inform specific policies. Similarly, invoke the role of educational and awareness campaigns in questioning the cultural underpinnings of harassment. In the Pakistani case, the Digital Rights Foundation Congress (2019) has reiterated that institutional responsibility and online safety are crucial measures to protect women reporters in both cyberspace and real-world spaces.

The literature positions the issue of harassment against female journalists in Pakistan as having a background of patriarchal leaning, cultural, and institutional limitations. Although in an individual, women can be affected by harassment (e.g., in terms of mental health or career growth), it is also perceived as a failure to increase the overall media environment, where free speech and the playing field of democracy are impaired. Feminist theories about knowledge have instilled an awareness of how the experiences of women are shaped by structural disparities rather than random events (Harding, 1991). This study synthesizes empirical results and theoretical perspectives to advance the debate on gender justice, media integrity, and professional equality through a combination of context-specific and global applications, focusing on the case of Islamabad.



Methodology

A qualitative research design was employed in this study to explore the rich, contextualized lives of women journalists in Islamabad who experience harassment in the course of their fieldwork. The qualitative approach was most appropriate, as the topic under study is pertinent to sensitive, personal, and socially constructed issues that cannot be fully grasped using numerical expressions. Qualitative inquiry is especially effective in revealing individual definitions of their lives, particularly when the matter of study relates to phenomena that are underreported or socially stigmatized. In Pakistan, where disclosure of harassment is not the rule and where institutional reaction is minimal, qualitative interviews offer an opportunity to give agency to women in their own words.

The location in Islamabad was logistically favorable, as the researcher had access to the respondents through his professional contacts and media contacts. The sample consisted of women employed as reporters at various news agencies, most of whom regularly attended events, press briefings, and field assignments. The selection of this group was guided by the fact that women journalists are more exposed to harassment than their male colleagues, both in newsrooms and in the field, where guard structures are weak (Jamil, 2020). The purposive sampling technique was used to recruit the participants. This plan enabled the researcher to establish respondents who would be rich and relevant in answering the research questions. Twenty to twenty-five women journalists were approached, and interviews were conducted until saturation was achieved, meaning that no new themes were identified in subsequent interviews.

Face-to-face in-depth interviews were the primary data collection method employed. This methodology was chosen due to the possibility of probing and clarifying questions that do not come out via structured questionnaires, which are often too black and white in their questions. The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview guide based on available literature, the field situation, and initial consultations with experts. Some of the questions asked were about the form of harassment they received, its psychological and professional effects, how they coped with the situation, the response by the institution, and their culture because of these women journalists. Questions were: "What is the nature of harassment you have had in the field work of reporting?", "How have harassment issues impacted your day-to-day



professional life?", and "Have you received any support, any at all, within your organization, after you have reported the incidences of harassment?" These questions were designed to elicit detailed stories and also to allow respondents to direct the interview to topics they considered most important.

All interviews, conducted in Urdu, the language in which the respondent was most comfortable, were transcribed and analyzed in English. Each interview lasted approximately 30-45 minutes, and participants were interviewed at a place of their choice and comfort to ensure privacy. Interviews were conducted in cafes, participants' offices, or their respective homes. All participants provided informed consent prior to the collection of data. They were informed about the purpose of the research, their right to withdraw at any time, and the measures taken to ensure their confidentiality. These ethics align with the focus on protecting participants in qualitative studies that involve sensitive issues. Coding was conducted inductively and deductively: some codes were derived from the available literature and the research questions, while others were identified based on patterns found within the narratives themselves. The codes were then grouped into larger topics like "cultural barriers," "psychological impact," "institutional silence," and "coping strategies." The method helped the researcher identify common themes and distinguish between distinctive and contextual experiences. Thematic analysis was specifically suited to serve its purpose, as it allows for flexibility in capturing both the explicit and underlying meanings, and in providing a more nuanced insight into the lives of women journalists.

Reliability and validity were ensured in several ways. Triangulation was achieved by correlating personal reports with larger trends identified in the literature and organizational reports, ensuring that the findings were not isolated. It was also peer-debriefed by sharing emergent themes with academic supervisors and colleagues, which helped refine interpretations and curb a researcher's bias. In addition, reflexivity was ensured through the researcher's journal, which addressed personal assumptions, positionality, and how these factors could affect the collection and analysis of data. This methodology has also taken into consideration that qualitative research has its limitations. Since the study was done in Islamabad, its findings cannot be generalized to female journalists in Pakistan. Additionally, the sensitivity of the subject matter could also have been reflected in the level of disclosure of experiences by participants, with some individuals downplaying them due to the fear of stigmatization. Nonetheless, these suspicions were countered to a certain degree by the trust that had been created during the rapport-building processes and the promises of confidentiality. The methodological framework employs a purposive sample, in-depth interviews, and thematic analysis to gain an understanding of harassment against women journalists in Islamabad. The research recognized the importance of prioritizing the voices of women, ethical rigor, and the need for findings to have both academic and practical relevance to provide knowledge of social interest. The paradigm echoes the thought of research as a duplication process of obtaining information and thinking, and puts emphasis on interrogation as a way of enhancing human knowledge. This design allowed the research to fulfill its objectives of investigating the socio-economic backgrounds, the impact of harassment, and the institutional and cultural powers that support the silence, and regularities with the local contexts of the Pakistani media industry.

Results and Findings

The interviews of the women journalists in Islamabad presented a complex picture on the processing and managing the harassment at work and personal contexts. The respondents described their weaknesses in terms of social and economic classes, occupational positions, and organizational cultures that were interconnected. The sample reflected a combination of

women with different ages, educational attainment, and marital status, therefore, providing a wide variety of examples of the role of harassment as part of the continuum of social situations. The socio-economic background of the respondents indicated that the participants were primarily in their late twenties to mid-thirties, which is a relatively young population working in the Pakistani media industry. Many of them had pursued tertiary education in journalism or mass communication, but some had also joined the profession through other fields. The other factor that emerged most was marital status. Although single women journalists had to contend with being harassed mainly in their place of work, married respondents had to deal with harassment by not just their fellow workmen, but also by people outside the workplace who came to them as a further stigma to their role. The salaries were quite different because the younger reporters had lower salaries, and could not easily resist or escape hostile work environments.

Table 1 summarizes the socio-economic characteristics of the respondents interviewed for this study.

Variable	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Age	25–30 years	11	44%
	31–35 years	9	36%
	36 years and above	5	20%
Education	Bachelor's degree	10	40%
	Master's degree	12	48%
	Other	3	12%
Marital Status	Single	13	52%
	Married	12	48%
Monthly Income (PKR)	Less than 40,000	14	56%
	40,000–70,000	8	32%
	More than 70,000	3	12%

In addition to socio-economic aspects, the thematic analysis identified four key patterns that shaped the experience of harassment in women: cultural barriers, psychological effects, institutional silence and coping mechanisms. Such themes were coherent in most of the interviews albeit to different degrees depending on individual background and experiences in the field. The most mentioned issue was that of cultural barriers the respondents highlighted how traditional gender roles that are strengthened by the Pakistani society play out in the media firm and also in the public sphere. Most participants recounted how harassment was considered a normal practice that had been the norm and women had to put up with it to stay in the journalism profession. The normalization of harassment made it hard for women to report harassment as they either expected to be blamed or trivialized.

The psychological blow of harassment was the next predominant theme. The women said they had felt worried, humiliated, and lost confidence in themselves after repeated incidents. Some recounted refusing some tasks or shunning social life in order to limit contact. This is a withdrawal that scholars define as a chill effect on female involvement in journalism.

Respondents agreed that such psychological strain also transferred to their personal lives, which caused some stress on family relationships and isolation. Institutional silence added to these predicaments. Most women who attempted to bring up their complaints with managers or human resources departments reported that they were ignored, downplayed, or that their complaints were dismissed as exaggerated. In other instances, the respondents were urged to adapt to the setting or be silent in the name of organizational image. The absence of institutional support created a vicious circle of underreporting, as even those who had initially come forward now vastly preferred silence to avoid professional backlash. Lastly, coping strategies showed the resilience of women journalists, which were either at an individual level or a systemic level. Some respondents referenced their reliance on the peer network, particularly female colleagues, as a source of support and advice.

Table 2 provides an overview of the key categories, based on the thematic analysis, along with concrete examples as stated by the interviewees.

Table: 2 Major Themes Identified from Thematic Analysis

Theme	Description	Illustrative Example (Respondent Quotes)
Cultural Barriers	Patriarchal norms normalize harassment and discourage reporting.	“In our culture, people say women should ignore such things; otherwise, they will be labeled as troublemakers.”
Psychological Impact	Harassment leads to stress, anxiety, and reduced confidence.	“I started avoiding press events because I felt too anxious to be there.”
Institutional Silence	Weak or absent organizational responses to complaints.	“When I reported, they told me to stay quiet because the channel’s reputation was at stake.”
Coping Strategies	Individual efforts such as peer support, avoidance, or direct confrontation.	“I only share my problems with other women colleagues because I know management won’t take action.”

As a whole, these findings prove that it is not an isolated gender-based issue that women journalists face but a phenomenon rooted in systemic inequality. The results help emphasize the existence of culturally established conditions of tolerance to harassment, the psychological effects of which do not encourage women to fully engage in their lives through their careers, as well as institutional silence that contributes to the underreporting aspect. Women journalists devise coping mechanisms, but these are often inadequate without changes in organizational structures and policy implementations. The data reveals, more importantly, that harassment is not an individual problem, it is something that undermines diversity in journalism and, weakens democratic media practices by preventing women from speaking up.

Discussion

The results of this case research advocate that harassment against women journalists in Islamabad is ubiquitous, multi-dimensional, and inscribed in structures and cultures. These findings align with previous studies, which explain that gendered harassment cannot be viewed



as sporadic actions, as women's subordination is a part of natural patriarchal processes (Harding, 1991; Faith, 2022). With extensive qualitative interviews with women reporters, the study shows how the phenomenon of harassment has less to do with specific instances of sexual violence and more to do with social stratification and institutional breakdowns.

The theme of identifying cultural barriers is closely related to the literature on the normalization of harassment in South Asia. Women respondents explained how they downplayed the harassment or contextualized it as a natural aspect of professional life, just as Jamil (2020, 2023) had found that women in the Pakistani media industry are both advised and expected to be submissive or to accommodate such situations. The cultural framing functions both as a rationalization of the perpetrators and as a tool of not allowing the victims to take action in changing the situation by denying them the right to seek redress at institutional level. Stories in this research add to the findings of Bhatti and Ali (2022) who observe that not infrequently, silence is not a choice but a cultural pressure imposed on a woman who makes a step.

The psychological consequences as reported by the respondents also echo the chilling effect identified in the research in other countries. This, according to the findings released by Chadha et al. (2020) and Amnesty International (2019), has led to environment in which women journalists censor themselves, avoid engaging with the population, or abandoning the work. The respondents in Islamabad also complained of being assigned to work on tasks, avoiding press events, and experiencing stress, which impacted their lives either negatively or directly. These results propose that not only does harassment reduce individual confidence, it also limits the diversity of voices in the Pakistani media. The lack of female representation in critical reporting areas will make journalism less inclusive and less able to represent society fully (Aslam, Malik, & Khan, 2023).

Institutional silence was one of the most distressing results that can be justified based on Hadi's (2022) argument that every legal framework in Pakistan is not well implemented in the organizational context. As indicated in various ways by those who participated in this research, employers often dismiss and even trivialize the complaints they receive. The absence of organizational accountability is not anomalous to Pakistan; other scholars have also attributed the lack of institutional accountability in protecting its people against harassment to collectively fractured institutional priorities (Fraser & Martineau-Searle, 2018). Nonetheless, institutional failures of this kind have an added significance in the Pakistani media, where journalistic contribution to the life of a democratic society has become central.

The results also cast some light on the socio-economic and harassment status. Women in the lower income bracket reported limited possibilities to resist or escape a hostile environment, which supports the argument that economic dependency increases vulnerability. Such actors tended to tolerate harassment as an inevitable sacrifice in order to retain their jobs. In contrast, those who were financially more secure or had stronger social resources could challenge the harassers or leave the organization.

Meanwhile, the resourcefulness in the coping measures used by women portrays strength and unity even when systems fail to proffer support. Anticipated support networks, including female co-workers, informal groups, and friendships, proved to be somewhat relieving for the participants, as also mentioned by Clarke and Braun (2013). This paper also adds to the debates on underreporting. While existing surveys have already reported low levels of harassment enforcement in workplaces in Pakistan (Digital Rights Foundation, 2017), the qualitative accounts here explain this reticence, namely, fear of punishment, loss of credibility, and a lack of serious institutional action. The study reveals that silence is a can of worms that is often employed as a strategy of self-protection, resulting in disempowerment and stigmatization in the context of cultural norms. These kinds of revelations go beyond numbers to take into



account what an individual experiences, as it pertains to gender-based violence in the workplace environment.

Theoretical insights can be woven through these findings. At this point, it becomes evident that women journalists having to face harassment is not a strand of aberration but rather a gendered power play. As Harding (1991) outlines in feminist epistemology, the situation and form given to women's experiences are very much defined by their social context, and this research proves that the context in which acts of harassment occur is equally important to recognize the phenomenon. Islamabad stories not only give local sense but also have global resonance since they follow patterns observed in other situations where a patriarchal code and the inability to hold institutions to account coexist.

In real-life applications, several implications are suggested by the discussion. One is that legal reforms cannot be enough without vigorous enforcement in organizations. Policies should be complemented by accountability measures and training sessions, along with effective reporting systems, which do not disgrace the complainants but help to defend them. Second, the issue of normalizing harassment needs to be addressed through a cultural shift (Ahmed, 2019). Educational awareness, dialogues, and media campaigns can help change the perceived idea that harassment is normal or unavoidable. Third, media organizations should provide greater support systems, such as counseling services and peer support groups, to address the psychological consequences mentioned by the respondents (Barton & Storm, 2016). Lastly, the society at large should also recognize that the underrepresentation of women in journalism compromises press freedom and the representation of the general public.

Conclusion

The research paper aimed to examine the life of women journalists in Islamabad who face harassment during the field work, and the report demonstrates that harassment is not merely perceived as a deeply personal violation but an institutional issue written into the media culture. The study through the voices of female reporters showed that this habit of harassment is normalized by cultural expectations, institutional silence, and increased by the socio-economic inequalities. All these experiences put together create a situation in which women journalists are fighting not only to be recognized professionally but also to secure their personal safety and dignity. The stories of respondents demonstrated that bullying can be both large-scale, such as verbal and psychological bullying in the streets and other places of entertainment, as well as minor, and equally harmful in the workplace, such as in newsrooms. Some individuals acted more resilient and developed coping strategies, but these were all personal reactions to a problem that can be considered a systemic issue. The results also revealed that underreporting continues to be a prevailing trait in that women are likely to remain hushed up to avoid punishment or labeling. The cost of this silence, through its implications, is that it denies women full participation in journalism and the diversity of voices, which is synonymous with an inclusive democracy in media. The effects of harassment are not only on individuals; they undermine journalism as an institution and also diminish the authority of the media organization. As women are marginalized in reporting on efforts, particularly in problem regions or on delicate topics, they will not have a voice. The media scene will be even further populated with male voices.

References

- Adnan, M., Ali, A., & Aslam, S. (2019). Economic issues and ethical journalism in Pakistan: Prospects and challenges. *Global Social Sciences Review*, 4(1), 11–22.
- Ahmed, A. (2019). *Journalism in Pakistan: A risky profession*. Academic Track Reader, 144.
- Ahmed, D. S. (2006). *Zeb un Nisa Hamidullah*. Mirror Publication.



- Ali, F., & Kramar, R. (2015). An exploratory study of sexual harassment in Pakistani organizations. *Asia Pacific Journal of Management*, 32(1), 229–249. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10490-014-9380-1>
- Ali, M. Y., & Kaur, K. (2015). Journalism 2.0: Journalist view about media information service trends in Karachi, Pakistan. *Chinese Librarianship: An International Electronic Journal*, 39, 40–51.
- Aslam, S. B., Malik, M. A., & Khan, M. A. (2023). Gender and cyber communication: A systematic literature review of challenges faced by women in Pakistan. *Global Language Review*, VIII(1), 174–183.
- Awan, M. S., & Hussain, Z. (2007). Returns to education and gender differentials in wages in Pakistan. *Lahore Journal of Economics*, 12(2), 49–68.
- Bareke, C. (2019). Challenges of journalist to conduct investigative reporting: The case of Oromia Broadcasting Networks (Doctoral dissertation, Addis Ababa University).
- Barling, J., Rogers, A. G., & Kelloway, E. K. (2001). Behind closed doors: In-home workers' experience of sexual harassment and workplace violence. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 6(3), 255–269. <https://doi.org/10.1037/1076-8998.6.3.255>
- Barton, A., & Storm, H. (2016). Violence and harassment against women in the news media: A global picture. *International News Safety Institute*.
- Batool, S., Qadri, F. A., & Amir, M. A. (2022). Social media and women empowerment: A digital feminist analysis of “Watch Us Rise” by Watson and Hagan. *Journal of Social Sciences Review*, 2(4), 9–18.
- Bell, S. E., & Braun, Y. A. (2010). Coal, identity, and the gendering of environmental justice activism in Central Appalachia. *Gender & Society*, 24(6), 794–813. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243210387277>
- Berdahl, J. L., & Moore, C. (2006). Workplace harassment: Double jeopardy for minority women. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 91(2), 426–436. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.91.2.426>
- Berdahl, J. L., & Raver, J. L. (2010). Sexual harassment. In S. Zedeck (Ed.), *APA handbook of industrial and organizational psychology* (Vol. 3, pp. 641–669). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Bhatti, A., & Ali, R. (2022). Negotiating sexual harassment: Experiences of women academic leaders in Pakistan. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 23(1), 263–279.
- Bowd, K. (2018). Keeping their distance? Navigating the complexities of journalist-public relationships in the social media age. *Australian Journalism Review*, 40(2), 93–105.
- Castilla, E. J. (2011). Bringing managers back in: Managerial influences on workplace inequality. *American Sociological Review*, 76(5), 667–694. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122411420814>
- Chadha, K., Steiner, L., Vitak, J., & Ashktorab, Z. (2020). Women's responses to online harassment. *International Journal of Communication*, 14, 239–259.
- Chan, D. K.-S., Lam, C. B., Chow, S. Y., & Cheung, S. F. (2008). Examining job-related, psychological, and physical outcomes of workplace sexual harassment: A meta-analytic review. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 32(4), 362–376. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-6402.2008.00451.x>
- Charles, M. (2014, June 4–5). The working situation of Southern African journalists. Paper presented at the *Integrity and Corruption in the Media Conference*, Johannesburg, South Africa.
- Clarke, V., & Braun, V. (2013). Teaching thematic analysis: Overcoming challenges and developing strategies for effective learning. *The Psychologist*, 26(2), 120–123.



- Collingworth, L. L., Fitzgerald, L. F., & Drasgow, F. (2009). In harm's way: Factors related to psychological distress following sexual harassment. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 33(4), 475–490. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-6402.2009.01524.x>
- Cortina, L. M., & Berdahl, J. L. (2008). Sexual harassment in organizations: A decade of research in review. In C. L. Cooper & J. Barling (Eds.), *Handbook of organizational behavior* (pp. 469–497). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Digital Rights Foundation. (2017). *Measuring Pakistani women's experiences of online violence: A quantitative research study on online gender-based harassment in Pakistan*. Islamabad. <https://digitalrightsfoundation.pk/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Hamara-Internet-Online-Harassment-Report.pdf>
- Endres, F. F. (1988). Stress in the newsroom at Ohio dailies. *Newspaper Research Journal*, 10(1), 1–14.
- Fedler, F. (2004). Insiders' stories: Coping with newsroom stress—A historical perspective. *American Journalism*, 21(3), 77–106.
- Fraser, D. E., & Martineau-Searle, L. (2018). Nature and prevalence of cyber violence against women and girls. *VAWG Helpdesk Research Report*, 211, 1–27.
- Gill, R., & Toms, K. (2019). Trending now: Feminism, sexism, misogyny and postfeminism in British journalism. In *Journalism, Gender and Power* (pp. 97–112). Routledge.
- Hadi, A. (2018). Workplace sexual harassment and its underreporting in Pakistan. *European Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, 4(1), 148–153.
- Harding, S. (1991). *Whose science? Whose knowledge? Thinking from women's lives*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Iqbal, I. (2022). Violence against media personas: A comparative study of women journalists in Pakistan and England. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 24(1), 10–28.
- Jacobs, P., & Schain, L. (2009). Professional women: The continuing struggle for acceptance and equality. *Journal of Academic and Business Ethics*, 2, 1–8.
- Jamil, S. (2020). Suffering in silence: The resilience of Pakistan's female journalists to combat sexual harassment, threats and discrimination. *Journalism Practice*, 14(2), 150–170. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2019.1703650>
- Mantilla, K. (2015). *Gendertroubling: How misogyny went viral*. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger.
- Martin, F. (2018). Tackling gendered violence online: Evaluating digital safety strategies for women journalists. *Australian Journalism Review*, 40(2), 5–17.
- Parveen, R. (2010). *Violence against women in Pakistan*. Aurat Foundation.
- Pryor, J. B. (1995). The phenomenology of sexual harassment: Why does sexual behavior bother people in the workplace? *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, 47(3), 160–168.
- Sadrudin, M. M. (2013). Sexual harassment at workplace in Pakistan: Issues and remedies about the global issue at managerial sector. *Journal of Managerial Science*, 7(1), 113–125.
- UN Women. (2010). *Safe cities free of violence against women and girls initiative: Report of the baseline survey, Delhi 2010*. Jagori and UN Women.
- UNISON. (2008). *Harassment at work*. <http://www.unison.org.uk/acrobat/17763.pdf>
- Women Media Center Pakistan. (2015). *Women in journalism: Problems and prospects in Pakistan*. <http://www.wmcpk.org/wp/wpcontent/uploads/2015/01/women-in-journalism.pdf>
- Zia, A., Batool, S., & Yasin, Z. (2016). Women harassment at workplace: A study of Pakistani television channels. *Global Media Journal: Pakistan Edition*, 9(1), 1–15.



**QUALITATIVE RESEARCH JOURNAL FOR SOCIAL
STUDIES**

ISSN Online: 3006-4686, ISSN Print: 3006-4678

Volume No: 03 Issue No: 01 (2026)

