

Challenges Encountered by Working Women: Gender-Based Harassment and Mental Health in Media and Other Industries

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the widespread issue of gender-based harassment and bias against working women and their harmful effects on mental health in the media and other industries. Despite advances in gender equality worldwide, women in public and professional roles continue to face significant challenges such as stress, anxiety, and depression caused by deeply rooted patriarchal institutions, socio-cultural values, and limited organizational support. A systematic review of literature from national and international media reports, peer-reviewed studies, organizational research, and policy documents, this study identifies key gaps in understanding the experiences women face regarding gender-based harassment, equal employment opportunities, and the absence of harassment policies in organizations. These issues contribute to psychological problems like anxiety, stress, and depression among women and marginalized groups. As a result, many women stop working in the media due to persistent harassment, and they do not report these problems because of a lack of legal support and lack of literacy. The research highlights that workplace harassment, which is often underreported because of fear of social stigma and weak enforcement, fosters a hostile work environment. Societal stereotypes exacerbate these problems,

hindering career progress and causing psychological stress for working women. The study emphasizes the critical gap for stronger protections, better enforcement of anti-harassment laws, and shifts in societal attitudes to create safe, fair, and supportive work conditions for women. Overall, this study contributes valuable insights to the literature on women's harassment in the media industry.

Keywords: Gender discrimination, workplace harassment, gender-based violence, psychological well-being, socio-cultural barriers, gender equity, and equal employment opportunity

INTRODUCTION

Gender inequality is a current issue worldwide, particularly in the workplace. One of the lowest female labor forces globally is in South Asia, with only 32% of women of working age in the workforce compared to 77% men. In Pakistan, women in the formal labor force remain low, with approximately 23 to 24% (World Bank, 2023). This enormous gap is symptomatic of systemic barriers: women are generally relegated to domestic roles, denied mobility, and provided with limited education and vocational opportunities. For instance, Ali et al. (2022) found that women are stereotypically viewed as "sexual objects and dependent" upon men and are largely assigned domestic and childcare roles. Education levels of females are low, cultural values and "gender-segregated occupational choices" highly restrict employment opportunities for women. The result is that millions of South Asian women, such as those in Pakistan, are not part of the labor force (estimated 47 million as of 2020), and when they do, they tend to earn much less than men. The International Labor Law

(2025) reports that the gender pay gap in Pakistan is around 25%, meaning women receive some 750 Pakistani rupees for each 1000 rupees a similarly employed man receives. This gap has persisted over the last decade despite a modest reduction and is wider in agriculture, which is a 63% gap (World Bank, 2024).

Social and cultural norms force strict gender roles, perhaps exacerbating women's harassment and discrimination experiences (Ali & Kramar, 2015; Iqbal et al., 2025; Kazimi et al., 2019). These factors can prevent them from concentrating on their work and professional growth, impacting their overall mental health. This research tries to examine the intricate issues facing working women in Pakistan, focusing particularly on gender-based violence, gender-stereotypical roles, and the subsequent mental health impacts. Through an examination of the varied issues, this research endeavors to illuminate the broader extent to which these facets affect the capability of women to work effectively and safely in public and professional life. The findings are intended to underscore the crucial necessity for greater protection in the workplace and in public spaces so that women can pursue their careers safely, free from harassment and discrimination. Addressing these concerns is necessary not just for the physiological and psychological well-being of women but also for a fairer and more productive workplace for all (Bond et al., 2004; ILO, 2022).

The global labour market situation also indicates a gap between men and women. In 2022-2023, women's participation has been around 64.5% in the prime age (25-54 years) in global employment, and 92% of males did (World Bank, 2023; ILO, 2024). While the global female and male unemployment rates were similar at 5.7% and 5.8% in 2022, the women's

employment gap rate was considerably larger at 15% compared to men at 10.5%, meaning 153 million more women have an unmet employment need, this gap particularly acute in developing countries (ILO, 2022; World Economic Forum, 2023). Furthermore, women are over-represented in informal and vulnerable employment, with nearly 60% of women's employment globally being in such employment (UN Women, 2023). The economic impact of such a gap is colossal, with the International Labour Organization estimating that bridging the gap between men and women could add hundreds of billions to the economies of nations (ILO, 2022; CARE, 2024). The worldwide gender pay gap is expected to be 20%, i.e., females earn approximately 80 cents on every dollar paid to men (Zimmermann, 2023). Legal frameworks also contribute to this inequality, with over 2.7 billion women in the world legally excluded from the possibility of having equal career choices as men (World Bank, 2023). Alarming, in 2023, more than one-third of 190 economies evaluated had laws that limit women's choice to work, and 43 economies had no laws regarding sexual harassment in the workplace (World Bank, 2023; UN Women, 2023).

Apart from the general statistics, women in public and work life worldwide have particular and serious issues in their professional development. Research indicates that although gender equity has developed significantly, women are still vastly disadvantaged when it comes to advancing in their professional lives, switching industries for employment, or entering management positions (Novotney, 2024). These are the difficulties which generally manifest in terms of gender bias, the historic gender pay gap, limited access to protection and mentorship, and

decreased access to training and career progression opportunities (Eagly et al., 2007).

This is also evident in global statistics: a 2023 Trades Union Congress (TUC) survey of women in the UK found that 58% of women respondents had experienced some form of harassment in the workplace, and a UN Women UK (2021) survey found that 71% of women have been made to endure harassment in public spaces (UN Women UK, 2021). 83% of female travelers experienced safety issues while business traveling (GBTA, 2019). Moreover, Pakistan continues to face democratic and gender equity difficulties even in the current 21st century (Ashraf et al., 2023). Therefore, it is important to uncover the issue.

This study investigates the critical gap of focusing on gender-based harassment, social stereotypes, and their impact on the psychological well-being of working women in media. To fully understand this problem, empirical research may not uncover this issue broadly therefore, this research can fill those literature gaps. Based on a systematic literature review, international media reports, organizational studies, and policy reports, this study attempts to shed light on how sources of communication shape depictions of gender roles and harassment in society. This research strongly emphasizes the necessity of increased legal protection, enforcement of strict compliance with anti-harassment legislation, and, most importantly, a change in the social attitude to create a secure, equitable, and supportive environment for working women.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Gender discrimination and harassment remain underexplored studies, specifically in the workplace and in the Media sector. The existing literature is specifically based on women who faced harassment and gender-based violence; however, there is still a gap in the literature on how these problems affect women's growth in society and the workplace. This study aims to highlight the problem faced by women and provide a solution to media channels, universities, and policymakers through existing literature to promote a supportive environment for all genders, specifically for women.

Barriers to Women's Career Progression

Hewlett et al. (2010) found that six factors serve as barriers to women's progression to senior leadership ranks, which include: societal attitudes and stereotypes, poor mentoring, dominant masculine corporate cultures, distortions in leadership identity, poor training and development experiences, and resistance to work-life balance. Even after women succeed in reaching top management ranks, they can continue to be targets of biased performance evaluation, particularly in male-dominated fields (Rudman & Glick, 2001; O'Brien, 2023). The conflict between work and family also renders it difficult for women to develop careers, as some of them face difficulties in taking up leadership roles since it would have a negative effect on family life (Kossek et al., 2009). However, even if employees are motivated and are high achievers, they need to be rewarded based on their performance (Ashraf et al., 2023) and not based on their gender. Such matters are regularly placed in front of national and

international media, highlighting gender harassment's workplace destructiveness, whereas efforts such as the 2010 Protection against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act of Pakistan have faced criticism by failing to establish effective safeguards (PILDAT, 2022).

Women in the media sector are showing a limited number of progressions. According to the United Nations there are only 27% of women are working in leadership-level positions in the media sector (Hanna et al., 2023); however, there is a growing number of men, 73% worldwide. A study by IWMF shows that 35% of women make up the journalism workforce worldwide (Byerly, 2011). It has also been seen that women in journalism are also getting softer roles, such as health and social issues; however, men have harder topics to cover, such as war, conflict, sports, politics, and economy, and this shows gender-based discrimination. Men and women should be treated equally in all sectors, even in the media. According to a Free Press Unlimited report, a drop in women's journalism has been noticed worldwide because of harassment in newsrooms and online violence. According to a global study, 40% women journalists dropped out of covering certain stories (Ferrier, 2018).

Cultural & Societal Influences on Gender Discrimination

Working women's misery is usually aggravated by strongly rooted social and cultural values that enforce gender roles (Sengar & Shah, 2024). Such a situation makes women even more susceptible to all types of harassment and discrimination. Gender-based harassment is prevalent, such as staring, indecent remarks, unwelcome advances, and relentless questioning about their private lives (Sadrudin, 2019). Research in Pakistan has been

conducted to report that sexual harassment is very common in workplaces and that most women believe that the perpetrators will not be punished (PILDAT, 2022). Research conducted in and around Karachi, Pakistan that there are fewer women's representations in organizations where there is more harassment (Hadi, 2022; Jabeen & Iqbal, 2020).

Psychological Impacts of Gender Harassment

Psychological impacts of gender-based harassment are strong and far-reaching. Prolonged exposure to abusive and unwelcome conduct renders the workplace hostile and unsafe, eroding one's confidence, influencing mental health, and decreasing productivity (Fairchild et al., 2018; White, 2024). Social expectations, as well as chronic harassment, are likely to cause inadequacy, depression, and anxiety (Fitzgerald et al., 1997). A meta-analysis by Willness et al. (2007) based on 41 studies proved that there exists a direct relationship between work harassment and psychological disorders such as depression, insomnia, and PTSD, especially in female workers, and it also negatively impacts on career and satisfaction of women. South Asian research also confirms the same fact and identifies gender inequality to be related to higher depression and anxiety rates in women (Tabassum, 2017).

Social gender stereotypes and social norms play a major role in the mental health of women. Women are held back by socialization to the majority through expectations that slow down their development in personal as well as professional development (Ali & Kramar, 2015). Psychological well-being is being blamed by cultural beliefs for leading to weakness or failure, and thus, women avoid seeking assistance for fear of stigma (Ahmad,

2022). Women are often discouraged from pursuing independence in patrilineal societies, and even the family structure can reinforce traditional gender roles (Kosec et al., 2021).

Gender Discrimination in the Media Sector

Structural prejudices in systems of professional professions like medicine also deny women a chance to move into leadership roles (De Rosa et al., 2024). This issue has been arising in the media sector as well, and it is considered as most vulnerable field for women. Although not just TV shows, drama, and movies, but women who worked as journalists, news anchors frequently faced discrimination, objectification, and verbal abuse (Dhiman, 2023). According to the policy European department, this hostile environment not just deters their confidence in the media sector, but this affects other women in society, and because of these vulnerabilities, they often end up not pursuing their careers in the mass communication and media sector (Park et al., 2023). Less than 5% of women are journalists rather than media journalists in Pakistan (Arain, 2023; World Press Freedom Index). According to the McKinsey & Company report (2020), only 3% have a chance to work on a leadership level in the media sector.

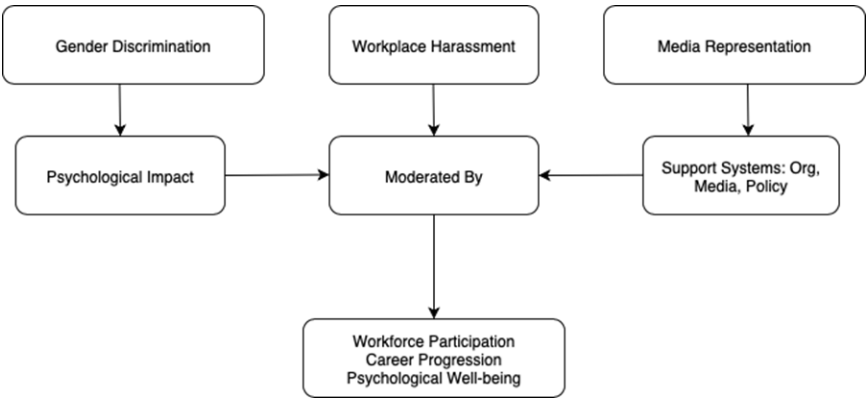
The reviewed literature highlights that harassment and gender discrimination are not separate from each other, but these are deeply rooted based on culture, society, structural, and organizational norms in every region of the globe. The media sector requires policy support and gender equity as it emerges as a vulnerable and underrepresented domain. This review forms the foundation that how such systemic challenges can

be addressed through systemic support, gender equity, and equal employment opportunity, where all genders can feel a safe environment.

Research Objectives

- To examine the psychological impact of gender discrimination and harassment against working women in the Media.
- To assess how women receive support from organizations, the laws, and policies.

Observed Pattern



This systematic literature review is guided by a conceptual framework that illustrates the multi-layered relationship between gender-based challenges and their impact on the psychological well-being of working women in media. The framework includes gender discrimination, workforce harassment, and media representation, which contribute to the psychological impact experienced by women. This psychological impact strains as anxiety, depression, stress, and reduced job satisfaction.

However, these outcomes are moderated by support systems, including organizational practices, media advocacy, and public policies. Ultimately, the framework links these dynamics to broader outcomes such as women's workforce participation, career progression, and psychological well-being. The conceptual model was developed based on existing literature, reports, media policies, and policy documents reviewed systematically.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

To understand the association of gender-based stereotypes, discrimination, workplace harassment, and their impact on the psychological well-being of women, this study is supported by Social Role Theory (Eagly, 1987) and the transactional model of stress which was proposed by Lazarus & Folkman (1984). Social Role Theory (Eagly, 1987) explains that gender stereotypes are based on the capacity and capability for some roles. Women in the workplace are affected by these gender-based stereotypes in society, and it also affects their professional development, making women vulnerable. For this reason, many women do not take a step to make their career, and also stop developing themselves because of social stereotypes, pressure from society. The impact of male-controlled society on women's psychological well-being, harassment, and discrimination plays a crucial role. On the other hand, women also have a responsibility for their household, where they cannot show or openly discuss with their families that what they are facing on the streets means harassment, sexual assault, and discrimination at the workplace. The reason women do not share these problems is that their families would hesitate to support them, and it's a type of protection by family for a woman. As it is very difficult

for a family to change the social norms where women can feel safe. Therefore, they ended up doing household activities to support their families. However, they also face family-related problems, like not supporting them at home. Therefore, they start realizing and facing multiple mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and other related issues.

To uncover the psychological well-being of women based on gender-based stereotypes, this study gets support from the transactional model of stress by Lazarus & Folkman (1984). The model uncovers two folds first; cognitive appraisal means how women get a sense of gender-based stereotype and how they perceive it. The second model of the theory is coping, which means how women face these challenges and how they deal with them personally what strategies they often use to face these challenges. By implementing these two theories, this study strengthens the purpose of the study by looking at the society and also women facing problems because of the society, and then how women face those problems.

Research Questions

This research uncovers the research questions:

RQ1. What is the psychological impact of gender discrimination and harassment against working women in the Media and other industries?

RQ2. How do organizations, the laws, and policies support women?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A systematic review of literature (Siddaway et al., 2019) from multiple sources, such as academic literature, media, public reports, and policy documents relevant to the themes of gender discrimination, workplace harassment, psychological impact, and institutional responses in the context of Pakistan. This research is also based on international and national research reports, and academic research articles such as the United Nations, UN Women, and international labor organizations. The media insights were extracted from a reliable source. Journalism platforms. And public policy sites, including CARE, IJNet, and the McKinsey company. The gathered literature was categorized thematically to identify patterns, contradictions, and gaps in existing literature aligning with the study's objectives. As a secondary research design, no human was involved as it does not require ethical clearances. The search strategy was based on peer-reviewed journal articles, media reports, and international policy documents that described women and gender empowerment, gender rights at the workplace, women harassment and discrimination policies. The following terms were used to perform the search in Google Scholar, APA PsycInfo, and Eric: “workplace harassment, OR “women in the workplace” OR “workplace discrimination” AND “gender discrimination” OR “sexual harassment” AND “gender inequity” “gender equity” OR “women’s rights at work” OR “workplace equity” OR “gender bias in employment” AND “Organizational support” OR “workplace policies” AND “harassment policies” OR “discrimination policies” AND “legal support”, OR “laws”, OR “law enforcement” AND “psychological well-being”, OR “stress” OR “anxiety” OR “mental health”.

The initial search was based on a total of 205 source papers and media reports. Duplicate papers and media reports, or older than five years of publication, were eliminated, reducing the number to 102, which met the inclusion criteria. Also, media reports and peer-reviewed articles published in more than one language (English) were eliminated. Then the next step was to validate the articles that met the inclusion criteria included which ensured that the focus was on women’s empowerment, women’s rights, workplace harassment, gender discrimination, and sexual harassment at the workplace. This process reduced the number of source documents to 85.

The themes extracted based on academic literature, such as trends in gender-based harassment and discrimination at the workplace, women face psychological problems such as anxiety and depression, and how women cope with it in a patriarchal society (Noonari et al., 2022; Patton, 2022).

Data Collection

The data was collected by a comprehensive review of literature using academic peer-reviewed research, policies, NGO & media reports, and policy documents. A total of 85 references were selected, and an overall summary of the key research selected studies is mentioned in detail in Table 1. Additionally, Table 2 is based on key findings, title, study title and methodology.

FINDINGS

Table:1. Summary Total (N=85)

Category	Count
Literature (Peer-Reviewed Journals)	43
NGO Reports	6
Media Articles / News Analysis	5
International Organization Reports	13
Other Documents (Books, Theses, Laws, Indexes, Institutional Publications)	18
Total	85

Analysis: As per methodology, this research is a systematic review approach to understand the multifaceted issues of harassment and discrimination faced by working women in the Media and other workplaces. A total of 85 sources were selected carefully and systematically, including academic literature, NGO reports, media reports, and policy documents from international organizations. The reason for restricting the literature sources to the past five years ensures that the findings reflect only the current socio-cultural and political landscape, particularly in the context of evolving gender norms and workplace dynamics in Pakistan. The inclusion of research reports from international and local institutions systematically strengthens the analysis systematically the context, such as the United Nations, and the International Labour Organization, as this also strengthens the global and local relevance of the findings. The repetitive themes and recurring patterns found by the process of thematic analysis such as patriarchal social structures, systemic underreporting due to stigma, ineffective enforcement of legal frameworks, and the significant psychological consequences of workplace harassment, such as anxiety, depression, and career stagnation.

DISCUSSION

The findings are based on two main research questions of the study: **RQ1)** To examine the psychological impact of gender discrimination and harassment against working women in the Media and other industries. **RQ2)** To assess how women receive support from organizations, the laws, and policies. To uncover these objectives, each thematic findings reflect the objectives by synthesizing peer-reviewed articles, international, national media reports, and policy documents highlighting and focusing on women's workplace harassment faced and gender discrimination, and the organizational support for these problems.

The first question of the research is divided into four main categories of the findings, including gender-based discrimination in media and other industries, psychological well-being, barriers to women's career progression, and cultural and societal influence on gender discrimination

1. Gender-Based Discrimination in Media

Research indicates that women journalists face gender-based discrimination and harassment in various countries. In the South Asian region, particularly a study conducted in Bangladesh, women reported that they face gender-based discrimination and sexual harassment by internal and external perpetrators that often leads to withdrawal and frustration (Kundu & Tabassum, 2023). Similar cases happened in Turkey, female journalists faced challenges such as the glass ceiling, sexual harassment, wage inequity, peer bullying, discrimination, and mobbing (Melek, 2024). However, research shows that both genders are affected by workplace

harassment in Pakistan, causing psychological impacts such as anxiety, stress, and depression, and potentially, it is different for men and women (Shafique et al., 2021). In the Arab region, women have reported many types of gender harassment and discrimination in Journalism, such as verbal abuse, societal discrimination, emotional manipulation, and, most importantly, physical harassment is one of the darkest realities (Blumell et al., 2025). All these types of gender discrimination and harassment show a major psychological impact on women in the journalism and media sector.

1.1 Psychological Well-Being of Women in the Media Industry

Women's psychological well-being is affected by workplace sexual harassment, discrimination, and informal organizational policies. Victims of harassment are one of the widespread issues affecting women's mental health, and symptoms often show as depression, anxiety, posttraumatic stress (PTS), and burnout (Cortina & Leskinen, 2013; Ho et al., 2012; Takeuchi et al., 2018). The frequency of harassment is directly associated with the symptoms; therefore, if they are frequently facing these issues means their mental health has been affected negatively (Cortina & Leskinen, 2013). The study by Takeuchi et al. (2018) uncovers that the direct and indirect effects of harassment can contribute to increasing burnout, with gender differences observed in the impact of these experiences. However, peer, family, or friend support plays a crucial role in mitigating the psychological effects of harassment and abuse (Buesa & Calvete, 2013). These findings underscore the importance of addressing

workplace harassment and providing adequate support systems for victims.

Research has indicated that women are constantly under threat of unsafety while commuting to and from work, and while working in workplace environments with male-dominated hierarchies (Ali et al., 2024; Shirkat Gah, 2019). This sense of unsafety results in increased stress, mobility restriction, and discouragement of women's participation in economic and professional life (ILO, 2021). Moreover, such conditions establish a setting where women must constantly be prepared for an attack, curtailing their means further to engage confidently within the working environment (Anwar & Burfat, 2021). Women journalists have reported psychological issues because of increasing and repeated violence in news reports and negative comments by society (Ferrier, 2018).

1.2 Barriers to Women's Career Progression

Working women face many challenges as they try to take on higher or leadership positions in their careers. These include restricted access to leadership and mentorship support from the organization, occupational segregation by gender, and lack of supportive organizational policies such as maternity leave and flexible work arrangements (Noonari et al., 2022; Iftikhar et al., 2024; Khan et al., 2025). The need to balance domestic responsibilities tends to compel women to give up their careers, which further promotes gender equity in the labor market (Khan, 2018). In addition, cultural demands for women's "primary role" at home are in

opposition to their career aspirations, presenting internal and external obstacles to promotion. Also, women have faced the men-made policies for women, and men are not able to understand the difficulties faced by women at the workplace (Khan et al., 2025).

They are entrenched in a patriarchal society where culture and traditional gender roles tend to limit the role of women in the professional and public domain (Jamil, 2023; Tabassum, 2017). There is a discrimination of various forms, including workplace harassment, discriminatory pay, restricted mobility, and career advancement opportunities (Shirkat, 2019) Zakar et al., 2012) identifies that majority of women working in urban Pakistan are verbally, psychological and physically harassed in the workplace by the majority of the time being their male colleagues or supervisors.

1.3 Cultural and Societal Influence on Gender Discrimination

Cultural and societal influence on gender discrimination is a significant barrier for women in Pakistan. Major socio-cultural pressures include family problems, societal prejudice, and stereotyping (Ateeq et al., 2023). Culture contributes a major proportion of gender discrimination in patriarchal society (Hunnicut, 2009). Women journalists have reported limited career opportunities, gender-based discrimination, which also plays a major role in the industry for their progression in leadership positions (Zaeem et al., 2023). Societal, cultural, and environmental restrictions foster their professional growth, leading to unjust treatment

and pay disparities compared to male peers (Zamir & Jullandhry, 2021). The implementation is limited, even in the presence of laws against women's protection (Hughes, 2017). Gender roles tend to be couched within expectations of domesticity, obedience, and passivity for women, which are reflected in structural obstacles in the workplace (Ali et al., 2011; Khan, 2018). These societal norms influence the recruitment, work conduct, and career decisions of women, with women needing to constantly demonstrate capability in ways that men are not compelled to (Iftikhar et al., 2024). The proof is that women experience levels of a "double burden" when they have to balance work concerns and domestic duties, which results in work-life clashes and reduces career development (Thakur & Goyal, 2025). These challenges persist despite women's competence and ambition in the field, highlighting the need for societal change and stricter enforcement of existing laws to create a more inclusive and diverse media industry in Pakistan.

2. Empowering Women through Legal Support and Inclusive Education

This finding supports the second question of the study. Women are facing significant challenges in the media industry due to persistent gender discrimination and inequity, and a lack of legal support is one of them. Women journalists encounter physical and psychological issues, the challenges including security issues and wage disparity in India (Rajeev, 2019). There is a guaranteed equal right in the Indian constitution; however, patriarchal beliefs hinder their actualization, perpetuating violence against women (Basu, 2009). Moreover, other organizations,

such as NGOs, play a significant role in providing legal support and mental healthcare to women victims in South Asia, such as Urban India; however, their impact is limited (Shukla, 2020). Women journalists who face verbal abuse, online harassment, and trolling on social media or in person usually do not report because of a lack of legal support, inadequate media literacy and training, and a dismissive attitude from law enforcement agencies. The normalization of trolling in professional online discourse leads many to prefer non-legal strategies over formal interventions. Integrating legal education into media literacy training at organizational, governmental, and educational levels is recommended to combat online harassment effectively (Yadav & Dutta, 2025). Despite legislation such as the Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act (2010) being in place, uncoordinated enforcement is still the order of the day. Practice and law vary greatly due to poor institutional accountability, poor awareness, and fear of retaliation (UN Women, 2020). Victims do not report harassment because there is social stigma, victimization, and an attack on family honor (Zakar et al., 2012). Thus, the majority of cases of harassment go unreported, and the harassers are rarely caught (Haris, 2025). Pakistan has an authorized law (Federal Ombudsman Secretariat for Prevention of Harassment, 2022) like the protection against harassment of Women at Workplace Act 2010, which was amended in 2020. There is a general feeling of insecurity within and outside the workplace that continues to affect the psychological well-being of working women. Now, organizations are mandated to implement these laws and have a proper code of conduct for harassment in the workplace. To fully implement this law, there is still a political gap and challenges. However, there is still a

need for a similar law for all genders. Furthermore, NGOs in rural areas and overall play a crucial role in spreading awareness of the rights of women.

To support women and all genders in the media industry, it is important to educate them and organize media literacy and safety training at the organizational, governmental, and educational levels. These trainings should not be just a part of the media industry but at all educational levels, specifically for undergraduate students, so that they can protect themselves. Moreover, these trainings should be a part of all majors and not restricted to just Information Technology, software, or computer science, but also Media, Mass communication, journalism, and all social science and medical-related programs should know how to protect themselves and know their legal rights.

The findings uncover a complex interconnection of cultural, institutional, and psychological factors that continue to impede gender equity in the workplace for women, especially in the media sector. Structural organizational barriers, deeply rooted patriarchal norms, and weak legal enforcement mechanisms contribute to a hostile work environment where harassment is widespread but often silenced. Moreover, there are international and national laws for workplace harassment and combating these issues; however, organizations still are not implementing these laws because of a patriarchal society. Also, these laws need to be re-evaluated from time to time and from region to region. Due to limited implementation of the laws in organizations, women often face difficulties at work, such as harassment, discrimination, and limited learning, growth opportunities, and support for women and all genders who face harassment

at work. They often do not report these problems because of a lack of support from the organization, and the outcome is depression, anxiety, and job quitting. This systematic review provides a timely and critical foundation for informed policy recommendations and future research aimed at creating safer, more equitable work environments.

Limitations

There are several limitations in this study, like many other studies. First limitation is that this research is based on a systematic literature review; therefore, qualitative research where lived experiences of victims can be captured would be best. Secondly, the study highlighted the psychological impacts of harassment; however, many other environmental factors are affecting women, and other genders can also be studied in the future for a broader spectrum. Thirdly, there is a limited literature on the gender base violence and harassment in the media sector; therefore, more literature is required to uncover this crucial issue. Lastly, there are studies and reports on these issues in developed countries such as the UK, the United States, and Europe; however, there is a critical gap in uncovering this topic in South Asia.

CONCLUSION

This research has addressed the struggles of working women in the media and other industries, including gender-based harassment, gender stereotypes, and consequently, mental and psychological impacts. Literature emphasizes the universal prevalence of gender disparity within the media sector, especially being heightened in socio-culturally

conservative settings. It also uncovers the organizational support and legal framework for supporting these consequences. The findings reflect strongly adverse impacts of harassment and discrimination on the career development and psychological well-being of women.

Despite the existence of legal protection mechanisms for women, they are undermined by implementation problems, cultural restrictions, and underreporting. The ongoing prevalence of feelings of unsafety among working women also necessitates stronger protection mechanisms and a shift in social attitudes towards gender roles and equality. It requires a multi-faceted strategy like stepped-up enforcement of anti-harassment laws and, most importantly, the existing implementation of laws in all types of organizations to protect women in the workplace, large-scale awareness-raising campaigns, promoting a healthy work culture, and removal of gender stereotypes. Further research, in the form of qualitative and quantitative research on the everyday life of working women in the media sector, would be useful in developing evidence to support targeted and culturally appropriate interventions for making working environments safer and more equitable in the region of South Asia. Lastly, the prevention of harassment- and discrimination-free workplaces is not just significant to women's well-being but also to the economic and social welfare of the nation.

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APPENDIX

Summary of a few key studies based on peer-reviewed journals, NGO reports, Media & international organization reports, and others.

Author(s) & Year	Study Focus / Title	Methodology	Relevance to the Study
Ahmad, S. S., & Koncsol, S. W. (2022)	Cultural factors influencing mental health stigma:	Cross-sectional study	Examines societal and cultural norms

	perceptions of mental illness (POMI) in Pakistani emerging adults.		that affects women mental health.
Ali, A. J., Al-Aali, L., & Krishnan, K. S. (2024)	Work ethics in Saudi Arabia: the critical role of women and expatriates.	Quantitative survey based study	The role of women in the workplace have been discussed and its connected with culture.
Ali, F., & Kramar, R. (2015)	An exploratory study of sexual harassment in Pakistani organizations.	Exploratory study.	Examines the sexual harassment in Pakistani workplaces.
Ali, T. S., Krantz, G., Gul, R., Asad, N., Johansson, E., & Mogren, I. (2011)	Gender roles and their influence on life prospects for women in urban Karachi, Pakistan: a qualitative study.	Qualitative study	Focuses on gender roles and their impact on women's lives in Pakistan.
Ali, T.S., Ali, S.S., Nadeem, S. (2022)	Perpetuation of gender discrimination in Pakistani society: results from a scoping review and qualitative study conducted in three provinces of Pakistan.	Scoping review and qualitative study.	Provides insights into the perpetuation of gender discrimination in Pakistan.
Anwar, S. M., & Burfat, F. M. (2021)	The Effects of Harassment of Working Women at Male Dominated Workplace.	Qualitative study	Addresses the effects of harassment on working women in male-dominated workplaces.

Arain, G. S. (2023, October 2)	In Pakistan, women journalists are breaking barriers in the face of harassment.	Media analysis / News reporting.	Highlights challenges faced by women journalists in Pakistan, specifically harassment.
Ashraf, J., Ali, S., & Abbasi, S. A. A. (2023)	Impact of reward on employee performance in the workplace.	Qualitative study	Broader study on employee performance, potentially relevant if gender differences in rewards are discussed.
Ashraf, J., Khan, M., Zaidi, M., Abbasi, R., Affandi, W. (2023)	Pakistan's Democratic Governance Issues in the Twenty-First Century.	Systemic literature review	Broader context of governance in Pakistan, potentially relevant for policy implications.
Ateeq-Ur-Rehman, M., Rafiq, N., Hashmi, N., & Siddiqui, B. N. (2023)	Nexus Between Socio-Cultural Factors and Women's Social Mobility: A Case Study of District Rajanpur (Pakistan).	Case study.	Explores the link between socio-cultural factors and women's social mobility in Pakistan.
Basu, A. (2009)	Harmful practices against women in India: An examination of selected legislative responses.	Examination of legislative responses.	Provides a comparative perspective on harmful practices against women and legislative responses in India.
Blumell, L. E., Mulupi, D., & Arafat, R. (2025)	The impact of sexual harassment on job satisfaction in newsrooms.	Quantitative Survey	Directly addresses the impact of sexual harassment on

			job satisfaction, specifically in newsrooms.
Bond MA, Punnett L, Pyle JL, Cazeca D, Cooperman M. (2004)	Gendered work conditions, health, and work outcomes.	Cross-sectional study	Examines gendered work conditions and their impact on health and work outcomes.
Buesa, S., & Calvete, E. (2013)	Violencia contra la mujer y síntomas de depresión y estrés postraumático: el papel del apoyo social.	Quantitative Survey	Focuses on violence against women and its psychological effects, including the role of social support.
Byerly, C. M. (2011)	Global report on the status of women in the news media.	Report.	Provides a global overview of the status of women in news media.
CARE. (2024, November 25)	Closing the gap between women and men in employment and entrepreneurship could boost global GDP by more than 20%; bridging lifetime earnings imbalances unlocks a staggering \$172 trillion.	Press release / Economic analysis.	Provides global statistics on economic benefits of gender equality in employment and entrepreneurship.
Cortina, L.M., & Leskinen, E.A. (2013)	Workplace Harassment Based on Sex: A Risk Factor for Women's Mental Health Problems.	Book	Identifies workplace harassment based on sex as a risk factor for women's mental health.
De Rosa, S., Schaller, S.J., Galarza, L. et al. (2024)	Barriers to female leadership in intensive care medicine: insights	Survey.	Examines barriers to female leadership in a

	from an ESICM NEXT & Diversity Monitoring Group Survey.		male-dominated field.
Dhiman B (2023)	Opportunities and Challenges for Women Journalist in Media Industry: A Critical Review.	Critical review.	Focuses on opportunities and challenges for women journalists.
Eagly, A. H. (1987)	Sex differences in social behavior: A social-role interpretation.	Theoretical interpretation.	Provides a theoretical framework for understanding sex differences in social behavior, relevant for gender roles.
Eagly, A. H., & Carli, L. L. (2007)	Through the labyrinth: The truth about how women become leaders.	Book / Analysis of leadership.	Explores the pathways and challenges for women in leadership.
Ernst Kossek, E., Lewis, S., & Hammer, L. B. (2009)	Work—life initiatives and organizational change: Overcoming mixed messages to move from the margin to the mainstream.	Conceptual paper	Focuses on work-life initiatives and organizational change, relevant for understanding workplace environments.
Fairchild, A. L., Holyfield, L. J., & Byington, C. L. (2018)	National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine report on sexual harassment: making the case for fundamental institutional change.	Report analysis.	Discusses the need for fundamental institutional change regarding sexual harassment.
Federal Ombudsman Secretariat for	The Protection Against Harassment of Women at the	Legal document.	Provides the legal framework for harassment

Prevention of Harassment. (2022, January 25)	Workplace (Amendment) Act, 2022.		protection in Pakistan.
Ferrier, M. (2018)	Attacks and harassment: The impact on female journalists and their reporting.	Report.	Examines the impact of attacks and harassment on female journalists.
Fitzgerald, L. F., Drasgow, F., Hulin, C. L., Gelfand, M. J., & Magley, V. J. (1997)	Antecedents and consequences of sexual harassment in organizations: A test of an integrated model.	Model testing.	Develops and tests a model for understanding sexual harassment in organizations.
Free Press Unlimited.	Gender equality in the media sector.	Website content / Organizational perspective.	Provides an organizational perspective on gender equality in the media.
GBTA. (2019)	Women's safety in business travel.	Report.	Addresses safety concerns for women in business travel.
Hadi, A. (2022)	Workplace sexual harassment and its underreporting in Pakistan.	Conceptual paper	Focuses on the issue of underreporting of workplace sexual harassment in Pakistan.
Hanna, T., Meisel, C., Moyer, J., Azcona, G., Bhatt, A., & Valero, S. D. (2023)	Forecasting women in leadership positions.	United Nations Report	Provides insights into future trends for women in leadership positions.
Haris, M. (2025, February 15)	Workplace harassment in Pakistan: Legal protections, challenges, and the need for stronger enforcement.	Media article	Provides an analysis of legal protections and challenges related to workplace harassment in Pakistan.

Hewlett, S. A., Marshall, M., & Sherbin, L. (2010)	The sponsor effect: Breaking through the last glass ceiling.	Survey research policy	Examines the role of sponsorship in women's career advancement.
Ho, I.K., Dinh, K.T., Bellefontaine, S.A., & Irving, A. (2012)	Sexual Harassment and Posttraumatic Stress Symptoms among Asian and White Women.	Quantitative study	Compares the impact of sexual harassment on mental health outcomes for Asian and White women.
Hughes, C. (2017)	Legislative Wins, Broken Promises: Gaps in implementation of laws on violence against women and girls.	Analysis of legislation.	Examines gaps in the implementation of laws related to violence against women.
Hunnicut, G. (2009)	Varieties of patriarchy and violence against women: Resurrecting “patriarchy” as a theoretical tool.	Theoretical.	Provides a theoretical framework for understanding patriarchy and violence against women.
Iftikhar, I., Javed, M., & Paracha, S. A. (2024)	From Glass Ceilings to Gendered Job Roles Examining Gender Disparities in Pakistani Media Organizations.	Quantitative survey	Directly examines gender disparities in Pakistani media organizations.
International Labour Organization (ILO). (2021)	Women in the workplace in Pakistan: Statistics and policy review.	Statistical and policy review.	Provides statistics and policy insights on women in the Pakistani workplace.
International Labour Organization. (2022)	World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends 2022.	International Report.	Offers a global outlook on employment and social trends,

			including gender-related aspects.
Iqbal, M., Shahbaz, M., Ahmad, B., & Saleem, H. A. R. (2025)	Breaking Barriers: Empowering Women's Professional Development in Pakistan to Achieve Gender Equality.	Qualitative Study	Focuses on empowering women's professional development in Pakistan.
Jabeen, N., & Iqbal, D. M. Z. (2020)	Gender and local governance in Pakistan: Promoting participation through capacity building.	Conceptual paper	Examines gender and local governance in Pakistan, particularly women's participation.
Jamil, S. (2023)	The growing norm of sexual harassment in Pakistan's mainstream and ethnic news media.	Qualitative study	Focuses on sexual harassment in Pakistani news media.
Javed, M. F., Jadoon, A. K., Malik, A., Sarwar, A., Ahmed, M., & Liaqat, S. (2022)	Gender wage disparity and economic prosperity in Pakistan.	Multivariate regression model	Directly examines gender wage disparity in Pakistan.
Kazimi AB, Shaikh MA, John S. (2019)	Mothers role and perception in developing gender discrimination.	Mixed method research	Explores the role of mothers in the development of gender discrimination.
Khan, K.I., Jamil, B., Muhammad, M. et al. (2025)	Gender inequality in healthcare leadership: the challenges women face in breaking through the glass ceiling.	Exploratory qualitative study	Addresses gender inequality and the "glass ceiling" in healthcare leadership.
Khan, S. (2018)	Gender inequality and its effects on women's career	Quantitative	Focuses on gender inequality and its impact on

	advancement in Pakistan.		women's career advancement in Pakistan.
Kosec, K., Mo, C. H., Schmidt, E., & Song, J. (2021)	Perceptions of relative deprivation and women's empowerment.	Conceptual framework	Examines the relationship between perceptions of deprivation and women's empowerment.
Kundu, P., & Tabassum, M. (2023)	Harassed and Hushed: Bangladeshi Women Journalists' Experiences of Gender Discrimination and Sexual Harassments.	Mixed method research	Focuses on the experiences of women journalists in Bangladesh, including harassment and discrimination.
Lazarus, R., & Folkman, S. (1984)	Stress, Appraisal, and Coping.	Theoretical.	Provides a theoretical framework for stress and coping, relevant for understanding responses to harassment.
Melek, G. (2024)	Sexual Harassment, Gender-Based Discrimination and Mobbing in Newsrooms: Qualitative In-Depth Interviews with Women Journalists in Turkish Media.	Qualitative in-depth interviews.	Examines sexual harassment, discrimination, and mobbing in newsrooms through qualitative interviews with women journalists in Turkey.
Noonari, H. B., Fatima, S. A., & Ahmedani, M. M. (2022)	Gender Discrimination in Curriculum.	Qualitative study	Focuses on gender discrimination within

			educational curricula.
Novotney, A. (2024, July 8)	Women leaders make work better. Here's the science behind how to promote them.	Analysis of research / Media article.	Presents scientific backing for promoting women leaders and their positive impact on workplaces.
O'Brien, W., Hanlon, C., & Apostolopoulos, V. (2023)	Women as leaders in male-dominated sectors: A bifocal analysis of gendered organizational practices.	Bifocal analysis.	Examines women's leadership in male-dominated sectors.
Park, K., Ging, D., Murphy, S., & McGrath, C. (2023, March)	The impact of the use of social media on women and girls.	Study / Report.	Addresses the impact of social media on women and girls.
Patton, M. Q. (2022)	Impact-driven qualitative research and evaluation.	Methodology discussion.	General resource on qualitative research methods.
PILDAT. (2022)	Gender-Based Violence in Pakistan: A situational analysis.	Situational analysis.	Provides an analysis of gender-based violence in Pakistan.
Rajeev, P.N. (2019)	Work and Life of Women Journalists : A Study with Special Reference to Kerala.	Feminist media theory	Examines the work and life of women journalists in Kerala, India.
Rudman, L. A., & Glick, P. (2001)	Prescriptive gender stereotypes and backlash toward agentic women.	Experimental	Focuses on gender stereotypes and the backlash against assertive women.

Sadrudin, M.M. (2019)	Sexual Harassment at Workplace in Pakistan - Issues and Remedies about the Global Issue at Managerial Sector.	Phenomenological Study	Discusses issues and remedies for workplace sexual harassment in Pakistan's managerial sector.
Sengar, N., & Shah, S. R. (2024)	Examining the domestic adversities imposed by patriarchy on working women: A sociological perspective.	Sociological perspective.	Examines the domestic adversities faced by working women due to patriarchy.
Shafique, T., Thalho, N., Bilal, D.M., Iftikhar, R., Faiza, M., Nasrat, & Azizi, U. (2025)	Workplace Harassment in Pakistan: Implications for Workers across the Gender.	Quantitative study	Examines the implications of workplace harassment in Pakistan across genders.
Shirkat Gah. (2019)	Women's Empowerment in Pakistan: A study of urban working women.	NGO	Focuses on women's empowerment among urban working women in Pakistan.
Shukla, D. (2020)	Assessing the impact of NGOs providing legal support to women in urban India.	Theoretical study	Examines the impact of NGOs providing legal support to women in India.
Statistics on women – ILOSTAT.	Statistics on women	Statistical data.	Provides statistical data on women.
Tabassum, R. (2017)	Gender inequality in mental health: A review from the South Asian context.	Review	Reviews gender inequality in mental health within the South Asian context.
Takeuchi, M., Nomura, K., Horie, S., Okinaga, H., Perumalswami, C.	Direct and indirect harassment experiences and burnout among	Cross-sectional study	Examines harassment experiences and burnout among

R., & Jagsi, R. (2018)	academic faculty in Japan.		academic faculty in Japan.
Thakur, A., & Goyal, S. (2025)	The Intersection of Paid Employment and Unpaid Household Work: Review of Literature on the Impact of Double Burden on Women's Mental Health.	Literature review.	Reviews literature on the "double burden" of paid and unpaid work and its impact on women's mental health.
UN Women UK. (2021)	Sexual harassment in public spaces in the UK.	Report.	Focuses on sexual harassment in public spaces in the UK.
UN Women. (2020)	The cost of violence: A gender-based analysis in Pakistan.	Report	Analyzes the cost of violence against women in Pakistan.
UN Women. (2023)	Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The gender snapshot.	Report.	Provides a snapshot of progress on gender-related Sustainable Development Goals.
White, A. D. (2024)	Abusive Management and Workplace Trauma in the Mental Health Field: A Phenomenological Study.	Phenomenological study.	Examines abusive management and workplace trauma, specifically in the mental health field.
Willness, C. R., Steel, P., & Lee, K. (2007)	A meta-analysis of the antecedents and consequences of workplace sexual harassment.	Meta-analysis.	Provides a comprehensive meta-analysis of workplace sexual harassment.
World Bank. (2023)	Women, Business and the Law 2023.	Report.	Examines laws and regulations affecting

			women's economic opportunities globally.
World Bank. (2024)	Women's Economic Empowerment in Pakistan (Executive Summary).	Executive Summary / Report.	Provides an executive summary on women's economic empowerment in Pakistan.
World Economic Forum. (2023, June 20)	Gender gaps in the workforce. In Global Gender Gap Report 2023.	Report.	Provides data and analysis on gender gaps in the workforce globally.
World Press Freedom Index.	World Press Freedom Index	Index.	Provides an index of press freedom, relevant for the environment of journalists.
Yadav, M., & Dutta, P. (2025)	Navigating Online Hostility: Gendered Trolling of Indian Women Journalists, Legal Interventions, and the Role of Media Literacy.	Qualitative study	Focuses on online hostility and trolling faced by women journalists in India.
Zaeem Yasin, D. A. A., & Musarat, A. (2023)	Challenges Faced by the Women Journalists: A Case Study of Gilgit-Baltistan.	Case study.	Examines challenges faced by women journalists, specifically in Gilgit-Baltistan.
Zakar, R., Zakar, M. Z., & Krämer, A. (2012)	Voices of strength and struggle: Women's coping strategies against spousal violence in Pakistan.	Qualitative study	Focuses on women's coping strategies against spousal violence in Pakistan.

Zamir, F., & Jullandhry, S. (2021)	Influence of Cultural Barriers, Societal Issues and Environmental Restriction on Career of Female Journalist: A Review of Feminist Economy of Female Journalists of Pakistan.	Review.	Reviews cultural barriers, societal issues, and environmental restrictions affecting female journalists' careers in Pakistan.
Zimmermann, F. (2023)	Gender Wage Inequalities within Firms.	Doctoral dissertation.	Focuses on gender wage inequalities within firms.