



Original Research Article

Gender Based Violence at Workplace: Are Women Safe?

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ABSTRACT

Background: Majority of women are not safe in their workplace as they are the victim of many types of gender based violence at workplace and they are more likely to experience violence in different forms such as physical, emotional, sexual etc. but due to social stigma, economic condition, illiteracy these are under reported. The purpose of the study was to identify magnitude, risk factors and response of women towards the common gender based violence.

Methodology: A descriptive cross sectional study among 182 female workers was conducted in different food industries of Pokhara Industrial Estate in October-December 2013 using quantitative methods.

Results: About fifty percent (49.5%) respondents had experienced GBV in their workplace where 47.3% faced emotional violence and 14.8% faced sexual violence but none of them experienced physical violence. The major perpetrators for emotional violence were seniors (86.0%) where as male coworkers (66.7%) for sexual violence. The risk of sexual violence was found 8.39 times more to those who experienced emotional violence. The risk of sexual violence was 3.67 times greater in below 20 years age than 20 years or above age groups.

Conclusion: There is an immediate to develop a friendly working environment with strict rules and regulations. Awareness and training programs to empower female workers are also necessary to eliminate gender based violence at workplace.

Keywords: Gender based violence, female workers, workplace, emotional violence, sexual violence etc.

INTRODUCTION

Violence pervades the lives of many people around the world, and touches all of us in some way. [1] In women's life, violation gets started when they have not even taken their first step to the earth, i.e. sex selective abortion. In infancy period, they faced nutritional and health care problems leading to malnutrition and other health problems. The most frustrating stage

for them is during adolescence period where they face different types of violence as forced prostitution, trafficking, early marriage, psychological abuse, rape and this kind of torture continues through their whole life. [2]

Gender based violence is more prevalent in developing countries. Nepal is a poor and male dominated country where literacy rate is low so to run a house most of

the women are engaged in different types of work. Compared to men only few women's who have higher degrees are working in higher post otherwise uneducated women are working in industries and majority of women are not safe in their workplace, as they are at risk of many types of violence such as: physical, psychological, sexual etc.

The term "violence against women" means any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life. Accordingly, violence against women encompasses but is not limited to the following: a) Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, including battering, sexual abuse of female children in the household, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitation; b) Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring within the general community, including rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere, trafficking in women and forced prostitution; c) Physical, sexual and psychological violence perpetrated or condoned by the State, wherever it occurs. Acts of violence against women also include forced sterilization and forced abortion, coercive/forced use of contraceptives, female infanticide and prenatal sex selection.^[3]

The objective of the study was to determine the magnitude, cause, and response of women towards gender based violence in their workplace.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A descriptive cross sectional study design was used to conduct this study during October- December, 2013. Quantitative method was used. All female workers working in selected food industries (biscuit, noodles and dairy) namely Himshree Foods Pvt. Ltd, Gauri Shankar Foods, Pokhara Noodles, Panthi Dairy, Fishtail Dairy, Taza Bread, Sujal Foods and Pokhara Foods of Pokhara Industrial Estate were included in this study individually. Purposive sampling technique was used to gather the primary data. Face to face interview was done with respondents by using interview guideline. Sample size was estimated by using the formula, $n = Z^2 pq/E^2$. Written permission to conduct the study was also taken from the administration of all selected industries. Purpose of the study was explained and oral informed consent was obtained from each subject before conducting the interview. Care was also taken to maintain the privacy and confidentiality. The obtained data were analyzed according to the research questions and objectives of the study by using descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation and cross tabulation using SPSS 16.0.

RESULTS

General information of the respondents:

Overall 191 women workers were requested for interview, out of them 182 workers gave consent. The non response rate was 4.72%. Among 182 respondents maximum respondents (44.5%) were belongs to the age group 30-39 years. Minimum age of the respondent was 17 and maximum age was 54. More than fifty percent of the respondents were from upper caste groups. Similarly, Most of the respondents were Hindus (93.4%). Eight in every ten (81.9%) respondents were married. Likewise slightly more than two-fifth (43.4%) respondents had secondary level education. Almost two third (68.1%) of

the respondents were working in packaging department. Nearly all of the respondents (97.3%) were labors. Likewise, one fourth of respondents (27%) had work experience of 3 years and less. While collecting data majority (90.7%) of the respondents were working in day shift and rest of the respondents were working in night shift.

Physical violence experienced at workplace:

None of the women had experienced physical violence in their workplace during last 12 months.

Emotional violence experienced at workplace:

Out of 182 respondents, 86 had experienced emotional violence in their workplace. So the reported proportion of emotional violence at workplace among female workers was 47.3% in last 12 months.

Types of emotional violence experienced:

Out of 86 respondents who experienced emotional violence; majorities (77.9%) were punished as late comers, followed by verbal degradation (74.4%) and very few (2.3%) were threatening to kill or beat. Among that 44.2% respondents experienced such types of violence more than 4 times in last twelve months. (Table 1)

Table 1: Types of emotional violence experienced (n= 86)

*Types of Emotional violence	n	%
Punishment for late comers	67	77.9
Verbal degradation	64	74.4
Threat to expel from work	19	22.1
Unequal wages for same work	10	11.6
Threat for cutting off wages	7	8.1
Threat to kill or beat	2	2.3

*Multiple responses

Perpetrators emotional violence: The perpetrators of emotional violence were seniors/employers (86.0%), male coworkers (43.0%) and junior male workers (2.3%) respectively.

Effect of emotional violence: Due to this violence 58 (67.4%) women became

worried, similarly 45.3% felt shame and guilt followed by 29 (33.7%) felt like crying and very few (2.3%) wanted to stay alone after the incident.

Responses towards emotional violence: Out of 86 emotional violence cases, maximum 59.3% ignored the incident, followed by 38.4% shared with their close friends only very few (1.2%) respondents done strikes and none of the cases had been reported to the police administration. (Table 2)

Table 2: Responses for emotional violence (n= 86)

*Responses	n	%
Ignore the incident	51	59.3
Share with friends	33	38.4
Share with family	23	26.7
Scold	15	17.4
Report to the industry administration	10	11.6
Seek help from political leaders	3	3.5
Strike	1	1.2
Report to the police	-	-

*Multiple responses

Cause of emotional violence: In respondents' opinion the cause of emotional violence (38.8%) was due to their own mistake followed by 23.5% insult, 17.6% lower in rank or position respectively but few (4.7%) were unknown about the cause violence and so on.

Sexual violence experienced at workplace: Out of 182, only 27 respondents had experienced sexual violence in their workplace. So the reported proportion of sexual violence at workplace among female workers was 14.8% in last 12 months.

Types of sexual violence experienced: Out of 27, 17 (63.0%) faced the telephone calls and SMS which indicate sexual favor, followed by 11 (40.7%) suggestive looks or gestures and very few 2 (7.4%) respondents faced touching body parts respectively. Among 27 respondents who faced sexual violence none had been the victim of extreme forms of sexual violence like showing pornographic pictures and videos, showing sexual organ, attempted rape etc. (Table 3)

Table 3: Types of sexual violence experienced (n= 27)

*Types of sexual violence	n	%
Phone call & SMS indicating sexual favor	17	63.0
Suggestive looks or gestures	11	40.7
Passing vulgar words and jokes	7	25.9
Pressure for dating	6	22.2
Touching sensitive body parts	2	7.4

*Multiple responses

Perpetrators of sexual violence:

Perpetrators of sexual violence were male workers (66.7%), strangers (51.9%) and seniors (11.1%) respectively.

Effect of sexual violence: Among 27 respondents who experienced sexual violence in their workplace; 17 (63.0%) reported that inability to concentrate on work, followed by 10 (37.0%), felt like quitting a job and very few (3.7%) came late to the work.

Responses towards sexual violence: Out of 27 sexual violence cases, 40.7% reported that they shared the incident with their friends, followed by 33.3% ignored the incident, 25.9% made perpetrators understand, 22.2% shared the incident with their family for help and only 14.8% reported to the industry administration respectively but none of the cases had been reported to the police administration. (Table 4)

Table 4: Response for sexual violence (n= 27)

*Responses	n	%
Share with friends for help	11	40.7
Ignore the incident	9	33.3
Make them understand	7	25.9
Share with family for help	6	22.2
Report to the industry administration	4	14.8
Report to the police	-	-

*Multiple responses

Respondents' opinions about the causes of sexual violence:

Out of 27 sexual violence cases, 14 (51.9%) violated respondents felt that they were insulted being a female followed by 8 (29.6%) teasing and very few (3.7%) felt that perpetrators might be grown up in such environment.

Preventive measures for GBV at work place:

Respondents' opinion about preventive measures: Among 182 respondents, 43 (28.5%) respondents suggested the unity among female workers is the most important. Similarly 41 (27.2%) respondents believe that women should raise the voice against GBV, 29 (19.2%) women said they should be self aware about violence, 25 (16.6%) reported women should enhance self esteem to tackle the violence and 24 (15.9%) said that women should have good attitude respectively. Very few (0.7%) respondents were unknown about the preventive measures that women can do to protect themselves.

Respondents' opinion about the role of administration: Among 182 respondents, 38 (21.0%) believed to establish work friendly environment in companies followed by 35 (19.3%) believed in giving punishment to perpetrators so that they won't repeat any mistake. Likewise 32 (17.7%) respondents opine gender equality at workplace and very few (2.8%) respondents suggested to rotation in work. Nearly one fifth (19.9%) of the respondents were unknown about the preventive measures that administration should follow.

Respondent's opinion about the government role: Among 182 respondents, 24.7% suggested that government should formulate and implement policy about GBV at workplace and 23 (12.6%) respondents believe penalization of perpetrators to prevent GBV. Very few 4 (2.2%) respondents suggested publishing annual report about GBV at workplace. About one fourth (23.6%) of the respondents were unknown about the preventive measures that government should implement at workplace.

Association of GBV with various factors:

There was no association found among age, ethnicity, religion, marital status, education, working department,

position, duty hour and emotional violence (P value > 0.05) but significant association found with work experience (P value 0.045). The risk of emotional violence was found 4.21 times greater to those who had work experience ≥ 10 than ≤ 3 years.

There was no association found among ethnicity, religion, marital status, education, position, and sexual violence but significant association found between age and sexual violence of the respondents (P value 0.03) and risk of sexual violence was 3.67 times greater in below 20 years age than above age groups. Similarly association of sexual violence was found with working departments (P value 0.007) and the risk was 3.73 times greater to those who worked in production department than other. Likewise there was high statistical association found with duty time of the respondents and sexual violence (P value 0.001) and the risk of sexual violence was 5.07 times more in night duty workers than day workers.

DISCUSSION

About fifty percent (49.5%) respondents had experienced GBV in their workplace this study which is similar to the study conducted in Turkey. [4] The high prevalence might be due to lack of rules and regulations, lack of self defense and empowerment, patriarchal society where males are given importance even in their mistakes. The reported proportion of emotional violence was (47.3%) found more than sexual violence (14.8%) supported by study conducted garment factories of Dhaka, Bangladesh. [5] The risk of sexual violence was found 8.39 times more to those who experienced emotional violence. While comparing general information of the respondents and emotional violence there was no association found among emotional violence and age, ethnicity, religion, marital status, education status, working department, position/rank and duty time of

the respondents but association found with work experience (P value <0.05). In this study who had >19 years work experience were more vulnerable to emotional violence but the study conducted in Dhaka [5] in which >5 years work experience were more vulnerable to any type of violence. This might be due to the lack of fear and habituation of perpetrators as they feel they do not get punished.

While comparing general information of the respondents with sexual violence there was no association found among sexual violence and ethnicity, religion, marital status, education status, position and work experience of the respondents. This is supported by study conducted in Dhaka. [5] But the study conducted in carpet factories of Kathmandu Valley [6] showed the relationship between sexual violence and marital status this may be due to unequal distribution of sample size i.e. married (81.9%) and single (18.1%). In this study association was found among sexual violence and age group of the respondents (P value 0.03), working department (P value 0.007) and duty hour (P value 0.001). This finding is supported by study conducted in Turkey [4] and Dhaka. [5]

Major perpetrators involved in emotional violence were seniors/employers followed by coworkers and juniors. Most of the respondents who faced emotional violence ignored the incident and none of the cases of emotional violence had been reported to the police station.

Major perpetrators involved in sexual violence were male coworkers followed by strangers and seniors. This result is similar to the study conducted in Turkey, [4] Dhaka, [5] carpet factories of Kathmandu, [7] carpet and garment factories of Kathmandu [8] and Malaysia. [9] Almost half of the respondents who experienced sexual violence in their workplace reported that they shared the incident with their

friends followed by ignored the incident. This finding is supported by study conducted in carpet factories of Kathmandu [7] similarly like emotional violence none of the cases of sexual violence had been reported to the police station.

In the emotional violence higher percentage (77.9%) of respondents were punished as late comers followed by verbal degradation. Different forms of emotional violence were faced by the women more than 4 times in last twelve months. Similarly in sexual violence respondents were violated by telephone calls or SMS indicating sexual favors followed by suggestive looks or gestures none had been the victims of extreme forms of sexual violence this result is similar to the carpet factories of Kathmandu. [7] The types of sexual violence faced by the more respondents were 2 times in 12 months.

Due to emotional violence out of 86, 67.4% were worried followed by shame and guilt feeling whereas due to sexual violence out of 27, 63.0% were unable to pay attention to their work followed by felt like quitting the job it means major impact on their mental health as well as productivity.

On the question of role of women to prevent GBV one third of respondents felt that unity among female respondent is the most in workplace so that perpetrators cannot violate women followed by raise voice against GBV because of that perpetrators won't dare to repeat violence. Same question about role of administration was asked and in their opinion thirty eight expressed that in each factory work friendly environment should be establish followed by penalization of perpetrators for the violence. Similarly on government role to prevent GBV at workplace one third of the respondents felt that government should formulate policy about GBV and need to be implement in industries.

There is no specific laws about GBV at workplace so many workers were suggested to have policy on GBV in workplaces of Nepal. In some factories there was display of organizational rules and regulation for workers. All factories should display clear cut rules and regulation and implement strictly inside the workplace so that there will be no violence.

CONCLUSIONS

The prevalence of GBV in the workplace was found high though none of female workers experienced physical violence. It was found that the female workers in food industries were suffered more emotionally than any other violence. Seniors and male co workers were reported to be the main perpetrators. Less than 20 year's age group and night duty workers were more vulnerable to sexual violence. The risk of sexual violence was found more to those who experienced emotional violence. Most of the female workers blamed themselves for being the cause for the violence. Majority of the respondents ignored the incident of emotional violence. Victims of sexual violence share the incident with near ones. Thus, women at workplace weren't found to be safe.

So there is immediate need to establish work friendly environment so that all senior as well as junior workers treat each other as a family member; encourage victims to report violence, providing them with necessary support system including legal assistance and help; make aware to female workers on GBV and make provision for special protection and facilities for night duty women workers.

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