Nurses' Experiences of Sexual Harassment by Patients at Punjab Institute of Mental Health, Lahore, Pakistan: A Qualitative Study

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ABSTRACT

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Any forcible, unfriendly, or unpleasant sexual behavior is referred to sexual harassment. The objective of the study was to explore the nurses’ experiences of sexual harassment by patients at Punjab Institute of Mental Health, Lahore, Pakistan. The study was cross-sectional and qualitative in nature. The purposive sampling of non-probability sampling technique was applied to select the study’s participants. Using the purposive sampling technique, 50 nurses were selected. The in-depth interviews were conducted to get the in-depth information. The collected data was analyzed by using thematic analysis. The findings of the study reveals that sexual harassment is a widespread problem faced by nurses. The participants shared that they face different forms of sexual harassment such as softly touching the fingertips, requesting sexual intercourse by patients, unwanted sexual gestures, holding breast and buttocks, forced kissing, pressuring to marry and retaining privates in an Addiction Ward at Punjab Institute of Mental Hospital, Lahore. It can be concluded that female nurses are mostly exploited by the male patients. It is recommended that administration of the Institute should implement code of conduct and relevant laws in a strict manner.

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1. Introduction

Any forcible, unfriendly, or unpleasant sexual behavior is referred to sexual harassment (Zhang et al., 2018). Sex-related behaviour that the victim considers to be offensive, exceeds their power, and interferes with their well-being is also termed as sexual harassment (Zeighami et al., 2022). Personal attributes and job characteristics are two aspects that might lead to sexual harassment in the workplace. Age (young), attraction, and appearance are the personality traits can lead someone to engage in undesirable behavior (Demir & Rodwell, 2012). Most prominent examples of the sexual harassment faced by the nurses are sexual remarks, touching, forcible
grapping hands, asking for sexual favor, showing any pornographic content, flirting and derogatory behavior (Njaka et al., 2020). Sexual harassment can happen anywhere, including at work, in the hands of perpetrators (Spector et al., 2014).

Sexual harassment against nurses has becoming more common in the workplace (Zhang et al., 2017). Compared to other occupational categories, nurses are three times as likely to experience workplace sexual harassment (Yosep et al., 2022). In comparison to other health professionals, nurses experience more sexual harassment (Gilmore et al., 2021). Nurses usually work three shifts and provide nursing care around-the-clock and it trigger the risk of happening of the incidents of sexual harassment (Kowalczuk & Krajewska, 2017). It was asserted that aggressive behaviour by mental patients which results in sexual problems causes sexual harassment of psychiatric nurses. Patients' and staff members' combative behaviour is frequently a sign of sexual harassment of nurses (Schlup et al., 2021).

The incidents of sexual harassment unleashed multifaceted sufferings for nurses. Physical degeneration, mental disturbance and social disorientation push the nurses to exclude themselves from the working place (Alyaemni & Alhudaithi, 2016). Sexual harassment can also increase the risk of depression and anxiety among nurses. It has been noted that patients in mental hospitals need extensive and focused care, therefore, nurses serve with professional integrity. Unfortunately, they face sexual harassment by the patients in return (Xing et al., 2015). As a result, the researcher designed this study and adopted a qualitative design to investigate the exposure and experiences of nurses who had faced any unwanted and forcible act of sexual favor in mental institution.

The objective of this study is following:

- To explore the nurses’ experiences of sexual harassment by patients at Punjab Institute of Mental Hospital, Lahore, Pakistan.

These are following research questions of this study:

1. Have you ever faced any type of sexual harassment at the Institution?
2. Which type of sexual harassment did you experience by patients at the Institution?
3. How do you feel after being sexually harassed by the patients at the Institution?

2. Materials and Methods

The study was cross-sectional and qualitative in nature. The purposive sampling of non-probability sampling technique was applied to select the study’s participants. The inclusion criteria of the nurses were (i) should be Charge Nurse, (ii) having more than three years’ experience at Punjab Institute of Mental Health, Lahore, (iii) serving in an Addiction Ward for one years, and (iv) age should be 25 years or more. Using the purposive sampling technique, 50 charge nurses were selected which was serving in an Addiction Ward for more than one year at Punjab Institute of Mental Hospital, Lahore. The in-depth interviews were conducted to get the in-depth information. The collected data were transformed into verbatim. The collected data was analyzed by using thematic analysis. Researchers developed codes, categories under the themes of research questions. Regarding the ethical considerations, permission was taken from the Executive Director, Punjab Institute of Mental Health, Lahore. Informed consent was taken from the study’s participants and it was pledged that obtained information would be only used for the research purpose.
3. Results

Table 5.1: Demographic Characteristics of Nurses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic Characteristics</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-30</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-35</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36 and Above</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital Status</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Un-Married</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career Duration</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-4 years</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-6 years</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-8 years</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 8 years</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Duration of Serving in Addiction Ward</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2 Years</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-4 Years</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 4 Years</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of Working Shift</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day Shift</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Night Shift</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day &amp; Night Shift</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Regarding the age of participants, 50% of the respondents had age between the 31-35 years, 30% of the participants had age between the 25-30 years and 20% of the participants had age 36 years and above. The majority of the participants (76%) were married. The career duration of the 36% of the participants were 3-4 years, 20% of the participants had career duration of 5-6 years, 24% of the participants had career duration of 7-8 years and 20% of the participants had career duration of 8 years and above. Most of the participants (72%) were serving in Addiction Ward for 1-2 years, 16% of the participants were serving in Addiction Ward for 3-4 years and 12% of the participants were serving in Addiction Ward for more than 4 years. The majority of participants (44%) were performing duty at night shift, 32% of the participants were performing duty at day shift and 24% of the participants were performing duty data and night shift.

Theme 1: Nurses’ Experiences of Sexual Harassment by Patients

According to the findings of the thematic analysis, nurses at the Punjab Institute of Mental Health, Lahore face incidents of sexual harassment at large scale. The actor of the sexual harassment were usually patients which were being treated in the said institute. Most prominent types of sexual harassment are faced by the nurses are verbal abuse, sexual comments, hand grapping, ask for sexual favor, sudden hugging and kissing and touching private parts. It has been noted that male patients were the major actor and perpetrator of the sexual harassment at the Institute. The participants of the study shared their experiences and exposures in the context of sexual harassment as under:

Z1. “Bipolar patients have made fun of me for wearing red lipstick. When a patient is in the insane phase, he will yell, "Let me kiss you, I want to kiss you!" That event made me dread going to work”.

B1. “When I walked into the patient's room at night shift, he immediately hugged me. I was stunned and amazed since the patient was naked. I didn't want to go through the patient's room after that”

S1. “I keep my distance from patients who have a history of sexual abuse after reading their medical data. But when I met the patient, he kissed my shoulder and requested for sex. I left the patient right away because I was terrified and astonished”.

S2. “When I first entered the ward, a patient abruptly grabbed, touched, and groped my buttocks...
from behind, and I smacked him”.

D1. “The patient unexpectedly approached me and stroked my right breast. His fingers grazed my breasts”.

**Theme 2: Forms of Sexual Harassment Experienced by Nurses**

The participants revealed that they face following forms of sexual harassment in Addiction Ward by the patients:

i. Softly touching the fingertips;
ii. Asking for sexual favor;
iii. Verbal abuse;
iv. Touching private parts;
v. Forced hugging and kissing;
vi. Favor for long-term relationship.

**Theme 3: Nurses’ Responses to the Sexual Harassment**

The majority of the nurses stated about their response towards sexual harassment that when a patient’s delusion manifested itself, ask for any sexual favor or try to act forcibly. For further information, please see the data descriptions below:

D1. “A glass was suddenly thrown at my leg, which swelled up instantly, and the patient then tempted me to have sexual intercourse. “He took a bath by himself. I’m not sure why he was spewing water out of his mouth at me”.

R1. “Suddenly, he opened the door, and I was forcefully hugged. I immediately punched the patient, without realising what I had done”.

S3. “When he was reminded to take his prescription, he kissed me and pointed his hand to my veil and eyes”.

H1. “He suddenly struck me, grabbing my face; it was a spontaneous and difficult escape, but this veil and my shirt buttons came undone”.

According to the findings of this study, nurses anticipate cases of sexual harassment by patients. Nurses are cautious, avoid patients who have perpetrated sexual harassment, and fortify themselves. The following are detailed descriptions of nurses' anticipation:

H2. “We must be certain that we must first be powerful. If the patients believe we are weak, we will be tortured and humiliated indefinitely. We entered the room with some reservations...”.

S3. “If I did not know the patient or there was a history of the patient committing sexual harassment behaviours, I would keep a safe distance from the patient”

A1. “In an acute room, I tend to be more emotional since we have to be in a dominant position to indicate who the boss is, similar to a prison”.

R2. “”For example, as a proactive measure, I must dare to interact with the patients.”

A2. “I must exercise extreme caution. There have been patients who attempted suicide. I was terrified of something similar happening again”.

**4. Discussions**

According to the findings of this study, nurses are largely sexually exploited and subjugated by the large-scale happenings of sexual harassment by the patients at Punjab Institute of Mental Health, Lahore. It has been also observed that male patients are the actor of sexual harassment among nurses. Therefore, nurses should be able to manage the unethical acts of patients in a strict manner.
Male patients are the most likely perpetrators of sexual harassment towards nurses, and female nurses are the most likely victims. As a result, male nurses are more needed than female nurses in mental hospitals to prevent sexual harassment towards nurses. This is consistent with prior research, which found that more male nurses are needed in mental facilities. This is intended to prevent sexual harassment against nurses. Previous research has found that female nurses are more likely to be victims of sexual harassment than male nurses. The high rate of sexual harassment is due to power dynamics between males and women. As a result, male patients are more likely to conduct sexual harassment against women.

Physical and verbal abuse are the typical act of sexual harassment faced by the nurses at workplace. The previous research also reveal that any unfavorable. Forcible and unwelcomed act of sexual intention lead to the uncomfortable and mental disturbance for the nurses. It is also against the fundamental rights of any human.

At the working place of nurses, incidents of sexual harassment has become matter of routine rather than anomaly. Sexual harassment also produces psychological issues such as dread, worry, and discomfort in the workplace. Furthermore, incidents of sexual harassment unleashed the cascading impacts on the personality and potential of nurses. The results of this study are also aligned with the previous researches that a comfortable and conducive working environment contribute in increasing the performance of nurses and remain adherence with the organizational commitments. Avoiding sexual harassment is one issue that contributes to nurses' job safety.

5. Conclusions
The acts of sexual harassment at Punjab Institute of Mental Hospital, Lahore faced by nurses are need to be tackled on urgency basis. In this regard, leadership and administrators play their effective role in ensuring safe and conducive working place for the nurses. Sexual harassment can both physical and verbal for mental health nurses. Nurses have reported being kissed, hugged from behind, held by the breasts, and invited to engage in sexual intercourse. Nurses are astonished, terrified, and anxious as a result of sexual harassment by patients with mental illnesses. Sexual harassment towards mental nurses also drives nurses to wish to quit their careers. The majority of sexually harassed nurses are female nurses. This could be due to the prevalence of power dynamics between males and women.

As a result, collective role should be adopted for ensuring the safety of nurses to prevent from the acts of sexual harassment. The study's implication is that there is sheer need to develop a code of conduct for the patients in order to ensure conductive working place and high performance of the nurses. The high rated acts of sexual harassment trigger the fear among nurses and it affects the both like professional integrity of nurses and patients care. It is proposed that a program should be introduced for nursing to deal and report such act of sexual harassment. Further research should be conducted to investigate the association between sexual harassment experience and working environment of the nurses.

References
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