



## Sexual harassment form: From the victim's perspective

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### Abstract

This study looked into the different types of sexual harassment that might occur among hospital personnel. The various forms of sexual harassment that exist among employees were investigated in this study. In the primary study, 14 participants were interviewed in a semi-structured manner based on the researchers' criteria for workplace harassment and bullying. For the purposes of this investigation, just two of them were found to be victims of sexual harassment. All the interviews were taped, transcribed, examined, and categorised into themes. According to the data, several themes arose from the dialogue, including verbal torment, physical patting, fear of reporting and tolerance. The victim chose to keep silent and endure the consequences because no action was taken against the assailant.

**Keywords:** Sexual harassment, form, victim and experiences

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### Introduction

Sexual harassment is a broad word that encompasses a wide range of unwanted sexual attention, both verbal and physical. The occurrence can happen in a variety of scenarios. Sexual harassment can affect women and men from many walks of life. The perpetrator can even identify as any gender. However, in the instance of sexual harassment, women appear to be the more common victims (Herrera, Herrera, & Expósito, 2018; Hersch, 2018) <sup>[20, 21]</sup>, though men can also be harassed. Most of the current research indicates that sexual harassment has a two-sided impact on women. Many people have experienced sexual harassment at some point in their lives. Sexual harassment can take many forms, including sexual jokes, sexual dialogues, name-calling, teasing, sexual groping, and other forms of physical assault. Although the legal definition varies every country, it is assumed to refer to uninvited sex-related behaviour.

Sexual harassment that occurs on a regular basis exposes the victim to a great deal of verbal or physical abuse, resulting in emotional instability, dread, and worry. Some studies use broad measures of psychological impact and find that being a victim of sexual harassment is linked to poor mental health. More specific consequences, such as psychological stress, have been linked to a reduced susceptibility to sickness and infection, according to Gianaros and Wager (2015) <sup>[18]</sup>. In the end, the victim of sexual harassment may be more likely to become unwell because of this. Depression, anxiety, aggression, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), low self-esteem, suicidal thoughts, and other mental illnesses are among them. These repercussions can have a significant impact on the victim's life expectancy (Ybarra, Mitchell, Kosciw, & Korchmaros, 2014; Bryan, Bryan, & Clemans, 2015; Monteith, Brownstone, Gerber, Soberay, & Bahraini, 2019) <sup>[46, 7, 31]</sup>.

Sexual harassment affects a variety of sectors and organisations, including the hotel industry (Matulewicz, 2015, Ram, 2018) <sup>[28, 35]</sup>, hostess (Matulewicz, 2015) <sup>[28]</sup>, nightlife industry (Matulewicz, 2015; Buvik, 2013) <sup>[28, 9]</sup>, restaurants (Matulewicz, 2015; Buvik, 2013) <sup>[28, 9]</sup>, and a variety of other settings. Nonetheless, a sexual harassment incident can occur anywhere. It is tough to prove workplace harassment especially sexual misconduct or bullying since many victims are unwilling to speak up because of the stigma that comes with it. In her study on sexual harassment in Malaysia, Sabitha Merican (2007) <sup>[38]</sup> identified a situation in which women were not confessing any misconduct such as harassment and avoided reporting or confronting because they were scared and worried that the situation would worsen (Macintosh, Wuest, Gray & Aldous, 2010) <sup>[27]</sup>. As a result, focusing on and scrutinising the issue using any existing data is difficult without or with less reporting evidence. The impact of extended exposure to high levels of pressure has a variety of implications. For these victims, the uncontrollable social situation may result in not only severe

psychological trauma but also a long-term stress condition that jeopardises their socioeconomic survival, productivity, job stability, job advancement, and even marriage.

### Literature Review

Sexual harassment is defined as any unwanted sexual conduct, whether verbal, non-verbal, visual, gestural, or physical, directed at a person that is offensive or humiliating or poses a threat to her/his well-being, arising out of and in the course of her/his employment, as defined by the Employment Act of 1955 in Malaysia (Rahman, & Shamsudin, 2000) [34]. Human relationships have been the source of the most tension and pressure. It is commonly believed that men and women interpret each other's behaviour in different ways, and this can lead to a series of misunderstandings and even sexual harassment at the workplace. In the case of sexual harassment, women appear to be the more common victims. Men, on the other hand, can be sexual harassment victims as well.

Sexual comments, unwanted looks or gestures, verbal coercion such as persistent phone calls, offensive graphic pictures or jokes, incessant compliments, numerous invitations for dates, and physical coercion such as unwelcome touches, kissing, or even attempts at assault are all examples of workplace harassment experienced by women. Sexual harassment can occur at any time and in any place. However, in Malaysia, only sexual harassment in the workplace is protected. Regardless of age, ethnicity and religious background, victims of sexual harassment admitted that they suffered at the hands of individuals of both same and different ethnicity, so there was no pattern. In addition, there is a high tendency for newly employed and younger females to be harassed by the powerful males. In majority cases, the typical target would have an introverted personality and is frightened to report the misbehaviour of her or his superiors. Males are more likely to be perpetrators in sexual harassment situations when they have authority over women (Sadler, Lindsay, Hunter, & Day, 2018; Bongiorno, Langbroek, Bain, Ting, & Ryan, 2019) [39, 5]. This tendency is more common in male-dominated occupations (Dresden, Dresden, Ridge, & Yamawaki, 2018; Reid, O'Neill, & Blair-Loy, 2018; Shisler, & Sbicca, 2019; Cheryan, & Markus, 2020) [13, 37, 43, 10].

Sexual harassment in the workplace is one example of pressures that have a greater impact on women and may contribute to a higher risk of depression (Salvaggio, Hopper & Packell, 2011; Zhu, Lyu, & Ye, 2019; Thurston, Chang, Matthews, von Kanel, & Koenen, 2019; Akoku, Tihnje, Vukugah, Tarkang, & Mbu, 2019; Jung & Yoon, 2020), [41, 47, 44, 2, 23]. The general consensus among sexual harassment victims was that they were constantly worried that it might happen again. Because of misconduct, particularly body language and physical contact, victims felt terrified and pressured to be alone, preventing them from concentrating on their task (Davenport, Schwartz & Elliott, 1999) [12].

According to a recent survey, more than a third of Malaysian women had been sexually harassed, compared to one out of every six men (Babulal, 2019) [3]. However, according to a recent YouGov Omnibus poll of 1,002 Malaysians, only half of those harassed reported or notified someone about their experiences, or around 53% (Babulal, 2019) [3]. Women were not disclosing any inappropriate behaviour at work, such as harassment, and instead avoided reporting or addressing because they were intimidated and worried that the issue would exacerbate (Macintosh *et al.*, 2010) [27]. Women are

more likely than men to report an event to friends and family rather to the police, according to Babulal (2019) [3]. As a result, focusing on and scrutinising the occurrence using any current data is difficult without any reporting evidence.

When it comes to the problem of sexual harassment and self-respect, cultural factors play a significant role too. Furthermore, there is likely to be under-reporting of sexual harassment formally because to the difficulties in gathering data among Asians, including Malaysians, concerning this sensitive subject that touches on psychological well-being, dignity, and respect. Research on sensitive themes is prohibited, as indicated by Faberow (1963) [15].

The victim of sexual harassment did not disclose the incident because of shame, denial, fear, and hopelessness, according to Garrett and Hassan (2019) [17]. The victim's feelings of hopelessness, shame, and fear may impact and contribute to no choice but to endure the sexual harassment they are subjected to. According to the victims, they are hesitant to file a complaint for fear of retaliation from the perpetrator and/or rumour from others (Garrett & Hassan, 2019) [17]. In addition, their social surroundings will react in such a way that the stigma of being a victim becomes more crippling than the underlying condition. As a result, most of the victims did not report the incident.

An extensive literature on gender demonstrates that women continue to encounter challenges and struggles in the workplace (Leskinen, Cortina & Kabat, 2010; Raver & Niishi, 2010) [25, 36]. Many of the findings in this field have substantial theoretical implications for understanding how contaminated corporate environments suffocate women's professional advancement. Dissatisfaction, a drop in productivity, a high turnover rate, and the need for new hires all result in higher operational costs (Salman, Abdullah, & Saleem, 2016; McLaughlin, Uggen, & Blackstone, 2017) [40, 30]. Because workplace productivity is frequently influenced by teamwork, the negative impacts of sexual harassment can have a significant impact to the organisation.

The loss of productivity is an often-cited effect of sexual harassment, and this can involve the loss of productivity in the whole workforce or group rather than simply the victim's tendency to reduce their own productivity (Salman *et al.*, 2016) [40]. This is because the workplace productivity is often affected by teamwork, and therefore, the negative effects of sexual harassment can have a substantial impact. Organizations must have well-designed systems in place, such as a grievance procedure, that allow for the reporting of sexual harassment incidents or any other wrongdoing at work, as well as the disciplining of perpetrators.

### Research Methodology

Purposive sampling was utilised in this research. Fourteenth participants were chosen from the original survey based on their Job Satisfaction Scores (from the main study). Two participants from the overall study who had experienced sexual harassment were chosen for this study. Participants who received a score of 36 to 144 were chosen as dissatisfied (refer figure 1). The research criteria were met by participants who had experienced sexual harassment at work. All of those who met these requirements were approached for an interview. If the participants agreed to be interviewed and volunteered, they were contacted through email or phone. Participants were provided an information sheet regarding the study after main contact. Consent forms were provided and received when they consented to participate, and then

interviews were scheduled. Prior to and on the day of the interview, the participant was given the option to ask questions. Before each interview session, written informed consent was obtained to record and transcribe the interviews. The participants were told that they might leave the study at any moment. Data was anonymised to ensure confidentiality. The session was guided by a semi-structured interview style with an outline of an interview schedule. The interviews are semi-structured so that a general topic can be defined first and then explored through open-ended questions. The focus of the interview was on the problem of sexual harassment. Thematic analysis was utilised to conduct this study, which is a qualitative method. Thematic analysis was the most pertinent to the study's goal. It was thought to be a particularly beneficial strategy since it identifies, analyses, reports trends, and decodes several facets of the study problem. This was perfectly in line with the study's purpose, which was to investigate sexual harassment in the workplace in Malaysia from the perspective of the participants.

### Participant

Participants came from a variety of professions and support staff who work in one of the government hospitals' clinical and non-clinical divisions. Background information is provided for the two participants that meet the research purpose criteria. To safeguard their identities, both participants were given a pseudonym, which will be utilised throughout this article.

### Participant criteria

This study will benefit from selecting volunteers with similar backgrounds and experiences. Because the purpose of this study was to learn about the experiences of sexual harassment victims, the following selection criteria were used: i. In the study, participants self-reported having experienced sexual harassment. ii. The Job Satisfaction Scale score of the participants ranged from 36 to less than 144.

### Confidentiality

All information was kept strictly confidential. Confidentiality procedures were clearly explained to participants, in both the information sheet and verbally. Participants were guaranteed that anonymity would be maintained. All names have been replaced with pseudonyms. Interview recordings and transcripts were stored securely in a locked cabinet.

### Data collection

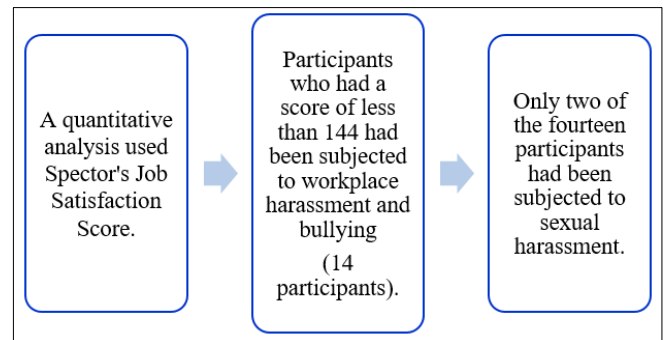
The data collection was conducted using semi-structured interviews in a separate location for each participant. Participants were provided with these settings in order facilitate a safe and supportive environment to talk in depth about this sensitive issue. Interviews were recorded and transcribed. Semi-structured interviews enable the tractability essential to address the participant's experience while ensuring that the discussion remains connected to the research question. This semi-structured interviewing begins with more general inquiries and a delicate ordering of questions to let the subject feel at ease before moving on to more sensitive topics.

### Interview process

Both participants were questioned for around half an hour and their responses were captured on a digital recorder. Following the interview, participants were given a recap of the study's

objectives and advised of their right to have their data removed.

### Criteria for a sexual harassment victim



**Fig 1:** Participants for this study were chosen through a process of elimination.

### Results

For this article, a summary of sexual harassment cases is as follows: -

Victim of sexual harassment in the first case: Aminah\* works in one of the clinical departments as a nurse. She has worked in a setting where she has experienced sexual harassment. Despite being publicly Muslim, the attacker made numerous remarks about her body shape and the fact that she had sex prior to marriage. The attacker made sexual comments about oral sex directly to her because of her teeth.

Victim of sexual harassment in the second case: Sharifa\* works at the hospital's patient registration office as a public relations assistant. Sexual harassment has been perpetrated on her. There are two perpetrators in her case. Perpetrator A had a habit of leering at her and making unwelcome physical contact with her. On the other hand, Perpetrator B prefers to interrogate Sharifa about her underpants.

\*The names of both respondents are pseudonyms.

### Analyses

The goal of this study is to learn about the experiences of sexual harassment victims, and only two people took part in it. Aminah and Sharifa (female participants) were the only ones in the main study who had experienced sexual harassment. To protect the privacy of the participants, all real names were changed. The themes were chosen because they were thought to express the genuine significance of the participants' experiences. The themes for this group of people who have experienced sexual harassment are detailed and extracts from the transcripts are used to further explain each subject. Table 1 shows the pattern quotes for each theme. The following are three key topics in the discussion of being sexual harassment victims, as evidenced by the results and analyses of the interview data:

1. Verbal torment
2. Physical patting
3. Fear of reporting and tolerance

In the beginning of the conversation, Aminah and Sharifa struggled to explain their experiences as sexual harassment victims. They were better capable of talking honestly about their experiences later, maybe as they felt more comfortable with the interview process. The case descriptions of Aminah

and Sharifa demonstrate the gravity of being a victim of sexual harassment. Both participants described their experiences with a variety of emotions in detail.

### **i. Verbal torment**

The act of directing unpleasant remarks toward someone, causing emotional suffering, is referred to as verbal abuse. Verbal abuse includes non-physical activities that can nonetheless be harmful, such as threatening, insulting, or shaming someone. In this study we may see how the perpetrators control their victims with words.

Despite being openly Muslim, the attacker made frequent comments about Aminah's physical figure and that she had sex before marriage. In addition, the attacker made sexual remarks regarding oral sex to her directly. During the interview, Aminah's first statement was,

#### **"It disturbed my emotional state"**

The words 'disturbed' and 'emotional state' in Aminah's excerpt imply that she was insulted, lost control of her emotions, remained dejected and sad following the occurrence, which occurred multiple times. Aminah described how she was thwarted by the culprit. She could not believe a medical practitioner would behave in such a manner. Aminah feels the perpetrator makes sexual remarks daily and likes causing people distress as a result. She understood there were many more victims who would never come forward.

"Ok, are you aware of others who have encountered similar unwelcome conduct?" the researcher asks throughout the interview.

"Is it sexual harassment with the same perpetrator, absolutely." Aminah responded.

Aminah was ashamed and outraged, according to the following paragraph.

"I'm furious, indignant, and my dignity appears to be being abused. When he stated such to me and in the presence of others, my coworkers, I felt ashamed and inferior." Aminah responded.

It takes time to recover from a loss of self-respect. The verbal remark hurt Aminah, and she felt anguish when she was unable to voice her feelings,

"It takes time to get over it, I felt like some kind of..... (silent)...." Aminah added.

As a result of being emotionally affected, Aminah was unable to let go of her hatred for the offender. When she described the situation, she said,

"When I saw him, I felt like I couldn't forgive him for what he had been saying about me."

As a result, she attempted to avoid him or stay as far away from him as possible. She had to be more cautious because the perpetrator liked to embarrass and make victims feel uneasy with his unwelcome public verbal comments.

"I'll try to avoid making eye contact with him, if at all possible, especially if there are a lot of people around." Aminah explained.

Sharifa raised the problem of being continually watched by Perpetrator A in another case. When Perpetrator A made comments on Sharifa's attire, she felt like he was physically monitoring her. The following is the perpetrator's statement to her,

"You have such a great body, and if you are going to wear slacks, please try to wear a low-cut blouse,"

Perpetrator A would say to her when she was wearing trousers to work. And of course, she felt so panic and terrified.

"Since that time, I've never worn pants to work," Sharifa told the researcher.

"I only wear traditional clothing since I know he is always looking at my body... I realised that, so I stopped wearing trousers and only wore long gowns."

She feels insecure about her ability to dress up for work after hearing his statement. Sharifa tried to evade Perpetrator B at the same time. Perpetrator B would ask Sharifa questions such,

#### **"What is the size of your bra?"**

Sharifa feels uneasy whenever she sees him at work because of this predicament. Sharifa also claimed that when he meets a gorgeous woman in the office, he likes to make derogatory noises.

"He (Perpetrator B) cannot stop himself because when he sees any good-looking woman, he will make sexist noises," Sharifa said.

His attitude disgusted her so much. This is considered unethical verbal communication, which is despised by others, particularly women.

Both felt apprehensive about the situation. They were saddened by being verbally insulted, particularly in front of coworkers. The participants were unanimous in their assessment that the threat had decreased their self-esteem as well.

### **ii. Physical patting**

Physical harassment is difficult to define because it entails the relative impact of the perpetrator's acts. Physical gestures such as fun pushing might be an appropriate level of behaviour between friends for some people especially among work colleagues. Similar behaviour, on the other hand, might be classified as harassment if the person on the receiving end is offended, threatened, or uncomfortable. Both victims have been subjected to physical contact that they did not request. According to the following excerpt from Aminah, many female hospital personnel are subjected to sexual harassment at work. Light physical contact, such as holding and touching coworkers' hands, delicate massage of the back body, and purposefully touching particular body area in a fast attempt

for any victim, are examples given by Aminah. She believes the offenders like seeing the victims' reactions.

“For sexual harassment style... occasionally male colleagues try to test us,” Aminah remarked. “They like how people react and respond to them, in my opinion.” She added.

She implies that the most common kind of sexual abuse is verbal abuse. Furthermore, she stated that unsolicited personal contact, such as physically caressing victims, occurs frequently among female personnel.

“The form of sexual harassment that is regularly occur...of course verbal, and their behaviour or physical also, and yes...when they go close to us, they will pat your physical (soft touch)... just like that,” Aminah explained.

Aminah noted that as a victim, she and others are powerless to intervene because everything happens so quickly. While walking, the offender simply touches the victim.

Sharifa, on the other hand, looked to be going through a similar fight every day, facing two offenders, Perpetrator A and Perpetrator B, when she said,

".....the same position as the first perpetrator but this one is Perpetrator B different race than Perpetrator A."

Sharifa described her concerns about her perpetrator's actions and how he takes advantage of her at work in the following excerpt.

“He (Perpetrator A) frequently came into contact with always at the same location that is my buttocks and I hate that so much,” Sharifa said.

Perpetrator A bothered her by physically touching her in the same spot over and over. Sharifa is visibly uncomfortable, insecure, and repulsed by her coworker in this position. It is tough to avoid, Sharifa explained, because she must wander around helping patients register and retrieve their files from the record room. No one will be present, and no one will be in the patient filing room when the incident occurs. Because of her line of employment, she is a prime target for the culprit in this case.

Simultaneously, Sharifa expressed her remorse for being married yet allowing Perpetrator A to have physical contact with her, particularly in an intimate area of her body. Sharifa's feelings of fear and isolation, as shown in the following passage, reveal that she does not like being disrespected.

“Infuriated..... I was furious, but I didn't know what to do.... I am married.....I don't like to be treated this way.” Sharifa exclaimed.

It indicates that she does not believe she has any control over what she wears. Sharifa conveys the sense in the interview that Perpetrator A is powerful and has complete control over her movements in the office. The basic line is that Sharifa is uncomfortable dealing with this immoral staff. Because of misconduct, particularly physical contact, participants felt terrified and pressured to be alone, preventing them from concentrating on their task. They continue to work and put up with the abuse.

Most of the light physical harassment occurs during working hours in broad daylight. In many cases, the perpetrator will make physical contact with the victim when no one else is there in order to avoid being seen.

### iii. Fear of reporting and tolerance

Employees frequently fear that if they submit a sexual harassment complaint, their employer will retaliate by terminating their employment. When it comes to exposing sexual harassment, the reporting action is a major roadblock for women. The victims in this study refused to report for fear of losing their credibility, being labelled a troublemaker, being blacklisted in the organisation, and fearing for their personal safety.

Both claimed it makes them feel humiliated when the perpetrators say things to them that are not required. The most humiliating occurrence was when the majority of coworkers were aware of it and were made targets of the circumstance. Both refuses to fight back, and this happens on a regular basis. Because it is impossible to verify the incidence, Aminah and Sharifa said to whom they need to speak about it.

Despite her dissatisfaction with her current predicament, Aminah appeared to accept it.

“I despise him so much, especially when he talks nonsense in front of my teammates,” Aminah remarked.

“If possible, I will try to avoid face to face contact with him especially when many people are around.”. She added.

“But what can I do when I need to work overtime in his department? And he is the one who approves overtime applications?”

Overall, it was assumed that she did so because she believed there was nothing, she could do to change the situation. Because she had to work overtime in his department, Aminah highlighted a pivotal moment when she had no choice but to confront the perpetrator and change her repulsive behaviour toward him. For Aminah, the perpetrator has the authority to recommend people who can work overtime in his department. And she requires it to increase her income.

These were humiliating situations that put Sharifa under a lot of pressure at work. When Sharifa's position became too much for her to bear, she confided in two of her closest friends.

“I was very uneasy. So, I told one of the senior staff members who I knew could be trusted, a female buddy. When I told her about the perpetrator, she replied she had known about his behaviour for quite some time.” Sharifa declared.

For a time, her buddy was aware of the perpetrator's wrongdoing, and another had reported her concern to the Unit Manager. As a result, the Unit Manager carried out an investigation. Sharifa was forced to give the perpetrator's name by the Unit Manager. Sharifa was put under a lot of pressure at work because of these humiliating circumstances. Sharifa expressed her circumstances in the following excerpt. “She wanted to know who did it and where the incident occurred,” Sharifa explained, “but I said nothing, and she still managed to guess.”

Sharifa expresses her dissatisfaction at this point, stating that many individuals, including her trusted friend and the Unit Manager, were aware of the perpetrator's actions. No disciplinary action was taken against him because no one had

previously reported his behaviour.

To be in that circumstance, both victims must tolerate the conditions despite their hatred. They do not know where else to report the situation. The offenders appeared to be in total command of the situation. The perpetrator has power over

Aminah because of his job and position. In the case of Sharifa, no action or proof has allowed both offenders to repeat their misbehaviour in the department. Both appear to be tolerant of the situation.

**Table 1:** Categories and themes

Themes	Keyword descriptions	Excerpts
Verbal torment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The perpetrator prefers to openly discuss sex in front of others.</li> <li>The perpetrator enjoys making derogatory noises.</li> <li>Victims are manipulated by the perpetrator's words, such as blackmail.</li> <li>In front of the victims, the perpetrator maintains control of the situation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"For sexual. Sometimes male employees try to test us with their word...from my personal opinion they like how we react and respond to them."</li> <li>"What is the size of your bra?"</li> <li>He (Perpetrator 2) cannot help himself as when he sees any good-looking women, he will make sexist noises."</li> <li>"You have such a great body, and if you are going to wear slacks, please try to wear a low-cut blouse,"</li> <li>"I only wear traditional clothing since I know he is always looking at my body... I realised that, so I stopped wearing trousers and only wore long gowns."</li> </ul>
Physical patting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>When the opportunity arises, make intentional physical contact.</li> <li>Prefer and attack a certain area of the victim's body.</li> <li>When no one is present, make physical touch to avoid being seen.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"...when they get close to us they will pat you (soft touch)...just like that."</li> <li>".....the same position as the first perpetrator but this one is Perpetrator B different race than Perpetrator A."</li> <li>"He (Perpetrator A) frequently came into contact with always at the same location that is my buttocks and I hate that so much,"</li> <li>"Infuriated..... I was furious, but I didn't know what to do....I am married....I don't like to be treated this way."</li> </ul>
Fear of reporting and tolerance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Victim was disgusted and tried to avoid the perpetrator.</li> <li>Victim had no choice but to tolerate the situation because the perpetrator controlled the department where she worked.</li> <li>Victim was frightened of reprisal if she mentioned the perpetrator's identity.</li> <li>The perpetrator's attitude was well-known, yet no action had been done.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"I despise him so much, especially when he talks nonsense in front of my teammates,"</li> <li>"But what can I do when I need to work overtime in his department? And he is the one who approves overtime applications?"</li> <li>"I was very uneasy. So, I told one of the senior staff members who I knew could be trusted, a female buddy. When I told her about the perpetrator, she replied she had known about his behaviour for quite some time."</li> <li>"She wanted to know who did it and where the incident occurred,"</li> <li>"but I said nothing, and she still managed to guess."</li> </ul>

## Discussion

To conclude, both persons were emotionally harmed because of sexual harassment and failed to report the incident formally to the organization. The majority of mistreatment goes unreported (Connecticut Business & Industry Association, 2018; Boaf, Hancock, & Gringart, 2016) [11, 4]. As a result, abusers were encouraged to continue preying on women who worked with them (Connecticut Business & Industry Association, 2018) [11]. Therefore, victims like those in this study must reinvent themselves in order to reclaim their ability to move on with their lives, despite their frustration with the circumstance. Sexual harassment described by female participants in the survey ranges from verbal pressure to physical coercion, such as touching, which is common. (Franz, Zeh, Schablon, Kuhnert, & Nienhaus, 2010; Esmaeilpour, Salsali, & Ahmadi, 2011; AbuAlRub & AlAsmar, 2014; Nielsen et al., 2017; Nevo, Peleg, Kaplan, &

Freud, 2019; Kahsay, Nrgarandeh, Dehghan & Hasanpour, 2020) [16, 14, 33, 32, 24]. Participants become emotionally and easily distracted as well as depressed (Houle, Staff, Mortimer, Uggan, & Blackstone, 2011; Salvaggio et al, 2011; Hanson, Perrin, Moss, Laharnar, & Glass, 2015; Longo, & DeDonno, 2018; Von Gruenigen, & Karlan, 2018) [22, 41, 19, 45], for example losing attention when working (McCann, 2005; Houle et al., 2011; Scarduzio, Sheff, & Smith, 2017; Burgess, Barmon, Moorhead, Perkins, & Bender, 2016) [29, 22, 42, 8].

Participants in this study believe that reporting a sexual harassment incidence has no benefit since they have already learnt and projected that the authority will be unable to manage the situation privately with whatever support system supplied. These findings have meaningful implications for practice and research. The situation demonstrates how the individuals who were initially considered principal victims in this occurrence have now become secondary victims. This is

because they believe their social environment would react in such a way that the stigma of being a victim would be more debilitating than the underlying predicament. When the victim is present in the workplace and coworkers' issue behaviour is aimed toward the victim, this is crucial. For example, constant chatting about the victim; investigators' anonymity is not safeguarded; and spreading rumours about the victim. As can be seen, this is a major problem, and the expected repercussions are likely to put victims under pressure not to report the misconduct. Their explanations of an inefficient organisational support system were supported by these descriptions.

### Conclusion

Compared to male employees, female employees are more likely to be subjected to sexual harassment. The most common forms of misconduct reported by participants in this study were verbal and light physical harassment. The victims wish to remain silent about the situation. When a company or an organisation fails to effectively address sexual harassment, most employees are affected. Employers shall work with the Human Resource Department or any other appointed independent agency to develop preventive measures as well as an investigation panel to get to the bottom of any sexual harassment allegations.

### Ethical approval

The School of Psychology Queens University of Belfast research ethics committee and the Medical Research and Ethics Committee of the Ministry of Health Malaysia gave and evaluated their ethical permission for this study.

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