**Fragility and Conservativism: EDI Policy and Practice Disjuncture in the Politicised Workplace: the case of Pakistan**

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**ABSTRACT**

**Purpose:** In this article, we aim to explore the experiences of bullying, harassment and discrimination (BHD) in work organisations in Pakistan.

**Research Design:** The approach adopted was qualitative. In addition to policy document analysis, 31 lived experience interviews were conducted.

**Findings:** The nature of BHD is shaped by a range of cultural, political and historical factors, intensified by the political instability, which reinforces traditional cultural, patriarchal and religious norms, and creates hostile work environments for many workers but especially for women, in spite of long-established and more recent equalities legislation and the greater participation of women in the labour market.

**Implications:** The research contributes to the understanding of EDI issues and in particular, bullying, harassment and bullying, in national contexts of the intersection of tradition and patriarchy, heightened by political instability, given legal and international pressures to modernise and enhance equality of opportunity.

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**Overview**

Addressing equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) has moved up many and organisational agendas, albeit that EDI policies have varied in the pace and depth of adoption in different national contexts. Many studies have focused on women’s experience of EDI, especially with regards to bullying and harassment. For example, Vertia and Hyyti (2002) reported that in Finland female nurses and prison officers experience bullying slightly more often than men. Similarly, findings were contributed by another study conducted by Salin (2001) suggest that among business professionals, women reported considerable more bullying than men. It is also recognised that those from traditionally disadvantaged groups are also likely to be the target of bullying, harassment and discrimination (BHD).

Research in the field of bullying and harassment is largely based on studies conducted in the Global North, with a fewer from those in the Global South. Although a country may have the potential to anti-discrimination rights in work organisations, there are a number of countervailing factors that may not only weaken adoption of EDI as daily organisational practice, but also serve to facilitate harassment and bullying when individuals challenge those not abiding by progressive laws and organisational policy.

In this paper, we explore employee experiences of harassment and bullying in Pakistan.

Our research is based on document analysis and semi-structured interviews with 31 women and men in public and private sector organisations. We contend that the rigidity of cultural norms may adversely affect those from traditionally disadvantaged groups wishing to pursue their career aspirations unhampered by bullying, harassment and discrimination (BHD) and that the configuration of the latter is likely to be influenced by the distinctive inequality experience. Further, we argue that national political climate, especially in the context of instability facilitated by national insecurity, and may have further consolidated culture norms in a manner that is at odds with national legal guidelines and international, supra-governmental

policies.

**EDI issues and contextual factors in Pakistan**

*Legislation*

The Labour Force Survey of Pakistan (2009) estimated Pakistan to be the world’s sixth most populous country with an estimated population of 169.9 million and an annual growth rate (revised) of 2.05%. The labour force is estimated at 52.71 million as of 2008–09. 47% of the workforce is engaged in the agriculture sector, 10% in manufacturing and mining and 43% in other professions such as banking, education and civil–military services. There are several laws that guide labour relations, employment management and EDI practice at work.

The 1973 Constitution of Pakistan provides several articles that refer to EDI issues, making it obligatory for all public and private organizations to implement them. Article 17 provides for a fundamental right to exercise the freedom of association and the right to form trade unions; Article 18 prescribes the right of all citizens to enter upon any lawful profession or occupation and to conduct any lawful trade or business; Article 25 lays down the right to equality before the law and prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of gender alone; Article 37(e) makes provision for securing just and humane conditions of work and for maternity benefits, and Article 38 directs organizations to ensure well-being irrespective of gender, caste, creed, or race. Other major labour laws that Pakistan inherited from its British colonial heritage include the Factories Act 1934, which provides a comprehensive framework to ensure health and safety conditions, working hours, holidays with pay, restriction of working hours for adolescents and children, and maternity leave. The Workmen Compensation Act 1929, another colonial law, requires compensation in cases of industrial accidents and resultant disabilities. The Industrial Relations Act (IRA) 2012 provides guidelines on the terms and conditions of employment, working hours, leave, minimum age and protection of young workers, unfair labour practices on the part of employees and employers, trade union registration, strikes and lockouts, labour disputes, conciliation and arbitration for settlement.

In Pakistan, the Industrial Relations Act, 2012boffers provision for employee representation through CBA and management–labour participation in decision-making. Employees’ collective issues are raised on the CBA platform but in most cases employees do not report their grievances to office bearers. Employees have the right to go on strike and protest at fifteen days’ prior notice to the employer. Public organizations have committees of management and CBA to investigate problems and find solutions. If they fail, mediation and then arbitration takes place; appellate tribunal or labour courts are the last resort to get problems resolved. It appears at individual levels managers make all possible efforts to silence employees. However, at CBA level things get resolved for the greater good in theory but in practice, female employees hesitate to complain due to cultural barriers. This is gender-based discrimination at work.

More recently, the Government of Pakistan passed a law, *The Protection against Harassment of Women at Workplace Act 2010*, subsequently adopted by governmental and private-sector organizations in their policy documents. However, policy implementation has been slow.

*Religion, civil-military elites, ethnic, political factors and women’s experience*

Despite religious, cultural, ethnic and linguistic diversity, Pakistani women have to face strikingly similar patterns of tribal, feudal, clan system and kinship network influences. Pakistan is a patriarchal society (Syed et al. 2015) in which women experience cultural pressure in socioeconomic, education, political and labour force participation (Syed, 2008). They also fall victim to domestic violence, honour killings, forced and exchange marriages (Akhtar and Metraux, 2013). In such a patriarchal environment women are expected to accept male authority, established by cultural and familial traditions and social norms, with male control through patriarchal structures and violence widely accepted. Given this societal context, it is unsurprising that exploitation of women, irrespective of the nature of their work, is a major challenge. Women in many professions are expected to ‘please’ male bosses and senior colleagues or face harassment and discrimination (Ahmer et al. 2009; Akhtar and Metraux, 2013).

*Challenges facing women*

Given the comparatively better levels of income parity and female economic activity rates in Indonesia, Bangladesh and Turkey (UNDP, 2004) relative to Pakistan, these countries may offer more useful examples to their ‘brethren’ countries—the worldwide Muslim community. The formal employment sector in Muslim majority countries is a traditional domain of men who are responsible support their family i.e. spouse and dependents (Syed, 2008). Mernissi (1996: 64) suggests a woman in employment triggers many Muslim men’s belief that women employment gives their family a bad name. This patriarchal bias against women’s employment is particularly visible in Middle East and South Asia. They are in total harmony with their own frame of reference, the Muslim concept and definitions of masculinity and femininity shaped by Sharia laws and values (Mernissi, 1996: 64–65).

Demographically, Pakistan is a Muslim majority nation. Islam provides theologically for a more independent and prominent role for women in society with equal legal rights of buying, selling, earning a living and managing personal finance and property, and financial security on divorce (Bukhari and Ramzan 2013: 91; Adeel 2010: 106; Omar, 2011).

However, Akhtar and Metraux, (2013) consider Pakistan as one of the most dangerous places anywhere for women due to archaic tribal customs and cultural and religious norms. The plight of women revealed by World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2012 ranks Pakistan, an Islamic state, 134th out of 135 countries among the worst places for women in the world (World Economic Forum, 2012: 9). Similarly, the report of United Nations Development Program (UNDP), ranked Pakistan at 123 out of 148 countries in the 2012 Gender Inequality Index (GII) (UNDP, 2013). Pakistan has signed many United Nations treaties guaranteeing no gender discrimination, providing equality and decent work: this is echoed in its national constitution of 1973. However, most of the legal framework, religious injunctions and UN treaties are routinely not honoured. Old customs and traditions typically prevail over modern definitions of human rights (Bhattacharya, 2013). There are many women who demand equal rights and protections based on the laws of the land and there are enlightened and educated men who support the inherent rights of women, but their voices are too often drowned out by reactionary forces (Akhtar and Metraux, 2013). The prevailing system of patriarchy both in Pakistan supports and influences structural violence against women (Ali and Gavino, 2008).

*Other sources of social injustice*

However, though the challenges facing women are recognised, there are other important sources of inequality, harassment and bullying to be found in organisations in Pakistan. As a former British colony, Pakistan is a society that has faced, and continues to face, political instability. During the era of British Colonial Rule (the British Raj), those from the ‘martial races’ and civil elites secured positions of privilege: these social structures continue in the postcolonial era. Further during the colonial era, inequalities between those from different ethnic heritage became most obvious through recruitment practices and accusations of injustice relating to the Indian Civil Service (Jhatial, Cornelius and Wallace, 2014). Quota systems were introduced to help redress inequalities and still operate but these proved then, and now, largely ineffective, not only in Pakistan, as in other former British colonies like Nigeria (Yusuff et al, 2017).

Political parties ally strongly to ethnicity and clan, remain male dominated, and influence most aspects of life, including working life. Pakistan remains a praetorian state, with the dominance of the military visible including in political arenas, reinforced by security pressures. For those who are not of the ‘right’ political persuasion, gender, and clan, and who are not part of the civil-military elites, things can become increasingly difficult at work, especially if authority is challenged or progression is sought. Thus, though gender inequality is marked, there are many other sources of inequality, many of which are likely to intersect with gender.

*EDI policies – the challenges in Pakistan*

In such a hostile societal environment for women, theoretically, EDI policy guidelines and anti-bullying initiatives should help organizations and managers to create and maintain a *relatively* more tolerant workplace (Beirne and Hunter, 2013; Salin, 2009). However, it is known from studies conducted in the Global North, for example, that the reality is more complex. In an ethnographic study undertaken in a Danish municipal centre, Holck (2016) illustrates how a substructure of inequality is spatially upheld alongside a formal diversity policy. There is an increasing body of empirical evidence suggesting that managerial practices do not match EDI policies and consequently BHD, often the oil in the machinery of inequality, occurs regularly (Cowie et al., 2002).

Workplaces in Pakistan are often hierarchically structured, paternalistic, collectivist, high power distance environments where managers enjoy unchallenged power to their authority (Aycan et al., 2000; Islam, 2004; Khilji, 2002). This context results in limited opportunities for subordinates to seek organizational justice and resolve conflicts. Some researchers have argued that incidences of bullying, harassment and discrimination (BHD) are structural, correlated to employees’ silence and the absence of restorative justice mechanisms (Ahmer et al. 2009; Khilji, 2003) and, it could be argued, help to perpetuate structural violence.

Government-sector enterprises in Pakistan in particular have attracted much criticism and are viewed by many not only as nepotistic but also as having a culture of *sifarish* (i.e. similar to *guanxi* or connection), cronyism and sycophancy, often mediated through male networks (Khilji, 2003; Islam, 2004; Transparency International Report, 2006). More recent narratives by Jhatial, Cornelius and Wallace (2014) have reported that such an environment causes workplace dissatisfaction, a lack of employee commitment and loyalty, and a trust deficit in supervisor–subordinate relationships.

However, although Pakistan is a traditionalist, male-dominated society, the status of women’s status is changing. Women’s access to education is improving: many now work in male-dominated fields and have been able to break historical silence to assert their rights. For example, they have been able to form associations such as the Aurat Foundation, Women Action Forums and support groups on social media to advocate women rights. Increasing numbers of women now work in the judiciary, education, medicine business, politics and other professional fields (Tarar and Pulla, 2014).

In spite of a combination of increasing female workplace participation and increasing international visibility and pressure regarding the status and entitlements of women in societies in general and Pakistani society in particular, there has been little published to explore how in a context of changing women’s achievements and expectations the circumstances women face in the workplace and in particular, their experiences bullying, harassment and discrimination.

In our study, we pose the research question: *how does the lived organisational experience of women and men shed light on the nature of bullying, harassment and discrimination in Pakistani organisations*?

**Research methods**

*Data collection*

In our study we first, conducted a secondary data analysis of organizational documents for EDI content, and, secondly, conducted in-depth key informant interviews (i.e. with line, middle and senior management) to investigate the causes and consequences of bullying, harassment and discrimination in public- and private-sector organizations (including multinationals).

Twelve firms from the healthcare, banking, airline, oil industry and tertiary education institutions participated in the study and a total of 31in-depth interviews were conducted. Participants were introduced to the concepts of EDI and BHD to ensure they knew about the core ideas under investigation.

*Data analysis:*

All the participants gave their informed and free consent for participation in the research activity and their confidentiality was ensured. All interviews were recorded, transcribed, coded and analysed, and the main emerging themes subjected to further analysis. The process of data analysis involved coding, categorizing and comparing themes to interpret the meaning through content analysis. The content analysis considered the individual experiences of each interviewee regarding BHD at work. This analytical strategy helped researchers to compare and categorize emerging themes to give meaning to words, context-situations, stories and managerial actions (Reisman, 1993). This analytical strategy has been chosen as a method for interpreting the “spoken life stories, past/present experience that are temporal and sequential with referral and evaluative understandings” of participants that establishes valid knowledge and contribution for theory and practice. Ontological assumptions of this analytical method are positioned in the real-life experience and personal stories of participants.

**Results and discussion**

*Secondary data analysis of organizational documents for EDI content*

In the initial stage of analysis, a survey was undertaken of the websites of the organizations in which participants worked. This included the Mission and Vision statements, Annual and Periodic Reports and the legal frameworks of the organizations, which were reviewed for EDI policy. *Almost all government and private-sector organizations and MNCs had no explicit EDI policy framework*.

*Demographics****:*** Table 1 contains a summary of interviewees’ age, gender, experience, occupational status and respective organizational affiliations. We aimed to have a balanced representation of male and female participants with 17 and 14 respectively from all levels of management across organizations. Thus, we have developed a purposive rather than a representative sample. The majority of participants were from the age group of 25 to 35, followed by 36 to 45. The same cohorts represent first-line and middle management.

**Put table 1 here**

Table 2 illustrates a clear dominance of males in top echelons of the organizational power. Of the twelve firms about 137 are men and just 7 were women, mainly in education sector. None of the boards in the banking, airline and oil industries contain a single woman on their boards. The data in the table 2 also implies that male dominance at the top may mean they occupy unchallenged positional power (see further evidence in table 3 and 4).

**Put table 2 here**

**Interview findings**

*Rigid hierarchies and positional authority*

Many lower-level employees argued that they were victimized, and felt powerless to seek redress for their grievances. Most of those interviews viewed their organisations as inflexible top-down hierarchies. Similarly, lack of career development, or poor terms and conditions of employment, is challenging. Similar experiences were shared by a couple of junior managers of private and multinational companies. A male junior manager in a multinational said:

*I find myself in a pretty fair environment. However, there is no exception to cut-throat competition which forces us all to comply with some difficult and unrealistic targets. My boss may be rude and bullying towards his subordinates but there is someone who is his boss and my boss is undergoing the same pressure and bullying, this is something that I know for sure – a vicious circle. Virtually every employee is trying hard to stay in the job and make way for a future career. That’s why there is only one way and that is to go along with that bullying, harassment and stress. Although we have a diverse workforce, their voice is not included in organizational decisions. As far as roles and responsibilities and authorities are concerned, senior managers make the decisions and managers below them need to be just informed about those decisions.*

*Socio-political factors and BHD*

In our study, we found *politico-cultural* factors that contribute to BHD in Pakistani organizations. Most interviewees talked about managerial or co-workers’ derogatory remarks regarding affiliation of employees to national political parties. Managers and colleagues felt sufficiently confident to frequently pass remarks on race, ethnicity, tribal affiliation, religion or sect and community. Moreover, participants also mentioned leg-pulling, backbiting, making prank phone calls, making threatening remarks, and misusing electronic social media.

A female government official complained as follows:

*Frankly, equality, diversity and inclusion are elusive concepts if it is not well-defined through a legal framework, which is missing in this organization. I would say that there is no equality, diversity, fairness and justice in this organization. ‘Equality’ is a subjective term and depends on an employee’s social, political and economic status. We have a strong culture of political manoeuvring which causes frustration among employees. This is a federal government organization and employment is governed through a fixed-quota policy for different regions of the country. Nevertheless, one specific ethnic group in overall employment of this organization dominates. As far as inclusion is concerned, all decisions are centralized and vested in high authority. The union has some voice in it but all decisions are made by the government and higher authorities. Union officials, having external political backing, provide extensive support to their members and harass management.*

A consistent view, albeit with contextual variations, was shared by a senior executive in a public-sector organization. His views are consistent with other managers of private organizations as far as the prevalence of bullying and harassment is concerned. Perpetrators (including reports of trade union officials and a government minister) appear to be free to act with impunity. In his words:

*I am one of the senior officers in this organization but I haven’t heard anything sweet like equality, diversity and inclusion. Rather, bullying and harassment in our organization come from higher authorities (e.g. the minister and secretary) and office bearers of the trade union: some of the office bearers are my subordinates, but I feel scared. If something doesn’t favour them, then they shout, kick furniture and humiliate everyone. Imagine: our senior official, one day, entered this office and started shouting at one junior officer and he even punched his face and started beating office staff. Several staff members were taken to hospital, nobody was able to stop him or ease the situation. Our union officials are also very abusive and behave like hooligans. They simply do not want to hear ‘no’. In such a situation, officers like us work under a high degree of BHD.*

*Gender and BHD*

A disturbing story of BHD, mobbing behaviour (Davenport et al., 1999), incivility and verbal abuse (Naime, 2003) was shared by a middle-aged female employee who has experience of working in private organizations. She said:

*Younger female employees are targets of BHD from management and co-workers. I have gone through a lot of trouble in the past when I was bit younger and unmarried. The boss and senior employees take female employees for granted and assume we are their property and when female employees remain sober and restrained then they give trouble; rather, they make our life at work hell. They fabricate stories, make prank phone calls, send emails through fake IDs, and even misuse social media to defame female co-workers.*

A trade union official in a public-sector organization spoke differently on BHD at work. His experience has been a torment for him and his family. He elaborated his point of view as follows:

*Theoretically, there should be EDI in the organization and we all must be treated equally. However, I suppose when organizational heads get involved in politics and create and support factions in employees in order to weaken the CBA (a trade union) then it is hard to establish equality and fairness. Management is trying to embarrass the CBA, which annoys employees. As a result, things go too far and then ‘everything is fair in love and war’. This is a male-dominated company and female employees are a very small minority. Management acts in isolation and creates a hostile environment and this trend takes us too far and it creates reasons of bullying and harassment. I was arrested in a fake legal case and spent several weeks behind bars with no legal assistance and my family really suffered.*

The following quote suggests that the employee experiences bullying and discrimination on the basis of gender, ethnicity and political affiliation. A female junior manager in a private (local) company shared the following:

*I have been working in this company for several years with no chances of being promoted to a senior position, with no bonus and overtime payment, my role is unclear and working hours are longer. I applied for three days’ leave to get my child hospitalized but my boss declined. I insisted that my child is critical and needs urgent medical attention and my boss told me to resign if I wish. There is no legal arrangement that supports the EDI concept. People around (co-workers and subordinates, too) make fun of my ethnic group; attribute me to a specific political group and they usually to do it openly, which is very embarrassing. I am desperate to leave the job and soon as I get good opportunity I would do so. I cannot share with you all that I experience: my life is hell. My boss is abusive and uses very hard language for every employee and insults us publicly. Still, I need to come up to the expectations of my company otherwise I may be asked to leave the company. In such an atmosphere I feel extremely stressed and I need to cascade that pressure down on my subordinates, every day.*

The statement above reveals some of the critical issues with the absence of EDI policy. A junior manger suggested that there should be a coherent legal framework that promotes EDI policy so that employees’ genuine requests for days off may be approved. Further, another revelation of the quote above is that it implies that a female employee, having been bullied by her boss, does the same to her subordinates. This suggests that in some cases the victim becomes the perpetrator and both perpetuates and legitimates a culture of bullying. Since there has been no policy or practice of EDI, nor a restorative mechanism for employees to get their grievances redressed, they instead cascade down what hardship they experience onto their subordinates or colleagues at work.

The statement above reveals some of the critical issues that arise with the absence of an EDI policy. A junior manger suggested that there should be a legal framework that promotes EDI policy so that employees’ genuine requests for days off may be approved. Further, another revelation of the junior female manager’s quote is that it implies that a female employee, having been bullied by her boss, does the same to her subordinates. This suggests that in some cases the victim becomes the perpetrator. Since there has been no policy or practice of EDI, nor a restorative mechanism for employees to get their grievances redressed, they instead cascade down what hardship they experience onto their subordinates or colleagues at work.

Another disturbing story was shared by a middle-aged female employee who has experience of working in couple of private organizations. She said:

*Younger female employees are targets of BHD from management and co-workers. I have gone through big trouble in my past when I was bit younger and unmarried. The boss and senior employees take female employees for granted and assume we are their property and when female employees remain sober and restrained then they give trouble; rather, they make our life at work a hell. They fabricate stories, make prank phone calls, send emails through fake IDs, and even misuse social media to defame female co-workers.*

EDI promotes inclusion of employee voices and encourages them to break silence. However, current empirical evidence suggests that in Pakistani organisations, employees are powerless and voiceless. A female manager in a government organization explained:

*Since childhood we [i.e. women] are advised to keep quiet when elders and specially males talk. We are told, do not argue with elders. Our culture, religion and male dominance suggest we keep quiet either at home or at work. Although my employer, who is my immediate boss, too, is foreign educated he prefers female employees’ silence. I have personal experience of remaining voiceless in meetings. I only speak when it is necessary or I am asked to explain. Once during the meeting one of my colleagues, a senior civil servant, told me to shut up when I was in middle of my talk. He further passed comment that “You can’t think and envision the way we [males] do”. I found it insulting, harassing, and complained to my employer but he did not do anything. We are kept silent at home and at work. Sometimes people keep us silent in the name of religion, sometimes culture and family. Sometimes fathers, brothers and husbands keep us silent at home. Here at work, it is the boss who really does not want voice and dissent.*

Another female employee of a government organization shared her harassment experience:

*It is just a few days back when I entered my manager’s office, he offered me seat and when I started talking he began watching my lip movements and kept on staring at me. Due to his unreasonable attitude I stopped talking and stood up to go back to my office room. He advised me to stay with him and finish my talk. I just said, “Sir, I am not feeling okay”. This is his routine attitude with many female employees. The big problem is that we can’t lodge a complaint with anyone. If we do it may be exploited and we will be defamed. People will make fun of us. This is a male-dominated company and less tolerant to female voices.*

**Final comments**

The empirical findings to our question, *how does the lived organisational experience of women and men shed light on the nature of bullying, harassment and discrimination in Pakistani organisations*, yielded some expected results but also some surprising ones. The level of BDH was marked, not only in terms of the nature of the reasons why individuals may be targetted, but also the level and intensity of social and physical violence that individuals were subject too. The complete absence of EDI policies was also surprising, given the extensive nature of the legislation in place, suggesting that government needs to redouble its efforts in order to press forward with increasing women’s participation in the labour market and also to reduce harassment and bullying against women. Few are challenged, and sanctions against perpetrators, rarely pursued.

Though the current legal framework, i.e. the 1973 Constitution and other labour laws, is robust in theory, there is a strong need to monitor whether organizational policies, employers and managers adopt and implement them in the letter and the true spirit. Several organizations have neither explicit EDI policies nor any mechanism or procedure for redressing grievances. Some employees suggested that it is highly likely that aggrieved employees will remain silent rather than complaining or seeking justice.

The absence and ineffectiveness of EDI policy and practice, it is suggested, reinforces BHD behaviour regardless of organizational size, sector and type. Participants shared distressing experiences; they find BHD behaviour to be health-endangering, impacts negatively on work performance and leads to a breakdown of trust between the perpetrator and the victim.

More recently, the government of Pakistan has provided legislation to protect women employees from any kind of workplace bullying and harassment; however, there is an urgent need to promulgate more general legislation to protect all employees regardless of gender and position in the organization. Male managers described use of social and physical violence and the risk of political and legal threats, including time spent unfairly in jail.

BHD is detrimental to the physical and psychological health of both the victim (and also, sometimes, for the bully), leading to increased illness and absenteeism. Culturally, the cost of bullying and harassment is largely unacknowledged as are the tangible and intangible costs to the organisations. Cultural modification programmes may be a positive and beneficial option in what are often negative and tense working environments: though it is likely that there may be initial resistance, it is anticipated that the corporate reputational lift in terms of being a professional and fair place to work is likely to be a benefit in terms of recruitment and retention. Government and organizations should introduce anti-harassment and anti-bullying legislation and explicit policies and programmes to provide protection for employees.

Government at federal and provincial levels need also to make concerted efforts to ensure that public, private and multinational organizations are obliged to institute pre-emptive anti-BHD laws along with training and counselling for managerial staff to create and maintain an EDI supportive atmosphere. There is urgent need across corporate sector heads to implement more robust principles of corporate governance by balancing gender ratios on corporate boards. This should be done under regulation of governments and disclosed and reported to all stakeholders especially UN, UNDP and World Economic Forum. Government should launch awareness campaign in line with promises made in the constitution 1973 for women and PWDs rights of equality and decent work free from BHD. This would be best undertaken initially in pilot organisations ahead of rolling out more generally across the country. Crucially, a more proactive programme of positive action for traditionally disadvantaged groups, including the setting of recruitment targets, may be necessary to ensure that there is a sufficient critical mass of within organisations to increase the likelihood of organisational culturally sustainable (rather than legislation driven) organisational change

This study identifies upper positions of the hierarchies of almost all corporate boards of the firms included in this study are overwhelmingly filled by men in Pakistan. Further table 3 suggests that managers at the top manifest dominance behavior, competitiveness, endurance directed at attaining some goal. However, the country's enforcement apparatus remains preoccupied with terrorism, crime and rampant corruption, and these pressing issues often overshadow the distinctive plight of women (Bhattacharya, 2013). These factors mediate harassment and bullying in the workplace as thus become the primary mechanisms for creating a hostile environment in order to discourage those not regarded as politically and socially acceptable, as well as to maintain a socio-political hierarchy within the workplace that is present without.

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**Table 1 Demographic detail of interviewees**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Demographic variables** | **Specifications** | **Public** | **Private** | **MNCs** | **Total** |
| Age | 25 to 35 years | 6 | 3 | 4 | 13 |
| 36 to 45 years | 4 | 4 | 3 | 11 |
| 46 to 60 years1 | 1 | 2 | 4 | 7 |
| Gender | Male | 7 | 4 | 6 | 17 |
| Female | 4 | 5 | 5 | 14 |
| Experience | Up to 10 years | 6 | 4 | 4 | 14 |
| 11 to 20 years | 3 | 3 | 3 | 9 |
| 21 to 30 years | 2 | 1 | 5 | 8 |
| Position in the organization | Top-level management | 1 | 2 | 2 | 5 |
| Middle-level management | 4 | 4 | 5 | 13 |
| First-level management | 6 | 3 | 4 | 13 |
| 1In Pakistan, the formal retirement age for employee is 60 years (Khilji 2003). | | | | | |

**Table 2 Board Diversity and Women Participation**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Sector** | **No of firms in study** | **Women on board** | **Men on board** | **Total** |
| Banking | 5 | 0 | 61 | 61 |
| Education | 3 | 7 | 39 | 46 |
| Airline | 2 | 0 | 16 | 16 |
| Oil Industry | 2 | 0 | 19 | 19 |
| **Total** | **12** | **07** | **135** | **142** |

**Table 3 Ranking of ten main organizational factors of workplace bullying (based on participant interview analysis)**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Institutional/organizational factors** | **Ranking** |
| Highly hierarchical organizational structure | 1 |
| Poor and unpleasant working conditions | 2 |
| Lack of transparency in HRM policy and practice | 3 |
| Job insecurity | 4 |
| Lack of autonomy to perform | 5 |
| Role ambiguity | 6 |
| Absence of organizational justice | 7 |
| Lack of conflict resolution procedure | 8 |
| Lack of career opportunities | 9 |
| Terms and conditions of employment | 10 |