

Summary

Workplace Sexual Harassment Scale with Emic and Universal Manifestations

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Workplace sexual harassment (SH) is a research topic that is relatively underexplored in Turkey, with a greater focus in Western countries. In a few studies that have focused on workplace SH in Turkey (e.g., Toker, 2016; Toker & Sümer, 2010), the extent to which social-sexual behaviors in the workplace are perceived as SH and some factors that influence these perceptions have been examined in samples of employed women. The Social-Sexual Behaviors Questionnaire (SSIQ; Toker & Sümer, 2010) used in these studies is a tool that contains universal and culture-specific behavioral examples obtained from interviews conducted with employed women in Turkey in the early 2000s (Toker, 2003).

This research is part of a comprehensive project supported by TÜBİTAK (Sümer et al., 2023) that aimed to identify, measure, and prevent different forms of mistreatment in the workplace. The main goal of the research is to identify behaviors that workers in Turkey, regardless of their gender, perceive as SH in the workplace and to develop a workplace SH scale that includes both universal and emic elements. To achieve this goal, two comprehensive studies were conducted using four different samples.

According to a widely used and empirically supported model in the United States (Fitzgerald et al., 1999), workplace SH is examined under four dimensions: 1) quid pro quo harassment, which involves hierarchical power dynamics and includes sexually coercive threats or promises of privilege related to com-

pliance with sexual requests that result in punishment for non-compliance; 2) unwanted sexual attention, which includes behaviors involving physical coercion and verbal approaches that indicate sexual interest; 3) sexual hostility, which includes the sharing of sexual images or conversations and verbal expressions with sexual content; and 4) sexist hostility, which involves discrimination against women based on their gender or sexist verbal or behavioral attitudes.

In Western literature, the most important feature that distinguishes SH from other forms of workplace abuse is that it involves explicit sexual content (e.g., Samuels, 2003). This is also emphasized in SH definitions shared by organizations such as the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (1980) and Eurofound (2013). However, in Turkey, some behaviors that do not involve explicit sexuality but are implicit are also perceived as SH. The “Insinuation of Interest” factor identified in Toker’s (2003) and Toker and Sümer’s (2010) study is an example of the culturally specific implicit form of SH. This type of SH, which is not commonly encountered in Western literature, often includes behaviors such as giving compliments, asking personal questions, and trying to interact excessively with the employee inside or outside the workplace.

Although we have some knowledge of what employed women perceive as workplace SH in Turkey, it is uncertain whether this information is still valid 20 years later. In addition, the existing scale developed by Toker

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and Sümer (2010) in the early 2000s is not a sufficient scale to evaluate the experiences of all genders. The purpose of the two studies presented in this article, which consist of four phases, is to develop a psychometrically sound SH scale that is culturally and temporally compatible and can be applied to both employed women and men. Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the first author's Institutional Review Board.

Study 1: Determining the Scope of Workplace SH, Item Development, and Exploratory Analyses

The purpose of Study 1, which consists of two phases, is to determine the scope of workplace SH in Turkey, generate an item pool for the Workplace Sexual Harassment Scale (WSHS) accordingly (Phase 1) and to conduct exploratory factor analyses and reliability analyses on the scale (Phase 2).

Study 1 - Phase 1: Qualitative Research for Content Determination and Item Pool Creation

The aim of this qualitative research is to understand the scope of workplace SH in Turkey by eliciting up-to-date information from employees.

Sample and Procedure

Fifteen focus group interviews were conducted with 149 employees in six cities (Ankara, Bursa, Gaziantep, Istanbul, Izmir, and Van) in Turkey, during January-March 2020. Each focus group consisted of at least eight and up to 12 employees representing different job groups, sectors, and job levels from the public and private sectors. Participants were reached through a consulting firm. Each focus group interview was conducted by at least two researchers, one coordinating the questions and facilitating the participation of the participants, and the other(s) taking notes as faithfully as possible on the shared expressions. No audio or video recordings were made during the focus groups.

Thematic Analysis and WSHS Item Generation

In the context of developing the WSHS, focus group data were subjected to thematic analysis. In the thematic analysis, the 95 identified behavioral examples were initially grouped under 41 codes (sub-dimensions). After iterations, codes with very low representativeness were removed, and codes with conceptual similarity were merged, resulting in 13 codes. These 13 codes were grouped under four themes. Consistent with the literature, the themes were named Sexual Bribery and Coercion (*Quid Pro Quo*), Physical Sexual Harassment, Sexual Hostility, and Insinuation of Interest. The codes and themes are summarized in Figure 1.

Initially, 33 items were written representing the

four themes and 13 sub-themes. The items were designed to be gender-neutral. The number of items in the final version of the WSHS used in Phase 2 is as follows: Sexual Hostility (10), Physical Sexual Harassment (6), Insinuation of Interest (12), and Sexual Bribery and Coercion (5). A notable finding was that men also reported experiencing SH from women at the workplace. The behavioral examples shared by men were mostly categorized under the themes of sexual hostility and insinuation of interest.

Study 1 - Phase 2: Exploratory Factor and Reliability Analyses

In Phase 2, the developed scale was applied to a sample of employees, and the factor structure was examined through exploratory factor analyses, and the internal consistency coefficients of the identified factors were calculated using Cronbach's alpha coefficient.

Sample and Procedure

The data were collected online as part of the larger project. The survey package included the WSHS scale, as well as other scales measuring different types of workplace mistreatment and a demographic information form. The survey link was opened by 803 employees. After eliminating those who did not meet the criterion of working for at least one year (176), did not consent to participate (5), abandoned the survey (190), and those who gave the same response to all items (5), factor analyses were performed on the data of 348 participants who completed the WSHS in full. The demographic information form at the end of the survey package was completed by 296 participants.

Of the participants, 209 were women, 75 were men, one participant marked the other option, and 11 participants did not respond. The average age of the participants was 35.13 years ($SD = 8.53$). Of participants 130 were married and 147 were single. The majority of participants had at least a bachelor's degree ($n = 281$) and worked in white-collar ($n = 277$) and private sector ($n = 197$) jobs.

Measures

WSHS. The participants were asked to rate the 33 items on a 5-point frequency scale (1 = Never; 2 = Sometimes; 3 = About once a month; 4 = About once a week; 5 = Every day). The instructions read "If you have started working remotely mostly due to the pandemic, please provide your answers considering the last year before the pandemic."

Demographic Information Form. Participants were asked to report their gender, age, marital sta-

tus, education level, sector of employment, job group (blue-collar, white-collar), position (whether they are a manager or not), male-to-female employee ratio in their workplace, working hours, etc.

Results

After conducting Principal Component Analyses (PCA) with different rotations and number of factors extracted, seven items were eliminated due to reasons such as cross-loading, low factor loading, and content overlap with other items. A new PCA with Varimax rotation was conducted on the remaining 26 items, resulting in a 4-factor solution that explained 60.37% of the variance. The identified factors were parallel to the themes identified in the qualitative study. The final version of the scale consists of the Insinuation of Interest factor with eight items ($\alpha = .90$), the Sexual Hostility factor with eight items ($\alpha = .82$), the Physical Sexual Harassment factor with six items ($\alpha = .80$), and the Sexual Bribery and Coercion factor with four items ($\alpha = .89$). The overall internal consistency coefficient of the scale was .93. This 26-item scale was used in Study 2.

Discussion

In Study 1, it was found that behaviors classified as SH were grouped under four themes using a qualitative research method. It was observed that these themes reflected not only the universal aspects of SH but also culture-specific manifestations. For example, Sexual Hostility and the Sexual Bribery and Coercion themes and the sub-dimensions under these themes (see Figure 1) show great parallelism with the measured harassment dimensions and sub-dimensions described in Western literature (Fitzgerald et al., 1999). In addition to these universal aspects, it is also observed that the dimensions and sub-dimensions specific to the cultural context are also reflected in the scale. It can be said that the Insinuation of Interest theme and its sub-themes identified in Study 1, as well as the “physical contact with ambiguous intent” sub-dimension of the Physical Sexual Harassment theme, are consistent with the cultural context. The Insinuation of Interest dimension, which was also identified by Toker and Sümer in 2010, is compatible with Turkey’s high contextual structure (Yahyagil & Ötken, 2011).

Similarly, one of the sub-dimensions of Insinuation of Interest, “harassing under a paternalistic disguise,” points to a type of harassment that uses patriarchal/paternalistic tendencies in Turkish culture as a cover (Ayacan et al., 2000). In addition to these, contrary to Toker’s (2003) findings, it has been found that behaviors related

to physical contact with ambiguous intent are also labeled as SH in the 20 years since Toker’s study. This difference can be explained by the increased awareness of SH among employees in Turkey over the 20-year period following Toker’s study.

Study 2: Construct and Criterion-Related Validation Study

The aim of Study 2 was to test the factor structure of the 26-item WSHS scale with an independent sample using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and to examine its relationships with outcome variables that have been shown to be related to being a victim of workplace harassment in the literature (Phase 1), and to test its convergent and discriminant validity (Phase 2).

Study 2 - Phase 1: CFA and Criterion-Related Validation

In this phase, initially, the four-factor structure of the WSHS was confirmed through a series of CFAs. Then, the relationships between scale scores and job satisfaction, affective organizational commitment, subjective well-being, counterproductive work behavior, and burnout were examined to evaluate the criterion-related validity of the scale.

Sample and Procedure

The data for the study were collected online using convenience sampling method. Analyses were conducted on 482 participants who provided correct responses to control questions out of 522 individuals who met the participation prerequisite of “having worked for at least 1 year.” The sample consisted mainly of women (57.1%), with a bachelor’s degree or higher (82.2%), white-collar workers (82.8%), working in the private sector (61.9%), and from 24 different occupational fields.

The survey package included the WSHS, Job Satisfaction Scale (Kunin, 1955), Organizational Commitment Scale (Meyer et al., 1993), Psychological Well-being Scale (Diener et al., 2010), Counterproductive Work Behavior Scale (Spector et al., 2006), Copenhagen Burnout Inventory (Kristensen et al., 2005), and Demographic Information Form.

Results

The 4-factor structure with the 26 indicators as identified in Study 1 was subjected to a CFA using Mplus 8.4. An MLM estimation for non-normal distributions was used. The 4-factor model had good chi-square to df ratio and RMSEA but relatively poor CFI and TLI values ($S-B \chi^2(289) = 462.009$, $\chi^2 / df = 1.60$, $p < .001$; CFI = .89, TLI = .87, RMSEA = .035, %90 C.I. .029, .041) due

to extreme skewness. Following suggestions by Xia and Yang (2019), nested models of 3-factors, 2-factors, and a single-factor were compared, resulting in better model fit for the 4-factor model.

Cronbach alpha coefficients were .89 for Insinuation of Interest, .83 for Sexual Hostility, .73 for Physical Sexual Harassment, and .66 for Sexual Coercion and Bribery. The latter two factors had relatively lower alpha values due to more severe skewness. Based on means, relatively more frequent SH was observed on sexual hostility and insinuation of interest. Women ($M = 1.30$) reported more exposure to insinuation of interest than men ($M = 1.14$) ($t(442.30) = 4.14, p < .001$). WSHS factors had large intercorrelations ranging from .51 to .76.

WSHS were associated with subjective well-being ($r = -.12, p = .008$), job satisfaction ($r = -.20, p < .001$), affective organizational commitment ($r = -.29, p < .001$), burnout ($r = .24, p < .001$), and counterproductive work behavior ($r = .27, p < .001$), as expected. Thus, in Phase 1, the 4-factor structure of the WSHS was demonstrated. In addition, the criterion-related validity was supported based on statistically significant relationships with the expected outcome variables.

Study 2, Phase 2: Convergent and Discriminant Validation

In this phase of Study 2, convergent and discriminant validity analyses were conducted to gain further insight into the construct validity of the WSHS. For this purpose, the correlation between the scale and another scale measuring sexual harassment (SSIQ; Toker & Sümer, 2010) as well as correlations with constructs which are associated with workplace SH occurrences, but still are relatively distant concepts (i.e., institutional sexism and workplace incivility) were examined.

Sample and Procedure

Participants were reached via KOSGEB (small and medium enterprises development organization) and responded to the survey online. The sample consisted of 170 employed individuals who completed all scales and reported to be employed in their current organization for at least one year. The sample consisted mainly of men (52.4%), with participants being white-collar workers (88.8%) and holding a bachelor's degree or higher (67.1%). Average age was 39.91, average organizational tenure was 6.5 years.

The online survey package included 18-item Social Sexual Incidents Questionnaire (SSIQ, Toker & Sümer, 2010), the 15-item Workplace Incivility Scale and the 12-item Organizational Sexism Scale, both developed as part of the same project as the WSHS, and a demographic information form.

Results

Supporting convergent validity, the WSHS had a large correlation with the SSIQ total score ($r = .91, p < .001$). In examining discriminant validity, WSHS was moderately correlated with Workplace Incivility ($r = .47, p < .001$) and Organizational Sexism ($r = .48, p < .001$). These findings indicated that the developed scale distinguished two distinct forms of mistreatment that could be considered precursors to workplace sexual harassment.

General Discussion

This study demonstrated the reliability, construct, and criterion-related validity of the 26-item WSHS, which was developed using qualitative and quantitative research methods on four independent samples. The findings of this study have potential theoretical and practical contributions to the local literature on workplace SH. Firstly, the fact that the WSHS includes emic aspects of workplace SH, is a response to the need for culturally sensitive measurement tools. Another unique contribution of the developed scale, compared to other SH scales, is that its use is not limited to women employees only. In this study, although to a lesser extent, men also reported to be exposed to workplace SH at a level that cannot be ignored. The fact that the WSHS can be used as a scale independent of the gender of the evaluator or harasser is an important strength.