

Gender Harassment in the Workplace: A Critical Study of Its Distinct Nature and Implications for Human Resource Management

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Abstract

This study examines gender harassment in workplace settings, distinguishing it from sexual harassment and situating it within broader discussions of gender inequality and organisational power dynamics. Drawing on Gender Role Theory and Acker's Theory of Gendered Organisations, it explores how societal expectations and gendered workplace structures sustain harassment, even in environments with progressive policies. Using a conceptual research design based on an integrative review of existing literature, the paper synthesises evidence from global and Nigerian contexts, including male-dominated sectors such as policing. The review indicates that entrenched masculine norms, organisational silence, and weak legal frameworks perpetuate gender-based hostility, particularly toward women in leadership positions and individuals who challenge traditional gender roles. It further highlights the psychological and professional consequences for victims and identifies critical gaps in Human Resource Management (HRM) practice. The study recommends integrating gender sensitivity into core HRM systems and strengthening policy enforcement to foster inclusive and equitable workplaces. Overall, the paper contributes to HRM discourse by framing gender harassment as a distinct and systemic issue requiring cultural, legal, and organisational transformation.

Keywords: Gender Harassment, Workplace Discrimination, Organisational Culture, Employee Well-being, Human Resource Management

1. Introduction

Gender harassment, a pervasive yet often misunderstood form of workplace misconduct, represents non-sexual behaviours that communicate hostility, exclusion, or derogation based on gender (Strid et al., 2021; Paulin et al., 2023). Unlike sexual harassment, which involves unwelcome sexual advances or conduct (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2023), gender harassment stems from discriminatory attitudes and cultural stereotypes about how men and women should behave. It reinforces gender hierarchies, undermines women's professional authority, and perpetuates organisational cultures that normalise subtle forms of gender-based hostility.

This issue has become increasingly relevant in contemporary Human Resource Management (HRM) as workplaces strive for inclusivity while grappling with persistent gender bias. Women in leadership positions, for example, often face resistance from subordinates or colleagues who perceive their authority as a challenge to traditional gender norms. Such behaviours, though not overtly sexual, constitute harassment that damages employee well-being, productivity, and morale, ultimately impeding organisational effectiveness.

The academic and practical interest in this topic was inspired by discussions in the course “Contemporary Issues in Human Resource Management,” where students debated whether undermining female leaders constitutes sexual or gender harassment. This question revealed a notable research gap: while sexual harassment has been extensively studied, gender harassment remains underexplored, particularly within the Nigerian context. Addressing this gap is essential for developing targeted HRM policies that foster equity and psychological safety in the workplace.

While existing studies have made important distinctions between sexual and gender harassment, much of the literature remains concentrated in Western contexts, with limited attention to how these dynamics manifest in African workplaces. In Nigeria, the conversation is often framed around sexual misconduct, leaving non-sexual, gender-based hostility underexplored both in theory and in practice (Genty, 2013). This gap presents a challenge for HRM, which must address not only overt harassment but also the structural and cultural conditions that enable it.

This paper makes three key contributions to the literature. First, it provides conceptual clarification by distinguishing gender harassment from sexual harassment, addressing persistent ambiguities in both academic and legal discourse. Second, it offers contextual insight by situating the analysis within the Nigerian workplace, where scholarly attention to non-sexual gender-based hostility remains limited. Third, it advances an HRM-focused perspective by examining how gender harassment affects core human resource functions and by proposing strategies that move beyond compliance-based interventions toward more systemic organisational change. Through this integrated approach, the paper links theory, context, and practice in a manner that is particularly relevant for emerging economies.

Accordingly, this paper adopts a conceptual research design, drawing on existing literature and policy documents to synthesise theoretical perspectives, empirical findings, and policy insights on gender harassment, with particular reference to Nigeria’s organisational and legal context. It focuses on understanding the phenomenon within workplace settings and analysing its implications for HRM practice.

The discussion proceeds as follows. The Literature Review clarifies the concept of gender harassment, examines measurement instruments, explores relevant theoretical frameworks, and analyses global and Nigerian empirical evidence. It then synthesises findings on manifestations, consequences, and HRM or legal responses, before identifying key gaps for further research. The Theoretical Framework elaborates on Gender Role Theory and Acker’s Theory of Gendered Organisations to explain the mechanisms through which gender harassment persists. Subsequent sections present real-world manifestations, discuss their impact on employees and organisations, and outline strategic HRM interventions. The paper concludes with recommendations for policy reform, organisational accountability, and future research.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Conceptual Clarification and Working Definition

Gender harassment is increasingly recognised as a distinct yet related form of workplace mistreatment. While sexual harassment involves unwelcome sexual advances or conduct of a sexual nature (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2023), gender harassment refers to non-sexual verbal, non-verbal, and organisational behaviours that demean, exclude, or express hostility toward a person because of their gender or gender expression (Fitzgerald et al., 1995; Strid et al., 2021; Paulin et al., 2023).

In this paper, gender harassment is conceptualised as behaviour that functions to enforce gender norms and sanction deviations from expected gender roles. Unlike sexual harassment, which is driven by sexual intent, gender harassment operates as a mechanism for maintaining social hierarchies and power relations embedded in organisational contexts (Willness et al., 2007; Cortina et al., 2013).

This distinction is analytically significant because it shifts the focus from individual acts of misconduct to broader organisational and cultural processes that sustain inequality. By adopting this working definition, the paper positions gender harassment not as a secondary or subtle form of sexual harassment, but as a distinct phenomenon with unique implications for Human Resource Management policy and practice.

2.2 Measurement and Key Instruments

Empirical studies on gender harassment have drawn on established tools designed to capture both subtle and overt forms of workplace mistreatment. Instruments such as the Sexual Experiences Questionnaire (SEQ) and its subsequent adaptations include subscales that distinguish gender harassment from sexual coercion and unwanted sexual attention. Originally developed for military and corporate settings, the SEQ has been refined to capture forms of selective incivility and everyday discriminatory behaviours that target individuals based on gender (Cortina et al., 2013).

While these instruments have advanced the measurement of workplace harassment, they also reveal important limitations. Their reliance on self-reporting may lead to underestimation of prevalence due to stigma, fear of retaliation, or the normalisation of gendered behaviours that are not recognised as harassment. Across studies, a consistent pattern emerges in which subtle, non-sexual forms of hostility are less likely to be reported or categorised as harassment, despite their cumulative impact.

These limitations are particularly pronounced in Nigerian and broader African contexts, where cultural norms, organisational hierarchies, and weak reporting mechanisms further constrain accurate measurement. The limited validation of existing scales in these settings restricts comparability and obscures the full extent of gender harassment. This suggests that prevailing measurement frameworks may inadequately capture context-specific expressions of gender-based hostility, reinforcing the need for locally grounded and culturally sensitive assessment tools.

2.3 Theoretical Perspectives

Gender Role Theory

Eagly's (1987) Gender Role Theory posits that societal expectations about masculinity and femininity shape individuals' behaviour and influence how others perceive and evaluate them. Individuals who violate these prescribed roles, such as women in leadership positions or men who adopt nurturing roles, are more likely to experience backlash in the form of exclusion, scrutiny, or harassment.

From this perspective, gender harassment can be understood as a corrective mechanism through which organisations and individuals enforce conformity to traditional gender expectations. For example, the persistent questioning of women's competence in leadership roles reflects a perceived mismatch between feminine stereotypes and leadership expectations. Similarly, men who deviate from dominant masculine norms may be subjected to ridicule or marginalisation. This helps to explain why gender harassment persists even in organisations with formal equality policies, as underlying cultural expectations continue to shape behaviour and perceptions.

Acker's Theory of Gendered Organisations

Acker's (1990) Theory of Gendered Organisations extends this analysis by locating gender harassment within organisational structures rather than individual behaviour alone. The theory argues that workplaces are not gender-neutral but are organised around implicit masculine norms that define competence, authority, and the "ideal worker." These norms are embedded in job design, performance evaluation, promotion criteria, and informal workplace interactions.

In this context, gender harassment functions as both a product and a reinforcement of organisational inequality. For instance, biased performance evaluations, exclusion from decision-making processes, and informal networks that privilege male employees can create environments where gender-based hostility becomes normalised. Evidence from male-dominated institutions such as policing supports this view. Rostami et al. (2025) found that female officers were frequently sidelined, subjected to heightened scrutiny, and required to demonstrate competence beyond that expected of their male counterparts.

These patterns illustrate how organisational structures and practices not only reflect gendered expectations but also actively reproduce them. Gender harassment, therefore, is not merely interpersonal misconduct but a systemic outcome of organisational arrangements that privilege certain forms of masculinity while marginalising other identities.

2.4 Empirical Evidence - Global

Global studies provide extensive evidence of gender harassment across a range of professional contexts, particularly within male-dominated institutions. In sectors such as law enforcement, research from Sweden demonstrates how organisational cultures reinforce gender hierarchies and masculine dominance, leading to both overt and subtle forms of gender-based hostility (Rostami et al., 2025).

Across academic and corporate settings, similar patterns emerge. Studies report persistent forms of exclusion from informal networks, the undervaluing of women's expertise, and the application of harsher or biased performance evaluations (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and

Medicine, 2018). These behaviours are often normalised as routine workplace interactions, making them less visible yet highly impactful.

Across these sectors, a consistent pattern emerges in which gender harassment is embedded within everyday organisational practices rather than isolated incidents. The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (2018) further emphasise that organisational silence, tolerance, and weak accountability systems enable both overt and covert forms of harassment to persist despite the presence of formal policies.

These findings suggest that gender harassment is sustained less by individual attitudes and more by institutional norms and practices that normalise inequality. This highlights the importance of examining gender harassment as a systemic organisational issue rather than a series of discrete interpersonal behaviours.

2.5 Empirical Evidence - Nigeria and Africa

In Nigeria, scholarly exploration of gender harassment remains limited. Most academic studies have focused on sexual harassment, particularly within universities, while public attention has been shaped largely by media reports and institutional inquiries in corporate and educational settings (Agbaje et al., 2021). However, emerging large-scale evidence suggests that broader patterns of discrimination and harassment are prevalent. Using nationally representative data from the Nigeria Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS), Zan et al. (2025) report that approximately 18.9% of women experience discrimination and harassment, with significant associations across socio-demographic factors such as education, marital status, and region. Although this study is not limited to workplace settings, it highlights the wider structural and cultural conditions that enable gender-based hostility. Consequently, there is a paucity of empirical research addressing non-sexual forms of gender-based hostility within organisational contexts, leaving a significant gap in understanding how such behaviours manifest in everyday workplace interactions.

Across the limited available studies and reports, a recurring pattern is the conflation of gender harassment with sexual harassment, which obscures the distinct mechanisms through which non-sexual hostility operates. This lack of conceptual clarity is further reinforced by weak institutional recognition and limited reporting frameworks, making gender harassment less visible and less likely to be addressed.

Adejonwo (2024) and Genty (2013) observed that although Nigeria has ratified several international conventions against discrimination, national labour policies still inadequately address gender harassment as a distinct category. Similarly, Animashaun (2019) finds that Nigeria's anti-discrimination laws are comparatively weaker and poorly enforced when compared to countries such as South Africa.

These legal and institutional limitations have important implications for workplace practice. In contexts characterised by strong hierarchical structures, cultural norms around authority, and fear of retaliation, employees may be reluctant to report non-sexual forms of harassment. This creates organisational environments where gender-based hostility is normalised, underreported, and insufficiently addressed by HR systems.

These findings show a critical gap between formal legal commitments and lived workplace realities in Nigeria. They also underscore the need for context-specific research and HRM interventions that explicitly recognise and address gender harassment as a distinct form of workplace inequality rather than subsuming it under broader categories of sexual misconduct.

2.6 Manifestations and Consequences

Gender harassment manifests through a range of subtle and overt behaviours, including exclusion from decision-making processes, demeaning comments, unequal task assignments, and biased performance evaluations. These behaviours often appear routine and are therefore less likely to be formally recognised as harassment, yet they collectively reinforce gender hierarchies within organisational settings.

Across the literature, a consistent pattern emerges in which these seemingly minor acts accumulate over time to produce significant individual and organisational consequences. At the individual level, victims frequently experience anxiety, depression, reduced self-esteem, and burnout, which contribute to disengagement and diminished productivity (Willness et al., 2007; Cortina et al., 2013). In male-dominated sectors such as policing and academia, women report persistent scrutiny and undervaluation of their contributions, limiting career progression and reinforcing perceptions of professional illegitimacy (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2018; Rostami et al., 2025).

At the organisational level, gender harassment undermines workplace cohesion, weakens morale, and contributes to increased turnover and reputational damage. It also disrupts core Human Resource Management functions, including recruitment, retention, and training, by creating hostile work environments that discourage employee engagement. In the Nigerian context, these effects are intensified by weak reporting systems, fear of retaliation, and cultural stigma surrounding complaints, leading to unaddressed grievances and diminished organisational trust (Ayub & Adegboyega, 2020).

The findings above suggest that gender harassment operates not only as an interpersonal issue but as a systemic organisational problem with far-reaching implications for employee well-being and HRM effectiveness.

2.7 HRM and Legal Responses

Human Resource Management (HRM) plays a dual role in both preventing and responding to gender harassment, but its effectiveness depends on moving beyond compliance-based approaches. While existing literature highlights the importance of formal mechanisms such as anti-harassment policies, awareness training, and reporting systems, these measures alone are often insufficient to address the underlying drivers of gender-based hostility.

Across studies, a consistent pattern emerges in which compliance-oriented interventions fail to disrupt the cultural and structural conditions that sustain harassment. Drawing on Acker's (1990) and Eagly's (1987) frameworks, gender harassment can be understood as embedded within organisational practices, including job design, performance appraisal, and promotion systems that reflect masculine norms. From this perspective, HRM interventions must move beyond procedural responses to actively challenge these embedded inequalities.

Globally, evidence from contexts such as Sweden, Canada, and the United Kingdom demonstrates that proactive strategies, including independent reporting channels, diversity audits, and leadership accountability mechanisms, can reduce the incidence of workplace harassment. However, their effectiveness depends on consistent implementation and organisational commitment.

In Nigeria, the application of such strategies is constrained by contextual factors, including weak enforcement of the Violence Against Persons (VAPP) Act, organisational silence, and fear of retaliation among employees. These conditions limit the effectiveness of formal HRM mechanisms and contribute to the persistence of unreported or unresolved cases.

This suggests that effective HRM responses must be context-sensitive and integrated into broader organisational systems. Embedding gender sensitivity into recruitment, training, performance management, and leadership development can enable organisations to shift from reactive compliance to proactive inclusion. In doing so, HRM can play a central role in addressing gender harassment as a systemic organisational issue rather than an isolated behavioural problem.

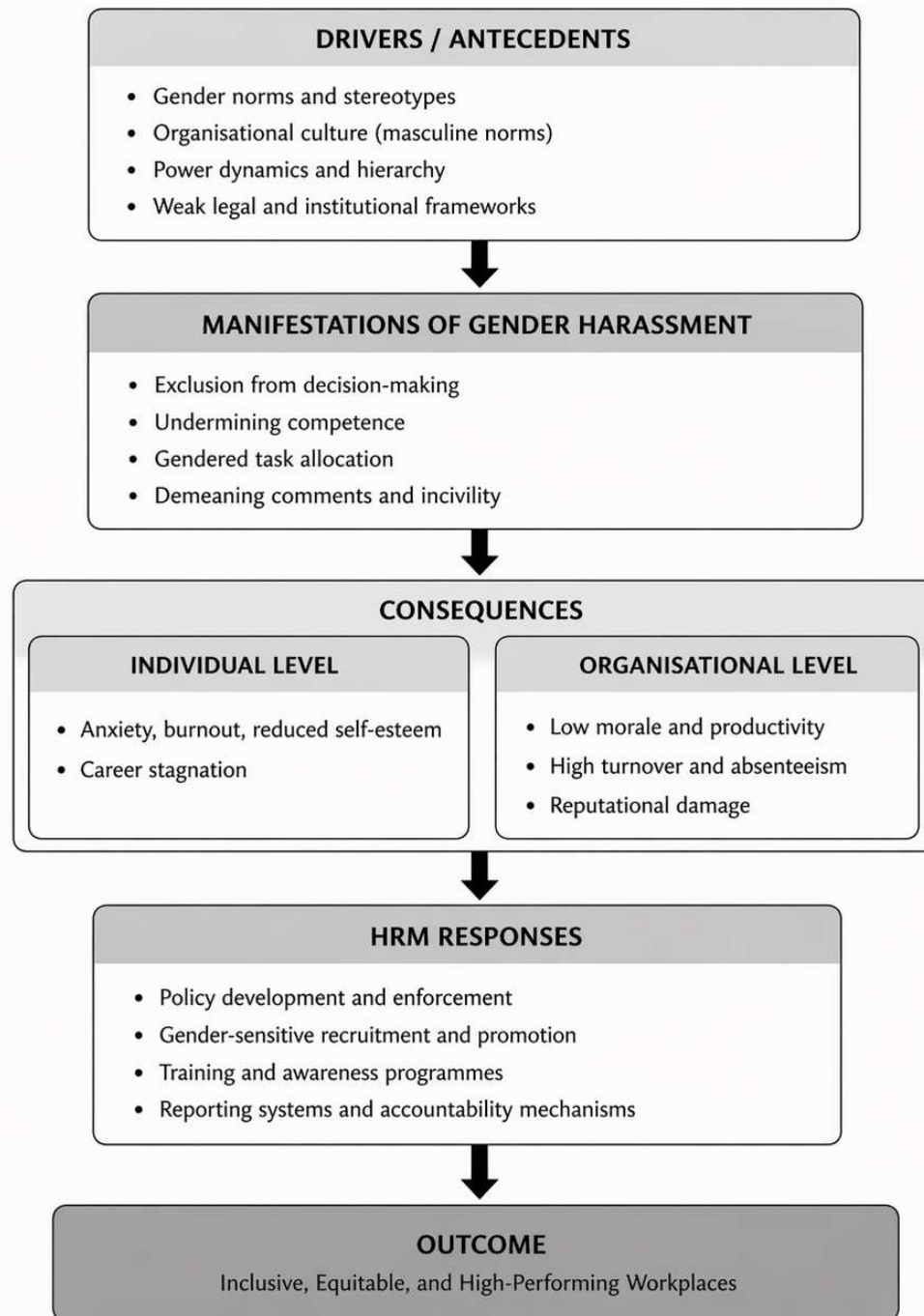
2.8 Synthesis: Gaps and Research Questions

The reviewed literature reveals that while global research provides valuable frameworks for understanding gender harassment, studies in Nigeria and Africa remain limited and fragmented. Few investigations distinguish gender harassment from sexual harassment or explore its systemic roots within organisational structures. Moreover, there is a lack of validated instruments for measuring gender harassment in local contexts and limited integration of HRM strategies in addressing it. This paper, therefore, addresses the following gaps:

1. Clarifying and contextualising gender harassment as a distinct construct in Nigerian workplaces.
2. Synthesising theoretical and empirical insights to highlight HRM's role in prevention and response.
3. Identifying pathways for integrating gender-sensitive practices into HRM systems to promote equitable and inclusive workplaces.

Based on the synthesis of the reviewed literature, Figure 1 presents a conceptual framework illustrating the relationships between the drivers, manifestations, consequences, and Human Resource Management (HRM) responses to gender harassment in the workplace.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of Gender Harassment and HRM Response



The framework shows gender harassment as a systemic organisational issue shaped by cultural, structural, and institutional factors, and indicates the role of HRM in addressing both its root causes and consequences.

3. Method

This study adopts a conceptual research design based on an integrative literature review, which enables the synthesis of diverse empirical and theoretical perspectives on gender harassment in the workplace. This approach is appropriate for examining an emerging concept such as gender harassment, where existing research is fragmented across disciplines and contexts.

A systematic search of the literature was conducted using academic databases including Scopus, Web of Science, PsycINFO, JSTOR, African Journals Online (AJOL), and Google Scholar. The search covered publications from 1980 to 2025, reflecting the evolution of scholarship from early studies on workplace harassment to more recent discussions on gender-based hostility. Keywords used included “gender harassment,” “sex-based harassment,” “workplace harassment,” “gender discrimination,” “Nigeria,” and “human resource management.”

The initial search yielded a broad pool of sources, which were subsequently screened based on relevance and quality. Inclusion criteria comprised peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and credible institutional reports that addressed non-sexual forms of gender-based hostility in workplace settings. Exclusion criteria included studies focusing exclusively on sexual harassment without reference to gender-based non-sexual conduct, as well as non-scholarly sources lacking methodological rigour.

Following screening, the selected studies were analysed using a thematic synthesis approach. Recurring patterns were identified across the literature, including the role of gender norms, organisational culture, power dynamics, and HRM practices in shaping the occurrence and consequences of gender harassment. These themes informed the organisation of the literature review and the development of the paper’s analytical framework.

The review integrates evidence from both global and Nigerian contexts to provide a comparative perspective. However, the relative scarcity of empirical studies in Nigeria is itself a key finding of the review, highlighting a gap in context-specific research. Accordingly, interpretations in this paper are presented as insights derived from the literature rather than primary empirical findings.

A summary of key studies included in the review is presented in Table 1 to illustrate the range of contexts, methods, and thematic focus of the literature analysed.

Table 1: Summary of Key Studies Reviewed

Author(s)	Context	Method	Key Focus
Fitzgerald et al, (1995)	USA (Workplace)	Quantitative	Conceptualisation and measurement of sexual and gender harassment.
Cortina et al. (2013)	Global (Workplace)	Quantitative	Selective incivility and non-sexual

			gender-based hostility.
National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (2018)	USA (Academic & Professional Settings)	Report / Review	Organisational climate, gender harassment, and systemic inequality.
Rostami et al. (2025)	Sweden (Police)	Qualitative	Gender norms, organisational culture, and harassment in male-dominated institutions.
Strid et al. (2021)	Europe (Higher Education)	Mixed Methods	Gender-based violence and institutional responses.
Paulin et al. (2023)	Europe (Workplace)	Quantitative	Gender harassment and workplace inequality.
Willness et al. (2007)	Global (Workplace and Organisational Settings)	Meta-analysis	Impact of workplace harassment on employee outcomes.
Agbaje et al. (2021)	Nigeria (Universities)	Quantitative	Workplace gender-based violence and harassment prevalence.
Adejonwo (2024)	Nigeria (Legal and Institutional Context)	Legal Analysis	Gaps in labour policies addressing gender harassment.
Animashaun (2019)	Nigeria vs South Africa	Comparative Legal Study	Weakness of Nigerian anti-discrimination laws.
Ayub & Adegboyega (2020)	Nigeria (Workplace)	Empirical	Reporting barriers, organisational silence, and stigma.
Zan et al. (2025)	Nigeria (National. Population-based Survey)	Quantitative (Secondary Data Analysis)	Prevalence (18.9%) and socio-demographic drivers

			of discrimination and harassment among women.
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Source: Literature Search (2026)

4. Results

The literature reviewed reveals several consistent patterns regarding nature, drivers, manifestations, and implications of gender harassment in workplace settings. These insights are synthesised below to reflect the key findings emerging from both global and Nigerian contexts.

4.1 Drivers of Gender Harassment

The literature indicates that gender harassment is primarily driven by deeply embedded gender norms, organisational cultures, and power dynamics. Evidence across studies suggests that societal expectations regarding masculinity and femininity shape workplace behaviour, often leading to hostility toward individuals who deviate from traditional gender roles (Eagly, 1987; Cortina et al., 2013).

In addition, organisational structures that prioritise masculine norms, particularly in male-dominated sectors, reinforce hierarchical power relations that enable gender-based hostility (Acker, 1990; Rostami et al., 2025). Weak legal enforcement and institutional silence further contribute to the persistence of gender harassment, particularly in contexts where accountability mechanisms are limited.

4.2 Manifestations of Gender Harassment

The review indicates that gender harassment manifests through both subtle and overt behaviours embedded in everyday workplace interactions. Common forms include exclusion from decision-making processes, dismissal of professional contributions, unequal task allocation, and the use of demeaning or stereotypical language (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2018).

Across studies, a consistent pattern emerges in which these behaviours are often normalised and therefore less likely to be formally recognised as harassment. Despite their subtle nature, such actions cumulatively reinforce gender hierarchies and undermine workplace inclusion.

4.3 Consequences of Gender Harassment

The literature reviewed suggests that gender harassment has significant consequences at both individual and organisational levels. At the individual level, employees subjected to gender harassment frequently experience anxiety, reduced self-esteem, burnout, and decreased job satisfaction, which negatively affect performance and career progression (Willness et al., 2007; Cortina et al., 2013).

At the organisational level, these individual effects translate into broader outcomes, including reduced morale, increased absenteeism, higher turnover, and reputational damage. The review further indicates that persistent gender harassment undermines organisational cohesion and weakens overall productivity.

4.4 HRM Implications

The review indicates that gender harassment poses significant challenges for Human Resource Management (HRM), particularly in relation to recruitment, retention, training, and employee relations. While many organisations have formal policies and reporting mechanisms in place, evidence suggests that these approaches are often compliance-driven and insufficient to address the underlying cultural and structural drivers of harassment.

Effective HRM responses require a shift toward proactive strategies, including embedding gender sensitivity in organisational systems, strengthening accountability mechanisms, and promoting inclusive workplace cultures. Without such interventions, gender harassment remains inadequately addressed despite formal policy frameworks.

4.5 Insights from the Nigerian Context

The literature highlights that, in Nigeria, gender harassment remains underexplored and frequently conflated with sexual harassment. Existing studies and reports suggest that organisational silence, fear of retaliation, and cultural norms discourage reporting, allowing gender-based hostility to persist (Ayub & Adegboyega, 2020; Agbaje et al., 2021).

Furthermore, weak enforcement of legal frameworks and limited institutional recognition of gender harassment as a distinct issue contribute to gaps in both policy and practice. These findings indicate that gender harassment in Nigeria is not only under-researched but also insufficiently addressed within existing HRM systems, underscoring the need for context-specific interventions.

5. Discussion

The findings from the literature review highlight that gender harassment is not merely an interpersonal issue but a systemic organisational problem shaped by cultural norms, power structures, and institutional practices. The persistence of gender harassment across diverse contexts suggests that formal policies alone are insufficient to address its underlying causes.

Drawing on Gender Role Theory (Eagly, 1987), the results indicate that gender harassment often arises as a response to perceived violations of traditional gender expectations. Women in leadership positions, for example, may be subjected to resistance or heightened scrutiny because their roles conflict with socially constructed norms of femininity. Similarly, men who deviate from dominant masculine expectations may experience ridicule or marginalisation. These patterns suggest that gender harassment functions as a mechanism for enforcing conformity to established gender roles within organisational settings.

Acker's (1990) Theory of Gendered Organisations further explains how workplace structures contribute to the persistence of gender harassment. Organisational systems such as recruitment, performance appraisal, and promotion criteria often reflect implicit masculine norms, thereby creating environments where gender-based inequalities are reproduced. In such contexts, gender harassment becomes embedded within routine organisational practices rather than being recognised as deviant behaviour.

The findings also reveal that the consequences of gender harassment extend beyond individual experiences to affect broader organisational outcomes. Reduced employee well-being, diminished morale, and increased turnover collectively undermine organisational effectiveness. These

outcomes reinforce the argument that gender harassment should be understood as a strategic organisational concern rather than a peripheral behavioural issue.

In the Nigerian context, these challenges are further intensified by weak enforcement of legal frameworks, organisational silence, and fear of retaliation. The limited recognition of gender harassment as a distinct form of workplace mistreatment contributes to its underreporting and inadequate management. This suggests that effective interventions must be context-sensitive and aligned with local organisational realities.

5.1 Implications for Human Resource Management

Building on the discussion above, the findings highlight the need for a more strategic and context-sensitive approach to Human Resource Management in addressing gender harassment. While policies, awareness training, and reporting systems are necessary, they remain insufficient if the underlying structural and cultural drivers of harassment are not addressed.

Drawing on Acker's (1990) Theory of Gendered Organisations, effective HRM interventions must challenge entrenched masculine norms embedded in job design, performance appraisal, and promotion systems. In parallel, Gender Role Theory (Eagly, 1987) suggests that organisations must actively counter societal expectations by supporting women in leadership roles and promoting more inclusive role distributions across genders.

Evidence from countries such as Sweden, Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom demonstrates that proactive strategies, including independent reporting mechanisms, diversity audits, and leadership accountability, can significantly reduce workplace harassment. However, their effectiveness depends on contextual adaptation rather than direct transfer.

In the Nigerian context, weak enforcement of the Violence Against Persons (VAPP) Act, organisational silence, and fear of retaliation continue to limit the effectiveness of HRM interventions. Addressing these challenges requires integrating gender sensitivity into core HR processes, including recruitment, retention, training, performance management, and succession planning. Such an approach enables organisations to move from reactive compliance to proactive inclusion, thereby fostering more equitable and sustainable workplace environments.

6. Conclusion

This study has argued that gender harassment is a distinct form of workplace mistreatment rooted in power dynamics and gendered organisational structures rather than sexual intent. By distinguishing it from sexual harassment, the paper contributes to both theory and practice. Theoretically, it extends Gender Role Theory and Acker's Gendered Organisations framework to show how harassment enforces gender norms. Practically, it highlights the Human Resource Management (HRM) consequences of ignoring non-sexual but gender-based hostility.

7. Recommendations

To address this challenge, three levels of intervention are essential.

Policy and Legal: Nigerian labour laws should explicitly define and prohibit gender harassment, with stronger enforcement of the Violence Against Persons (VAPP) Act and workplace compliance audits.

HRM Practices: HR must embed gender sensitivity into recruitment, performance appraisal, and promotion systems, while establishing confidential and independent reporting structures to counter organisational silence.

Organisational Culture: Leadership accountability, regular culture audits, and inclusive training are required to dismantle entrenched masculine norms.

This conceptual review is limited by its reliance on secondary data, highlighting the need for empirical research in Nigeria and across Africa. Future studies should develop reliable measurement tools, explore sector-specific prevalence, and examine how digital communication platforms enable gender harassment.

Ultimately, addressing gender harassment is not simply an HR compliance issue but a strategic imperative for creating equitable, inclusive, and sustainable workplaces.

By positioning HRM at the forefront of cultural and structural change, organisations can transform workplaces from sites of silent bias into environments of equity, respect, and productivity.

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