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The Relationship between the Increased Sexual Harassment and the Coping Strategy among the Employees

Najwa Azyan Munirah Binti Zailani¹ & Rusyda Helma Mohd¹

¹Centre for Research in Psychology and Human Well-being, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

Corresponding Author Email: rusyda_h@ukm.edu.my

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Abstract

Sexual harassment is an issue that often happens among workers but is, however, always not reported to the authorities. The impact not only disrupts productivity at the workplace but also disturbs employees' mental health. Hence, this study is done with an aim to analyze the employees' perception of sexual harassment that's been happening among their colleagues, analyzing the employees' ability to be aware and identify the form of sexual harassment on them and their colleagues, studying the workers' capacity to realize and identify the forms of sexual harassment on themselves and their colleagues, and determining the anticipated coping strategy used by the workers if faced with sexual harassment. 385 respondents, comprising 186 male workers and 199 female workers who have been selected, consisted of individuals that are still working or used to work in the public or private sector, aged 18 until 40 years old for this quantitative research. 100 people have been involved in its pilot study meant to see the consistency of its test equipment. The study findings show the relationship between the increase in sexual harassment and the ability to cope among the employees (r = 0.66, p > 0.05). In terms of understanding and awareness of sexual harassment, there's a significant difference among employees in the private sector (t=7.63, p<0.05). Other than that, there's a significant difference in perception for coping between male and female if they are involved in sexual harassment (t = 2.89, p < 0.01). Workers must remain vigilant and receive increased education on sexual harassment. The employer should shoulder this responsibility, and it is compulsory for the employees to abide by the rules set. Finally, the findings of this study aim to broaden the awareness, understanding, and perception of sexual harassment in the workplace among Malaysian society.

Keywords: Sexual Harassment, Coping, Youth, Awareness, Employee

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Introduction

Sexual harassment in the workplace is a crucial issue that will permanently affect employees across various industries. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), sexual harassment refers to any physical behavior, oral or non-oral, that is sexual in nature and is detrimental to the pride of the surrounding workplace (Sharma et al., 2020). A study done worldwide figured that more than 74,000 employees in 121 countries and provinces stated that they had experienced violence or harassment physically, psychologically, or sexually at the workplace (ILO, 2022). Sexual harassment is harassment in the form of unwanted behavior. It could happen verbally, with signs, touch, psychologically, and also visually with sexual elements, and it will happen repeatedly to the victims. According to Zainudin et al. (2024), sexual harassment could be divided into two, that is, sexual harassment in the form of sexual coercion and sexual harassment in the form of threat to sexual annoyance. Sexual coercion will have a direct impact on an individual's working status, whereas sexual annoyance is a form of behavior that is perceived as a threat, intimidation, and insult but has no relation at all to the jobs' benefits. It could be detected through various ways, including through unpopular behavior, unsuitable jokes or comments, and also through clear or implicit threats with sexual nuance (Dalin et al., 2024).

Sexual harassment is generally defined as an unwanted sexual offer, either sexually or physically, that may turn into a job condition or otherwise, could compromise one's job and career, and could even create an uncomfortable working environment among the employees (Cronin et al., 2024; Gutek, 2015). This sexual harassment phenomenon not only brings discomfort; it could even disturb the mind and cause someone to be traumatized in his life (Sari et al., 2023). Generally, the targets of sexual harassment usually consist of females; nevertheless, males are not excluded from being the target of these unethical people (Almasri et al., 2024). In general, sexual harassment is a form of harassment that brings discomfort to an individual either orally or non-orally, visually, either psychologically or physically (Mirhosseini et al., 2023). However, it doesn't necessarily mean towards sexual relationships only, but also inclined to forms of disturbances that could be considered as a violation of one's dignity, humiliation, and even a threat to them (Hardies, 2023). Sexual harassment is easy to happen in the form of power abuse on an individual, or in other words, the perpetrator has power over them (Khader, 2023; Paniello-Castillo et al., 2023; Spiliopoulou & Witcomb, 2023). Sexual harassment is mostly targeted at women due to them always being perceived as weak and easily terrified when faced with things like this (Drew & Chevroulet, 2024). However, most of the victims tend not to lodge a report because they worry about potential consequences (Rusyda et al., 2021). Having said all the above doesn't mean that male employees didn't become the victims of sexual harassment. As a matter of fact, only 10-14 percent of sexual harassment cases are filed from the male employees, according to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) (Noah, 2023). This proves that in this case, it is not always the female employees who are the victims, but instead they are also experienced by the male employees (Faridah Awang et al., 2020).

However, in 2022, Malaysia introduced the Anti-Sexual Harassment Act 2022 to give an avenue to the victims of sexual harassment to lodge reports and claims against individuals who are doing the sexual harassment (Akta Anti-Gangguan Seksual Malaysia 2022, 2022). Nevertheless, Malaysia has a sound legislative system for handling workplace moral misconduct. Both Malaysia and Indonesia have laws against quid pro quo, which refers to

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moral misconduct. However, Malaysia's law has imposed a fine for companies that do not cooperate in solving *quid pro quo* problems that are happening in their company (Spiliopoulou & Witcomb, 2023).

Most of the studies done on sexual harassment are attempting to see the difference between male and female (Yusoff et al., 2024). Females are proven to be more sensitive towards forms of sexual harassment in the aspects of oral, signs, physical, psychological, and visual compared to males. According to Zainudin et al. (2024), most of the sexual harassment victims at the workplace come from the female group compared to males. Data has shown that obscene jokes and also sexual-formed compliments are among the forms of harassment orally and the most frequently received, and there is no exception to physical harassment such as stroking and touching with sexual elements. Free social interactions between employees and physical touch that is considered normal maybe become a factor that makes the colleague among the main perpetrators that are doing the sexual harassment at the workplace. The sexual harassment victim always chooses not to report on the harassment that they had because the victims only dare to tell and share on this issue with colleagues (Dalin et al., 2024) and not to the psychology officer that is at their organization. The effect of this is that most of the victims will experience psychological problems, have to change their workplace, and even more, they could lose their job and have to face marital problems.

Female employees in general have a good understanding of sexual harassment that happens to women in public places (Low et al., 2023), but knowledge alone is not strong enough to push the victim to complain or lodge a report and at last seek help. Even though the respondent understand and is obvious on the concept of sexual harassment that is involving the physical aspect such as touch and stroking the body parts and it is unwanted, it includes the visual aspect too, such as sending obscene photos and videos, however, majority of the victim still chooses not to make a report due to the weakness of the judiciary system, no solid proof, embarrass and scared (Faridah, 2020). Besides, they only get some personal support from colleagues who see the incident. This study is parallel with the findings in Pakistan, where the female employees there couldn't afford to report due to society's discrimination and fear of safety of their family and themselves, as a result of their country's weak law and judiciary system (Turner et al., 2018).

In understanding the root of sexual harassment happenings, most of the respondents have different views, especially within males and females. The male respondent stated that the cause of the sexual harassment happening is the outcome of the way the victims dress, no courage to fight, or they aren't even aware that they are the victims of sexual harassment due to being involved in workplace socializing that is too free (van der Rijt et al., 2012). On the other hand, women stated that the main contribution for women to be sexually disturbed is due to women always being considered weak and easily bullied. They also stated that obviously the organization does not have any rules that argue against sexual harassment specifically. Nevertheless, the sexual harassment doer in every organization will be taken action against in stages until the final stage, which is the termination of the job contract.

The culture of gender discrimination in Malaysia is also the cause of the spread of sexual harassment. This is because women are deemed individuals that have no authority and are often denied their rights. (Darkin et al., 2020.) have raised this issue and stated that

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discrimination faced by female workers is at a medium level and could happen regardless of the rank and status of an individual. While sex workers are a group that gets the least empathy if they are disturbed sexually compared to workers in other fields,

The phenomenon of sexual harassment among employees needs to be dealt with urgently. If not, it would compromise the well-being of the victims' psycho-social and finally bring a decrease to productivity and quality of life (Rusyda et al., 2022). Hence, every individual needs to have the courage to fight for their justice. Other than law enforcement, the role of employer and also the leader is crucial in shaping a safe surrounding or a surrounding that threatens in an organization. As a superior, they have to be wise to communicate and alert on the current issues of each employee as well as watch the employee-employer limit.

Examining the coping strategies that employees use in response to sexual harassment is a crucial area of research. Employees who experience sexual harassment engage in a wide variety of passive and active coping strategies to deal with the situation. Understanding these strategies, and how they impact job and health outcomes, is essential for developing effective prevention and intervention approaches.

Previous research has identified several factors that may influence an employee's coping response, such as the nature of the harassment, the working relationship between the harasser and target, and the gender composition of the work group. Exploring these factors in greater depth can provide valuable insights into why some employees may be more vulnerable to the negative effects of sexual harassment, and how organizations can better support those who are impacted.

The emotional and psychological consequences of sexual harassment can be severe and long-lasting. Feelings of anger, fear, and self-blame are common among victims, and can lead to increased stress, anxiety, and depression. These psychological impacts can, in turn, affect an employee's job performance, job satisfaction, and overall well-being.

Procedure

The scope of this study is only focusing on youth who have been or still are employees. In this study, emphasis is on how employees are being handled on sexual harassment cases happening at their workplace. Besides data collection through the circulation of questionnaires, the literature method. The population of this study consists of employees from public and private sectors aged between 18 and 40 who are still working either in the public or private sector. The sample choice is made using a simple random sampling method. A number of about 385 respondents are needed to fulfill the criteria of this study.

Study Test Tools

The study instrument in this questionnaire is divided into 3 parts, that is Part A, Part B and Part C.

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Table 1

Questionnaire Marking Following Parts and No. of items___

Parts	Questionnaire	Total
A	Respondent's Demography	6
В	Sexual Harrasment's Questionnaire (SHEQ)	35
С	Adult Resilience Measure (ARM)	17
Total Amount		58

Section A: Respondents' Demography

This part includes questions on brief information about the respondent that could help the researcher describing the background of the involved respondent. The questions that consist of this part are age, race, sex, education level, working status and religion.

Section B: Sexual Harassment

Sexual Harassment Experiences Questionnaire (SHEQ) by Fitzgerald et al. (1999) is a self-report that has been uniformed to evaluate the experience of workplace sexual harassment. The total score gained through the whole amount response on all items. The higher score will represent high resistance to sexual harassment (Lim, 2021).

This questionnaire consists of 35 questions which are divided into three dimensions: gender harassment, unwanted sexual attention, and sexual coercion. 7 items for gender harassment consists of questions such as staring, obscene jokes or songs, and usage of pornographic material. On the other hand, Unwanted Sexual Attention has 21 items that consists of discussion questions on personal things or unwanted sexual things, asking to go on a date, trial (forcibly) to make exist romantic sexual relationship, attempt to touch, caress or rape. Seven items in sexual force includes subtly or directly corrupt for a sexual cooperation, subtle or direct threat to repay due to sexual non-cooperation and experiencing negative effect clearly on behaviour due to sexual non-cooperation (R. Lim et al., 2016). This item is measured using Likert Scale, 1= Never 2= Once 3= A few times 4= Very often. Cronbach's Alpha reliability for item SHEQ is 0.94 where this value is at a good level and reliable.

Table 2
Sexual Harassment Questionnaire Ranking

Marks (Item)	
1	
2	
3	
4	
	1 2 3

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Section C: Coping Factor

This section is to measure the coping of an individual in a certain situation. Hence, Adult Resilience Measure (ARM) questionnaire has been used. ARM focuses on an individual's coping process, contextual and relationship, determining an adult's social ecology coping source that is exposed to environmental risks. This measurement is based on the idea that coping involves sources related to contextual (physical source, relationship and service support) that is the key to processes that result in positive outcomes, and coping is interactive and fluctuates from time to time (Clark et al., 2022).

This questionnaire has 17 questions that were processed based on Child and Youth Resilience Measure (CYRM). CYRM consists of 28 items with five subscales (Ungar & Liebenberg, 2011) which however, through Rasch analysis, 17 items with 2 subscales that are intra-interpersonal resilience and caregiver resilience were produced (Jefferies et al., 2020). The use of 5 -point Likert Scale is used to measure questionnaire items that are 1= Extremely Unlikely 2= Unlikely 3= Neutral 4= Likely 5= Extremely Likely.

Table 3
Coping Questionnaire Ranking

Statement	Marks (Item)		
Extremely Unlikely	1		
Unlikely	2		
Neutral	3		
Likely	4		
Extremely Likely	5		

Sampling Design

The design of this study is quantitative. This study is using Simple Random Sampling technique that is probability sampling that gives an equal chance for each population element (member) to be chosen as sample members (A. G. Turner, 2003). Simple Random Probability sampling is to ensure every subject in the population has an equal chance to be selected (Etikan & Bala, 2017).

Descriptive Statistic

Descriptive analysis is a method in arranging and simplifying information gained from data gathered. This analysis is aimed at elaborating the variable features such as respondents' demography. Its function is to summarise data in the form of numerical. This descriptive analysis is using one or more variables and is independent, hence this analysis is not in the form of comparison and relation (McHugh, 2012). Due to that, in this section, the researcher will explain the relation of information in section A in the questionnaire that is respondents' gender, age, race, religion, level of education and also employment status.

Respondents' Demographic Profile

385 respondents in this study are from the youth group aged 18-40 years old with an additional criteria that is used to work and still working in any sector either public or private.

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Detailed study on respondents' background involving aspects such as gender, age, race, religion and level of education and also employment status.

Distribution of Respondents According to Gender

Table 5 shows the frequency of distribution and also percentage for the aspect of gender. It is found that the involvement of female employees exceeds the involvement of male employees with the frequency of 199 people that equals to 51.7% whereas for male is 186 people, about 48.3%.

Table 5
No. and Percentage of Respondents According to Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage(%)
Male	186	48.3
Female	199	51.7
Total	385	100

Distribution of respondents According to Age

Table 6 is showing the number and percentage according to the age of the respondents. Youth at the age of 18-20 years old is the lowest with the number of participating respondents about 42 people (10.9%) only. Besides, the highest number is dominated by those aged within 20-30 years old (56.9%), while the remaining, that is around 124 people (32.2%) are those aged 30-40 years old.

Table 6
Number and Percentage of Respondents According to Age

Age	Frequency	Percentage (%)	
18-20 years old	42	10.9	
20-30 years old	219	56.9	
30-40 years old	124	32.2	
Total	385	100	

Distribution of Respondents According to Race

According to Table 7 that shows the number and percentage of respondents according to race, it is figured out that Malay has the highest percentage of involvement that is 64.4% (248 people). This shows that the majority of involvement from respondents are from Malay employees. Next, Chinese are at 2nd highest with the total respondents being 65 people (16.9%). With a difference of only two respondents, the involvement of Indian respondents is about 63 people (16.4%). A race apart from Malay, Chinese and Indian, only about 9 people (2.3%).

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Table 7
Number and Percentage of Respondents According to Race

Race	Frequency	Percentage (%)	
 Malay	248	64.4	
Chinese	65	16.9	
Indian	63	16.4	
Other	9	2.3	
Total	385	100	

Distribution of Respondents According to Religion

Table 8 shows the number and percentage of respondents according to the religion of each respondent. Majority of the respondents are from Muslim employees, about 252 people (65.5%). It is then followed by Buddhist with a total respondents of 51 people (13.2%). The involvement from Hindu respondents are about 46 people (11.9%) and second lowest are Christians being only 32 people (8.3%). For other religions, only 4 people (1.0%) participated.

Table 8
Number and percentage of Respondents According to Religion

Religion	Frequency	Percentage (%)	
Muslim	252	65.5	
Hindu	46	11.9	
Buddhist	51	13.2	
Christian	32	8.3	
Other	4	1.0	
	205	100	
	385	100	

Distribution of Respondents According to Employment Status

Table 9 shows the number and percentage of respondents according to their employment status. About 217 respondents (56.4%) that is more than half are from the private sector, while the remaining, 168 respondents (43.6%) are from the public sector.

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Table 9
Number and Percentage of Respondents According to their Employment Status

Employment Status	Frequency	Percentage (%)	%)	
Public Servant Private Employee	168 217	43.6 56.4	_	
Total	385	100	_	

Distribution of Respondents According to Level of Education

Based on Table 10 that shows the number and percentage of respondents according to their level of education, it is figured out that involvement by employees with a degree is the most that is about 172 people (44.7%). Apart from 'Others' with a total of 6 people (1.6%), the level of education that has the least are employees who finished Foundation/ Matriculation/STPM and PhD with an amount of 26 people (6.8%). Respondents from those who finished SPM are about 43 people (11.2%), while those with Diploma are 44 people (11.4%) and finally 68 people (17.7%) are respondents that graduated with a Master's Degree.

Table 10
Numbers and Percentage of Respondents According to Level of Studies

Education Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM)	43	11.2
Foundation/Matriculation/STPM	26	6.8
Diploma	44	11.4
Degree	172	44.7
Master's Degree	68	17.7
PhD	26	6.8
Other	6	1.6
Total	385	100

Inferential Statistic

Inferential analysis is a method used to elaborate the relationship among the study's variables and state its relations with the samples' features to the study's population. Santoso (2006) opined that inferential statistics is about learning about drawing the result on population parameters (average, proportion) from the existing sample. Two analyses used in this part;

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Pearson correlation and T-test. In this section, there are four study hypotheses that have been submitted; (1) "A significant relationship exists between actions taken among male and female employees", (2) "There's a difference in understanding the sexual harassments' cases among public and private sector employees aged 18 - 40 years old", (3) "There's a significant relation towards an individual perception on sexual harassment and with factors that encourage their action", and (4) "There's a difference in reported cases among the public and private employees".

Pearson Correlation Analysis

According to Widayanti (2016), Pearson correlation is a simple correlation that only involves one dependent variable and one independent variable. Pearson Correlation produces correlation coefficients that are aimed to measure the intensity of the linear relationship between two variables of the study. If both variables do not have a linear relationship, Pearson Correlation does not reflect the intensity of both the variables. In this study, the researcher uses Pearson Correlation Analysis to measure hypotheses (1) and (3).

Independent Sample T-Test Analysis

According to Sampson (2018), Independent Sample T-Test or T-Test Parametric Independent that is also known as 'Student's t-test' is used to determine whether statistical difference exists between min for both independent groups.

Descriptive Analysis Outcome

Analysis on the relationship between increase in sexual harassment and ability to cope among employees.

The outcome of the analysis in this part is in relation with the first research assumption, that is, "There's a significant relationship between the increase in sexual harassment and ability to cope among employees". Pearson Correlation is an analysis that is used to analyse data. Table 11 below, is showing the correlation between the action taken among the male and female employees.

Table 11
Pearson Correlation between increase in sexual harassment and coping ability among employees

Value	r	K value
Increase in sexual harassment and coping ability among employees	0.66	.198

Referring to Table 11, the outcome of Pearson Correlation analysis is showing findings that are contradicting with the research assumption, that is, there is no significant relationship between action taken among male and female employees (r= 0.66, p>0.05). Hence, the study hypothesis is not accepted.

Difference in understanding sexual harassment cases among public and private employees aged 18 until 40.

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In this section, the outcome of the analysis is related to the study's early assumption that is, "There's a difference in understanding sexual harassment cases among public and private employees aged 18 until 40". Analysis involved to analyse data is T-test. Table 12 below is showing the T-test between understanding the sexual harassment among public and private employees.

Table 12
Difference in understanding cases of sexual harassment among public and private sector employees

Variables			Type of o	ccupation			Sign.		
	Public		Private		(2-tailed)	t	df		
	M	SD	n	М	SD	n			
Difference in understanc sexual harass	ling	24.56	168	38.87	8.71	217	.000	7.63	38

Significance level is *p< 0.05 and **p< 0.01

Based on Table 12, results from T-test shows that there is a significant difference (t(383)=7.63, p<0.05) on the understanding of sexual harassment cases among employees from public and private sector. Min value by Public employees (n=168, M=52.58, SD=24.56) is higher compared to Private sector employees (n=217, M=38.87, SD=8.71).

Table 13

Difference on coping between male and female employees if they are involved in sexual harassment

Variables	Type of oc Male		Type of occup	cupation Female		Sign. (2-tailed)	t	df	
	M	SD	n	М	SD	n			
Difference in male and fe coping if invol in sexual hara	male ved	15.93	168	73.14	9.37	217	.004	-2.89	383

Significance level is *p< 0.05 and **p< 0.01

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From Table 13, resulted from T-test shows that there are some significant difference (t(383)= -2.89, p<0.01) towards the ways of coping by male and female employees if they are involved in sexual harassment cases reported among the public and private employees. According to this table, the min value for females (n=217, M=73.14, SD=9.37) is higher than min value for male (n=168, M=69.39, SD=15.93).

Research Summary

As a whole, the researcher has done this study to analyse the perception of employees towards sexual harassments that happened among their colleagues and other people around them, analyse the ability of public sector employees and private sector employees to realise sexual harassment that happens to themselves or people around them , and determine the factors that encourages the happening of sexual harassment at workplace. At the end of this study, the researcher could portray the perception towards the relationship between the increase in sexual harassment (Mustapa et al., 2015) and factor that influences actions through a few tests analysis done.

The number of respondents in this study is 385 people which were selected through Simple Random Sampling Technique that gives equal chance for each population to be selected. All the respondents of this study are youths aged 18 until 40 years old and are still employed or were employed in the public or private sector. The use of the ARM and SHEQ questionnaire test tool has been used to measure each variable in this study. SHEQ questionnaire is to evaluate sexual harassment experience at workplace while ARM questionnaire is to look at individual's coping process, relation and contextual, determining the source of adults' social ecology coping which is exposed to surrounding risks.

The findings of this study shows that three out of four early hypotheses has been accepted that is, Second Hypotheses; there's a difference in understanding sexual harassment cases among public and private sector employees aged 18 until 40 years old, third hypothesis; significant relationship exists towards individual's perception on sexual harassment and factors encouraging their act and fourth hypothesis; there's a difference in the number of cases reported among employees in public and private sector. The only hypothesis rejected is the first hypothesis; there;s a significant relationship between action taken among male and females.

Through implication theoretical-wise, the findings of the study enlighten more and give further knowledge specifically in its field especially in psychology. The outcome of this study indirectly could be made as a reference material to the psychologists to widen their study to be more specific and detailed, that is out of the thought ability of an individual in the future to come. If we compare with other studies that is more synonym with the society like the study on depression, marriage satisfaction, students' satisfaction and a few other studies, issues on sexual harassment is still foreign among the Malaysian citizen whether at the secondary school level, university level until the working life. Hence, it's opening more space to future researchers to analyse more deeply on sexual harassment specifically.

Implications practical-wise are more focused to all individuals regardless of their involvement directly or indirectly. Based on this study, we could say that all parties have connections with the issue discussed. This is because, sexual harassment not only happen among public and

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private sector employee only, sexual harassment as a matter of fact happen since they're still children. Through this study, it could be proven that adult individuals has the potential to receive harassment that they don't favour and not many have the courage to fight-back, moreover if this situation happens among teenagers or even small children. Trauma, phobia and fear that they experience is definitely incomparable. Not only that, the experience of receiving sexual harassment would definitely become a dark moment in life. What's more scary is as they grow older, sexual harassment is not considered as violation of rights anymore, but instead a basic culture that definitely will have to experience to enter adult life.

Conclusion

In conclusion, based on study's findings, through T-test independent sample and Pearson Correlation we could summarise that there is a relationship between perception towards relationship between the increase of sexual harassment and factors influencing coping. So, it shows that all variables in this study are related to each other. How an individual perceive a situation could influence the rise or the reduction of sexual harassment that happened at workplace. Action taken also depends to the understanding and views of an individual on the situation received, either they consider it as a culture and norm in their working life or conclude it as a form of sexual disturbance and a violation of their dignity.

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