UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND COPING STRATEGIES AMONG MALAY FEMALE ADMINISTRATIVE AND DIPLOMATIC OFFICERS

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By

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Faculty : Human Ecology

With forecasted participation rate of 45.8 per cent in 2005, Malaysian women have contributed significantly to the development of the Nation. Thus, their well-being and basic human rights to have a safe and conducive workplace should be assured: including from sexual harassment. Sexual harassment is noted by the United Nations as a form of discrimination and violence against women in various conventions that Malaysia has acceded to; primarily the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Literature on sexual harassment suggests that one in two women would experience some forms of sexually harassing behaviour during her working life.
This is a qualitative research involving 16 female respondents working in the public sector. Observation is mainly drawn from interviews with the respondents. In the interest of triangulation, informal interviews with their friends and colleagues were also conducted. Besides that, key informants also provided required background information. It is a study of power relations between the harassers and the victims at public workplaces. The research examines the incidences and reactions to sexual harassment and the types of coping strategies employed by the respondents who are in the subordinate positions in the organizational structure. The central argument is that the issue of power and powerlessness is embedded in the work culture which oppresses women's rights to have a safe and conducive working environment. The study also seeks to examine the factors influencing the types of coping strategies used by the respondents.

Findings revealed that no one reported a one-time harassment. Instead, all the respondents faced numerous types of harassment for a considerable length of time. As for types of coping, a number of coping strategies were simultaneously used by the respondents as they saw fit and most effective at that particular time. Some coping patterns emerged. While there are some respondents who were empowered enough to stand for their rights, most preferred to keep quiet as to avoid further complications and repercussions at the workplace. This supports previous
studies that women tend not to seek advocacy intervention. Only in severe harassment cases did they do so. Respondents in this study avoided advocacy-seeking since previous cases reported to higher authority yielded no favourable response. There are some exceptional cases where respondents went along with the harassers due to several factors, including childhood upbringing and family background. The main factors influencing their decision on coping strategies were power differential, socialization and background, severity, personal empowerment and personality, and office environment.

The study concludes that sexual harassment is an intricate form of sexual violence and is mostly all about men in power and un-empowered women. To minimize incidences of sexual harassment at public workplaces, people need to have basic respect to others as found in the tenets of all religion. Besides that, more gender sensitivity courses should be conducted, with massive awareness campaign on the Sexual Harassment Guideline introduced by the PSD in August 2005. Only then, more harmonious and safer working environment could be achieved in the public sector.
Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi sebahagian keperluan untuk ijazah Master Sains

GANGGUAN SEKSUAL DAN STRATEGI DAYATINDAK DI KALANGAN PEGAWAI WANITA PERKHIDMATAN TADBIR DAN DIPLOMATIK

Oleh
NOOR AZIMA AHMAD
Mac 2006

Pengerusi : Profesor Madya Jariah Masud, PhD
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Wanita Malaysia telah memberikan sumbangan yang signifikan kepada pembangunan negara dengan jangkaan 45.8 peratus penyertaan dalam tenaga kerja pada tahun 2005. Disebabkan sumbangan yang sangat signifikan, hak asas mereka untuk mendapatkan suasana kerja yang sentiasa menggalakkan penyertaan mereka dan suasana selamat amat perlu diberikan perhatian: termasuk daripada gangguan seksual.

Gangguan seksual telah diklasifikasikan sebagai salah satu daripada bentuk diskriminasi dan keganasan terhadap wanita di dalam pelbagai konvensyen oleh Pertubuhan Bangsa-bangsa Bersatu. Ini terutamanya di dalam Konvensyen Penghapusan Segala Bentuk Diskriminasi Terhadap
Wanita (CEDAW) yang ditandatangani oleh Malaysia. Kajian menunjukkan bahawa seorang dalam setiap dua orang wanita akan mengalami pelbagai jenis gangguan seksual sepanjang kerjaya mereka.

Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa tidak ada seorangpun responden melaporkan gangguan seksual yang hanya berlaku sekali. Sebaliknya, semua responden telah menghadapi pelbagai bentuk gangguan yang berulang-ulang dalam tempoh yang panjang. Pelbagai jenis strategi dayatindak telah digunakan pada masa yang sama oleh responden mengikut kesesuaian pada ketika tersebut. Beberapa corak dayatindak telah diperolehi dalam kajian ini. Walaupun ada responden yang telah berani menegakkan hak masing-masing, kebanyakan memilih untuk berdiam diri untuk mengelakkan komplikasi yang lebih buruk di tempat kerja.

Keadaan ini menyokong hasil kajian-kajian terdahulu bahawa wanita mengelak untuk membuat laporan dan mendapatkan bantuan secara rasmi. Hanya di dalam kes-kes yang dirasakan terlampau serius strategi dayatindak membuat laporan ini digunakan. Keadaan ini berlaku kerana terdapat kes terdahulu yang dilaporkan kepada pengurusan tertinggi tidak menampakkan hasil yang diharapkan. Terdapat juga kes-kes istimewa di mana responden menggunakan situasi tersebut untuk kepentingan diri disebabkan sejarah hidup dan keluarga. Faktor-faktor utama yang menyebabkan sesuatu pemilihan dayatindak ialah kerana perbezaan kuasa, sosialisasi dan pengalaman, tahap kes-kes gangguan, tahap pengupayaan diri sendiri dan personaliti, dan suasana tempat kerja.
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To Kak Farid, my best friend: For laughing and crying with me, for pushing me on, for listening to my ramblings, for constantly praying for me and guiding me closer to The One. From the bottom of my heart: Thank you everybody. My life is richer because of all of you.

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Above all, I thank God for all that I have today. I pray to God to make all of us happy, grant us health, award us wealth, and most of all, to bestow upon us paradise.
I certify that an Examination Committee has met on 27 March 2006 to conduct the final examination of Noor Azima Ahmad on her Master of Science thesis entitled "Sexual Harassment And Coping Strategies Among Malay Female Administrative And Diplomatic Officers" in accordance with Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (Higher Degree) Act 1980 and Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (Higher Degree) Regulations 1981. The Committee recommends that the candidate be awarded the relevant degree. Members of the Examination Committee are as follows:

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This thesis submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Science. The members of the Supervisory Committee are as follows:

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Date: 13 JUL 2006
DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis is based on my original work except for quotations and citations which have been duly acknowledged. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted for any other degree at UPM or other institutions.

NOOR AZIMA AHMAD

Date: 14 June 2006
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Research

Malaysia has been recognized as one of the fastest growing developing countries over the past two decades (ILO, 1993; Adler, 1994). Apart from the recession periods (1984-1985), the Malaysian economy has expanded tremendously since the 1970s with forecasted real GDP growth of 5.0 - 6.0 per cent in 2005. This is achieved by the labour force of 10.3 million in 2005, including more than 900,000 in the public sector. Malaysia has progressed with an impressive record of only 3.4 percent unemployment rate in 2004, and forecasted at 3.5 percent in 2005 (Department of Statistics, 2005). The rapid economic development has been attributed to the contribution of women with participation rate of 47.7 per cent in 2003 and forecasted at 45.8 percent in 2005 (Economic Planning Unit, Malaysia, 2005).

Studies have shown that with increased participation rates of women in the workplaces, especially in sectors traditionally dominated by men, incidences of sexual harassment towards women would be unavoidable (Riger, 1991; Sabitha, 2003). Although harassers and harasees come in
both sexes, the great majority of situation involves one or more male harassers and a lower-rank female harasee (Foulis & McCabe, 1997; DuBois, Knapp, Haley, & Kustis, 1998; Welsh & Gruber, 1999). Hence, she is therefore still very much the proper pronoun when sexual harassment is discussed (Wagner, 1992; Stockdale, Visio & Batra, 1999).

Several countries around the world have legislated sexual harassment as a serious misconduct (Levesque, 2000). It violates the well-being of workers; presenting negative impact on one’s emotional, social, and physical well-being (Powell, 1993; Labig, 1995; Kinney, 1995; Fitzgerald, Drasgow, Hulin, Gelfand, & Magley, 1997; Harned, Ormerod, Palmieri, Collinsworth, & Reed, 2002). Studies have shown that absenteeism tends to increase among employees who are sexually harassed, work attitudes adversely affected, and productivity drops (Rosenberg, Perlstadt, & Phillips, 1993; Culbertson & Rodgers, 1997; Dorfman, Cobb, & Cox, 2000).

The 1995 Beijing Platform for Action notes sexual harassment as a form of violence against women and calls on member states to take measures to actively combat this act of violence. It is also in accordance to the spirit of Article 3 & 5, Universal Declaration on Human Rights that states:
`Everyone has a right to life, liberty and security of person and no one shall be subjected to torture, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment'.

In Malaysia, the act of sexual harassment violates Article 8(2) in the Federal Constitution that reads "there shall be no discrimination against citizens on the ground of religion, race, descent, place of birth or gender ..."

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Sexual harassment has been recognized as a key issue in debates about gender relation for the past 20 years (Wilson, 2000). Numerous studies have been conducted from the extent and forms of sexually harassing behaviour (Fitzgerald, Schullman, Bailey, Richards, Swecker, Gold, Ormerod, & Weitzman, 1998; Whatley & Wasieleski, 2001), to how it would affect the organizations as a whole (Schneider, Swan, & Fitzgerald, 1997). A number of researchers consider sexual harassment at the workplace as a serious problem (Dine & Watt, 1995; Sabitha, 1999; Dorfman, Cobb, & Cox, 2000; Cecilia, Zanariah & Maria, 2003), and "maybe the single most widespread occupational hazard at the workplace" (Garvey as cited in Riger, 1991). Others view sexual harassment as the outgrowth of sexism within the society (Murrell, Olson, & Frieze, 1995) and
should be viewed as equivalent to other violent sexual assault such as rape (Gutek & Koss, 1993). Thus, an in-depth study needs to be conducted to identify incidences of sexual harassment towards women administrators in Malaysia including in the Administrative and Diplomatic Service (ADS), who are policy-makers in the Country.

Researchers (Fitzgerald et al., 1988; Popovich, Gehlauf, Jolton, Somers, & Godinho, 1992; Bingham & Scherer, 1993) agree that one of the problems in studying sexual harassment is the need to understand the perception of the construct itself. This is because perception and belief are learned everyday by members of a certain group, and becomes the norms acceptable to all members within that group (Bandura, 1977). An in-depth study enables us to examine the experiences faced by the Malay victims as individuals, with different personalities, and as parts of the human ecological system, react to the incidences. The present study provides invaluable information on how personalities, cultures (in this case, the Malay culture) and socialization (Roziah, 1994) frame one’s belief and provides the framework for society to work; either inhibiting or fostering certain acts. Because of cultural expectations, victims of sexual harassment may be forced to act against their wishes, in order to maintain the status quo of the work environment. Qualitatively done, this study enables better access to the meanings of social experiences, interactions
and activities of the people involved from the viewpoint of the victims. This is in accordance with the view that humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied life that best be told narratively (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

Besides identifying the types and impacts of sexual harassment, researchers (Gutek & Dunwoody, 1987; Baker, Terpstra, & Lantz, 1990) have ventured into other aspects including how the victims cope individually with the incidences and how these coping strategies affected their lives and careers. Due to various differences in past experiences and upbringing, Barry (2002) in support of Bandura, points that it is important to be aware that an event perceived as threatening by one person maybe a challenge to another, and perceived by a third person as quite normal. It is the differences in these individuals that cause differences in their individual coping responses, creating an internal subjective reaction that can never be identical for any two people. However, certain common patterns of coping might exist among these victims. Hence, the present study is an attempt to investigate the specific individual coping strategies, and patterns of coping among these respondents over a period of time within the socio-cultural complexity.
Researchers (Hulin, Fitzgerald, & Drasgow, 1996; Malamut & Offermann, 2001) have also studied factors influencing sexual harassment coping strategies. The present study aims to examine the factors influencing types of coping strategies employed by the respondents who have multiple roles as individuals, workers, wives, mothers, daughters and members of the society.

The study attempts to answer the following research questions:

i) what experiences the respondents face and how do they react?;

ii) how the respondents individually cope with the incidences over a period of time?;

iii) what coping patterns prevalent among the respondents?; and

iv) what factors influence their coping strategies?.

1.3 Objective of the Study

In general, this study seeks to explore in-depth the sexual harassment experiences among women administrators especially on their coping mechanism. In particular, this study attempts to: