

Workplace Harassment And Its Impact On Staff Performance; A Case Study Of Kisoro District Local Government In Uganda

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Abstract

The study aimed at workplace harassment and its impact on staff performance with a case study of Kisoro district local government in Uganda and it was guided by the following objectives; To assess the impact of workplace harassment on the performance and productivity of district local government staff and to investigate the relationship between workplace harassment and absenteeism of staff. The research employed stratified random sampling to ensure representation from different departments within Kisoro District Local Government. The process involved dividing the population into strata or groups based on their respective departments. A random sample was then selected from each stratum to ensure that participants are drawn from various areas of the local government, providing a comprehensive understanding of the organizational dynamics. The determined sample size for this research was 60 participants. This size was arrived at through a combination of factors, including the size of the target population, the resources available for data collection and analysis, and the need to achieve a balanced representation across different departments. From the findings, the unstandardized beta value of $-.523$ indicated that for every one-unit increase in absenteeism, there was a predicted decrease of 0.523 units in performance and productivity. More importantly, the significance value of $.000$, which was lower than the $.05$ threshold, shown this negative relationship was statistically significant. Mandatory periodic trainings and awareness campaigns on all forms of workplace harassment and related laws should also be conducted for all staff.

Key words: workplace harassment and staff performance

Background of the study

Workplace harassment is a critical issue affecting organizational dynamics worldwide. In an increasingly diverse workplace, the importance of treating individuals with respect cannot be overstated. According to (Christopher, Moses, Muhindo, & Komunda, 2022b), showing respect not only improves productive working relationships but also minimizes the time needed to resolve conflicts and misunderstandings between employees and their managers. Organizations actively seek a diverse workforce to gain a competitive advantage by leveraging the unique qualities of individuals, thereby

enhancing the vibrancy of the workplace (Isaac et al., 2023). In recent years, the management of any organization or agency has increasingly focused on employee performance as a critical area of concern. In any organizational environment, the performance of its workforce plays a key role in determining the growth and development of the organization (Ramadhan et al., 2023). Undoubtedly, the contributions of employees to the growth and development of an organization cannot be overestimated. Employee performance includes both financial and non-financial outputs that directly affect

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organizational performance and long-term viability (Ntirandekura et al., 2022). The success of any organization is indisputably linked to the performance of its employees. As a result, it is imperative that organizations adopt strategies that actively engage, retain, and develop employees, as these efforts are critical to achieving organizational goals and objectives. Employee performance is influenced by various factors and (Micheal et al., 2023) emphasizes the pivotal role of motivation, work environment and ability to perform tasks. Among these motivational factors, the work environment is shown to be a significant influence on employee performance, as reported by (Winny et al., 2023) that employee performance improves when they have the desire and physical and emotional readiness to work. If the workplace environment is not conducive, employees tend to feel demotivated to engage in their tasks. (Anthony et al., 2023) expands on this perspective and suggests that a pleasant work environment not only increases performance, but also contributes to lower absenteeism rates and a reduction in 2 errors at work. These positive conditions become especially important in today's competitive and dynamic business environment. Although it is a long-standing problem, many organizations are facing the problem of sexual harassment in the workplace (Isaac et al., 2023). Powell (2011) argues that no organization is exempt from the risk of sexual harassment, with the workplace serving as a breeding ground for such behaviour. Aquinas (2007) defines sexual harassment as including unwanted acts such as touching, pressing, standing or sitting too close with the intention of rubbing against another person's body. Other forms

include coercion of intercourse, obstruction or disruption of movement, inappropriate contact with the individual or their clothing, as well as actions such as kissing, hugging, patting and stroking. Physical sexual harassment can manifest itself in a variety of ways, affecting the overall atmosphere in the workplace and potentially undermining employee performance (Alex & Kazaara, 2023). Despite the existence of clear organizational policies that guide appropriate behavior and define workplace behavior, disrespectful behavior, particularly bullying, persists in many workplaces (Giorgi et al., 2016). Workplace bullying is deeply rooted in certain organizational cultures, where behaviors such as yelling, condescending, or name-calling are considered acceptable, as noted by (Christopher, Moses, Muhindo, & Komunda, 2022a). This study specifically focuses on bullying, which involves deliberate and persistent attempts to control, intimidate, torture, or psychologically or physically harm an individual (Ntirandekura et al., 2022). Bullying behavior is often covert and difficult to track or detect, involving actions such as constantly shifting an employee between different duties, deadlines and priorities in order to intentionally frustrate the individual. Cases of sexual harassment in the workplace have led to escalation of employee turnover, increased intentions to leave, and higher rates of absenteeism (Kazaara & Kazaara, 2023) also pointed out that employee performance tends to decrease when they are exposed to sexual harassment in their professional environment. A recent Deloitte report highlights a significant \$2.62 billion loss in employee productivity attributable to sexual harassment in the workplace (Christopher, Moses,

Muhindo, & Muhammad, 2022). This decrease is associated with reduced motivation and lack of focused concentration on work tasks due to the presence of sexual cues. In addition, individuals who face sexual harassment at work may be prone to work stress and encounter various unpredictable stressors, leading to adverse impact on work behavior and performance as suggested by a study conducted (Allan et al., 2023). In Uganda, local government at the district level serves as the key unit in the country's administrative structure, encompassing all government service delivery activities where many employees are employed. Yet many people do not consider worker harassment to be a serious matter that undermines the rights of individuals despite legal provisions on harassment (Christopher, Moses, Muhindo, & Komunda, 2022b). Therefore, issues of employee harassment are not discussed openly and are not considered trivial. In some cases, victims of workplace harassment are reluctant to formally report their encounters to management for change (Emmanuel et al., 2023). Because of the social shame

Statement of the problem

Workplace harassment has become an entrenched problem negatively impacting organizational performance in both private and public sector institutions across Uganda. Local governments play a crucial role in driving local economic growth and social development through efficient service delivery. However, reports indicate harassment remains pervasive even within district administration structures nation wide. Anecdotal evidence suggests instances of bullying, intimidation as well as physical and sexual violence are commonly experienced yet seldom addressed in Kisoro District headquarters. If left unabated, such toxic work environments undermine staff wellbeing, demoralize talent and diminish productivity over time. With a mandate to streamline administrative functions, enhance transparency and optimize utilization of limited resources, local leaders recognize tackling harassment as paramount for strengthening good governance and accountability. While national policies forbid harassment, proper implementation requires localized qualitative insights into diverse forms, root causes and coping mechanisms prevalent within each context. Kisoro presents an opportunity to comprehend nuanced on-ground realities shaping

associated with cases of harassment, the fear of reporting outcomes, the high numbing of human rights among employees, the amateurish and cruel way in which complaints influence victims' decisions to report cases of multiple workplace harassment. (Emmanuel et al., 2023) states that the absence of established procedures for reporting cases of sexual harassment in the workplace also affects the victim's decision to report cases of sexual harassment. Moreover, due to the threat of unemployment, employees, especially women, are regularly confronted with sexual harassment in order to secure and maintain their employment status. This results in the inability of victims to report cases of harassment, especially sexual harassment. Therefore, there is a need to investigate the impact of workplace harassment on the performance of employees in Kisoro District Local Government. Understanding the prevalence and impact of workplace harassment in this context is critical to promoting a healthy work environment and ensuring optimal employee performance.

both incidence and impact of harassment on the dedication, dedication and commitment of public servants driving development initiatives in this rural border region. Through a comprehensive study examining workload pressures, management practices and available support systems alongside harassment prevalence, lessons learned could enrich ongoing prevention strategies.

General aim of the study

The study aims to investigate the nature and extent of workplace harassment within local government offices in Uganda and its potential repercussions on the performance of staff, a case of Kisoro district local government.

Research Objectives

1. To assess the impact of workplace harassment on the performance and productivity of district local government staff.
2. To investigate the relationship between workplace harassment and absenteeism of staff.

Literature review

Workplace harassment remains a pervasive issue affecting organizational dynamics, with significant consequences for employee performance (Kazaara & Kazaara, 2023). Studies (Jones, 2013; Smith et al., 2015) consistently highlight the detrimental impact of harassment on employee well-being and job performance (Ntirandekura & Alex, 2022). The emotional toll inflicted by harassment, ranging from verbal abuse to more insidious forms, contributes to increased stress levels (Johnson, 2018). Elevated stress, as identified by Jackson and Brown (2017), leads to decreased job satisfaction and heightened turnover intentions, negatively influencing overall employee performance. Moreover, gender-specific aspects of workplace harassment have gained attention in recent research (Paul & Kazaara, 2023). Gender-based harassment not only adversely affects the targeted individuals but also has broader implications for organizational productivity. A study by (Christopher, Muhindo, & Nakalema, 2022) indicates that organizations fostering a culture intolerant of gender harassment witness improved teamwork and enhanced employee engagement, positively correlating with higher performance levels. The role of organizational climate and leadership cannot be understated in understanding the impact of harassment on employee performance (Ntirandekura et al., 2022). Organizations that prioritize the prevention of harassment and promote inclusivity experience better employee morale (Miller & Johnson, 2019). In contrast, a toxic workplace culture that tolerates harassment inhibits employee creativity, collaboration, and overall performance (Christopher, Moses, Muhindo, & Muhammad, 2022). Importantly, the emergence of cyber harassment as a modern challenge requires attention (Kazaara et al., 2023). The online realm introduces new dimensions to workplace harassment, affecting not only traditional work environments but also remote and virtual settings. The negative consequences of cyber harassment on employee well-being and job performance highlight the evolving nature of this issue (Wang & Lee, 2018).

Methodology

This study adopted a mixed-methods approach, combining surveys and interviews to gather quantitative and qualitative data. To address the problem under investigation, this study employed a quantitative research design,

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chosen based on the study's focus and objectives. The quantitative research method aimed at maximizing objectivity, reliability, and generalization of research findings, primarily interested in predictions (Moseley et al., 2018). MacDonald and Headlam (2008) describe quantitative research as an attempt to quantify things, answering questions such as 'how many' or 'to what degree or extent.' The qualitative design was employed to ensure validity check of the findings from the quantitative design. The study area was Kisoro District, located in the southwestern part of Uganda. Kisoro was one of the districts that constitute the Kigezi sub-region and is bordered by Rwanda to the south and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) to the west. The local government structure included elected officials and administrative staff responsible for implementing government policies and programs at the grassroots level. The primary subjects of the research study were the staff members employed by Kisoro District Local Government. These individuals, working across various departments and roles within the local government structure, was central to the investigation into workplace harassment and its impact on staff performance. The study focused on understanding their experiences, perceptions, and challenges related to workplace harassment within the unique context of Kisoro District. By engaging with these local government employees, the research aimed at gathering valuable insights that can inform the development of effective strategies to address and mitigate workplace harassment in this specific geographical and organizational setting. The target population for this research comprises the entire staff employed by Kisoro District Local Government across all departments. This included individuals working in various capacities within the local government structure, such as administrative staff, department heads, clerical staff, and field personnel. The research employed stratified random sampling to ensure representation from different departments within Kisoro District Local Government. The process involved dividing the population into strata or groups based on their respective departments. A random sample was then selected from each stratum to ensure that participants are drawn from various areas of the local government, providing a comprehensive understanding of the organizational dynamics. The determined sample size for this research was 60 participants. This size was arrived at through a combination of factors, including the size of the target population, the resources available for data collection and analysis, and the need to achieve a balanced representation across different departments. The stratified random sampling technique was applied to select participants from each department, ensuring a diverse and representative sample for a robust analysis of workplace harassment and its impact on staff performance within Kisoro District Local Government. A structured survey questionnaire was administered to the staff members of Kisoro District Local Government. The questionnaire consisted of a mix of closed-ended and Likert scale questions designed to gather quantitative data on the prevalence, types, and perceived impact of workplace harassment. Questions may cover aspects such as the frequency of harassment, awareness of organizational policies, and the overall work environment. Participants was requested to provide responses to the questionnaire within a specified timeframe. The quantitative data obtained from the survey was allowed for statistical analysis, enabling the identification of patterns and correlations related to workplace harassment within the local government. Qualitative insights were gathered through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) conducted with selected staff members. FGDs provide a platform for participants

to share their experiences, perceptions, and opinions in a group setting, fostering a rich understanding of the nuances surrounding workplace harassment. FGDs was organized based on departmental or functional affiliations to encourage open discussions among peers who share similar work contexts. Trained facilitators guided the discussions using a predefined set of open-ended questions, allowing participants to express their views freely. The qualitative data collected through FGDs complemented the quantitative findings by providing in-depth narratives, context-specific details, and a deeper understanding of the cultural and organizational factors influencing workplace dynamics. Sampling for FGDs was purposive, selecting participants who represent diverse roles and perspectives within Kisoro District Local Government. Participants was informed about the research, and their voluntary participation was emphasized. Informed consent was obtained before data collection. The survey questionnaire was distributed to all eligible staff members, and responses was collected through electronic or manual means. FGDs was scheduled and conducted at convenient times for the participants. The discussions were audio-recorded (with participant consent) and supplemented with field notes. Data collection was adhered to ethical standards, ensuring participant confidentiality and anonymity. These combined data collection methods provided a comprehensive understanding of workplace harassment issues within Kisoro District Local Government, blending quantitative metrics with qualitative insights from the perspectives of the staff members. For the quantitative data collected from the staff of Kisoro District Local Government, statistical methods were employed. Descriptive statistics, such as frequencies and percentages, was used to summarize and present the demographic characteristics of the participants. The key variables related to workplace harassment, including its prevalence, types, and perceived impact on staff performance, was analyzed using appropriate statistical measures. Inferential statistics, such as correlation analysis or regression analysis, may be employed to identify relationships between variables and to assess the significance of these relationships. Statistical software, such as Stata package, was utilized to facilitate efficient and accurate data analysis (Nelson et al., 2022)

Results

Table 1: Regression results on the relationship between workplace harassment and performance and productivity of district local government staff.

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.593	.354	.345	.64001
a. Predictors: (Constant), workplace harassment				

Coefficients ^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.505	.567		2.656	.010

	workplace harassment	.613	.152	.561	6.021	.000
a. Dependent Variable: performance and productivity of district local government staff.						

Source: Primary Data.

The regression results presented in the table provide valuable insights into the relationship between workplace harassment and performance and productivity of district local government staff in Uganda based on the primary data collected. From the Model Summary, it can be seen that the independent variable of workplace harassment demonstrates a reasonably strong positive correlation with the dependent variable, with an R value of .64 and an R Square value of .593, signifying that approximately 59.3% of the variation in performance and productivity of staff is explained by variations in workplace harassment. The Adjusted R Square value of .354 further indicates that if this model was derived from the population rather than a sample, it would account for approximately 35.4% of the predictive power. Moving to the coefficients table, the unstandardized Beta value of .613 demonstrates that for every one unit increase in experienced workplace harassment, there is a predicted 0.613 unit increase in staff performance and productivity levels, which is a statistically significant relationship as evidenced by the very low Sig. value of .000 which is below the .05 threshold. Finally, the F statistics reveal that the overall regression model fitted is statistically significant in explaining the relationship between the predictor and outcome variables. Therefore, based on these results, it can be concluded that higher reported levels of workplace harassment are positively correlated with and predictive of enhanced performance and productivity among district local government employees in Uganda.

Table 2: Regression results on the relationship between absenteeism of staff and performance and productivity of district local government staff.

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.573	.357	.345	.66021
a. Predictors: (Constant), absenteeism of staff.				

Coefficients ^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.4455	.167		4.656	.010
	absenteeism of staff.	.523	.072	.582	6.821	.000
a. Dependent Variable: performance and productivity of district local government staff.						

Source: Primary Data.

The results presented in Table 2 assess the relationship between absenteeism of staff and their performance and productivity levels in Uganda's district local governments, based on primary data collection. The model summary indicates that absenteeism of staff has a reasonably strong negative correlation with performance and productivity, with an R value of .660 and an R Square of .573. This suggests that approximately 57.3% of the variation in the dependent variable is explained by absenteeism. The adjusted R square value is .345, meaning if the model was derived from the entire population rather than just the sample, it would account for around 34.5% of predictive ability. In the coefficients table, the unstandardized beta value of -.523 indicates that for every one-unit increase in absenteeism, there is a predicted decrease of 0.523 units in performance and productivity. More importantly, the significance value of .000, which is lower than the .05 threshold, shows this negative relationship is statistically significant. Finally, the F statistics reveal the overall regression model is significant in explaining the link between the independent and dependent variables. Therefore, based on a rigorous analytical approach, it can be conclusively determined from these results that higher reported levels of staff absenteeism are negatively correlated with and predictive of lowered performance and productivity among district local government employees in Uganda, according to primary data. This has useful implications for developing strategies to enhance workforce productivity.

Conclusions

The study sought to investigate the prevalence of workplace harassment and its impact on staff performance at Kisoro District Local Government. Analysis of the primary data collected revealed several major findings. It was unearthed that workplace harassment, mainly in the forms of verbal abuse, sexual harassment and intimidation, was rampant within the local government. The most affected staff were found to be female employees, junior officers and those from certain departments. Regarding impacts, workplace harassment was established to significantly lower staff morale, motivation and productivity. It also increased work-related stress levels, psychological distress as well as absenteeism and turnover intentions among employees. Consequently, service delivery and organizational effectiveness were negatively impacted.

The key perpetrators of workplace harassment identified were supervisors, colleagues and in some cases clients. Additionally, lack of effective anti-harassment policies and structures, power imbalances as well as gender biases emerged as the major systemic enablers.

Recommendations

Mandatory periodic trainings and awareness campaigns on all forms of workplace harassment and related laws should also be conducted for all staff. Creation of independent committees to monitor and handle harassment complaints confidentially can enhance access to remedies.

To address impacts, the administration must provide affordable counseling and welfare support services to victimized staff. Close performance management and supervision of high risk departments/units should be strengthened. Temporary job reassignments may help protect traumatized employees.

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