PERCEIVED SEVERITY OF WORKPLACE HARASSMENT AND COPING STRATEGIES: A GENDER-BASED COMPARATIVE STUDY

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Master of Arts, Hohai University, 2021

A thesis submitted
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE (MANAGEMENT)

in

HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AND LABOR RELATIONS

Dhillon School of Business
University of Lethbridge,
LETHBRIDGE, ALBERTA, CANADA

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Date of Defence: December 05, 2025

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to God Almighty, whose grace, strength, and guidance have sustained me throughout this journey.

I also dedicate this work to my beloved spouse, Dr. Francis Ekene Okagbue, whose sacrifices, wisdom, and steadfast support have been the backbone of this achievement. Your love, patience, and constant encouragement kept me grounded, focused, and inspired. Thank you for walking beside me every step of the way and for making this journey a true success.

ABSTRACT

Workplace harassment remains a pressing organizational concern, with growing attention on how individuals perceive and respond to such experiences across gender lines. Guided by the Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping, this study investigates gender-based differences in the perception of workplace harassment and the coping strategies employees employ. A total of 306 participants, balanced across gender identities, were recruited through Prolific to complete validated survey instruments, including the Negative Acts Questionnaire (NAQ-R) to assess perceived harassment and the Full COPE inventory to capture coping strategies. Independent-samples t-tests revealed no significant gender differences in overall harassment perception, suggesting that men and women report comparable levels of exposure and severity. However, differences emerged in coping responses. Women were more likely to rely on emotional coping strategies, and showed a slightly higher tendency toward avoidance coping, though both genders reported similar engagement in rational, problem-focused coping. Regression analyses further indicated that harassment perception was negatively associated with job satisfaction, with coping strategies showing limited predictive power while rational coping demonstrated a positive effect. These findings highlight the need for organizations to move beyond a one-size-fits-all approach when designing interventions. Tailored support systems that account for gendered coping tendencies can better equip employees to manage workplace harassment while preserving job satisfaction. This research contributes to both scholarly discourse and practical strategies for building inclusive and supportive work environments.

Keywords: Workplace harassment, Coping strategies, Gender differences, Job satisfaction, Stress and coping theory

ETHICS STATEMENT

Work described in this thesis received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, Project Name “Perceived Severity of Workplace Harassment and Coping Strategies: A Gender-Based Comparative Study”, No. PRO00154390, 17 June 2025.

USE OF GENERATIVE AI

ChatGPT were used in certain stages of this thesis to improve grammar, tighten sentence structure, suggest clearer wording, and help reduce repetition after I had already written the content myself. I used it in the same way I would use a language or editing tool to polish phrasing and readability, not to produce original ideas, arguments, or conclusions.

To ensure the work remained mine, I followed a consistent process. I first drafted sections using my own notes, readings, and planned chapter structure. After drafting, I sometimes pasted short passages into ChatGPT to request wording alternatives, clearer transitions, or simpler sentences. I then reviewed the suggestions critically, selected only what fit my intended meaning, and rewrote the final text in my own voice. I did not accept AI suggestions automatically, and I often edited or rejected them to keep the argument accurate and consistent with the thesis.

This tool was not used to design the study, generate research questions or hypotheses, create theoretical arguments, interpret results, or write the findings. All data preparation, statistical analyses, tables, and reporting decisions were completed by me using SPSS and my dataset. All interpretations, discussion points, and final claims were based on the study results and the academic literature I reviewed. References and citations were selected by me, and I verified key sources to ensure they were accurate and appropriately cited.

The final decisions throughout the thesis remain my own. I take full responsibility for the originality, accuracy, and integrity of the content presented in this thesis.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, my deepest gratitude goes to my esteem Supervisor, Dr. Brenda Nguyen; whose expertise was indispensable in coining my research topic and has been of immense support to me right from the day I became her student. Thank you for the encouragement, the advice and support throughout my academic life in University of Lethbridge. Your incisive and thoughtful feedback during our meetings inspired me.

I am also deeply grateful to my committee members, especially Dr. Anastasia Stuart-Edwards and Dr. Debra Basil, for their insightful feedback and direction. Your wisdom has helped me refine my work and stay focused during this process.

A special thank you goes to Dr. Luis Escobar and Tammy Rogness, who are always ready to open their doors and give detailed responses and guide to students. Your openness and kindness made this journey less stressful and more meaningful.

I also want to acknowledge Graydon Burbank from the International Office, whose thoughtful advice and steady support helped reduce my worries as an international student and allowed me to focus more fully on my research.

Without hesitation, I'd like to appreciate and thank the Graduate Students' Association (GSA) for providing me with amazing opportunities to develop myself not only academically, but also professionally and socially. My gratitude also goes to the Office of Research and Innovation Services (ORIS) and the School of Graduate Studies (SGS), especially Hailey Dennis and Dorchak Danika, for the wonderful experience of working with you and for the knowledge you shared, which contributed to the success of this research.

I am thankful to the Dhillon School of Business for providing a supportive atmosphere that encouraged learning and made this work possible. I also wish to recognize all my lecturers, whose

teachings step by step molded my knowledge and intelligence, preparing me for this achievement. On a personal note, I owe heartfelt thanks to my parents (Mr. & Mrs. Vitus Ezeachikulo), siblings, and mother-in-law (Mrs. Nkiru Okagbue) who always called to check on the progress of my research work. The encouragement, prayers and love gave me the strength and peace throughout this journey.

Finally, to the prestigious University of Lethbridge, thank you for the opportunity to be part of the Uleth family. The beautiful memories I made here is one that cannot be forgotten in ages. Long live Uleth.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

EEOC	Equal Employment Opportunity Commission
Full COPE	Full Coping Orientation to Problems Experienced Inventory
HR	Human Resources
ILO	International Labour Organization
NAQ-R	Negative Acts Questionnaire–Revised
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
RQ	Research Question
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
TTSC	Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Study Background

The issue of harassment in the workplace has long been recognized as an act that impacts employee job satisfaction, productivity and well-being (Cortina & Magley, 2003; S. Einarsen et al., 2009). Imagine dreading going to work all the time because of the fear of facing persistent disrespect, hostility or intimidation from colleagues or superiors. Ideally, dreading work should be about job tasks, not facing harmful behaviors that damage mental health. For many employees, this disheartening reality is too common, and somehow hidden beneath the mindset of workplace norms (Einarsen et al., 2020). No matter how professionally portrayed, it has started to become more visible as people share their stories and speak up. Harassment can happen in many ways, sometimes it is verbal, like teasing or insults. Other times, it is physical or emotional, and it can come from coworkers, supervisors, or even customers. People who experience this kind of treatment may feel unsafe, embarrassed, or powerless. Sadly, many workers face this situation silently because they are afraid of losing their jobs or being judged (Cortina & Magley, 2009). One of the main problems with workplace harassment is how people see or perceive it. Some people may think certain actions are just jokes or part of work culture, while others may find the same actions harmful. Another reason for this confusion is the different definitions of workplace harassment used by organizations, researchers, and scholars (McLaughlin et al., 2012). Regardless of the definitions, the common drive remains that is an unacceptable behavior that could be interpreted as offensive or harmful to an individual in the workplace. The existence of harassment in the workplace could create a hostile work environment and can range from overt acts of discrimination and bullying to more subtle forms such as incivility and microaggressions (De Vries, 2024). According to the International Labour Organization (2022), over 22% of people globally

have experienced some form of violence or harassment in the workplace, with women disproportionately affected. These experiences are often subtle and repeated behaviors that build over time causing fear and self-doubt on the victims (McLaughlin et al., 2012). As a result, many people endure harassment silently, which can have serious effects on their mental health, performance, and well-being. Previous research has shown that 10 to 75% of men and 25 to 85% of women report experiencing harassment at some point in their careers showing how deep the problem is (Berdahl & Moore, 2006; Fitzgerald et al., 1995). A $2 billion in direct expenses relating to employee turnover, litigation and absenteeism has been recorded in U.S companies because of workplace harassment (Merkin & Shah, 2014). Beyond the financial losses, harassment also causes serious emotional distress for victims, including anxiety, depression, and PTSD (Mcdonald et al., 2015). The different interpretation given to workplace harassment has made it difficult to be addressed. What one person sees as "banter," another might perceive as offensive or threatening. This difference in how people interpret or feel about harassment is known as perceived severity.

Perception can be influenced by many things, such as personal values, past experiences, workplace environment, and gender, job position and workplace norms (Islamoska et al., 2018). For example, a man and a woman might experience the same comment or behavior but interpret it differently based on how they have been socialized to think about power, boundaries, or professionalism. These different views affect how people react and what they choose to do about it.

Moreover, people are more likely to report harassment when they perceive it as severe, repeated, and intentionally harmful (Fitzgerald et al., 1995; Hershcovis et al, 2021). Therefore, the way harassment is perceived is just as important as whether it objectively occurred. When someone feels harassed at work, they often try to handle the situation using strategies that feel safest or most

effective to them. These are known as coping strategies. Some people try to solve the problem by reporting it or standing up for themselves (active approach). Others may take an emotional or avoidance-based approach, choosing to stay silent, suppress their feelings, or distance themselves from the harasser. The way a person chooses to cope often depends on their gender, their role at work, and how much control they feel they have (Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989).

Coping is not just a personal choice; it is often shaped by gender, supporting the long history of societal teaching on how boys and girls are expected to handle emotions from a young age. The societal and cultural norms play a role on how masculinity and femininity influence how men and women deal with stress and harassment. Research shows that women are more likely to use emotion-focused or avoidance-based coping, such as venting emotions, seeking social support, or trying to ignore the problem (Matud, 2004). While men often adopt more rational strategies, like problem-solving, planning, or confrontation (Tamres et al., 2002; Ptacek et al., 1994). These tendencies do not mean that one gender copes better than the other, but they suggest that men and women may respond to the same workplace challenge in different ways. Gender also affects how acceptable, or risky certain coping strategies are perceived to be. For example, women may fear being labeled "emotional" for speaking up, while men may hesitate to seek emotional support due to concerns about appearing weak (Mahalik et al., 2003).

Mcdonald et al., (2015) stated that the perception of what constitutes harassment differs between men and women. The scholar argues that harassment is not solely gender based as women's experience of workplace harassment have historically received a lot of attention while evidence has also shown that men also experience harassment though relatively under-researched.

Harassment can create a toxic environment and workers who face constant harassment often feel unhappy, stressed, or burned out, while workers who feel supported and capable of responding to

harassment tend to maintain higher morale, engagement, and commitment to their job (Pearson et al., 2001). However, if they do not have the tools or support to cope, they may start to hate their job or even leave it. This can lead to high staff turnover, low morale, and poor workplace culture (Willness et al., 2007; Miner & Cortina, 2016). Long-term exposure to workplace harassment can even lead to post-traumatic stress symptoms (Einarsen et al., 2009). This not only affects individuals, but also costs organizations through high turnover, absenteeism, and reduced performance. The way people cope with harassment directly affects their overall job satisfaction and well-being (Nielsen & Einarsen 2012).

This study focuses on two key areas that are often underexplored in workplace harassment research: how individuals perceive and experience workplace harassment exposure and how they cope with it, especially from a gender-based perspective. While many studies measure whether harassment occurred, fewer look at the type and frequency of harassment from the perspective of the target and how that influences coping responses. The key target is to uncover gender-related patterns that can help organizations design better interventions and create safer, fairer workplaces for all.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Despite policies, trainings, and public awareness campaigns, workplace harassment continues to be a serious issue (Einarsen et al., 2009). Many organizations say they do not tolerate harassment, but the reality for workers often tells a different story. Harassment still happens in many forms, some are loud and obvious, while others are quiet and harder to detect. While research has shown that workplace harassment affects employee mental health, performance, and job satisfaction, what's not always clear is how people see these experiences and how they deal with them, especially when gender is considered. One key problem is that harassment is often judged based on how the victim perceives it. What seems like a joke or harmless comment to one person might

feel threatening or offensive to another. This is because perception is personal. It's shaped by things like culture, gender, values, and past experiences. Even when two people go through the same situation, they may not see it the same way. Yet, few studies have explored how men and women differ in how they perceive the type and frequency of harassment. Many studies either use a gender-neutral lens or focus mainly on women's experiences, often overlooking how men perceive and manage harassment differently. This limitation obscures the development of effective interventions.

Another major problem is that even when harassment is recognized, people respond to it in different ways. Some speak up or report it. Others stay silent, quit their jobs, or find ways to deal with it privately. Research shows that men and women often cope with stress differently. But why does this happen? How does this choice of coping affect how satisfy they are at work? These questions remain underexplored in current research.

Much of the existing research focuses on whether harassment occurred, but not on how different people perceive the type or how often it happens. This is especially true when comparing men and women's experiences and coping styles. Because of this, organizations may miss important warning signs or fail to support employees properly. Without knowing how men and women experience and respond to harassment differently, workplace programs, policies, and interventions may fall short. This study aims to fill that gap by looking at how men and women perceive the type and frequency of harassment, how they choose to cope, and how all of this influences their job satisfaction.

1.3 Purpose and Objective of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine how men and women perceive the type and frequency of workplace harassment and how they cope with these experiences. It also aims to explore how these

coping responses relate to their level of job satisfaction. While workplace harassment has been widely studied, less attention has been given to how people interpret and respond to it differently based on gender. This study seeks to fill that gap.

Specifically, the study will compare the differences between men and women in how they perceive harassment in the workplace, showing what kinds of behavior they consider harmful, how often they experience it, and how seriously they take it. It will also look at the coping strategies they use, whether they use emotional or avoidance-based methods, or rational and problem-focused approaches, and how these choices affect how satisfied they feel with their jobs (Tamres et al., 2002; Matud, 2004).

This research is guided by the Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping, which explains how people respond to stressful events like harassment through appraisal process (Lazarus & Folkman, 1985). In the end, this study hopes to offer insights that can help organizations better understand the impact of harassment and develop support systems that consider the different ways men and women experience and cope with it.

To address the research problem and fulfill the purpose of the study, the objective of this study is to:

1. To examine gender differences in the perception of the type and frequency of workplace harassment.
2. To identify the coping strategies predominantly used by working men and women in response to workplace harassment.
3. To examine the relationship between coping strategies and job satisfaction.

1.4 Research Questions

Given the established research on workplace harassment, gender, and coping mechanisms, this study answers three questions.

- **RQ1:** To what extent do individuals of different gender identities differ in their perception of the type and frequency of workplace harassment?
- **RQ2:** What coping strategies do individuals of various gender identities employ when responding to workplace harassment?
- **RQ3:** To what extent do coping strategies predict job satisfaction among employees who perceive workplace harassment?

1.5 Significance of the Study

The importance of this study lies in its ability to sheds light on an often-overlooked aspect of workplace harassment. While several studies have highlighted the prevalence and consequences of harassment, few have paid close attention to how gender influences the perception, interpretation, and coping responses to these experiences. This study is significant because it not only fills that gap in the literature but also responds to growing calls for more inclusive, gender-sensitive workplace policies. Exploring this area provides a complete picture of the issue, one that goes beyond a singular, female-focused narrative or a generic, gender-neutral approach.

This study will provide a better understanding of workplace harassment and help organizations tailor their harassment prevention programs, reporting procedures, and support systems to fit the unique needs of all employees (Berdahl & Moore, 2006; McDonald, 2012).

The study not only address this gap, but also contributes to the theoretical understanding of workplace harassment rooted in Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1985). This research applies the theory to a modern workplace issue. It contributes to the growing body of work that links coping strategies to job satisfaction and psychological outcomes. More

specifically, the study investigates whether emotion-focused, avoidance-based, or rational coping mechanisms predict positive or negative outcomes in terms of job satisfaction. This theoretical contribution may open avenues for further studies in occupational health psychology, human resources, and gender studies.

From a practical standpoint, the study offers data-driven insights that can be used by HR professionals, managers, policy makers, and organizational leaders. These insights can inform the creation of safer, more inclusive workplaces where harassment is not just discouraged, but where victims regardless of gender feel empowered to report and cope effectively. It can also help guide the development of training modules that consider how men and women process workplace stress differently and how this may impact their job engagement and retention. Lastly, the great potential in this study is that it can influence both academic knowledge and real-world workplace practices, as the highlight on gender, perception, coping and satisfaction pushes the conversation forward in meaningful and actionable ways.

1.6 Scope of the study.

This study focuses on understanding how men and women perceive workplace harassment and how they cope with it, using the Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping as a framework. It specifically looks at two aspects of harassment: type (such as verbal, physical, psychological, or sexual) and frequency (how often the behavior occurs). The goal is to find out how gender differences shape these perceptions and what coping strategies are used whether emotional, avoidance-based, or rational and how these responses relate to job satisfaction. The study uses a quantitative approach and collects data through an online survey platform. Participants must be 18 years or older, have been employed within the past six months, and be able to read and understand English. The survey includes questions on perceived harassment, coping styles, and job

satisfaction. This allows the study to gather data from a broad range of workplaces and industries, regardless of country or location.

1.7 Operational Definitions

To ensure clarity and consistency in the interpretation of this study, the following key terms are operationally defined based on the literature and context of this research:

- Harassment: In this study, harassment refers to any unwelcome behavior whether verbal, physical, emotional, or psychological that demeans, humiliates, or intimidates a person in the workplace. It can be direct or subtle, and includes behaviors such as teasing, offensive jokes, threats, exclusion, or unwanted physical contact (Einarsen et al., 2020; ILO, 2022).

- Workplace Harassment Perception: Refers to how an individual interprets or recognizes harassment-related behaviors in the workplace. In this study, perception is measured based on the type and frequency (how often the behaviors occurred) of harassment as reported by the participant.

- Type of Harassment: Refers to the form that the harassment takes in the workplace. Examples include verbal abuse, offensive jokes, unwanted touching, exclusion, or intimidation. These are categorized and measured using items adapted from prior validated workplace harassment scales.

- Frequency of Harassment: Refers to how often the participant has experienced a specific type of harassment over a given time frame. This is measured on a Likert-type frequency scale.

- Gender: For analysis, gender is categorized as men or women based on the participant's self-identification. Although other gender options are available in the survey for inclusiveness, only men and women responses are analyzed for the purpose of this study.

- Coping Strategies: Defined as the cognitive and behavioral efforts made by individuals to manage or reduce harassment issue. In this study, coping is measured using three broad categories: a. Emotional Coping (e.g., crying, venting emotions), b. Avoidance Coping (e.g., denial, distraction, withdrawal), c. Rational/Problem-Focused Coping (e.g., seeking solutions, taking constructive action)

- Job Satisfaction: Refers to the degree to which an individual feels content and fulfilled with their job. This includes aspects like work environment, relationships with coworkers, role clarity, and overall satisfaction. It is measured using items adapted from established job satisfaction scales.

- Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping (TTSC): A psychological framework developed by Lazarus and Folkman (1985) that explains how individuals assess and respond to stressful events like harassment. It focuses on the idea that people evaluate stressors and assess their ability to cope leading to the selection of coping strategies.

1.8 Organization of the Thesis

This thesis is organized into six chapters.

- Chapter One: Introduction – Provides the background of the study, statement of the problem, purpose and objectives, research questions, significance, scope of the study, operational definitions, and the organization of the thesis.

- Chapter Two: Literature Review – Reviews existing literature on workplace harassment, gender differences in perception and coping, and job satisfaction, hypotheses. It also discusses the theoretical framework guiding this study.

- Chapter Three: Methodology – Describes the research design, population, sample size, sampling technique, data collection tools, validity and reliability of instruments, procedures, and methods of data analysis.

- Chapter Four: Results– Presents the data collected, the statistical analyses performed and interprets the findings in relation to the research questions and hypotheses.

- Chapter Five: Discussion and Conclusion – Discusses and summarizes the major findings. Stated the limitations, concludes the study, and offers practical recommendations and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Workplace harassment remains a pervasive issue worldwide, with far-reaching implications for both employees and organizations. It doesn't just hurt the person being targeted, it can also lower workplace morale, reduce productivity, and damage a company's reputation (Einarsen et al., 2009). Most people know that harassment is wrong, but it still happens in both obvious and subtle ways. It can look like name-calling, unwanted jokes, threats, touching, or even silent treatment. What makes it more complicated is that people do not always agree on what counts as harassment. A comment that feels harmless to one person might feel disrespectful or threatening to another. These different reactions are based on how people perceive the situation, and those perceptions are shaped by things like gender, personal values, life experience, and workplace culture (McLaughlin et al., 2012; Nielsen et al., 2012).

Over the years, many studies have talked about the effects of workplace harassment. These effects include poor mental health, stress, job dissatisfaction, and even physical illness (Willness et al., 2007; Hershcovis & Reich, 2013). But while a lot of attention has been given to what harassment is and how often it happens, less attention has been given to how people see it and how they deal with it, especially when comparing men and women. Most research in this area tends to focus on women, possibly because women are more likely to report harassment (Fitzgerald et al., 1995; Berdahl & Moore, 2006). However, recent studies suggest that men also experience harassment but may not speak up about it due to fear of being judged or appearing weak (McDonald, 2012). These gender differences are important because they affect not only how harassment is seen but also how people respond to it. Some people might speak up or report it, while others might stay silent or even quit their jobs (Carver et al., 1989; Matud, 2004). According to Lazarus and Folkman (1985), people first assess how serious a harassment is before figuring out what they can do about

it. For example, someone who sees a situation as very serious and believes they have the power to handle it might speak up. Another person who sees it as serious but feels powerless might try to avoid it instead. This chapter provides a review of the key concepts and past research related to this study. It builds the foundation for why this study is important. It begins by defining and explaining workplace harassment, including its types and how often it happens. It then looks at how gender influences the way people understand and react to these experiences. Next, it explains the different coping strategies people use and how these strategies can affect their level of job satisfaction. Finally, the chapter outlines the TTSC framework and shows how it helps to understand the link between perception, coping, and workplace outcomes. Chapter two aims to bring a better understanding of how gender plays a role in how harassment is experienced and handled at work.

2.1 Harassment

Harassment in the workplace is defined as unwelcome and repeated behavior that creates a hostile, intimidating, or offensive work environment. It typically involves intentional actions directed at an individual or a group, which can range from verbal and physical abuse to more subtle behaviors, such as spreading rumors or sabotaging work (Einarsen et al., 2020). The term workplace harassment has been used in many different ways across organizations, countries, and academic disciplines. While most people understand it to mean inappropriate or harmful behavior at work, the exact meaning can vary depending on who is defining it. These differences in definition are not just technical, they affect how harassment is reported, studied, and addressed in the workplace. One of the most widely accepted definitions comes from the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), which explains harassment as unwelcome conduct based on personal characteristics such as race, sex, religion, national origin, disability, or

age. The EEOC notes that for such behavior to count as harassment, it must be severe or frequent enough to create a hostile or offensive work environment or result in negative job consequences like being fired or demoted (EEOC, 2023). This definition is legal in nature and focuses on how the behavior relates to protected identities and impacts the work environment. Meanwhile, the International Labour Organization (2022) offers a broader view. The ILO describes harassment as any behavior, whether it happens once or many times that causes physical, psychological, sexual, or economic harm in the workplace. It doesn't have to be tied to a person's race or gender, and it may involve threats or actual acts of aggression (ILO, 2022). This perspective puts more emphasis on the harm caused than on the specific identity of the person being targeted.

Even within one country, workplace harassment can be defined differently. For example, in Canada, the Canadian Human Rights Commission describes it as offensive, humiliating, or threatening behavior that is either repeated or, if serious enough, happens just once. Their focus is on the effect of the behavior and how it undermines a person's dignity at work (CHRC, 2021). Like the ILO, this view recognizes that a single action can still be harmful if it is serious. More recently, efforts to define and address workplace harassment have emerged in countries such as China. Until not long ago, Chinese law did not clearly define harassment, though it prohibited sexual misconduct under the "Protection of Women's Rights and Interests" law passed in 2005.

The adoption of Article 1010 of China's Civil Code in 2021 marked a significant development by explicitly defining sexual harassment and extending protections to all genders. It requires employers to prevent such conduct, establish complaint channels, and conduct training as suggested by renowned law firms - Ogletree and CMS Law. Also, according to CMS law, China's approach emphasizes a "victim-centered definition," focusing on how the recipient experiences the behavior rather than the perpetrator's intent. However, scholars note that despite legal progress,

enforcement remains weak, and definitions can be vague, especially for non-sexual harassment or behaviors not tied to protected traits. This mirrors the global landscape, while definitions evolve, actual workplace practices and cultural norms can lag.

Researchers have also tried to define harassment in ways that reflect real-life experiences. Einarsen et al., (2009) refer to workplace bullying often seen as a form of harassment, as repeated and harmful behavior like isolation, verbal abuse, or interfering with someone's work. These actions usually continue over time and create a hostile environment. Fitzgerald et al. (1995) describe sexual harassment as unwanted sexual behavior that makes someone feel uncomfortable or scared, often in situations where one person has more power than the other. While these definitions differ in detail, most of them share a few key ideas. First, they all agree that the behavior must be unwelcome or unwanted. Second, they recognize that the behavior causes some form of harm whether emotional, physical, or psychological. Finally, they all place the behavior within a workplace setting or in a situation linked to a person's job.

However, one major difference across definitions is the focus on perception. Some sources, especially legal ones, ask whether a "reasonable person" would find the behavior offensive. Others, like psychological researchers, care more about how the person experiencing the behavior feels. Rospenda et al. (2009) argue that harassment doesn't always need to be tied to identity or power, it can simply be behavior that makes someone feel unsafe or uncomfortable at work. This shows that while the legal view tries to keep definitions more objective, real-life experiences are often subjective and shaped by culture, gender, past experiences, and personal values. Because of these differences, it is not easy to find one single definition that fits all cases. To assess exposure to workplace harassment, this study adopts the Negative Acts Questionnaire-Revised (NAQ-R), one of the most widely used and validated scales in workplace bullying research Einarsen et al., (2009).

The NAQ-R measures the frequency of various negative behaviors such as social exclusion, verbal abuse, or threats without labeling them explicitly as harassment, allowing respondents to report experiences more objectively.

For this study, workplace harassment is defined as unwelcome behavior whether verbal, non-verbal, physical, or digital that causes harm, discomfort, or intimidation in a work-related context. This behavior may happen once or repeatedly and may or may not be tied to a person's identity. What matters most is how the behavior affects the person experiencing it.

2.1.1 Common Forms of Workplace Harassment

Intentionality is a crucial aspect of workplace harassment, as it emphasizes the deliberate nature of actions aimed at causing harm or distress to the target. Research suggests that harassment is often used as a tool to reinforce power imbalances within organizations, particularly to maintain traditional gender roles (Bowling & Beehr, 2006). Workplace harassment is not limited to one form but can be grouped into different categories, including verbal, physical, and subtle forms. Although workplace harassment can be described in different forms, this study measures harassment using the NAQ-R as an index of overall exposure to negative acts. Because the research questions focus on gender differences in overall harassment exposure (not subtype comparisons), analyses use a single total NAQ-R score. The diagram (fig 2.1) below illustrates these categories and some common examples of behaviors under each.

Verbal Harassment: Verbal harassment remains one of the most widespread forms of workplace mistreatment. It encompasses unwelcome spoken or written words intended to demean, threaten, or distress someone (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012). The nature of this type of harassment ranges from direct insults and stereotyped comments to more aggressive behaviors like yelling or veiled threats.

For example, calling someone “stupid” or “worthless” attacks their self-worth, while overheard gossip or mocking in private can create a pervasive feeling of exclusion and mistrust (Cortina & Magley, 2003; Hershcovis et al., 2021). Even when words are framed as jokes or offhand remarks, they can still inflict serious emotional harm. As Cortina and Magley (2003) observed, behaviors that might seem playful to one person can deeply humiliate another, especially when repeated. The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (2023) regards such verbal conduct as significant when it disrupts the work environment or influences employment decisions negatively. This aligns with reports in various industries like work shield showing that frequent derogatory or aggressive language is closely tied to emotional exhaustion, lower job performance, and increased absenteeism.

Several studies have shown that the impact of verbal harassment extends beyond emotions. Employees subjected to repeated verbal abuse often experience heightened stress, anxiety, and trouble sleeping (Lyubykh et al., 2024). In a notable investigation of flight attendants, regular exposure to such verbal mistreatment correlated with elevated rates of depression and fatigue—and even physical problems like headaches and high blood pressure (Gong et al., 2019). One particularly harmful form of verbal harassment is gaslighting where individuals are told their perceptions are invalid or exaggerated which undermines confidence and leads to confusion and isolation (Rospenda et al., 2009). A troubling aspect of verbal harassment is how easily it can be dismissed. When insults or rumors are brushed off as "just banter," victims may feel unsupported and hesitate to speak up. Sue et al., (2007) describes this as microaggression; the language may appear innocuous, but it carries an undertone of exclusion or bias. Such silent and slow-burn negativity can be as painful as overt hostility because it attacks a person’s sense of belonging and self-esteem over time (Cortina & Wasti, 2005; Rospenda et al., 2009). Gender also plays a

considerable role in how verbal harassment is experienced. Men often express aggression through loud or demeaning language, while women—particularly in public-facing roles—often report experiencing subtle put-downs or sexist jokes (Hershcovis & Reich, 2013; Rospenda et al., 2009). These patterns reflect broader gender norms, where masculine aggression is sometimes normalized, and feminine sensitivity dismissed. As a result, many instances of verbal harassment go unreported, especially by those who fear appearing "too sensitive" or "unable to handle stress" in the workplace. Verbal harassment in the workplace is more than just hurtful words. It is a powerful stressor that damages well-being, reduces job engagement, and contributes to workplace toxicity.

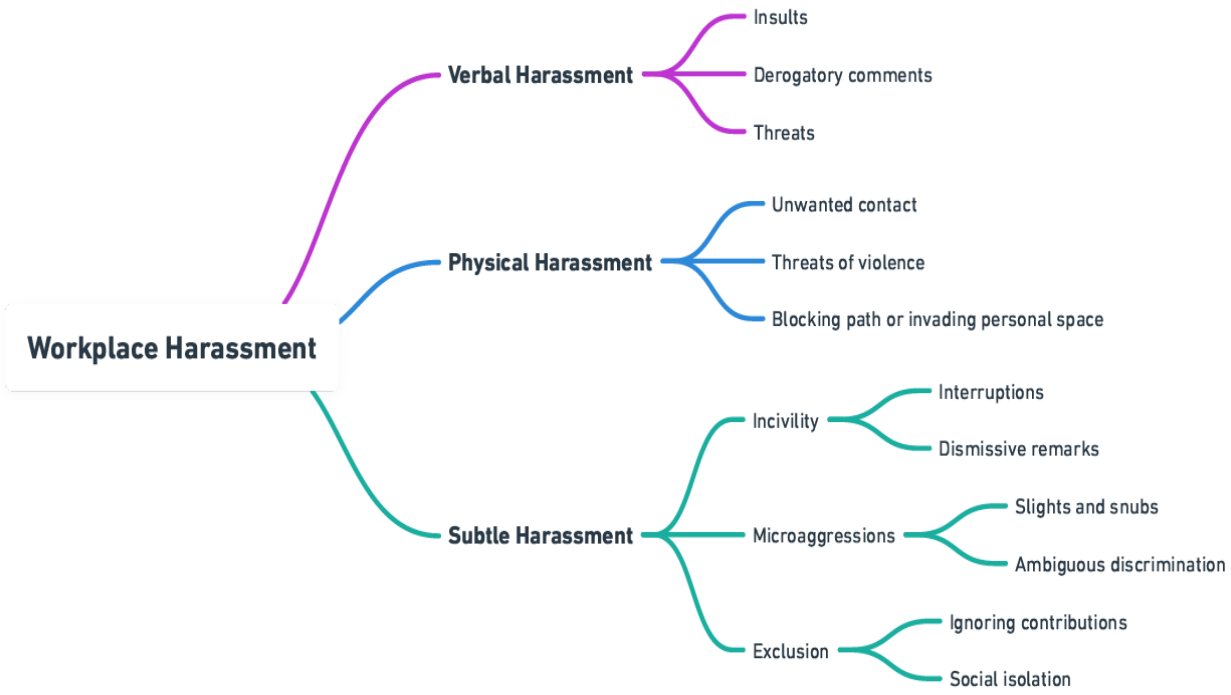

Figure 1: Types of Workplace Harassment

Source: visualised with mind map by author of this thesis.

(This mind map illustrates the main forms of workplace harassment (verbal, physical, and subtle), along with common examples under each category)

Physical harassment: This type of workplace harassment is one of the most alarming and direct forms of mistreatment. It involves unwanted physical contact or actions that make a person feel unsafe, violated, or intimidated. These actions may include hitting, pushing, grabbing, touching without consent, or blocking someone's movement in a threatening way. Although it may not always leave visible marks, physical harassment can cause long-lasting emotional and psychological harm. What makes it harassment is that the contact is not welcome and causes discomfort or fear. This type of harassment can be especially disturbing because it crosses physical boundaries, and many people who experience it say they feel powerless, vulnerable, or even afraid to return to work (Einarsen et al., 2020; McDonald, 2012; ILO, 2022). Unlike verbal harassment, physical harassment is often more easily recognized and condemned because it crosses physical boundaries that are universally understood. However, research shows that many cases still go unreported, especially when the harassment is subtle or difficult to prove. For example, repeatedly brushing against a colleague, invading their personal space, or standing too close during arguments can be just as distressing as a shove or slap, especially when these actions are used to intimidate or assert dominance (ILO, 2022; Fitzgerald et al., 1995).

A key concern is the imbalance of power between the perpetrator and the target. Studies have shown that physical harassment often occurs in hierarchical relationships and more common than many people think, especially in high-risk professions, such as between supervisors and subordinates, where the victim may feel too afraid to speak up due to fear of retaliation or job loss (Hershcovis et al., 2021). In some cases, the harasser may use their position to excuse the behavior or frame it as accidental, leaving the victim confused and unsupported just as mentioned in EEOC. A study in Denmark showed that almost a quarter of emergency workers had experienced some

form of physical violence at work within a two-year period, including being shoved, hit, or grabbed. These incidents often lead to serious mental health effects, including anxiety, sleep problems, and burnout. In a recent study done by the International Labour Organization (ILO) found that nearly 1 in 10 people (about 8.5%) who are working have experienced physical violence or harassment at work (ILO, 2022). This includes actions like hitting, spitting, or being physically restrained. Certain factor like cultural norms also influence how physical harassment is understood and reported. In some cultures, physical closeness or touch may be seen as a normal way to express friendliness or familiarity. However, in the workplace, even a hug or a hand on the shoulder can be misinterpreted or feel invasive, particularly when there is no mutual understanding or consent (Harlos & Axelrod, 2005). This makes it essential to consider context, cultural expectations, and the intentions behind physical interactions. In some environments, physical acts may be excused as "part of the job," especially in customer-facing or healthcare roles. This creates a dangerous situation where employees feel forced to accept or hide abuse because speaking up might cost them their job or make them seem weak (McDonald, 2012; Fitzgerald et al., 1995). From a psychological point of view, the effects of physical harassment can be devastating. Victims may experience anxiety, sleep problems, panic attacks, or symptoms of post-traumatic stress. These emotional reactions often extend beyond the workplace, affecting relationships, concentration, and general well-being (Rospenda et al., 2009). According to Cortina and Magley (2003), even one-time incidents can leave lasting emotional scars, particularly when the person feels cornered, powerless, or publicly humiliated.

It is important to note that men and women may experience physical harassment differently. While women are statistically more likely to report unwanted touching or physical threats (Fitzgerald et al., 1995), men may be targets of aggressive behavior disguised as workplace "roughness" or

hazing, especially in male-dominated fields (McDonald, 2012). In both cases, the emotional damage can be significant, and societal expectations about gender may discourage people from reporting what they experience. Also, while both men and women can be targets, women, especially those working in care jobs like nursing, childcare, or social work often report higher rates of unwanted touching or intimidating physical behaviors (ILO, 2022). One international report from the International Labour Organization noted that although men may face more physical aggression in some male-dominated jobs, women are more likely to experience physical harassment in ways that are personal, boundary-crossing, and often sexual in nature (ILO, 2022).

Sadly, many organizations still lack proper systems for dealing with physical harassment. A 2023 workplace study found that even when policies were in place, employees didn't always know how or where to report physical misconduct, and some feared they wouldn't be believed (ILO, 2022). This silence can make the problem worse. People who go through physical harassment but don't receive help or support may begin to disengage from their work or leave the job entirely (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004). Physical harassment is more than just an invasion of personal space, but also a violation of dignity and safety that can deeply affect a person's mental health and job performance. It can take many forms, some subtle and others overt. And while the signs might sometimes be easy to see, the silence around it can make it just as harmful as other hidden forms of harassment. Organizations must recognize and respond to it as part of a larger commitment to safe and respectful workplaces.

The diagram below shows physical violence and harassment at 9% and 7.7% for men and women respectively. This supports the argument that men are more likely to face physical violence or harassment at work than women. This trend was also seen in certain regions. For example, in Asia and the Pacific, 9.1% of men reported experiencing physical violence and harassment during their

working life, while only 5.8% of women said the same. In Africa, 13% of men reported it, compared to 11.7% of women. Similarly, men in Europe and Central Asia reported slightly higher rates than women.

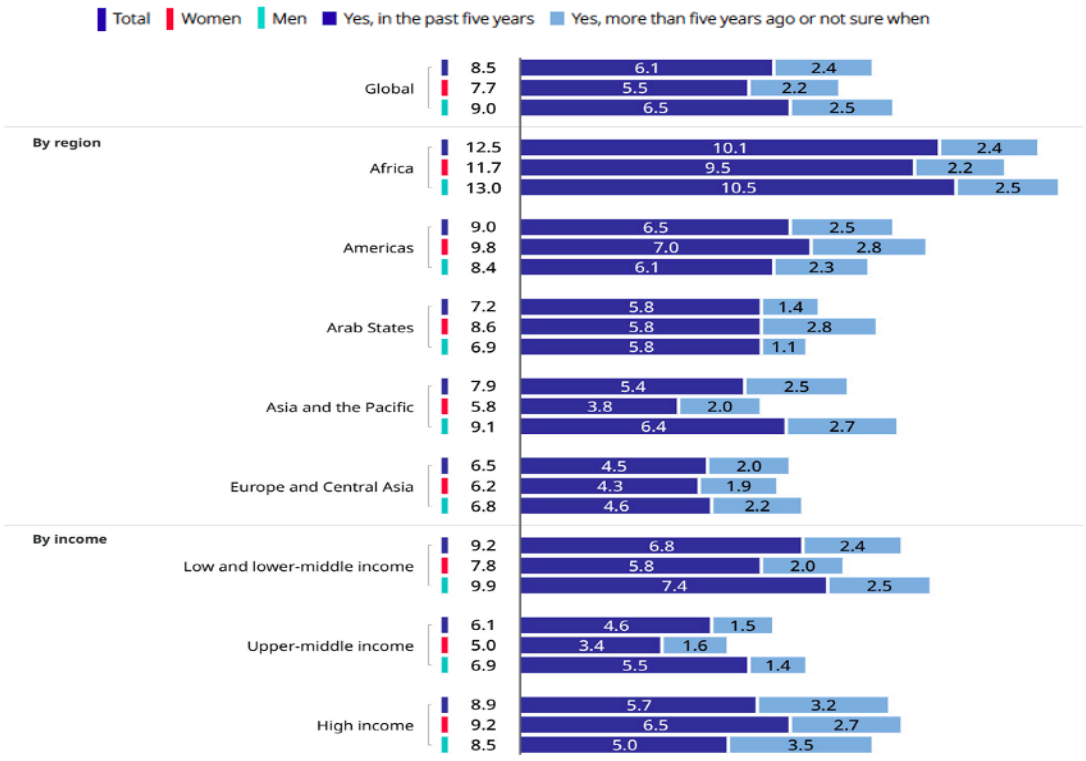

Figure 2: Global survey on physical harassment experience in the workplace

Source: Lloyd's Register Foundation World Risk Poll 2021.

https://www.ilo.org/publications/major-publications/experiences-violence-and-harassment-work-global-first-survey

However, there were a few exceptions. In the Arab States and the Americas, more women than men reported being physically harassed or attacked at work. For example, in the Americas, 9.8% of women reported experiences of physical harassment, compared to 8.4% of men. These numbers

show that physical harassment at work doesn't affect everyone in the same way. Gender, region, and income levels all play a role in how people experience this type of workplace harm. This makes it important for organizations to understand these differences and respond with gender-sensitive and culturally aware solutions.

Subtle harassment: This type of harassment is often referred to as covert or low-intensity mistreatment, it is one of the most difficult forms of workplace harassment to identify and address. Unlike overt behaviors such as physical threats or verbal abuse, subtle harassment tends to operate beneath the surface, manifesting in quiet, indirect ways that may not violate formal workplace rules but still cause harm to the victim. These behaviors include incivility, microaggressions, social exclusion, and ambiguous discrimination, like actions that can slowly erode an individual's sense of belonging and psychological safety in the workplace (Cortina et al., 2018; Miner et al., 2018).

One of the most common forms of subtle harassment is incivility. Incivility in the workplace is a subtle but harmful form of mistreatment that often goes unnoticed or unaddressed because it tends to fall below the radar of formal disciplinary action. It involves low-intensity behaviors that violate norms of respect and courtesy, such as making dismissive remarks, or interrupting others repeatedly during meetings, ignoring colleague's contributions, rolling eyes, or using sarcastic tones. These behaviors are often ambiguous in intent, making them hard to prove or confront (Cortina & Wasti, 2005; Porath et al., 2015; Pearson et al., 2001). Recent studies confirm that incivility remains widespread and significantly impacts employee well-being, particularly among women and minority groups who may already face systemic disadvantages. Despite their subtlety, the effects of incivility can be deeply damaging, especially when they are repeated or come from someone in a position of power. Over time, they can lead to emotional exhaustion, reduced job satisfaction, and even physical health problems (Abdullah et al., 2021).

Researchers have described incivility as “the gateway drug to workplace aggression” meaning that while it may seem small or harmless at first, it can gradually escalate into more serious forms of mistreatment if left unchecked (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). Employees who experience incivility are more likely to disengage from their work, avoid colleagues, and reduce their effort, as a result hurting organizational productivity (Porath et al., 2015). In diverse workplaces, women, racial minorities, and LGBTQ+ employees are especially vulnerable to this kind of subtle mistreatment, often facing forms of incivility that intersect with other social biases (Miner et al., 2018). For example, women may be interrupted more often in meetings or have their ideas dismissed, only to see the same idea praised when presented by a male colleague. These patterns, though rarely addressed directly, reflect broader inequalities that persist in organizational cultures. Recent studies have continued to link incivility with psychological stress and burnout. Andersson and Pearson, 1999 found that even minor acts of rudeness, when repeated over time, can increase employees’ levels of emotional exhaustion and lower their organizational commitment. The COVID-19 pandemic and the rise of remote work have also introduced new forms of virtual incivility, such as ignoring emails, turning off cameras during meetings, or sending curt messages that can harm team cohesion and trust. Moreover, researchers have pointed out that incivility often flourishes in workplaces that lack clear behavioral standards or fail to enforce policies around mutual respect (Lim et al., 2008). When leaders ignore or model rude behavior themselves, it signals to others that such actions are acceptable, further embedding them into the organizational culture. What makes incivility so difficult to address is that it often doesn’t look like harassment in the traditional sense. It is not always about yelling or direct insults, but rather about the slow erosion of professional respect and inclusion. Victims may hesitate to report it because they fear being seen as overly sensitive or misinterpreting harmless behavior. Yet, studies continue to show

that these “small” acts can cause big damage, especially when they build up over time and go unacknowledged (Hershcovis et al., 2021). Therefore, it is important not to overlook these quiet signals of disrespect. They are often the early signs of a toxic environment and deserve attention in research and organizational policy alike.

Another form of subtle harassment comes through microaggressions**.** These are everyday comments, actions, or behaviors that may seem harmless on the surface but carry insulting, dismissive, or offensive meanings, especially toward people from marginalized groups. These comments may be unintentional, but they reflect deeper social biases. For example, telling a woman in a technical field, “You’re really good for a girl,” may seem like a compliment but subtly reinforces gender stereotypes. The term was first introduced by psychiatrist Chester Pierce in the 1970s to describe subtle insults toward African Americans, but it has since expanded to include subtle mistreatment based on gender, sexual orientation, religion, disability, and other identities (Sue et al., 2007). What makes microaggressions difficult to address is that they often appear unintentional or are framed as jokes or compliments. Another example is telling a woman she is “too emotional to lead” or expressing surprise that a Black colleague “speaks so well” may not seem aggressive to some, but to the person receiving the comment, it can feel demeaning, exclusionary, and emotionally draining.

In workplaces, such microaggressions can contribute to a hostile climate, especially when they go unchecked. This form of harassment can show up in many forms like being repeatedly interrupted in meetings, being mistaken for someone in a lower-level role, or being excluded from important conversations. These experiences can build up over time and make people feel undervalued or invisible. Sue, (2010) introduced the term in psychological research, and newer studies have shown how these small insults, repeated over time, have significant emotional and performance

consequences. According to Nadal et al., (2014), microaggressions send the message that a person is “less than” or does not belong. They may not cause immediate, visible harm, but repeated exposure can wear down a person’s mental health, confidence, and sense of belonging at work. Research has shown that employees who experience microaggressions are more likely to report feeling anxious, depressed, and disengaged from their job (De Vries, 2024). These feelings can eventually lead to burnout or resignation, especially if the person doesn’t feel safe enough to speak up (Holder et al., 2015).

The fact is, microaggressions are not just about what is said, but they are also about what is left unsaid or undone. Not acknowledging someone’s idea in a meeting, consistently mispronouncing their name, or excluding them from social gatherings may not seem hostile, but they send powerful messages of rejection. In some cases, these behaviors stem from unconscious bias, where a person holds negative stereotypes without even realizing it (Sue, 2010). While intent matters in understanding behavior, research suggests that the impact of microaggressions is more important. Even if the person didn’t mean to cause harm, the hurt and isolation felt by the recipient are real (Spanierman et al., 2021). Organizations are slowly beginning to recognize microaggressions as a workplace issue, but many still lack the tools to address them properly. Traditional harassment training often focuses on extreme behaviors like physical threats or sexual advances, while ignoring these more subtle patterns that cause long-term damage. When leadership fails to acknowledge microaggressions, it sends a message that these everyday slights are acceptable (Lim & Cortina, (2008). This creates a culture where people from minority groups feel they must constantly monitor their behavior, code-switch, or stay silent to survive in the workplace. Microaggressions challenge the idea that harassment must be loud or violent to be harmful. It’s

often the quieter, everyday actions like those that chip away at someone's sense of dignity that create the most toxic environments (De Vries, 2024).

Social exclusion is another form of subtle harassment. It is one of the most painful and damaging forms of subtle harassment in the workplace. Unlike more visible acts like yelling or insults, exclusion works quietly. It happens when people are left out of conversations, meetings, team projects, or even social events at work or informal gatherings. At first view, it might seem harmless, maybe someone was just forgotten or there was no bad intent. But over time, these small acts of being left out can add up and send signals to the target that they are not valued or welcome. According to Ferris et al. (2008), being ignored or excluded activates the same part of the brain that registers physical pain. This shows just how serious and deep the emotional harm of exclusion can be. In the workplace, exclusion often happens in ways that are hard to prove or call out. A manager may repeatedly fail to invite a particular employee to meetings, or coworkers might always go for coffee or lunch without including someone in the group. Over time, the person being excluded begins to feel invisible or unimportant. Studies show that when people experience this kind of social rejection, they are more likely to disengage from their job, feel anxious or depressed, and even start questioning their own worth. Exclusion doesn't just affect how someone feels, it can also damage their performance, productivity, and chances for advancement.

One reason exclusion is so harmful is because humans are wired for connection. We want to feel accepted and included, especially in a place where we spend most of our time like work. Researchers such as Baumeister and Leary (2017) explain that belongingness is a basic human need, just like food or shelter. So, when that need is not met and when someone is constantly left out or pushed to the margins, it creates emotional pain and stress. People who face exclusion often struggle with loneliness and start to feel like outsiders in their own teams. What makes this issue

even more complex is that exclusion can be both intentional and unintentional. Sometimes it's done on purpose, like when coworkers freeze someone out after a disagreement. But many times, it happens because of unconscious bias or a lack of awareness. For example, a team might consistently include only certain people who share similar backgrounds or interests, unintentionally leaving out others who are different. When this happens to people from underrepresented groups, whether due to race, gender, religion, or other identities, it becomes part of a larger pattern of marginalization and inequality (Buchanan et al., 2008). Tackling exclusion in the workplace takes more than just encouraging people to be nicer. It requires leaders to build a culture of inclusion where every person feels seen, heard, and valued. This involves actively noticing who is being left out and making intentional efforts to include them, not just socially, but in decision-making and leadership opportunities. As Shore et al., (2011) argue, inclusion is not just the opposite of exclusion but the proactive creation of an environment where diversity is welcomed, and everyone can fully participate. When organizations recognize and tackle exclusion, they not only support the well-being of their employees but also benefit from stronger collaboration, trust, and innovation.

2.1.2 Frequency and Severity of workplace harassment

Workplace harassment varies not just in type, but also in how often it happens and how severe it feels to the person experiencing it. The frequency of harassment is important because repeated exposure can make the impact more damaging. According to a global survey by the ILO, over half (55.3%) of all victims of physical violence and harassment at work said they experienced it three or more times during their working life (ILO, 2022). This kind of repeated experience can make people feel powerless, unsafe, and emotionally drained. Men were slightly more likely than women to report frequent physical violence and harassment, with 55.7% of male victims saying

they had experienced it multiple times, compared to 52.2% of female victims. In some regions, like the Americas, the gap was much wider, men were 17.9 percentage points more likely than women to say they had faced repeated violence (ILO, 2022). But in other places like Africa and Europe, women actually reported more frequent experiences of harassment than men.

From a severity standpoint, how serious the harassment feels often depends on the person's own view of the situation. The Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1985) explains this idea well. So, two people might face the same kind of harassment, but one might see it as deeply distressing while another might feel it's easier to handle. Factors like personality, past experience, support systems, and workplace culture can influence this.

Severity in the context of workplace harassment refers to how intense, harmful, or threatening a particular behavior feels to the person experiencing it. While frequency tells us how often something happens, severity tells us how bad it feels even if it only happens once. A single comment or action can feel extremely upsetting and disruptive depending on the situation, the intent behind it, and how the person interprets it. For example, someone being yelled at in front of their coworkers or touched inappropriately might feel deeply embarrassed, unsafe, or even traumatized, even if it was just one incident. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), severity can be shaped by both the type of harassment and the context in which it occurs. In their 2022 global report on violence and harassment, about 21% of women and 9% of men who experienced physical violence and harassment said it had occurred within the last five years, and a large portion of those individuals never spoke about it with anyone. This silence, especially after serious incidents, shows that the emotional weight or severity of an experience can lead to fear, shame, or worry about retaliation. In other words, severe incidents are not always easier to talk about, in fact, they can shut people down even more.

Different organizations offer slightly different definitions of severity, but they all agree it's about how much distress or harm the behavior causes. For example, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) in the United States explains that for harassment to be considered unlawful, it must be either severe or pervasive enough to create a hostile work environment (Baumle et al., 2025). A single incident might meet this bar if it's extremely threatening or harmful like sexual assault or a violent act. On the other hand, Canada's Human Rights Commission (CHRC) notes that severity includes things like the impact on the person's dignity, emotional health, and ability to do their job. Research by Lee and Brotheridge (2011) shows that people from marginalized groups, or those in junior roles, are more likely to feel that harassment is severe because they feel less safe or supported. This same behavior may feel more threatening and harder to cope with when it's even based on power dynamics in the workplace like where the superior is the harasser. In this thesis, perceived severity plays a central role in understanding why some people feel more distressed by harassment than others, and how this affects the coping strategies they use. For instance, if someone sees a harassing event as highly severe, they may either feel motivated to report it or feel completely overwhelmed and shut down. The same action like a sexually suggestive comment might be dismissed by one employee but feel deeply harmful to another based on their past experiences, cultural background, or gender identity (Ely,1995).

The ILO (2022) data confirms this pattern. Women consistently reported higher levels of harm from the same types of behavior compared to men. For instance, physical harassment by co-workers or clients was reported to be not only more frequent but also more damaging to women's mental and emotional health. Women reported higher levels of emotional and avoidance coping, which have been linked in prior research to negative outcomes such as stress, anxiety, and job dissatisfaction.

These differences support the idea that gender influences both how harassment is experienced and how seriously it is perceived. Also, the impact of workplace harassment is not only tied to what happens, but also how often it occurs. This is why examining patterns of repeated exposure provides a clearer picture of how workplace harassment affects people at work. It also shows the importance of not just reacting to extreme cases, but also addressing repeated or "low-level" harassment that can build up and cause harm over time. Research shows that women tend to recognize and report harassment more often than men, possibly due to increased sensitivity to boundary violations (Berdahl & Moore, 2006). Meanwhile, men may underreport such incidents due to gender norms that discourage expressions of vulnerability (McDonald, 2012). To test this, the following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis 1

$H1_0$: There is no significant difference between men and women in their perception of the type and frequency of workplace harassment.

$H1_1$: Women will report significantly higher perceptions of the type and frequency of workplace harassment compared to men.

2.2 Gender and the Perception of workplace Harassment

Perception is how people make sense of the world around them. It's not just about what happens it's about how it feels. In the case of workplace harassment, two people can go through the same situation but feel completely different about it. One person might laugh off a rude comment, while someone else might feel deeply hurt or threatened by it. That's because our perception depends on who we are, what we've been through, and the kind of environment we work in. When it comes to harassment, perception plays a big role in how people define what happened. Many behaviors can

fall into a grey area for example, jokes, teasing, or just being friendly. Some people might see those things as harmless, while others might feel uncomfortable or disrespected. According to Cortina et al. (2018), the same act may be seen as annoying by one person but as harassment by another, depending on how they interpret the meaning and intent behind it.

In fact, perception is so important that most researchers agree it should be taken seriously, even when no laws are clearly broken. Fitzgerald et al., (1995) argued that people's own interpretations of how they are treated at work and how threatening or inappropriate they find those experiences should guide how we understand harassment. If someone feels uncomfortable, unsafe, or disrespected, then that experience matters, even if no one else sees it the same way. This is especially true for people who are in vulnerable positions, like new employees, immigrants, or those in lower-power jobs. They may be more sensitive to certain behaviors or more likely to feel unsafe because they don't feel they can speak up. For example, the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2022) report found that many people did not speak out about their experiences of violence and harassment at work because they thought it wouldn't be taken seriously or nothing would change. Women, especially, were more likely to feel that reporting was pointless or risky. This shows how perception is shaped not only by personal feelings but also by how safe people feel in their work environment.

Even something as simple as body language can be perceived in different ways. A long stare, a touch on the arm, or an offhand comment might seem harmless to one person but could be deeply upsetting to another. Researchers like Hershcovis and Reich (2013) remind us that perception is subjective, and because of that, there is no one-size-fits-all way to define harassment. Importantly, perception also influences how people respond to harassment. If they think something is "just the way things are" or not serious enough, they may not speak up. But if they feel threatened, targeted,

or disrespected, they may try to report it, cope with it, or even leave their job. This highlights why it's crucial to listen to how people describe their experiences in their own words. What one person sees as a “minor issue” may have long-term effects on someone else’s mental health or job satisfaction.

Harassment doesn’t affect everyone the same way. What really matters is how people appraise it in other words, how they see and judge the experience. The same behavior, like a sarcastic comment or being ignored in a meeting, can feel upsetting to one person but might not bother someone else as much. That’s because we all have different ways of understanding and reacting to stress, and our background, support system, and personal history can shape those reactions.

The word “stressor” means something that causes pressure, discomfort, or harm. When harassment is seen as a stressor, it means the person feels threatened, hurt, or under emotional strain because of it. But that feeling doesn’t come from the behavior alone, it also comes from the person’s own thoughts and beliefs about what’s happening. This is where Lazarus and Folkman’s (1985) Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping becomes useful. Gender plays a big role in how people see, experience, and respond to harassment in the workplace. This is not just about biology, it’s about how society teaches people to think, feel, and act based on their gender. Men, women, and people of other gender identities may all experience harassment, but they often understand it and react to it in different ways. These differences are shaped by culture, workplace norms, power dynamics, and even the fear of being judged or not believed.

Many studies show that women are more likely than men to report workplace harassment and to recognize certain behaviors like sexist jokes, unwanted touching, or being excluded as harassment (Fitzgerald et al., 1995; Leskinen & Cortina, 2014). This doesn’t mean women are more sensitive.

Instead, it reflects how women are more often the targets of these behaviors and are therefore more aware of how harmful they can be. For example, the ILO's (2022) global survey found that women reported higher levels of physical, psychological, and sexual harassment at work compared to men. This pattern was consistent across most countries, especially in jobs where women are in the minority or have less power. This challenge is different for men, they are less likely to label their harassment experience or to report it (Berdahl et al., 2018). This is partly due to cultural beliefs about masculinity. In many workplaces, men are taught to "tough it out" or avoid showing weakness. Admitting to being harassed can feel embarrassing or even shameful, especially if the harassment comes from a woman or another man. As a result, male victims may stay silent, downplay the experience, or blame themselves. This creates a serious problem: harassment continues, but it goes unnoticed.

The way people perceive the severity and frequency of harassment also depends on gender. Women are more likely to see repeated negative behaviors as harmful, while men may view them as jokes or part of the job unless the behavior becomes very extreme (Settles et al., 2013). This doesn't mean men don't suffer. In fact, when they do acknowledge harassment, they often report high levels of stress, isolation, and confusion about what to do. They may not know where to turn for support, especially if they fear being mocked or not taken seriously (McDonald, 2012).

The hypothesis 2 below stems from the idea that gender shape how individuals respond to stress. According to TTSC, coping is influenced by how people appraise stressful events like harassment and their perceived ability to manage them. Research suggests women are more likely to use emotional or avoidance-based strategies, while men lean toward rational or problem-focused strategies (Carver et al., 1989; Ptacek et al., 1994; Tamres et al., 2002). To test this, the following hypotheses 2 are proposed:

H2₀: There is no significant difference in coping strategies used by men and women in response to workplace harassment.

H2a: Women will be more likely to adopt emotional coping than men

H2b: Women will be more likely to adopt avoidance coping strategy than men

H2c: Men will be more likely to adopt rational (problem-focused) coping strategies than women.

It's also important to mention that people who don't identify as male or female such as nonbinary or transgender workers often face even higher risks of harassment and greater barriers to reporting (**Meyer, 2021**). These individuals may be targeted not just because of their gender, but because they challenge traditional gender roles. Yet research on their experiences is still limited, and many organizations are not equipped to support them properly.

Table 1

Gender Differences in the Appraisal of Workplace Harassment

Appraisal Aspect	Women	Men	Sources
Recognition of Harassment	More likely to recognize subtle and overt forms of harassment	Less likely to recognize or label behaviors as harassment	Leskinen & Cortina (2014); Fitzgerald et al., (1997)
Perceived Severity	Tend to rate harassment as more harmful and emotionally distressing	Often downplay the severity unless it is extreme	Settles et al., (2013); Willness et al., (2007)
Reporting Behavior	More likely to report or seek help, though still underreported	Less likely to report due to stigma or fear of appearing weak	McDonald (2012); Berdahl et al., (2018) Cortina & Berdahl (2008)
Emotional Reaction	Feelings of fear, anxiety, anger, or helplessness are more commonly expressed	May feel shame, confusion, or suppression of emotion	Cortina & Magley, (2009); Berdahl et al., (2006)

Cultural and Social Expectations	Encouraged to speak up but often not believed or blamed	Socialized to "tough it out" or dismiss emotional impact	Berdahl et al., (2006); McDonald (2012)
Workplace Interpretation	Often see harassment as a threat to safety, dignity, and professional standing	May view same acts as jokes, teasing, or part of workplace banter	Willness et al., (2007); Fitzgerald et al., (1995)

2.3 Coping Strategy and job satisfaction in the Workplace

When people face harassment at work, they use different coping strategies. Some speak up, some try to fix the problem, and others stay quiet or try to ignore it. Coping is how people manage the thoughts, feelings, and actions that come with difficult or threatening situations. The idea of coping comes mainly from Lazarus and Folkman (1985), who explained that people respond to stress not just based on what happens, but based on how they think about it and what they can do about it. In their theory, people go through two steps: first, they decide if a situation is harmful and then they figure out if they can handle it. If they feel like they can't deal with it, stress builds up. Coping strategies are what people use to handle this stress sometimes in healthy ways, and sometimes in ways that help them get through the moment but don't solve the problem. There are many types of coping strategies, but researchers often group them into two main types: problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping. Problem-focused coping means taking action to fix the situation. For example, if someone is being harassed at work, they might report it to a manager or HR or talk directly to the person involved. Emotion-focused coping means trying to feel better without necessarily fixing the situation. This could include venting to a friend, avoiding the person causing stress, distracting oneself with work, or just staying silent and hoping it passes (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004). A third category some researchers include is avoidance coping, where people

try to escape the problem altogether by calling in sick, changing departments, or even quitting their job (Carver & Connor-Smith, 2010). While this might bring short-term relief, avoidance often doesn't address the real issue and can make things worse in the long run. Still, people often use avoidance when they feel they have no power to change the situation.

Coping choices depend on many things, including gender. Research shows that women are more likely to use emotion-focused coping, such as talking about feelings or avoiding conflict, while men are more likely to use problem-focused coping like trying to fix the issue directly (Tamres et al., 2002; Matud, 2004). However, this is not always the case. People's coping responses are also shaped by their job role, workplace culture, personal history, and the level of support they have from others. For instance, a man working in a toxic workplace with no support might also choose avoidance over confrontation. Likewise, a woman with strong peer support and confidence in the system may report harassment and take formal steps to address it. These differences aren't about weakness, they reflect social norms around how each gender is expected to cope

A global report by the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2022) found that while both men and women experience physical and psychological violence at work, men were more likely to experience repeated incidents and often chose not to report them. It's important to understand that no coping style is completely good or bad. What matters is whether the strategy helps the person feel better, stay safe, and protect their mental health in the long run. In some cases, emotion-focused coping may be the only safe option, especially in workplaces where speaking up could lead to punishment. However, if people are stuck in avoidance for too long, the stress from harassment can grow worse over time. Coping responses to harassment are measured using the Full COPE Inventory (Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989), a comprehensive tool that assesses a range of coping strategies including problem-focused, emotion-focused, and avoidant responses.

This scale is suitable for capturing both adaptive and maladaptive coping styles in response to workplace stressors. In this study, we focus on three main types of coping strategies to help explain this idea more clearly, the following infographic shows the types of coping strategies and its explanation.

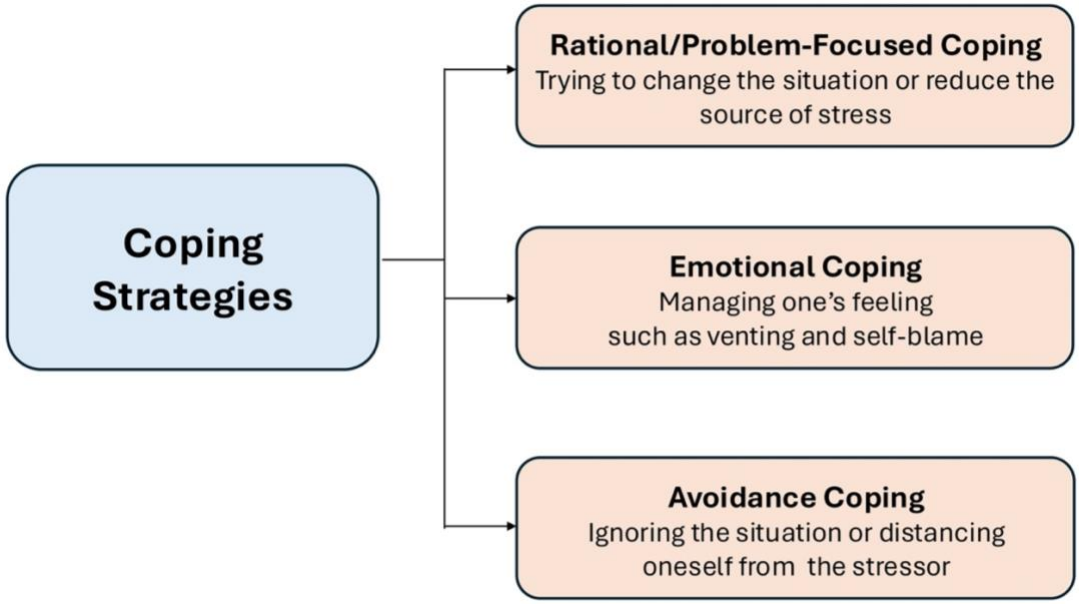

Figure 3: Coping Styles

Source: author creation

While much research focuses on how employees respond to harassment, fewer studies explore how those responses shape long-term feelings about their jobs. Coping strategies help individuals manage workplace harassment, how employees feel about their jobs overall can shape, support, or even limit how they cope. One of the goals of most employees is to be find satisfaction in what they are doing. Job satisfaction refers to how content a person feels about their job. It includes many things: how much they enjoy the tasks they do, how fairly they feel treated, how supported they are by supervisors or coworkers, and whether they feel valued or recognized. Locke, Sirota and Wolfson (1976) described it as a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the

appraisal of one's job or job experiences. More recent studies have expanded this idea to include emotional, social, and psychological well-being at work (Spector, 1997; Judge et al., 2008).

Feeling satisfied at work can serve as a buffer against the negative effects of harassment. For instance, employees who feel a strong sense of support, value, or purpose in their workplace may be better able to cope with difficult situations even if harassment occurs. But when job satisfaction is low, even small stressors can feel overwhelming. Research shows that low job satisfaction is often linked to poor mental health, burnout, and high turnover (Faragher et al., 2005). Organizations that promote fairness, safety, and open communication tend to have happier workers. This is especially important in harassment cases. If employees trust their employer to take action, they may feel safer reporting problems, which can improve both satisfaction and coping. This simply means that satisfaction is not only about enjoying one's work, but also tied to how safe, respected, and supported employees feel. These factors are deeply connected to how people experience, react to, and cope with harassment.

The proposed hypothesis 3 below, supported by TTSC, emphasizes that the type of coping strategy people use can shape long-term outcomes like well-being and job satisfaction. Prior research shows that rational coping is linked to more positive outcomes, while emotional or avoidance strategies are often associated with dissatisfaction or burnout (Carver et al., 1989; Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004; Hershcovis & Reich, 2013).

$H3_0$: Coping strategies are not significantly associated with job satisfaction.

H3a: Rational coping strategies will be positively associated with job satisfaction.

H3b: Emotional coping strategies will be negatively associated with job satisfaction.

H3c: Avoidance coping strategies will be negatively associated with job satisfaction.

2.4 Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping (TTSC)

Understanding how individuals interpret and respond to workplace harassment requires more than identifying exposure to negative workplace behaviors. It also requires a framework that explains why the same workplace behavior can be experienced as mildly irritating by one person but deeply threatening, humiliating, or emotionally destabilizing by another. The Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping (TTSC), developed by Lazarus and Folkman, conceptualizes stress as a dynamic transaction between a person and their environment, one that depends on how the situation is cognitively evaluated (appraised) and what coping options are perceived to be available (Lazarus & Folkman, 1985). In this view, stress does not arise solely from the external event itself; rather, stress emerges from the meaning the individual assigns to the event and the perceived capacity to manage its demands (Folkman et al., 1986). This perspective is especially relevant to workplace harassment because harassment experiences are not only behavioral and interpersonal; they are also interpretive and emotional, and they occur within organizational contexts shaped by power, norms, and constraints.

TTSC argues that individuals continuously evaluate events in terms of personal significance, threat, controllability, and implications for wellbeing. Lazarus and Folkman (1985) describe appraisal as the cognitive process through which a person determines whether an encounter is irrelevant, benign, or stressful. When an event is appraised as stressful, it may be evaluated as involving harm/loss (damage already done), threat (anticipated damage), or challenge (demands that could potentially be met with growth or mastery) (Folkman, 1984). In workplace harassment contexts, this helps explain why some behaviors are interpreted as identity-threatening, unsafe, or undermining, while others may be minimized, normalized, or interpreted as "part of the workplace culture."

Appraisal is typically discussed in two related processes: primary appraisal and secondary appraisal (Lazarus & Folkman, 1985). Primary appraisal addresses the question: What does this situation mean for me? In harassment settings, primary appraisal may involve interpreting whether the behavior reflects disrespect, discrimination, hostility, reputational harm, or threats to job security. Secondary appraisal addresses the question: What can I do about it? This involves evaluating perceived resources and constraints such as control, social support, confidence in reporting systems, anticipated retaliation, financial dependence on the job, or perceived credibility within the organization (Lazarus & Folkman, 1985). Importantly, TTSC frames stress as a process rather than a one-time event. Appraisals and coping responses can shift as individuals receive feedback from the environment (e.g., whether harassment escalates, whether reporting is taken seriously, whether supervisors intervene, or whether coworkers provide support). This dynamic relationship between appraisal, coping, and outcomes is reflected in empirical work applying transactional perspectives, showing that appraisal and coping processes are meaningfully linked to short-term encounter outcomes (Folkman et al., 1986).

Within TTSC, coping refers to the cognitive and behavioral efforts used to manage demands that are perceived as taxing or exceeding one's personal resources (Lazarus & Folkman, 1985). A foundational distinction is between problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping (Folkman, 1984). Problem-focused coping aims to change the stressor or its conditions (e.g., documenting incidents, reporting, seeking instrumental support, assertive communication), whereas emotion-focused coping aims to manage emotional distress (e.g., emotional support seeking, reframing, acceptance, emotional regulation). Lazarus and Folkman (1985) emphasize that people often use both forms of coping, and that coping may vary across time depending on perceived controllability. A key contribution of TTSC is that coping strategies are not inherently

good or bad, instead, coping effectiveness often depends on fit, like the match between coping strategy and the situation as appraised. For example, problem-focused coping tends to be more likely when a stressor is viewed as changeable or controllable, whereas emotion-focused coping becomes more likely when the stressor is viewed as unchangeable or risky to confront (Lazarus & Folkman, 1985). This is particularly relevant to harassment, where employees may perceive formal action as unsafe or futile and therefore adopt strategies that protect short-term functioning like emotional detachment, silence, avoidance, even if those strategies do not stop the underlying behavior.

In this thesis, coping strategies are examined in ways that align with established coping measurement traditions. For example, Carver et al. (1989) developed a theoretically grounded coping inventory capturing multiple coping dimensions (e.g., active coping, planning, support seeking, disengagement), which supports the conceptualization of coping as multidimensional rather than singular. Using coping dimensions that are consistent with established approaches strengthens the theoretical alignment between TTSC and the coping strategies used in this study (Carver et al., 1989).

TTSC has been widely applied in research on occupational stress and wellbeing to explain why similar workplace stressors can produce different outcomes across individuals. Transactional perspectives have been used to interpret how stressful workplace encounters translate into strain, coping patterns, and downstream outcomes (Folkman, 1984). Within the broader workplace harassment literature, meta-analytic research has shown that workplace harassment is meaningfully linked to negative psychological and work-related outcomes, supporting the importance of examining how individuals interpret and respond to harassment experiences rather than treating exposure as uniformly impactful (Bowling & Beehr, 2006). Research on workplace

bullying provides additional support for the relevance of appraisal and coping frameworks. A meta-analytic review by Nielsen and Einarsen (2012) demonstrates that exposure to workplace bullying is associated with adverse job-related and health-related outcomes. While not all studies directly measure appraisal, these findings are consistent with a transactional logic in which ongoing negative acts are interpreted as threatening and are associated with distress and reduced wellbeing, and coping responses may influence how these effects unfold (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012). In this sense, TTSC provides a coherent framework for understanding variability in how individuals manage workplace mistreatment and why outcomes can differ across targets.

Sexual harassment scholarship also supports the importance of workplace context and downstream work outcomes. Fitzgerald et al., (1995) tested an integrated organizational model showing that organizational climate and job gender context are critical antecedents of harassment, and that harassment is associated with work-related outcomes such as job satisfaction, as well as psychological wellbeing indicators. These findings strengthen the theoretical rationale for examining harassment not only as an experience but as a stressor with implications for job satisfaction and broader wellbeing (Fitzgerald et al., 1995). In depth, job satisfaction has been linked to health outcomes at the meta-analytic level, further justifying its inclusion as an outcome variable when examining workplace stressors and coping processes (Faragher et al., 2005).

A major strength of TTSC is its capacity to incorporate how social location and organizational context shape both appraisal and coping. Harassment often occurs within workplace hierarchies and gendered expectations that influence what is interpreted as serious, what is judged as reportable, and what responses are perceived as safe. For example, Berdahl & Moore (2006) conceptualizes sex-based harassment as rooted in maintaining or protecting social status within gender hierarchy, highlighting that harassment can function to police roles and reinforce power

relations. Similarly, Cortina & Magley (2009) argues that subtle forms of incivility can operate as modern discrimination, emphasizing that mistreatment may be shaped by broader inequalities even when it appears ambiguous. From a transactional perspective, these gendered and organizational dynamics can influence both appraisal stages. In primary appraisal, individuals may differ in whether they label behavior as harassment, interpret it as threatening, or normalize it as typical workplace interaction (Rim & Kim, 2024). In secondary appraisal, perceived power relations, anticipated backlash, and organizational responsiveness may influence whether individuals perceive reporting or confrontation as viable coping options (Berdahl & Moore, 2006; Cortina & Magley, 2009). In harassment contexts, coping is therefore not merely an individual choice, but an action shaped by perceived risk, available resources, and the organizational climate surrounding reporting and retaliation (Fitzgerald et al., 1995).

TTSC is well-suited to this thesis because it directly aligns with the concept of perceived severity. It places appraisal (meaning-making and evaluation) at the center of the stress process (Lazarus & Folkman, 1985). It explains variation in coping under similar exposure by showing that individuals' appraisals and perceived resources can differ even when harassment behaviors appear similar (Folkman et al., 1986; Lazarus & Folkman, 1985). Additionally, the appraisal to coping to outcome logic provides a coherent rationale for examining links between perceived harassment severity, coping strategies, and job satisfaction (Fitzgerald et al., 1995; Lazarus & Folkman, 1985). TTSC is flexible enough to incorporate organizational and social context as influences on appraisal and coping rather than treating coping as purely individual or decontextualized behavior (Cortina & Magley, 2009; Fitzgerald et al., 1995).

Although TTSC provides a powerful framework, it also has limitations that must be acknowledged when applying it to harassment research. One limitation concerns measurement: appraisals are

internal cognitive processes and are not always measured directly; many studies infer appraisal from perceptions, coping choices, or emotional outcomes, which can complicate causal interpretation (Folkman et al., 1986; Lazarus & Folkman, 1985). Another limitation is the risk of over-individualizing workplace harm. If applied without adequate attention to organizational structures and power relations, TTSC may appear to emphasize individuals' interpretations rather than the objective and structural realities of harassment and discrimination. To avoid this, TTSC must be situated within organizational context and linked to the broader literature emphasizing status, power, and workplace climate (Berdahl & Moore, 2006; Cortina & Magley, 2009; Fitzgerald et al., 1995). Finally, because stress and coping are dynamic processes, cross-sectional designs may not fully capture feedback loops (how coping responses change as harassment continues or as organizational responses unfold) (Lazarus & Folkman, 1985).

2.4.1 Conceptual framework

Guided by TTSC, this thesis conceptualizes workplace harassment as a stressor whose impact depends not only on exposure but also on how the experience is appraised and how individuals cope in response (Lazarus & Folkman, 1985). Specifically, harassment experiences are interpreted through appraisal processes, followed by coping responses that may be problem-focused, emotion-focused, or avoidance-oriented (Carver et al., 1989; Folkman et al., 1986). These coping patterns have implications for work-related wellbeing outcomes such as job satisfaction (Fitzgerald et al., 1995), and job satisfaction itself is meaningfully linked to broader health outcomes in the literature (Faragher et al., 2005). Therefore, the conceptual model in this thesis reflects a transactional logic in which perceived severity and coping strategies operate as key mechanisms linking harassment experiences to job satisfaction, while recognizing that gendered experiences and organizational

context can shape appraisal and coping pathways (Berdahl & Moore, 2006; Cortina & Magley, 2009; Fitzgerald et al., 1995).

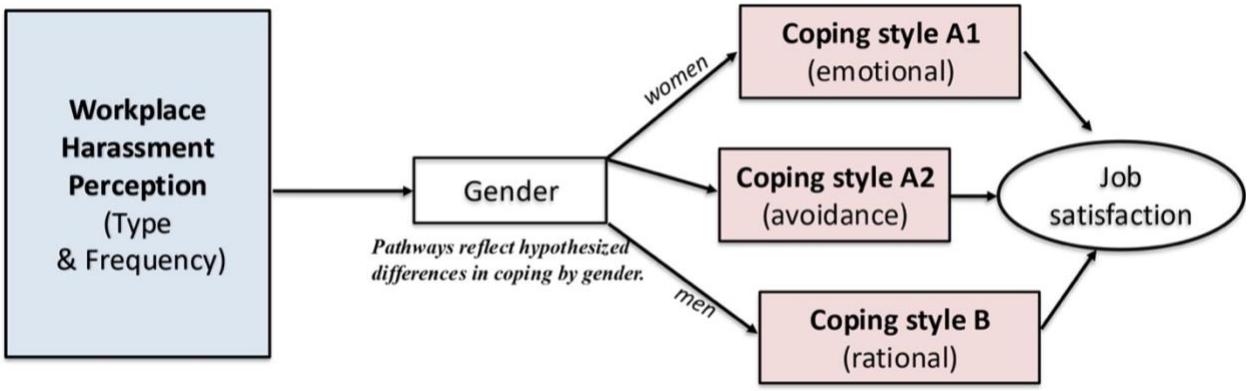

Figure 4: Conceptual model

Source: author's illustration

The framework highlights a pathway that begins with perception of harassment, flows through gendered coping responses, and ultimately influences job satisfaction. This model does more than describe; it helps predict where differences might occur and where support is most needed.

2.5 Research Gaps

Workplace harassment remains a troubling part of the employment experience for many people, yet how individuals perceive and cope with it continues to vary. The literature has shown that harassment is not just about isolated acts but it's about how people appraise to these acts within a broader social context. Scholars have explored the types of harassment, how frequent it can be, and what impact it has on workers. They've also examined how coping styles whether active, avoidant, emotional, or rational can influence an employee's ability to maintain a sense of wellbeing at work.

However, while past research has explored these topics separately, fewer studies have connected them in a way that reflects the real-life complexity of these experiences. Many scholars, for example, have noted gender differences in either harassment exposure or coping style (Berdahl, 2007; Carver et al., 1989), but there is still limited research that looks closely at how gender influences the entire process; from perception to coping, and then to job satisfaction. This gap matters because if men and women experience the same behaviors but interpret and react to them differently, then workplace support systems may not be meeting everyone's needs equally.

Another missing piece in the literature is how individuals interpret and appraise workplace harassment exposure and how that appraisal guides their coping response. While some studies mention severity as part of the experience, few explore how people make sense of or evaluate their harassment experiences based on personal or social factors. Understanding this perception is essential, especially in workplaces where harassment may not always be physical or overt, but still causes stress and harm.

Coping has also been widely studied as a reaction to stress in general, it is less often explored in the specific context of workplace harassment, especially when looking at its emotional cost and long-term impact on job satisfaction. Emotional exhaustion, lowered trust in leadership, and decreased job commitment are real outcomes, yet they are often discussed broadly, without tying them back to the personal meaning and coping choices people make when they face harassment.

This study aims to offer a clearer picture of what it means to experience harassment not just in terms of exposure, but in terms of meaning, response, and emotional cost.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study uses a quantitative research design to explore how men and women perceive workplace harassment, how they cope with it, and how these experiences affect their job satisfaction. A quantitative approach was chosen because it allows for the collection of measurable data that can be analyzed statistically to find patterns, compare groups, and test relationships among variables. The design is cross-sectional, meaning all data was collected at a single point in time rather than over a period. This makes it easier to capture how participants feel and respond to harassment as it is currently experienced or remembered, without needing long-term tracking time (Creswell, 2014).

Using a structured survey, this study gathered responses from employed adults who met the inclusion criteria. By applying existing validated scales, the survey measured perceptions of harassment, coping strategies, and job satisfaction in a clear and consistent way. The goal was not just to count how often harassment occurs, but to understand how it is perceived and how people react to it especially across different gender identities. Administering online questionnaire is ideal because of time constraint for the project. Also, the fact that it is important to control for individual demographic factors such as sector, sex, years of work, etc. makes primary dataset the most ideal for the research. This will help to determine more accurate result as it is expected that more years of work is likely to get more experience. The use of structured instruments with closed-ended questions and established validity, will ensure consistency, replicability, and comparability of responses across different respondent categories. This design fits well with the study's foundation in the Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping (TTSC). TTSC focuses on how individuals

evaluate and respond to stressful events, and a survey method allows researchers to capture those appraisals and coping styles directly from participants.

3.1.1 Population and Sampling

The population for this study includes adults who are currently employed or have been employed within the last six months, regardless of their job sector, or role, though limited to Canada only. Focusing on Canada allowed the study to capture experiences within a consistent social, legal, and cultural environment. This decision improves the relevance and comparability of the data by reducing the variability that might come from differences in national workplace laws, cultural norms, or organizational practices. These individuals represent the broader group of working adults who may have experienced or witnessed workplace harassment and used coping strategies in response. Including people from different industries and locations helps capture a wide range of experiences and perspectives. To be part of the study, participants had to meet a few basic conditions. They had to be 18 years or older, be able to read and understand English, and have experience working in any kind of workplace setting such as offices, factories, schools, hospitals, or retail stores. These criteria were important to ensure that all participants had some exposure to workplace environments and could reflect on their experiences meaningfully.

Participants were recruited online using a research platform called Prolific, which connects researchers with a large pool of potential respondents from diverse backgrounds. This platform was selected because it allows for targeted sampling and helps ensure ethical recruitment, including informed consent, fair compensation, and privacy protection. The sampling approach aimed to reflect different gender identities, but for the purpose of analysis, this study focuses specifically on individuals who self-identified as men or women. This focus allows for a direct

gender comparison, which is central to the research questions and hypotheses. However, options for non-binary and other gender identities were included in the survey to promote inclusivity and respect for all respondents and give more insight into further research opportunity.

The final sample size was determined using a power analysis, which helps identify how many participants are needed to detect a statistically meaningful difference or relationship. Based on a medium effect size (Cohen's $d = 0.5$), a significance level of 0.05, and a power of 0.80, the minimum recommended sample size was approximately 128 participants per group meaning at least 256 participants in total. However, to allow for more detailed comparisons and account for potential dropouts or incomplete responses, the study aimed for a larger sample of 300 participants.

3.2 Instruments

This study used two standardized tools to collect data on how participants perceive harassment, how they cope with it, and a general question to capture how satisfied they feel with their job. Each instrument has been widely used in research and has strong evidence of reliability and validity.

3.2.1 NAQ-R

To measure how participants experience and interpret harassment at work, this study used the NAQ-R developed by Einarsen, Hoel, and Notelaers (2009). The NAQ-R is a well-established instrument widely used in workplace harassment research because it captures specific negative behaviors without requiring respondents to label those experiences as harassment or bullying. This behavioral focus helps reduce personal bias and emotional reactions, allowing participants to answer based on what they've experienced rather than how they feel about the label. This is especially important in gender-related studies, where cultural and social norms can shape what individuals consider to be unacceptable behavior. The NAQ-R includes 22 items that describe a

range of hostile behaviors, such as being humiliated, ignored, ridiculed, over-monitored, or subjected to verbal abuse or threatening gestures. These experiences may relate to one's tasks, social treatment, or sense of safety at work. Participants were asked how often they had faced each of these acts over the past six months, using a five-point scale that ranged from "never" to "daily." This time frame and frequency scale help capture both the presence and intensity of these experiences.

In addition to offering a better view of harassment exposure, the NAQ-R supports the study's focus by capturing how often respondents experience specific negative acts. In this thesis, NAQ-R scores are treated as an indicator of the frequency and breadth of exposure, rather than a direct measure of subjective "severity." Perceived severity is conceptualized separately as individuals' appraisal of how distressing, threatening, or harmful the experience feels. This distinction allows the study to examine whether greater exposure to negative acts is associated with higher perceived severity and related outcomes. Numerous studies have confirmed the NAQ-R's strong reliability and validity. Internal consistency scores are often very high, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from .86 to .94 across different settings and populations. The tool has also been validated across multiple countries and industries, making it appropriate for use in a Canadian sample. In this study, the NAQ-R is used not only to capture exposure to harassment but also to understand how participants interpret the frequency and type of those experiences. This fits well with the Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping, which emphasizes how people assess the seriousness of stressful situations before choosing a way to respond.

3.2.2 Full COPE Inventory

The Full COPE Inventory developed by Carver, Scheier, and Weintraub (1989) is used in this study to understand how participants deal with workplace harassment. The Full COPE inventory is a well-regarded psychological instrument that explores how people respond to stress in different ways. Rather than focusing only on whether someone tries to fix a problem or ignore it, the Full COPE inventory offers a more complete picture by examining a variety of emotional, behavioral, and cognitive strategies. Its broad and inclusive structure makes it especially useful for studies like this one, which aim to explore both gender differences and individual variations in coping behavior. The inventory includes 60 items that cover different reactions people may have when faced with difficult or threatening situations. These reactions include active problem-solving, seeking emotional support, venting, distraction, humor, self-blame, avoidance, and even the use of substances. Participants were asked how often they typically used each of these responses when experiencing stress, using a four-point scale from "I usually don't do this at all" to "I usually do this a lot." This format captures coping as a habitual and subjective process, allowing individuals to describe how they usually respond rather than what they think they should do.

The ability to reflect both healthy and unhealthy forms of coping is what makes the Full COPE inventory valuable for this research is. Some strategies, like planning or seeking support, are generally considered constructive. Others, such as denial or disengagement, may be seen as less effective in the long run but still represent real and valid ways people try to protect themselves. In this study, participants' responses to the Full COPE inventory were later grouped into broader coping sub-categories to help identify meaningful trends. These included rational strategies that involve problem-solving or planning, emotional responses like venting or seeking comfort, and avoidance strategies such as denial or mental withdrawal. These categories were chosen based on prior research and adapted to suit the study's focus on workplace stress. Using the full COPE

provides a richer and more reliable picture of coping patterns, but it also increases the length of the survey. A longer survey can raise the risk of respondent fatigue, which may affect attention and response quality. To address this trade-off, responses were screened during data cleaning for low engagement (e.g., incomplete patterns and indicators of insufficient effort), and only complete and interpretable responses were retained for analysis.

3.2.3 Job Satisfaction Scale

To assess participants' overall satisfaction with their work, this study used a single-item measure of job satisfaction. Although brief, this approach has been validated and widely used in workplace research, especially when the goal is to gather straightforward insights without adding unnecessary complexity or participant fatigue. The question asked participants to reflect on how they felt about their current or most recent job and rate their response on a six-point Likert scale ranging from strong disagreement to strong agreement. The specific item used in the survey was simple and direct: *"Overall, how satisfied are you with your job?"* This format allows participants to give a global assessment of their job satisfaction without breaking it down into multiple dimensions like pay, workload, or supervision. While multi-item scales can provide more detailed feedback, research has shown that single-item job satisfaction measures often correlate strongly with longer scales and can capture a reliable sense of how people feel about their jobs as a whole (Wanous et al., 1997).

In the context of this study, where the main focus is on harassment and coping responses, using a single-item scale allowed the researcher to keep the survey concise and manageable while still including job satisfaction as an important outcome variable. This measure offers insight into how exposure to harassment and the ways people cope with it might influence their broader emotional

connection to work. It provides a snippet of participants' contentment, frustration, or disconnection, all of which can be critical in understanding the full impact of negative workplace experiences.

3.3 Data Collection Procedure

Data for this study were collected using an online survey hosted on Qualtrics, a secure and widely used platform for academic research. The survey was designed to be clear, anonymous, and user-friendly, allowing participants to respond at their own pace and in their own environment. The instruments used (NAQ-R, Full COPE Inventory, and the job satisfaction item) were integrated into the survey as separate sections, following a brief introduction and consent form. Before the survey was made public, it was pilot tested to ensure clarity and flow. Minor edits were made based on feedback, including simplifying the language in a few questions and ensuring that the layout was easy to navigate. Once finalized, the survey link was uploaded to Prolific, a reputable online participant recruitment platform. Prolific was selected for its ability to target specific participant criteria especially those relevant to this study, such as location (Canada), age (18+), language proficiency (English), and recent work experience (currently employed or employed within the last six months). Participants were first shown an informed consent form, which explained the purpose of the study, their rights as participants, confidentiality measures, and how the data would be used. Only after agreeing to the consent could, they proceed to the actual survey. The full survey was designed to be completed within 10 to 20 minutes. The report shows the survey took participants about 8 minutes on average to complete (M = 8.37 minutes, SD = 4.61 minutes), participants received fair compensation of CAD $5.00 for a 20 minutes completion. This meets Prolific's minimum pay policy (at least £6 / $8 per hour) and aligns with Prolific recommended higher pay levels (£9 / $12 per hour) for better engagement. To protect participants' privacy, no identifying information was used in analysis. Responses were submitted through Qualtrics and

linked only to Prolific IDs for compensation. Any automatically generated metadata like the IP address were not retained for analysis and were removed during data cleaning. The survey included built-in attention checks to ensure data quality, and any responses that failed these checks or appeared incomplete were excluded from the final analysis.

Lastly, the data collection process was designed to be respectful, ethical, and aligned with university research standards. The online format allowed for quality and relevance of the data gathered.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

This study followed strict ethical guidelines to protect participants and ensure the integrity of the research process. Before any data were collected, ethics approval was obtained from the University of Lethbridge Human Participant Research Committee. The research protocol, survey instruments, recruitment strategy, and consent process were all reviewed and approved to make sure they met ethical standards. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary. Each participant received a detailed informed consent form at the beginning of the survey, which explained the study's purpose, the kind of information being collected, and what participation involved. The form made it clear that participants could skip questions they felt uncomfortable with or withdraw from the study at any point before submitting the survey, without facing any penalty.

To protect participants' privacy, no personally identifying information was collected. All responses were submitted anonymously through the Qualtrics platform, and participants were identified only by randomly assigned Prolific IDs, which served solely to manage survey submissions and compensation. Data were stored securely in password-protected research drive accessible only to the researcher and supervisor. The survey also avoided sensitive or triggering

language and used a neutral tone when describing negative workplace experiences. A short debrief was provided at the end of the survey to thank participants for their time and remind them of support resources in case reflecting on past experiences caused any discomfort. Compensation was provided through Prolific based on time commitment and platform standards. Fair payment helps reduce coercion and ensures participants feel respected for their time. The whole process ensures that participants were fully informed, treated with respect, and protected from harm.

3.5 Data Analysis Plan

After data collection, the responses were downloaded from Qualtrics and prepared for analysis using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). A total of 308 survey responses were initially collected. Each response was manually reviewed to assess completeness and response quality. Two responses were removed, resulting in a final analytic sample of 306 participants. The small number of excluded cases indicates a generally high level of data quality in the dataset.

Missing data were handled using listwise deletion, which is the default procedure in SPSS for t-tests, ANOVAs, correlations, and regression analyses. This means that ones with missing values on variables required for a specific analysis were excluded from that analysis. Listwise deletion was selected because the proportion of missing data was minimal and because it ensures consistency across statistical tests by using the same set of complete cases. Given the large sample size and the small number of excluded responses, this approach was unlikely to bias the results or reduce statistical power.

Other unnecessary variables that were not relevant to the research questions, such as session identifiers, start & end time or other platform generated data were removed. These variables did not contribute to the study's theoretical or analytical objectives, so removing them minimizes error.

The missing data screening responses were evaluated for overall quality. Low-quality responses were identified based on patterns of insufficient engagement with the survey (duration of completion), also flagged as low quality if a participant failed an attention check or left large sections of the survey incomplete. The survey included two attention-check items "Please select Agree for this item" to confirm that participants were reading carefully. These cases were excluded before the final analyses. These cases were removed to improve data reliability and validity. The final sample reflects participants who provided sufficiently complete and interpretable responses to the study measures.

Workplace harassment was measured using the Negative Acts Questionnaire–Revised (NAQ-R), a widely used instrument designed to assess exposure to negative acts at work without requiring respondents to label their experiences as "harassment" or "bullying." The NAQ-R includes items reflecting three commonly recognized domains of workplace harassment: work-related bullying, person-related bullying, and physically intimidating behaviors. Though these domains are conceptually distinct, this present study treat workplace harassment as a single global construct, representing participants' overall exposure to negative acts in the workplace. Participants rated how often they experienced each NAQ-R behavior on a 5-point frequency scale (1 = Never to 5 = Daily). In this thesis, perceived severity is captured using this frequency rating. This is because workplace harassment is commonly understood as behavior that becomes most harmful when it is repeated and ongoing, not when it happens only once. When negative acts occur more often (e.g., weekly or daily), they place a greater burden on the person and are more likely to disrupt well-being, coping, and satisfaction at work. For this reason, higher NAQ-R frequency scores are interpreted as greater perceived severity in the sense of a stronger and more persistent harassment experience.

Responses were aggregated into a single composite score (naq_total) by summing all 22 NAQ-R items (possible range = 22–110). This approach captures cumulative harassment exposure across multiple negative acts rather than focusing on subtype-specific comparisons. This decision aligns with the study's research questions, which examine gender differences in overall harassment exposure and its relationships with coping and job satisfaction, rather than differences across specific harassment categories. The NAQ-R primarily reflects frequency of exposure to negative acts. In this thesis, higher NAQ-R totals are interpreted as indicating more frequent and more persistent exposure to negative workplace behaviors. Because repeated exposure is often more strongly linked to strain than isolated incidents, a total NAQ-R score provides a practical way to represent overall exposure in hypothesis testing. For ease of interpretation on the original 1-5 metric, the NAQ-R total can also be expressed as an average score by dividing naq_total by 22, this is a simple rescaling that does not change statistical conclusions. In the study sample, the NAQ-R demonstrated excellent internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .94$).

Coping strategies were assessed using subscales from the Full COPE inventory. Items corresponding to rational (problem-focused), emotional, and avoidance coping were averaged to create composite scores for each coping dimension. Job satisfaction was measured using a single-item scale, with higher scores reflecting greater satisfaction. The data analysis followed a structured sequence aligned with the study's research questions and hypotheses. First, descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, and frequencies) were computed to summarize the demographic characteristics of the sample and the distributions of key variables.

To address Research Question 1 and Hypothesis 1, which examined gender differences in perceptions of workplace harassment, an independent samples t-test was conducted to compare NAQ-R total scores between women and men. For research question and hypothesis 2, gender

differences in coping strategies were examined using independent samples t-tests, with rational, emotional, and avoidance coping entered as dependent variables.

To examine Research Question 3 and Hypothesis 3, which focused on the relationship between coping strategies and job satisfaction, Pearson correlation analyses were first conducted to assess bivariate associations among workplace harassment, coping strategies, and job satisfaction. This was followed by a multiple linear regression analysis, in which workplace harassment summed as NAQ-total and the three coping strategies were entered simultaneously as predictors of job satisfaction. This approach allowed for the assessment of both the combined and unique contributions of each predictor.

After this analysis, exploratory post hoc analyses were conducted to further investigate demographic and contextual influences on coping strategies. Spearman rank-order correlations were used to examine associations between age, years of work experience, and coping strategies, given the ordinal nature of these variables. One-way ANOVAs were conducted to examine differences in coping strategies across job levels and workplace gender composition. Where appropriate, analyses were stratified by gender to explore subgroup patterns. Gender was used as a grouping variable for comparison, but it was not included as a covariate in the regression models. Regression analysis helps show whether a change in one variable (like avoidant coping) is associated with a change in another (such as lower job satisfaction). Each regression model was tested for assumptions of normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity to ensure the results were valid and reliable. Multicollinearity in regression models was examined using variance inflation factors, all of which were within acceptable limits. The study used a standard p-value threshold of .05 for determining statistical significance, and effect sizes (R^2) were reported to show the

strength of the relationships between variables. These analyses were exploratory in nature and interpreted cautiously.

CHAPTER 4: ESTIMATION RESULTS

This chapter presents the findings from the data collected for this study. The purpose of this research was to explore how men and women perceive workplace harassment, how they cope with it, and how these experiences relate to their job satisfaction. The analysis in this chapter is guided by the research questions and hypotheses outlined earlier and follows the structure laid out in the previous chapter.

To begin, this chapter describes the response rate and outlines how the data were cleaned and prepared for analysis. It then provides an overview of the demographic characteristics of the respondents to give context to the findings. Descriptive statistics are used to show patterns in the main variables: harassment perception, coping strategies, and job satisfaction. The chapter also compares male and female participants across these key variables using t-tests, before presenting the results of the regression analyses that test how coping strategies predict both harassment perception and job satisfaction. Each of these results is discussed clearly and simply, with tables and explanations to help make sense of the numbers.

Finally, the chapter brings together the findings to test each hypothesis and summarize the major results. This helps connect the data analysis to the bigger story of the research on how gender, coping, and satisfaction interact in the workplace.

4.1 Reliability Test

To test the internal consistency of the scales, a reliability analysis was carried out. The reliability analysis indicated that all scales had satisfactory internal consistency. The NAQ-R consisted of 22 items, and the analysis produced a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.94. According to Nunnally (1978), a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.70 and above is considered acceptable, while values of 0.90 and above

indicate excellent reliability. This shows that the NAQ-R has very high internal consistency, and that the items consistently measure workplace harassment. The corrected item-total correlations ranged from .415 to .770, showing that each item contributed meaningfully to the overall construct. None of the items, if deleted, would have improved the reliability coefficient, supporting the decision to retain all 22 items. Higher scores indicating more frequent exposure overall. For descriptive purposes, item-level means were also examined; these ranged from 1.06 to 2.12 on the 1–5 scale, suggesting generally low to moderate endorsement of individual negative acts. This might seem aa bit low, but this pattern is common when the NAQ-R is used in broad employee samples. In these general samples, many respondents select "never" or "rarely" for several negative acts, so item averages often fall closer to the lower end of the scale. Even so, lower average scores do not mean harassment is unimportant, but simply show that frequent exposure was not reported by most respondents in this sample.

The rational coping subscale also demonstrated strong psychometric properties. The items yielded a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.90, which is regarded as excellent reliability. This suggests that the subscale reliably captures problem-focused coping strategies. Corrected item-total correlations ranged from .25 to .67, with most items exceeding the accepted .30 threshold. While a few items were weaker, removing them would not have improved the overall reliability, so all were retained. Item means ranged from 2.42 to 3.28, pointing to a moderate level of rational coping among participants.

Reliability analysis of the avoidance coping subscale achieved a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.88, which falls within the range of good reliability. This indicates that the items coherently represent avoidance-oriented strategies. Item-total correlations ranged between .17 and .62. Although some items correlated weakly with the overall scale, their removal did not meaningfully increase the

alpha. As a result, all items were preserved. Mean scores ranged from 1.30 to 2.76, highlighting participants used avoidance coping strategies, but at a modest level compared to other approaches.

The emotional coping subscale reflects good reliability ($\alpha = .81$) across items This suggests that the subscale is a dependable measure of emotion-focused coping strategies. Corrected item-total correlations ranged from .28 to .61, with most items contributing adequately. A few fell at the lower end of the threshold, but none detracted significantly from the reliability. Mean scores for these items ranged between 1.61 and 2.64, indicating that emotional coping was used by respondents but not as strongly as rational coping. Job satisfaction was assessed with a single-item measure, in which respondents rated their overall satisfaction with their job. Because it was measured with one item, internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's Alpha) could not be calculated. However, prior research supports the validity of single-item measures of job satisfaction (Wanous et al., 1997).

4.2 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The demographic profile of the study's participants provides a contextual background for the later sections of the study. Demographic information collected included participants' gender, age group, employment status, industry of employment, job position, and tenure in their current organization.

A total of 306 valid responses was received and were analyzed after data cleaning. Out of the 306 responses, 50% are women, 48.69% are men while only 1.31% are non-binary, indicating an almost equal representation of both men and women, which is appropriate for the gender-based comparative nature of the study. Most participants fell within the 25–34 years age group (39.22%), followed by those aged 35–44 years (23.86%) with least age showing from 55-65. This distribution suggests that most respondents were in early to mid-career stages, aligning with the study's focus

on workplace experiences and job satisfaction. People in this age group often deal with work-related challenges such as building a career, handling stress, and working with diverse teams which are factors that may likely affect how they experience and cope with harassment (Ohse & Stockdale, 2008; Reese & Lindenberg, 2005; López-Cabarcos et al., 2017).

In terms of employment status or work type, 77.78% of respondents are employed full-time, while the rest worked part-time, casual or other arrangements. This is important because full time spends more time in their work environment and may be more likely to encounter or report harassment compared to part time workers. Respondents came from many different industries, including healthcare, education, finance, technology, public service etc. 14.5% work in Health Care and Social Assistance, making them the highest proportion of respondents in this survey. Those that work in professional, scientific, and technical services are 13.7%, and Educational Services were 10.13%. Additional representation came from Finance and Insurance (8.82%), Retail Trade (6.54%), Information (6.21%), and Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation (5.56%). Public Administration accounted for 4.90% of respondents, while the lowest sector representations were from manufacturing, Transportation and Warehousing, Administrative & Support / Waste Mgmt, Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, and Hunting, Construction, Real Estate and Rental and Leasing, Utilities, Mining, Quarrying, and Oil & Gas Extraction, Wholesale Trade, Management of Companies and Enterprises. These sectors were recorded 3.27%, 2.94%, 1.96%, 1.96%, 1.63%, 1.63%, 1.31%, 1.31%, 0.65%, 0.33% respectively.

This diversity helps the study reflect a wider range of workplace experiences and makes the findings more generalizable across job sectors.

Looking at job level, 36.36% were in mid-level roles, 26.80% were in entry-level jobs, and 22.55% were in senior roles. A smaller portion of 8.50% held the executive or director position. This

distribution is helpful because people at different levels may face different types or frequencies of harassment and may also use different coping methods.

When asked how long they had worked in their current organization 27.50% said 3 to 5 years and 21.90% indicates 6 to 10 years. A longer time in one place allows workers to better observe patterns, workplace culture, and long-term stressors, especially those related to harassment and support systems.

To further avoid any biasness, participants were asked to indicate the gender composition of their workplace or team based on their perception. The distribution shows that 41.80% work in a workplace or team with an even mix of men and women, while 30.39% worked in mostly women setting and 21.57% in mostly men settings. Only 0.65% were unsure of the gender composition in their team. Considering this ratios matter because previous research shows that the gender composition of a team or workplace can shape how comfortable employees feel and how likely harassment is to occur or be reported. Table 2 provides the relevant summary statistics of these demographic and employment characteristics.

Table 2

Summary Statistics for Demographic and Employment Variables

Variable	Average
Age	
18-24	12.42%
25-34	39.22%
35-44	23.86%
45-54	12.75%
55-64	9.80%
65 or older	1.96%
Gender	
Men	48.69%
Women	50.00%
Non-binary	1.31%
Work Type	
Full time	77.78%
Part time	19.93%

Casual	1.63%
Other	0.65%
Length of work	
< 6 months	4.58%
6-11 months	7.19%
1-2 years	21.24%
3-5 years	27.45%
6-10 years	21.90%
> 10 years	17.65%
Job level	
Intern/Trainee	1.31%
Entry-level	26.80%
Mid-level	36.60%
Senior-level	22.55%
Director	4.25%
Executive/Management	4.25%
Other	1.69%
Gender composition in workplace	
Even mix	41.80%
Mostly women	30.39%
Mostly men	21.57%
All women	3.59%
All men	2.61%
Not sure	0.65%

4.3 Descriptive Statistics of Key Variables

Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics for workplace harassment, coping strategies, and job satisfaction. Workplace harassment was measured using the Negative Acts Questionnaire-Revised (NAQ-R), which includes 22 items. Each item was scored from 1 (Never) to 5 (Daily). Following common practice, item scores were summed to create a total NAQ-R score representing respondents' overall exposure to workplace harassment across behaviors, with higher scores indicating more frequent exposure. Because the NAQ-R captures multiple negative acts, the total score reflects the cumulative frequency of exposure rather than the frequency of a single behavior.

Table 3

Summary Statistics for Key study Variables

Variable	Mean (M)	SD	Min	Max
Workplace Harassment (NAQ)	32.73	11.90	22	66
Rational Coping	61.87	11.13	22	77
Avoidance Coping	42.79	9.88	22	67
Emotional Coping	34.16	8.39	16	58
Job Satisfaction	3.49	1.09	1	5

N = 306 (153 women, 149 men)

The mean score for workplace harassment was 32.73 (SD = 11.90). A higher score means the respondent experienced more frequent and severe harassment at work. The average score in this study indicates that participants experienced relatively low to moderate levels of negative acts in the workplace. In other words, while many participants did not experience frequent harassment, some still reported repeated negative behaviors. Coping was measured using selected subscales from the FULL Brief COPE inventory. These were grouped into three broader coping styles: rational coping, emotional coping, and avoidant coping. In terms of coping strategies, rational coping emerged as the most frequently used approach, with a mean of 61.87 (SD = 11.13), suggesting that respondents often relied on problem-focused methods to deal with workplace challenges. It is important to note that self-reported coping strategies may be influenced by social desirability bias, even in anonymous surveys. Problem-focused or rational coping is often viewed as a socially acceptable and adaptive response to workplace stressors, which may have contributed to its higher endorsement relative to emotional or avoidance-based strategies. As such, the prominence of rational coping should be interpreted with caution, as it may reflect both actual coping behavior and normative expectations regarding how individuals believe they should respond to workplace harassment. Avoidance coping followed with a mean score of 42.79 (SD =

9.88), showing that participants engaged in avoidance behaviors at a modest level, though less frequently than rational coping. Emotional coping strategies were the least endorsed, with a mean of 34.16 (SD = 8.39), reflecting a relatively modest use of emotion-focused responses to harassment experiences. Finally, Job satisfaction was assessed with a single item: "Overall, how satisfied are you with your current job?" rated from 1 (Extremely dissatisfied) to 5 (Extremely satisfied). The average score was 3.49 (SD = 1.09), indicating that most participants were moderately to somewhat satisfied with their jobs. However, the range of responses (1–5) shows that while many were content, some participants were very dissatisfied, which could be influenced by their experiences of workplace harassment or limited support systems.

4.4 Gender difference in harassment perception

The RQ1 asked to what extent individuals of different gender identities differ in their perception of the type and frequency of workplace harassment. To answer this, an independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the mean scores of women and men on the NAQ-R scale. The results showed that women had a mean score of 32.59 while men had a mean score of 32.92, suggesting only a very small difference in perceived harassment between the two groups. The test of equality of means indicated that this difference was not statistically significant, t (300) = -0.240, p = 0.810, with a negligible effect size (Cohen's d = 0.03). The result indicate that both men and women appear to view harassment as equally present in their work environments, with no evidence that one group reports more frequent exposure to workplace harassment than the other.

This finding suggests that reported exposure to harassment is not strongly differentiated by gender in this sample. These results do not support the alternative hypothesis ($H1_1$) which predicted that women report higher levels of workplace harassment exposure than men. Therefore, the null

hypothesis is retained. The NAQ-R measures harassment primarily as frequency of exposure to specific negative acts, so perceived severity was not measured as a separate construct in this study.

Table 4

Independent Samples t-Test for Gender Differences in Reported Workplace Harassment Exposure (NAQ-R)

Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	F	p	t	df	p (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% CI of the Difference
Equal variances assumed	0.327	0.568	-0.240	300	0.810	-0.331	1.380	[-3.047, 2.384]

Note: Levene's test for equality of variances was non-significant (p = .568); therefore, results assuming equal variances are reported. N = 302 (153 women, 149 men)

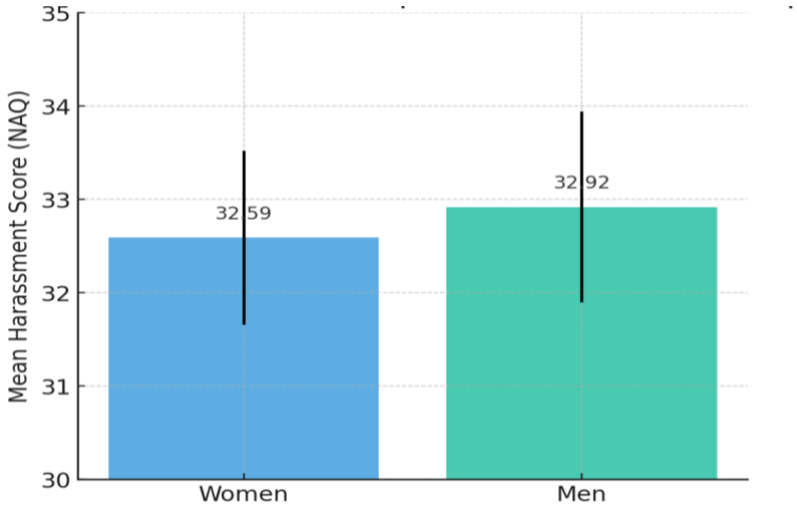

Figure 5:Harassment Perception Scores by Gender

While this answers the first research question by showing that differences in perception are negligible, it also raises further insights that need to be explored. Even if harassment is perceived at similar levels, it is still possible that women and men differ in how they respond to such experiences, or in how harassment influences their overall job satisfaction.

4.5 Gender Differences in Coping Strategies

To determine whether there were significant gender differences in these coping strategies, the three-coping style (rational coping, avoidance coping, emotional coping) were examined by conducting an Independent-samples *t*-tests. This also aims to answer the RQ2: *What coping strategies do individuals of various gender identities employ when responding to workplace harassment?* The results revealed no significant gender difference in rational coping, reported comparable usage of rational strategies such as planning, active coping, and seeking instrumental support. This similarity suggests that regardless of gender, many participants may engage in logical problem-solving or practical efforts when responding to workplace harassment. One possible reason could be the increasing emphasis on workplace professionalism and awareness of grievance procedures in Canadian organizations, which may have encouraged both men and women to adopt structured coping methods (Rayner & Keashly, 2005). The effect size for this difference was negligible (Cohen's d = 0.03), indicating virtually no practical gender difference in the use of rational coping strategies.

However, avoidance coping showed a significant gender difference with a small effect size (Cohen's d = 0.25). This shows that, on average, women scored slightly higher than men (M = 2.04, SD = .65 for women; M = 1.94, SD = .70 for men), indicating that while the difference is not large, it is meaningful. Women were more likely to disengage or downplay their experiences, using strategies like mental disengagement. This aligns with findings from Tamres, Janicki and Helgeson (2002), they reported that women use most coping strategy than men, and men on the other hand often resort to avoidance coping due to societal expectations that discourage emotional vulnerability. Moreover, men may underreport or avoid confronting harassment to preserve perceived masculinity or to avoid being seen as weak. Although some prior studies suggest that

men may rely more on avoidance coping due to societal expectations around masculinity, the present findings indicate that women in this sample reported slightly higher levels of avoidance coping. This difference may reflect contextual factors, reporting norms, or changing workplace dynamics

Similarly, for emotional coping, women scored higher than men, with the difference reaching statistical significance (t (300) = 2.607, p = .010). The effect size was medium (Cohen's d = .300), suggesting that women are more likely to express distress or seek emotional support when dealing with harassment. This finding is consistent with the broader literature indicating that women tend to be more emotionally expressive and are more likely to use coping strategies involving emotional processing and support-seeking (Billings & Moos, 1982; Ptacek et al., 1994). These coping styles may also be shaped by the cumulative impact of repeated exposure to microaggressions and discriminatory practices in male-dominated workspaces, reinforcing a need for emotional regulation. To visualize these patterns, Figure 4.2 presents the mean coping scores of women and men across the three strategies.

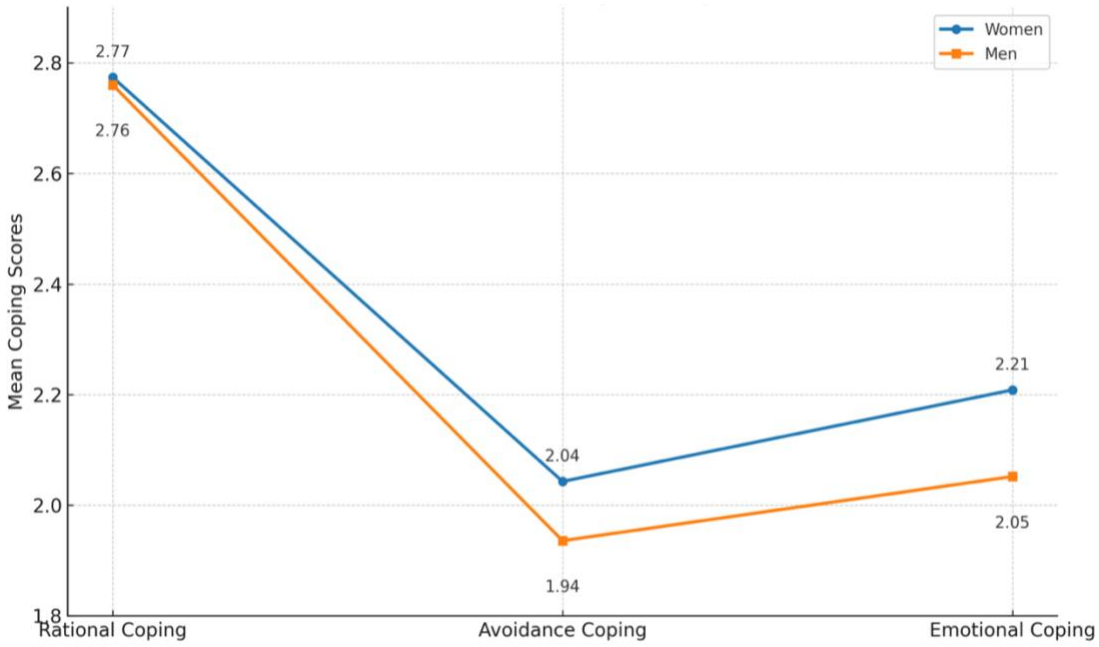

Figure 6: Line Graph of Gender Differences in Coping Strategies

The figure illustrates the near overlap in rational coping scores, as well as the small but visible higher means for women in avoidance and emotional coping. Therefore, the second hypothesis H2a & H2b was supported and H2c unsupported. This finding clearly indicates that gender identities may shape not only whether individuals seek to directly solve workplace problems, but also how they manage or disengage from the emotional toll of harassment. To determine why these differences might exist and whether they impact overall job satisfaction, further post-hoc analysis was done for clarity.

4.6 Bivariate Relationships Among Key Variables

Pearson product–moment correlations were conducted to understand the relationships between workplace harassment, coping strategies, and job satisfaction. The results provided a clear picture of how these variables interacted in the sample. Correlation analysis is an important step in this thesis because it provides insight into whether the constructs are related in the expected directions before moving to regression and hypothesis testing. It also offers a preliminary understanding of which variables are most strongly linked to job satisfaction, the outcome of central interest in this study.

The analysis revealed a significant negative association between workplace harassment and job satisfaction ($r = –.377$, $p < .001$, $N = 306$). This medium sized correlation indicates that higher exposure to harassment was strongly linked to lower job satisfaction. This finding supports Bowling & Beehr, 2006; Hershcovis & Barling, 2010 research demonstrating that harassment erodes morale, diminishes engagement, and contributes to dissatisfaction at work. Harassment represents a direct violation of psychological safety, and its cumulative impact lowers employees' motivation and organizational attachment (Einarsen et al., 2020). From a practical standpoint, the

result highlights that harassment is not merely a stressor but a direct threat to the overall quality of working life.

The relationship between coping and job satisfaction was more complex. When coping strategies were combined into a single overall score, the correlation with job satisfaction was positive but weak and non-significant ($r = .099$, $p = .084$). This is understandable, since coping encompasses both constructive strategies that may enhance satisfaction and maladaptive strategies that may undermine it. A likely explanation lies in the nature of coping itself. As Carver, Scheier, and Weintraub (1989) noted, coping is multidimensional: while rational or problem-focused coping can enhance outcomes by addressing stressors, avoidance or emotion-focused strategies may provide only temporary relief or even worsen dissatisfaction in the long run.

When disaggregated into subscales, a clearer pattern emerged: rational coping was positively associated with job satisfaction ($r = .190$, $p < .01$), suggesting that employees who engaged in problem-focused strategies such as planning or taking action were somewhat more satisfied with their jobs. But avoidance coping ($r = –.046$, ns) and emotional coping ($r = .035$, ns) showed no meaningful associations with job satisfaction, reinforcing the idea that these strategies provide limited long-term benefit in the workplace context (Leiter et al., 2011).

Table 5 confirm that harassment has a detrimental impact on job satisfaction, while rational coping plays a small positive role. Avoidance and emotional coping did not emerge as significant predictors, suggesting that they may not substantially alter how harassment influences satisfaction. These findings reinforce the importance of distinguishing between adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies when examining employee outcomes.

Table 5

Correlation Matrix

Variable	NAQ Total	Rational Coping	Avoidance Coping	Emotional Coping	Job Satisfaction
NAQ Total	1				
Rational Coping	–.067	1			
Avoidance Coping	.127*	.061	1		
Emotional Coping	.089	.431**	.420**	1	
Job Satisfaction	–.377**	.190**	–.046	.035	1

N = 306 (153 women, 149 men)

To visualize the strongest relationship, Figure 7 plots workplace harassment against job satisfaction. The scatterplot illustrates the downward trend, with the regression line clearly showing that employees who reported more frequent harassment also reported lower job satisfaction.

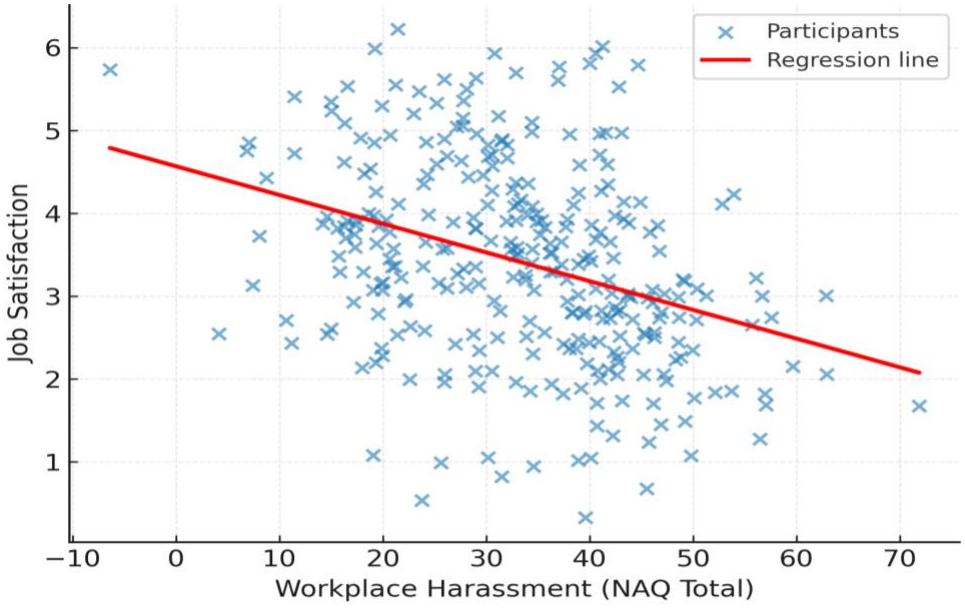

Figure 7: Scatterplot of Workplace Harassment and Job Satisfaction

(The figure illustrates the significant negative correlation between workplace harassment (NAQ total) and job satisfaction ($r = –.377$, $p < .001$). Higher harassment scores are associated with lower job satisfaction, as shown by the downward regression line).

4.7 Predictors of Job Satisfaction

To examine whether workplace harassment and coping strategies significantly predicted job satisfaction, a multiple regression analysis was conducted with NAQ total, rational coping, emotional coping, and avoidance coping entered as predictors. The overall regression model was statistically significant, $F(4, 301) = 16.566$, $p < .001$, explaining approximately 18% of the variance in job satisfaction ($R^2 = .180$, Adjusted $R^2 = .170$). This indicates that the combined effect of harassment and coping accounted for a meaningful portion of how satisfied employees felt with their jobs. Inspection of the coefficients revealed that workplace harassment (NAQ total) was a strong and significant negative predictor of job satisfaction ($B = –0.032$, $\beta = –.348$, $p < .001$). This means that as employees reported more frequent harassment, their job satisfaction significantly decreased.

Among the coping strategies, rational coping emerged as a significant positive predictor of job satisfaction ($B = 0.419$, $\beta = .190$, $p = .003$). Employees who reported using more problem-focused strategies such as planning and seeking solutions tended to have higher job satisfaction, even when accounting for harassment levels. In contrast, emotional coping ($B = 0.073$, $\beta = .035$, $p = .603$) and avoidance coping ($B = –0.116$, $\beta = –.046$, $p = .451$) were not significant predictors. These results suggest that while constructive coping has some protective benefit, reliance on avoidance or emotional responses does not meaningfully influence job satisfaction in this context. No issues of

multicollinearity were detected, as all VIF values were below 2.0, well within acceptable thresholds.

Table 5

Multiple Regression Predicting Job Satisfaction from Workplace Harassment and Coping Strategies

Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	p	95% CI (Lower, Upper)	VIF
Constant	3.451	.396	—	8.722	<.001	2.672, 4.230	—
NAQ Total	–.032	.005	–.348	–6.325	<.001	–.042, –.022	1.113
Rational Coping	0.419	.142	.190	2.961	.003	0.141, 0.698	1.513
Emotional Coping	0.073	.139	.035	0.520	.603	–0.202, 0.347	1.640
Avoidance Coping	–.116	.154	–.046	–0.755	.451	–0.420, 0.187	1.357

Note. $R^2 = .180$, Adjusted $R^2 = .170$, $F(4, 301) = 16.566$, $p < .001$ N = 306 (153 women, 149 men)

These results show the importance of minimizing harassment and encouraging rational coping as strategies for fostering healthier, more satisfying workplaces.

Summary of Hypotheses Testing

The first hypothesis predicted that women would report higher levels of workplace harassment than men. Although women and men showed small differences in their mean harassment scores, the independent-samples *t*-test indicated that this difference was not statistically significant. As a result, the null hypothesis was retained. These findings suggest that, within this sample, workplace harassment was perceived as a concern by both men and women, rather than being reported more frequently by one gender group. The second set of hypotheses (H2a & H2b) was partially supported. Women reported significantly higher emotional coping and avoidance coping, while

there was no significant gender difference in rational coping. This mixed pattern suggests that some coping responses may differ by gender, but coping is also likely shaped by other factors such as personal resilience, organizational culture, and situational context.

The third hypothesis examined whether coping strategies were associated with job satisfaction. The results supported H3a, which predicted that rational coping would be positively associated with job satisfaction. Across the analyses, rational coping showed a positive relationship with job satisfaction and emerged as a significant positive predictor, suggesting that employees who used more problem-focused strategies tended to report higher satisfaction. However, H3b and H3c were not supported in the regression models, as emotional coping and avoidance coping did not significantly predict job satisfaction when considered alongside other variables. In addition, NAQ-R total score emerged as the strongest and most consistent predictor, showing a significant negative association with job satisfaction across the models. This pattern shows that higher harassment exposure is linked with lower job satisfaction and may account for more variation in job satisfaction than most coping strategies in this sample, suggesting that while harassment strongly undermines job satisfaction, rational coping may provide a modest protective effect. Other demographic and contextual variables, such as gender, age, years of work experience, job level, and workplace gender composition, gave limited explanatory value in the models. So, the results depicts that job satisfaction in the context of workplace harassment is shaped primarily by the combined influence of harassment exposure and the use of more adaptive coping strategies.

Practically, it highlights the importance of organizational interventions that both reduce harassment and strengthen employees' capacity for rational coping. Efforts such as training programs, supportive leadership, and accessible reporting mechanisms can help mitigate harassment, while resilience and problem-solving workshops may empower employees to adopt

more constructive coping strategies. Together, such measures could help build healthier workplace environments where harassment is minimized, and job satisfaction is sustained.

4.8 Post-Hoc Exploratory Analysis

While the main analyses of this study focused on gender differences in harassment perception and coping strategies, further exploratory analyses were conducted to examine patterns in coping strategies across selected demographic and contextual variables, including age, years of work experience, job level, and workplace gender composition. These analyses were not designed to test the study's main research questions or hypotheses, but rather to explore potential trends that may inform future research. The inclusion of post hoc analyses serves an exploratory purpose, consistent with recommendations in quantitative research to identify contextual factors that may shape individual responses but were not specified a priori. Accordingly, findings from these analyses are interpreted cautiously and are presented as supplementary to the main results. They do not alter the conclusions drawn from the primary hypothesis tests but instead highlight areas where further, theory-driven investigation or further research may be warranted. Post hoc analyses are valuable in social science research because they allow researchers to account for unexpected findings, explore subgroup differences, and generate new hypotheses for future studies (Benjamin et al., 2018; Fidell et al., 2020).

In this thesis paper, post hoc analyses were used to explore whether age, years of work experience, job level, and workplace gender composition influenced coping strategies among participants. First, I checked whether age and years of work experience were linked to coping styles. Since age and work experience were grouped into ordered categories, I used a correlation method that works well

for this kind of data. In general, the results showed a small pattern, older participants tended to use less avoidance coping, and people with more work experience also showed a small tendency to use less avoidance coping. However, age and work experience did not show clear links with emotional coping or rational coping. When I looked at men and women separately, this pattern appeared stronger among men than women. See Appendix 4 (Table 7). Next, I checked whether coping styles were different across job levels and workplace gender composition like workplaces with mostly men, mostly women, or an even mix. Overall, job level showed only small differences in coping. The clearest difference was for avoidance coping among women, where avoidance coping changed across some job levels. This pattern is also shown in Figure 8 (Mean Avoidance Coping Scores by Job Level and Gender). Meanwhile, workplace gender composition did not show meaningful differences in coping styles. Appendix 4 (Tables 8-9) shows the details.

These extra analyses suggest that demographic and workplace factors had limited effects on coping in this study. The most consistent extra finding was that avoidance coping was slightly lower among older participants and sometimes among those with more work experience. These results are included as extra information and possible ideas for future research, not as the main focus of the thesis.

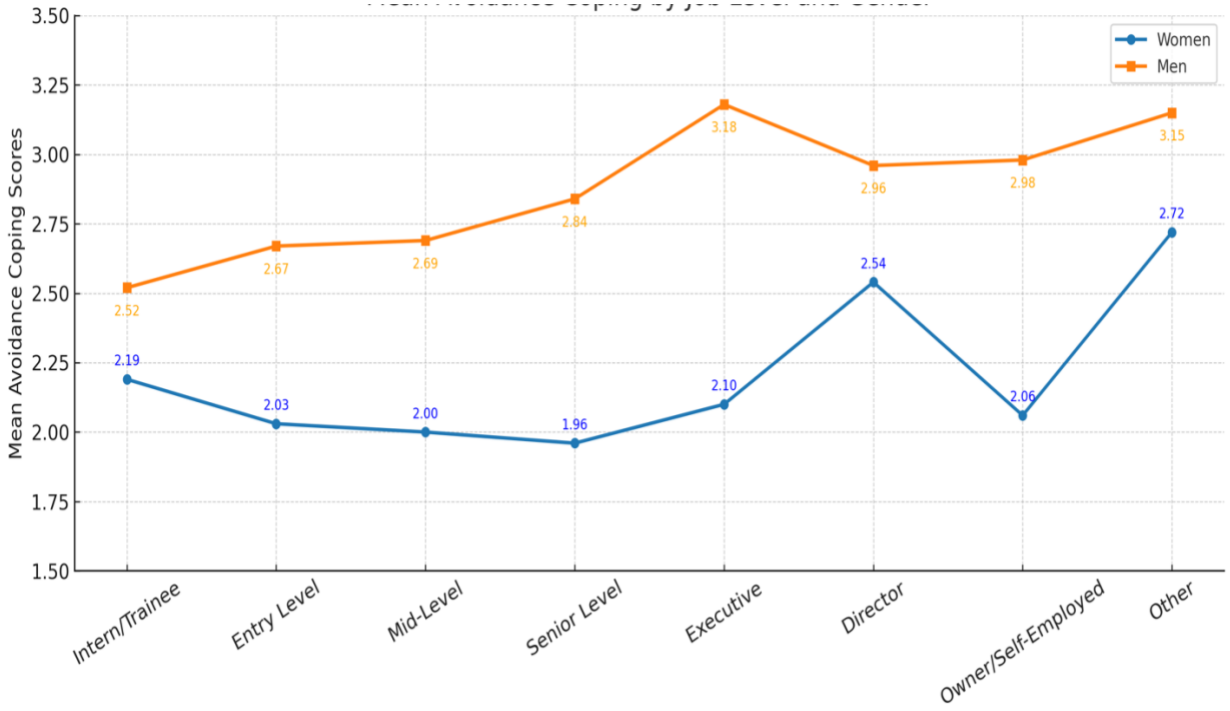

Figure 8: Mean Avoidance Coping Scores by Job Level and Gender

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

5.1 Overview of key findings

This chapter discusses the key findings in relation to the research questions, the Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping, and prior research. The purpose of this study was to compare the perception and coping strategies men and women employ when faced with harassment in the workplace, and how this coping strategy influences their satisfaction at workplace. The Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1985) was the theoretical guide used for this research, the study explored how employees appraise negative workplace experiences, the strategies they employ to manage them, and the subsequent outcomes for their well-being. Using a Canadian sample of 306 employees, the research tested three key hypotheses: whether men and women differed in their perception of harassment, whether coping strategies varied by gender, and whether coping strategies were significantly associated with job satisfaction. In addition, exploratory post hoc analyses were conducted to examine other external influences like the demographic and contextual variables (age, years of work experience, job level, and workplace gender composition).

The findings showed no statistically significant difference between women and men in overall perceptions of workplace harassment frequency, as measured by the NAQ-R. This result shows a gap with some literatures suggesting that women typically report higher exposure to workplace harassment than men. Some of these existing studies have often attributed these differences to gendered power relations, occupational segregation, and differential vulnerability to negative acts at work. The absence of a significant gender difference in the present study may reflect changing workplace norms, increased awareness of inappropriate behaviors across genders, or the use of a frequency-based measure that captures exposure rather than subjective severity. This finding

suggests that experiences of negative workplace acts may be more widely distributed across genders than previously assumed, highlighting the importance of examining harassment as a shared organizational issue rather than one affecting only specific groups. This answers the first research question that asked what extent individuals of different gender identities differ in their perception of the type and frequency of workplace harassment.

Although gender differences in overall harassment perception were not statistically significant, meaningful differences emerged in coping strategies. Women reported greater use of emotional and avoidance coping strategies, while rational (problem-focused) coping was similar across genders; therefore, the hypothesis received partial support. These patterns align with existing research suggesting that coping responses to workplace stress are shaped by socialization processes and perceived access to control and resources (Hershcovis & Barling, 2010).

According to the Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping, individuals are more likely to adopt coping strategies that reflect their appraisal of situational demands and perceived ability to influence outcomes. Women's greater reliance on emotional and avoidance coping may reflect differential appraisals of control in response to workplace harassment, whereas the similar use of rational coping across genders may indicate a stronger orientation toward problem-solving approaches. Workplace harassment was found to have a strong and consistent negative association with job satisfaction. Both the correlation and regression analyses demonstrated that harassment was the most significant predictor of reduced satisfaction, showing its harmful impact on employee well-being.

The relationship between coping strategies and job satisfaction revealed clear and theoretically meaningful patterns.

Rational coping was positively associated with job satisfaction and remained a small but significant predictor in the regression models. But, emotional and avoidance coping were not significant predictors of job satisfaction in this sample once harassment was included in the model. This may suggest that problem-focused coping relates more consistently to better work attitudes, while emotional or avoidance strategies may not improve satisfaction when harassment persists. Future longitudinal research could test whether these coping styles predict changes in satisfaction over time.

Finally, exploratory post hoc analyses were conducted to examine whether selected demographic and workplace characteristics (age, years of work experience, job level, and workplace gender composition) were associated with coping strategies. These analyses were not designed to answer the primary research questions or test the study's hypotheses. Instead, they were included to explore possible patterns that may help guide future research. Overall, the results suggested that demographic and contextual factors played only a limited role in coping strategies. Age and years of work experience showed small negative associations with avoidance coping, especially among men, which may suggest that coping patterns can shift with experience over time (Aldwin et al., 2007; Blanchard & Kalinauskas, 2009). Job level and workplace gender composition showed no consistent effects across coping outcomes. Because these findings were exploratory, they are interpreted cautiously and are presented as supplementary to the main results (see Chapter 4, Figure 8 and Appendix 4, Tables 7-9)

The notable reason is that coping responses may be influenced more by situational demands and organizational forms than by gender identity alone. As workplaces become more diverse and employees are increasingly exposed to stress management resources, coping behaviors may converge across gender lines. The obvious and consistent negative relationship between workplace

harassment and job satisfaction aligns with existing literatures highlighting the detrimental effects of mistreatment on employee attitudes and well-being. Harassment undermines psychological safety, trust, and motivation, leading to lower job satisfaction and increased turnover intentions (Bowling & Beehr, 2006; Hershcovis & Barling, 2010; Einarsen et al., 2011).

The present study supports these findings in a Canadian context, showing that workplace harassment was the strongest predictor of lower job satisfaction in the regression models, even when coping strategies were included. Rational coping emerged as a small but significant positive predictor, consistent with the Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1985), which emphasizes the adaptive value of problem-focused strategies in dealing with controllable stressors. Employees who approached harassment by planning, problem-solving, or seeking constructive action reported slightly higher satisfaction, whereas avoidance and emotional coping were not significant predictors of job satisfaction in the regression models. This supports existing research suggesting that while these strategies may provide temporary relief, they do little to improve long-term outcomes and may even perpetuate stress (Leiter et al., 2011; Carver et al., 1989). The findings in this study challenge traditional assumptions about gender differences in harassment perception and coping, suggesting that such differences may be less pronounced in modern workplaces.

5.2 Implications

The findings of this study offer important implications for the Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping (TTSC; Lazarus & Folkman, 1985) and for theories of workplace behavior more broadly. The strong and consistent negative association between workplace harassment and job satisfaction supports a central premise of TTSC: that how people appraise stressors is closely linked to important outcomes. Employees who perceived more frequent exposure to negative acts were more

likely to view their work environment as threatening or harmful, and this appraisal was strongly associated with reduced job satisfaction. In this sense, workplace harassment functions as a meaningful stressor with clear consequences for employee well-being and work attitudes. The findings also highlight the value of distinguishing between coping responses that appear more adaptive in work contexts and those that may be less effective when a stressor persists. Rational coping, which reflects problem-focused behaviors such as planning and seeking constructive solutions, emerged as a small but significant positive predictor of job satisfaction. This pattern aligns with TTSC's view that coping is most beneficial when it fits the demands of the situation and supports a sense of control. Meanwhile, emotional and avoidance coping were not significant predictors of job satisfaction in the regression models once workplace harassment was included, suggesting that these responses may not meaningfully improve satisfaction when harassment remains present. This supports the view that coping effectiveness depends not only on the coping style itself but also on whether the stressor is reduced or resolved.

Another theoretical implication is that gender may not operate as strongly as prior research often suggests in shaping harassment perceptions or coping responses. The absence of statistically significant gender differences in overall harassment exposure and the modest differences observed across coping styles suggest that workplace context, situational demands, and access to resources may be more influential than gender identity alone in this sample. This invites continued refinement of TTSC to better account for changing workplace norms and environments that may reduce or reshape traditional gender patterns in coping.

Also, the limited role of demographic variables such as age, years of work experience, and job level reinforces TTSC's emphasis on appraisal processes over static personal characteristics.

Although some demographic trends appeared in exploratory analyses, these effects were modest, and the appraisal of harassment remained the most consistent factor linked to job satisfaction. The study strengthens TTSC's relevance for understanding workplace harassment by confirming the central role of stress appraisal, clarifying differences in coping effectiveness, and questioning the strength of gendered assumptions in contemporary workplace samples.

5.2.1 Practical Implications

Practical implications from this study apply to individuals as well as organizations. At the individual level, the findings suggest that employees benefit from recognizing repeated negative acts early and taking safe steps to protect their well-being. Keeping brief records of recurring incidents, reaching out to trusted supports, and using available formal channels such as supervisors, HR, unions, or employee assistance programs can help employees respond more deliberately rather than carrying the burden alone. The results also indicate that rational coping (planning, problem-solving, and seeking useful support or information) may be more helpful than coping responses that involve only withdrawal or avoidance. Importantly, this does not imply that employees are responsible for "fixing" harassment. Instead, it highlights that support-seeking and problem-focused responses may help employees navigate harm while organizations work to prevent and address mistreatment. At the organizational level, the clearest implication is the need to address workplace harassment directly because it showed the strongest and most consistent negative association with job satisfaction. Organizations should ensure that anti-harassment policies are not only present but also clearly communicated, consistently enforced, and supported by accessible reporting procedures, confidentiality protections, and timely responses to complaints. Training for employees and managers remains essential, not simply as a compliance exercise, but as a way to strengthen shared understanding of what harassment looks like, reduce normalization of

mistreatment, and build accountability across teams. The findings also suggest that organizations can support employee well-being by providing resources that strengthen adaptive coping without shifting responsibility onto individuals. When employees have access to mentoring, supportive supervision, stress-management resources, and practical skill-building opportunities (such as constructive communication and problem-solving supports), they may be better equipped to respond to stressful workplace experiences in ways that protect job attitudes and well-being. These resources should be viewed as complements to prevention and enforcement not substituted for addressing harassment at its source. Finally, the absence of strong gender differences in harassment perception and coping strategies in this sample suggests that workplace responses should be inclusive and broadly relevant. Interventions framed as "for everyone or for all" may be more effective than approaches targeted narrowly at one gender, especially when harassment is recognized across groups. Similarly, the limited role of demographic and workplace characteristics in the exploratory analyses suggests that improving organizational culture and systems may have greater impact than focusing on individual characteristics. Clearly, the practical implications point to a dual approach: reducing harassment through strong organizational systems and strengthening problem-focused coping supports through employee development resources, thereby promoting safer, healthier, and more satisfying workplaces. While these implications offer useful guidance, the findings should be interpreted in light of important limitations related to design, measurement, and sampling as discussed below.

5.3 Limitations of the Study

Although the study provides valuable insights into the relationships among workplace harassment, coping, and job satisfaction, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the study employed a cross-sectional design, which captures data at a single point in time. While this design allows for

the identification of associations among variables, it does not permit conclusions about causality. For example, while harassment was negatively correlated with job satisfaction, it is possible that employees who are already dissatisfied may also be more likely to perceive and report harassment. Longitudinal studies would be needed to clarify the directionality of these relationships. The study also did not include a separate measure of perceived severity like ratings of how severe or harmful each experience felt. The NAQ-R reflects frequency-based exposure to negative acts.

The reliance on self-report measures introduces the possibility of response biases. Because these measures relied on personal reporting, participants may be influenced to underreport or overreport their experiences of harassment or their coping strategies due to social desirability, recall errors, or sensitivity of the topic. Although validated instruments such as the NAQ-R and Full COPE inventory were used to enhance reliability, the subjective nature of self-reports remains a limitation.

Additionally, although the survey included participants who identified as non-binary, their number ($n = 4$) was too small to allow meaningful statistical analysis. Consequently, these responses were excluded from the inferential tests to preserve validity. This limitation means that the findings apply primarily to participants identifying as men or women which limits how much the findings can speak for other gender-diverse groups. Future research should aim for larger, more diverse samples that can capture the experiences of non-binary and gender-diverse employees, as their perspectives are crucial for building inclusive workplace policies.

Third, the study focuses on perceptions of harassment, not on verified or officially reported incidents. As perception is subjective and shaped by culture, personal history, and workplace norms, what one person sees as harassment might not be viewed the same by another. This means the study explores felt experiences, not legal outcomes.

Fourth, the sample was restricted to Canadian employees recruited through Prolific, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. While the sample size was adequate and diverse in age and job level, it may not represent all industries, workplaces, or cultural settings. Differences in organizational practices, labor laws, and social norms across settings may influence both harassment experiences and coping resources. Therefore, the results should be interpreted with caution, as they may not represent all Canadian workplaces or industries. The study also focused only on individual-level variables (harassment perception, coping, and job satisfaction). Broader organizational-level factors such as leadership style, organizational culture, or the availability of support systems were not measured. These contextual variables likely interact with individual experiences and could explain additional variance in outcomes.

Lastly, the data is collected online and in English only, which may exclude non-English speakers or individuals with limited access to technology, potentially reducing the diversity of the sample. The study measured coping strategies as self-reported frequencies, which may not fully capture the dynamic and situational nature of coping. Coping is a process that can change depending on the stressor, the resources available, and time. By reducing it to subscale scores, the study provides a useful snapshot but may miss the fluidity of coping responses in real workplace contexts.

Despite these limitations, the study provides meaningful contributions by highlighting the strong negative influence of harassment on job satisfaction and the modest positive role of rational coping. Acknowledging these constraints also helps guide future research directions. Future studies may build on these findings by including more diverse populations, longitudinal data, or additional workplace variables.

5.4 Directions for Future Research

This study points to several clear directions for future research on workplace harassment, coping, and job satisfaction. A priority is the use of longitudinal designs that follow employees over time. Because the present study is cross-sectional, it cannot determine whether harassment leads to reduced job satisfaction or whether dissatisfaction increases sensitivity to, and reporting of, harassment. Longitudinal approaches would help clarify directionality and would also capture how coping strategies shift as workplace conditions and experiences change. Future studies would also benefit from mixed method designs that combine surveys with qualitative data. Although instruments such as the NAQ-R and the COPE provide reliable measurement, they may not fully capture the situational meanings employees attach to negative acts or the context that shapes coping choices. Interviews, focus groups, or open-ended responses could provide richer insight into how employees interpret harassment, why certain coping strategies are selected, and how coping unfolds in real workplace settings beyond what standard scales measure.

Broader sampling would strengthen the generalizability of these findings. The present sample was limited to Canadian employees recruited online, and harassment experiences and coping responses may vary across industries, organizational structures, and cultural contexts. Comparative research across sectors (e.g., healthcare, education, technology) and across national settings would help determine whether the patterns observed here are consistent across workplaces with different norms, policies, and power dynamics. Also, future research should incorporate organizational-level variables that were not directly measured in this study, such as leadership style, organizational culture, climate for reporting, and the availability of formal support systems. These factors may shape both exposure to harassment and the effectiveness of coping responses. Multilevel designs would be especially useful for examining how organizational conditions interact with individual coping strategies to predict job satisfaction.

Lastly, future studies should adopt an intersectional lens to better understand how overlapping identities such as gender, race, immigration status, age, job status, and disability shape harassment exposure and coping processes. While this study focused on gender, the results suggest that gender alone may not explain variation in experiences and responses. Including more gender-diverse participants and examining intersectional patterns would support more inclusive and context-sensitive conclusions. This would extend theoretical understanding of harassment as a workplace stressor and provide more practical guidance for building safer, more inclusive, and more satisfying workplaces.

This study shows that workplace harassment is not a small issue but linked to how satisfied people feel at work. It also suggests that the way employees respond matters, but coping cannot replace prevention. The key message is simple: workplaces need to reduce harassment, and employees need safe supports when it happens. These findings add to the Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping by showing that appraisals of mistreatment are closely tied to job attitudes, even when personal coping is considered. Overall, the study supports a practical goal which is to create workplaces where negative acts are addressed early, reported safely, and handled fairly.

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APPENDIX 1: NEGATIVE ACT QUESTIONNAIRE REVISED SCALE

These statements describe your interactions with your coworkers. For each statement, please rate the frequency with which you experience the following interactions by CHOOSING the appropriate number.

Never	1	**Occasionally**	2	**Weekly**	3	**Monthly**	4	**Daily**	5

CIRCLE ONE

Work-related Bullying						
1	Someone withholding information which affects your performance.	1	2	3	4	5
2	Being ordered to do work below your level of competence	1	2	3	4	5
3	Having your opinions ignored	1	2	3	4	5
4	Being given tasks with unreasonable deadlines	1	2	3	4	5
5	Excessive monitoring of your work	1	2	3	4	5
6	Pressure not to claim something to which by right you are entitled (e.g. sick leave, holiday entitlement, travel expenses)	1	2	3	4	5
7	Being exposed to an unmanageable workload	1	2	3	4	5
Person-related						
8	Being humiliated or ridiculed in connection with your work	1	2	3	4	5
9	Having key areas of responsibility removed or replaced with more trivial or unpleasant tasks	1	2	3	4	5
10	Spreading of gossip and rumors about you	1	2	3	4	5
11	Being ignored or excluded	1	2	3	4	5
12	Being the subject of excessive teasing and sarcasm	1	2	3	4	5
13	Having allegations made against you	1	2	3	4	5
14	Having insulting or offensive remarks made about your person, attitudes or your private life	1	2	3	4	5
15	Repeated reminders of your errors or mistakes	1	2	3	4	5
16	Practical jokes carried out by people you don't get along with	1	2	3	4	5
17	Being ignored or facing a hostile reaction when you approach	1	2	3	4	5
18	Persistent criticism of your errors or mistakes	1	2	3	4	5
19	Hints or signals from others that you should quit your job	1	2	3	4	5
Physically intimidating						
20	Intimidating behaviors such as finger-pointing, invasion of personal space, shoving, blocking	1	2	3	4	5
21	Threats of violence or physical abuse or actual abuse	1	2	3	4	5
22	Being shouted at or being the target of spontaneous anger	1	2	3	4	5

APPENDIX 2: FULL COPE INVENTORY

Instructions: The following questions ask about how you typically responded to workplace harassment that you may have experienced within the **past six months**.
Please indicate how frequently you used each coping strategy in response to those experiences.

Choose the right option-
Scale:
1 = I didn't do this at all
2 = I did this a little bit
3 = I did this a medium amount
4 = I did this a lot

1	I try to grow as a person as a result of the experience.	1	2	3	4
2	I turn to work or other substitute activities to take my mind off things.	1	2	3	4
3	I get upset and let my emotions out.	1	2	3	4
4	I try to get advice from someone about what to do.	1	2	3	4
5	I concentrate my efforts on doing something about it.	1	2	3	4
6	I say to myself "this isn't real."	1	2	3	4
7	I put my trust in God.	1	2	3	4
8	I laugh about the situation.	1	2	3	4
9	I admit to myself that I can't deal with it and quit trying.	1	2	3	4
10	I restrain myself from doing anything too quickly.	1	2	3	4
11	I discuss my feelings with someone.	1	2	3	4
12	I use alcohol or drugs to make myself feel better.	1	2	3	4
13	I get used to the idea that it happened.	1	2	3	4
14	I talk to someone to find out more about the situation.	1	2	3	4
15	I keep myself from getting distracted by other thoughts or activities.	1	2	3	4
16	I daydream about things other than this.	1	2	3	4
17	I get upset and am really aware of it.	1	2	3	4
18	I seek God's help.	1	2	3	4
19	I make a plan of action.	1	2	3	4
20	I make jokes about it.	1	2	3	4
21	I accept that this has happened and that it can't be changed.	1	2	3	4
22	I hold off doing anything about it until the situation permits.	1	2	3	4
23	I try to get emotional support from friends or relatives.	1	2	3	4
24	I just give up trying to reach my goal.	1	2	3	4
25	I take additional action to try to get rid of the problem.	1	2	3	4
26	I try to lose myself for a while by drinking alcohol or taking drugs.	1	2	3	4
27	I refuse to believe that it has happened.	1	2	3	4
28	I let my feelings out.	1	2	3	4
29	I try to see it in a different light, to make it seem more positive.	1	2	3	4
30	I talk to someone who could do something concrete about the problem.	1	2	3	4
31	I sleep more than usual.	1	2	3	4
32	I try to come up with a strategy about what to do.	1	2	3	4

33	I focus on dealing with this problem, and if necessary let other things slide a little.	1	2	3	4
34	I get sympathy and understanding from someone.	1	2	3	4
353	I drink alcohol or take drugs, in order to think about it less.	1	2	3	4
6	I kid around about it.	1	2	3	4
37	I give up the attempt to get what I want.	1	2	3	4
38	I look for something good in what is happening.	1	2	3	4
39	I think about how I might best handle the problem.	1	2	3	4
40	I pretend that it hasn't really happened.	1	2	3	4
41	I make sure not to make matters worse by acting too soon.	1	2	3	4
42	I try hard to prevent other things from interfering with my efforts at dealing with this.	1	2	3	4
43	I go to movies or watch TV, to think about it less.	1	2	3	4
44	I accept the reality of the fact that it happened.	1	2	3	4
45	I ask people who have had similar experiences what they did.	1	2	3	4
46	I feel a lot of emotional distress and I find myself expressing those feelings a lot.	1	2	3	4
47	I take direct action to get around the problem.	1	2	3	4
48	I try to find comfort in my religion.	1	2	3	4
49	I force myself to wait for the right time to do something.	1	2	3	4
50	I make fun of the situation.	1	2	3	4
51	I reduce the amount of effort I'm putting into solving the problem.	1	2	3	4
52	I talk to someone about how I feel.	1	2	3	4
53	I use alcohol or drugs to help me get through it.	1	2	3	4
54	I learn to live with it.	1	2	3	4
55	I put aside other activities in order to concentrate on this.	1	2	3	4
56	I think hard about what steps to take.	1	2	3	4
57	I act as though it hasn't even happened.	1	2	3	4
58	I do what has to be done, one step at a time.	1	2	3	4
59	I learn something from the experience.	1	2	3	4
60	I pray more than usual.	1	2	3	4

APPENDIX 3: JOB SATISFACTION SCALE

Overall, how satisfied are you with your current job?

Scale:

1 = Extremely dissatisfied
2 = Somewhat dissatisfied
3 = Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
4= Somewhat satisfied
5 = Extremely satisfied

APPENDIX 4: Post-Hoc Analysis Tables

Table 7
Age/Work Experience and Coping Strategies

Table 7 reports correlations between age, years of work experience, and coping styles. Overall-sample correlations are Pearson correlations as provided in the SPSS output; gender-specific correlations are Spearman's rho as provided in the SPSS output.

Group	Predictor	Coping outcome	r/ρ	p	N
All	Age	Avoidance coping	-0.169	.003	306
All	Age	Emotional coping	0.066	.249	306
All	Age	Rational coping	0.066	.249	306
All	Age	Years of work experience	0.425	< .001	306
All	Years of work experience	Avoidance coping	-0.112	.050	306
All	Years of work experience	Emotional coping	0.088	.124	306
All	Years of work experience	Rational coping	0.088	.124	306
Women	Age	Avoidance coping	-0.094	.245	153
Women	Age	Emotional coping	0.029	.724	153
Women	Age	Rational coping	0.119	.144	153
Women	Years of work experience	Avoidance coping	-0.079	.330	153
Women	Years of work experience	Emotional coping	-0.046	.576	153
Women	Years of work experience	Rational coping	0.025	.756	153
Men	Age	Avoidance coping	-0.253	.002	149

Men	Age	Emotional coping	-0.050	.548	149
Men	Age	Rational coping	0.041	.622	149
Men	Years of work experience	Avoidance coping	-0.115	.161	149
Men	Years of work experience	Emotional coping	-0.022	.793	149
Men	Years of work experience	Rational coping	0.143	.082	149

Note. Overall-sample correlations are Pearson's r. Gender-specific correlations are Spearman's ρ. Two-tailed tests.

Table 8
Coping Strategies Across Job Levels

One-way ANOVA results for differences in coping strategies across job levels (by gender).

Group	Coping outcome	N	df	F	p	(η^2)
Women	Avoidance Coping	153	(7, 145)	2.597	.015	.111
Women	Emotional Coping	153	(7, 145)	1.509	.169	.068
Women	Rational Coping	153	(7, 145)	0.827	.567	.038
Men	Avoidance Coping	148	(7, 140)	0.432	.881	.021
Men	Emotional Coping	148	(7, 140)	1.657	.124	.077
Men	Rational Coping	148	(7, 140)	1.717	.110	.079

Note. η^2 = eta squared effect size. Men's analyses exclude the single "Prefer not to say" job-level response.

Table 9
Coping Strategies & Workplace Gender Composition

One-way ANOVA results for differences in coping strategies across workplace gender composition (full sample).

Coping outcome	N	df	F	p	(η^2)
Avoidance Coping	306	(5, 300)	0.691	.630	.011
Emotional Coping	306	(5, 300)	0.553	.736	.009
Rational Coping	306	(5, 300)	0.810	.543	.013

Note. η^2 = eta squared effect size. Gender composition categories include: all men, mostly men, even mix, mostly women, all women, and not sure.