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## Workplace Harassment: A case of the University of Balochistan

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## Abstract

The impact of harassment on female students' empowerment, academic performance, and general well-being is the main emphasis of this study, which looks at the difficulties experienced by these students at the University of Balochistan. The study draws attention to the social and cultural constraints that worsen gender inequality and make it dangerous for women to pursue higher education. Seventy female BS students from different departments participated in the study, which found that many of them encounter physical, verbal, and sexual harassment both on and off campus. The results show that harassment has a negative impact on students' mental health in addition to impeding their academic performance and making some of them think about dropping out. The study emphasizes how important it is to have strong reporting procedures, supportive networks, and a focus on female role models in order to create a more secure and welcoming learning environment. The University of Balochistan can greatly enhance the educational experience and results for its female students by tackling these problems, which would also help the region's economy and society as a whole.

**Keywords:** Harassment , Female Empowerment and Academic Performance, Gender Inequality in Education, Mental Health and Student Well-being, University Safety and Reporting Procedures.

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## **Introduction and Background**

Women in Balochistan are significantly deprived of their participation and assuming a leadership role in the society, particularly owing to cultural barriers, deep-rooted gender disparities, illiteracy and social backwardness. However, societal attitudes are gradually evolving over time, recognizing the dire need of education, and learning for female students to enhance their standard of life, albeit in a smaller degree. To top it off, harassment is another stumbling block that acts as major problem female students face in a multitude of ways in pursuing their academic activities. Therefore, empowering women is essential for the advancement of society, especially in educational environments. The obstacles that female university students must overcome might impede both their personal and academic growth.

Given the strict societal norms of different communities residing in Balochistan, females are more susceptible to be barred from joining universities to pursue their higher education, especially a university that includes co-education system in which boys and girls study together. Likewise, a number of harassment challenges exist in Balochistan University creating inauspicious environment for female students to continue their studies conveniently and with feasibility. This research aims to study the challenges faced by the female students at the university of Balochistan and explore how to overcome these challenges by collecting primary data through semi-structured questionnaire.

## **Statement of Problem**

Women comprise 48.3% population of Balochistan (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics 2023), nearly half of the total population. Equipping this whopping number of women with new skills acquired through education and other means has the potential to empower them to a huge extent, and increasingly contribute to the economy by providing their services within the country and potentially abroad. Some female students are already engaged in such activities and are authorized to support themselves and their families. Being independent and empowered, they are less susceptible to domestic violence, social pressure and less dependent on male relatives for basic necessities. Therefore, women empowerment is highly imperative for fostering a societal improvement, growth of the economy and ensuring the social and natural rights of women.

Higher education plays a key role in improving the life conditions of the female of population. It enables female students to take leadership roles in economy and society at large and serves as a social equalizer. However, universities are also the sites where female students face many challenges ranging from subtle micro-aggressions to overt harassment and sexual violence. With this aim, the study tries to highlight the impediments and challenges faced by the female students at the University of Balochistan in Quetta, Pakistan.

University of Balochsitan is the largest and the oldest higher education institution in the Pakistan's conflict prone province of Balochistan. It was established in 1970 soon after the region gained a provincial status. Until recently, the university was the only

higher education institution in the province that provided comprehensive education in the fields of physical, biological and social sciences and also offered programs in arts and humanities. Due to its significance in imparting higher education institution in Balochistan, and the key role it plays in women empowerment, it is imperative to explore challenges and impediments faced by the female students of the campus. The following section will provide an overview of knowledge thus far created which focuses on the issue of campus harassment in the higher education context of Pakistan, specifically Balochistan.

### **Literature Review**

There have been many studies exploring the topic of harassment in educational institutions. A thorough investigation on gender-based harassment at Balochistan University was carried out by Ali and Khan (2019), who found that a sizable portion of female students encounter various types of harassment. Their findings highlight the psychological anguish and anxiety that harassment causes, which significantly restricts students' capacity to fully engage in extracurricular and academic activities.

In another study, Haider and Ahmed (2020) investigated the attitudes and experiences of female students with relation to harassment at university campuses. Their research revealed that the fear of harassment frequently inhibits academic performance and discourages participation in campus events, which in turn stifles progress on both a personal and professional level. A significant obstacle to empowerment is created by this atmosphere of uncertainty and dread.

Bashir and Fatima (2018) investigated the viewpoints of female students and staff members with regard to sexual harassment. They found that harassment is so commonplace in both public and private sector universities in Pakistan that it creates a hostile learning atmosphere where female students frequently feel alone and ostracized. The obstacles these students encounter in their academic endeavors are made worse by the absence of institutional assistance.

Harassment also adversely affects students learning outcomes. The study conducted by Jamil and Yasmeen (2017) centered on the effects of harassment on female students' academic performance. According to their findings, harassment raises the dropout rate and has an impact on academic achievement. Harassment can cause tension and worry in students, which can hinder their focus and motivation and eventually hinder their academic progress.

Additionally, studies have also found a positive correlation between harassment and students' dropout. The relationship between harassment and female student dropout rates was investigated at Balochistan University by Khan and Yousaf (2022). They discovered a clear link between higher dropout rates and the frequency of harassment. Harassment creates a hostile environment that frequently leads students to discontinue their studies early, which limits their opportunities for further education and employment.

In another study, harassment was highlighted by Amin and Jamal (2019) as a major obstacle to female empowerment. Their study demonstrates how harassment weakens female students' sense of self-efficacy and confidence, two essential elements of empowerment. These fundamental qualities are undermined by the ongoing fear of harassment, which makes it harder for women to speak up in formal and academic contexts.

In a more theoretically informed study, Sultana and Naeem (2018) investigated how patriarchy contributes to harassment. They contended that the normalization of harassment is facilitated by deeply rooted patriarchal norms and attitudes. Because of this cultural context, harassment of female students is not only tolerated but often encouraged, making it a systemic problem that calls for extensive institutional and cultural reform.

Highlighting the importance of the knowledge of legal framework in women empowerment, Ahmed and Gul (2021) investigated female students' level of legal knowledge and its correlation with the instances of harassment. They discovered that the issue is made worse by a lack of knowledge about one's legal rights and accessible protections. Due to a lack of knowledge about reporting procedures or mistrust of the efficacy of existing systems, many students fail to report harassment, which results in a dearth of responsibility for those who engage in it.

On the psychological dimension, the effect of harassment on female students' goals and sense of self-efficacy was investigated by Zubair and Malik (2017). According to their findings, harassment dramatically reduces female students' self-esteem and goals. Their capacity to effectively pursue further education and professional ambitions is further hampered by this fall in desire and self-efficacy.

Rahim and Rasheed (2023) offered information on tactics for preventing harassment. They stressed the significance of changing policies, implementing awareness campaigns, and putting in place efficient reporting systems in order to provide a secure and encouraging learning environment. According to their research, thorough preventive measures can greatly lower the frequency of harassment and encourage a more welcoming and empowering learning environment for female students.

Even though earlier research studies have addressed the issues regarding the female harassment and workplace empowerment in the higher education campuses in context of Pakistan and Balochistan more specifically, more studies are warranted particularly due to the university's adoption of semester system in recent years, which have radically transformed the relationship among students, university administration, and faculty members. The restructuring of relationship in wake of the adoption of semester system empowered the teachers and administrators in new ways as it bestowed powers to assess, evaluate, and supervise students, in addition to granting admissions and enforcing attendance rules. In this altered situation, significant knowledge

gap regarding the precise mechanisms through which various forms of harassment obstruct female BS students' attempts to further their education.

In order to close this gap, the data in my study looks at how harassment affects people not just emotionally and academically but also in ways that are detrimental to the process of empowerment in general including self-efficiency, leadership development, and career ambitions. This study will examine the long-term effects on the trajectories of female students' empowerment, in contrast to other research (Jamil & Yasmeen, 2017; Khan & Yousaf, 2022) that concentrated mainly on the incidence and immediate repercussions of harassment. In addition, it will take into consideration the methods in which patriarchy (Sultana & Naeem, 2018), legal knowledge (Ahmed & Gul, 2021), and preventative methods (Rahim & Rasheed, 2023) intersect, offering a comprehensive perspective that takes institutional and cultural dynamics into account. This study will examine in a novel way the ways in which different types of harassment serve as significant obstacles to the educational success and self-determination of female students, providing fresh perspectives on how to overcome these difficulties.

### **Research question and objectives**

The study is guided by the question that seeks to understand that how different types of harassment act as a leading obstacle for BS female students in pursuing their education at Balochistan University?

1. The study will enable the university administrators and policy making bodies to better understand the multifaceted phenomenon harassment, particularly after the implementation of semesters system of evaluations and organization of academic activities.
2. The study can be foundational in framing new policies that are aligned with the new set of challenges and reform the existing policies.
3. The study also aims to sensitize the students and larger public about the issues permeating the institutions of higher learning that are creating hurdles in achieving learning outcomes and hence creating social inequalities on grounds of gender.
4. To evaluate how well the University respond to these challenges and how supportive it is to curb these harassment issues.

### **Research Methodology**

This study was conducted in university of Balochistan Quetta. The research participants were the female students of BS program from different departments of the university. The data was collected using semi-structured questionnaire. The instrument was pre-tested, complying with the research ethics an informed verbal consent was obtained from the participants before participation in the research. A sample size of 70 respondents was selected through non-probability convenient method. The data were collected anonymously with all personal identifiers removed from the data. and was analyzed by simple frequency distribution tables and graphs.

## Key Findings and Data Analysis

An overview of the student population examined is given by the demographic data. The age distribution shows that the bulk of students (55 percent) are between the ages of 20 and 22, i.e., 30 percent between 22 and 24, and 15 percent between 18 and 20 age group. According to seniority, majority of the students, i.e., 70 percent are in their fourth year of study, followed by 19 percent in their third, 9 percent in their second, and a far lower percentage (3 percent) in their first year of academic calendar. This implies that a sizable portion of the sample's pupils are seniors, providing an enhanced overview of vast female experiences. The wide range of study is diverse, which include DPT, Pharmacy, Social Sciences, Science, and the Arts. Students live in a variety of residential settings, including off-campus homes, family homes, and the university hostel.

## Experience of Campus Harassment

The data shows various forms of harassment, manifesting in verbal, physical and online forms, rampant in the university campus. Classes, libraries, cafeterias, labs, and dorms are among the main places where students feel the least safe, despite the fact that these spaces are vital for fostering both intellectual and personal development. Harassment in these areas ruins the learning environment and may discourage female students from participating fully in campus life.

Analyzing the dominant forms of harassment, verbal harassment emerges as the most common form, which is rampant in all spaces of the university. More than fifty percent (51.7%) of the female students reported to have faced verbal harassment. However, among the more egregious forms of harassment, 3.4 percent reported attempts of sexual harassment, while none of the students noted cyberbullying, including online stalking.

Exploring the sites where harassment is the most common occurrence, classrooms emerge as the most common places. Around 62 percent of the female students noted to have faced verbal harassment inside their classrooms. This includes harassment from both fellow students and teachers. After the classrooms, libraries were found to be another key site of harassment. Around 24.1 percent students reported instances of harassment inside the central and departmental libraries. This is followed by canteens (20.7 %), hostels (10.3%) and laboratories (3.4%), respectively.

**Table 1**

*Overall campus environment of the campus*

Very Safe	Safe	Neutral	Unsafe	Very Unsafe
10.3%	24.1%	44.8%	4%	2%

When asked about overall feeling of safety and security inside the campus, the data reveals a mixed set of responses. Around 10 percent of the female students reported campus environment to be 'very safe'. This was followed by 24.1 percent

reporting campus as 'safe'. However, the majority of participants noted their response as 'neutral' or preferred not to answer the question (around 45 percent). Only a handful of the responses noted the campus environment to be 'unsafe' and 'very unsafe' (see table I).

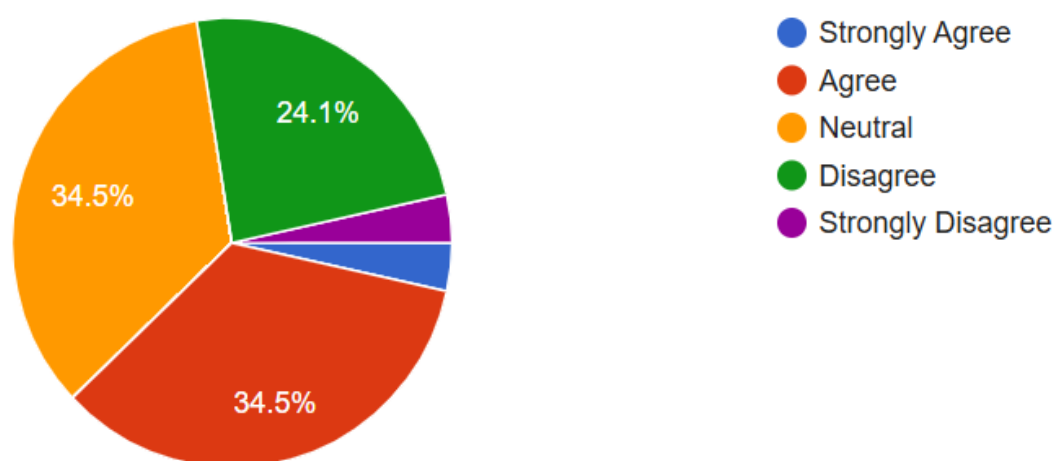
## **Social Environment and Gender-Based Challenges:**

### **i. Supportive Social Environment**

When asked about the campus environment as supportive of female safety and security, the varying opinions on how supportive the social environment is point to a variable experience for the students. Different departments and student clubs may have differing levels of gender sensitivity and inclusivity, which could explain why some students feel the environment is supportive while others do not.

**Graph 1**

*Participants responses regarding how supportive the social environment at the University is:*



### **ii. Gender-Related Social Pressure**

Gender-based social pressure varies greatly in frequency; some students encounter it frequently. Students may feel discouraged from participating in extracurricular or academic activities as a result of this social pressure, which can negatively impact their self-esteem and overall university experience. Furthermore, when asked about the instances of reporting harassment to the university administration and relevant bodies dealing with such issues, less than three percent of respondents approached these bodies, while staggering 93.1 percent ignored the issue.



### **iii. Academic Assistance with Social Issues**

Divergent opinions exist regarding university support for social challenges. While some students report feeling supported, there appears to be a disparity in the university's handling of gender-based concerns. To address these issues and promote an inclusive atmosphere, strong support networks are essential.

#### **Academic and Discrimination Issues:**

##### **i. Equal Academic Opportunities**

While the majority of students think they have equal access to academic opportunities, a significant minority don't. This shows that there may be obstacles preventing some female students from having equal access to chances and resources in the classroom as their male counterparts.

##### **ii. Discrimination Against Women by Teachers or Staff**

Reports of teacher or staff discrimination based on gender have brought attention to a serious problem that has the potential to negatively impact the learning environment. Discrimination of this kind has the potential to harm students' academic performance as well as their faith in the school.

#### **Issues with Discrimination and Academics:**

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##### **iii. Having access to female role models or mentors**

One major worry is the lack of female role models or mentors in departments. The absence of female mentors can impede the career and personal development of female students. Mentorship is essential for both personal and professional development.

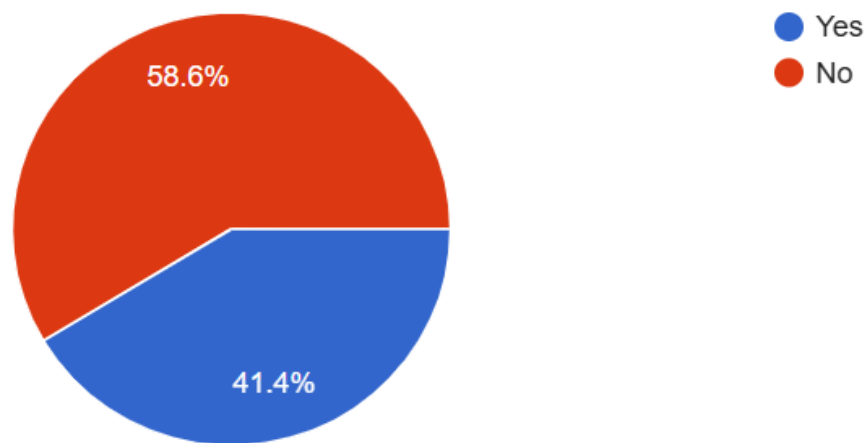
#### **The Effects of External Harassment on University:**

##### **i. Life Harassment Off Campus**

Students' university lives are greatly impacted by external harassment, which includes both verbal and physical abuse. The difficulties faced by female students are made worse by the combination of internal and external harassment.

**Graph 2**

*Participants responses regarding having experienced harassment outside the campus affecting their university life:*



## **ii. Awareness and Disclosure of Harassment**

Diverse degrees of knowledge regarding reporting protocols and assistance programs underscore the necessity for enhanced dialogue and instruction on accessible resources. Because they are unhappy with the reactions they received in the past, many students choose not to report occurrences, which emphasizes the need for more efficient and transparent procedures.

## **iii. Contentment with the Answer and the Measures Employed**

The varying opinions of the university's handling of harassment cases suggest that the existing policies might not be enough or might not be implemented uniformly. Trust-building and student safety are reliant on efficient reporting systems and prompt responses.

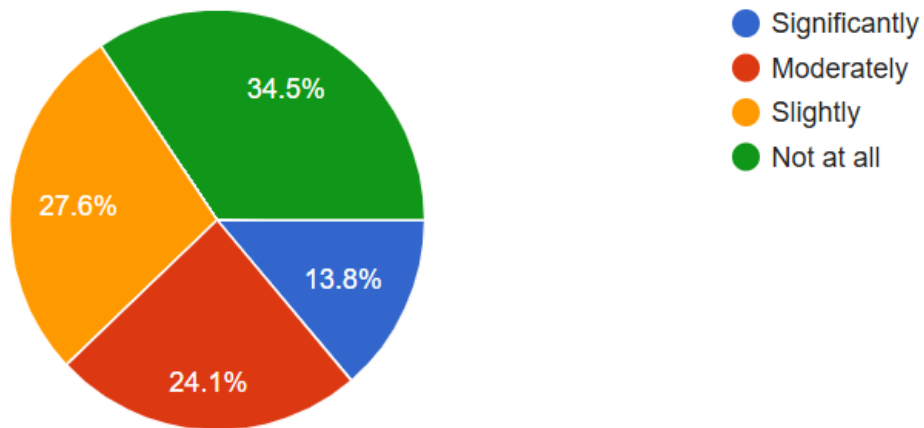
### **Effects of Mistreatment:**

#### **i. Academic Achievement**

Academic performance is significantly impacted by harassment, which impairs students' capacity to focus, engage in class, and achieve academic success. On their educational and professional paths, this effect may have long-term effects.

**Graph 3**

*How harassment impacted participants' academic performance?*

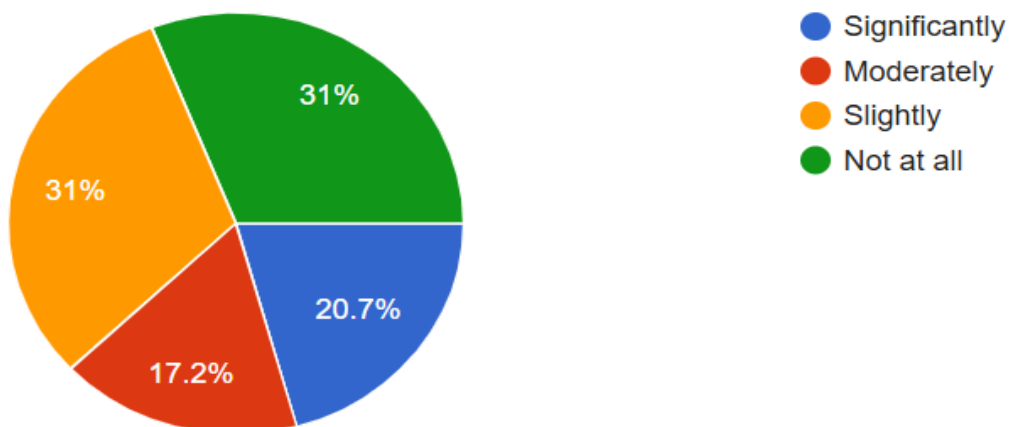


## **ii. Mental Well-Being**

It is concerning because students have reported a considerable detrimental influence on mental health. Academic performance and personal growth depend heavily on mental health, and harassment jeopardizes this by causing stress, anxiety, and other mental health problems.

**Graph 4**

*How has harassment affected participants' mental health*

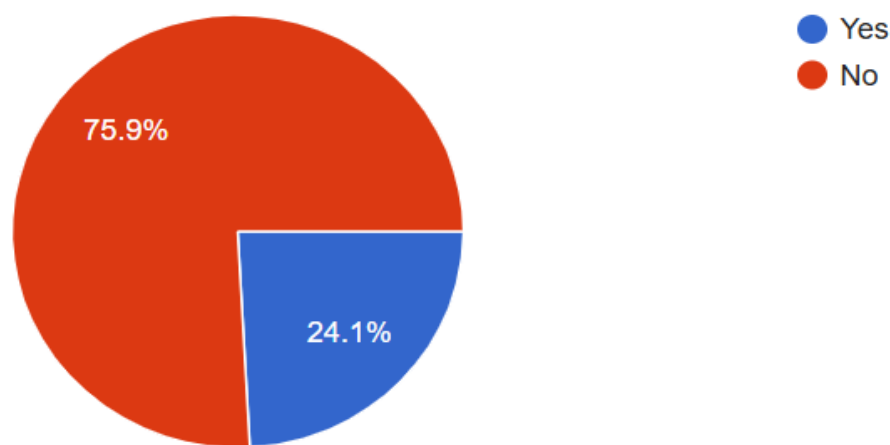


### i. Thinking About Leaving College Because of Harassment

The seriousness of the problem is demonstrated by the fact that some students have thought about dropping out of university as a result of harassment. This emphasizes how urgently efficient actions are needed to guarantee a secure and encouraging learning environment.

**Graph 5**

*Participants who have and have not considered leaving university due to harassment (of any type):*



### Mobility and Safety Modes of Mobility

Students travel in a variety of ways, such as by walking, public transportation, private transportation, and the campus shuttle. To protect students' safety, each mode has unique safety issues that call for customized solutions.

#### i. Security While Traveling

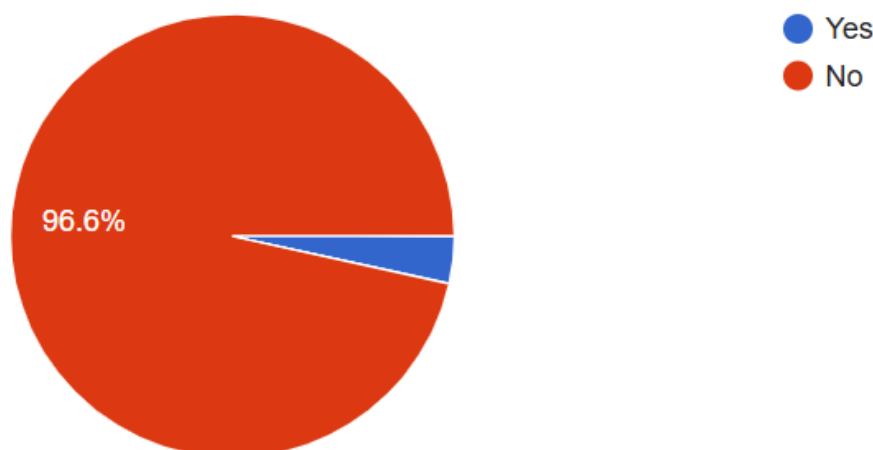
Students usually travel to university in the university provided busses and go on field works from the department for an area of study. The conflicting perceptions of safety during commutes are a reflection of the various hazards connected to various forms of transportation. Ensuring safe transportation alternatives is critical to the general health and academic success of kids.

#### ii. Harassment During Commute

The safety issues for female students are compounded by instances of harassment occurring during the commute. Collaboration between local authorities and university management is necessary to address these concerns.

**Graph 6**

*Participants having experienced any form of harassment during their commute to the University*



### **University Housing Safety: Living in Housing Offered by the University (Hostels)**

A portion of the student body lives in housing supplied by the university, which ought to be a secure environment. Different opinions about how safe hostels are, though, suggest that this isn't always the case.

#### **i. Hostel security**

Hostel safety is perceived as being anything from "Very Safe" to "Very Unsafe," indicating inconsistent management and security protocols. For students to be safe, their living conditions must be consistently safe.

#### **ii. Harassment at Hostels**

Since hostels are supposed to be secure places for people to relax and study, reports of harassment there are especially worrisome. Sustaining a helpful residential environment requires addressing these problems.

### **Summary of Key Issues:**

#### **i. Perception of Safety**

Overall, students have mixed feelings about safety both on and off-campus. This highlights the need for comprehensive safety measures and a supportive university environment.

#### **ii. Experience of Harassment**

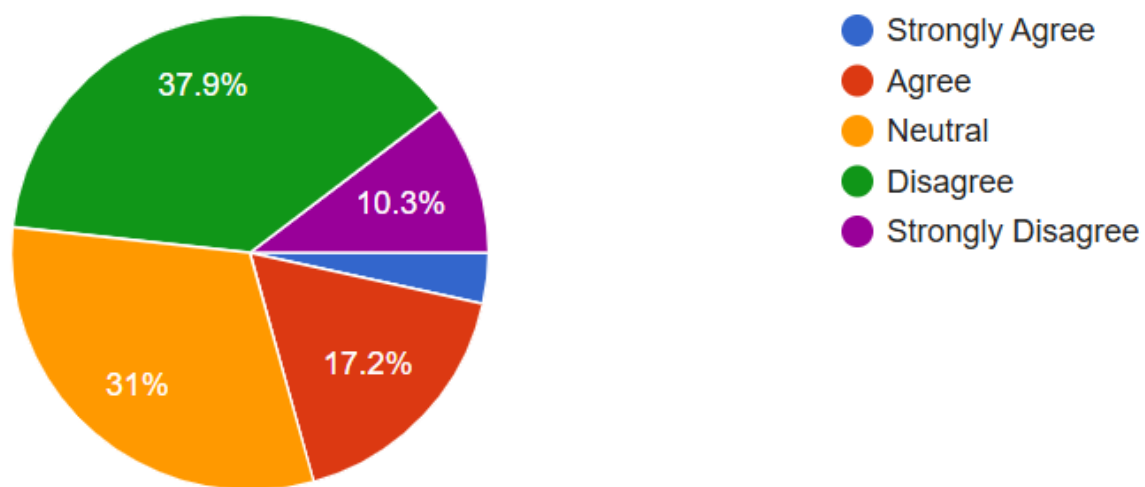
Harassment in various forms is prevalent, both on-campus and off-campus, necessitating a multi-faceted approach to address and mitigate these challenges.

### iii. Support Systems

There is a clear need for improved support systems and reporting mechanisms to address the challenges faced by female students effectively. This includes better communication, training, and responsive actions.

**Graph 7**

*Participants responses regarding adequate support from the university to address social challenges faced by female students:*



### iv. Impact on Students

Harassment significantly affects academic performance, mental health, and students' decisions to continue their education. Addressing these issues is critical for fostering an empowering educational environment for female students.

### Conclusion

This study was based on the primary data to investigate the challenges faced by the female students enrolled in the university of Balochistan. The key findings of the study present the prevalence of female harassment in the institute, with mostly attributing it a major hindrance in pursuing their academic activities, and some leading to a consideration of leaving the university. This has caused several psychological issues in the participants who are prone to harassment. A significant portion of the participants shows that the support system in this regard has not been supportive. Concerning harassment and societal pressures based on gender, female students feel vulnerable in the face of multitude of harassment challenges at campus. Inconsistent social support and discrimination based on gender further impede students' academic and personal growth, and the widespread harassment in key campus places compromises the learning environment and deters female involvement. Nevertheless, there are encouraging opportunities for progress in spite of these difficulties. Campus environments may be

made more secure and encouraging by putting in place efficient reporting systems, improving support networks, and putting in place extensive safety measures. In addition, female students may be empowered and equitable academic opportunities can be ensured by supporting female role models and mentors, as well as gender sensitivity and inclusion across all departments and student groups. The University of Balochistan can greatly enhance the learning environment and results for each and every one of its students by tackling these problems comprehensively, opening the door for a more diverse and equal academic community.

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