

Ethical work environment and employee wellbeing with a mediating role of anti-sexual harassment cell - Evidence based on college campuses.

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Abstract

Purpose - It is very crucial that an anti-sexual harassment cell's role in every institution. Both teachers and non-teaching staffs are facing sexual harassments from their work environments in different ways. Here comes the importance of an anti-sexual harassment cell through which awareness can be created among the staffs and intervention of the cell in such problems may lead to smooth working and increases the reputation of the institution.

Design / Methodology Approach – The data for the study was collected through tested questionnaire from the staffs of colleges of Thiruvananthapuram (South), Ernakulam (West), Thrissur (Central), and Palakkad (East) via google form. A total number of 620 questionnaires were distributed. Out of which 580 responses were received and from 580, 75 were rejected due to lack of proper data. The questionnaire uses five-point Likert scale response format.

Findings – This study establishes a positive correlation between variables Ethical Work Environment (EWE) and Employee Well-being (EW), Ethical Work Environment (EWE) and Anti-sexual Harassment Cell and Ethical Work Environment (EWE), Anti-sexual Harassment Cell (ASHC), and Employee Well-being (EW). The research analysis validates dependency of employee well-being on ethical work environment and anti-sexual harassment cell. On testing the hypothesis, the dependent variable employee well-being is predicted by the independent variable ethical work environment and also with the mediating variable anti-sexual harassment cell.

Originality/Value - This study provides insightful findings in understanding ethical work environment and employee well-being with the mediating effect of anti-sexual harassment cell among staffs of colleges of Thiruvananthapuram (South), Ernakulam (West), Thrissur (Central), and Palakkad (East).

Keywords - Ethical Work Environment (EWE), Employee Well-being (EW), Anti-sexual Harassment Cell (ASHC)

Introduction

Ethical work environment (EWE) or workplace ethics plays an important role in an organization in framing rules and regulations, standards and in the process of making decisions. Sexual harassment is a widespread and harmful form of violence in workplace that impacts people in different areas, such as workplaces, educational settings, and social environments (**Mensah et al., 2024**). There arises the role of a cell in preventing sexual harassments. Although the awareness among the employees regardless of sexual harassments have increased, still sexual harassment continues to be a big problem in work environments. Sexual harassment may lead to absenteeism, burnout, low work performance and work satisfaction (**Boyd, 2011**). Sexual harassment not only affects the physical health but also the mental health of an individual. On college campuses, faculty and staff face unique challenges, including issues related to harassment and discrimination, which can have detrimental effects on their mental and emotional health. Sexual harassment remains a pervasive issue in higher education, creating hostile environments that negatively impact employee well-being (**Bhattacharya, 2023**). Institutions of higher learning have recognized the importance of implementing. The presence of an active ASHC is not just about legal compliance but also about nurturing an ethical work environment that contributes to the well-being of employees. Research has shown that when institutions implement effective anti-sexual harassment policies, employees feel safer, more supported, and valued, which leads to higher levels of job satisfaction, reduced stress, and improved overall mental health (**Kumar & Rao, 2021**).

Review of Literature

Ethical Work Environment (EWE) and Employee Well-being (EW)

Ethics was derived from the Greek word ethos which means habit, morals, customs, values and beliefs. **Merriam Webster (2025)** defines the meaning of work ethics as “a set of values centred on the importance of doing work and reflected especially in a desire or determination to work hard.” Ethical work environment (EWE) or workplace ethics are the ethical standards, values and moral principles that an organization should follow to continue in the tight competition of globalization era. A good ethical work environment results in employees’ quality in work and better goal-oriented results. Organizations can build trust among the parties, whether it may be employees, customers or the general public by treating them with all respects and honesty

(Rumage, 2024). Organisations have to create good and positive impacts within and outside organisations (Adiguzel et al., 2021). Ethical work environment helps to reduce absenteeism and burnout and also to retain the employees in the organization with satisfaction (Schminke et al., 2007). If an organization is aligned with ethical standards, automatically it will be under the legal rules and regulation made by the government and thereby helps to increase the public reputation and can gain competitive advantage.

There is a drastic change have occurred in the organisational field (technically, economically or socio- culturally). Many employees lost their job as part of organisation's cost control and existing employees' responsibilities and workload has been doubled (Sapra et al., 2023). This may lead to the thought of employee well-being. Employees are the most valuable and inevitable assets of a company. They play a vital role in contributing profits and enhancing the reputation of the organization. They utilise their skills and knowledge to attain the goal of the organization. Employees work for the satisfaction of their customers. Employee wellbeing is not only related to physical health, but also mental, emotional and financial conditions. Even though there is stress in all types of work, over stress may affect the working of employees. If the stress continues for a long period of time, that may lead to create problems in the working of an employee, reduces the productivity and enhances absenteeism and burnout (Maslach et al., 2001), which may affect the reputation of the organization. WHO (2002) states that employee wellbeing enhances satisfaction in job of an employee and thereby increases the productivity and profitability of the organisation and can achieve competitive advantage and good position in the market.

According to the study conducted among 194 employees in a Chinese Construction company by Cheng et al. (2022), the results shows that employee well-being is positively influenced by ethical leadership. The findings of the study also shows that a good ethical environment enhances employee wellbeing. Bocean et al. (2022) states that employees are performing double role in an organisation, as internal stakeholder and acts as an integral part of external stakeholder. He collected data from 423 employees of Romanian organizations, and thereby reached the conclusion that ethics in organizations improves the well-being of employees. As per the data collected from 398 faculties of 20 public universities in Pakistan, employees can manage and control their emotions accordingly with the ethical behaviour of leaders and it improves the wellbeing of employees (Saleem et al., 2024). The study conducted by Khan et al. (2022) according to the data collected from 609 employees of upper and middle-level, who are in the project of China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). It can be seen from the study that ethical leadership and ethical work environment increases the quality in work-life, personal growth and well-being. Giacalone & Promislo (2013) in their handbook, states that workplace ethics helps to reduce the stress related to the work of employees and positively influences on employee well-being. From the data collected from 222 employees from various organizations in Portugal, it can be seen that the ethical circumstances within the organization positively enhances the well-being of employees (Paralta et al., 2023). In accordance with the study conducted among 398

academics of Pakistan Public Sector Universities by **Saleem et al. (2022)**, employees' feeling of resentment or bitterness towards the job will be reduced by the ethical actions of leaders which in turn enhances employee well-being. Grounded on these literatures, we hypothesize,

H1: EWE significantly influences on EW

Anti-Sexual Harassment Cell (ASHC) and Employee Well-being (DV)

The relationship between Anti-Sexual Harassment Cells (ASHCs) and employee well-being has gained significant attention in recent years. Sexual harassment in the workplace is a threat to both employees and organizations. Anti-sexual harassment cell will reduce the harassment at workplace. Existing studies discuss the prevention and management strategies of workplace sexual harassment in terms of employee responses. Workplace sexual harassment has the potential to threaten an organization's reputation as it gives people a reason to hold the organization in low regard. Stakeholders will become aware of a workplace sexual harassment incident through news coverage (**Liao et al., 2023**) Employee well-being encompasses various dimensions, including physical, mental, and emotional health. The well-being of employees is directly linked to their overall job satisfaction, productivity, and organizational commitment (**Chopra & Pandey, 2021**). Harassment in the workplace has long been associated with a negative impact on employee well-being, often resulting in anxiety, depression, and burnout (**Bedi & Malik, 2019**). Anti-Sexual Harassment Cells are organizational bodies created to deal with cases of sexual harassment, probe complaints, and provide support for the victims. The establishment of such cells is often a direct response to legal requirements such as the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prohibition, Prevention, and Redressal) Act, 2013 in India, which mandates the creation of internal complaints committees in every organization (**Singh, 2020**). The primary purpose of ASHCs is to offer a formal mechanism for employees to report incidents of harassment, ensuring confidentiality, protection from retaliation, and timely redress. Studies indicate that the presence of effective ASHCs contributes to a more inclusive and ethical organizational culture (**Gupta & Rao, 2022**) The literature suggests that ASHCs play a critical mediating role in validating employee well-being. According to the establishment of an ASHC leads to a decrease in workplace harassment incidents, creating a healthier work environment. This reduction in harassment directly influences the overall psychological well-being of employees, making them feel more valued and safer in their workplace (**Sharma 2020**) The implementation of anti-sexual harassment policies and the functioning of ASHCs can notably shape organizational culture. When ASHCs are active and visible, they signal an institution's commitment to fairness, respect, and gender equality (**Singh & Mishra, 2019**). In a study on corporate work places found that organizations with a proactive approach to preventing sexual harassment had better employee retention rates and greater employee gratification, with reduced incidents of psychological distress among staff (**Singh 2018**)

H2: ASHC significantly influences on EW

Anti-Sexual Harassment Cell (ASHC) Mediates Ethical Work Environment (EWE) and Employee Well-being (EW)

Now a days management focus on ethical work environment, adopting anti-sexual harassment policies and promoting employee well-being are critical components of modern management. For a holistic workplace culture, employee satisfaction is a critical element. (Mitonga-Monga et al., 2016), according to research Ethical leadership and a positive working culture boost employee engagement and productivity, especially in developing countries. (Mayer et al., 2010), Ethical culture directly related to decreased employee misconduct as they promote an environment where ethical pattern is the rule. (Indoyo & Ranihusna, 2022) Research indicates a perceived ethical work environment are more likely to exhibit positive attitudes and behaviors, thereby enhanced morale can be assured

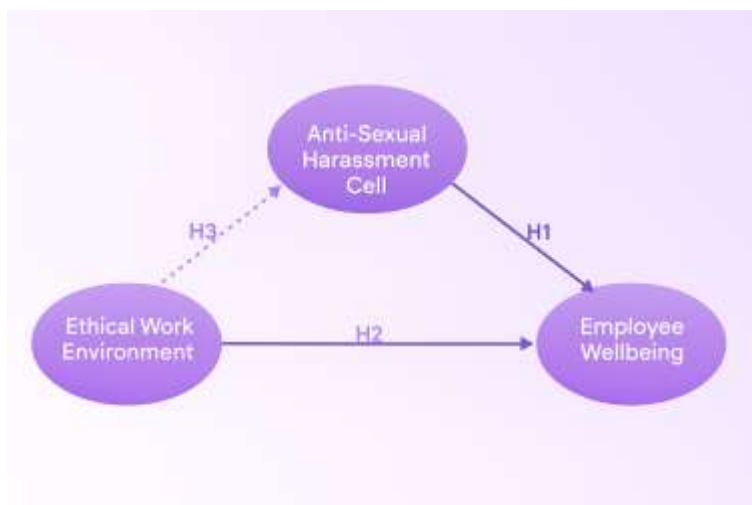
(Barkhordari-Sharifabad et al., 2017), Executing anti-sexual harassment norms are vital for creating a safe and trusted workplace; by promoting employee well-being, a culture of respect and accountability can be ensured. (Numminen et al., 2014) Management's commitment to ethical norms significantly influences the organizational climate and employee perceptions of safety, making their role in establishing these policies crucial

(Wieneke et al., 2019), creating ethical work environments and implementing anti-harassment measures are comprehensive strategies for addressing physical, emotional, and social aspects of well-being can significantly boost employee satisfaction and engagement.

(León et al., 2021) Organizations that prioritize employee well-being through supportive programs and initiatives enhance morale, foster a culture of care, and promote psychological safety, thereby reducing absenteeism and enhancing overall organizational culture.

The integration of ethical leadership, anti-sexual harassment policies, and comprehensive well-being initiatives is crucial for cultivating a positive organizational culture. By emphasizing these aspects, organizations can improve employee satisfaction, decrease turnover rates, and enhance overall performance.

Conceptual Framework (Figure 1)



Methodology

Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted with 60 faculty and administrative staff from private and aided colleges to test the clarity, reliability, and appropriateness of the measurement items. Based on their feedback, slight modifications were made to ensure better comprehension

Population and Sample

For this study the purposive sampling technique was used the survey was distributed online google forms through institutional email networks and WhatsApp groups of teaching and non-teaching staff. A total of 580 responses were received, out of which 505 were valid and used for final analysis (Response Rate: 87.1%).

Measuring Instruments

Ethical Work Environment (EWE):

EWE was measured with a 36-item scale of Cullen & Victor (2008), Alpha score of 0.864 was used to access the normalcy of the data; skewness and kurtosis were used to determine whether the data between the range of -1.96 and +1.96 using a 5-point Likert scale. 1 represents strongly disagree and 5 represents strongly agree.

Anti-Sexual Harassment Cell (ASHC):

ASHC was measured with a 10-item scale of Walker et al. (2023), an Alpha score of: 0.879 was used to access the normalcy the data; skewness and kurtosis were used to determine whether the data between the range of -1.96 and +1.96 using a 5-point Likert scale. 1 represents strongly disagree and 5 represents strongly agree.

Employee Well-being (EW):

EW was measured with a 10-item scale of Friedman, P. (1992), an Alpha score of 0.882 was used to access the normalcy the data; skewness and kurtosis were used to determine whether the data between the range of -1.96 and +1.96 using a 5-point Likert scale. 1 represents strongly disagree and 5 represents strongly agree.

Analysis and Results**Demographic Statistics**

278 (55%) female and 227 (45%) male teaching and non-teaching employees made the sample. 98 (19.4%) belonged to the below 30 age group, 135 (26.7%) belonged to 31-40 age group, 148 (29.3%) belonged to 41 -50 age group and the remaining 124 (24.6%) represents the age group of 51 and above. Teaching and non-teaching members working across Kerala ;125 (24.8%) represents the South region; 127 (25.1%) each represents East and Central regions of Kerala; 126 (25.0%) represents West region.

Table 1 Convergent Validity

Construct	Average Factor Loading	AVE
EWE	0.728	0.543
ASHC	0.729	0.562
EW	0.735	0.578

Table 2 Constructs reliability and validity

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability
EWE	0.864	0.901
ASHC	0.879	0.915
EW	0.882	0.918

Table 3 Discriminant validity (Fornell-Larcker Criterion)

Construct	EWE	ASHC	EW
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EWE	0.737	0.498	0.475
ASHC	0.498	0.749	0.489
EW	0.475	0.489	0.761

Table 4 Model Fit Indices

Fit Index	Threshold	Model Value
Chi-square/df	< 3	2.13
GFI	> 0.90	0.92
CFI	> 0.90	0.95
TLI	> 0.90	0.93
RMSEA	< 0.08	0.06
SRMR	< 0.08	0.05

Particularly for this investigation, every one of these scales was modified and validated. Before the hypothesis was tested, the construct validity was verified using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). In order to calculate composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE), Fornell and Larcker's (1981) formula was used. Since AVE is greater than 0.50, the observed variable's error is within allowable bounds in the current inquiry. To ensure the overall concept validity, investigations of discriminant validity and convergent validity were performed. Convergent validity indicates that each construct is more than 0.50. AVE indicates that the average constructions for EWE, ASHC and EW are respectively, 0.543, 0.562, and 0.578 As a result, we can verify that every concept possesses the required convergent and discriminant validity. The square root of the AVE is also higher than the correlation of the constructs. Hence, acceptable standards of discriminant validity exist among the constructs.

The conceptual model was determined after the construct validities were confirmed. Next, a confirmatory factor analysis was carried out using two parameters—the Normal Fit Index (NFI) and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR), as suggested by Henseler et al. (2015). A model that has an SRMR < 0.08 and a minimal discrepancy of < 5 is considered to be roughly well-fitting; nonetheless, it has to be modified if it contains any significant residual values. The constructs have an excellent model fit in this case since the SRMR is less than 0.08, the

minimum discrepancy is less than 5, the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) is greater than 0.05, and the Goodness Fit Index (GFI) and Normal Fit Index (NFI) are greater than 0.9 (Table 4).

Implications of the Study

The study on college campuses examining the ASH cell's mediating role between an ethical work environment and employee wellbeing carries significant implications. It would likely provide evidence for the positive impact of ethical practices (fairness, transparency, respect) on employee wellbeing, justifying resource allocation towards fostering ethical cultures.

The research could validate ASH cells as crucial mechanisms for upholding ethical principles and enhancing psychological safety, thereby improving wellbeing. Conversely, weak mediation might highlight areas for improvement in ASH cell functioning, accessibility, and awareness.

By focusing on sexual harassment, a key detractor of wellbeing, the study can inform broader institutional wellbeing initiatives and contribute to a more inclusive and supportive environment. Contextually, it can shed light on specific cultural.

Discussion

The study revealing a strong mediating effect of ASH cells between an ethical work environment and employee wellbeing on Indian college campuses would underscore the practical benefits of cultivating ethical cultures. It would provide empirical support for the notion that institutions prioritizing fairness, transparency, and respect not only foster a morally sound environment but also directly contribute to the psychological and emotional health of their employees. Conversely, a weak mediating effect would necessitate a critical evaluation of the current ASH cell mechanisms, prompting investigations into their functionality, accessibility, and awareness among the campus community. Such findings could lead to targeted reforms aimed at bolstering the effectiveness of these cells in addressing grievances, particularly those related to sexual harassment, and ensuring they truly serve as robust pillars of support and accountability. Ultimately, this research has the potential to inform evidence-based strategies for enhancing overall institutional wellbeing and cultivating safer, more inclusive environments within the unique socio-cultural context of higher education.

Limitation

The study is focused on college campuses. The dynamics of an educational institution, the age range of employees (faculty, administrative staff), and the specific culture might not be generalizable to other work environments. Geographical Limitations the study in a specific region or even a few colleges within a particular area in Kerala. The findings might be influenced by local cultural norms, legal frameworks, and institutional policies related to ethics, wellbeing, and sexual harassment. These might not be applicable universally.

Conclusion

This paper sought to identify the mediating effect of ethic work environment with the anti-sexual harassment cell on Employee Wellbeing in education institutions. 505 accurate responses were received and the study revealed that there is a substantial positive correlation between ethical work environment and employee Wellbeing. and mediating effect of anti-sexual harassment cell and employee Wellbeing. This study also revealed that ethical work environment among the employees results in employee Wellbeing, employees are more likely to be happy and engaged which results in higher productivity. Our analysis strongly suggests that a robust and effectively functioning Anti-Sexual Harassment (ASH) Cell acts as a vital bridge, significantly mediating the positive influence of an ethical climate on the overall wellbeing of college employees.

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