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The risk factors of the workplace violence against women work in the public libraries in Sri Lanka

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Workplace violence (WPV) is defined as any instance in which workers are threatened, harmed, or assaulted at their workplace or due to their work. This violence can be categorized based on the nature of the behavior, including physical, sexual, psychological, and verbal violence. Many people consider libraries to be safe, public spaces. However, studies on WPV have concluded that health and safety hazards exist in libraries, particularly for female workers. Since public libraries have become multi-functional spaces. Visitors come to borrow books, read, study, use computers, and socialize, creating an environment where different activities and functions intersect. This ongoing research aims to survey to identify the risk factors faced by female library workers in Sri Lankan public libraries. The research employed a mixed-method approach. This research encompasses four phases: a quantitative phase involving surveys among female librarians across Sri Lanka to collect data on WPV and workplace dynamics; a qualitative phase with in-depth interviews to explore personal narratives; case studies investigating specific WPV incidents; and documentary analysis of existing policies and guidelines on workplace harassment and gender equality. This paper focuses on the first phase, with data collected using a stratified random sampling method by dividing the population (women librarians) working in public libraries into subgroups by region, age, and years of experience in the field. The sample size was 53-woman library employees from four districts through Google Forms and structured interviews. Mixed methods analysis has been utilized to summarize the data's basic features, such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. The data revealed the respondents' regions as follows: Colombo (41.18%), Gampaha (17.65%), Galle (23.53%), and Matara (17.65%). The respondents included 11.76% librarians, 52.94% library attendants, 29.41% library assistants, and 11.76% assistant librarians. Most respondents were in the 26-35 age group. The primary reported risk factors included working at the front desk (63.6%), working alone in isolated libraries (63.6%), and encountering drug addicts visiting the library (54.5%). Additionally, frequently admonishing readers to be quiet and polite (54.5%), providing instructions on using computers and telephones (45.5%), regularly checking isolated areas of the library (27.3%), and intervening in the activities of security personnel (9.1%) were identified as significant risks. Walking through the library was reported as a non-issue (0%). Several actions are necessary to minimize WPV in libraries. These include staff training, appropriate punishment for acts of violence, and maintaining a small team of regular helpers. Displaying ads showing the consequences of violent behavior and enforcing zero tolerance for malfeasance are also important. Increasing the number of library workers and enlisting the assistance of social workers for library safety can further enhance security. Additionally, prohibiting or restricting library use by perpetrators of violence is crucial.

Keywords: Female workers, Library safety, Public libraries, Sri Lanka, Workplace violence