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Ethical Dilemmas for Human Resource Professionals in Handling Sexual Harassment at Workplaces: Cases from Sri Lanka

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to explore the ethical dilemmas faced by Human Resource (HR) professionals when handling sexual harassment in organizations, using a multidimensional framework suggested by Kevin Wooten for studying Human Resource Management (HRM) ethics. Employing a qualitative research approach, HR professionals of 10 Sri Lankan companies operating in different industries were selected for the study using a purposive sampling technique. Data was collected through in-depth interviews and documents. The nature of ethical dilemmas faced by HR professionals (such as misrepresentation and collussion, misuse of data , manipulation and collusion, value and goals conflict and technical ineptness), when handling sexual harassment in organizations within an HRM environment, which is greatly influenced by the legislative/regulatory climate, demographic trends and social climate with organizational, personal and professional ethics overlapping and intersecting in different ways and instances, was revealed . The main areas under sexual harassment that give rise to these ethical dilemmas were identified as; 1) handling complaints without proper evidence and failing to ensure the truthfulness of data 2) handling complaints against key persons, 3) managing tempting behaviours at workplaces in order to prevent sexual harassment occurrences, 4) unawareness about the issue of sexual harassment at workplaces, and 5) the inability to ensure complete confidentiality. Further, the study also explores environmental influences and other competing ethical considerations which influence the occurrence of these ethical dilemmas.

Keywords: Ethical Dilemmas, HR Professionals, Sexual Harassment, Ethical Environment of HR Professionals

1. Introduction

Sexual harassment at the workplace continues to be a devastating workplace issue even after the introduction of various legislative and policy interventions as well as numerous other mechanisms (; McDonald, 2012; O'Leary-Kelly, Bowes-Sperry, Bates, & Lean, 2009; Pina & Gannon, 2012). Many countries around the globe have enacted laws prohibiting sexual harassment, while many companies have introduced anti-harassment policies and procedures as well as training interventions, counselling,

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ombudsmen, mediation services, grievance handling procedures and so on. Yet, there does not appear to be a considerable decrease in sexual harassment incidents in organizations. While prevalence estimates vary depending on the methodological protocol such as sampling and questions employed, as well as definitions used, overall, sexual harassment is found to be unrelenting (McDonald, 2012; O'Leary-Kelly et al., 2009; Pina & Gannon, 2012). Prevalence rates years ago (Fitzgerald, 1993) still appear to persist with more recent studies also indicating that more than half of all working women (Ilies, Hauserman, Schwochau, & Stibal, 2003) - that is one out of two women - face sexual harassment in their professional lives. These startling statistics indicate the magnitude of the issue.

Preventing and combating sexual harassment at present is identified to be a core responsibility of HR professionals in organizations, since it concerns a number of HR areas such as workplace discrimination, safety and health (Haspels, Kasim, Thomas, & McCann, 2001;Wijayatilake & Zachariya, 2001),), discipline management, employee grievances (Gomez-Mejia, & Balkin, Cardy, 2002; Haspels et al., 2001; Reinhart, 1999), international human resource management and diversity management (Hardman & Heidelberg, 1996; V.K. Luthar& Luthar, 2002). The HR professional has a responsibility in handling sexual harassment at the workplace given his/her role as an employee champion and an employee advocate.. As employee champions and employee advocates, HR professionals are accountable to ensure that employees are safe from any form of harassment including sexual harassment. Looking at the role of HRM with regard to sexual harassment, it is also clear that the responsibility of formulating and implementing mechanisms to prevent and combat sexual harassment, including anti-harassment policies, training, and counselling services as well as taking the initiative in creating a culture of intolerance towards harassment and discrimination, lies with HR professionals. Yet, it appears that prior research on sexual harassment has been detached from the role of the HR professional, with very little research exploring the relationship between the two. Salin, (2008) in exloring HR's role in harassment, has also exphasised this shortcoming in research related to harassment, which also includes sexual harassment. As Kihnley (2000) aptly states "[w]e must expand research on the staff involved with implementing the sexual harassment policies, because they confront first-hand the institutional impediments to successful implementation of sexual harassment internal grievance policies and procedures" (p.88). Hence, it is this knowledge gap that we are attempting to address in this study by exploring the ethical dilemmas faced by HR professionals in addressing and handling sexual harassment incidents in workplaces.

Citing Homer, Wiley (2000) states that "[h]uman resource (HR) professionals must frequently make and execute decisions with ethical implications" (p.25), and dealing with sexual harassment cases raise ethical issues for HR managers (Schumann, 2001). Hence, we will use the 'multidimensional framework for the study of ethics in HRM' of Kevin Wooten (2001) as the basis in exploring our research problem; what are the ethical dilemmas faced by HR professionals in preventing and dealing with sexual harassment in organizations?. Our reasons to select the ethical framework of Wooten (2001) in this article are twofold. First, sexual harassment per se is recognized as an ethical issue (McDonald, Charlesworth, & Graham, 2015; Schumann, 2001; Wiley, 2000) on one hand, and as an issue which gives rise to numerous ethical concerns (Wiley, 2000) and dillemmas (Wooten, 2001) on the other. Secondly, ethical practices and behaviours are considered to be pivotal for the HR profession (Schumann, 2001; Wiley, 2000; Winstanley & Woodall, 2000; Wooten, 2001), with HRM departments holding the main responsibility and playing a leading role in ensuring ethical behaviours of organizations through developing and implementing ethics programs, conducting training and making organizational actors conduct themselves ethically (Wiley, 2000). As Greenwood (2013) emphasises, "[h]uman resource management is an inherently ethical activity in that its

fundamental core is concerned with the treatment of humans; hence, conceptualisations of HRM automatically raise ethical considerations" (p. 355).

While ethics related to sexual harassment has been researched to some extent (Adler & Peirce, 1993), and ethics in the HR profession has been widely discussed (Wiley, 2000; Winstanley & Woodall, 2000; Wooten, 2001), researchers have rarely studied these two important phenomena together. Very often researchers have broadly mentioned the need for HR to consider the ethical and moral aspects when handling and combatting sexual harassment (Schumann, 2001; Wiley, 2000) and yet, they have not delved deeper into these two aspects together to understand the ethical issues that HR professionals face in handling sexual harassment incidents. Within this milieu, in this article we illustrate the ethical dilemmas that HR professionals face by addressing three specific research questions 1) what are the ethical dilemmas HR professionals encounter when combating and handling sexual harassment, 2) what specific areas in sexual harassment handling give rise to these ethical dilemmas and 3) how does the HR environment affect and influence the identified dilemmas.

Therefore, by exploring the research problem of the current article from a standpoint of ethics, we attempt to generate deeper and more focused understanding of the dilemmas HR professionals face in handling sexual harassment, going beyond the commonly explored areas such as implementation of sexual harassment policies and procedures, procedural justice, perceived justice and limitations in legislation related to sexual harassment. As Wooten (2001) highlights, ethical dilemmas in HRM is an area that has not been explored sufficiently by scholars as well as practitioners. Winstanley and Woodall (2000) attest to this fact by stating that "the ethical dimensions of HR policy and practice have been almost ignored in the recent text (sic) of HRM, where the focus has shifted to 'strategic fit' and 'best practiceapproaches" (p.6), indcating the importance of studying from an ethics perspective the policies and procedures - sexual harassment being one such area- from an ethical point of view. Further, the findings will also help to develop and to communicate professional codes of conduct/ ethics and eventually standards of practice for HR professionals (Wooten, 2001), as well as to raise awareness and sensitivity of HR professionals towards ethics (Winstanley & Woodall, 2000) in dealing with sexual harassment complaints and instances. More importantly, by recognizing and acknowledging ethical dilemmas that can occur related to sexual harassment, HR professionals can lower the probability of making unethical decisions (Wooten, 2001).

We will first provide a review of organizational mechanisms and strategies of addressing harassment in companies around the world. In order to investigate and understand the numerous challenges and ethical dilemmas faced by organizations in handling sexual harassment, it is necessary to explore the organizational interventions that are employed in preventing and handling harassment. Next we will provide an overview of sexual harassment in the Sri Lankan context, specifically concentrating on the legal and other regulatory mechanisms available. This explanation will be followed by a discussion about ethics and ethical dilemmas in HRM, highlighting the theoretical frame work of the study. After the methodological section, the analysis and discussion of findings will be presented under the main ethical dilemmas identified. The paper will end with a brief conclusion.

2. Organizational Mechanisms to Prevent and Handle Sexual Harassment

A large body of literature exists on individual mechanisms and strategies in handling and responding to sexual harassment with relatively little research focusing on organizational interventions in addressing sexual harassment (Buchanan, Settles, Hall, & O'Connor, In press). Prior research has explored organizational contexts related to sexual harassment, exploring the organizational factors which facilitate sexual harassment (Chamberlain, Crowley, Tope, & Hodson,

2008; Fitzgerald, Drasgow, Hulin, Gelfand, & Magley, 1997; McCabe & Hardman, 2005; Timmerman & Bajema, 1999) as well as organizational mechanisms leading to reduced incidents (Bell, Quick, & Cycyota, 2002; Rubenstein, 1989). A considerable body of research has explored the existence and effectiveness of policies and procedures of sexual harassment, generally comparing those policies with model policies (Reese & Lindenberg, 2002) or desirable features that make a policy effective. Research has also extensively explored the low formal reporting of sexual harassment incidents and the related reasons (Fitzgerald, Swan, & Fischer, 1995; Mani, 2004). There are also instances where research has explored how victims' rights are protected or how due process is followed in sexual harassment cases (Hart, 2012).

Anti-sexual harassment policies have been universally identified as a key mechanism for preventing sexual harassment in organizations (Chamberlain et al., 2008; Buchanan et al., In press; McDonald, 2012). These policies are found to serve many purposes by preventing occurences, protecting companies against litigation, assisting the complaining, ensuring fairness and non-descrimintaion. Yet, the mere existance of a policy will not yield these benefits. Policies should be effectively designed and implemented. Prior research indicates that many organizations implement policies without a real commitment to eradicating the issue from workplaces, but as a means of evading legal repurcussions (Dobbin and Kelly 2007; Marshall 2005).

Training is another important mechanism to prevant and address sexual harassment (Chamberlain et al., 2008; Buchanan et al., In press; Goldberg, 2007). The role of training in creating awareness and educating employees as to what sexual harassment is, the consequences of sexual harassment, the company commitment towards sexual harassment, how to respond to unwanted behavior, as well as the process to be followed when harrasment occurs, is well established. Here again researchers highlight how the mere existance of training will not lead to expected outcomes, but rather, how different factors such as the gender of trainees, organziational culture and type of training will impact the effectiveness of training. At the same time it is said that while training will create awarenss and eradicate ignorance to a certain level, they do not ensure that employees will connect their own behaviors to this understanding of sexual harassment (Chamberlain et al., 2008). As Chamberlain et al., (2008) point out, training programs will be more effective "when men receive assistance in understanding what their behaviors actually mean to women" (p. 290).

In addition to these mechanisms, literature on preventing and addressing sexual harassment commonly talks about leadership commitment, effective investigation (Bell et al., 2002; Buchanan et al., In press; Rubenstein, 1989), counselling, and making different means available for handling harassment. While these mechanisms will help companies prevent and handle sexual harassment to a greater extent, HR will still face various challenges in this endeavour, both in trying to implement formal and informal mechanisms. Yet, as also mentioned above, past studies that deal with these challenges faced by HR professionals were very rare. The available related literature mainly discusses the lack of reporting, unawareness about the issue, and lack of evidence in proving harassment instances which can be considered as problems related to handling the issue. The lack of reporting and unawareness about the issue is mainly looked at from a victim's/employee's point of view rather than from an employer's (or HR professionals') point of view (Mani, 2004). There are also few studies that had explored how organizations balance confidentiality in investigating complaints (McDonald, 2012).

Moreover, it is commonly known that sexual harassment generally does not take place in public. This creates the problem of finding evidence which is needed to build a strong case against the

perpetrator (EEOC, 1990). Due to this fact, many people are reluctant to complain about sexual harassment incidentss (Takeyama & Kleiner, 1998). Further, Chau (2005) has explored the challenges public sector employers face, in terms of maintaining work places free of sexual harassment from non-employees, in a context where organisations have increased interaction with the public.

While these past studies have provided a general idea about the strategies used to prevent and handle sexual harassment, these studies have not explored the role of HR and ethical considerations related to this very sensitive and complex issue. In this milieu, the intention of the current study is to explore in-depth the ethical dilemmas faced by HR professionals in Sri Lanka in preventing and handling sexual harassment instances at workplaces.

3. Sexual Harassment in Sri Lankan Workplaces

Sexual harassment at the workplace is a punitive offense in Sri Lanka under the Penal Code (Amendment) of 1995. Section 345 of the Act defines sexual harassment as;

> Whoever, by assault or use of criminal force, sexually harasses another person by the use of words or actions, causes sexual annoyance or harassment to such other persons, commits the offence of sexual harassment.

It is further stated that,

> unwelcome sexual advances by words or actions used by a person in authority in a working place, or any other place, shall constitute the offence of sexual harassment

This legal intervention is said to be the first in South Asia, prompted by the ratification of the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1981 and the United Nations (UN) Declaration on Elimination of Violence against Women in 1993 as well as the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 111 on non-discrimination with respect to employment and occupation, by Sri Lanka. In addition, the Bribery Act and the Industrial Disputes Act too indirectly provide legal avenues for victims to seek relief in instances of harassment. Yet, unlike in other countries such as the USA (Landau, 2005; Kelly, Kadue, & Mignin, 2005; Rubenstein, 1989), insufficient research has analysed the effectiveness of these legislation related to sexual harassment in Sri Lanka. However, there are evident shortcomings and ambiguities which would in any case have resulted in almost no cases being filed under the Penal Code on workplace sexual harassment in Sri Lanka.While sexual harassment is a heavily researched area universally, in Sri Lanka, there exists very little scholarly research on the subject, providing only a modest understanding of the issue. Few prior studies in Sri Lanka indicate high prevalence rates of sexual harassment similar to universal prevalence rates (Adikaram, 2006). Even though there exist a few studies which explore the nature of sexual harassment (Wickremasinghe & Jayathilake, 2006: Wijayatilake and Zachariya, 2001), the extension and types of preventive measures taken by Sri Lankan companies in addressing sexual harassment remains unclear and uninvestigated. Nevertheless, it is seen that a number of companies have implemented anti-sexual harassment policies and grievance handling procedures to address the issue (Gamage, 1999; Wickremasinghe & Jayathilake, 2006), even though the effectiveness of those policies too remains unexplored. Further, similar to other countries (Chamberlain et al., 2008), alternate measures such as training and awareness creation are also employed as mechanisms by a few Sri Lankan companies in handling sexual harassment. However, there is an apparent lack of exploration about the existence and effectiveness of these different mechanisms and the issues HR professionals face in implementing these mechanisms in Sri Lanka, similar to the research gap highlighted in the above section (under 'organizational mechanisms to prevent and handle sexual harassment') in comparison to the international scenario.

More specifically, sexual harassment is rarely studied from an ethical perspective in Sri Lanka and no HR professional body has indicated ethical codes for HR managers in handling issues such as sexual harassment and discrimination, let alone codes of ethics for the overall HRM profession. Hence due to this lack of studies in the area of sexual harassment in Sri Lanka, as well as internationally, it was deemed vital to gain an understating about the ethical dilemmas HR professionals face in attempting to prevent and handle sexual harassment more effectively in Sri Lanka.

4. Ethical Dilemmas in HRM

Ethics and HRM has continuously been identified as an underdeveloped field of study, where more research in the area has persistently been advocated by scholars in other countries (Greenwood, 2013). Apart from highlighting the need for research on Ethics and HRM, many scholars, practitioners and professional bodies have attempted to develop ethical codes of conduct and frameworks for the HR profession. Wiley (2000), after an analysis of main HR professional bodies' presentations of HR ethics in USA, has identified five key professional ethics codes in HRM "integrity (*integrity*); respecting employees' rights and obeying laws (*legality*); enhancing their professional competence (*proficiency*); supporting the profession and not misusing professional affiliations (*loyalty*); and guarding the confidentially of privileged information (*confidentiality*)" (p.109). There are other similar identified ethics codes as well as frameworks which highlight numerous ethical dimensions (Schumann, 2001; Winstanley & Woodall, 2000). This makes it difficult to identify a common set of professional ethics or a common framework for the study of these HR ethics. Yet, as Winstanley and Woodall (2000) state,

> [s]ome ethical frameworks are more relevant to the study of HRM than others, and different situations require ethical insight and flexibility to be able to identify those frameworks and address the grounds on which competing claims are made. (p. 9)

With that, we decided to adopt the 'multidimensional framework of ethical dilemmas in HRM', of Wooten (2001) as the most suitable framework for the current study due to its suitability to study sexual harassment. Wooten (2001) defines ethical dillemas as "the multifaceted demands placed on HRM professionals in which personal, professional and organzational beleifs, expectations, values, and needs conflict as a result of environmental influences upon HRM functions, duties, roles, serivces and activities" (p. 165). In line with this definition, Wooten (2001) presents five ethical dillemmas in HRM which he identifies as mutifaceted, involvin personal, professional and organizational considerations in a HRM environment which is greatly influenced by demographic trends, a legislative/regulatory climate, economic climate and social trends. The five ethical dillemmas he presents are:

1) misrepresentation and collusion (this can occur when the HRM professional misinterprets his/her capabilities and expertise and also when HRM practioners attempt to exclude other parties for their personal gain or self-protection);

2) misuse of data (this occures when voluntary consent or cofidentiality of organiaztional members is violated or abridged or when data is distorted, deleted or not reported);

3) manipulation and collusion (will occur when implementing HR roles, practices or programs require organizational members to abridge their personal values or needs against their will);

4) value and goals conflict (occurs when there is conflict or ambiguity concerning whose needs will be fullfilled by meeting specific goals); and

5) technical ineptness (this dillemma occures when there is lack of knowledge and capabilities about the use of techniques and procedures to effectively diagnose HRM issues).

While Wooten (2001) applies this framework to eight HRM functions, we will explore only sexual harassment at the workplace, which is not a direct function Wooten has mentioned, is yet an inherently ethical and core responsibility of HRM as mentioned in numerous previous instances in this paper. Hence, using this framework we will attempt to understand the ethical dilemmas HR professionals face in handling sexual harassment and how the HR environment affects and influences these dillemmas.

5. Methods

Using a qualitative research approach, in-depth interviews were carried out with HR professionals of 10 companies (while maintaining the anonymity of the companies, a brief description about each of the companies is presented in Annexure I). The companies selected for the study had various formal and informal mechanisms for handling sexual harassment. While seven companies had anti-sexual harassment policies, three companies had other grievance handling procedures under which sexual harassment is addressed without an explicit policy. In the in-depth interviews, information was gathered about the companies' and the HR professionals' (interviewees) stand and understanding of what sexual harassment is, how the company is handling the issue, the HR professionals roles and the challenges and dilemmas they face in preventing and handling sexual harassment.

In addition to in-depth interviews, documents such as anti-sexual harassment policies and grievance handling procedures of the selected companies were analysed. All the interviews were tape recorded with the consent of the HR professionals interviewed and later transcribed verbatim. Analysis of information started with the first few interviews where a sentence by sentence coding was carried out. Coding was mainly inductive, in that, a borrowed coding based on the concepts of the multidimensional framework of Wooten (2001) discussed above as well as emergent codes were identified. With further interviews and subsequent analysis, the codes were developed into broader categories. The five problematic areas (handling complaints without proper evidence and ensuring the truthfulness of data, handling complaints against key persons, etc:,) which give rise to the ethical dilemmas identified by Wooten (2001) were the main categories thus identified and refined. Wooten's (2001) five ethical dilemmas emerged as co-categories (properties) under each of the problematic areas. The discussion was then constructed around the main categories in explaining the ethical dilemmas, with the HR ethical environment being discussed as the background.

6. Findings and discussion

Settling any dispute or complaint would be a challenge to any HR professional. Preventing and handling sexual harassment was found to be even more difficult, with its subjective, sensitive, and ethical nature. It was possible to identify specific problematic areas in handling sexual harassment, which give rise to the numerous ethical dilemmas HR professionals face, influenced by the organisational, professional and personal factors, and ethics. While certain ethical dilemmas were more prominent in relation to sexual harassment, certain others were not that important. We will present our findings within a complex environment of legislative and regulatory climate, social trends, demographic trends and economic climate, with numerous ambiguities taking place, linking Wooten's five ethical dilemmas where relevant (2001).

6.1 Handling Complaints without Proper Evidence and Ensuring the Truthfulness of Data

A key problem HR professionals face in settling and investigating complaints of sexual harassment is collecting evidence and proving sexual harassment charges giving rise to numerous ethical dilemmas such as value and goal conflict, manipulation and coercion, and misrepresentation and collusion. While the importance of proving a case and finding evidence is highlighted by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC, 1990, March 19) and many legal reviews, it is not discussed in line with ethical dilemmas or ethical conduct for HRM.

When HR division receives a complaint of sexual harassment, whether it is verbal or written, formal or informal, it is of paramount importance to collect relevant and precise evidence, in order to make an accurate and ethical decision of the case (EEOC, 1990). Hence, proving becomes critical when settling any case related to sexual harassment. Yet, HR professionals interviewed stated how difficult it is to collect relevant and accurate evidence in these cases, presenting them with a challenge in making decisions.

Mr. Nimal (pseudonym to ensure confidentiality of the respondents), HR Manager of Company A, a large multinational company, stated how sexual harassment happening in isolation leads to a difficulty in obtaining relevant information regarding the incident, specially without any witnesses and the two parties involved being the only evidence. Most HR managers interviewed attested to this difficulty in getting evidence from witnesses due to many reasons such as fear of retaliation and fear of getting into unnecessary problems at work. Overall, the HR managers stated that sexual harassment instances generally become one person's word against the other, making it very difficult for the organisations to make the right decision. Mr. Lal, HR Manager of Company D, a company operating in the garment industry in Sri Lanka, also mentioned that once he could not settle a sexual harassment case due to lack of evidence, indicating the importance of having evidence and substantiating claims. Similarly, Mr. Yapa of Company I, a global information technology services company, too stated how the complaint will be one person's word against the other, and if there is no material evidence that can support the allegations, they are compelled to dismiss the case. Mr. Ruwan, General Manager HR of Company J, a Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) company in Sri Lanka, mentioned how taking action without evidence may create other complaints, where the harasser might say that the company wants to fire him and for that purpose management is using false allegations of sexual harassment against him.

Mr. Perera, the HR managers of company G, a travel company, attested to this fact as well when he said;

> And the challenge with sexual harassment is that nobody does it openly. So they challenge us saying that it did not happen that way" where he further stated "All the offenders say they are not guilty, which is the challenge we have. We look at their past records. Actually nobody admits that they harassed someone.

This common situation where sexual harassment does not take place in public most of the time and where only the two parties involved would know what actually happened, leads to harassers challenging the management by denying the incident.

Hence, HR is often compelled to dismiss these cases, giving rise to the ethical dilemma of 'value and goal conflict' (Wooten, 2001), as HR is compelled to compromise employees' wellbeing and the right to work free of harassment, while also withholding appropriate action when such is justified. And this decision of HR to overlook and dismiss these cases is also not in the best interest of the

organization (Wooten, 2001), employees and the society at large. This dilemma was more prominent when HR managers sometimes personally believe that sexual harassment has actually happened, yet cannot prove it and hence cannot take action. As Mr. Yapa of Company I, and few other HR managers believe it is unlikely that people, especially women, would fabricate things that will impact personally on their own characters. Yet, even though they may believe the credibility of the complainant, according to these managers, they are unable to take action against the perpetrator if proper evidence is not present. This also indicates how organizational ethics (taking action only with proper evidence) overlap with personal ethics (knowing that sexual harassment has actually happened) and professional ethics (the responsibility to provide a harassment free environment to employees, and fulfil the professional roles of employee champion and employee advocate).

It was also seen how value and goal conflict arises in this situation, where HR purposely discourage complaining about sexual harassment due to this very problem of proving cases and taking action, even though managers suspect that actual incidents have taken place. Mr. Ruwan of Company J attested to this, where he mentioned how HR discourages complaints of sexual harassment even in instances where explicit anti-harassment policies and procedures exist in companies. Mr. Ruwan further added that it is a real problem and a disturbance to the day-to-day activities of the HR department to carry out the investigation procedures when faced with a sexual harassment complaint.

> *First you have to get statements for which you have to sit and listen to both parties. Thereafter, you have to question the accused as to whether the said action had been done. If he says 'no' then again you have to carry out a discussion. The pressure that comes with taking a decision and the consequences faced when the decision is put into action. There is a lot of stress and at the end of the day the consequences have to be borne by the HR Manager. Therefore, most of the time, the management inquires as to whether the victim wants to continue or not with the complaint. There are situations in which the management convinces the victim to withdraw the statement by saying "these are minor matters, let us settle things internally. If it happens again you need to know how to handle the situation among yourselves."*

These sentiments of HR managers clearly indicate how the value and goal conflict arises with regard to sexual harassment.

In addition, due to this very difficulty of proving cases of sexual harassment, 'misrepresentation and collusion' (Wooten, 2001) occur, where HR will misrepresent the employee's posture by not taking up the issue and handling it appropriately, while also not representing the company standard of providing a harassment free environment to employees (specially in companies where specific anti-harassment policies exists where the companies responsibility towards creating a harassment free environment and zero tolerance is specifically highlighted). Mr. Yapa of Company I presented a different manner of handling these complaints without proper evidence, where he gives the benefit of the doubt to the victim;

> *We give the biggest weightage to what the complainant says. We do not need proof as long as they come and complain… they can be fabricating also, but who would fabricate a thing that will have a personal impact on their own reputation.*

While this sentiment of Mr. Yapa can be true, it too gives rise to an ethical dilemma as there would be favouritism (towards the complainant) and discrimination (towards the alleged perpetrator without proper evidence).

The HR ethical dilemma of 'manipulation and coercion' occurs (Wooten, 2001) in this context, when HR managers have to manipulate witnesses to give statements about instances in complaints even when they are reluctant to do so due to many reasons, or when HR has to manipulate and coerce

the victims not to make formal complaints, when they first approach the HR professionals with their issues (as Mr. Ruwan stated above, due to the cumbersome procedure the HR has to follow in investigating and proving these cases, the HR discourages victims to make formal complaints).

When exploring the ethical environment that can give rise to these dilemmas (Wooten, 2001), it becomes clear how the environment/climate within which HR operates has influenced and given rise to some of these dilemmas. In the legislative and regulatory climate of Sri Lanka where the numerous labour laws of the country protects employees to a greater extent, it is very difficult to dismiss an employee, even for disciplinary reasons. On one hand it is difficult to terminate the services of a person or take some other form of disciplinary actions against an employee being within the legal framework of the country. On the other hand, the employee is given various avenues to contest the disciplinary or other decisions taken with regard to their employment by management. Hence, if an action is taken against a person without evidence, that person will have a chance of winning their rights through various avenues available to him/her mainly under the Industrial Disputes Act. With the direct and indirect cost involved in such legal action, HR needs to be extra careful in dealing with employees. Hence, this reluctance of HR in pursuing a sexual harassment case without proper evidence, and the tendency for them to discourage related complaints is closely linked to the legal implications that arise through such a situation, indicating the significant impact the environment has on the ethical dilemmas the HR professionals face.

Further in exploring the lack of evidence and reluctance of witnesses to give evidence and in some instances even the victims being reluctant to divulge complete information, the influence of social trends (Wooten, 2001) come to the forefront. As Director HR of Company F, a company operating in the hotel industry in Sri Lanka, Mr. Sampath mentioned that worker affiliation and gender biases make finding evidence through witnesses a difficult task. Worker affiliation is a person's need to feel a sense of involvement and belonging within a work group. As Mr. Sampath stated "A person might have witnessed a sexual harassment case at the workplace, but will be reluctant to complain if the harasser is a team member due to the fear that he/she will be considered an outsider by the team (a traitor)". At the same time, Mr. Sampath mentioned how most of the time men support men, while women support women in instances of sexual harassment, a situation which restricts the gathering of accurate evidence. This indicates how the social climate and trends will influence the dilemmas HR managers face.

6.2 Handling Complaints against Key Persons

Mr. Nimal and Mr. Ruwan from companies A and J respectively, pointed out another common ethical dilemma they face when handling sexual harassment incidents in companies. According to them, if the complainant is against a key person who is essential in order to maintain the company's competitive position in the industry, or if the company cannot find an alternative person who is capable of carrying out the work he/she does, then they face the dilemmas of misrepresentation and collusion, value and goal conflict and as a result, manipulation and collusion (Wooten, 2001), putting them in a very difficult position. As Mr. Ruwan mentioned

> *Sometimes action cannot be taken because the supervisor or the manager will leave the company upon the investigation of the complaint. Here, the vulnerability of the organization is very high compared to a lower level employee leaving a company. Those things matter when taking actions or making decisions. Organizations take action but there is more bias towards the management.*

This indicated how HR managers are sometimes unwilling to even initiate any investigation against the 'valuable manager' for fear of him leaving the company, let alone firing the manager upon

proving the complaint. Even if the HR decides to take the matter further, there will be many difficulties they face in this situation in terms of collecting evidence, where witnesses will be more reluctant to give evidence against a senior official, due to fear of retaliation, which also ultimately leads to the earlier challenge of the lack of evidence to prove a case. Yet, the key dilemma HR face will be ethical, in that, there is the difficulty in making a challenging decision, especially when the key person is indispensable to the organization and when they get pressure from higher officials of the organization. Hence, even when there is evidence to prove the case, HR will face the issue of either choosing to not take action against the person and loosing the faith of the other employees, or to take action against the person and losing a valued professional of the company.

Interviews with the HR professionals of the study indicated that they will most probably take the key professional's side, warn him, and keep him, while the plaintiff might be transferred to another department to avoid future problems. In this situation HR appear not to understand that this is one of the worst situations that could be faced by a victim, in which the company too will lose miserably in attempting to prevent and handle sexual harassment in the future, by employees losing faith in the company, their policies and procedures and even in the HR. Hence HR here fails to represent their responsibility towards employees and victims and fails to fulfil their professional role as employee advocates, leading to 'misrepresentation and collusion' occurring (Wooten, 2001). Sometimes the fact that HR might avoid carrying out proper inquiry and avoid taking action against the key professional perpetrator for personal gains and self protection (Wooten, 2001) too gives rise to this dilemma of 'misrepresentation and collusion'.

Moreover, the dilemma of 'value and goal conflict' will also take place, especially in situations where the HR will not be meeting organizational values and goals of protecting and providing a harassment-free environment for employees with zero tolerance policies and will be compromising their professional ethics to protect the higher official. Here, HR will also misrepresent the employees' best interest and wellbeing and will represent higher officials and their own wellbeing and best interest.

6.3 Managing Dress Codes and Provocative Behaviour

Most of the HR professionals interviewed mentioned the difficulty of managing the dress and behaviour of employees in attempting to prevent and handle sexual harassment instances. As they mentioned, the way some women dress and their provocative behaviour encourage people to harass them. Ms. Dilini, Chief Manageress of HR of Company B, a company that operates in the banking industry in Sri Lanka, stated that as a female she believes there are two sides to each situation, and that prevention of harassment has to begin with the individual. She further stated that,

> *If a female is dressed appropriately and acts in a professional manner it is unacceptable for her to be harassed. Yet, in situations where females dress provocatively, it is difficult to take action against the harassers. This is why a strict dress code policy in every company is important, though many companies face difficulties in managing their dress codes, especially on dress down days.*

Sharing similar sentiments, many HR managers stated how they have taken steps to restrict women wearing provocative dresses in order to prevent sexual harassment instances. Mr. Ruwan of Company J, said that he even went to the extent of sending a female employee back home since she was wearing a very provocative dress, in spite of having been warned before. Mr. Yapa of Company I, stated that females should know how to dress properly and how to talk and conduct themselves appropriately, and that such dress and behaviour has an impact on the way other colleagues respond to them. He further stated that a trend is emerging, where females are more sexually explicit than males.

"*They provoke and then complain. This is why you have to always be alert in situation such as these, in order to fully understand both parties. This is why we educate youngsters*". Mr. Yapa further stated that he had to terminate a good employee who was otherwise well behaved but who had made an unwanted joke to a female employee who had been wearing a provocative dress.

> Mr. Sampath of Company F also discussed an incident that took place in his company.
>> *There was an employee who was overly friendly with all employees. One day a junior executive complained saying that the particular employee had verbally harassed her. When the company investigated the incident, all the employees said that the junior executive was inappropriately attired, tempting that person to make such a joke to her. Warnings were issued to both parties and the case was settled.*

While the examination of whether these sentiments are valid is not the purpose of the present paper, these above perceptions and statements of HR professionals clearly indicated how technical ineptness surfaces as an ethical dilemma with regard to sexual harassment. It was evident how unaware many of the HR professionals were about the whole issue of sexual harassment and how they were quick to overlook the totality of the situation and take value laden and judgemental decisions about issues of sexual harassment based on victims dress and behaviour. Studying complaint committees of sexual harassment Chaudhuri (2008) too has identified how these complaint handling committees thought that many casese forwarded to them are motivated incidents and hence, dismissed them without proper investigation. These perceptions that women coerce, and motivate harassment through their dress and behaviour are commonly held myths about sexual harassment (Haspels et al, 2001), which the HR needs to correct in organizations. Yet, the HR managers interviewed held these very sentiments and myths they should be fighting against. HR also needs to consider the fact that these sentiments about the dress and behaviour of women and sexual harassment will lead to future harassers in the company to taking refuge by claiming the girls were dressed revealingly. Hence, HR managers' overemphasis and preoccupation with attempting to correct the dress and behaviour of employees indicate their technical ineptness in handling sexual harassment and would lead to regulating the victims in organizations rather than the perpetrators.

Moreover, as Chau (2005) states provocative dress restrictions would illegitimately impose a condition of employment based on sex. Hence, having policies that unnecessarily restrict dress can also be questioned for its ethical appropriateness, especially as it can also give rise to the dilemma of 'manipulation and coercion' because such restriction on dress can be seen as a means of abridging employees' personal decisions and values about dress (Wooten, 2001).

6.4 Unawareness of the Issue of Sexual Harassment at the Workplace

Unawareness about the issue of sexual harassment of HR professionals as well as employees in general, points towards another ethical HR dilemma. HR managers highlighted the fact that many employees were not aware of the phenomenon of sexual harassment and the resultant lack of reporting and effective handling of sexual harassment incidents by victims. While the HR talked about this in relation to employees, this actually points toward the technical ineptness of the HR professionals, where they appear not to have understood their professional role and responsibility in educating employees about the issue and their duty in creating awareness about the issue in their organizations. Many of the HR professionals interviewed appeared to think that their responsibility lies in implementing policies and in investigating and making judgements about sexual harassment. Appropriate communication and awareness creation, including training related to sexual harassment was not a common practice among these HR professionals.

Unawareness about sexual harassment is common and this does not help in the prevention and handling of the issue. Effective communication of policies and procedures as well as training related to sexual harassment is identified to be paramount in addressing the issue though greater awareness (Buchanan et al., In press; Rubenstein, 1989). Paludi and Paludi, (2003) also talk about including the policy in the employee handbook and noticing it companywide, providing ample disclosure as to what sexual harassment is and the company stand and procedure on sexual harassment.

Only HR manager of company J spoke of any awareness sessions on sexual harassment, but that too was only for HR department professionals. HR professionals have not understood the importance of similar programs for other managers and employees in creating awareness. Other HR managers in companies where anti-sexual harassment policies were in place, stated that policy manuals and orientation programs were the only instances where the issue was communicated and discussed to a certain degree (not an in-depth awareness creation, but a statement of what the policy is about). Other HR managers of companies where such policies and formal procedures were absent had no awareness or communication about the matter at all. All this indicates how HR is technically inept about this whole issue and how this will in turn pose a challenge to companies in effectively preventing and handling sexual harassment cases. It was interesting to note how a few managers even went to the extent of thinking that 'over communication' of the policy will lead to unnecessary problems for them.

Further indicating their unawareness about the issue, its subjective nature, victims' psychological status and the consequent non-reporting and the cultural dimensions that play a role in this, the HR managers appear to be judgemental without properly investigating the complaints. Ms. Dilini of Company B said that if someone has been sexually harassed, the complaint should happen immediately, not tomorrow or a couple of months later when a person has been given a bad grading or when someone is at the end of his/her contract. Ms. Dilini explained a case that had taken place at their office recently. A particular girl's contract of service came to an end, and as her performance was not up to bar they had to let her go. Her aunt had sent an email saying that she was being harassed. So the company asked the girl to give a written complaint for them to inquire into the matter, yet she has not replied. So they were unable to carry the case forward. As Ms. Dilini stated two of the major cases that had taken place at Company B had happened after the contract of employment had come to an end. Ms. Dilini had clearly failed to understand the complex nature of sexual harassment, the psychological status of a victim, how rare it is for victims to make formal complaints, and the various factors that lead to this fear of reporting, indicating her technical ineptness related to this sensitive issue of sexual harassment.

The fact that three of the companies did not have policies and procedures on sexual harassment, and also the fact that the HR managers appear to think that they don't need to introduce a policy or implement other strategies to handle the issue, mainly due to the lack of complaints, also clearly indicate the technical ineptness of HR professionals where they have not even understood the importance of having policies and procedures in place to combat the issue.

6.5 Ensuring Confidentiality

Ensuring confidentiality is a common ethical standard identified for HR professionals (Schumann, 2001; Wiley, 2000; Wooten, 2001). However, due to the sensitive and complex nature of the issue, guaranteeing and maintaining confidentiality of victims, harassers and witnesses can pose a challenge to HR professionals and can give rise to 'misuse of data' (Wooten, 2001). While confidentiality is

difficult to maintain in sexual harassment (Cortina & Magley, 2003; McDonald, 2012), it is an area that is strongly advocated for effective and ethical handling of sexual harassment (Aalberts & Seidman, 1996; McCann, 2005; Reese & Lindenberg, 20020) . Yet, none of the HR managers indicated that sufficient care had been taken to ensure the confidentiality of the complainant, harassers, or witnesses.

It is important to explore at this juncture, the policies and procedures related to sexual harassment to assess whether confidentiality is ensured in the companies under study. Many of the policies had explicit clauses ensuring confidentiality, even though the actual practice of the clause is not known. Only two HR managers stated how their companies have anonymous methods of reporting sexual harassment, where the victims could call the pre-named professionals anonymously, ensuring confidentiality to a greater degree at the time of complaining.

In other instances, HR professionals were unable to mention how they actually ensure confidentiality during investigating and taking action against perpetrators. Hence, while they promise confidentiality in sexual harassment policies, they do not apparently take appropriate measures to ensure it, leading to the 'misuse of data' ethical dilemma. In companies where no policies or procedures exist, ensuring confidentiality was not promised nor mentioned.

Being informed by Wooten's presentation of unethical behaviour that can occur in various HRM functions, Table 1 presents 20 examples of unethical behaviours that can occur in handling sexual harassment, under the five ethical dilemmas Wooten presented in his framework. The table manifests how ethical dilemmas take place in varying degrees under different problematic areas that HR professionals face in handling sexual harassment. It was also seen how these numerous ethical dilemmas transpire in a complex ethical environment which is influenced by demographic trends, legislative/regulatory climate, economic climate and social trends (Wooten, 2001). The next section provides a detailed explanation of this ethical environment in relation to sexual harassment.

6.5 Ethical Environment of HRM Professionals when Handling Sexual Harassment

As also discussed above, sexual harassment is a criminal offence according to the Penal Code of Sri Lanka, and it has also been indirectly addressed under various other legislation. In addition, the strict protection and the various avenues for redress made available to employees/victims under various labour legislation of the country and against offences different punishments even including termination of employment in instances of sexual harassment for perpetrators have been listed, which makes it a very sensitive and complex issue for HR to handle. This also gives rise to ethical dilemmas such as the value and goal conflict, misrepresentation and collusion and manipulation and coercion.

Table 1: Potential Unethical Behaviours that Can Occur in Handling Sexual Harassment Incidents by HR Professionals

Problematic areas in handling sexual harassment that give rise to ethical dilemmas	Misrepresentation and collusion	Misuse of data	Manipulation and coercion	Values and goal conflict	Technical ineptness
Handling complaints without proper evidence and ensuring the truthfulness of data	- Misrepresent the employee's position by not taking up the issue and handling it inappropriately, while also not representing the company standard of providing a harassment free environment to employees - Sometimes favouring the complainant, misrepresenting the alleged harasser	- Distorting the diagnosis and fair and just handling of sexual harassment incidents	- Manipulating witnesses to give statements about sexual harassment incidents, even when they are reluctant due to many reasons - Manipulating and coercing the victims not to make formal complaints, when they first approach the HR professionals with their issues, due to different reasons such as lack of evidence or more work for HR departments	- Being forced to dismiss cases due to lack of evidence, compromising employees wellbeing and right to work free of harassment, while also withholding appropriate action when such is justified - Discouraging victims' complaints of sexual harassment due to lack of evidence or due to perception of additional work to the HR department	
Handling complaints against key persons	- Not carrying out proper inquiry and taking action against key professionals for personal gains and self protection - Misrepresenting the employees' interests when handling sexual harassment complaints against top management		- Coercing victims to not complain or complainants to withdraw their complaints when the perpetrator is a top personnel in the organization	- Compromising employee welfare to protect the top management - Misrepresent the employees' best interest and wellbeing and will represent the higher officials and his/her own wellbeing and best interest	

| Problematic areas in handling sexual harassment that give rise to ethical dilemmas	Misrepresentation and collusion	Misuse of data	Manipulation and coercion	Values and goal conflict	Technical ineptness
Managing dress code and tempting behaviour				- Abridging employees personal decisions and values about dress	- Taking value laden and judgemental decisions about incidents /complaints of sexual harassment based on victims dress and behaviour - Lack of awareness about misconceptions and myths related to sexual harassment and the resultant inability to diagnose incidents of sexual harassment
Unawareness of the issue sexual harassment at workplace		- Implementing anti-sexual harassment policies with ulterior motives rather than with a real understanding of the importance and without real implementation			- Lack of knowledge and awareness about the concept of sexual harassment - Inability to diagnose and carry out training needs related to sexual harassment

Social trends and climate impact on the issue in various ways, especially with regard to reactions of victims and even management of companies, including HR professionals. For example, Mr. Ruwan of Company J, discussing the silence of victims, said that the 'shame factor' discourages victims of sexual harassment from complaining. The shame factor is greatly influenced by the culture of our society. People feel desperate and ashamed in facing the society when rumours spread that they have been sexually harassed. Therefore, some victims feel it is better to keep it to themselves than complaining. Further, cultural values and norms about dress and behaviour of women, which lead to self-blame and victim blame (Adikaram, in press) also give rise to certain dilemmas such as misrepresentation and collusion and technical ineptness. Mr. Ruwan also stated that due to changes in thinking pattern of the modern generation, some behaviours such as touching and ways of looking which are not considered sexual harassment by modern girls indicated how demographic climate affects sexual harassment. The economic climate did not appear to have a direct influence on sexual harassment at the micro level the level at which current study is exploring the issue.

It was also interesting to note how personal, organizational and professional ethics clash and influence the ethical dilemmas (Wooten, 2001) discussed above. While many organizations studied had anti-sexual harassment policies and codes of ethics prohibiting sexual harassment and indicating zero tolerance on paper, these organizational goals and ethics were not always in line with personal ethics of HR professionals, where they were trying to discourage complaining and were not effective in handling sexual harassment complaints. Sometimes, the organizational goals of protection against legal consequences contradicted HR managers' personal values and abilities, even when it was known that the victims were telling the truth, managers were forced to put aside the complaints due to a lack of evidence. Professional ethics contended with organizational ethics when HR managers were not properly aware of the complex issue of sexual harassment and did not make unethical decisions and demonstrate their professional knowledge about the issue.

All this indicates how ethical dilemmas in human resource management take place within a complex and multidimensional ethical context as indicated in Figure 1.

Overall, in comparison to the original framework of Wooten (2001), it was observed how the five ethical dilemmas takes place at various degrees in a complex intersection of organiational, professional and personal ethics, as a result of environmental influences upon the HR professionals responsibility in handling sexual harassment. While, the existance of the five ethical dilemmas, the overlap of professional, organizational and presonal ethics and demograhic trends, legilsative and regulatory climate and social trends were apparent in handling sexual harassment, economic climates' influence on ethical dilemmas was not seen. Further, the five key problematic areas identified in the study (handling complaints without proper evidence and ensuring the truthfulness of data; handling complaints against key persons; managing tempting behaviours at workplaces in order to prevent sexual harassment occurrences; unawareness about the issue of sexual harassment at workplaces, and; inability to ensure complete confidentiality) as against the eight HRM functions of Wooten's Framework was an addition and a novel contribution.

Figure 1: Ethical Environment of the HRM Professionals in Handling Sexual Harassment at Workplace
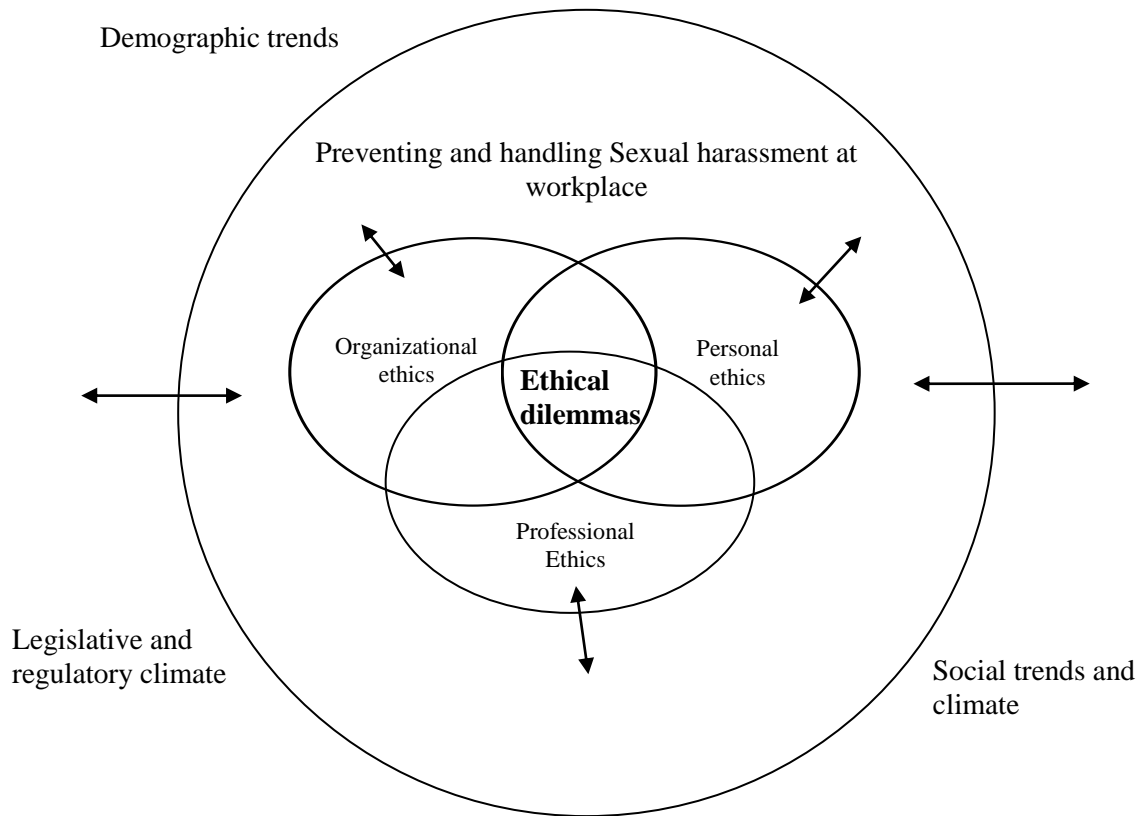
Source: Adapted from Wooten, K. C. (2001, p.164). Ethical dilemmas in human resource management: An application of a multidimensional framework, a unifying taxonomy, and applicable codes. *Human Resource Management Review , 11*, 159-175.

7. Conclusion

It was clearly evident how HR professionals face numerous ethical dilemmas in handling sexual harassment in organizations within a complex legal/regulatory, demographic and social environment, where they have to balance organizational, personal and professional ethics. While at the outset many HR professionals projected commitment in providing a harassment-free environment with zero tolerance, the mechanisms used by them in combating sexual harassment, their awareness and knowledge about the issue, the manner in which they investigate and handle complaints, how they make judgements and their overall sentiments about the issue, all indicated how ethical dilemmas of 'misrepresentation and collusion', 'misuse of data', 'manipulation and coercion', 'value and goal conflict' and 'technical ineptness' arise in different degrees. Taking action about complaints without proper evidence, unawareness of the issue of sexual harassment at the workplace, managing dress codes and provocative behaviour of female employees, handling complaints against a key person, and ensuring confidentiality were all identified to be problematic areas faced by HR professionals, giving rise to various ethical dilemmas. If these ethical dilemmas can be identified and acknowledged, there is a greater probability that unethical decisions would not be made and unethical behaviours would not be exhibited by HR (Wooten, 2001).

It was further noted how unaware HR professionals were about these very ethical dilemmas they face in handling sexual harassment cases, indicating a need to promote ethical behaviour and decision making among HR professionals. Though difficult, it is of utmost importance that HR professionals balance organizational ethics, personal ethics and professional ethics which will allow them to achieve greater recognition, occupational status and organizational visibility (Wooten, 2001). It is even more important to develop ethical standards for HR professionals in Sri Lanka with proper monitoring by relevant professional bodies. In an environment where more and more women enter the workforce and with more gender diversity being present in workplaces, HR should not overlook the negative consequences they would face when sexual harassment occurs in workplaces and should understand the need to practice ethical HR with greater accountability towards employees, organizations and the profession. Hence, HR professionals should be more sensitive, concerned and committed to ensuring ethical standards in matters such as sexual harassment to earn the employees' commitment and motivation in achieving the overall objectives of the companies while maintaining professional significance and standards.

While the study is conducted in the Sri Lankan context, the findings can be applied to the universal context, as the mechanisms used to combat and handle sexual harassment and the problems thus faced are similar, irrespective of the country. Further, with HR professionals around the world taking core responsibility in handling sexual harassment, the ethical dilemmas they face and the implications of these ethical dilemmas will be similar.

7.1 Limitations and Directions for Future Research

A notable limitation of the study is the absence of other stakeholder voices in identifying the ethical dilemmas HR professionals face. With only the HR professionals being interviewed in the study, there might be certain other ethical issues related to HR professionals' handling of sexual harassment in the workplace, that were ignored. Further, the study being conducted in the Sri Lankan context limit the applicability of the findings to different contexts. However, multinational companies being included in the study, as well the commonality of mechanisms and problems faced by HR professionals around the world in handling sexual harassment, help mitigate this limitation to a certain extent.

Future studies can obtain a more holistic view of ethical dilemmas that HR professionals face by listening to the voices of other stakeholders such as HR professional bodies, employees, and victims. Future studies can also explore in more detail the role episode (role conflict, role ambiguity and role multiplicity) presented by Wooten (2001) which gives rise to these various ethical dilemmas.

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Annexure I: Company Background

Company A

Company A is a Sri Lankan operation of a large multinational company, which has been in existence for more than a hundred years worldwide. This Sri Lankan company provides employment to more than 700 individuals. It was interesting to note that 99% of the workers in the manufacturing division are males. The company has won HRM awards on several occasions. Company A has customized its anti-sexual harassment global policy to the local environment and culture.

Company B

Company B is a privately owned bank in Sri Lanka, established eight decades ago. The bank has branches established island-wide and employs more than 4300 employees. The bank has won HRM awards on several occasions. There is a separate policy developed by the bank to deal with sexual harassment according to the guidelines of an anti-sexual harassment policy issued by the Employee Federation of Ceylon (EFC).

Company C

Company C engages in the automobile industry, providing various services and solutions to the market. The company employs about 134 female employees and 1400 male employees. The company has won HRM awards on several occasions. They have an anti-sexual harassment policy developed according to the guidelines issued by EFC.

Company D

Company D is a privately owned garment manufacturing and wet processing company in Sri Lanka, which was established a few decades ago and is now recognized as one of the top players in the industry. The company provides employment to around 1050 individuals and 80% of them are females. The company does not have an anti-sexual harassment policy implemented. Yet, they solve sexual harassment cases by using their grievance handling procedures.

Company E

Company E is a privately owned Sri Lankan multinational, established more than a hundred years ago. The business has diversified into agriculture, textiles, leisure, manufacturing, services and many more industries while contributing a significant percentage to the Sri Lankan export income. The company employs more than 30,000 individuals. Company E is about to implement its anti-sexual harassment policy in the near future.

Company F

Company F is privately owned and is one of the oldest hotels in Sri Lanka. This hotel engages with accommodation, catering and conventions, weddings, and dining. Hotel F provides employment to around 800 individuals and of which only 60 are females. The company does not have an anti-sexual harassment policy implemented, yet, solves sexual harassment cases by using a fair and confidential procedure. The company has understood the importance of moving towards a sexual harassment free environment, and has thus taken various steps to create awareness.

Company G

Company G is a company dealing in travel and tourism in Sri Lanka, established a few decades ago. The workforce comprises around 5600 individual with a gender balance. They have many other subsidiaries linked to the company and have won HRM awards on many occasions. They have a very complex and comprehensive policy and procedures to deal with sexual harassment at the workplace.

Company H

Company H is a large multinational company which engages in fast moving consumer goods production and sales. The company provides employment to about 1500 individuals directly and many more indirectly. The company has won HRM awards on several occasions. Their 'code of business principles' covers sexual harassment. This Sri Lankan company adheres to their global policy and acts within the country's legal requirements.

Company I

Company I is a global information technology (IT) services company providing IT consulting, technology, and outsourcing services. It was established more than a decade ago and currently employs over 1800 individuals. The workforce consists of around 65% male employees and 35% female employees. It has won HRM awards on many occasions. The company has been very strict on sexual harassment cases and they have an anti-sexual harassment policy covering a vast area.

Company J

Company J is a Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) Company started about 16 years ago and operating in over 11 countries. Its operations in Sri Lanka started about a decade ago. The company has about 500 employees and the average age of its work force is 23– 27 years. The company has a very good gender balance of approximately 50-50. The company has a global policy on creating a positive work environment where sexual harassment at work place is also addressed.