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Study on Experiences of Workplace Violence and Workplace Gender Discrimination among Korean Women Employees: A Cross-Sectional Study

Joohee Kim

Assistant Professor, Department of Nursing, Daedong University, Busan, Korea

Purpose: This study aims to examine female workers' experiences of workplace violence and workplace gender discrimination, and to identify the factors influencing these experiences.
Methods: Data were obtained from 16,161 female wage workers who participated in the 7th Korean Working Conditions Survey in 2023. Logistic regression analysis was used to examine these relationships.
Results: Significant factors related to verbal violence were educational level, marital status, number of employees, years of service at the current workplace, and type of occupation. Significant factors related to humiliating behavior were educational level, number of employees, and type of occupation, while significant factors related to sexual violence were number of employees and type of occupation. Marital status and type of occupation were also found to be significant factors influencing workplace gender discrimination experiences.
Conclusion: Significant factors influencing female workers' experiences of workplace violence and gender discrimination were either shared or distinct. Notably, type of occupation emerged as a common significant factor across both experiences. Therefore, prevention and intervention strategies for workplace violence and gender discrimination should adopt a multilayered approach that considers the specific characteristics and contexts of each type.

Keywords: Female; Employee; Workplace violence; Sexism

Introduction

The 'MeToo' movement, which shook the Korean society, and the 'taeum' culture (a Korean term referring to a harsh workplace bullying culture in nursing), which led to the suicide of nurses, are the phenomena that clearly show the reality of workplace violence that female workers face [1]. The World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations (UN) officially recognized violence against women as a serious social problem, and defined it as any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women [2]. Violence against women is a phenomenon regarded as a major social concern in Korea [3]. According to a recent survey, 69.8% of female workers and 48.8% of male workers have experienced workplace violence, showing that the prevalence of workplace violence is higher among female workers, and verbal violence accounted for the largest proportion of reported workplace violence at 46.3% [4]. A number of previous studies have reported that women experience more nonphysical violence, such as verbal violence, sexual harassment, and bullying, than men, while the prevalence of experiencing physical violence was higher among men than women [5].

Verbal violence is a problem that is much more prevalent than most people perceive it to be, and it is explicit or subtle verbal ex-

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Corresponding author: Joohee Kim
Department of Nursing, Daedong University, 88, Dongbugok-ro 27beon-gil, Geumjeong-gu, Busan, 46270, Korea
Tel: +82-51-510-4868 Fax: +82-51-510-4929 E-mail: hyperdream01@naver.com

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pressions intended to inflict pain on another person, including abusive language, public and hostile remarks about a person's ability, gossip, and rumors [6]. It has been clearly shown through previous studies that although physical violence may clearly include visible, overt expressions, verbal violence can have much more negative and long-lasting effects on victims [7].

Workplace violence experienced by female workers includes emotional violence, such as humiliating behavior, as well as verbal violence. Humiliating behavior is defined as any behavior that intentionally denies or lacks fundamental respect that an individual deserves according to social norms or additional respect that an individual deserves depending on situations [8]. In other words, workplace violence refers to incidents where workers are not respected due to abusive or insulting behavior directed at them. Cases of so-called 'gapjil' (a Korean term referring to the abuse of power by those in a higher position), such as the repeated occurrences of insulting behavior toward drivers and the Korean Air nut rage incident, suggest that workplace violence is a structurally embedded problem in the overall Korean society. This phenomenon is not an exceptional deviation committed only by some people who have difficulty regulating their emotions, but a serious problem in that such workplace violence is structurally tolerated and sometimes intentionally used.

According to WHO, sexual violence is defined as any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, or other act directed against a person's sexuality using coercion, and this definition encompasses a range of behaviors such as rape, attempted rape, and sexual harassment [2]. Workplace sexual violence is a type of workplace violence that is manifested in verbal, nonverbal, and physical forms, and can be interpreted as unwanted, unilateral, or unwelcome sexual behaviors that are humiliating, intimidating, or disconcerting [10]. Although everyone has a right to live and work without experiencing violence, workplace sexual violence occurs in all occupations all over the world [11]. However, since previous studies on workplace sexual violence experienced by female workers were mostly limited to specific occupations, there is a need for population-based research that encompasses various occupations and social classes [12].

Workplace sexual violence is closely related to the structural inequality problem of gender discrimination. Gender discrimination is a phenomenon of inequality based on gender, and it includes behaviors and practices that lead to unequal access to authority, resources, and opportunities and gender discrimination [13]. A patriarchal culture that is still persistently present in the Korean society supports the notion of male superiority, which promotes male dominance over women, and this social structural constraint leads to power imbalances in the workplace, which consequently contributes to the repeated occurrences of violence against women [14]. As a result, workplace gender discrimination against women still remains prevalent [15]. A previous study has shown that factors such as young age, lack of experience, frequent changes of job duties, specific work environments, low professional status, a hierarchical organizational structure, and minority status are gender-sensitive factors, and these factors reflect the structural disadvantages faced by female workers in the workplace [5]. Historically, female workers have experienced marginalization, inequality, and discrimination in the workplace, and it needs to be recognized that it is a misconception to think that women are supposed to take such unequal or discriminatory treatment in the workplace for granted [3].

Despite the prevalence of violence against women throughout the society and especially despite the rising rates of workplace violence, there is still a lack of social attention to the problem of workplace violence faced by female workers [16]. Therefore, to properly understand this problem, it is very important to understand the context in which workplace violence against female workers occurs. Both workplace violence experiences and gender discrimination experiences have been shown to negatively affect work attitudes among female workers [17]. It has been reported that female workers working in traditionally male-dominated working environments or occupations can be most vulnerable to gender discrimination and sexual harassment, and this finding suggests that we can elucidate the cultural foundations and structural contexts of gender discrimination through actual working environments [18]. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate main types of workplace violence (verbal violence, humiliating behavior, and sexual violence) and gender discrimination that female workers experience in the workplace respectively, and to identify the individual factors and working conditions that influence these experiences.

Methods

Study design

This study is a descriptive cross-sectional study to investigate female workers' experiences of workplace violence and gender discrimination at work and to identify factors influencing these experiences, and is a secondary data analysis using raw data from the 7th Korean Working Conditions Survey (2023).

Participants

The participants of this study were extracted from the raw data of

the 7th Korean Working Conditions Survey (2023) in consideration of the research aims. The Korean Working Conditions Survey (KWCS) has been periodically conducted by the Occupational Safety and Health Research Institute, and it is a government-approved statistical survey (No. 380002). It was developed based on the European Working Conditions Survey conducted by the European Union (EU), and the first KWCS was conducted in 2006. The participants of this survey are workers aged 15 years or older who reside in the sample households and have worked for the purpose of 'earning income' for at least one hour in the past week at the time of the survey. They include self-employed workers, business owners, paid workers, unpaid family workers, and workers on temporary leave. To reflect the current aging labor force structure of the Korean society as a super-aged society, the age limit was not set to 65 years or younger as in the KWCS conducted in 2006. Based on a previous study [19], in this study, out of the 50,195 participants of the 7th KWCS, 16,161 female paid workers were included in the final analysis, excluding 23,678 male workers, 7,106 self-employed workers/business owners, 3,225 unpaid family workers, and 25 military personnel.

Measures

Experiences of workplace violence

In this study, workplace violence was largely classified into three types: verbal violence, humiliating behavior, and sexual violence (sexual harassment, unwanted sexual attention). If the respondent answered "yes" to the question "Have you ever experienced verbal violence, humiliating behavior, sexual harassment, or unwanted sexual attention at work in the past year?", the person was considered to have experienced a specific type of workplace violence. The perpetrators of workplace violence were categorized into three types of people: supervisor, colleague or subordinate, and customer (student, patient, etc.). In response to the question "If you have experienced workplace violence in the past month, who most frequently inflicted workplace violence on you?", the person selected as the answer was regarded as the perpetrator.

Experiences of workplace gender discrimination

In this study, if the respondent answered "yes" to the question, "Have you experienced gender discrimination in the workplace in the past year?", the person was considered to have experienced gender discrimination in the workplace.

Individual factors and working conditions

The individual factors of the participants considered in this study were age, education level, and marital status. Regarding age, participants were divided into two age groups: the young or early middle-aged group (aged 49 years or younger) and the late-middle-aged or elderly group (aged 50 years or older). Education was categorized into high school or less and junior college or higher. Marital status was categorized into married and single.

With respect to working conditions, variables such as employment status, number of employees, years of service at the current workplace, weekly working hours, and occupation type were included in the analysis. Employment status was classified into regular and non-regular workers. Regular workers refer to permanent employees in terms of the employment type of wage workers, and temporary workers were categorized as nonregular workers. Regarding workplace size, number of employees was divided into less than 300 people and 300 people or more. Years of service at the current workplace was divided into less than 10 years, 10 to 19 years, and 20 years or more. Weekly working hours were divided into 42 hours or less and more than 42 hours, based on the average weekly working hours of Koreans, which is 42 hours [20]. Type of occupation was classified into management/professional occupations, clerical occupations, service/sales, elementary occupations, and others (agriculture, forestry, and fishery, skilled trades/machine operators, and assembly workers).

Ethical approval and data collection

This study used the raw data excluding personally identifiable information from the 7th KWCS (2023) provided by the Occupational Safety and Health Research Institute after receiving approval from the institution. The KWCS was conducted using a two-stage probability proportional to size (PPS) stratified cluster sampling method, First, enumeration districts were extracted using a probability proportional to size (PPS) sampling method by stratifying the country based on 17 cities and provinces (8 special and metropolitan cities and 9 provinces), regions (eastern parts and towns (eup) / townships (myeon) of 9 provinces), and housing type (apartment, general house). Then, households were selected from the enumeration districts selected as samples by a systematic sampling method. Trained interviewers visited the household members of the households selected as samples, explained the content of the survey and confidentiality of the respondents' personal information to the participants, and obtained informed consent from them before conducting a one-on-one interview. For the participants who were reluctant to participate in a household interview survey, they were surveyed by a self-administered survey method or an online survey method

only if they wanted to. This study was conducted after receiving an exemption determination from the Institutional Review Board of Dongseo University (IRB No: 1041493-E-2024-004).

Data analysis

In this study, the collected data was analyzed using SPSS version 25.0 (IBM Corp., Armonk, NY, USA). Female workers' individual factors, working conditions, and experiences of workplace violence and workplace gender discrimination were analyzed by calculating the frequencies and percentages. Also, x^2 test was conducted to identify differences in the experiences of workplace violence and workplace gender discrimination according to the participants' individual factors and working conditions. In addition, to analyze the factors influencing the experiences of workplace violence and workplace gender discrimination, a multivariate logistic regression analysis was performed by entering all the variables.

Since the KWCS data was collected from a sample extracted using a complex sampling design method, an analysis plan file was created by reflecting the strata, clusters, and weights to ensure the representativeness of the sample for the population, and the collected data was analyzed using methods for analyzing complex sample data. When an analysis database is constructed using only a portion of the data rather than the entire data obtained by a complex sampling design, the standard error of the estimate can be biased due to the omission of the complex sample design information included in the deleted data [21]. Thus, analysis was conducted using the entire data as the analysis database [21].

Results

Individual factors and working conditions of the participants

In this study, young or early-middle-aged people under 50 years of age accounted for 62.0% of the participants, and the late-middle-aged or elderly people aged 50 years or older accounted for 38.0%. The average age of the participants was 49.1 years. The proportion of married female workers (76.2%) was higher than that of unmarried female workers (23.8%), and the proportion of regular workers (67.9%) was also higher than that of non-regular workers (32.1%). Among the workers for whom data about workplace size was available, workers in workplaces with less than 300 employees (95.8%) accounted for the majority of the participants. As for years of service at the current workplace, workers working for less than 10 years at the current workplace accounted for 89.1%, those working for 10 to less than 20 years took up 9.3%, and those working for 20 years or more made up 1.7%. As to weekly working hours, workers working for 42 hours or less per week accounted for 79.0%, and those working for more than 42 hours per week took up 21.0%. In terms of type of occupation, managerial and professional workers (28.4%) accounted for the largest proportion of the participants, followed by service and sales workers (26.2%), clerical workers (22.5%), workers with elementary occupations (17.6%), and workers with occupations categorized as others (agriculture, forestry, fishery, skilled trades, machine operators, etc.) (5.4%) (Table 1).

Experiences of workplace violence and workplace gender discrimination among the participants

In this study, 4.4% of the participants reported having experienced verbal violence in the past year, and among the perpetrators of verbal violence, customers accounted for the largest proportion (84.2%), followed by supervisors (9.9%) and colleagues or subordinates (5.9%). In addition, 2.8% of the participants reported having experienced humiliating behavior, and among the perpetrators, customers accounted for the largest proportion (78.8%), followed by supervisors (15.3%) and colleagues or subordinates (5.9%). As for sexual harassment, 0.8% of the participants reported experiencing sexual harassment, and among the perpetrators, customers accounted for the largest proportion (88.6%), followed by colleagues or subordinates (8.2%) and supervisors (3.2%). Regarding unwanted sexual attention, 1.1% of the participants reported experiencing unwanted sexual attention, and among the perpetrators, customers took up the largest proportion (85.6%), followed by colleagues or subordinates (9.8%) and supervisors (4.6%). Of the participants, 2.7% reported experiencing workplace gender discrimination (Table 2).

Differences in workplace violence and workplace gender discrimination according to the general characteristics of the participants

There were statistically significant differences in the experience of verbal violence according to marital status, number of employees, weekly working hours, and type of occupation. The prevalence of verbal violence was significantly higher among unmarried workers (5.1%) than married workers (4.1%). In terms of the number of employees, the prevalence of verbal violence was significantly higher among workers working in workplaces with 300 or more employees (9.0%) than those working in workplaces with less than 300 employees (4.5%). Regarding weekly working hours, the prevalence of verbal violence was significantly

Table 1. General Characteristics of Research Subjects (*N*=16,161)

Variables	Categories	n (%)
Age (n = 16,161)	M ± SE	49.10 ± 14.93
	≤ 49	8,286 (62.0)
	≥ 50	7,875 (38.0)
Education level (n = 16,149)	High school or less	7,912 (41.0)
	College or higher	8,237 (59.0)
Marital status (n = 15,769)	Married	12,162 (76.2)
	Unmarried	3,607 (23.8)
Employment status (n = 16,161)	Regular	11,916 (67.9)
	Non-regular	4,245 (32.1)
Number of employees (n = 15,096)	< 300	14,462 (95.8)
	≥ 300	634 (4.2)
Years of service at current workplace (n = 14,003)	< 10	12,267 (89.1)
	≥ 10, < 20	1,447 (9.3)
	≥ 20	289 (1.7)
Weekly working hours (n = 16,161)	≤ 42	12,478 (79.0)
	> 42	3,683 (21.0)
Type of occupation (n = 16,161)	Management, professional	3,017 (28.4)
	Clerical	3,901 (22.5)
	Service, sales	5,579 (26.2)
	Elementary	2,939 (17.6)
	Others†	725 (5.4)

N = unweighted count, n = weighted count, % = weighted percent, †Agriculture, forestry, fishery/skilled trades/machine operators.

Table 2. Status of Types of Workplace Violence Perpetrators and Gender Discrimination Experiences (*N*=16,161)

Variables	Categories		n (%)	Perpetrator		
				Supervisor	Colleagues, subordinates	Customers
				n (%)		
Verbal violence (n = 16,140)		Yes	749 (4.4)	65 (9.9)	42 (5.9)	642 (84.2)
		No	15,391 (95.6)			
Humiliating behavior (n = 16,139)		Yes	467 (2.8)	63 (15.3)	22 (5.9)	382 (78.8)
		No	15,672 (97.2))			
Sexual violence (n = 16,145)	Sexual harassment	Yes	140 (0.8)	8 (3.2)	14 (8.2)	118 (88.6)
		No	16,005 (99.2)			
	Unwanted sexual attention	Yes	197 (1.1)	12 (4.6)	21 (9.8)	164 (85.6)
		No	15,948 (98.9)			
	Total†	Yes	201 (1.1)			
		No	15,944 (98.9)			
Gender discrimination (n = 16,100)		Yes	406 (2.7)			
		No	15,694 (97.3)			

N = unweighted count; n = weighted count; % = weighted percent; †Experienced sexual harassment or unwanted sexual attention or both sexual harassment and unwanted sexual attention.

higher among workers working for 42 hours or more per week (5.8%) than those working for less than 42 hours per week (4.1%). In terms of type of occupation, service and sales workers showed the highest prevalence of verbal violence at 6.9%, followed by managerial and professional workers (4.2%), clerical workers (4.0%), elementary occupations (2.4%) and other occu-

pations (skilled trades, machine operators, etc.) (2.1%).

With respect to the experience of humiliating behavior, there were significant differences according to education level, number of employees, weekly working hours, and type of occupation. The prevalence of humiliating behavior was significantly higher among workers in workplaces with 300 or more employees (4.9%) than those in workplaces with less than 300 employees (2.7%). Regarding weekly working hours, the prevalence of humiliating behavior was significantly higher among workers working for more than 42 hours per week (3.8%) than those working for 42 hours or less per week (2.5%). Regarding type of occupation, service and sales workers (4.1%) showed the highest prevalence of humiliating behavior, followed by managerial and professional workers (2.8%), clerical workers (2.2%), other occupations (skilled trades, machine operators, etc.) (2.1%), and elementary occupations (1.9%).

There were significant differences in the experience of sexual violence according to weekly working hours and type of occupation. The prevalence of sexual violence was significantly higher among workers working for more than 42 hours per week (1.7%) than those working for 42 hours or less per week (1.0%). In terms of type of occupation, service and sales workers showed the highest prevalence rate of sexual violence (2.6%), followed by clerical workers (0.9%), workers with occupations categorized as others (skilled trades, machine operators, etc.) (0.8%), managerial and professional workers (0.5%), and workers with elementary occupations (0.1%).

There were significant differences in the experience of gender discrimination according to age, education level, employment status, and type of occupation. Regarding age, the percentage of workers with experiences of gender discrimination at work was significantly higher among female workers aged 49 or younger (3.0%) than those aged 50 or older (2.3%). In addition, the percentage of people with experiences of gender discrimination at work was significantly higher among female workers with an education level of college or higher (3.3%) than those with an education level of high school or less (2.0%). Also, the percentage of people with the experience of gender discrimination was significantly higher among regular workers (3.1%) than non-regular workers (2.0%). In terms of type of occupation, clerical workers showed the highest prevalence of gender discrimination at 4.2%, followed by managerial and professional workers (2.9%), workers with occupations categorized as others (skilled trades, machine operators, etc.) (2.7%), service and sales workers (2.1%), and workers with elementary occupations (1.6%) (Table 3).

Factors affecting workplace violence and workplace gender discrimination

A multivariate logistic regression analysis was conducted to identify individual factors and working conditions significantly associated with the experiences of each type of workplace violence and workplace gender discrimination.

With respect to factors affecting the experience of verbal violence, education level, marital status, number of employees, years of service at the current workplace, and type of occupation were identified as significant influencing factors for the experience of verbal violence. Workers with an education level of high school or less were 1.40 times more likely to experience verbal violence than those with an education level of college or higher. Also, unmarried female workers were 1.37 times more likely to experience verbal violence than married female workers. Regarding workplace size, workers working in workplaces with 300 or more employees were 2.63 times more likely to experience verbal violence than those working in workplaces with less than 300 employees. As to years of service at the current workplace, workers with 10 to less than 20 years of service were 1.41 times more likely to experience verbal violence, compared to those with less than 10 years of service. In terms of type of occupation, service and sales workers were 1.68 times more likely to experience verbal violence, compared to managerial and professional workers, and managerial and professional workers were 2.33 times more likely to experience verbal violence, compared to workers with occupations categorized as others (skilled trades, machine operators, etc.).

As for the factors associated with the experience of humiliating behavior, education level, number of employees, and type of occupation were identified as significant influencing factors. Regarding education level, workers with an education level of high school or less were 2.50 times more likely to experience humiliating behavior, compared to those with an education level of college or higher. Also, workers working in workplaces with 300 or more employees were 2.54 times more likely to experience humiliating behavior than those working in workplaces with less than 300 employees. In addition, managerial and professional workers were 1.72 times more likely to experience humiliating behavior than clerical workers, and they were also 3.33 times more likely to experience it than workers with elementary occupations.

Significant influencing factors for the experience of sexual violence were found to be number of employees and type of occupation. Regarding workplace size, workers working in a workplace with 300 or more employees were 3.76 times more likely to experience sexual violence than those working in a workplace

Table 3. Differences in Workplace Violence and Gender Discrimination Experiences in the Workplace acording to the General Characteristics of Research Subjects (*N*=16,161)

Variables	Categories	Verbal violence			Humiliating behavior			Sexual violence			Gender discrimination		
		No	Yes	$x^{2\dagger}$ (*p*)	No	Yes	$x^{2\dagger}$ (*p*)	No	Yes	$x^{2\dagger}$ (*p*)	No	Yes	$x^{2\dagger}$ (*p*)
		n (%)			n (%)			n (%)			n (%)		
Age	M ± SE	45.7 ± 0.16	43.5 ± 0.65	1.25 (.345)	45.7 ± 0.16	44.4 ± 0.82	.241 (.704)	45.6 ± 0.15	44.6 ± 1.27	0.49 (.553)	45.7 ± 0.16	43.6 ± 0.89	6.88 (.038)
	≤ 49	7,866 (95.4)	406 (4.6)		8,011 (97.2)	262 (2.8)		8,168 (98.9)	107 (1.1)		8,018 (97.0)	239 (3.0)	
	≥ 50	7,525 (95.8)	343 (4.2)		7,661 (97.3)	205 (2.7)		7,779 (98.8)	94 (1.2)		7,676 (97.7)	167 (2.3)	
Education level	High school or less	7,540 (95.5)	364 (4.5)	0.25 (.684)	7,668 (96.7)	236 (3.3)	11.20 (.010)	7,807 (98.7)	99 (1.3)	4.81 (.075)	7,728 (98.0)	152 (2.0)	24.45 (< .001)
	College or higher	7,840 (95.6)	385 (4.4)		7,993 (97.6)	231 (2.4)		8,126 (99.0)	102 (1.0)		7,955 (96.7)	254 (3.3)	
Marital status	Married	11,639 (95.9)	505 (4.1)	8.22 (.028)	11,810 (97.2)	333 (2.8)	.557 (.580)	12,012 (98.9)	137 (1.1)	1.85 (.243)	11,801 (97.0)	309 (3.0)	6.64 (.065)
	Unmarried	3,398 (94.9)	207 (5.1)		3,494 (97.4)	111 (2.6)		3,556 (98.0)	49 (2.0)		3,510 (97.8)	90 (2.2)	
Employment status	Regular	11,293 (95.3)	606 (4.7)	6.57 (.066)	11,523 (97.1)	375 (2.9)	1.65 (.391)	11,758 (99.0)	147 (1.0)	2.30 (.252)	11,540 (96.9)	334 (3.1)	14.07 (.014)
	Non-regular	4,098 (96.2)	143 (3.8)		4,149 (97.4)	92 (2.6)		4,186 (98.7)	54 (1.3)		4,154 (98.0)	72 (2.0)	
Number of employees	< 300	13,810 (95.5)	636 (4.5)	33.67 (< .001)	14,047 (97.3)	397 (2.7)	11.54 (.002)	14,282 (99.0)	166 (1.0)	7.47 (.050)	14,035 (97.2)	374 (2.8)	0.19 (.738)
	≥ 300	567 (91.0)	65 (9.0)		596 (95.1)	36 (4.9)		622 (97.9)	11 (2.1)		616 (97.5)	17 (2.5)	
Years of service at current workplace	< 10	11,677 (95.5)	574 (4.5)	2.81 (.260)	11,894 (97.2)	353 (2.8)	0.71 (.705)	12,103 (99.0)	151 (1.0)	3.27 (.121)	11,904 (97.2)	312 (2.8)	2.07 (.419)
	≥ 10, < 20	1,358 (94.5)	87 (5.5)		1,392 (96.8)	53 (3.2)		1,425 (98.6)	20 (1.4)		1,395 (96.9)	47 (3.1)	
	≥ 20	270 (94.9)	19 (5.1)		279 (97.3)	10 (2.7)		288 (99.9)	1 (0.1)		276 (95.6)	13 (4.4)	
Weekly working hours	≤ 42	11,928 (95.9)	540 (4.1)	19.31 (.001)	12,122 (97.5)	341 (2.5)	14.60 (.007)	12,338 (99.0)	131 (1.0)	12.94 (.002)	12,123 (97.4)	305 (2.6)	2.66 (.267)
	> 42	3,463 (94.2)	209 (5.8)		3,550 (96.2)	126 (3.8)		3,606 (98.3)	70 (1.7)		3,571 (96.8)	101 (3.2)	
Type of occupation	Management, professional	2,880 (95.8)	134 (4.2)	103.12 (< .001)	2,924 (97.2)	91 (2.8)	40.20 (.013)	2,995 (99.5)	20 (0.5)	131.56 (< .001)	2,942 (97.1)	65 (2.9)	50.11 (< .001)
	Clerical	3,727 (96.0)	167 (4.0)		3,790 (97.8)	104 (2.2)		3,855 (99.1)	41 (0.9)		3,723 (95.8)	163 (4.2)	
	Service, sales	5,202 (93.1)	369 (6.9)		5,357 (95.9)	213 (4.1)		5,411 (97.4)	131 (2.6)		5,453 (97.9)	108 (2.1)	
	Elementary	2,874 (97.6)	65 (2.4)		2,877 (98.1)	50 (1.9)		2,934 (99.9)	4 (0.1)		2,880 (98.4)	45 (1.6)	
	Others‡	708 (97.9)	14(2.1)		714 (97.9)	9 (2.1)		719 (99.2)	5 (0.8)		696 (97.3)	25 (2.7)	

N = unweighted count; n = weighted count, % = weighted percent; †Using a Rao-Scott chi-square test; ‡Agriculture, forestry, fishery/skilled trades/machine operators.

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with less than 300 employees. In terms of type of occupation, service and sales workers were 4.70 times more likely to experience sexual violence than managerial and professional workers, and managerial and professional workers were 12.50 times more likely to experience sexual violence than workers with elementary occupations.

Factors significantly associated with experiences of workplace gender discrimination were marital status and type of occupation. Specifically, married workers were 1.58 times more likely to experience gender discrimination, compared to unmarried workers, and clerical workers were 1.82 times more likely to experience gender discrimination, compared to managerial and professional workers (Table 4).

Discussion

This study investigated the experiences of main types of workplace violence with relatively high prevalence, such as verbal violence, humiliating behavior, sexual violence, and gender discrimination, and analyzed individual factors and working conditions affecting the experiences of each type of workplace violence and gender discrimination among 16,161 female workers by using data from the 7th Korea Working Conditions Survey. The main results of this study are discussed below.

First, in this study, verbal violence showed the highest prevalence rate at 4.4% among the analyzed types of workplace violence, and factors affecting the experiences of verbal violence were found to be education level, marital status, number of employees, years of service at the current workplace, and type of occupation. Female workers were reported to be mainly victims of verbal, psychological, and sexual violence [22], and in particular, regular female workers showed the highest prevalence rate of verbal violence [23]. Consistent with the present study, a previous study of nurses also found that the likelihood of experiencing verbal violence was high among nurses, who are mostly comprised of women [24]. Factors that significantly influenced only the experience of verbal violence were marital status and years of service at the current workplace. In this study, female workers with 10 to less than 20 years of service were 1.41 times more likely to experience verbal violence, compared to those with less than 10 years of service. In addition, a prior study of nurses also reported that a long length of service was found to be a risk factor

Table 4. Factors Influencing Workplace Violence and Gender Discrimination Experiences in the Workplace

Variables	Categories	Verbal violence (n = 13,731)	Humiliating behavior (n = 13,724)	Sexual violence (n = 13,731)	Gender discrimination (n = 13,693)
		OR (95% CI)	OR (95% CI)	OR (95% CI)	OR (95% CI)
Age	≤ 49	1.01 (0.75-1.37)	1.20 (0.83-1.73)	1.33 (0.71-2.47)	0.96 (0.66-1.42)
	≥ 50	1	1	1	1
Education level	High school or less	1.40 (1.02-1.92)*	2.50 (1.66-3.77)**	1.37 (0.72-2.56)	0.68 (0.45-1.02)
	College or higher	1	1	1	1
Marital status	Married	1	1	1	1.58 (1.11-2.24)*
	Unmarried	1.37 (1.06-1.78)**	1.00(0.72-1.39)	0.83(0.45-1.52)	1
Employment status	Regular	1.23 (0.89-1.69)	1.23 (0.73-2.08)	1.23 (0.66-2.32)	1.17 (0.79-1.73)
	Non-regular	1	1	1	1
Number of employees	< 300	1	1	1	1
	≥ 300	2.63 (1.83-3.79)**	2.45 (1.61-3.71)**	3.76 (1.58-8.93)**	0.78 (0.41-1.50)
Years of service at current workplace	< 10	1	1	1	1
	≥ 10, < 20	1.41 (1.04-1.92)*	0.70 (0.30-1.65)	1.34 (0.68-2.65)	0.91 (0.60-1.36)
	≥ 20	1.10 (0.60-2.00)	1.21 (0.82-1.79)	0.15 (0.02-1.13)	1.30 (0.65-2.59)
Weekly working hours	> 42	1	1	1	1
	≤ 42	1.20 (0.99-1.45)	1.20 (0.82-1.74)	1.48 (0.94-2.33)	1.09 (0.78-1.52)
Type of occupation	Management, professional	1	1	1	1
	Clerical	0.79 (0.58-1.06)	0.58 (0.41-0.84)**	1.67 (0.77-3.62)	1.82 (1.26-2.64)**
	Service, sales	1.68 (1.20-2.36)**	0.86 (0.54-1.36)	4.70 (2.25-9.83)**	1.03 (0.65-1.61)
	Elementary	0.55 (0.30-1.02)	0.30 (0.16-0.59)**	0.08 (0.01-0.71)*	0.92 (0.48-1.75)
	Others†	0.43 (0.21-0.89)*	0.45 (0.14-1.51)	1.20 (0.22-6.47)	1.13 (0.61-2.09)

n = weighted count; †Agriculture, forestry, fishery/skilled trades/machine operators; *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$

for workplace violence [25]. Furthermore, in another study of nurses, of whom approximately 90% were female, nurses with a longer length of service were found to be more likely to experience and inflict verbal violence [26], and these findings are similar to the results of this study. In particular, verbal violence repeatedly occurs in a vicious cycle in which victims become perpetrators [26], showing that this vicious cycle of verbal violence can become culturally entrenched in various organizations. Therefore, there is a need for in-depth research on this phenomenon.

Second, in this study, 2.8% of female workers reported experiencing humiliating behavior, and factors significantly associated with the experience of humiliating behavior were found to be education level, number of employees, and type of occupation. In this connection, a previous study of distribution workers reported that 72.9% of the respondents reported experiencing verbal violence, including verbal insults [27], suggesting that such violence commonly occurs in some types of occupations. In addition, the results of this study showed that female workers with an education level of high school or less were 2.5 times more likely to be exposed to humiliating behavior than those with an education level of college or higher, indicating that there may be differences in job content, working environments, and positions within the organization depending on education level. These results suggest that it is necessary to establish an anonymous reporting system and guidelines on the protection of victims to immediately respond to humiliating behavior, and it is also required to apply organizational culture improvement programs primarily in occupations with a large number of employees with an education level of high school or less.

Third, among the types of workplace violence analyzed in this study, sexual violence had the lowest prevalence rate at 1.1%, and significant influencing factors for the experiences of sexual violence were the number of employees and the type of occupation. The percentage of workers with experiences of sexual violence, including sexual harassment and unwanted sexual attention, was 4.70 times higher among service and sales workers than managerial and professional workers. This finding is consistent with the results of a previous study [20] showing that increased contact with customers is associated with a higher likelihood of exposure to workplace violence. In addition, female workers generally take up a high proportion of employees in the occupations that deal with customers or sell products [21], and in this study, customers were found to account for the majority (approximately more than 90%) of the perpetrators of workplace violence experienced by service and sales workers, indicating the seriousness of violence committed by customers. Since the Emotional Workers Protection Act began to be enforced recently, some organizations have established customer response guidelines and manuals on responses to customer-initiated workplace violence, but there are still limitations in the consistency and effectiveness of the application of them in the field. Therefore, in addition to simply setting up guidelines, a practical protection system for workers is needed, including the establishment of a crisis response system, placement of a dedicated customer service team, AI-based emotional monitoring, and professional counseling and rehabilitation systems. In addition, it is also necessary to implement education for the improvement of awareness of emotional labor within the organization and ensure the effectiveness of the legal apparatus for strengthening employers' responsibility.

Fourth, in this study, 2.7% of the respondents reported experiencing gender discrimination in the workplace, and marital status and type of occupation were found to have a significant impact on the experiences of gender discrimination. In this study, a higher rate of gender discrimination was associated with younger age, a higher education level, and regular employment. A lower percentage of workers with experiences of gender discrimination among irregular female workers may be attributed to the fact that irregular female workers tend to perceive gender discrimination as a result of employment type or job positions rather than external factors [15], and thus they may have relatively lower sensitivity to or awareness of discrimination, compared to regular female workers. A foreign study reported that although women with higher levels of education respond more sensitively to gender discrimination, they have better problem-solving skills, so they are less negatively affected by gender discrimination [28]. However, it should be noted that since women with higher levels of education are more likely to work in male-dominated occupations, they could be more frequently exposed to gender discrimination, and may be at a disadvantage in recognizing and dealing with the problem of gender discrimination in a male-dominated organizational culture [15]. In addition, this study found that married workers are 1.58 times more likely to experience gender discrimination than unmarried workers, and this finding suggests that married women are more likely to experience gender discrimination in the workplace. To alleviate this problem, it is considered necessary to establish a system for ensuring that social responsibility for housework and caregiving can be shared. In other words, it is important to expand universal care services at the national level and effectively implement flexible work arrangements. In addition, employee incentives should be provided to male workers who participate in childcare as well as female workers who participate in childcare in order to reduce a gender im-

balance in childcare responsibility within the organization and create a workplace culture based on gender equality.

Fifth, type of occupation was found to be a major factor affecting both the experiences of workplace violence and the experiences of gender discrimination. The prevalence of verbal violence was 1.68 times higher in service and sales workers than in management and professional workers, and it was 2.33 times higher in managerial and professional workers than in workers with occupations categorized as others (skilled trades, machine operators, etc.). In the case of humiliating behavior, its prevalence was found to be 1.72 times higher in managerial and professional workers than in clerical workers, and it was 3.33 times higher in managerial and professional workers than in workers with elementary occupations. As for sexual violence, it was found that the prevalence of sexual violence was 4.70 times higher among service and sales workers than management and professional workers, and it was 12.50 times higher among managerial and professional workers than workers with elementary occupations. In particular, this study found that customers were the main perpetrators of each type of workplace violence, taking up a higher proportion of the perpetrators for each type of workplace violence than supervisors, colleagues, or subordinates. These research results suggest that there is a need to establish a real-time response system at the organizational level to protect service, managerial, and professional workers who are vulnerable to workplace violence in the process of interactions with customers. Thus, it is necessary to put a 'crisis response protocol' in place within the organization, and expand protective measures equivalent to those for emotional laborers not only to emotional laborers but also to various occupations that involve customer contact, such as managerial and professional workers. More specifically, it is necessary to implement measures such as strengthening pre-service training, reorganization of customer service personnel, introduction of AI-based counseling and emotion monitoring systems, operation of psychological rehabilitation programs for victims, and introduction of a paid leave system for the recovery of victims. Additionally, there is a need for legislation to establish a manual for responding to malicious complaints, and it is also necessary to introduce an institutional system to hold employers responsible for protecting employees' human rights when responding to customers. These measures will mitigate the negative impacts of a customer-centric service culture and contribute to creating a sustainable work environment.

Meanwhile, the prevalence of workplace gender discrimination was 1.82 times higher in clerical workers than in managerial and professional workers. These results suggest that the structural characteristics of the working conditions of clerical workers, the hierarchical organizational culture of clerical occupations, and gender role stereotypes that implicitly operate in the process of job performance can influence experiences of gender discrimination. Therefore, there is a need for in-depth analysis on the patterns of repeatedly occurring workplace gender discrimination cases in clerical occupations and structural factors underlying them, such as organizational culture, job assignments, and evaluation systems. In addition, follow-up research on female clerical workers should be conducted to develop effective improvement measures to create working environments based on gender equality.

Lastly, the results of this study revealed that number of employees, which indicates workplace size, is a common influencing factor for all types of workplace violence among female workers. Workplace violence was found to be more likely to occur in large workplaces with 300 or more employees than in small or mid-size workplaces. More specifically, in large workplaces with 300 or more employees, verbal violence was 2.63 times more likely to occur, humiliating behavior was 2.45 times more likely to occur, and sexual violence was 3.76 times more likely to occur. These results suggest that larger organizations are likely to have a more complex hierarchical structure, a greater psychological distance between members, and less clear communication between members, which may lead to an increased likelihood of workplace violence. Therefore, monitoring and review systems for preventing workplace violence need to be run in a customized manner by taking into account the workplace size and organizational culture. Especially in large organizations, it is difficult to prevent conflicts only through regular training programs, so multi-layered interventions are required to perform continuous monitoring and promote communication. In addition to uniform training for all employees, it is necessary to implement participatory training programs that can promote collaboration between departments and enhance mutual understanding and trust between employees. Additionally, managers should be provided with tailored leadership training for conflict mediation, violence prevention, and the improvement of human rights awareness. This training can help to prevent workplace violence and conflicts, and contribute to the creation of a healthy organizational culture.

This study has several limitations. First, due to the methodological limitations of secondary data analysis, only variables included in the raw data were used in the analysis, so the scope of analysis was limited. For example, sexual violence can include a variety of behaviors, including sexual harassment and unwanted sexual attention, but since each item in the questionnaire was constructed individually, there was a possibility that there were

duplicate responses, making it impossible to conduct a specific analysis of the perpetrators. In addition, due to the nature of the self-administered survey method, there is a possibility that respondents may have avoided or distorted their responses to questions about sensitive experiences such as workplace violence, so the prevalence estimated from the collected data may be lower than the actual prevalence [19].

Nevertheless, this study has significance in the following respects. First, this study objectively investigated the current status of workplace violence and gender discrimination experienced by female workers by using representative nationwide data. Second, this study specifically examined the current status of various types of workplace violence, such as verbal violence, humiliating behavior, and sexual violence, as well as workplace gender discrimination, and showed that individual factors, such as education level, and working conditions, such as type of occupation and number of employees indicating workplace size, differently affect distinct types of work violence and gender discrimination.

Conclusions

This study aimed to identify factors influencing the experiences of workplace violence and gender workplace discrimination among female workers through a secondary data analysis by using data from the 7th Korean Working Conditions Survey. As a result, factors significantly associated with verbal violence were found to be education level, marital status, number of employees, years of service at the current workplace, and type of occupation. Meanwhile, significant influencing factors for humiliating behavior were education level, number of employees, and type of occupation. As for factors affecting sexual violence, the number of employees and the type of occupation were identified as significant influencing factors. These results show that although there are common influencing factors for different types of workplace violence, some factors significantly affect only specific types of workplace violence. In addition, marital status and type of occupation were found to have a significant impact on the experience of workplace gender discrimination. Therefore, to prevent workplace violence and workplace gender discrimination and protect female workers from them, it is necessary to establish customized education programs and systems that reflect the characteristics of specific occupational groups, utilize differentiated prevention strategies based on the workplace size and working conditions, and establish effective workplace violence response systems and victim support systems.

ORCID

Joohee Kim, https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7716-333X

Conflict of interest

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Data availability

Please contact the corresponding author for data availability.

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