

An Analysis of Women Suffering Sexual Harassment in the Workplace

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Abstract: The concept of gender equality helped bring the issue of sexual harassment into public discourse, shifting it from a private concern to a matter requiring societal attention. As society moved away from viewing sexual harassment as a private matter, increasing numbers of women sought legal recourse, bringing workplace harassment issues to the forefront of public concern. This article examines the prevalence of workplace sexual harassment across various social groups and the consequences that victims must endure as a result. The article also considers possible explanations for the occurrence of this phenomenon. This article aims to draw people's attention toward the severity and universality of sexual harassment by providing profound theories and studies. By challenging traditional beliefs that women are expected to serve others, this article emphasizes the importance of recognizing sexual harassment as a human rights issue that requires awareness and action from both women and men. Recognizing sexual harassment as an issue that must be eradicated reflects the development and maturation of women's rights ideology. Raising awareness about the universality and severity of sexual harassment encourages the establishment of widely recognized moral standards.

Keywords: Workplace sexual harassment, Sexual discrimination, Power of women

1. Introduction

Sexual harassment is pervasive in many scenarios. News reports frequently highlight incidents of sexual harassment in public spaces like subway stations, bars, and nightclubs. Historically, perceptions of sexual harassment have shifted significantly since the 1970s, particularly concerning gender roles and expectations. Initially, women often experienced harassment while performing tasks traditionally seen as supportive roles, such as organizing office spaces or assisting in meetings [1]. However, increased female participation in the workforce has heightened women's awareness of their aspirations for life satisfaction, career growth, and self-fulfillment. The concept of 'work' has evolved to encompass long-term career development and personal identity, not just a means of earning a living, thus reflecting a broader sense of social worth [2]. As a result, women's roles in the workplace have become more comparable to men's, with an increasing number of women stepping into leadership and managerial positions. Theories have since emerged that examine the evolving dynamics between power, sexual harassment, and other forms of gender discrimination. This article will further explore explanations for the 'paradox of power' and other theories that help explain motivations behind gender discrimination.

In this article, the author examines the prevalence of sexual harassment in the workplace and explores explanations of harassment from accompanying historical events that people experience, societal conditions and people's typical ideology towards sexual harassment, and individual's inner discriminations. The review concludes with a discussion of prominent theories and studies that support the proposed hypothesis and identify patterns in the data. The power dynamics between superiors and subordinates strongly influence sexual harassment in the workplace. Studying sexual harassment in the workplace seeks to understand the relationship between the frequency and severity of harassment and the job position or possessed range of work control that female employees hold.

This article wants to build upon existing studies on sexual harassment in the workplace and offer a comprehensive conclusion and synthesis of current research. Another goal of this article is to emphasize the importance and universality of sexual harassment, encouraging greater attention to this issue. Furthermore, the article highlights the importance of raising awareness about relevant laws and legal resources available to address sexual harassment.

To address this issue, various research methods, such as literature reviews, will be employed to understand sexual harassment in the workplace and within different social groups.

2. Literature Review

Since the 1970s, research on sexual harassment has firstly concentrated on the need to define it as a serious problem that needs to be paid attention to. Following the publication of Catharine MacKinnon's book, sexual harassment began to be considered verbally and systematically. In response to evidence of male workers being targeted by sexual harassment, some feminist perspectives have argued that sexual harassment is an act perpetrated by powerful male workers against 'powerless females.' After years of analysis, research shifted the discussion into developing empirical methods and precise measurements to explore the issue in greater detail and logical, general system [3].

After the 1970s, as women began to rise to positions of leadership, new dynamics in sexual harassment emerged, leading to discussions on the relationship between women's switching power and harassment. Some studies have underscored the power of women, which makes them recognized targets. Suggesting that rather than reducing exposure to sexual harassment, power in the workplace may actually increase women's vulnerability to victimization [1].

3. Social and Historical Contexts towards the Development of Sexual Harassment

Men's attitudes, from the beginning of the Industrial Revolution through much of the 20th century, towards women gaining job opportunities and social rights led to the groundless slander towards women's abilities." Men continued to emphasize the negative effects of women entering the workforce, perpetuating the idea that women were not suitable for many jobs and were undeserving of labor rights or access to higher-level positions. The prevalence of sexual harassment was evident but largely ignored, as women were primarily seen as cheap labor. Women were not gaining the consciousness of revolt. For society viewing them as the problem rather than recognizing them as victims, women themselves lost the opportunity and subjective consciousness to fight. In this context, co-workers held power over a woman's job and economic security [4]. Society became more aware of the equal human rights possessed by both men and women until the feminist movement and civil rights legislation of the 1960s. Society became more aware of the equal human rights possessed by both men and women. Women's access to nontraditional job opportunities increased, and there was a growing call for equal treatment and opportunities for both women and men. However, the persistence of rigid gender norms led to more serious problems with sexual harassment in the workplace, with the traditional gender stereotypes still remaining unchanged.

Women also suffer sexual harassment due to their necessity to work for family income. As economic necessity became a heavy burden for raising the whole family, women's increasing obligation to work often left them with little opportunity or motivation to fight for their rights while enduring harassment to support their families. Women preferred to bear more of the harmful behaviors in the workplace to continue their qualification of consistently working and gaining job opportunities.

4. Prevalence and Measurement of Sexual Harassment

The occurrence of sexual harassment can be seen considerably due to the presented data. The most recent US National Women's Study, conducted by the Crime Victims and Treatment Center, found that 12% of women reported experiencing harassment in their lifetime. Many of the studies reveal that over half or nearly half of women suffer sexual harassment. "In Canada, studies estimate that between 23% and 51% of women experience sexual harassment during their lifetime". Although the definition of sexual harassment remains unclear due to the lack of standardized limitations and the non-covered forms of the channels to evaluate the precise quantity of harassment, reviewing the available data and reports on sexual harassment experiences highlights the need for formal measurement and standardized definitions.

5. The Prevalence of Sexual Harassment in the Workplace Among Different Conditions

5.1. Harasser of the Behavior

Studies show that male supervisors against women primarily perpetrate sexual harassment in the workplace. Although studies reviewed include instances where men are also victims of sexual harassment, their incidence is lower [4].

Additional details about the women victims are provided below. A study of federal employees conducted by the Merit Systems Protection Board found that among the women who reported being victims, 51% were trainees, 67% were aged 16 to 19, and 47% earned less than \$10,999 annually [5]. More than half of the victims were harassed by males who were mostly older than the victims. More than half of the victims identified co-workers or other employees, mostly supervisors, as their harassers.

5.2. Victims of the Behavior

5.2.1. Victims Condition Towards Family Status, Education Level and Race and National Origin

Firstly, when considering family status, single women are often viewed as more vulnerable and susceptible to victimization than married women. De Coster and colleagues suggest that single women are perceived as deviating from the traditional family structure, making them seem less protected and more sexually available, with 'fewer barriers' to reach.

Regarding education, De Coster and colleagues found that women with higher education who contradict traditional gender roles by competing with men are more likely to experience harassment [6]. This finding indirectly supports the power-threat model, which suggests that women who challenge men's dominant positions are more frequent targets of harassment. As men perceived their traditional roles being replaced by women, they were more likely to develop negative feelings toward this 'scramble for power.'

Economists David Weil and Amanda Pyle found that "workers who feel vulnerable to exploitation, such as immigrant workers, those with lower education or fewer skills, and those in smaller

workplaces or informal sectors, are less likely to assert their rights.” Low-wage workers, who are more likely to have lower education and economic status, frequently experience illicit harassment in the workplace.” Although the collected data shows that more than half of women experience sexual harassment at work, only 25% report it to anyone, and just 5% file a formal complaint. This is a common pattern observed within certain social groups that most workers ignore such treatment and never pursue justice against the harasser or employer. [7].

Furthermore, when considering race and national origin, some studies show that women of color are more likely to experience multiple forms of harassment, while other studies report few racial differences.

5.2.2. Victims Condition Towards Gender-Identification and the Expression of Gender

Gender identity and expressions of gender are closely linked to forms of sex-based discrimination. Connell’s theory of hegemonic masculinity argues that society privileges a singular normative ideal of male behavior, offering a particular sociological pattern for understanding harassment, gender, and power dynamics [6]. When men are perceived as feminine, their vulnerability to harassment may increase. Additionally, when women challenge their traditionally inferior position by taking on roles typically considered ‘manly’, such as managing and leading work teams, or by expressing gender in stereotypically masculine ways, such as being confident, dominant, or managing, they may become more vulnerable to sexual harassment. Perpetrators, to some extent, assault others to reinforce the ideology of gender conformity and regain a sense of control by restoring traditional gender roles through their actions. When men harass other men, they ‘prove their manhood by undermining their targets’ masculinity’ [6].

5.2.3. Workplace Demography

Women are unlikely to be promoted to management unless a significant portion of women have already taken charge of managerial positions. “The weight of evidence suggests that harassment, of both men and women, most often occurs in male-dominated work settings. Studies suggest that male subordinates may become jealous of the priority given to their female manager, which increases the vulnerability of female managers to sexual harassment. They are especially sensitive to women in leadership positions. “For instance, one woman wrote that she ‘cannot escape sexual harassment because male workers are jealous of her supervisory role [1]. As Dellinger and Williams suggest, qualitative studies analyze how the standards and severity of sexual behavior vary across different organizational and occupational contexts. Similar to Tallichet’s study of coal miners, McLaughlin’s study interviewed victims who suffered unfair treatment, including harassment and discrimination, aimed at diminishing the role of women in male-dominated occupations. “For example, Jordan experienced gender-based discrimination before officially beginning her security job.” Her co-workers refused to issue her a uniform, saying, ‘There is no way they hired you for security.’ Her colleagues viewed her as ‘not belonging in law enforcement’ despite being officially hired through legal channels. When the policewoman gets a call, no one will assist until the dispatcher assigns someone [6].

5.2.4. Prominent Theories that Reveal an Explanation of the Prevalence of Sexual Harassment

Some behaviors, such as ‘girl watching,’ demonstrate men’s power to sexually evaluate women. Men often view these actions as commonplace and are surprised when women take offense. Martin’s finding that men ‘mobilize masculinities’ by engaging in behaviors that may harm women as a group provides a theoretical basis for this phenomenon.

Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity outlines the societal standard for what qualifies as an 'eligible' and 'qualified' man. As discussed earlier, men may be vulnerable to harassment if they do not conform to traditional notions of 'manliness.' Similarly, women who challenge traditional 'masculine' traits may become more likely targets of harassment. Sexual harassment thus becomes a tool to 'correct' the traditional gender system. Additionally, the power-threat model suggests that women who threaten men's dominance in the gender system and move further from their subordinate positions are more frequent targets. Studies have been presented to support the paradoxical power-threat model.

Due to the deeply rooted belief that women are incapable of handling jobs well, it has become more difficult for women to qualify for leadership roles in the workplace. Additional layers of obstruction stemming from ingrained societal discrimination make it harder for female leaders to objectively demonstrate their abilities in the workplace.

6. Conclusion

Through analysis with quantitative and qualitative measurements and case studies, this study proposes an overall overview of the current research on the formation background, prevalence, severity, and possible explanations of sexual harassment in the workplace. The research emphasizes the influences of traditional stereotypes towards the "classical" gender system in the job market and the revolt and resolution through women's actions and historical background. Additionally, the study points out the prevalence of sexual harassment in the workplace by giving data on specific targets and victims, as well as environmental factors triggering the conclusions. Finally, the article pointed out possible theories that refine the trigger of sexual harassment in a more specific aspect by considering the inner relationship between different roles in the company and their attitudes toward females having power or getting advanced achievements. Ultimately, these findings are of significant theoretical and practical importance for promoting people's awareness towards the advancement of temporary ideology towards equal human rights and gender equality, helping females to get rid of sexual harassment and use their true talents.

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