

Reflective article review – sexual harassment

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According to a survey by Crocker and Kalemba (1999) in “ The Incidence and Impact Of Women’s Experiences of Sexual Harassment in Canadian Workplaces”, sexually harassed women in the workplace has been considered a contentious social dilemma as half women in the workforce went through incidence of various types of sexual harassment at work which made sexual harassment as the most widespread form of female sexual victimization, 1, 990 women divulged their sexual harassment experiences, responses and how it affected their work and personal lives; furthermore, this analysis shows the characteristics of female sexual harassment and its consequences at workplace; moreover, the results are used to discuss complications and the organizational power theory’s understanding of workplace harassment complications.

Crocker and Kalemba (1999) first present a sexual harassment survey done by Fitzgerald et al (1988) in the late 1980s in which the survey explore specific issues pertaining to risk factors and women’s responses to sexual harassment at workplace. The study was considered as the largest Canadian survey describing 1, 990 number of women that participated about incidence and consequences of female sexual harassment in Canadian workplaces. Behaviours that are derogatory about women such as visual sexual materials are considered as gender harassment (542). Furthermore, verbal and non-verbal treatment are described as unwanted sexual attention while bribery or intimidation to gain sexual favours are part of sexual coercion (542). Victims of workplace sexual harassment go through feelings of job dissatisfaction, absenteeism, nervousness, anger, irritability, low self-esteem and increased stress level (543).

Thacker and Gohmann (1996) research findings showed workplace sexual harassment are worst in male dominated settings that involved supervisor sexual harassment, sexual coercion and long term sexual harassment (543). The authors pointed out that organizational power theory pertains to workplace superiors harassment of subordinates and how employees are vulnerable to be sexually harassed due to their superiors authority to be in control of their subordinates work situations such as salary factor (543). The authors explained that contact theory illustrates the ill effects of sexual harassment incidents in workplaces; thus, sexually harassed employees suffered more negative effects in male dominated work environments (543). Moreover, the authors described positive control theory as the positive relationship between the length of sexual harassment and ill feelings which means that failure to control the situation as time goes on makes a sexually harassed victim feels worse (543).

However, the authors mentioned that sexual coercion has the worst effects and most recognized form of sexual attention (543). Victims of sexual harassment in workplace responded in different ways such as confronting or ignoring their harassers, discussing the problem with a superior and filing an official complaint which is very uncommon (543). Victims of sexual harassment tend to confront their co-workers but not their superiors for fear of job loss or complaints consequences against someone with authority at work (544). There are several factors why targets of sexual harassment respond differently; consequently, sexual harassment is being viewed as a stressful life situation in order to conceptualize the way victims respond to sexual harassment (544).

The sampling method conducted by female interviewers through telephone interviews performed in 1992 consisted of 1,990 Canadian working women between 18 and 65 year old, who were working or had worked in the past year at paid labour outside the home (544). The survey showed that 56% of Canadian working women were victims of sexual harassment in the previous year prior to the survey while the total working life rate was 77% (545). According to the survey, staring, remarks about women and jokes about the respondents were the top three form of sexual harassment while attempted physical force, threats and bribery were the least frequent incidents of sexual harassment in the workplace (545). However, the survey showed that women were upset in all forms and frequency of sexual harassment in the workplace. Furthermore, the survey showed that gender harassment was the most common type of sexual harassment compared to non-verbal and verbal unwanted sexual attention and sexual coercion was the rarest form of sexual harassment (546).

One-third of the women reported that sexual harassment affected their job, 45% of the women reported an increased stress level, 48% indicated being unable to perform their jobs and 14% reported personal obstacles such as preoccupation, stress at home and loss of trust in men (548). Job and personal effects were related to the type of sexual harassment and status of the harasser (548). The survey showed women harassed coercively reported more job-related and personal problems than women sexually harassed by co-workers (548). Gender harassment was only related to job effects and did not show a high level of job-related or personal effects while a bigger proportion of women reported more job-related problems in female

dominated environment than male dominated or gender-balanced work environment (548). Women react to sexual harassment directly by reporting, opening up to someone or confronting the predator at the same time women respond equally through indirect reactions such as being unresponsive, ignoring the problem, not taking sexual harassment seriously, avoiding the situation or altering own's attitudes. The survey showed that women confront their co-worker harassers compared if harassed by others. In addition, women react differently when harassed by superiors such as leaving or quitting and retaliating when harassed by clients (550).

The authors point out results of this survey that shows few women reported significant work related or personal issues and fairly direct responses to sexual harassment that are in contrast with the psychological literature that illustrates adverse effects and indirect responses (552). The findings does not contradict psychological literature and should not be perceived that sexual harassment is not a serious problem since a big percentage of working women reported worried of experiencing being sexually harassed. The authors realized that the inaccurate findings and the psychological literature n effects might be due to the way questions were asked and could have received an elevated emotional issues if a psychological instrument was asked. Furthermore, the authors find it hard to assume why the participants in the survey reported assertiveness and direct responses while psychological literature focuses on passive and indirect responses.

The findings of the survey did not support the contact theory that the authors presented such as the ratio of male and female in the workplace, level of contact with male related to effects and a higher proportion of

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women who responded about job performance being affected worked in a female-dominated environment (553). This contradicts Thacker and Gohmann's (1996) predictions about contact theory and findings that they presented. However, the organizational power theory was well supported with the findings that more adverse effects and passive responses associated with harassment committed by a superior or someone with authority in a workplace. Women respond directly if harassed by their co-workers and more likely quit their job when harassed by superiors; thus, this shows that women avoid confronting their superiors.

I do not find the article informative enough because the survey done was very limited in nature. For example, they are only focused on determining effects and responses of Canadian working women in male dominated settings and if they included women sexually harassed by fellow women as I think this is possible too, then the survey could have been more concise and interesting to read. Another thing is that they did not describe the ethnicity of these women who participated in this survey. I had read other articles about sexual harassment and different women with various ethnicity responds differently from each other about how sexual harassment affects them. I found out from other articles that women with colour are not as assertive and willing to share about their experiences as Caucasian women due to their culture and their residency status in Canada. Sexual harassment is a social issue that needs to be addressed for the protection and safety of all women of colour. Any woman does not deserve to be sexually harassed in any kind of form of harassment. Furthermore, women should voice their

concerns and seek help if they fear for their safety especially in public places or at workplace.