

Sexual harassment in educational institutions and workplaces

[Sociology](#), [Violence](#)



To begin with, the aim of the research is to explore the issue of Sexual Harassment in Educational Institutions and Workplaces. Apparently, Sexual harassment is a recurring problem around the globe. Different nations have taken different measures to deal with the consequences of such a problem. Continuous development of policies is observed. Nations, universities, colleges and companies are dealing with the topic by either reacting or pro-acting to the salient situations. Therefore, this research aims to explore gravity of Sexual Harassment and how different institutions, globally, are handling it.

Research problem

It has been argued that no occupation or profession is safe from sexual harassment (Kim and Kleiner, 1999). Sexual harassment continues to be a prevalent issue in workplaces. The frequency shows the seriousness of the problem and also the urgent need to eliminate it.

Studies have shown that women are more prone to sexual harassment (Mathis et al., 1981). There might be several explanations in relation to this statement. Long ago, women were seen as second-class citizens. They were victims of gender disparities and female subordination at all levels. They were seen as poor, burdened and loaded with difficulties in the male dominated societies. They were uneducated; hence they were not eligible for white collar jobs. They were able to occupy positions like market women or tea sellers (Abdel Hamid et al, 2009). Furthermore, they were unaware of their rights to equality. Consequently, they were sexually harassed in ways like dirty language and jokes imposed on them while doing work. They had to

face sexual harassment mostly every day from noisy customers. The lack of education compels the women to bear these harassments without being able to do anything. They did not know about their rights and the relevant laws.

Another factor which triggers sexual harassment is the values and customs which arise from cultural beliefs. Some cultures support the fact that men occupy superior position than women. The latter, hence, find it normal and accept that men hold condescending entitlements. This highlights gender disparity which in turn, encourages sexual harassment of women. In such situations, female victims choose to remain silent because they know that they will never get justice.

However, even today, despite the fact that there has been emancipation of women, where the latter have become educated, self-expressive and aware of laws, there is still sexual exploitation of women. However, we cannot turn a blind eye also to the fact that although less frequent, men can also be victims of sexual harassment. Several studies have revealed that women are also sexually harassing men. Furthermore, nowadays we also find the same sex harassing each other, men harassing men and women harassing women respectively. The majority of cases on sexual harassment which have been reported and brought before the Courts in different countries still show that sexual harassment happens when a person who is in a very powerful position uses his particular position to harass others who are in a vulnerable position. In other words, this would imply that someone who is at the top of the ladder uses his power to continuously trouble another person who is at the bottom of the hierarchical ladder of the organization. Various international

organizations, trade unions, women's associations and other pressure groups have revealed that sexual harassment is becoming an alarming situation, especially in the field of employment (Cruet et al, 2010).

On the whole sexual harassment affects an individual's employment, interferes and disturbs the performance. Consequently, an intimidated, offensive and hostile environment come into play. There is a negative impact on productivity as there will be more absenteeism and loss of valuable staff as a result of dissatisfaction at work, low self-esteem, frustration and loss of trust. Studies show that apart from causing economic harm, sexual harassment can also have a negative effect on the human psychology. Victims may suffer from various complications like insomnia, depression and loss of interest in the family (Kim and Kleiner, 1999). Whether public or private sector, sexual harassment can be very humiliating and this may lead to health and safety problem.

The literature review

The aim of this section is to critically review previous studies, in the current area of research, that pertain to sexual harassment. The emergence of the term 'sexual harassment' can be traced back to the mid-1970s in North America, although in the UK, the first successful case when sexual harassment was argued to be a form of sex discrimination was in 1986, under the Employment Protection Act (Hodges Aeberhard, 2001). There is no one definition of sexual harassment, either in terms of behaviour or the circumstances in which it occurs (Bimrose, 2004; Fitzgerald and Ormerod, 1991; Fitzgerald et al, 1995; Stockdale and Hope, 1997).

According to Crucet (2010), Sexual harassment is a wrongful conduct and should not be tolerated in the workplace. Crucet further argues that sexual harassment refers to unwelcoming sexual behavior. It includes physical, verbal or non-verbal conduct of sexual nature, unwanted sexual advances, sexist remarks, demands or requests for sexual favors and showing pornography. It is true that every individual has the right to life, liberty and equality. This is guaranteed by the country's Constitution, which is considered to be the supreme law of that country. In the Mauritian Constitution for example, sections 3-19 highlight the protection of human fundamental rights and freedoms of the individual. Section 16, precisely protects individuals against discrimination. It is extremely important for employers as well as other responsible persons or institutions to observe certain guidelines to ensure the prevention of sexual harassment at work.

Indeed, to live with dignity is a human right guaranteed by our Constitution. It is the duty of the employer in work places to prevent or deter the Commission of acts of sexual harassment and to provide the procedure for the resolution, settlement or prosecution of acts of sexual harassment by taking all steps required (ibid).

Moreover, studies show that mostly women are victims of sexual harassment and unfortunately very few seek redress and little has received encouraging actions. For example, there has been a case in India. In 1985 where a woman, named Shehnaz Sani had been dismissed from her job because of willful negligence. In fact, she had complained of sexual harassment from her employers. She was surely granted legal protection and she was also

given her previous job. On the other side, however, her harassers which in this case revealed to be her employers, appealed to the Bombay High Court. Consequently, they were granted a stay as well (Chaudhuri, 2006).

Moreover, according to Sanhita (2006) there is another case where a female employee in a company in Hyderabad, complained that she was being repeatedly sexually harassed by her supervisor. Her case was being followed by a woman representative from the Head Office of the company (based in the US). Indeed, the harassment was proved but unfortunately, the female employee was seen as a trouble maker. Consequently, she was compelled to resign and she did not even benefit from any monetary compensation. In fact, the harasser had great power, authority and influence and hence he was immune to all types of disciplinary committees. He continued to work in the same organization (Chaudhuri P., 2006 adapted from Kumar, 2003). Moreover, it has been seen that complaints of harassment are very often dismissed as a “ trivial matter” and not officially recorded (Chaudhuri P., 2006 Adapted from Sanhita, 2006).

As we can see, these cases prove the fact that among the few cases that women report, there is very less chance of obtaining positive support against sexual harassment. Moreover, the already existing committees have not been able to prove their efficiency- relevant actions are, most of time, not taken against the harasser, especially if he is influential (ibid).

In this context, it is not wrong to say that laws should be designed against sexual harassment to protect the employee from the boss, from co-workers

or even customers at work. In 2001, Mauritius had taken a step to combat sexual harassment. Indeed, on the 21 March, the Mauritian Minister, who was at the head of the Ministry of women's affairs and child development and family welfare had publicly promulgated a legislation to impose limitation against female sexual harassment. The aim was to break the silence on subjects which prevented the woman from enjoying her rights. The women were encouraged to denounce such acts. It is true that sex discrimination laws are very effective and efficient in curbing sexual harassment at the workplace (op. cit.).

According to Huntr et. Al. (2008), Sexual harassment can either be Qui Pro Quo or Hostile environment. Qui Pro Quo' highlights the fact that the harasser explicitly or implicitly make sexual request in exchange for some desired results. However, on the other side, hostile environment explains that sexual harassment occurs when the victim is faced with unwelcome conduct based on his or her sex. Such behavior can be verbal, non-verbal, visual, or physical. This creates an uncomfortable, intimidating, hostile, or offensive work or learning environment.

According to Sung (2008), Prevention is the most effective way to deal with sexual harassment. Preventive measures include adopting sexual harassment policies; provide training and establishing complaints processes. All these together help to curb the occurrence of sexual harassment at workplace. A company can also prevent sexual harassment by sponsoring trainings (Sung, 2008 adapted from Bordeaux 2002; Raphan &Heeman, 1997). These training may help employees in dealing with sexual

harassment and its consequences. Furthermore, the channel for complaints encourages victims to complain and report and consequently, this will discourage harassers from continuing with their unwanted behaviors.

In conclusion, this academic piece of writing has been identified and reviewed the available literature on sexual harassment to provide an overview of the current state of knowledge. A number of key points have emerged which show that although some aspects of harassment are well documented, others are quite under researched. Harassment can have a serious impact on the individuals involved and the organization where it occurs. The evidence strongly suggests that to avoid this, organizations take a proactive, i. e. preventative, rather than a reactive, i. e. response driven, approach to developing effective sexual harassment policies and procedures.