

Causes and impacts of sexual harassment sociology essay



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This study provides an insight into the connection between a male dominated organisation such as the Fire and Rescue Service and sexual harassment. It shall evaluate and quantify the effects that sexual harassment has on women fire fighters, the impact of legislated policies against sexual harassment and what the FRS are doing to prevent this cruel act.

It is studied that women, who work in a predominant male environment, are at risk of sexual harassment; this is reconciled by the presence of male dominated cultural norms. Sexual harassment implicates negative health consequences for sufferers and the organisation involved also faces repercussions of their own from this social evil.

It is evident that within the route of society, social categories are often fashioned within groupings, which often present unseen barriers. The impact of pressure throughout society forces many individuals to create a persona that may not be true to their beliefs but one that conforms into a socially accepted position.

Through social processes which many individuals hold, they tend to often catalogue individuals quickly into positions that often affect their lives, these judgements are often made due to indoctrinated perceptions that are fashioned by society's uniform skeletal attitudes.

The impact of a gendered identity within the Fire and Rescue Service creates cultures in which hegemonic masculinity is reinforced and maintained, it allows a dominant male position to be held and controlled. Due to the nature of masculinity ingrained within formal and informal activities of the Fire and

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Rescue Service, the acceptance of women as subordinated subjects is very complex.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This research study examined the causes, impacts and ramifications of sexual harassment in the Fire and Rescue Service, focusing primarily on women as they are the central focus of this social malevolence.

The thesis begins with a brief history of the Fire and Rescue Service, a review of relevant literature including related legislation, a discussion of significant cases, and an overview of the fear of reprisal.

1. 1 – The Scale of the problem

Sexual harassment has been evident in the Fire and Rescue Service since the sanctioning of the equality act in 1964 which allowed females to pursue careers in the Fire and Rescue Service. An operational career in the Fire and Rescue Service has always been perceived as a masculine role; fighting fires and being involved in operational activities, representing “ an example of the masculine standards of aggressive heterosexuality, physical and mental strength and stoic discipline.” (Baigent; 2001) Altered perceptions of the Fire and Rescue Service; conventional, cultural and even educational often presume a stereo typed identity for fire fighters to be, “ strong, masculine and tough” idealist perceptions of this dominant alpha male figure often fashion barriers for females entering and feeling “ accepted” within this male dominated organisation, disregarding the fact that female fire fighters perform the same duties as their male counterparts.

Currently there are 46 Fire and Rescue Services in England employing 45, 016 fire fighters; 43, 632 of which are men and only 1, 384 are female. (31 March 2007 – Fire Research Technical Report 8/2008) This makes fire fighting one of the most sex segregated professions in the world. Statistics from The Baigent Report 2006, show that 53. 4% of female fighters report that they had been harassed.

1. 2 – General Aim of study

The foundation behind the selected topic, related to the facts that although females have served in operational roles within the Fire and Rescue Service for almost 50 years now (UK Fire Services); reviewing current cases in the media, it is evident that they have not been fully accepted into this largely assumed male role. The fundamental purpose of this research project was to take an in depth look into the literature and secondary data that is already available in relation to sexual harassment on women in the Fire and Rescue Service and to present an overview of the current state of knowledge and determine what the causes and the impacts of sexual harassment are, make a judgement whether Sexual Harassment is still evident in this society, despite relevant laws and efforts such as ‘ positive action’ to diminish these acts of hostility.

The primary aim of the research project was to identify based on current literature the nature and prevalence of sexual harassment within the Fire and Rescue Services.

1.3 – Specific Objectives

To identify the prevalence of sexual harassment in the Fire and Rescue Service.

To analyse the nature and causes of sexual harassment in the Fire and Rescue Service.

To examine the impacts created with sexual harassment in the Fire and Rescue Service.

To examine if 'positive action' has a positive impact on prevention and protection of females within the Fire and Rescue Service.

To examine if 'CLG targets' affected male staff's opinions of women being recruited?

To identify measures and precautions that can be implemented to address the problem of sexual harassment within the Fire and Rescue Service.

Methodology

The study focused on each aspect surrounding the problem separately, investigating each factor and the subsequent consequences that they fashion. The information is then linked to relevant cases relating to the Fire and Rescue Service and their agenda to prohibit this difficulty and to form an overall impartial analysis of the findings.

After consideration of the difficulty to gain ethical clearance to carry out primary data due to the invasive nature of the study and also with a limited time frame, the study interprets secondary research data to be more

efficient. The information used within the study has been outsourced from related research to the study. Benefits of secondary data are that it is already collated, downsides to the use of secondary data is the possibility of manipulated and biased data by the researcher. An array of secondary data sources were used within the study, such as journals, literature, books and web pages.

The report identifies and examines the present existing literature available on sexual harassment to provide an impression of the current state of knowledge. During research it was noticed that although various aspects of sexual harassment are well documented, others are quite under researched; such as exact figures and the full stories behind the cases presented in the media.

The term ' Woman' and ' Female' are used interchangeably throughout; however both have the same meanings within this study.

1.5 – Summary

Sexual Harassment often has a serious impact on the individual involved and the organisation where this malevolence occurs. The evidence provided in this report strongly suggests sexual harassment is still largely evident within the Fire and Rescue Services and is likely to occur until the organisation becomes less male dominated.

Chapter 1

Chapter 2 reviews and critiques the relevant literature relating to the Fire and Rescue Service and Sexual Harassment.

Chapter 3 interprets, presents the findings and to draws conclusions from the research.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

The practise of sexual harassment has been dominant for centuries and can be traced back to the 1970's in North America; sexual coercion was a well established characteristic of chattel slavery by African-American women devoid of the fortification of the law.

Nevertheless it wasn't until 1986 in the UK when the first successful case identified sexual harassment to be a form of sexual discrimination, under the Employment Protection Act. (Hodges Aeberhard; 2001)

Many activists have authoritatively expressed their opinions about sexual harassment, but in 1980, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) defined the act as;

“ Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favours, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitutes sexual harassment when submission to or rejection of this conduct explicitly or implicitly affects an individual's employment, unreasonably interferes with an individual's work performance or creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive work environment.”(Wall; 2001)

Key elements found in most definitions include:

The conduct of a sexual nature, and other conduct based on sex affecting the dignity of women and men, which is unwelcome, unreasonable, and offensive to the recipient.

A person's rejection of, or submission to, such conduct is used explicitly or implicitly as a basis for a decision which affects that person's job.

Conduct that creates an intimidating, hostile or humiliating working environment for the recipient.

Legal and Sociological understandings

Interpretations of sexual harassment are fashioned by "legal consciousness" or with the aid of cultural schemes guiding the understanding and use of law. (Merry 1990; Ewick and Silbey 1998)

Individuals often have varied perceptions on what constitutes to sexual harassment, this varies among different societies and social groupings; this can potentially cause issues both legally and sociologically, as it causes difficulty interpreting if sexual harassment has occurred. Behaviour is more likely to be seen as harassment if there is a large power difference between the victim and the co-conspirator. Many forms of the act may be easily identifiable; such as kissing and touching, while other kinds such as verbal and physical conduct may not. Certain behaviours which may seem inappropriate in some cultures may be regarded as normal social practise in others. A kiss on the cheek in greeting is considered normal behaviour, while in other cultures; this may be considered a sexual advance. What is acceptable in some workplaces, such as sexually suggestive calendars or posters, may not be tolerable in others.

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Implementing an effective sexual harassment policy in an organisation and strict enforcement punishments for offenders is the rightful solution to the problem.

It has been identified that 50% of women are sexually harassed in the workplace and “ fewer than 20% of these women label themselves as having been sexually harassed.” (Magley; 1999, p390) Women can be hesitant to identify their experiences, as they don't feel that they are serious enough. This is a large contributing factor to why sexual harassment is still present today as the problem can't be prevailed if it goes unreported. This also suggests that present statistical data on sexual harassment is widely inaccurate as large amounts are unknown.

2. 1. 1 – Impacts

Sexual Harassment usually has a negative impact on the victim concerned, potentially leaving them with long term psychological effects.

Suffers of this social evil may often experience illness, loss of self confidence, psychological damage and often feel intimidated, ashamed, angry and humiliated. They are also likely to face work place problems such as decreased performance, lower job satisfaction, high absenteeism and often find it difficult to continue working in such circumstances as it can create a hostile, offensive and unhealthy environment, which can occasionally lead to the victim being unable to carry out their job effectively and can even cause resignation.

Negative outcomes of sexual harassment such as anxiety, fear of retaliation, retaliation and depression are often exacerbated by victim reporting and <https://assignbuster.com/causes-and-impacts-of-sexual-harassment-sociology-essay/>

that reporting may not in fact be a 'reasonable' course of action for most targets. (Bergman)

According to the National Council for Research on Women; due to sexual harassment, women are 9 times more likely than men to quit their jobs, 5 times more likely to transfer, and 3 times more likely to lose jobs. (The Webb Report; 1994)

Sexual harassment threatens the fundamental constitutional basis of freedom and equality for all, which needs to be abolished from society altogether. The women's liberation movement has been spoilt by this act of discrimination which continues to haunt society.

2. 2 – History of the Fire and Rescue Service

Historically, the fire fighting profession was dominated by white males until the equality act was introduced in 1964. The first female operational fire fighter in the UK joined the London Fire Brigade in 1982. Primarily many male fire fighters strongly resisted the introduction of people who did not fit their ideal perception of a fire fighter, especially women.

Almost 50 years have passed since the equality act was conceded and the Fire and Rescue Services today are still largely a white male predominant service. Currently women represent a meagre 4% of the UK's fire fighting profession; however this is an improvement from 3% in 2006, which makes operational fire fighting one of the most gender segregated occupations in the UK. Sexual harassment is often more prevalent in professions where there is an unequal sex ratio; such as the Fire and Rescue Service, ' Fire

stations once boasted a fraternity house atmosphere; they were “ homes away from home” for men.’

The HMFSI conducted a review into Equality and Fairness (1999) and results suggested that generally the views and opinions of service staff were ‘ institutionally sexist’ and it was largely believed that Women didn’t belong in operational roles in the Fire and Rescue Service.

Diagrams taken from ????? show the proportions of female fire fighters between 2002 and 2012.

Fire and Rescue Service – Operational Statistics Bulletin for England 2010-11

This diagram illustrates a slight increase of female fire fighters each year; from 1. 7% in 2002 to 4. 3 % in 2012, this is a significant improvement however they are still considerably low in proportion to figures.

This diagram illustrates the ratio of males to female fire fighters, each year the figures for females are subsequently rising, however at the lowest capacity of males in 2012, 95. 7% would be considered a very large percentage.

This diagram illustrates that only 2 member of staff resigned due to harassment or discrimination.

2. 2. 1 – CLG targets

A report was published by The Audit Commission in 2009, on the deficit of women and ethnic minorities in the Fire and Rescue Service, stating that the ‘ lack of diversity significantly reduces the services capability to contact and

inform different communities about the risks of fire’.” Even where the proportion of female fire fighters and staff from minority ethnic communities is increasing, numbers remain very low and are not representative of the communities they serve.”

This was highlighted in the latter national Equality and Diversity Strategy for Fire and Rescue Services.

Individual Fire and Rescue Service’s have introduced proactive measures to promote the inclusion and recruitment of women linked to the Home Office CLG targets relating to the percentages of women in operational roles.

Despite these measures there are still relatively low numbers of women working within an operational capacity, less than 1% of women in the whole time operational service and just over 1% in the retained service but the EOTG concluded that a target of representation of anything less than 20% by 2009 would not make the service attractive to women. Women fire fighters would continue to find themselves isolated on fire station watches. (E. GUY; Home Office; 2000)

Recruitment of women (whole-time and retained operational staff)

1 April 2002: 4% of uniformed staff (excluding control) should be women;

1 April 2004: 9% of uniformed staff (excluding control) should be women;

1 April 2009: 15% of uniformed staff (excluding control) should be women.

2.3 – The Law; Sexual Harassment at work

Sexual Harassment was not regarded as a discrete injury prior to the campaign for its inclusion as a form of sex discrimination under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, the change in the law has done more than simply create new legal rights.

Sexual harassment law is of particular interest to feminist theorists confronting the capacity of law to promote cultural change. This feminist intervention into the law has affected the cultural meaning of interactions between men and women in the workplace, even when the new meanings have not translated into legal victories.

The legal claim for sexual harassment is notable for its distinctively feminist origins. Born in the mid-1970s, the term was invented by feminist activists, given legal content by feminist litigators and scholars, and sustained by a wide-ranging body of scholarship generated largely by feminist academics. Sexual harassment is the quintessential feminist harm – in Catharine MacKinnon's words, the first time in history ... that women have defined women's injuries in a law.

The goal of legal feminism has been to fit the cause of action to women's experience in the workplace. As a phenomenon, sexual harassment is virtually gender-specific: unlike other types of sex discrimination suits where male plaintiffs frequently complain of gender-based injury, the great majority of sexual harassment plaintiffs are women, and their complaints rarely have a precise analogue in the experience of men.

2010 Protection of Women against Sexual Harassment at the Workplace –

Under the Equality Act 2010 – All Fire and Rescue Service Establishments have a legal duty to promote equality. This act covers; age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race religion/belief, sex and sexual orientation. The aim of this act is to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation.

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 – The act doesn't distinctively state sexual harassment; however it states that it is against the law to prohibit employment based on gender, race, belief or national origin.

Subsequent codes have defined sexual harassment and the US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission is responsible for the administration of policies prohibiting sexual harassment in the job place.

The Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) was established in 1975, and ever since has been apprehensive with sexual harassment in the workplace. The commission has used its abilities under the Sex Discrimination Act (SDA) to support many employment tribunal cases and has funded many claims for sexual harassment towards women, to primarily develop current case law and raise awareness of the issue through campaigns and lobbying.

Quid pro quo & Hostile Environment

Sexual harassment can be categorised as either quid pro quo or a hostile environment; Quid pro quo is a demand for sexual favours for career advantages for the employee. Hostile environment in the workplace would

include sexual conversations, off colour jokes, sexually explicit pictures, and inappropriate touching and gestures.

2. 4 – Sexual harassment in the Fire and Rescue Service

It isn't uncommon for staff in a highly respected profession such as the Fire and Rescue Service to be caught in the middle of acts of discrimination and intolerance to others. Sexual Harassment can destroy the lives and careers of those targeted and in this day and age where everyone has the right to be treated equally it should not be condoned.

It has been uncovered that as many as 85% of fire fighters have been exposed to some form of sexual harassment during their career; however it is apparent that less than 5% of the victims reported or 'blow the whistle' on their experiences. (Gutek & Koss; 1993)

Carrying out the role of an operational fire fighter often exposes individuals to dangerous situations which can contribute to stress, however adding the strain of harassment and a hostile work environment can often isolate the victim and undermine member camaraderie, which is a fundamental part of survival within the Fire and Rescue Service.

Public lawsuits involving the Fire and Rescue Service are commonly well publicised and due to the severity often reflect negatively on the industry, potentially costing the service their reputation, credibility and community status. Funds from lawsuits are better spent elsewhere and make the community question the very integrity of the department they pay for and support.

The Fire and Rescue Service has been described as one of the last bastions of white, male, laddish culture, where sexual discourse about women using stereotyped terms is prevalent. (Kehily; 1997)

“ In the old days, there was delineation between when you go to work and what you do outside of work. At work you conducted yourself in a certain way, but with longer work days and more casual dress codes, particularly among young people, there has been a blurring of the lines between what happens at work and what happens in your social life,” (Mr. Telman)

“ We spend so much of our lives in the workplace, which has become less and less formal like much of society.” (D L. Hoover)

Comments from victims who didn't report the harassment said ' they didn't want to be labelled as a trouble maker and didn't feel that a positive outcome was possible', ' they didn't want to be “ singled out” further.

Women who have taken their case to court have usually undergone years of sexual harassment before they have decided to take legal action.

Research suggests that sexual harassment is not just a problem in the UK; in 1995 surveys were conducted on Women in the U. S Fire and Rescue Service. 551 Female staff were asked about their experiences with sexual harassment and other forms of job discrimination and 88% responded saying that they had been subject to some form of sexual harassment at some point in their fire service careers. 70% of these women said they were latterly experiencing harassment in the duration of the study.

Out of the 88% harassed only 1/3 had had positive outcomes, where an investigation was performed and the harasser was disciplined. 26% were retaliated against for reporting the incident.

2. 4. 1 – Whistle blowing

Ignoring problems of sexual harassment can cost the average company up to £6. 7 million a year in low productivity, low morale, and employee turnover and absenteeism, not including litigation or other legal costs. Following clear and proactive formal policies against sexual harassment in the workplace is one way to prevent lawsuits and drops in productivity and efficiency.

According to social scientists and psychologists; the fire and rescue service industry is a ‘ hyper focused reflection of a community’s cultural mix and bias.’ When the mix of men, women, black, white, Jews, Muslims, Catholics and other cultures it’s not surprising when they result in some form of prejudice is engaged.

It has been observed that many women and people of colour leave the Fire Service, frequently in the midst of successful careers, in order to avoid the daily harassment, isolation and scrutiny. In what is already a high stress profession, these added negative factors can take their toll. Results indicate that that fear of retaliation and appraisal play the largest role.

‘ Diversity in the workplace creates room for new ideas, as well as the possibility of increased conflict.’

Different opinions have been expressed regarding the status of women in fire fighting profession.

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Male operational group manager in Derbyshire expressed:” Women bring a different dimension to the fire service, as they can appeal to other women about safety in the home, in a way that men can’t”.

Woman fire fighter:” Men would threaten to transfer off their own watch if a woman was set to join. Things have improved considerably over the last few years but the fire services should not become complacent about equality. I work with some great people, men and women. I also work with some dinosaurs.”

“ The majority of fire fighters are in the FBU, so the union takes its role of combating discrimination seriously,

Woman, non- uniformed position:” Because women are in a very small minority, the infrastructure does not change, and the women can experience dreadful isolation.”

Woman, fire fighter:” Much of the harassment occurred when I was on probation and felt I could not speak out, I did attempt to speak to my officers; all of them shrugged off my appeals for help. I want to keep my job. It’s clear that those who seek legal recourse can’t come back to work. I didn’t want to get someone suspended or fired. I just wanted it to stop.”

In 1984, Toledo was under a federal court order to hire more minority fire fighters – to match the city’s racial demographics

Read more at <http://www.toledoblade.com/Police-Fire/2013/03/04/Woman-hired-as-firefighter-in-84-broke-barriers.html#hzJoDrISfxRVrsuw>. 99

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2. 4. 2 – Challenges females face

As previously mentioned due to social stereo typing, a career in the Fire and Rescue Service is often perceived as a males role and non traditional for women. Bradley identified characteristics which were associated with typical roles suitable for females. ‘ Clean, safe, physically undemanding, repetitive, boring and lacking in mobility’ (1989; P. 9) this idealist perception that females were only suited to office roles created difficulties for females who wanted to break this stereo typing barrier and carry out roles in “ masculine” professions such as the Fire and Rescue Service. In the U. K Fire and Rescue Services females have carried out operational posts for almost 50 years; along this journey there have been many difficult adjustments within the service.

tradition, formalised, para-military relationships and discrimination.

“ Women are not getting recruited and hired because of an occupational culture that is exclusionary and unequal employment practices in recruiting, hiring, assigning and promoting women generally and women of colour in particular in fire service,”

Moccio added.

USA: 79. 7% of women survey respondents reported problems with ill-fitting equipment. These problems involved (gloves 57. 8%) boots (46. 8%), coats (38. 9%), helmets (28. 4%), and breathing masks (25. 6%).

One major hurdle to entrance into fire fighting for women was the lack of facilities. The immediate problem of sleeping quarters and bathing areas had

to be solved before women could participate fully in fire fighting as an occupation and as a culture. Communal showers and open bunk halls were designed for men only. Today, although most stations are now designed to accommodate fire fighters of both genders, some female fire fighters still face issues related to their gender.

One of the greatest difficulties experienced by most women in the fire service is ill-fitting protective gear. Gear designed for men often will not fit correctly. In an environment where uncovered skin can be almost instantly covered in full-thickness burns, it is essential that protective gear fit properly.

According to a study at Cornell University, “ the under-representation of women in fire fighting is an alarming inequity that needs to be immediately addressed,” said Francine Moccio, director of the institute and co-author of the report, “ A National Report Card on Women in Firefighting,” which was presented at the International Association of Women in Fire and Emergency Services meeting, April 24 in Phoenix, Arizona.

In a survey conducted by Women in the Fire Service in 1995, 551 women in fire departments across the U. S were asked about their experiences with sexual harassment and other forms of job discrimination. Eighty-eight percent of fire service women responding had experienced some form of sexual harassment at some point in their fire service careers or volunteer time. Nearly seventy percent of the women in the survey said they were experiencing ongoing harassment at the time of the study. Of the 339 women who said they had complained about harassment, only a third (115

women) listed only positive outcomes: investigating/taking care of the problem, and disciplining the harasser. Twenty-six percent said they were retaliated against for reporting the incident.

The gender neutral term “ fire fighter” has been used since 1902, replacing “ fireman”, as the term excluded women from the profession, however it is still common for the term to be used.

Stand Down Activities

Fire stations are generally well equipped for leisure pursuits[57], as one fire-fighter observed: ‘ it’s like a lads night in’. How this time is spent varies from watch to watch, but there is usually one communal activity that is engaged in by all fire-fighters. Interestingly, two females expressed dissatisfaction with the preferred stand-down activities on their watch, with one describing how she was one of 3 fire-fighters, on a watch of 18, who didn’t enjoy football. In terms of fitting into the watch, she noted that ‘ if you don’t like football, ;you’ve really got to try hard.’ (FFF9). Similarly, another female felt slightly outside of watch culture, as she couldn’t appreciate the communal stand-down activities of cards and golf, ‘ ;It doesn’t suit me, I’m not really into playing cards for two hours but I will

sit and have a quick game, more for the sake of fitting in than for the enjoyment of playing you know.’ (FFF5). This particular female came from a smaller watch (of 7 people) and described how the culture was one where everyone liked to be in the same place at the same time. She found this atmosphere slightly claustrophobic and felt that she would be better suited to a bigger watch (where there is more opportunity to dilute and do your own

thing). The actual physical layout of the station may have some bearing on this, indeed the smaller station had no separate rooms[58] and a large ‘banquet’ style table, perhaps inducing a forced sociability. In contrast one of the bigger stations visited had separate rooms, as well as a ‘quiet room’ and a mess room furnished with about 12 small tables designed to seat one or two fire-fighters, thus reducing the need to constantly engage with your fellow co-workers. Ultimately, Cockburn argues that male worker’s engagement in certain social activities positions women outside of ‘the boys club’ (1991).