

Facts and Figures on Sexual Harassment in the workplace

Author: Fadzai Danha . August 2020

In 2017, the #MeToo movement swept through the world bringing a fresh focus on sexual harassment in workplaces. A subject that had been for many years simply ignored and swept under the rug suddenly became a grave concern at a global level. The ILO defines sexual harassment as a sex-based behaviour that is unwelcome and offensive to its recipient. For sexual harassment to exist these two conditions must be present. Sexual harassment may take two forms: 1) Quid Pro Quo when a job benefit - such as a pay rise, a promotion, or even continued employment - is made conditional on the victim acceding to demands to engage in some form of sexual behaviour; or; 2) hostile working environment in which the conduct creates conditions that are intimidating or humiliating for the victim. Unfortunately, sexual harassment in the workplace statistics shows a clear upward trend.

Workplace sexual harassment can take many forms, including – but not limited to – a completed or attempted nonconsensual sex act (e.g., rape); abusive sexual contact (e.g., unwanted groping); non-contact sexual abuse (e.g., threats of sexual violence); conduct that creates a hostile work environment (e.g., pervasive telling of lewd sexual jokes); and unwelcome, abusive, or harassing misconduct as a condition for employment or advancement (e.g., offering a promotion in exchange for sex), or to prevent an adverse action (e.g., termination). It includes any sexual act or behavior in the workplace that is perpetuated against another's will when they did not or cannot, consent. Consent is not given when a harasser uses force, harassment, the threat of force, threat of adverse personnel action, coercion, or when the victim is asleep, incapacitated, or unconscious.

The following table which was produced by the International Labour Organisation shows the effects of workplace sexual harassment on the victim, employer, and society:

Workplace sexual harassment by industry

The industries with the highest number of sexual harassment claims employ high numbers of women. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (USA), over half of all workers in the accommodation and food services sector are women, while just under half of the retail workers are women. These industries also employ women in low-paying jobs, such as fast-food workers, cashiers, housekeepers, and servers. However, some industries dominated by women reported many fewer claims of workplace sexual harassment. Over 68% of employees in the education sector, for example, are women, but the field made up less than 4% of EEOC sexual harassment claims. Significantly, educators earn higher salaries than the most restaurant, hospitality, or retail workers. The data suggest that women earning low salaries may face an increased risk of sexual harassment.

Workplace Sexual Harassment by Country/Region

ASIA-PACIFIC

In Australia, One in Three People Experienced Sexual Harassment at Work in the Past Five Years

- In a 2018 survey, nearly one-quarter (23%) of women and one-sixth (16%) of men in the Australian workforce said they experienced some form of workplace sexual harassment during the previous 12 months.
- 40% of sexual harassment incidents were witnessed by another person, a majority of whom (69%) did not intervene.
- Nearly four of five (79%) sexual harassment incidents involved one or more male perpetrators.
- Sexual harassment is a top complaint received by Australia's Human Rights Commission (AHRC).
- In 2017–2018, 27% of all complaints to the AHRC were filed under the Sex Discrimination Act, and 82% of those complaints were sex discrimination in employment.

In India, few workers report sexual harassment

- India's Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act of 2013 established Internal Complaints Committees within organizations to address sexual harassment complaints. However, most (68.9%) employees do not report instances of sexual harassment to their Committee and, among those who did, only a third (33.3%) believed that the Committee treated the complaint fairly.
- In 2018, 533 workplace sexual harassment complaints were filed with India's government.
- In India, the landmark case of Vishaka vs. the State of Rajasthan brought a shift in the legal definition of sexual harassment by the Supreme Court. Previously identified as "Eve teasing", sexual harassment was defined by the court judgment as a violation of women's human rights. The judgment also outlined guidelines for its prevention and redress.

In Japan, Only 39% of Companies Have Offices for Handling Sexual Harassment Cases Despite a Government Mandate Requiring Them. In 2017, Japan's Equal Employment Office received 6,808 requests for consultations on responding to sexual harassment.

A survey published in Hong Kong in February 2007 showed that nearly 25% of workers interviewed suffered sexual harassment with one-third of them men. Among male workers, only 6.6% reported their grievance (compared to 20% of women) because they felt too embarrassed to face "ridicule".

CANADA

Nearly one in five women experience some form of workplace harassment

- In 2018, sex discrimination accounted for 18% of disputes received by the Canadian Human Rights Commission.
- In 2016, 4% of women reported experiencing sexual harassment at work in the past year compared to 1% of men.

EUROPE

In Germany, of the 3,455 requests for counseling received by Germany's Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency in 2018, nearly one-third (29%) were related to gender discrimination. In the same year, cases of sexual harassment prompted 193 counseling requests from the Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency.

In Italy, an estimated 43.6% of women between 14 and 65 years old have experienced sexual harassment in the workplace at some point in their lives. According to a 2004 report issued in Italy, 55.4% of women in the 14-59 age group reported having been victims of sexual harassment. One out three female workers are subjected to sexual intimidations for career advancement with 65% blackmailed weekly by the same harasser, usually a co-worker or supervisor. Furthermore, 55.6% of women subjected to sexual intimidation had resigned from the job.

UNITED STATES

In the United States, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) handles complaints regarding sexual discrimination and harassment. The agency is tasked with enforcing anti-discrimination laws, as well as with collecting and disseminating statistics dealing with these issues.

More than a third of women experience sexual harassment in the workplace. In 2018, 38% of women and 13% of men across the US claimed they had been sexually harassed in the workplace.

SOUTH AFRICA

Research agency Columinate recently engaged 1000 urban South Africans to investigate the statistics behind sexual harassment in the workplace and they found that:

- 30% of women and 18% of men reported having been victims of unwanted sexual advances in the workplace.
- The harassment comes in many forms, with 15% of those who have experienced harassment reporting the advances are verbal, and 38% admit that it turned physical with unwanted touching. 42% report lustful staring at body parts, and 32% report receiving messages of a sexual nature.
- 57% of women and 47% of men claimed that unwanted advances came from a workplace peer.
- 26% of women report that a boss or superior is the source of the harassment. For men, it's the juniors, with 20% of men saying they garner unwanted attention and advances from their subordinates.
- 51% of workplaces do not have a clear sexual harassment policy in place.
- Only 37% of organisations have a clear process to report sexual harassment.
- 20% of businesses employ a reporting hotline, with another 20% offering training on eliminating sexual harassment in the office.

Workplace sexual harassment of men

When we think of sexual harassment, we tend to immediately think of male workers harassing or propositioning female co-workers however a growing number of men report being sexually harassed in the workplace, by both male and female co-workers and managers. Statistics indicate that almost one in five complaints about workplace sexual harassment to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) of America comes from men.

In 2015, 6,822 sexual harassment claims were filed with the EEOC. 17.1 percent of those cases were filed by men. A recent study found that one-third of working men encountered at least one form of sexual harassment in the prior year (McLaughlin, Uggen, & Blackstone, 2012). Also, the proportion of sexual harassment charges filed by men to the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) is rising: men filed 16.1% of the 7,809 charges in 2011 versus 17.6% of the 7,256 charges in 2013 (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2013).

More Facts on Workplace Sexual Harassment

- 81% of Women Have Experienced Sexual Harassment
- According to one study parsed by Vox, 75% of people who did speak out when they were harassed in the workplace experienced retaliation from their bosses or colleagues.
- Roughly 87% to 94% of Employees Experiencing Harassment Do Not File a Formal Complaint
- A Cosmopolitan survey from 2015 asked female victims to identify their harasser(s). Seventy-five percent said it was a male colleague, 49% said it was a male customer, 38% said it was a male manager and 10% said it was a female colleague.
- Another 2017 poll by ABC News-Washington Post found that 33 million U.S. women have been sexually harassed at the workplace. 30% of victims said the harasser was a male colleague and 25% said the harasser was a man with power over their career.

The economic cost of sexual harassment in the workplace



Some Major changes to address workplace Sexual Harassment

In response to the rampage of workplace sexual harassment occurring worldwide some countries saw it fit to take action against it. Bahrain, Barbados, Djibouti, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, and the United Arab Emirates enacted legislation on sexual harassment in the workplace and included redress avenues such as criminal penalties or civil remedies. Additionally, Gabon, Montenegro, and Peru enacted criminal penalties, and France, Georgia, São Tomé and Príncipe, and South Sudan implemented civil remedies to complement existing legislation.

Conclusion

Sexual harassment limits all workplace stakeholders in realizing their fullest potential. While high-income women who report sexual harassment, such as actresses and journalists, appear more visible to the public, millions more women and men face workplace sexual harassment with little public attention. It is critical to address this silent enemy before it is too late.

Fadzai Danha is a consultant at Industrial Psychology Consultants (Pvt) Ltd a management and human resources consulting firm. Phone +263 4 481946-48/481950 or email: fadzai@ipcconsultants.com or visit our website at www.ipcconsultants.com

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