



Sexual Harassment In The Workplace

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Abstract

Sexual harassment is an increasingly major problem in our society since the 1900s. This paper addresses the psychological, economic and political and legal aspects of sexual harassment in the workplace. People are able to persevere through adversity by implementing sexual harassment training programs. These training programs help to recognize sexual harassment, encourage reporting and decrease victim blaming, and increases bystander intervention.

Keywords: Sexual harassment, workplace, training programs

Introduction

In many circumstances, adversity gets in the way and can frequently be difficult to conquer. Nelson Mandela writes about the discrimination and inequality he faced while in prison. "prison is designed to break one's spirit and to destroy one's resolve... the authorities attempt to exploit every weakness..." (Mandela 13). Likewise, the current sexual harassment issues in the workplace break people down and crush their spirits. While in the workplace, many women and men face inequality from their coworkers, bosses, customers, etc which causes serious mental and physical health impacts. According to Clearvue Health, "22% of the patients... reported a history of sexual assault...

researchers estimated...these patients had nearly triple the risk of depression" (2019). If sexual harassment in the workplace continues these mental health effects will worsen. Sexual harassment worsens depression, anxiety, and sleep deprivation by almost triple the normal amount (Clearvue Health 2019). Furthermore "Migrant Mother" by Dorothea Lange, symbolizes the struggles of the Great Depression, with poverty and hopelessness. Many Americans face these same impacts from sexual harassment in the workplace. Numerous people affected by sexual harassment feel it will never stop and give up hope. In accordance, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission obtained 27,291 charges

claiming sexual harassment (1). These claims bring up the question of what is the most effective way to address sexual harassment in the workplace? To fully comprehend the complexity of this enigma, it is essential to analyze it from psychological, economic, and political and legal perspectives. Through research, it will be easily understood that training programs are the most effective solution because they create greater recognition of sexual harassment, encourage reporting, and increase bystander intervention.

Psychological Impacts

The majority of experts agree the psychological ramifications affect the victims and cause serious mental health implications not only for the victims themselves but for witnesses too. According to Daniela Acquadro, from the Department of Psychology at the University of Turin, "impact of SHW affects not only direct victims but also witnesses..." (2). Being in a climate portraying these "dysfunctional behaviors" affect people not directly affected (Acquadro 2). A study explored the incident of sexual harassment in the workplace and its consequences in women and men (Acquadro 2). It revealed the perceptions of sexual harassment in the workplace with women were correlated with negative impacts on the "psycho-physical health" of the volunteers (Acquadro 2). Acquadro voices how the results from the study support the idea that sexual harassment in the workplace is a "social stressor" (2). Kimberly Schneider, from the Department of Psychology at the University of Texas, voices "sexual harassment in the workplace is increasingly recognized as a stressor with serious consequences..." (401). Research shows the negative effects of sexual harassment including "decreased morale" (Schneider 401). Studies examined how women who experienced sexual harassment also experience deterioration in their emotional or physical condition (Schneider 401).

Laura Good, from the Department of Work and Organizational Studies, expresses how sexual harassment "can cause psychological and physical harm to those targeted..." (447). The psychological and physical harm done to the victims also "lower job satisfaction, wellbeing in the workplace and work performance (Good and Rae 448). Moreover, experts agree the psychological repercussions of sexual harassment affects victims and cause serious health consequences.

Job Performance and Engagement

Experts recognize the economic repercussions and agree it affects job performance and engagement. Heather McLaughlin, from the Department of Sociology at Oklahoma State University, explains that "many targets quit their jobs rather than continue working in a harassing work environment..." (1). Sexual harassment can have long-term impressions on a women's career (McLaughlin et al. 2). Sexual harassment pushes women out of jobs that include harassing work environments. With women being forced out of jobs because of sexual harassment it can lead to a serious lack of stability. Research from multiple studies shows "voluntary and involuntary career interruptions are linked to significant earning losses" (McLaughlin et al 3). Likewise, Suzanne Andrews, a member of the New York State Bar and law clerk, goes back to what Good originally expressed about lower job performance. In a study done by the Working Women's Institute "75%..." of sexual harassment victims state that it interfered with their "job performance" and another "65% are either fired or pressured into resigning" (Andrews 116). Sexual harassment has been a problem since women joined the labor union (116). Sexual harassment is a big factor in the gender wage gap and is only making it worse. In agreement, the Kathy Gurchiek, a managing editor of a Department of Defense journal, also examines how sexual harassment

creates long-term economic impacts, that can result in less engagement and the decision to leave their job (Gurchiek 2021). When women leave their job they normally go to a less-paying or lower-quality job, which contributes to occupational segregation (Gurchiek 2021). Overall, experts agree with the economic implications of sexual harassment cause serious harm to a woman's career.

Hostile Work Environment

Specialists acknowledge that a hostile work environment can create and increase the chances of sexual harassment. Barry Roberts, a retired program director of the Center for Professional Development, explains how complaints about sexual harassment have differed from “fostering of a hostile work environment to demands for prostitution” (2). Roberts lists all the effects sexual harassment can cause and suggest companies develop a sexual harassment policy (9). He expresses that if a company wants to manage the risk, they have to act before the problem occurs (Roberts 9). Following Roberts, Molly Peterson, from the News Bureau at the University of Missouri, explains companies should have sexual harassment policies, but later expresses, the way employees interoperate the policies can “invalidate the purpose of the policies” (2019). In a study, they found the perceptions of employees on how sexual harassment is defined from a company policy can modify and abolish the meaning of the policies (Peterson 2019). According to these specialists, hostile work environments need to be prevented and all companies should have a sexual harassment policy. Companies should not just rely on the policy because the limitations outweigh the positives.

Sexual Harassment Training Programs

Justine Tinkler, an associate professor and graduate program coordinator of sociology at the University of

Georgia, explains that sexual harassment training programs are a popular instrument because it is simple and affordable (1). Sexual harassment training programs help to expand employees' understanding of the definitions of sexual harassment and help to convey how seriously the company or organization takes this issue (Tinkler 1). The most effective way to address sexual harassment in the workplace is to set up sexual harassment training implemented by supervisors or managers as it creates greater recognition of sexual harassment, encourages reporting, and increases bystander intervention.

Creates Greater Recognition of Sexual Harassment

Carmina Ravanera, a senior research associate at the Institute for Gender and the Economy at the University of Toronto's Rotman School of Management, expresses the goals of sexual harassment training programs are to increase the awareness and recognition of sexual harassment (2019). Employees are often confused or uncertain of what behaviors would be considered sexual harassment (Ravanera 2019). Training is useful in the way it helps everyone be on the same page as to what counts as sexual harassment while giving them the tools and knowledge on how to deal with it (Ravanera 2019). Research has shown that sexual harassment training has increased the tendency to recognize sexually harassing behaviors, especially in men (Ravanera 2019). In another study, employees receiving the training were more likely to identify “unwanted sexual gestures, touching, and pressure for dates” as sexual harassment. According to Mark Roehling, a professor in the School of Human Resource and Labor Relations at Michigan State University, recognizing what sexual harassment is, is fundamental to someone's ability to be able to monitor their behaviors and respond appropriately when sexual harassment occurs (10). Roehling concurs with Ravanera and points out that

sensitivity is increased and accuracy of judgment is improved (10). Studies have shown that sexual harassment training creates a greater likelihood of recognizing and identifying behaviors as sexual harassment (Roehling and Huang 10). Frank Dobbin, a professor of Sociology at Harvard University, agrees that sexual harassment training helps employees recognize and correct violations (2021). The purpose of sexual harassment training is to provide employees with the knowledge and tools to identify, prevent and report inappropriate behavior in the workplace explains Dobbin and Kalev (2021).

Encourages Reporting While Decreasing Victim Blame

Ravanera, express that along with the ability to recognize sexual harassment, evidence has shown that sexual harassment training complaints have increased since, indicating people are more willing to come forward (2019). Ravanera explains how this should show that the training is working, and create a more comfortable space for people to speak up, without fear of being judged (2019). Research has shown, victim blame decreases with training (Ravanera 2019). Sexual Harassment Training.org echoes Ravanera's idea of how the training creates a more open environment where people feel they can report without the fear of colleagues judging them (2022). As well as educating everyone on the effects associated with sexual harassment, results in fewer counts of sexual harassment and less victim blaming (Sexual Harassment Training 2022). Nelson Mandela acknowledged what his government was doing was wrong and took a stand against it. Other people saw this and stood alongside him. Mandela continued to encourage more and more people to stand up for what they believe is right and wrong. With the help of sexual harassment training programs, people are

more likely to report sexual harassment when they realize they are not alone in this matter.

Increases Bystander Intervention

According to the International Labour Organization sexual harassment training can empower employees to interfere with others to prevent harassment or violence that may occur (82). Sexual harassment training helps employees build the skills to recognize when sexual harassment occurs and how to put a stop to it (ILO 82). Studies show that when sexual harassment happens in the workplace is regularly witnessed by colleagues and most of the time they do not interfere with the situation (ILO 82). ILO explains that bystanders "should be encouraged and supported to take the initiative, including, if appropriate, to approach the perpetrator sensitively." (82). Ravanera explains many people believe the purpose of sexual harassment training is to reduce offense and motivate the victim to complain, but research shows sexual harassment training is more effective due to the bystander effect (2019). Sexual harassment training for the public can increase public intervention intentions, confidence in interventions, and actual intervention rates (Ravanera 2019). Bystander intervention also reduces the victim blame game and avoids possible negative reactions when the victim reports harassment. Sexual harassment training is an important tool to support victims of harassment. Sexual harassment training helps to increase bystander intervention and stops victim blaming leading to more victims willing to report.

Limitations and Implications

While sexual harassment training is the most effective solution, some limitations exist. Justine Tinkler, an associate professor and graduate program coordinator of sociology at the University of Georgia, verbalizes how sexual harassment training

can reinforce the traditional norms of women being weak and men being powerful (1). She continues stating how these training programs enforce the thinking of women being weak and men strong and more powerful (Tinkler 1). A study showed when a male led the sexual harassment training, there was no backlash against women (Tinkler 1). Sydney Gold, the principal shareholder of the Pennsylvania & New Jersey employment law firm, conveys how the training programs can help to make employees feel safer and better in their workplace (2017). He continues explaining how people will feel their company truly cares about them (Gold 2017). Lastly, Gold closes by stating that what people learn in the workplace can help them outside the workplace (Gold 2017). Per Gold, Ravanera expresses the training signals to employees that they work in a safe environment and will not be judged if they come forward (2019).

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