



Sexual harassment in the workplace

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ABSTRACT

In Brazil, the majority of harassment cases in companies were registered from the 90s, and nowadays, this issue is dealt with daily inside companies, this is a matter that has grown and has been part of the daily routine of companies. These situations are determined by a relationship between power and submission. It is a conduct aiming to diminish, to execute an abusive conduct, to embarrass and obtain personal and sexual gain. Although provided for under the Brazilian Constitution as a crime and a violation of fundamental rights, it remains as part of the organization's culture. In addition, there are adverse effects that can cause physical or psychological damage to the victims. The purpose of this study is to compare both male and female perceptions of sexual harassment in organizations, through a survey and bibliography research. This research also aims, in addition to understanding the behavior of people given some situations considered normal in the workplace, to compare the perspectives of men and women, regarding Paul's questionnaire, on how they react to the same situation. Besides, there are differences between types of harassment that are present in workplace environment. And it is also an important indicator to understand what are male and female's perceptions about all types of harassment as well. Because it provides an understanding about why some behaviors are considered "normal", when in matter of fact it is a sexual harassment. Therefore, it should be noted that this perception is usually associated to the male's answer on the survey. While there is a different perception followed by a better identification of situations that are harassment, with a less tolerable conduct about it, and this viewpoint is from the female answers.

Keywords: Working Environment. Sexual harassment. Gender equality.

INTRODUCTION

Sexual harassment in the workplace is as old as work itself. And it occurs anywhere, private or public institutions. In most cases, the harassment in the workplace happens in silent ways and without the presence of witnesses. It is a fact that affects the victim morally and psychologically, one of the most insulting forms of embarrassment for the worker. (Pascoal, 2017). In Brazil, the majority of harassment cases were registered, more specifically, from the 90s. Nowadays, this subject is constantly dealt with by the companies, that is, a growing subject and has been a part of the daily routine in companies. A relationship between power and submission determines these situations. (Pascoal, 2017). Briefly, to sum up, "the sexual division of labor structures gender relations in society and establishes a naturalized division of reproductive areas attributed to women and productive areas attributed to men" (Thome, 2012, p. 119-120). This paper aims to explain sexual harassment in the workplace.

The objective of this paper is to compare male and female perceptions of sexual harassment in organizations. As Magalhães (2011) points out, harassment can cause severe damage to the psychological health of victims, such as stress, a decrease in productivity, interference in interpersonal relationships, within the family, logically at work. Additionally, there are other consequences such as anxiety, fear, insomnia, headaches, decreased cognitive ability, depression. Another factor that the harassed person may suffer is post-traumatic stress, which can cause insecurity, which then turns into guilt, blaming themselves for what happened, which drives the person into a depressive state and can end up causing physiological issues like cardiovascular diseases.

Sexual harassment is, according to Dias (2008), a violation of rights foreseen by the Brazilian Federal Constitution of 1988, as being an action that is an undesired situation by the victim that provokes insult to human dignity, in addition to possible effects related to productivity and growth at work. Sexual harassment can be confused in the literature with moral harassment. However, these are different concepts in that the former refers to an action that involves the possibility of sexual pleasure by the harasser in some way, which will embarrass the person who is harassed (Ávila, 2008). Moral harassment is characterized by a situation of humiliation, embarrassment or intimidation that a person or worker experiences and is caused by another person. That said, it can be defined as “any and all abusive conduct, manifesting, above all, in behavior, words, acts, gestures or writings that can harm a person's personality, dignity, physical or psychological integrity”. (Hirigoyen, 2001, p. 65)

A type of harassment that there is no such recognition since it had only surfaced a few years ago, is Cyberbullying, a type of violence, or intentional attacks that aim to harass, insult, diminish, humiliate, intimidate a person through the internet or other technologies. According to the Brazilian Criminal Code, this crime can consist of: slander, insult or defamation, being treated as separate crimes. Furthermore, people experience virtual sexual harassment in several cases, which would be sexual abuse through the internet in public networks or through public online profiles. (Friederich, 2017).

Moreover, verbal harassment is considered to happen when someone makes unpleasant or invasive statements (such as the infamous “pick-up lines”), threats, and also boos, swearing, trying to ridicule, insult and defiance. (Article 216 Brazilian Criminal Code – Decree no. 2848/40; included by Federal Law 10.224, 15 of 2001).

Unlike sexual harassment, moral harassment or psychological harassment, it is an action strategically developed to destroy the victim and remove them from the workforce psychologically. Psychological harassment is also known as “mobbing” is a new cause of uneasiness and sickening of the victim in their workplace, hence why researchers in occupational mental health started researching this theme. This type of harassment, according to Leymann (1996 apud Guimarães; Rimoli, 2006) is not an exclusive problem to certain countries, but a generalized phenomenon, where the aggressor can use obscene gestures, threats of laying off workers, yelling in a situation of disagreement, usage of insults to attack the victim, intimidation, attacking the victim's sexual identity, thus, causing a drop in self-esteem.

Sexual harassment in the workplace is a practice that affects women, affects men, and occurs in several ways. For instance, negative behaviour in the workplace, such as jokes, pictures of naked women, games considered appealing to the male audience, or embarrassing comments about the female figure, can and should be avoided. (Brazil, Ministry of Labor and Employment, 2013). According to the Criminal Code, sexual harassment is defined as “embarrassing someone, to obtain sexual advantage or favor, making use of a condition of superior hierarchy or ancestry inherent to the title of a job, position or function” (Brazilian Criminal Code, Article 216-A). Freitas (2001) states that: Unfortunately, these practices are still backed by prejudice, misinformation and the macho mentality imprinted on social values.

MATERIALS

The methodology conducted it is bibliographic research of the subject. In addition, a field study was carried out, in which a survey was conducted to elicit responses from both females and males, seeking to understand the perception that these groups had regarding sexual harassment that has either occurred and/or spoken about within organizations. Between 6 August 2020 to 6 December 2020, an online survey was carried out, with the title "Behavior in the Workplace", and its purpose was to understand people's behaviour in some scenarios. The survey was composed of 15 questions with 5 different choices (totally agree - TA, agree - A, neither agree nor disagree - ND, disagree - D and disagree - DT); the questions follow in the next section. Every question is theoretically based on the types of harassment mentioned above. One hundred seventy-six responses were collected, 50.6% corresponding to 89 people who identify as female, 46.6% corresponding to 82 people, who identify as male, and 2.8% corresponding to 5 people who identify as non-binary.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results are reported in the table below and based on the analysis of the responses of each individual, according to their gender. Hence, it is possible to verify the position of men and women regarding the given harassment scenarios. Furthermore, several types of harassment are listed in the chart, in accordance with the survey, and their respective answers according to each gender, enabling a comparative analysis on the subject addressed.

According to the survey, in general, the female's viewpoint of an abusive practice is seen as less tolerable. On the other hand, it is more acceptable from the male point of view. For instance, in the question "Can I yell at my team when they do not comply with what was previously agreed?", that is a case of moral harassment, from the male perspective, the approach is considered in a certain way normal, while for the vast majority of women it is seen as an intolerable action.

In the case of psychological harassment, illustrated by the statement "Recurring criticism about physical appearance, way of dressing, excessive pressure by a superior aiming to increase productivity can cause serious psychological damage to the employee", it is possible to observe the discrepancy between female and male opinions once again. It can be noticed that women are less tolerable when it comes to psychological harassment, while men do not care about the consequences generated by these actions.

As well as for sexual harassment, it is observed that, once more, women are less tolerable. This result is directly related to the patriarchal and misogynistic model that organizations fit into. The history of aggression and harassment of women has always been observed and felt only from the victim's side, disregarding the aggressor's guilt and responsibility (Oliveira, 2019). For this reason, women can identify harassment cases with greater sensitivity than men.

Table 1: Results of the survey about moral, virtual and psychological harassment

Type of harassment	Female View (%)					Male View (%)				
	TD	D	ND	A	T A	TD	D	ND	A	T A
Moral										
Can I yell at my team when they do not comply with what was previously agreed?	37,7	29,2	16,9	14,6	2,2	13,4	24,4	25,6	31,7	4,9
Sometimes it is necessary to use your authority status to repress an employee?	33,7	25,8	20,2	15,7	4,5	18,3	18,3	29,3	29,3	4,9
Is it correct to be forced to take on a role unrelated to the position held within the company?	31,5	40,4	20,2	6,7	1,1	18,3	34,1	25,6	18,3	3,7
Virtual										
In a given company, employees created a WhatsApp group used to talk about co-workers. In this group the staff make jokes related to the appearance and behavior of other employees. Do you agree with the usage of such group?	79,8	16,9	2,2	1,1	0	59,8	20,7	15,9	3,7	0
An employee was absent from work without notice, the supervisor went out of control using his phone to offend and scold said employee. Do you agree with usage of use social media for this kind of reprisal?	77,5	15,7	4,5	2,2	0,1	53,7	34,1	11	1,2	0
Psychological										
Is it ok for me to blackmail AN employee who does not want to go out with me after work hours?	94	0	6	0	0	82	16	1	1	0
Recurring criticism about physical appearance, way of dressing, excessive pressure by a superior aiming to increase productivity can cause serious psychological damage to the employee.	60	30	8	1	0	9	6	7	39	39
In a company's time card the following statement is written: "How hard is it to correctly clock in and sign?" Given there is no context for given statement, do you agree with this policy?	48	3	32	17	0	27	43	18	10	2
Contemporarily having a good psychological system is fundamental for achieving good performance inside a company. Do you agree that hostile environments, simulated by a superior could embarrass an employee, hence impairing his performance?	60	26	5	5	0	6	4	4	48	39

Table 2 : Results of the survey about sexual harassment

Type of harassment	Female view (%)					Male View (%)				
	T D	D	N D	A	T A	T D	D	N D	A	T A
I believe complimenting someone on their physical appearance is natural; after all everyone likes receiving compliments, even in the workplace	3	2 5	22	3 3	17	7	1 8	33	3 3	9
To have good relations, it is crucial to receive gifts from other employees.	1	2	47	1 0	40	28	4 6	23	2	0
I do not see a problem in hugging, touching and kissing my co-workers, even without permission	0	1	21	9	69	60	2 1	13	4	2
A superior has an assistant for a set of given work tasks. Nonetheless he delegates tasks of a personal matter, which are not part of the job description of said assistant, even imposing tasks of a certain intimacy. Do you agree with this behavior?	0	0	29	2	69	50	4 4	0	1	0
Do you agree that an employee must face a compliment coming from a supervisor with the same criteria as a compliment coming from someone of the same hierarchy level as his?	12	4 2	17	2 0	9	5	1 3	32	4 4	6
Can I take advantage of my subordinates?	76	0	23	1	0	54	3 9	5	1	1

CONCLUSION

This research sought to assess the issue of sexual harassment in the workplace, extending to other types of harassment, its history, as it happens in Brazilian culture, as seen in organizations and within society, the view of the harasser and the harassed, as well as the victim's rights in when facing such situation. After the results of the survey, we can say that when it comes to the types of harassment in the workplace, some behaviors are considered "normal", this may be due to the lack of a more detailed explanation on the subject, types of harassment in the work environment and how they happen, or because they are behaviors that are present in our culture and end up not being considered harassment, when in fact it is.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST:

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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