

A research brief on

Harassment and violence in the era of #MeToo

Overview

In 2016, 4% of Canadian women reported being sexually harassed in the workplace, compared with less than 1% of men. Due to underreporting, however, these numbers may be higher. Certain groups of women are more vulnerable than others: Aboriginal women were more likely to report sexual harassment at work than non-Aboriginal women (10% versus 4%); and lesbian or bisexual women were more likely to report having experienced sexual harassment than heterosexual women (11% versus 4%).¹

Approximately every six days, a woman in Canada is killed by her intimate partner.² Aboriginal women, including First Nations, Inuit and Métis women, are six times more likely to be killed by their partners than non-Aboriginal women.³ Transgender people are almost twice as likely to report experiencing intimate partner violence than cisgender women and men.⁴

Victims of sexual harassment and violence also experience psychological trauma, which makes it difficult to focus on work.⁵ Many victims experience lower work productivity, an increased use of sick leave, and higher job turnover due to toxic work environments.⁶

Consequences of sexual harassment and violence at work

Sexual harassment claims are prevalent in traditionally male-dominated industries, such as policing, firefighting, mining, the military, finance, and construction work. However, low-wage workers are most vulnerable to harassment: women working in hotel service, restaurant, and caregiving are most likely to suffer sexual harassment.⁷ Those most vulnerable to sexual violence at work are children that are in forced into labour, forced and bonded labourers, migrant workers, domestic workers, health services workers, and sex workers.⁸

Victims of harassment and violence are often compelled to leave their job, and subsequently start over in a new position. This may impede progression up the career ladder.⁹ Those experiencing harassment may also be held back from leadership roles, especially if the harasser has decision-making authority for promotions. Women in leadership may also be subject to harassment, if they are seen as too "uppity."¹⁰

4% of Canadian women reported being sexually harassed at work

Experiencing violence at home makes it difficult to maintain a job. Victims of abuse experience higher rates of depression, or may call in sick in order to recover from and hide injuries.¹¹ Abusers may prevent victims from getting to work, causing them to be late or to miss work altogether. Abusers may excessively call, email, or text victims while they are at work, or stalk their victim. Victims may have to move to escape violence.¹²

Ways to combat sexual harassment and violence at work

Because sexual harassment and violence are underreported—often due to fear of professional retaliation¹³—it is difficult to combat. Groups that are already marginalized along lines of race and citizenship are less likely to report harassment and violence. As a result, harassment and violence can become a normalized part of everyday life.¹⁴

The #MeToo movement has had an unintended consequence that further disadvantages women: male executives have publicly stated that their fear of being accused of harassment has led them to stop offering the mentorship or sponsorship women need to advance their careers.¹⁵

There are several measures firms can take to encourage deterrence and reporting of sexual harassment and violence in the workplace:

Name the behaviour

Employers can provide specific guidelines and examples of what they consider as sexual harassment and violence (e.g. crude jokes, displaying sexual screensavers or porn, sexual advances, or repeated unwanted requests for a date) to increase awareness of inappropriate and illegal behaviour.

Improve reporting mechanisms

New web-based tools can improve reporting by allowing victims to decide when and how a report advances and by flagging repeat offenders more effectively.

Bystander training

While evidence on the effectiveness of anti-harassment training is mixed, bystander training has been found to be more effective.¹⁶ Bystanders can learn to disrupt sexual harassment and assault before it happens.¹⁷

Buy-in from leadership

Leaders must champion changes in organizational culture by taking an explicit stance against sexual harassment and violence. They must deal with it expediently when it does occur, regardless of the job performance of the perpetrator.

Continue to mentor and sponsor women

Executives must continue to mentor and sponsor women in order to help them advance in their careers.

View this full brief, including references, on our website:
<https://www.gendereconomy.org/harassment-and-violence-in-the-era-of-metoo/>