

Career Issue: Effects of Sexual Harassment towards Individuals in Workplace

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Abstract

Sexual harassment remains a critical issue in the workplace, significantly affecting employees' mental health, job satisfaction, and overall organizational culture. This review aimed to systematically explore the psychological, occupational, and organizational consequences of workplace sexual harassment and identify effective prevention and intervention strategies. PRISMA model was used to identify the multifaceted impacts of sexual harassment on individuals and effective prevention strategies. This methodology allowed for a comprehensive synthesis of data across various workplace settings. The review reveals that sexual harassment in the workplace leads to profound psychological distress, including depression, anxiety, and decreased self-esteem. These psychological effects contribute to reduced job satisfaction and increased turnover intentions, resulting in higher employee turnover rates and associated organizational costs. Additionally, the negative effects of harassment extend beyond the workplace, disrupting employees' work-family balance and overall quality of life. Further research is needed to evaluate the long-term effectiveness of various prevention strategies and to develop comprehensive models for assessing the risk factors and impacts of sexual harassment. Effective prevention and intervention strategies are crucial for mitigating the impacts of workplace sexual harassment. By understanding the multifaceted impacts of sexual harassment and implementing robust preventive measures, organizations can foster safer, more inclusive workplaces that enhance employee well-being and productivity.

Keywords: Career Issue, Sexual Harassment, Workplace

Introduction

In the modern era, work serves not only as a means to financial stability but also serves as a critical component of individual identity, social integration, personal growth and self-esteem (Krauss & Orth, 2021). In the context of the workplace, where individuals spend a significant portion of their time, the work environment must not only promote productivity but also the

well-being and safety of its employees. However, the prevalence of sexual harassment in the workplace poses a severe threat to this ideal, impacting not only the victims but also the broader organisational culture and productivity.

According to Maran et al (2022), sexual-harassment in workplace (SHW) is defined as unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature that explicitly or implicitly affects a person's employment, unreasonably interferes with their work performance, or creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work environment. This definition highlights the variety behaviours of sexual harassment, ranging from physical interactions to psychological forms of intimidation. In recent decades, the prevalence of sexual-harassment in the workplace has increased rapidly (Zhou et al., 2024; Raj et al., 2020; Dagnaw et al., 2022). For example, a study by Hardies (2023) found that nearly 83.3% of men and 88.5% of women have experienced at least once or twice some form of sexual harassment at work in the past 24 months in professional service firms. These findings highlight the alarming prevalence of this issue.

Previous studies indicated that psychological distress is one of the most immediate and damaging consequences of SHW. Victims often experience increased levels of depression, anxiety and stress, which ultimately can impact individuals job satisfaction and overall well-being (Benítez-Hidalgo et al., 2023; Gale et al., 2019). Not only that, the mental health impact of SHW can also manifest in physical symptoms, further impeding an individual's professional performance and personal life. As such, the significance of studying "Effects of Sexual Harassment towards Individuals in Workplace" lies in its potential to shed light on the multifaceted impact of SHW on employees and the organisation. Moreover, understanding the dynamics of SHW is crucial for developing effective prevention and intervention strategies, fostering a safer and more inclusive work environment for all employees.

Objectives

Incorporating systematic review into this study offers a comprehensive approach to examining the existing body of research on SHW. By summarizing and analyzing the results of a wide range of studies, this review aims to

1. Identify the multifaceted impacts of sexual-harassment towards individuals in workplace
2. Identify effective prevention and intervention strategies of sexual-harassment in workplace

Methodology

The PRISMA model was used in the current study. Several databases such as Scopus, SAGE, and Cambridge Journal Online were used to search for journal articles. These databases were accessed through UPM EZAccess website as provided by Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM). During the early stage, a total of 3969 literatures were found followed by the search included three keywords, these are "Effects", "Sexual-harassment", and "Workplace" along with the use of Boolean operators "AND" and "OR" to obtain focused results. Records after duplicates removed was 3853. As shown in Table 1 and 2, inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied to get the most related journal for the title. Later, the year of publication was narrowed down between 2019 to 2024 in an attempt to look for more recent literature.

The keywords of "Effects", "Sexual-harassment", and "Workplace" from the year 2019 - 2024 produced 432 journal articles, books and reviews. The number of results found was then decreased by keywords "Harassment", "Work Experience", "Mental Health", and "Stress

Psychological". Next, filtration was then being conducted by limiting the search results into journal articles which are related to "Psychology", "Social Science", and "Behavioural". Additionally, in order to limit the search results, the search areas such as "Medicine", "Medical Education", and "Physician" field articles as well as the literature review, books and book chapter were excluded. The remaining papers were then screened and reviewed according to their titles and abstracts, only those that were relatable to the content of this study will be selected. Finally, a total of 10 out of 24 most relevant journal articles were identified. These selected journal articles were downloaded from the publication servers and saved in PDF form followed by in-depth review.

Table 1
Inclusion Criteria for Systematic Review

Criteria	Eligibility	Articles Obtained	Articles Remaining
Key terms	Effects, Sexual-Harassment, Workplace	3969	3853 (After duplicates removed)
Year	2019 - 2024	1253	1253
Subject	Psychology, Social Science	432	432
Document type	Article	271	271
Keyword	Harassment, Work experience, Mental Health, Stress Psychological	77	77

Table 2
Exclusion Criteria for Systematic Review

Criteria	Eligibility	Articles Obtained	Articles Remaining
	Inclusion criteria		77
Subject Area	Medicine, Medical Education, Physician, Nursing Staff	49	28
Source type	Book series, Book, conference proceeding, trade journal	4	24

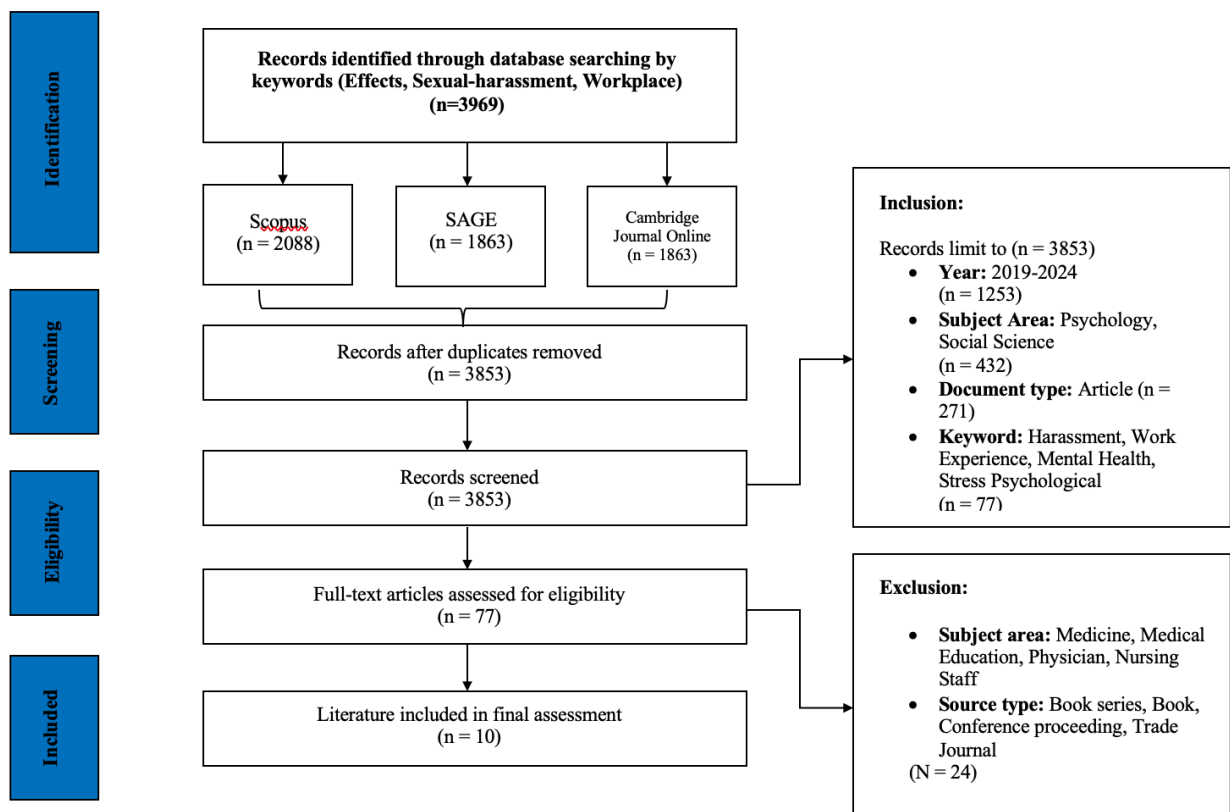


Figure 1. PRISMA flowchart for a systematic review on effects of sexual-harassment towards individuals in workplace.

Findings of Literature Review

Summary of the selected journal articles is presented in Table 3. The table consists of author name, year of publication, article title, sample, and main findings that are related with current study. Table 3 is to provide clearer and better view of the information related to sexual harrasment in various workplace settings. The literatures included in this review were studies done in Indonesia, Sudan, Korea, United Kingdom, Germany, Peru and US, with the hope to have a more balance findings.

Table 3

Summary of selected literatures

Authors (Year) / Journal	Article's Title	Country	Sample	Main Findings
Wolor et al. (2024) / Universal Journal of Public Health	Sexual Harassment and Its Impact on Employees	Indonesia	406 employees who have encountered incidents of sexual harassment	The study found that sexual harassment impacts depression but does not directly affect job satisfaction. Depression leads to lower job satisfaction and increases turnover intentions.
Chen et al. (2021) / Pacific Journal of Management	Effects of sexual harassment on work–family enrichment: the roles of organization-based self-esteem and Polychronicity	China	362 part-time Master of Business Administration students with full-time jobs	The study found that employees' perceptions of sexual harassment negatively affected their work–family enrichment through diminished organisation-based self-esteem.
Kheir et al. (2023) / Pan African Medical Journal	Prevalence of sexual harassment among female medical staff in four Khartoum State Tertiary Hospitals	Sudan	325 participants	The study found that those who had been sexually harassed, 53% were psychologically affected. The most common psychological effect was the loss of desire for work (46.4%). Followed by fear and anxiety (21.7%).
Park et al. (2022) / Journal of Men's Health	Sexual Harassment to Male Hotel Employees: An Assessment of its Negative Consequences	Korea	312 Male samples. (94 respondents were 20s; 145 were 30s, 61 were 40s, and 12 were 50s and older)	The study found that negative emotional experience of sexual harassment at work increased emotional violation, decreased organisational citizenship behavior and self-efficacy, and increased turnover intention.
Jung and Yoon (2020a) / International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health	How does sexual harassment influence the negative response in a deluxe hotel?	Korea	295 female employees working in deluxe hotels (five-star hotels) located in Seoul, South Korea	The study found that perceived sexual harassment has a negative impact on the female employees' psychological distress and workplace deviant behavior.
Jung and Yoon (2020b) / International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	Sexual harassment and customer-oriented boundary-spanning behaviors: The role of burnout and psychological safety of deluxe hotel employees	Korea	50 Female frontline employees in a deluxe hotel	The study found that sexual harassment in a job situation triggers physical and mental exhaustion, leads individuals to losing their sense of achievement or passion for their job, and negatively affects their customer-oriented behaviors.

Draucker (2019) Responses of nurses and / Online Journal other healthcare workers United of Issues in sexual harassment in the Kingdom Nursing workplace	Article Review		The review indicated that recipients of sexual harassment experience a wide variety of aversive feelings, including fear, anger, and shock. Some also experience negative psychological and physical harms and negative employment-related consequences.
Herrmann et al. (2020) / Journal of Interpersonal Violence	Consequences of Exposure to Violence, Aggression, and Sexual Harassment in Germany Private Security Work: A Mediation Model	Sample of 487 German-speaking security guards (Represented all common fields of operation)	The study found that experience or witness violence, aggression, or harassment, which leads to worries about violence; these worries then lead to health problems and thoughts of quitting (turnover intention)
Vargas et al. (2020) / Journal of Women's Health	#MedToo: A Large-Scale Examination of the Incidence and Impact of Sexual Harassment of Physicians and Other Faculty at an Academic Medical Center	705 workers who had been working at University of Michigan Medical School for at least 1 year	The study found that increased experiences of harassment were independently associated with lower mental health, decreased job satisfaction, sense of safety, and increased turn-over intentions
Vara-Horna et al. (2023) / Heliyon	Direct and indirect effects of workplace sexual harassment on the productivity of victims and witnesses: The preventive role of equitable management	827 female employees from 37 different companies in region of Metropolitan Lima	The study found that all aspects of presenteeism, including difficulty concentrating, distraction, concerns affecting work, slower work pace, tiredness or exhaustion, and lack of energy, were reported more frequently by those who had experienced workplace sexual-harassment
Authors (Year) / Journal	Article's Title	Country Sample	Main Findings

Discussion

The objective of this review is to identify the multifaceted impacts of sexual-harassment towards individuals in the workplace and also identify effective prevention and intervention strategies of sexual-harassment in the workplace. Sexual harassment refers to any unwanted sexual conduct directed towards an individual that offends or embarrasses them, regardless of whether it is verbal, nonverbal, visual, gestural, or physical. There is no denying that this kind of behaviour in the workplace is unacceptable and shouldn't be tolerated. after looking over a number of studies on sexual harassment at work. We can observe the extent of the harm that harassment in the workplace can do to a victim.

Psychological Impact

Several studies Kheir et al (2023); Jung & Yoon (2020a); Draucker (2019) highlighted the psychological impact of sexual harassment in workplace. Sexual harassment victims tend to experience a range of negative emotions, such as fear, shock, anger and psychological distress. These negative emotions can result in depression, anxiety and reduced organisation-based self-esteem. (Wolor et al., 2024; Jung & Yoon, 2020b).

Job Satisfaction and Turnover Intentions

Sexual harassment not only affects a person's psychological status but also their job satisfaction and the thought of leaving the job. Studies Wolor et al (2024); Park et al (2022); Herrmann et al (2020) have consistently found a negative relationship between sexual harassment and job satisfaction, lower job satisfaction reported to increase in turnover intentions for the employee.

Work Performance and Productivity

Sexual harassment at work can have a negative impact on employees' productivity and work performance. Sexual Harassment experiences have been found to be associated with lower job satisfaction and a lower sense of safety (Vargas et al., 2020). And these factors may eventually lead to presenteeism by weakening concentration, decreasing work pace, and exhaustion (Vara-Horna et al., 2023).

Organisational Behaviour and Culture

Sexual harassment is not just affected on employee but also the organisational behaviour and culture. Negative emotional experiences of harassment can lead to decreased organisational citizenship behaviour Park et al (2022), fostering a toxic work environment and hindering teamwork and collaboration. Furthermore, victims who experienced or witnessed sexual harassment can increase their worries about violence, which lead into a working environment of mistrust and fear inside the company (Herrmann et al., 2020).

Work-Family Dynamic

Chen et al.'s (2021) research revealed that employees' perceptions of sexual harassment may negatively affect on work-family enrichment and make it more difficult for them to manage both their professional and personal lives. This affects not just the person's health but also their family dynamics and overall quality of life.

Prevention and Intervention Strategies

Numerous studies were carried out in order to establish practical solutions for the successful prevention of sexual harassment at work. The attention on timing of prevention strategy is important, it offer benefit of a systematic and coordinated method to the sexual harassment in workplace (Mc Donald et al., 2014). Organisation need to develop prevention policy before any organisation injustice happens, as known as primary prevention. An effective policy against organisation injustice should be clear, visible and accessible to all employees. The organisation should also incorporate behavioural norms and multiple channels of communication to enhance the confidence of the employees. Effective high-level management plays an important role in formulating and communicating relevant policies, allocating resources and encouraging accurate reporting (Bell et al., 2002). The policy should include a declaration of intent to enforce and indicate penalties for violations to raise the

certainty of punishment as it is more effective than severity of punishment (O'Leary-Kelly et al., 2000). The policy should also address power imbalances (mostly among gender), and be in alignment with more general goals for gender equality. Giving women the chance to engage democratically in settings where men predominate is crucial to upending established hierarchies and promoting inclusivity.

Beside anti sexual harassment policy, sexual harassment prevention training should be provided by the organisation too. Studies suggested that individual who joined prevention workshop showed improvement on overall sexual harassment prevention knowledge compare to individual who did not join (Campbell et al., 2013). According to Mc Donald et al (2014), the training content needs to be developed based on organisational assessments to train employees assessing the risk factor that increase the likelihood of sexual harassment happen. Furthermore, the training also needs to raise the employee's awareness about sexual harassment and clarifying misconceptions about sexual harassment. In addition, managers should also be trained in conflict management, including managing emotions and facilitation techniques to help address the employees who fears of making sexual harassment report. Apart from that, training should also challenge gendered organisational cultures, as sexual harassment is more prevalent in male-dominated occupations and work contexts.

Implication of the Review

In summary, this review highlighted the multifaceted impacts of sexual-harassment in the workplace towards individuals and organisations including: organisational culture Park et al (2022); Herrmann et al (2020), work-family dynamics Chen et al (2021), psychological well-being Kheir et al (2023); Jung & Yoon (2020a); Draucker (2019); Wolor et al (2024); Jung & Yoon (2020), work performance Vargas et al (2020); Vara-Horna et al (2023) and job satisfaction (Wolor et al., 2024; Park et al., 2022; Herrmann et al., 2020). The findings have strengthened the body of research demonstrating the negative impacts of sexual harassment on both the individual and the organisation. It implies that sexual harassment is a problem that needs to be handled, to enhance employees' well-being and job satisfaction, and also create safer and more inclusive work environments. On top of that, this review also discussed some the prevention and intervention strategies toward workplace harassment, including provide effect policies against organisation injustice and anti-sexual harassment training (Mc Donald et al., 2014). It serves as a recommendation for company to develop policies and training against sexual harassment.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this review serves as a call to action for organisations to prioritize the prevention of sexual harassment and invest in creating environments where all employees feel safe, valued, and respected. By implementing evidence-based strategies and policies, organisations can play a crucial role in addressing this pervasive issue and promoting the well-being and dignity of their workforce.

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