

**Forum:** Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)

**Issue:** The problem of sexual harassment by people in power

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## INTRODUCTION

It is estimated that 13% of women and 4.5% of men have experienced sexual harassment at least once in their lifetimes<sup>1</sup>. Approximately, 1 in 10 women and 1 in 20 men have been sexually harassed by a coworker or employer of theirs. Those disturbing figures indicate that millions of people all over the world feel unsafe and targeted in their chosen place of work or studies. Defined as any unwelcome sexual advance - or gesture with a sexual nature, that aims to intimidate, belittle or provoke the recipient without their consent - sexual harassment is a pervasive issue that negatively affects people from all over the world.

Unfortunately, the number of victims that report their harassers is extremely small: tormented by shame, regrets and self-blame, victims often dismiss their experiences as unimportant, bury their feelings and suppress their voices. This way they suffer the psychological consequences of their harassment on their own, stalling their rehabilitation and healing while often losing their aptitude, vocation and even spark.

The reasons as to why victims opt for silence over speaking up, constitute a complicated complex that varies for each individual. However, one pervasive factor that hinders the rehabilitation of victims is whether the abuser is a person of high power or not. When the harasser holds a position of authority, victims often fear retaliation, including the loss of their job, destruction of their reputation, damage to their career prospects and generally further stigmatization.

The power dynamics that compose many workplaces, can render working a hostile activity for sexual harassment victims, while also protect and empower the harasser. Generally, the more power that an individual possesses, the harder it can be to prove them guilty of harassment. Taking that unsettling fact into consideration, it is of utmost importance that victims regardless of their occupation, position and financial state, are able to report their harasser, should they wish to.

Unfortunately, however, this is not the case at the moment seeing as it is estimated that around 79% of sexual harassment cases in the workplace go down unreported<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Government of Queensland. "Sexual Violence Statistics." *Department of Justice and Attorney-General*, 22 Sept. 2023, [www.justice.qld.gov.au/about-us/services/women-violence-prevention/violence-prevention/sexual-violence-prevention/sexual-violence-statistics](http://www.justice.qld.gov.au/about-us/services/women-violence-prevention/violence-prevention/sexual-violence-prevention/sexual-violence-statistics).

<sup>2</sup> Trades Union Congress. "Still just a bit of banter? - Sexual harassment in the workplace in 2016." *Trades Union Congress*, 2016, [www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/SexualHarassmentreport2016.pdf](http://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/SexualHarassmentreport2016.pdf).

Overall, this situation has worried professionals and various stakeholders globally while many people consider it as one of the world's most pressing humanitarian crises. That being said the worldwide vigor to address the issue of sexual harassment by people in power is intensifying with governments, the civil society, the private sector, United Nation (UN) entities, etc., all trying to prevent, monitor and ease the situation. A multilateral approach is of utmost necessity in order to permanently remove sexual harassment from the world's agenda.

## DEFINITION OF KEY-TERMS

### ***Sexual Violence***

Sexual violence refers to “any sexual act that is committed against the will of another person, either when this person does not give consent or when consent cannot be given because the person is a child, has a mental disability, or is severely intoxicated or unconscious as a result of alcohol or drugs<sup>3</sup>”. An activity can be considered as sexually violent in various circumstances and settings including that of sexual harassment and rape.

### ***Harassment***

Harassment is legally defined as any “illegal behavior towards a person that causes mental or emotional suffering, which includes repeated unwanted contacts without a reasonable purpose<sup>4</sup>”. Examples of harassing behavior include insults, threats, touching and offensive language.

### ***Sexual Harassment***

Sexual Harassment falls under the category of sexual violence and includes “any behaviour of a sexual nature that affects the dignity of women and men, which is considered as unwanted, unacceptable, inappropriate and offensive to the recipient, and that creates an intimidating, hostile, unstable or offensive work environment<sup>5</sup>”.

### ***Quid Pro Quo***

Literarily translated from Latin as “something for something”. In the context of sexual harassment, quid pro quo occurs when opportunities for advancement including titles and benefits are conditioned on the participation to unwelcome sexual advances.

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<sup>3</sup>UN Women. "Explore the Facts: Violence Against Women." *UN Women*, [interactive.unwomen.org/multimedia/infographic/violenceagainstwomen/en/index.html#sexual](https://interactive.unwomen.org/multimedia/infographic/violenceagainstwomen/en/index.html#sexual).

<sup>4</sup> Cambridge Dictionary. "Harassment." *Cambridge Dictionary | English Dictionary, Translations & Thesaurus*, [dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/harassment](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/harassment).

<sup>5</sup>International Labour Organization. "SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN THE WORKPLACE." *International Labour Organization*, [www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@asia/@ro-bangkok/@ilo-hanoi/documents/publication/wcms\\_371182.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@asia/@ro-bangkok/@ilo-hanoi/documents/publication/wcms_371182.pdf).

## **Stereotypes**

Stereotypes refer to “an often unfair and untrue belief that many people have about all people or things with a particular characteristic”<sup>6</sup>. Stereotypes can refer to the racial, sexual, religious, physical, intellectual, etc. properties and characteristics of a person or thing.

## **Power Dynamics**

Power Dynamics is a term used to describe “the inherent structures and influences of power that exist between individuals and groups within a given context”<sup>7</sup>. More specifically, power dynamics refer to the distribution and usage of power among people in different positions.

## **Abuse of Power**

Abuse of Power is defined as “the abuse of a position of power in order to harm other people, to bully them or place them at a disadvantage, or in order to procure personal advantages for oneself or one’s favorites”<sup>8</sup>. Power abuse is an indicator of a corrupt system of work, and it negatively affects the power dynamics that exist between individuals.

## **Bystander Effect**

The Bystander Effect, or else commonly referred to as Bystander Apathy, is a psychological phenomenon that describes “the inhibiting influence of the presence of others on a person’s willingness to help someone in need”<sup>9</sup>. In simpler terms, the bystander effect theory suggests that individuals are less likely to help someone in need in the presence of others.

## **Retaliation**

Retaliation is “the act of hurting someone or doing something harmful to someone because they have done or said something harmful to you”<sup>10</sup>. In the case of victims of sexual harassment, many avoid reporting their harassers for fear of retaliation.

# **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

## ***The Essence of Sexual Harassment***

Sexual Harassment is a pervasive phenomenon that affects men and women from all over the world. The very essence of such abusive behavioral trends lies in their primary form as an abuse of power and violation of a person’s rights and dignity. More specifically, sexual harassment

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<sup>6</sup> Encyclopaedia Britannica. "Stereotype Definition & Meaning | Britannica Dictionary." *The Britannica Dictionary*, [www.britannica.com/dictionary/stereotype](http://www.britannica.com/dictionary/stereotype).

<sup>7</sup> Hecker, Jörg, and Neringa Kalpokas. "Power Dynamics in Research| Definition, Examples & Awareness." ATLAS.ti, 30 July 2024, [atlasti.com/guides/qualitative-research-guide-part-1/power-dynamics](http://atlasti.com/guides/qualitative-research-guide-part-1/power-dynamics).

<sup>8</sup> Law Insider. "Abuse of Power Definition." Law Insider, [www.lawinsider.com/dictionary/abuse-of-power](http://www.lawinsider.com/dictionary/abuse-of-power).

<sup>9</sup> Blagg, Robert D. "Bystander Effect | Causes and Consequences." Encyclopedia Britannica, 14 June 2024, [www.britannica.com/topic/bystander-effect](http://www.britannica.com/topic/bystander-effect).

<sup>10</sup> Cambridge Dictionary. "Retaliation". 24 July 2024, [dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/retaliation](http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/retaliation).

is the exploitation of the power and authority of the offender which manifests as a sexually charged conduct. Generally, victims of sexual harassment are most commonly reported to be women, a trend that can be attributed to the cultural and religious beliefs that construct our society. More precisely, the female gender is stereotypically perceived as a sexual object whereas the male gender as a sexual subject. Women, in the context of a patriarchal society are often regarded as intellectually inferior beings, expected to react passively and submissively.

Additionally, they are often objectified for their body and appearance, neglecting and overlooking their intellectual strengths and abilities. All of these norms and beliefs situate women in a supportive rather than leading position in society, encouraging gender inequalities and facilitating their manipulation, harassment and often abuse., despite any marked progress, some of these beliefs are deeply rooted in our society's foundations and unconsciously affect the behavior of many people all over the world, and in some cases, fueling acts of sexual violence and sexual harassment.

That being said, sexual harassment functions either in compliance with or in protest of said stereotypes and beliefs, as a means to influence the power dynamics between two parties. In simpler words, with sexual harassment the offender usually aims to show superiority over the victim by abusing their power. At this point it is important to note that outside of the aforementioned stereotypes and norms, although less frequently, there also exist many male victims of sexual harassment. However, the trends and norms that surround victims of sexual harassment are not a product of coincidence rather than a part of our society's matrix.



**Fig. 1: Members of the UCLA community protest the university's handling of sexual harassment complaints made against a professor<sup>11</sup>**

### ***The History of Sexual Harassment***

Sexual harassment is a social practice; influenced by societal norms and cultural attitudes which perpetuate and define said practice throughout time, sexual harassment has a social and cultural history. Considering and reviewing sexual harassment from a historical perspective can allow the deeper understanding of its nature, philosophy and conduct. That being said, sexual harassment constitutes a result of gender and sex-role stereotypes.

Therefore, in order to trace the history of sexual harassment, one must firstly investigate that of stereotypes; way back in the Paleolithic period, cave drawings portrayed women in the household, nurturing their children and men in the woods, hunting for food. Through the passing of time, those gender-roles became fixated and created the stereotypes that were discussed further above. That being said, an allowing, welcoming even, environment for sexual violence and harassment was created.

On this historical context of a male-dominating society, many sexual harassment cases have been reported throughout history. Slaves were particularly prevalent victims of such discrimination and violence, as their low social class rendered them submissive to their masters. Particularly during the era of slavery in America which took place from 1619-1863, the sexual exploitation of the enslaved reached its peak, with hundreds of thousands of slaves being sexually abused and assaulted.

Similar trends and cases of sexually offensive behaviors are evident throughout many different time periods and regions. Additionally, many religions present patterns of sexual exploitation, something that glorified and idealized sexual violence in general. For instance, the rape of Persephone by Hades in Ancient Greek<sup>12</sup> mythology, where Hades, the god of the Underworld, kidnapped Persephone and made her his queen, adequately showcases the belief that through violence (sexual or not), people could obtain whatever they wished.

Considering all of the above, the widespread nature of sexual violence and gender-based stereotypes is indeed alarming. Until the 20th century, sexual harassment wasn't legally recognized as a crime, leaving victims without recourse. In the 1970s, activists like Catharine MacKinnon and Lin Farley led efforts to challenge sexual harassment, coining the term and pressuring the legal system to acknowledge women's right to work free of unwanted sexual advances.

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<sup>11</sup> Watanabe, Teresa. "UCLA Community Protests Professor's Punishment for Sex Harassment: \$3,000 Fine and 11-week Suspension." *Los Angeles Times*, 3 Mar. 2016, [www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-ucla-sex-harass-20160302-story.html](http://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-ucla-sex-harass-20160302-story.html).

<sup>12</sup>Theoi Project. "RAPE OF PERSEPHONE." *THEOI GREEK MYTHOLOGY - Exploring Mythology in Classical Literature & Art*, <http://www.theoi.com/Khthonios/HaidesPersephone1.html>.

Gradually, laws against sexual violence and harassment emerged globally, with milestones like the 1964 Civil Rights Act, the 1975 UN World Conference on Women, and the 2002 Rome Statute, which classified sexual violence as a crime against humanity.



**Fig. 2: Women's 1970 Strike for Peace and Equality.**<sup>13</sup>

### The Case of Anita Hill

One landmark case which channeled the international interest on the topic of sexual harassment was that of Anita Hill, an American educator, lawyer and author, working at the United States department of Education and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. Her supervisor at the time was Clarence Thomas, who was being nominated for Associate Supreme Court Justice by President George Bush (1991). His career was seemingly blossoming until Hill's private report to the FBI got leaked to the public.

After that, her case was forwarded to be handled by the Senate Judiciary Committee and on October 11, 1991, Anita Hill formally and publicly accused Thomas of sexually harassing her. According to her accusation, after she had rejected Thomas many times during her two years of being his assistant, Thomas took advantage of their shared work settings by constantly bringing up sexual subjects and attempting to push advances between them. Thomas denied all allegations made by Hill, explaining that he considered Hill as a very dear friend whose current behavior offended him deeply.

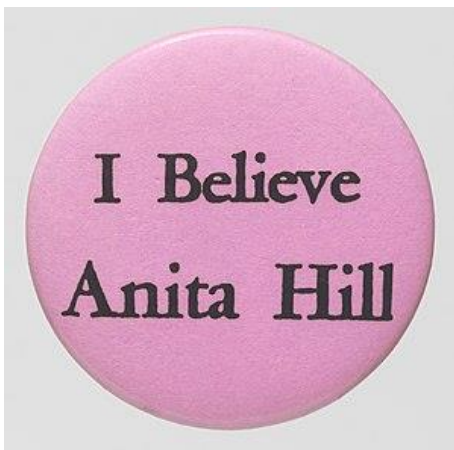
<sup>13</sup>Boomer, Lee. "Women Strike for Equality." Women & the American Story, 13 Mar. 2024, [wams.nyhistory.org/growth-and-turmoil/feminism-and-the-backlash/women-strike-for-equality](https://wams.nyhistory.org/growth-and-turmoil/feminism-and-the-backlash/women-strike-for-equality).

The validity and credibility of Hill's testament was further questioned as the date in which she was sexually harassed was 10 years before the trial. After extensive debate, the United States Senate by a vote of 52-48 appointed Thomas to the Supreme Court, regardless of Hill's testimonies.

To this day, public consensus on this case has not been reached, seeing as both Thomas and Hill have made believable testimonies. However, the effect of this case on the global community was immensely positive; since Hill's testimony in 1991, the term sexual harassment escaped closed academic and legal circles and gained international traction.

Additionally, a growing number of women gathered the courage to report incidents of sexual harassment, taking after Hill's example. While Hill's case came under a lot of public scrutiny, many sexual harassment victims sympathized with Anita's experiences and felt a little less alone in their personal battles with sexual violence. Furthermore, the overall treatment of Hill's case worked as a reminder to many women of their inadequate representation in Congress, fueling their more active engagement in politics.

In 1992, the year after Hill's testimony, multiple female politicians were elected to office, marking this year as "The Year of Woman". To date, Hill's case continues to touch and inspire sexual harassment victims from all over the world, showing the importance of speaking up, regardless of the outcome.



**Fig. 3: Pin used in support of Anita Hill's 1991 testimony<sup>14</sup>**

### ***Minorities and other victims***

Just as it was discussed further above, sexual harassment, outside women, also affects other social groups and minorities. Unfortunately, however, contrary to the treatment of Hill's case multiple sexual harassment victims do not receive the treatment, compensation and rehabilitation they deserve.

Minorities and disadvantaged groups in particular, are not taken care of appropriately. Such social groups include underage persons, the LGBTQ+ community and men. As far as the former is concerned, children, especially in environments such as school, are very susceptible to sexual harassment by their teachers, professors and even classmates.

A particularly disturbing case of sexual harassment with children is that of Jeffrey Epstein, a serial sex trafficker who sexually abused and trafficked underage girls, some as young as 14. Starting off with sexual harassment and then moving on to other crimes such as rape, child prostitution and solicitation, the nature and extent of Epstein's actions are shocking, with

<sup>14</sup> National Museum of African-American History & Culture. "Pinback button featuring "I Believe Anita Hill"." *National Museum of African-American History & Culture*, The Smithsonian, 1991, [nmaahc.si.edu/object/nmaahc\\_2010.69.9](https://nmaahc.si.edu/object/nmaahc_2010.69.9).

investigations showing he allegedly abused as much as 36 girls. Sadly, after spending almost a year in jail after being convicted in 2008, thanks to his connections and resources he was let off with extensive work release.

Years later on July 6, 2019, Epstein was rearrested but took his own life a month later on August 10, 2019 before getting a chance to go through his trial<sup>15</sup>. The Jeffrey Epstein case to this day adequately showcases the dire importance and fragility of the issue of sexual harassment, particularly among minors.

Aside from schools, other institutions also fail to protect their members from sexual harassment. For instance, universities, which should serve as safe havens for learning and growth, often fail to protect their students from such discrimination and violence. A noteworthy case of sexual harassment in an educational institution constitutes that of Ronni Alexander, Ann Olivarius, Pamela Price, Margery Reifler and Lisa Stone, all of which were Yale students between 1973 and 1980, and accused Yale of failing to protect them from sexual harassment<sup>16</sup>.

More specifically, Alexander and Reifler were allegedly harassed and/or assaulted by a teacher and coach of theirs, Pamela experienced a quid pro quo case of sexual harassment when a course instructor offered her good grades if she agreed to advance sexually with him, Lisa's professor touched her inappropriately during their working together, whereas Ann claimed that the lack of adequate response mechanisms to sexual violence in general forced her to volunteer and help her classmates on the matter, something that situated her in a vulnerable position, letting her get sexually harassed by those who she was investigating/ prosecuting.

Overall, the girls did not wish to damage Yale rather than clear the poisoned atmosphere from sexual harassment and force the court to order Yale to provide a grievance procedure for victims. Although the women did not win their case, Yale did set up a grievance procedure, marking the girls' attempt for change successful.

As far as the LGBTQ+ community is concerned, society's general disapproval and lack of support towards them renders them particularly vulnerable to any sort of manipulation and mistreatment. More specifically, many uneducated people based on misconceptions, ignorance and a superficial understanding of the LGBTQ+ identity, mock and sexualize queer individuals, often sexually harassing them. Complementarily to that, a lack of sensitization towards their community often leads to limited or nonexistent access to rehabilitation.

Similarly with men, due to the widespread belief that they are the most dominant, strong and assertive out of the genders, many do not believe that they can be victims of sexual harassment or abuse. Additionally, influenced by those beliefs, many male victims do not speak up for fear of being mocked and looked down on.

Overall, both LGBTQ individuals and men, being minority sexual harassment victims, do not receive the treatment they deserve when it comes to speaking up about sexual violence.

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<sup>15</sup> BBC News. "Who Was Jeffrey Epstein? The Financier Charged with Sex Trafficking." *BBC News*, 3 Jan. 2024, [www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-48913377](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-48913377).

<sup>16</sup>U.S. District Court for the District of Connecticut. "Alexander V. Yale 3:77-cv-00277 (D. Conn.)." *Find Information on Civil Rights Cases and Lawsuits | Civil Rights Litigation Clearinghouse*, 22 Sept. 1980, [clearinghouse.net/case/12614](http://clearinghouse.net/case/12614).



Taking all of the above cases and circumstances into consideration, the effect of sexual harassment is undeniably broadly devastating.

### ***The psychology behind Sexual Harassment***

It is a logical thing to wonder what the harassers' reasoning was, so as to justify and rationalize their behavior, however, it is impossible, and inappropriate, to speculate about the rational construct of their minds. On the contrary, it is possible to observe the shared psychological forces that drive one's self towards the path of sexual harassment and violence.

### Personal Construct

A personal construct, meaning the composition of beliefs and personal hypotheses which we employ to interpret, explain, give meaning to or predict life events, is a major factor that determines our actions and way of conduct. Depending on the composition of one's personal construct, individuals may resort to unethical, irrational, and harmful behavior, including sexual harassment. For instance, grandiosity and omnipotence, the elevated perception of one's own importance and strength respectively, are particularly met in sexual harassers.

Additionally, a lack of empathy and discipline, a poor impulse control, as well as an excessive need for admiration are some personal traits that can lead someone towards the path of sexual harassment. Finally, beneath the grandiose exterior that harassers often portray there lays a profound sense of inadequacy and inferiority, creating an extremely insecure and "fragile" personality. All in all, the personal construct of sexual harassers consists of multiple vulnerabilities which they, in an effort to mask, channel into harmful and "wrong" behaviors.

### Triggering Factors and Coping Mechanisms

Except for an individual's personal construct, one other factor that determines their actions is their current psychological state. Negative experiences and current psychological factors can require the employment of certain coping mechanisms which often manifest in misbehavior. In the case of sexual harassment, some of the triggering factors that might insinuate such actions are loneliness and overstimulation.

The former, with the individual being in a state of human contact deprivation, renders them yearning for sexual interaction, while the latter describes the individual enthralled by their power or success, or even pressured extremely by their job, so much that they are very likely to act without thinking. Additionally, personal struggles including a recent life change or a significant loss can render an individual vulnerable and desperately looking for ways to feel better. Finally, an individual, confused and pressured by their responsibilities, might be prone to self-deceptive rationalization.

More specifically, as a coping mechanism, they might try to justify and rationalize all of their actions, including their wrongdoings. All of the aforementioned factors can push an individual towards the path of sexual harassment and violence.

### Power Dynamics and Social Environment

Power is a multifaceted social construct whose perception determines its exercise. To put it more simply, power can be perceived as a tool to bring about innovation, change and betterment, while also as a means to inflict harm, force decisions and get one's own way. The

way in which those in higher positions handle the power given to them, determines the power dynamics in a workplace's relationships.

As a result, when an individual exploits its authority to the detriment of its surroundings and co-workers, an environment ripe for abuse and manipulation is created. That being said, sexual harassment can work as a tactic for gaining or maintaining power as well as owning the respect of others. Individuals, particularly when they are immersed in an environment that values power over substance, are very likely to abuse their position to their advantage.

Influenced by their power, harassers operate on the principles of "I want it, I'm going to get it" thinking that they are entitled to whatever they want. Overall, the psychology of sexual harassment is very complicated and has many aspects to it, one of which revolving around power dynamics. Taking all of the above into consideration it is logical to conclude that those in power are more prevalent to sexually harass their subordinates.

### ***The Silence of Victims***

Unfortunately, out of all sexually harassed victims, only a really small percentage gathers up the courage to report their harassers. Victims, taken over by the fear factor, postpone or avoid reporting instances of sexual harassment either for fear of the consequences that may come or in hopes that the situation will stop. More specifically, it is very common for victims to avoid reporting their harassment because they fear that by doing so, they will lose their job, dignity, and ruin their reputation.

By reporting their case they mistakenly assume that they will be regarded as weak and pitiful and therefore prefer silence over speaking up. Additionally, it is very common for harassment victims to be afraid of retaliation; afraid of any professional repercussions that may follow, any damage to their reputation and scared that their professional relationships with their co-workers might be ruined, they again opt for silence.

Lastly, the fear of not being believed, the thought that what happened to them might not be as serious as it seems and the overall fear of getting humiliated, silence the voices of many victims thinking about reporting their harassers.

As a result, victims feel invalidated and start dismissing and suppressing their feelings, thoughts and experiences as unimportant. To avoid that from happening, it is of crucial importance that victims always feel welcome to report and testify, with society being helpful and understanding instead of scrutinizing them and their actions.

### ***The Consequences of Sexual Harassment***

Sexual Harassment negatively affects its victims on both a mental, emotional and often physical level. Excerpts from a survey conducted by the Australian Human Rights Commission indicate that 36% of sexual harassment victims experience a negative impact on their mental health. Additionally, 19% reported deteriorated health accompanied with physical symptoms (psychosomatic), while another 10% suffered financial consequences.

It is important to note that the effect of sexual harassment on victims' mental and psychological wellbeing was observed to prevent them from going about their daily life tasks.

Particularly, 1 in 4 confessed to have experienced negative impacts in their employment, career or work<sup>17</sup>. After these traumatic experiences, victims found their work disrupted and professional relationships ruined as their morale, reputation and productivity were compromised.

Undeniably, the symptoms that each victim may endure differ based on the individual's psychological strength, the nature of the harassment they received as well as the existence or absence of a social support structure helping them recover. Generally, most victims report deteriorated mental and physical health experiencing symptoms varying from insomnia, acute stress and depression to Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) -particularly in cases in which the sexual harassment was proceeded with sexual assault. Survivors often struggled with self-blame and low self-esteem, while they usually experienced emotional and psychological distress.

Lastly, intrusive thoughts, flashbacks and panic attacks tormented many of sexual harassment victims. While for most individuals, all symptoms weaken and eventually disappear, there are cases whose lives are permanently affected, as they become unable to overcome such an experience. All of the aforementioned consequences of sexual harassment adequately highlight the need for constant help and support to its victims and survivors.

## **MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED**

### ***United States (US)***

Although a disturbingly big amount of sexual violence cases are being reported annually, the progress that the country has marked is positive. Increased awareness and cultural shifts toward zero tolerance have been significant, but consistent policy enforcement, and the creation of safe working environments remain priorities that need to be addressed.

Reports indicate a rise in harassment charges filed, something that shows willingness to speak up while also highlighting the issue's pervasiveness. The civil society has indicated a particular engagement on the topic, something that can be seen through the creation of the #MeToo movement which encourages survivors to speak out, exposing systemic abuses across various sectors including politics and business.

As far as the government is concerned, it has enacted several measures in response to the situation; one of which is the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) which has promoted and strengthened the enforcement of anti-harassment policies while also initiated numerous legislative efforts including the 2018 Stop Sexual Harassment in Federal and Congressional Workplaces Act<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> Respect@Work. "The impacts of workplace sexual harassment." *Respect@Work | Respect@Work*, Feb. 2019, [www.respectatwork.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-08/Final\\_R%40W\\_Impacts%20of%20WSH.pdf](http://www.respectatwork.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-08/Final_R%40W_Impacts%20of%20WSH.pdf).

<sup>18</sup> City of New York. "Sexual-harassment-factsheets-posters." *Welcome to NYC.gov | City of New York*, [www.nyc.gov/site/cchr/law/sexual-harassment-factsheets-posters.page](http://www.nyc.gov/site/cchr/law/sexual-harassment-factsheets-posters.page).

## India

It is estimated that in 2019 there were 32,033 reported rape cases<sup>19</sup> while a 101% rise was observed in sexual harassment cases in India's largest companies in the year ending March 2023.<sup>20</sup> Those highly alarming figures showcase the urgent need for legislative changes on the matter.

At the moment, the Indian Legal System makes it a challenge for survivors to obtain justice as the process of reporting an abuser or harasser is complicated and unknown by most of the public population. In fact, a survey of 400 working professionals indicated that 37%, most of which were women, had experienced sexual harassment in their workplace, while 17% either feared or were unaware of their option to report their harasser.<sup>21</sup>

In India, particularly members of the country's marginalized and impoverished communities face multiple barriers when it comes to sexual harassment. Additionally, seeing as the topic of sexual violence is considered a social taboo, serious conversation on the topic is majorly avoided. Taking all of the above into consideration, while Indian companies are making efforts to eliminate sexual violence, legal constraints, social taboos along with corrupt law enforcement systems, render the elimination of sexual violence a challenge. The engagement of more powerful stakeholders could potentially boost progress on the matter.

## France

Sexual harassment by people in power has been a prominent issue in France whose government and civil society are actively engaged in efforts to address it. Movements and initiatives by the public such as #MeToo and #BalanceTonPorc -which directly translates to denouncing your pig, have highlighted the importance of addressing the problem.

The French government by promulgating the "Loi Schiappa"<sup>22</sup>, a law aiming to strengthen the fight against sexual violence published in August 5, 2018, it managed to further limit sexual harassment cases while generating discussion on the topic. Apart from that, the French Penal and Labour codes along with organizations such as "Défenseur des Droits" (Defender of Rights), play an instrumental role in preventing as well as addressing sexual harassment instances.

Overall, the positive and active engagement of the legal system, the government and the civil society, have been great factors driving innovation and progress on the issue. Despite that,

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<sup>19</sup>Equality Now. "Sexual Violence in India." *Equality Now*, 12 Nov. 2021, [equalitynow.org/learn\\_more\\_sexual\\_violence\\_in\\_india/](https://equalitynow.org/learn_more_sexual_violence_in_india/).

<sup>20</sup> Sultana, Nasrin. "India Inc Sees Alarming High Unresolved Sexual Harassment Cases At Workplace." *Forbes India*, 17 Oct. 2023, [www.forbesindia.com/article/take-one-big-story-of-the-day/india-inc-sees-alarming-high-unresolved-sexual-harassment-cases-at-workplace/89043/1](https://www.forbesindia.com/article/take-one-big-story-of-the-day/india-inc-sees-alarming-high-unresolved-sexual-harassment-cases-at-workplace/89043/1).

<sup>21</sup> Laboris, Ius. "India's Sexual Harassment Law, a Decade on." *Kliemt.blog – Arbeitsrecht Weltweit*, 22 Mar. 2024, [kliemt.blog/2024/03/22/indias-sexual-harassment-law-a-decade-on](https://kliemt.blog/2024/03/22/indias-sexual-harassment-law-a-decade-on).

<sup>22</sup> Government of France. "Loi du 3 août 2018 renforçant la lutte contre les violences sexuelles et sexistes." *Vie Publique*, 8 Aug. 2018, [www.vie-publique.fr/loi/20794-loi-schiappa-3-aout-2018-lutte-contre-atteintes-sexuelles-et-sexistes](https://www.vie-publique.fr/loi/20794-loi-schiappa-3-aout-2018-lutte-contre-atteintes-sexuelles-et-sexistes).

more efforts are needed to be made in order to ensure the enforcement of legislative measures as well as render workplaces a harassment-free zone, safe for all employees.

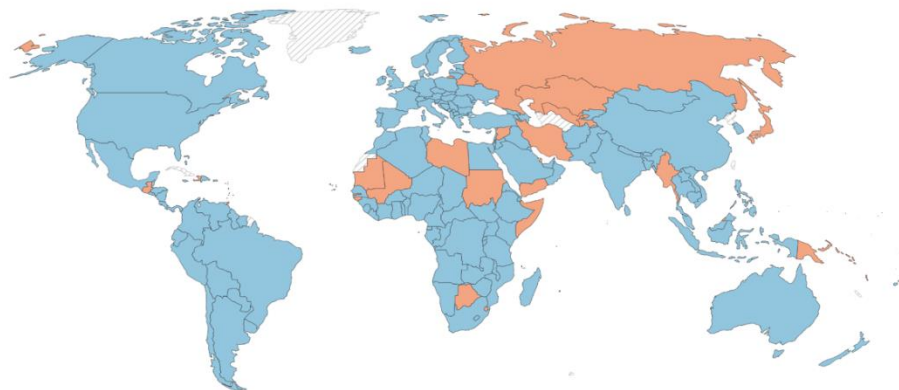
## Egypt

Even though there is no official data on sexual violence, it is estimated that about 20,000 rapes are reported every year in Egypt. Alongside that, 90% of Egyptian women report having experienced some sort of sexual harassment<sup>23</sup>. The country has one of the highest records of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and is generally considered as an unsafe place for women and girls. Despite persistent efforts from the civil society to ameliorate the situation, a significant lack of legislative measures on sexual harassment and sexual violence leave women in a vulnerable position in society.

An unfortunate event that particularly rose sexual harassment to public prominence was a case of mass sexual assault by police officers in 2005, publicly referred to as “Black Wednesday”<sup>24</sup>. On the positive side, an ever-growing amount of people are becoming sensitized by the issue, while more and more initiatives are being published such as the 2006 “Safe Streets for All”, 2007 “Respect Yourself”, 2009 “Be a Man” and 2010 “Syndicate the Harassers”.

### Legislation on sexual harassment in employment, 2023

Legislation on sexual harassment includes protections for unwelcome verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature.



No data No Yes

Data source: World Bank (2024)

OurWorldInData.org/women-rights | CC BY

**Fig. 4: Global map measuring were there are legal provisions or legislations that specifically protect women from sexual harassment and sexual discrimination<sup>25</sup>.**

<sup>23</sup> RAINN. "Africa Project - Egypt." *RAINN | The Nation's Largest Anti-sexual Violence Organization*, [rainn.org/africa/egypt](http://rainn.org/africa/egypt).

<sup>24</sup> Kenton, Will. "Black Wednesday: Definition, Causes, Role of George Soros." *Investopedia*, 15 Aug. 2022, [www.investopedia.com/terms/b/black-wednesday.asp](http://www.investopedia.com/terms/b/black-wednesday.asp).

<sup>25</sup> Our World in Data. "Legislation on Sexual Harassment in Employment." *Our World in Data*, 15 Apr. 2024, [ourworldindata.org/grapher/legislation-on-sexual-harassment-in-employment](http://ourworldindata.org/grapher/legislation-on-sexual-harassment-in-employment).

## **International Labour Organization (ILO)**

The ILO has been actively participating in efforts to address the problem of sexual harassment. Particularly focusing on power dynamics within workplaces, the ILO has adopted conventions, provided guidance and suggested solutions to promote inclusive and safe working environments globally.

One note-worthy example of the ILO's efforts to address the topic includes the adoption of the ILO Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190), and its accompanying Recommendation No. 206.<sup>26</sup>

This convention recognizing the right of everyone to a working environment free from any sort of harassment and violence, set the foundation for progressing towards the elimination of sexual harassment in the workplace. By emphasizing the role of national laws and policies, workplace risk assessments, and the need for comprehensive measures to support victims, the ILO has been involved in providing technical assistance and guidance to member states for the implementation of these standards, promoting safe and inclusive working environments globally.

## **World Health Organization (WHO)**

The WHO has significantly contributed in the rehabilitation and protection of sexual harassment victims. By providing guidelines and resources, the WHO is promoting a zero-tolerance policy for sexual harassment and violence in the workplace. The organization after defining the term sexual harassment, it initiated research and studies to monitor reported cases globally as well as track the progress made on the domain.

Additionally, WHO is actively trying to shift systems and cultures into victim and survivor-centered ones. In collaboration with United Nations (UN) agencies as well as other nongovernmental organizations, WHO is working to create supportive systems to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and sexual violence in general.

Overall, WHO's efforts and engagement on the topic have certainly contributed to any marked progress on the matter.

## **UN Women**

UN Women is a United Nations entity devoted to ensuring gender equality and empowering women. While the entity's spectrum of preoccupations is broad, it has nevertheless contributed to the fight against sexual harassment.

By raising awareness, coordinating actions for women's empowerment, strengthening women's economic rights as well as upholding standards for an equal world between men and women, UN Women is leading an instrumental role in efforts to address sexual harassment. While unfortunately, the entity does not whatsoever, advocate or help male harassment victims, its

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<sup>26</sup> International Labour Organization. "C190 - Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190)." *Information System on International Labour Standards (NORMLEX)*, International Labour Organization, 21 June 2019, [normlex.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100\\_ILO\\_CODE:C190](http://normlex.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C190).

primary focus -women- make up the biggest number of sexual harassment victims worldwide, therefore rendering its efforts extremely influential.

Overall, UN women, while not specifically nor directly addressing the problem of sexual harassment in general, it is significantly contributing in eradicating sexual violence and protecting women globally.

## TIMELINE OF EVENTS

DATE	DESCRIPTION OF EVENT
2 July 1964	The Civil Rights Act is Passed Prohibiting Discrimination on the Basis of Race, Color, Religion, Sex and Natural Origin.
19 June - 2 July 1975	First United Nations World Conference on Women is Held in Mexico City.
3 July 1977	Alexander v. Yale case is filed .
11 October 1991	Anita Hill Accuses Thomas Clarence of Sexually Harassing her in her Testimony in Television Hearings.
23 October 1991	Clarence Thomas joined the U.S. Supreme Court.
2002	Establishment of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) - Sexual Violence is Recognized as a Crime.
5 August 2018	Publication and Promulgation of Loi Schiappa by the French Government
11 January 2019	The General Assembly Passes Resolution A/RES/73/148 to Eliminate and Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls.
10 June 2019	The International Labour Organization adopts the Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190), as well as its accompanying Recommendation No. 206.

6 July 2019

Jeffrey Epstein is arrested on charges of Sex Trafficking.

## RELEVANT UN RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

### ***General Assembly Resolution on the Elimination and Prevention of Violence Against Women and Girls (A/RES/73/148)***

This resolution was adopted by the UN General Assembly on January 11, 2019<sup>27</sup> in an effort to strengthen efforts to prevent as well as eliminate violence against women and girls. The document, discussing gender-based violence, sexual harassment and women's rights, focused on preventing crimes of a sexual content.

Being one of the very few UN resolutions on the matter, this document provides a pivotal advancement in the topic of sexual violence. While focusing only on women and girls and not mentioning specifically sexual harassment, this resolution provides a good foundation for further actions, advancements and resolutions on the topic.

### ***Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)***

CEDAW, adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly, is an international human rights treaty devoted to protecting women and girls globally<sup>28</sup>. Made up of a preamble and 30 articles it defines discrimination against women, while also setting up an agenda that coordinates actions to end such discrimination.

By accepting the convention, Member States make a commitment to participate in all efforts towards the elimination of discrimination against women. They more specifically agree to undertake measures that incorporate gender equality in the legal system, protect women from discrimination through tribunals and other public institutions as well as ensure the elimination of acts of violence against women from persons, organizations and enterprises. Countries that have ratified the convention must submit national progress reports as well as implement new strategies to progress on the topic. Overall, by promoting and helping Member States' progress on the matter, CEDAW allows the fight against women discrimination to advance positively.

### ***Sustainable Development Goals 5 and 10***

In January of 2015, the UN General Assembly, upon negotiating on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, created a set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as an urgent call for action to address humanity's pressing problems. SDGs 5 and 10 in particular have

<sup>27</sup> United Nations. "Intensification of efforts to prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls." *Official Document System - UN*, 11 Jan. 2019, [documents.un.org/symbol-explorer?s=A/RES/73/148&i=A/RES/73/148\\_8389300](https://documents.un.org/symbol-explorer?s=A/RES/73/148&i=A/RES/73/148_8389300).

<sup>28</sup> UN Women. "Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women." *United Nations*, 31 Dec. 2007, [www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/).



a direct correlation to sexual harassment and upon their completion, the problem of sexual violence as a whole should have been resolved as well.

Namely, SDG 5 “Gender Equality”, and SDG 10 “Reduced Inequalities” both envision a world free of discrimination, inequalities and sexism. While not providing direct instructions and measures to address sexual harassment as a whole, the SDGs welcome progress and innovation while helping generate discussion and interest on the topic.

## PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

### ***#MeToo Movement***

The #MeToo movement, which gained public traction in October 2017 following the spreading of sexual misconduct allegations against Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein, is leading the fight against sexual harassment and assault. Founded by activist Tarana Burke in 2006 as a way of advocating against sexual harassment, sexual abuse and rape culture, #MeToo gained recognition through social media.

By encouraging individuals to share their personal experiences of harassment and assault, the movement has contributed to a major culture shift with increased public awareness and accountability. Alongside that, the movement’s achievements include legal actions and policy changes aimed at improving workplace safety and addressing unfair and unbalanced power dynamics. Despite its successes in raising awareness and promoting systemic change, the movement continues to face challenges.

While a broad and diverse audience experienced the impact of the movement, a reduction in sexual violence instances was not noted nor associated with the movement’s efforts. That is because the movement had a self-selective audience of individuals who were already sensitized on the topic and therefore not reaching those with violent admissions. However, having gained international recognition, it has the ability to continue advocating for the values it stands for.

### ***Equal Treatment Directive 2006/54/EC***

The Equal Treatment Directive is a document adopted by the European Union (EU) on the 5th of July, 2006<sup>29</sup>, as a means of ensuring the equal opportunities and treatment of men and women in matters of employment and occupation. The directive, by defining relevant terms, acknowledging the issue, as well as providing guidelines for Member States, it successfully consists of a foundational step that all countries should implement in order to approach the issue of sexual harassment in the workplace. However, despite the directive’s excellent relevance to the topic, it does not apply to all countries. Seeing as it is a product of the EU, the directive both applies but also strictly refers to its Member States.

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<sup>29</sup> European Union. "Directive 2006/54/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 July 2006 on the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment and occupation." *EUR-Lex — Access to European Union Law — Choose Your Language*, European Union, 5 July 2006, [eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32006L0054](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32006L0054).

## ***Online Anonymous Reporting Platforms***

Multiple non-governmental organizations and enterprises have taken the initiative to create anonymous reporting platforms for their employers. AllVoices<sup>30</sup>, constitutes a primary example of said initiatives. Identifying as an “Employee Relations Platform”, AllVoices envisions and advocates for the elimination of harassment and toxic relationships between coworkers.

The platform provides an anonymous reporting hotline, workplace investigations, HR case management as well as useful data and insight. Having collaborated with various companies including Duolingo, SONOS and GoPro, AllVoices constitutes a useful tool for sexual harassment victims wishing to anonymously report their problems and experiences.

## **POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS**

### ***Ensuring the Reporting of Harassers***

Ensuring that all sexually harassed individuals feel safe and welcome to report their harassers is key to restoring justice and helping them reintegrate into society. Especially in instances of sexual harassment by people in high power, survivors have difficulty in reporting their harassers for fear of being retaliated for speaking up.

As a result, thousands of sexual harassment cases go down unreported, while the harassers do not get punished for their actions, possibly inflicting the same harm to other people as well. That being said, in order to ensure that justice is restored as well as that victims can heal quicker and better, it is of utmost importance that the reporting of harassers is an easy, quick, and if preferred, a private process.

Member States and nongovernmental organizations need to collaborate and craft solutions in order to provide the public with ways of reporting what happened to them. Similar initiatives to AllVoices can be embedded into governmental bodies, organizations and enterprises.

### ***Creating a Support System***

Whether a victim has chosen to report their harasser or not, it is important that they have opportunities to seek mental health and support. By creating hotlines and other methods of communication and consultation, while also strengthening relationships between co-workers, we can provide individuals with a “substructure” that encourages their psychological rehabilitation and reintegration to society.

Companies can consider embedding a psychologist, a hotline/ communication platform within their programs in order to better support the psychological rehabilitation of victims. Additionally, it is important to consider the introduction of seminars aiming to inform workers of methods and ways to dealing and coping with sexual harassment and its effects.

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<sup>30</sup> AllVoices. "AllVoices - All-in-one employee relations tool." *AllVoices: All-In-One Employee Relations Platform*, 22 Aug. 2024, [www.allvoices.co](http://www.allvoices.co).

## ***Raising Awareness***

In order to successfully address the problem of sexual harassment, it is of utmost importance that people are aware it exists. By creating campaigns, brochures and tailoring the educational system to include sexual violence awareness, we can ultimately channel the international interest on the topic. Member States, UN bodies and nongovernmental organizations need to collaborate in order to equip the civil society with the information necessary to recognize, understand and deal with sexual harassment instances.

By doing so, victims can acknowledge their experiences and gather the courage and strength to speak up and report their harassers. Additionally, victims and survivors can be liberated from any stigma and scrutiny that may accompany and burden them due to their unfortunate past and experiences.

## ***Creating Harassment-Free Workplaces***

Finally, apart from addressing the repercussions that follow sexual harassment, what holds even more significance is reducing such incidents. It is of utmost importance that Member States, UN entities, NGOs, the civil society and businesses, all collaborate and work towards the creation of safe and harassment-free workplaces. For such a goal to be realized a careful orchestration of initiatives and actions is required.

Strengthening law enforcement, creating laws to protect employees, reconstructing companies' sexual harassment policies as well as carefully reviewing and monitoring company records, are some of the many steps that can be implemented in an effort to prevent sexual harassment. Generally, the legislative framework that surrounds sexual harassment and equality within workplaces, needs to be urgently reassessed.

Member States, in collaboration with the respective bodies and organizations must revise the laws and regulations that affect sexual harassment while also strengthen penalties for trespassers. This way, a foolproof system of regulation, monitoring and reporting can be created, something that will deter harassers and help victims recover.

Supposing that all the aforementioned solutions have been implemented, workers can feel welcome to report an escalating sexual harassment case before it evolves into something more serious. In any case, an attempt to prevent and minimize sexual harassment, requires many resources as well as a lot of time and energy. Collaboration and open-mindedness paired with accountability and transparency, are all necessary for any sort of progress to be made.

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