

## Risk Factors Unveiled: Profiling Women Most Prone to Workplace Sexual Harassment

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### Abstract

Sexual harassment of women in the workplace remains a critical issue worldwide, reflecting deep-rooted power imbalances, cultural norms, and gender stereotypes. This phenomenon is not only a violation of human rights but also creates a toxic work environment, leading to severe psychological, emotional, and career-related consequences for the victims. Research indicates that while harassment can occur to any woman, certain characteristics may increase vulnerability. The characteristics of victims, including factors like personality traits, perceived vulnerability, and physical appearance, often influence both the likelihood and nature of harassment they encounter. This paper examines the characteristics of women who are particularly vulnerable to workplace harassment, recognizing how these traits may intersect with their experiences of victimization.

**Keywords:** sexual harassment, characteristics, victims, working women, workplace, prone

### Introduction

Sexual harassment is not an isolated issue; it is a manifestation of broader systemic problems in society. At its core, it reflects gender discrimination and the persistent power imbalances between men and women. These power dynamics are often ingrained in social structures, cultural norms, and workplace hierarchies, where traditionally male-dominated roles and leadership positions can perpetuate environments conducive to harassment. Sexual harassment is a critical issue that undermines the rights, dignity, and well-being of individuals, particularly women, in various settings including workplaces, educational institutions, public spaces, and online environments. Research indicates that while harassment can occur to any woman, certain characteristics may increase vulnerability. The characteristics of victims, including factors like personality traits, perceived vulnerability, and physical appearance, often influence both the likelihood and nature of harassment they encounter. The present paper examines the characteristics of women who are particularly vulnerable to workplace harassment, recognizing how these traits may intersect with their experiences of victimization.

### What is Sexual Harassment?

Sexual harassment in the workplace refers to any unwelcome or inappropriate behavior of a sexual nature that occurs in a professional setting. It creates a hostile, intimidating, or offensive work environment for the victim and can significantly impact their mental well-being, job satisfaction, and career progression. It is a form of gender discrimination and is illegal in many countries.

In the workplace, sexual harassment can be categorized into two primary types:

1. **Quid Pro Quo:** This occurs when submission to sexual advances is made a condition for employment decisions, such as hiring, promotion, or retention. For example, a supervisor may suggest that an employee will receive a raise or promotion if they agree to engage in a sexual relationship.
2. **Hostile Work Environment:** This form occurs when unwelcome sexual behavior creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work atmosphere. This might include persistent unwanted advances, inappropriate touching, or circulating explicit content.

### 1.1. Legal Frameworks

Sexual harassment in the workplace is a global issue, and many countries have implemented laws and regulations to protect employees, ensure justice for victims, and hold perpetrators accountable. A few have been mentioned below:

- **Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (United States)**

This landmark law is the foundation of workplace anti-discrimination measures in the U.S. It prohibits employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, and national origin. Under Title VII, sexual harassment is considered a form of sex discrimination. The law covers quid pro quo harassment and hostile work environment harassment.

- **European Union Directives on Equality and Workplace Safety (European Union)**

The EU has established several directives that address gender equality and workplace safety, including measures to prevent sexual harassment. These include the Directive 2006/54/EC on equal treatment and the Directive 89/391/EEC on workplace safety.

- **International Labour Organization (ILO, International Frameworks) - Convention No. 190**

The ILO's Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 is a global treaty that addresses violence and harassment in the world of work, including sexual harassment.

- **The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition, and Redressal) Act, 2013 (India)**

This comprehensive law was enacted following the Vishaka Guidelines set by the Supreme Court of India in 1997, which established the first legal framework for workplace harassment following a landmark case.

#### Literature Review

The issue of workplace sexual harassment has been widely studied, with several researchers investigating the demographic, occupational, personal, and organizational factors that may increase the risk of harassment for certain groups of women. A few researchers have examined the characteristics of the victims in an attempt to establish a profile of high risk individuals.

Merit Systems Protection Board (1981) has found that typical women who are likely to be harassed are young, not married, have a higher education, members of a minority, racial or ethnic group, in trainee positions, in non-traditional positions, supervised by someone of the opposite sex. Chappel and Maritino (2000) have reported similar findings that single, separated, widowed and divorced are at a higher risk of harassment.

The General Union of workers in Spain has found that women between 26 and 30 years old are more likely to be harassed than any other age groups. Women who are separated, divorced or widowed not only more likely to be subject to sexual harassment, but they also experience stronger forms of harassment (Fuentes, 1988). A survey of Federal employees in the United States has indicated that women are sexually harassed if they are single or divorced, between the ages of 20 and 44, have some university education, have a non-traditional job, or work in a predominantly male environment or for a male supervisor. Fitzgerald et al. (1997) found that women with lower educational attainment tend to experience higher rates of harassment, possibly due to occupying lower-status jobs with less power.

**Mode Market Research Agency has conducted a poll in four major metropolitan cities in India. Results show that 42 percent respondents report that clerical and administrative staff is more likely to be harassed at work, 31 percent of them feel that middle class executives are also at risk. Almost 74 percent of the sample polled feels that several men in superior position take advantage of their positions by making passes at their subordinate women. Women who challenge the superiority of men by acquiring social, economic or organizational power over them are visible targets for sexualized hostility. In fact, the findings from one study have revealed that women who possess more work experience and higher education qualification are at the greater risk of sexual harassment and victimization (Decoster et al., 1999). Thus the more power a woman acquires, the more she is perceived to be a threat to those in power and the greater her risk of being sexually harassed will be.**

It is also apparent that the kind of workplace in which a woman is employed plays a significant factor role in her being harassed. Women in non-traditional jobs and predominantly male environments and women who work for male supervisors are found to be more prone to harassment (European Commission, 1999).

Cortina et al. (2001) highlighted that women in lower-ranking positions are at a higher risk of harassment because they have less power and control within the organization, making them easier targets for harassers. Rotundo et al. (2001) found that younger women reported higher instances of sexual harassment, often correlating with the power dynamics in workplaces where older, more experienced male colleagues take advantage of younger, less experienced women.

Cortina and Magley (2003) found that women are more likely to attribute sexual harassment to male perpetrators due to the gendered power structures present in most workplaces. The research emphasizes that male harassment often reflects broader societal norms about masculinity and gender dominance. The study noted that women, particularly in male-dominated industries, view harassment as an extension of traditional gender hierarchies.

**Aquino and Thau (2009) suggested that certain personality traits, such as high agreeableness and lower assertiveness, may increase a woman's susceptibility to harassment as they may be less likely to resist or report inappropriate behavior. Rospenda et al. (2009) focused on the increased vulnerability of part-time and temporary workers to sexual harassment due to their precarious employment status.**

McLaughlin et al. (2017) found that younger women are at a higher risk of experiencing sexual harassment compared to older women. It was suggested that younger women may be targeted due to their perceived vulnerability and inexperience in the workforce.

Bondestam and Lundqvist (2020) mentioned that younger women, particularly those who are new entrants in the workforce or academic settings, are disproportionately targeted by perpetrators. The lack of power and experience among younger women makes them more susceptible to harassment.

Adams and Clarke (2021) examined the increased risk for single women in the workplace, highlighting how societal stereotypes about single women being "available" or more receptive to advances exacerbate their risk of harassment.

**The ILO (2024) report on addressing sexual harassment in the workplace pointed to the increased vulnerability of women due to new work patterns such as remote and hybrid models, where digital harassment has become a growing concern. The ILO underscores the pervasive nature of workplace violence, with statistics indicating that one in five individuals globally experiences some form of harassment, with women being disproportionately affected.**

### 1.2 Objectives

The objectives of the present paper are:

- To explore the relationship between demographic characteristics (such as age, marital status, education level, and occupation) and the vulnerability of working women to sexual harassment in the workplace.
- To investigate how working women attribute blame for incidents of sexual harassment in the workplace, focusing on whether responsibility is placed on male, female or both.
- To propose interventions for reducing sexual harassment of women in the workplace.

### Methodology

The study had been conducted in Chandigarh. A purposive sample of 200 women working in the private sector (includes both organized and unorganized sector) was drawn and women working in different occupational groups were covered. Doctors, Administrative Officers, Journalists, Actresses, Nurses, Clerks, Receptionists, Sweepers working in Hospitals, Hotels and various Private Offices, Construction Workers, Factory Workers and Waitresses in Hotels and Restaurants etc. were included in the study. The research design for the study was exploratory in nature.

### Results

Demographic variables often play a significant role in shaping experiences and perceptions. The following table seeks to analyze the demographic, socio-economic and family background of the respondents.

**Table 1 : Showing the characteristics of the respondents**

Characteristics	1.2. Frequency	1.2. Percentage
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<b>Age (Years)</b>		
Below 25	35	17.5
25 - 35	117	58.5
35 - 45	45	22.5
Above 45	3	1.5
<b>Marital status</b>		
Never married	76	38.0
Married	94	47.0
Once married	30	15.0
<b>Caste</b>		
Upper	113	56.5
Intermediate	49	24.5
Low	38	19.0
<b>Education</b>		
Illiterate	38	19.0
Up to high school	25	12.5
Graduate	67	33.5
Post Graduate & above	70	35
<b>Occupation</b>		
Upper	66	33.0
Middle	93	46.5
Lower	41	20.5
<b>Income</b>		
Low	41	20.5
Middle	91	45.5
High	68	34.0
<b>Family type</b>		
Nuclear	146	73.0
Joint / Extended	54	27.0

Majority of the women in the sample were in the age group of 25-35 years and majority were married i.e. 47.0 percent as dual earner couple is an emergent phenomenon. Similarly for widows, separated and divorced women economic necessity forces them to work outside home to make their living and most of the women in the study i.e. 113 belonged to upper caste.

**The educational background of the respondents indicate that majority of the respondents were educated (Graduate, Post-Graduate & above). The educated women as compared to uneducated women are more aware of their rights; they can fight for their rights at workplace. Education helps in widening the perspective and exposes the individual to the world of opportunities and alternatives.**

**Different studies have indicated that majority of the working women get employment in middle level of occupations (Parthasarathy, 1990). The occupation of the respondents has been graded into three categories i.e. upper, middle and lower. Doctors, Administrative Officials and other Professionals have been included in upper category of occupations. The Administrative Staff i.e. Receptionists, Clerks etc., women working in Call Centers, Stage Actresses, Nurses have been included in the middle category of**

occupations. Occupation in the lower category included Sweepers, Labourers, Construction Workers and Waitresses etc. Distribution of the data in the present study also highlights the fact that majority of the women were concentrated in the middle level occupations. Since majority of the respondents were engaged in middle level occupations, it is but natural that majority fall in the middle level income category. The data clearly reveals the dominance of nuclear family in the sample. The nuclear families maintain more open and healthy interaction between its members. It is assumed that respondents would also be discussing about their problems with family members.

**Women prone to sexual harassment**

An attempt has been made to find out which women were prone to sexual harassment at workplace according to women themselves.

**Table 2: Distribution of women prone to sexual harassment**

Which women are sexually harassed	Frequency	Percent
Physically attractive	23	11.5
Economically needy	46	23.0
Weak personality	45	22.5
Weak family background	18	9.0
High qualification	17	8.5
Sexualized workplace environment	51	25.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Majority of the respondents i.e. 25.5 percent considered workplace environment as the main factor for sexual harassment of women. Workplace environment referred to a situation where women were supervised by men, working in a highly sexualized fields (male to female ratio in high), working at odd hours etc. 23.0 percent of the respondents were of the view that chances of sexual harassment were more among the economically needy women. Their economic necessity is known to the perpetrator and he exploits that. 22.5 percent of the respondents considered weak personality of the victim in the sense that they were afraid of reprisals; women blamed themselves as responsible factor for sexual harassment at workplace. 11.5 percent of the respondents believed that physical attributes i.e. young, beautiful women were more likely to be harassed. 9.0 percent of the respondents considered weak family background like no family support, member of minority community etc. as main factors for sexual harassment. 8.5 percent of the respondents believed that women with high qualification were likely to be harassed because they were treated as a threat to men at the workplace.

**Sexual harassment of the respondents by male colleagues, superordinates and subordinates**

When sexual harassment is conceptualized as the exercise of power, it is generally understood that it is the male superior who perpetrates it against a female holding a lower level position. It has been found that most of the sexual harassment of women at workplace comes from their superordinates. Sometimes male co-workers and subordinates are also involved in harassment. Sexual harassment is typically perpetuated by a person in a position of authority. In a study done, it has been indicated that 90.0 percent of women are harassed by their superior, 7.0 percent by fellow workers and 3.0 percent by subordinates (Zaitun, 2001).

**Table 3: Distribution of respondents according to their sexual harassment by male colleagues, superordinates and subordinates**

Response	Colleagues	Superordinates	Subordinates
Yes	54 27.0%	68 34.0%	20 10.0%
No	146 73.0%	132 66.0%	180 90.0%
Total	200	200	200

Table 3, shows that maximum sexual harassment of women in the present study comes from supervisors i.e. 34.0 percent, followed by colleagues i.e. 27.0 percent. Least sexual harassment of women comes from subordinates i.e. 10.0 percent. It makes clear that men who are in power positions also hold the authority of harassing women. Results support the power theory that superiors harass because they have the power.

**Age of the respondents and sexual harassment by male colleagues, superordinates and subordinates**

An attempt was made to find out relationship between age and sexual harassment by male colleagues, superordinates and subordinates. Previous research suggests that since younger women constitute a less powerful group and tend to be in lower levels of the organization, they may be particularly susceptible to being sexually harassed (Farley, 1978; Merit Systems Protection Board, 1981). Fain and Anderton (1987) found that maximum harassment of individuals was in the age group of 16 and 34 years and harassment declined with increasing age.

**Table 4: Age of the respondents and sexual harassment by male colleagues, superordinates and subordinates**

Age (In years)	Colleague		Superordinates		Subordinates	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Below 25	8 14.8%	27 18.4%	12 17.6%	23 17.4%	3 15%	32 17.8%
25-35	36 66.6%	81 55.4%	36 52.9%	81 61.5%	15 75%	102 0.6%
35-45	10 18.6%	38 26.2%	20 29.5%	28 21.1%	2 10%	46 25.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>146</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>132</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>180</b>

Table 4 shows that maximum sexual harassment of women at workplace by male colleagues, superordinates and subordinates was among the age group of 25-35 years i.e. 66.6 percent by male colleagues, 52.9 percent by male superordinates and 75.0 percent by subordinates. It was mainly because younger women were new in profession, holds low occupational level, usually unmarried, thus constituting a less powerful group. Findings endorse the results of the research that reported that women upto the age of 35 years were more vulnerable to sexual harassment. However, sexual harassment in the younger age group did not emerge as most vulnerable group.

**Marital status of the respondents and their sexual harassment by male colleagues, superordinates and subordinates**

Table 5 presents the relationship between marital status and sexual harassment by male colleagues, superordinates and subordinates. Marital status of a woman may be an important moderator for the occurrence of sexual harassment. The U.S. Merit System Protection Board (1981, 1988) reported that sexual harassment was less among married women than unmarried women.

**Table 5: Marital status of the respondents and sexual harassment by male colleagues, superordinates and subordinates**

Marital Status	Colleagues		Superordinates		Subordinates	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Single at present	23 42.6%	83 56.8%	27 39.7%	79 59.8%	12 60.0%	94 52.2%
Married	31 57.4%	63 43.2%	41 60.3%	53 40.2%	8 40.0%	86 47.8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>146</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>132</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>180</b>

*\*The category 'single at present' included respondents who were unmarried, widowed, separated or divorced.*

Table 5 indicates that maximum sexual harassment by male colleagues and superordinates was among married women i.e. 57.4 percent and 60.3 percent respectively, whereas the maximum sexual harassment by male subordinates was among single women i.e. 60.0 percent. It may be because superordinates can harass women of any marital status by using their position. Subordinates harassed women who were single because men in lower position to women were not ready to take commands from female in spite of the fact occupationally women occupied higher position they continued to occupy lower position in the social ladder.

**Education of the respondents and sexual harassment by male colleagues, superordinates and subordinates**

An attempt has been made to find out the relationship between education and sexual harassment by male colleagues, superordinates and subordinates. Highly educated women may be more sensitive to sexual harassment behaviours and protective of their rights. Fain and Anderton (1987) indicated that harassment was more likely to occur for women who had some technical or college education, and less likely to occur for those with college degrees or graduate education. Higher levels of education of women could dampen the tendency of men to be sexually aggressive.

**Table 6: Education of the respondents and sexual harassment by male colleagues, superordinates and subordinates**

Education	Colleagues		Superordinates		Subordinates	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Illiterate	14 25.9%	24 16.4%	14 20.6%	24 18.2%	2 10.0%	36 20.0%

High School	10 18.5%	15 10.3%	6 8.8%	19 14.4%	5 25.0%	20 11.1%
Graduate	14 25.9%	53 36.3%	23 33.8%	44 33.3%	3 15.0%	60 36.6%
Post Graduate & above	16 29.6%	54 37.0%	25 36.8%	45 34.1%	10 50.0%	60 33.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>146</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>132</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>180</b>

Table 6 indicates that maximum sexual harassment of women by male colleagues, superordinates and subordinates was more among highly educated women i.e. 29.6 percent by male colleagues, 36.8 percent by male superordinates and 50.0 percent by male subordinates. The difference in the harassment and different educational level was not much. Results showed that harassment was also high among illiterate women. Results don't endorse the findings of Fain and Anderton.

**Occupation of respondents and their sexual harassment by male colleagues, superordinates and subordinates**

An attempt has been made to find out the relationship between occupation and sexual harassment by male colleagues, superordinates and subordinates. Occupational status of women is considered to be an important factor for the prevalence of sexual harassment.

**Table 7: Occupation of the respondents and sexual harassment by male colleagues, superordinates and subordinates**

Occupation	Colleagues		Superordinates		Subordinates	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Upper	16 29.6%	54 37.0%	29 42.6%	41 31.1%	8 40.0%	62 34.4%
Middle	21 38.9%	68 46.6%	25 36.8%	64 48.5%	10 50.0%	79 43.9%
Lower	17 31.5%	24 16.4%	14 20.6%	27 20.5%	2 10.0%	39 21.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>146</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>132</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>180</b>

It has been found that maximum harassment by male colleagues and subordinates was among middle occupational level women and the percentage was 38.9 percent and 50.0 percent respectively. It was because colleagues and subordinates would hesitate to harass the women of upper occupational level. Maximum harassment by male superordinates was found to be among the women of upper occupational level because superordinates hold the

power at workplace.

In the present study, there were four such respondents, who were harassed by their male colleagues, superordinates as well as by the subordinates in the same workplace. Among these respondents, two respondents were in 25-35 years age group and remaining two were in 35-45 years age group. Three respondents were Post Graduate and one was Graduate. Regarding marital status, two respondents were single and two respondents were married. Regarding occupation, three respondents were of middle occupational level and one respondent was of upper occupational level.

**2. Whom respondents blamed for sexual harassment?**

Workplace romances and sexually harassing behaviour have become commonplace in organizations. Workplace romances are mutually desired relationships involving physical attraction between two employees of the same workplace (Pierce, 1998; Pierce and Aguinis, 2003). It is believed that if harassment occurs between women and male colleagues, then that is because of the consent from both sides. If supervisors harass women, it is mainly because of their power position and if subordinates harass women, it is because of their male ego of being working under women.

**Table 8: To whom women blamed for sexual harassment**

Blame	Sexual Harassment		
	Colleagues	Superordinates	Subordinates
Female	37 18.5%	10 5%	2 1%
Male	53 26.5%	175 87.5%	188 94%
Both	110 55%	15 7.5%	10 5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>200</b>

Majority of the respondents i.e. 55.0 percent blamed both male as well as female for sexual harassment, if the harassment is from male colleague. 26.5 percent blamed males and 18.5 percent blamed females only, if sexual harassment is by a male colleague. However, if sexual harassment is done by male superordinates, majority of the women blamed males only i.e. 87.5 percent because of their power positions at workplace. Only 7.5 percent blamed both male and female and 5.0 percent blamed females only. When sexual harassment is done by a male subordinate, majority of the women blamed males i.e. 94.0 percent. They were of the opinion that male subordinates could not see women working as their superordinates. Therefore, they indulge in sexually harassing behaviour. Whereas only 1.0 percent blamed females and 5.0 percent blamed both males and females.

**Discussion**

The study at hand provides a comprehensive analysis of the demographic characteristics and contextual factors that contribute to the prevalence of sexual harassment in the workplace, with a focus on age, marital status, educational background, occupation, and workplace environment. The findings resonate with previous research on sexual harassment, highlighting key patterns related to power dynamics, gender roles, and workplace structures.

The study finds that younger women, particularly those in the age group of 25-35 years, are more likely to experience sexual harassment, a result that echoes earlier research by Farley (1983) and Merit Systems Protection

Board (1981). Both studies indicated that younger women, often in lower-ranking positions, are more vulnerable to sexual harassment due to their perceived lack of power and experience. In particular, Rotundo et al. (2001) and McLaughlin et al. (2017) have pointed out that younger women are more likely to be targeted by male colleagues who perceive them as vulnerable and less assertive in hierarchical workplace environments.

The study's findings align with the conclusions, where younger women are often new to their professions and hold entry-level roles, making them prime targets for exploitation. This supports the power theory, which asserts that women in subordinate positions are more susceptible to harassment, as they lack the authority to challenge or resist inappropriate behavior (Cortina et al., 2001). The vulnerability of younger women is further emphasized by Bondestam and Lundqvist (2020), who argue that the lack of workplace experience among younger women places them at a higher risk of harassment in environments where gender norms are rigid.

The study also reveals that marital status plays a significant role in determining the risk of sexual harassment, with unmarried women reporting higher rates of harassment. This finding mirrors Merit Systems Protection Board's (1981) research, which found that unmarried women are more likely to experience harassment than married women. However, the present study's finding that harassment also occurs among married women, particularly from male colleagues and superiors, suggests a more nuanced understanding of how power and vulnerability intersect with marital status. Fain and Anderton (1987) had similarly suggested that unmarried women are more prone to harassment, but married women are not immune, particularly in hierarchical structures where male superiors may feel entitled to exert control over female employees.

In this study, the fact that harassment is prevalent among both single and married women suggests that marital status may not be the sole determinant of vulnerability. The presence of male superordinates and colleagues willing to exploit their power positions likely plays a more significant role than marital status alone. Cortina and Magley (2003) support this, emphasizing that male superordinates often harass women regardless of their marital status because of their dominant position within the organizational hierarchy.

Another important finding of this study is that highly educated women are also at risk of sexual harassment, contradicting some earlier studies, such as Fain and Anderton (1987), which found that women with higher educational attainment were less likely to face harassment. The present study's findings that educated women are more likely to be harassed, particularly in roles where they challenge traditional gender hierarchies, align more closely with Decoster et al. (1999), who found that women with higher qualifications often face greater risks of harassment due to their perceived threat to male-dominated power structures. This suggests that the more a woman challenges gender norms through her qualifications or expertise, the more she may be seen as a target of male aggression in the workplace.

In contrast, Fitzgerald et al. (1999) observed that women with lower educational attainment may experience higher rates of harassment because they occupy lower-status positions, which also makes them more vulnerable to exploitation. This complexity highlights that while higher education may confer certain protections, it may also expose women to harassment in more competitive or male-dominated environments, where they are seen as challenging male authority.

The study also emphasizes the role of occupation and the workplace environment in determining vulnerability to sexual harassment. The findings that women in middle-level occupational roles, particularly in sectors such as administration, nursing, and the service industry, are more likely to be harassed align with previous research by Parthasarathy (1990), which highlighted the prevalence of harassment among women in mid-level jobs. The study reinforces the idea that women in male-dominated industries or non-traditional roles are more likely to face harassment due to gendered power dynamics and the hierarchical nature of these workplaces (European Commission, 1999).

Moreover, the study found that women in lower-ranking positions were more likely to experience harassment from their superordinates, which is consistent with Cortina et al. (2001) and Rotundo et al. (2001), who noted that women in positions of lower power are more vulnerable to harassment. Cortina and Magley (2003) highlighted that harassment in male-dominated workplaces reflects broader societal gender hierarchies, a point echoed by the study's findings that women working in male-dominated or highly sexualized work environments face heightened risks.

A significant contribution of the study is its exploration of how women attribute blame for sexual harassment. The majority of respondents blamed both male and female perpetrators when harassment occurred by male colleagues, but most attributed blame solely to male superordinates or subordinates. This is consistent with the

findings of Zaitun (2001), who noted that women typically view harassment by superordinates as a result of abuse of power. The present study further supports this, demonstrating that when harassment is perpetrated by men in positions of authority, women are more likely to place blame on the men due to the power dynamics at play.

The findings also suggest that women may sometimes internalize blame for harassment, which could be indicative of broader societal trends where women are socialized to accept certain behaviors or feel responsible for avoiding harassment. This is in line with Cortina and Magley (2003), who found that women often attribute harassment to individual behavior rather than structural inequalities, which can perpetuate a culture of silence and inaction.

### Interventions

To effectively reduce sexual harassment in the workplace, a combination of preventive measures, supportive systems, and accountability structures must be implemented. These interventions aim to create a safer, more respectful environment for all employees, and to address the complex social, cultural, and power dynamics that enable harassment.

1 Implement zero-tolerance policies with visible leadership commitment and regular updates to reflect changes in workplace dynamics, such as remote or hybrid work.

2 Regularly conduct mandatory workshops on sexual harassment, its impact, and ways to intervene. Leaders and managers should be trained on their responsibilities in preventing and addressing harassment, and bystander intervention should be emphasized.

3 Implement third-party complaint systems to reduce biases and encourage victims to report without fear of retribution.

4 Establish counseling services and support networks within the organization, such as access to legal advice, to help victims recover and understand their options.

5 Foster diversity initiatives and leadership development programs that specifically target women and underrepresented groups in the workplace.

6 Integrate bystander intervention training into regular anti-harassment training programs to empower employees to take action when witnessing inappropriate behavior.

7 Enforce disciplinary actions consistently and transparently across all organizational levels. Make it clear that no one is above the rules.

8 Conduct anonymous surveys to gauge the workplace environment and identify areas where harassment might be prevalent. These surveys help organizations proactively address issues before they escalate.

### Conclusion

The research highlights the multifaceted nature of sexual harassment in the workplace, demonstrating how demographic factors such as age, marital status, education, occupation, and workplace culture contribute to the vulnerability of women. The consistent findings across different studies underscore the importance of power dynamics in shaping harassment patterns. Women in lower-status positions, younger women, women in middle level occupations, and those in male-dominated workplaces are particularly at risk due to their perceived powerlessness and vulnerability.

In conclusion, this research reiterates the necessity of addressing the structural inequalities that enable harassment, highlighting the importance of creating supportive policies and work environments. By focusing on empowering women to report harassment without fear of retribution, organizations can begin to dismantle the gendered power structures that perpetuate such behaviors.

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