

The Impacts of Sexual Harassment on the Health of Women Working in Male-Dominated Industries in Canada: A Literature Review.

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ABSTRACT: With the advancement of science and technology and the improvement of social attitudes and mentalities, many Canadian women nowadays hold professions that have always been held exclusively by men. They have been able to integrate educational training, academic programs, and professional careers that have always been “masculine”, such as engineering, architecture, accounting, finance, military, trades, construction, and law enforcement, to name a few. Women in Canada have successfully performed and integrated these “masculine” professions. However, this integration was only a one-way street in many circumstances, not appreciated or accepted by men who considered it an invasion of their professional property and territory. Therefore, it unfortunately opens the door to bullying, discrimination, intimidation, and even sexual harassment. Sexual harassment of women in the workplace has always been persistent, especially in male-dominated industries. Not only does it harm women’s health, advancement, and career, but it also harms the organizations and their reputations. This research will investigate the impacts of sexual harassment on the overall health of women working in male-dominated industries in Canada.

KEYWORDS: *Sexual Harassment. Workplace Harassment. Mental Health. Physical Health. Social Disruption. Gender discrimination.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Sexual harassment of women in the workplace has always been a phenomenon prevalent in the East and the West, in the North and the South of the globe regardless of the geographic limitations. It is an offense to human dignity, and a violation of human rights and morality according to The United Nations, (United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women, 2013). It has emerged as a fundamental crisis in the world, and it is against gender equality and equity, (United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women, 2013). In Canada, nowadays, many women are victims of sexual harassment in the workplace, especially if they are a minority working with men who are the majority in the industry. According to the statistics of The Labour Code of Canada, there is a high percentage of Canadian women who claimed that they had experienced workplace sexual harassment: “Over 90 percent of Canadian women have admitted that they had experienced this type of harassment at some point during their working lives¹” (Canadian Labour Relations, 2024). According to Statistics Canada, young single women are the most likely to be sexually harassed in the workplace (Statistics Canada, 2024). Women between the ages of 25 years old and 45 years old experienced sexual harassment at the same rate as young women aged 18 years old and 24 years old (Statistics Canada, 2024). Most of the time, the harassers are colleagues, supervisors, managers, or customers. Statistics Canada states that the largest proportion of women reported ever experiencing inappropriate sexualized behaviors in a workplace setting (44%), followed by discriminatory behaviors (20%) and sexual assault (13%)² (Statistics Canada, 2024). The purpose of this research is to investigate specifically the impacts of sexual harassment on the health of women working in male-dominated industries in Canada. This research will also provide the definitions and the types of sexual harassment in the workplace, as well as statistics and facts about the condition of women working in male-dominated industries.

¹ Canadian Labour Relations. (2024). Sexual Harassment in the Workplace. www.CanadianLabourRelations.com.

² Statistics Canada. (2024). Gender Results Framework: A new data table on workplace harassment. www.statcan.gc.ca.

II. Definition

According to The United Nations for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women sexual harassment is:

" Any unwelcome sexual advance, request for sexual favor, verbal or physical conduct or gesture of a sexual nature, or any other behavior of a sexual nature that might reasonably be expected or be perceived to cause offense or humiliation to another, when such conduct interferes with work, is made a condition of employment or creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive work environment. While typically involving a pattern of behavior, it can take the form of a single incident. Sexual harassment may occur between persons of the opposite or same sex. Both males and females can be either the victims or the offenders³".

III. List of mostly male dominate industries according to Statistics Canada:

- Construction trades helpers and laborers.
- Engineering and architecture.
- Automotive service technicians, truck and bus mechanics, and mechanical repairers.
- Material handlers.
- Farmers and farm managers.
- Janitors, caretakers, and building superintendents.
- Finance and accounting.
- Natural and applied sciences-related occupations.
- Trades transports equipment operators.
- Natural resources agriculture and related production occupation.
- Occupations in manufactory and utilities.
- Industrial.
- Law enforcement and the army.
- Insurance and real estate.

IV. Types of Sexual Harassment in the Workplace

Physical Sexual Harassment in the Workplace

Physical sexual harassment in the workplace is any inappropriate, unwanted, imposed, and uninvited physical sexual gesture (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2024). It could be touching somebody's body without consent, or touching somebody's hair or any other part (D'Amore Law, 2020). It could also be grabbing, massaging, or invading physical personal space without permission (D'Amore Law, 2020). It could be hugging or patting without consent (Canadian Human Rights Commission, 2024). It could also be any indecent exposure inappropriate display of body parts, or any type of unwelcome physical contact, such as getting too close to the person's physical space, making unnecessary inappropriate physical contact, including unwanted touching (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2024). Many women who work in a male-dominated industry in Canada are victims of physical sexual harassment. According to Statistics Canada, one in four women in Canada has been the victim of sexual harassment in the workplace (Statistics Canada, 2024). As well, 47 percent of women working in trades, law enforcement, and transportation experienced sexual harassment in the year leading up to the pandemic, compared to just 19 percent of men⁴. (Rolfe, 2021). According to the Survey on Sexual Misconduct in the Canadian Armed Forces, which was a voluntary survey conducted in 2016, military women were more victims of sexual harassment than men. (Senate Canada, 2019) Among the regular Force members, 27.3% of women had been victims of a sexual assault at least once since joining the Canadian Armed Forces⁵. (Senate Canada, 2019).

Verbal Sexual Harassment in the Workplace

Verbal sexual harassment is any inappropriate comments, rumors, advances, jokes, or requests of a sexual nature. It could be through phone, text messaging, social media, or simply in person ([Sakounthong, 2023](#)). It is

³ United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and The Empowerment of Women. 2008, Prohibition of discrimination, harassment, including sexual harassment, and abuse of authority. <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/uncoordinated/antiharassment.htm>.

⁴ Rolfe, Kelsey. One in four Canadian women has been target of sexual harassment at work: StatsCan. 2021. <https://financialpost-com>

⁵ Senate of Canada. 2019. Sexual Harassment and Violence in The Canadian Armed Forces. https://sencanada.ca/content/sen/committee/421/SECD/Reports/SECD_Report_harassment_May_19_e.pdf

an offense to the rights and freedom of women in the workplace, or elsewhere. It could cause many harmful consequences on women's health reputation, career, and motivation in the workplace. Verbal sexual harassment can take many forms, such as receiving unwanted sexual requests or advances verbally or receiving inappropriate sexual comments, or compliments. Being subjected to jokes of a sexual nature, or even receiving threats or being subjected to verbal intimidation of a sexual nature (Sakounthong, 2023). Many women in Canada are unfortunately subjected to verbal sexual harassment in the workplace, such as receiving comments or compliments on their private body parts, being subjected to excessive and unwelcomed flirting, receiving excessive inappropriate compliments, obscene emails, sexting, the spread of rumors of a sexual nature or accusations of a sexual nature (Sakounthong, 2023). It could also be unwanted inappropriate questions regarding sexuality or even excessive invitation of a sexual nature. Verbal sexual harassment could also be non-verbal communication, such as leering, catcalls, kissing sounds, or any other type of non-verbal inappropriate behavior.

Virtual Sexual Harassment in the Workplace

The Ontario government recently introduced Bill 190 (also known as the *Working for Workers Five Act, 2024*). The purpose of this Bill is to change the various peace of employment-related legislation⁶. One of these changes is the expansion of the definitions of workplace sexual harassment under the *Occupational Health and Safety Act ("OHS")* to include certain virtual activities (Montpetit, 2024)⁷. Since the pandemic, the Ontario government has been searching for workplace "virtual" sexual harassment (Montpetit, 2024). Virtual sexual harassment, also called "online" sexual harassment, could be any misconduct of a sexual nature through the use of social media or any other virtual platform (Montpetit, 2024). It could be comments or the spread of rumors about the victim's sexuality through social media, such as Facebook, Instagram, or TikTok (Montpetit, 2024). It could be the spread of rumors about the victim's sexual activities through the telecommunication tool, it could also be the sharing of sexually explicit photos without consent, using sexual or gender-based derogatory terms to describe the victim, or even sexting (Montpetit, 2024). Harassers may post inappropriate sexual content on their social media pages or online forums, they could also send it to others via email, text message, or other digital application (Montpetit, 2024).

V. The Impacts of Sexual Harassment on the Health of Women Working in Male-dominated Industries:

The Impacts on the Mental Health

Women victims of sexual harassment in the workplace are more prone to anxiety, stress, PTSD, and depression. (McFadyen, 2016). They could experience trauma, constant fear, psychosis, anxiety, burnout, stress, emotional distress, and emotional exhaustion (McFadyen, 2016). They could also experience a huge hypervigilance which will destroy their motivation (McFadyen, 2016). Women victims of sexual harassment won't be able to remain present mentally and intellectually in their workplace, they won't be able to concentrate since they are traumatized. They won't be able to concentrate and focus mentally on the task since they will lose their professional engagement, devotion, job satisfaction, and motivation. They will experience an impaired concentration distressing thoughts and preoccupation (McFadyen, 2016). The consequences of sexual harassment on the mental health of woman could further impede their motivation. They could be hesitant in their career motivation and advancement. It could dampen their motivation to strive for professional growth and hinder their career aspirations because of the mental consequences of sexual harassment. Indeed, they could be hesitant to take on leadership responsibilities. As well, this type of harassment could limit their motivation to strive for professional growth since they have been traumatized. Therefore, women could lose their motivation even in future jobs. They could even lose their job. They will lose their motivation which could even impact their career and advancement within their organization. Moreover, sexual experience by women in the workplace could result in high levels of turnover, absenteeism, huge disengagement, and other counterproductive behaviors. (McFadyen, 2016).

The Impacts on the Physical Health

Sexual harassment also negatively impacts the physical health of women working in male-dominated industries. Therefore, it could destroy their motivation and devotion to their organization. Women who experience sexual harassment in the workplace could have a long-term risk of high blood pressure, diabetes, a

⁶ Montpetit, Katharine, 2024. Ontario's Bill 190: What it could mean for investigating workplace "virtual" sexual harassment. www.robinthomlinson.com/Ontario-bill-190.

⁷ Montpetit, Katharine, 2024. Ontario's Bill 190: What it could mean for investigating workplace "virtual" sexual harassment. www.robinthomlinson.com/Ontario-bill-190.

higher risk of heart disease, and a greater risk of developing a major risk factor for cardiovascular disease (Spiliopoulou, 2022). They could have many other physical strains such as chronic pain, pelvic pain, menstrual problems, chronic fatigue, headaches, and gastrointestinal symptoms (Barling et al. 1996; Culbertson and Rosenfeld 1994; de Haas, Timmerman, and Höing 2009; Fitzgerald, Swan, and Magley 1997; Piotrkowski 1998; Wasti et al. 2000). (Spiliopoulou, 2022). Therefore, the harmful impacts of sexual harassment could lead to not only physical health issues but also lead to counterproductive behaviors such as high levels of absenteeism, high levels of tardiness, lack of devotion, and lack of motivation (McFadyen, 2016). The impacts of sexual harassment in the workplace could lead to many physical health issues but it could also hinder women's ability to concentrate and to be motivated (Spiliopoulou, 2022). It could also cause a huge disengagement, withdrawal from participating in team projects, avoidance of bringing new ideas to the organization, and overall lack of motivation.

The Impacts on the Social Health

Sexual harassment experienced by women in the workplace could lead to harmful impacts on their social health which once again will negatively impact their motivation. It could decrease their interactions with men due to fear, social anxiety, and trauma. It could also lead to a lack of belonging to their organization. It causes a social disruption and a loss of significant relationships, inside and outside the workplace (Spiliopoulou, 2022). Therefore, women victims of sexual harassment in the workplace won't be able to satisfy their social needs since they are experiencing social isolation and social disruption due to sexual harassment (Spiliopoulou, 2022). They could experience anti-social behaviors, social isolation, disengagement, lack of social relationships, and lack of motivation (Spiliopoulou, 2022). This can include the loss of important mentoring, including relationships with intimate partners and social networks (Spiliopoulou, 2022). It could have harmful social consequences, which therefore could cause social rejection, retaliation, and isolation (Spiliopoulou, 2022). Losing these relationships could deprive women of this support. It could decrease their motivation due to the hostile work environment. they won't be able to satisfy their growth need within their organization. Women won't be motivated to be present at work due to the social anxiety caused by sexual harassment. They won't be motivated to perform their tasks. Therefore, they won't be able to satisfy their social needs which could lead to a lack of social life and social relationships in the workplace (Spiliopoulou, 2022). Since women feel undervalued, disrespected, and unsupported by their organization, then they will lose their entire motivation.

VI. Facts and Statistics

According to Statistics Canada, among the members of the Canadian Armed Forces, the prevalence of sexual harassment was higher among women than men. (Statistics Canada, 2023). In 2023, Statistics Canada confirmed that 61% of the regular members of the Canadian Armed Forces testified that sexual harassment was a problem that affected more than 75% of women compared to 59% of men (Statistics Canada, 2023). Women suffered more compared to their male colleagues in the Canadian Armed Forces: The most common consequence measured by the survey was feelings of anxiety or depression, reported by three-quarters (76%) of women, and half (50%) of men who were sexually assaulted⁸.

In 2024, CBC News announced that 90% of women working in the trades industry have been victims of sexual harassment and gender discrimination. The harassers have always been men who hold higher leadership positions. Among the women working in the trade, 68% of them were subjected to verbal sexual harassment. For example, any inappropriate sexual jokes, sexual comments, sexual advances, or any other unwelcomed comments or compliments of a sexual nature. (Grant, 2024). In addition, many women entered skilled construction trades in Canada, and many of them claimed that sexism and discrimination based on their gender still play a big role in how they are treated on job sites by their male counterparts (Swadden, 2023). Many women working in construction sites claimed to have been subjected to sexual harassment, such as touching, comments, jokes of a sexual nature, excessive flirting, or excessive requests for sexual favors.

The City News revealed that many Canadian women working in policing have been victims of sexual harassment at least once during their careers (Mulligan, 2021). Women police officers have been subjected to sexual advances, unwanted sexual comments, or requests such as sending naked pictures or exposing themselves. Sexual harassment or abuse of women working in policing in Canada has been documented. According to the City News, more than 3000 women working as police officers won a million action lawsuit against the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. (Mulligan, 2021).

Canadian women working as firefighters have also been victims of sexual harassment and sexual assaults in their workplace. According to CBC Canada, firefighting remains an almost exclusively male-dominated industry. Only about three percent of 22,000 professional firefighters in Canada are women. While several fire

⁸ Cotter, Burczycka, 2023. Sexual misconduct in the Canadian Armed Forces. www.150statcan.gc.ca

services are working hard to recruit young women, some veterans say they face daily horrors. Unfortunately, many women testified that they had been victims of sexual harassment physically or verbally.

VII. CONCLUSION

Since women entered the employment market in Canada, many of them have been victims of sexual harassment and sexual assaults in their workplace. Most of the time, their harassers are men who hold higher leadership positions and are positioned in a powerful hierarchy. Women working in male-dominated industries are more subjected to sexual harassment since they are a minority in the “masculine” industry. Sexual harassment in the workplace has significantly detrimental consequences on both women and the entire organization. It causes damaging consequences on their overall health as mentioned earlier. It also destroys women’s self-confidence, self-esteem, motivation, performance, engagement, devotion, career aspiration, and advancement. Therefore, it is important to pressure the government and organizations to establish anti-harassment policies, and to offer training programs and campaigns to protect women victims of sexual harassment in the workplace. It would help organizations that are mainly male-dominated to become safer and healthier for women, so they can evolve and flourish in their careers, pursue their ambitions, and broaden their aspirations and expertise. It would also contribute to the engagement and motivation of employees, and protect the good reputation of the organization, and its relationships with the stakeholders both nationally and internationally.

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