



The Economic Effects of Sexual Harassment in the Workplace

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RESEARCH



ABSTRACT

This article discusses evidence on the economic costs of sexual harassment. We first review the available data sources that allow researchers to measure these costs. Next, we identify studies highlighting the effect of sexual harassment on occupational segregation, job turnover, wage penalties, productivity losses for companies, and female labour participation. In assessing the existing policies, we review the evidence on anti-harassment training, targeted enforcement, and diversity programmes and we find promising options for policymakers. Also we note that there are still some limitations from persisting sexist attitudes too. By discussing a novel survey experiment, we illustrate the importance of beliefs in sustaining cultures of harassment, while also being potential pathways for solutions. We conclude our review by suggesting that combining accountability measures with interventions to shift norms is crucial for much-needed cultural transformation across gender relations to eliminate sexual harassment.

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Sexual harassment is a pervasive societal issue that has garnered significant attention in recent years, particularly following 2017 #MeToo movement after the Harvey Weinstein scandal. This movement brought to light the systemic and widespread nature of sexual harassment and its profound impact on victims' – who are predominantly women – lives and careers, across various sectors and job types globally. Despite the increased social awareness generated, it has yet to translate into widespread implementation of effective policies to safeguard victims. Scandals are still emerging across the world.

In this article, we argue that this failure must be redressed – not only for moral reasons, but because sexual harassment carries substantial economic costs at the individual, firm, and societal levels. This article aims to review the existing evidence on the economic costs of sexual harassment and discuss the emerging literature on the potential policy solutions for addressing this issue. The focus is on studies from the field of economics that employ creative quantitative methods to empirically assess the impacts of sexual harassment. First, the article describes the efforts made by academics and policymakers to gather reliable data and to define the scope of the problem. It concentrates on three countries – the United Kingdom, France, and the United States – and discusses potential improvements in data collection methodologies to address the issue of underreporting and obtain more accurate estimates of prevalence. We discuss the limitations of these initiatives to collect data and the next step to improve our quantitative understanding of the issue.

Next, the article explores works that have been done in recent years to understand the impact of sexual harassment, despite the many obstacles. Such obstacles include the sensitive nature of sexual harassment, the societal stigma issue, or the varying individual and cultural interpretations of what constitutes harassment. This review highlights the role that sexual harassment plays in explaining labour market segregation, wage gaps, career trajectories, and long-term effects on victims' careers.

The article then discusses potential policy solutions to tackle sexual harassment, drawing from existing strategies implemented at the policy and organizational levels. It reviews various pieces of evidence of the effect of training aimed at changing societal beliefs and attitudes and the role of social desirability bias in support of policy interventions.

Finally, the article concludes by summarising the key findings and offering recommendations for future research directions and policy implementation. It highlights the importance of continued efforts to raise awareness, improve data collection methodologies, and develop comprehensive and evidence-based solutions to address the significant economic and societal costs of sexual harassment.

GATHERING RELIABLE DATA ON SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Collecting reliable data on sexual harassment is essential for raising awareness, targeting policies, and assessing progress. Precise data can allow the identification of settings and demographics that are the most affected, enabling tailored interventions. The following sections review data collection efforts in the United Kingdom, France, and the United States, outlining advancements and remaining gaps.

COLLECTING DATA: WHERE ARE COUNTRIES AT?

Resources from the United Kingdom, France, and the United States

At first glance, the most interesting data source for assessing the prevalence of sexual harassment in the workplace would be police or court data from Justice Ministries. And indeed, important information has been used in various countries, such as France (1, 2) or the United States (3). Nevertheless, there are several limitations to the use of these data. First and foremost, accessibility: not all countries grant public access to such sensitive data. If they do, some information, such as the plaintiff's and the accuser's personal information, may be anonymized, preventing researchers or policymakers from understanding the broader context. In addition, they suffer from underreporting, which is characteristic of sensitive issues. Therefore, most countries tried to complement these data with surveys.

Yet such data collection and surveying are only beginning in most countries. In a 2018 UK report from the House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee titled *Sexual Harassment of Women and Girls in Public Spaces*, the committee reported:

The Government has left it to others to collect data on sexual harassment in public places. Even where there is data on specific criminal offenses, such as indecent exposure, it is not brought together. This means that there is no central measurement of the problem upon which to develop policy, and no way of knowing whether the incidence of sexual harassment is increasing or decreasing, or whether women and girls of particular backgrounds are particularly targeted.

In sum, no central, reliable measures of sexual harassment existed before 2017/18, making it difficult to assess long-term trends or evaluate the effectiveness of past initiatives.

Faced with this lack of information, several experiments have been launched. First, the government commissioned the first *Sexual Harassment Survey* in 2019. It is 'the first survey in the UK to sample a nationally representative cross-section by age, gender, region, ethnicity, and sexual orientation'. It aims to provide a comprehensive and representative overview of the issue and interviewed 12,131 individuals. Around the same time, the *Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW)* launched an experimental module to fill some important evidence gaps around the experience of harassment between October 2022 and March 2023. While representing key advancements in measuring sexual harassment, both the surveys focus on gender-based violence broadly, without a specific focus on the workplace.

France

France has pioneered the collection of detailed data on the issue of gender-based violence. In 1996, following the Fourth World Conference on Women, the Women's Rights Department of the French Ministry of Employment and Health asked the Institut National d'études Démographiques (INED) to set up a national survey on violence against women. This gave rise to the first survey of such scale, the *Enquête Nationale sur les Violences Envers les Femmes (ENVEFF)*, launched in 2000. Data collection for the survey was carried out on a representative sample of 6,970 women. In 2015, the survey was expanded and a new sample of 25,000 individuals living in France was collected. In addition, the *Enquête Conditions de Travail et Risques Psychosociaux (CT-RPS)* from the Ministry of Labour initiated a new specific module around harassment in the workplace, allowing researchers to gain a sense of sexual harassment at work by coordinating with workforce administrative data, despite the survey's focus on the broader issue of workplace climate (1). Finally, several private initiatives arose as a response to the growing social concern following #MeToo. We can cite the Ifop report for the Fondation Jean-Jaurès 2019, Ifop survey for Vie Healthy, 2016, or the Ifop survey for Défenseur des Droits, 2014. Each conducted representative surveys, adding significant data about the issue.

United States

The United States has strong governmental institutions and many different private initiatives addressing workplace sexual violence, some of them collecting representative data regularly. First, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission has been able to collect important centralized and accessible data on charges of sexual harassment in the workplace. Between 2018 and 2021, the EEOC received a total of 27,291 charges alleging sexual harassment. Again, the underreporting issue is major in this case, leading several private initiatives to attempt to bridge the gap. For instance, the Lean In initiative in 2018 launched the largest comprehensive study of the state of women in the workplace and continues to collect data through a survey each year to understand dynamics and trends. The Pew Research Center report *Sexual Harassment at Work in the Era of #MeToo* interviewed 6251 respondents about sexual harassment, including beliefs about its extent by American workers.

Finally, more global initiatives have been launched from America, such as the International Labour Organization (ILO), Lloyd's Register Foundation (LRF), and Gallup *Experiences of Violence and Harassment at Work: A Global First Survey* study, conducted in 2021 with nearly 75,000 employed individuals aged 15 years or older in 121 countries and territories, as part of the Lloyd's Register Foundation World Risk Poll.

It is undeniable that sexual harassment is a prevalent issue across countries. The data shows that nearly one in three French women have been sexually harassed or assaulted at work according to the Ifop report for the Fondation Jean-Jaurès 2019.¹ In the UK, 29% of workers experienced some form of sexual harassment in their workplace or work-related environment in the past year, as found by the 2020 *Sexual Harassment Survey* (4). According to the *Crime Survey for England and Wales* (CSEW), 1 in 10 people aged 16 years and over experienced at least one form of harassment in the previous 12 months, and a quarter (26%) of those said they had experienced it at their place of work (5).

Finally, across the Atlantic, a majority of American women (59%) have faced unwanted sexual advances or verbal/physical harassment of a sexual nature based on data from the Pew Research Center (6). The Lean In initiative found that 64% of women reported facing ‘microaggressions’ at work (7). Men are not unaffected: the Pew Research Center finds that 27% of American men report harassment, and the French *Virage* survey shows 14% of men reported workplace violence (8). Nevertheless, women remain disproportionately affected as the main victims.

MEASUREMENT ISSUES

The available data on workplace sexual harassment, while valuable, has significant limitations.

First, the definition of sexual harassment greatly impacts reports of its prevalence. Some of the disparities observed above reflect differences in wording; for example, terms like ‘unwanted sexual advances or harassment’ or ‘microaggressions’ used in certain surveys cover a broader scope than most legal definitions. In addition, legal definitions of sexual harassment continue to evolve as societal norms change. In France, for example, the law was updated in 2021 to incorporate sexist behaviours within sexual harassment’s scope. Such changes in legislation will shape the information available over time but can also prevent us from making consistent comparisons across different contexts and periods.

Second, sexual harassment is significantly underreported. Using data from police reports only addresses a subset of sexual harassment cases. Similarly, according to the Ifop report for the Fondation Jean-Jaurès 2019 survey run in France in 2018, only 9% to 12% of women victims of sexual harassment reported it to their superiors. In addition, panel data on police reports to measure sexual harassment can reflect changing norms on reporting but not on actual occurrence. For example, Levy and Mattsson (9) show that the #MeToo social movement increased reporting of sex crimes to the police by 10%. Another example is from Antecol and Cobb-Clark (10) who examined how attitudes and perceptions of sexual harassment in the US Federal Government evolved from 1978 to 1994. Although the overall rate of unwanted sexual behaviour remained relatively stable, the type of harassment shifted: unwanted attention from supervisors decreased, while crude and offensive behaviour from coworkers increased. Additionally, employees became significantly more willing to label unwanted sexual behaviour as harassment. These findings suggest that societal changes in understanding and defining sexual harassment can shape both the reporting and the forms of harassment that occur in the workplace.

Reporting can also be impacted by economic conditions. A study by Dahl and Knepper in the United States found that fear of employer retaliation significantly suppresses sexual harassment reporting, with underreporting increasing as unemployment rates rise (11). Exploiting variation over time in the unemployment rate, they look at changes in the selectivity of sexual harassment charges files hypothesizing that, if workers raise their threshold for the severity of sexual harassment, they are willing to tolerate before speaking up, it suggests that underreporting is on the rise. They find that a one-percentage-point increase in the unemployment rate raises the probability of a charge being determined to have merit by 0.5% to 0.7%. Additionally, they show that reduced unemployment benefits further decrease reporting, suggesting that

¹ In France, the legal definition is:

Sexual harassment is the act of repeatedly imposing on a person comments or behaviour with sexual or sexist connotations that either violate their dignity by being degrading or humiliating, or create an intimidating, hostile or offensive situation; Sexual harassment is the use, even if not repeated, of any form of serious pressure with the real or apparent aim of obtaining an act of a sexual nature, whether this is sought for the benefit of the perpetrator or a third party.

economic security directly impacts a victim's willingness to report harassment. Their results demonstrate that the selectivity of sexual harassment charges increased by more than 30% following a 50% decrease in an unemployment insurance programme in North Carolina. These findings suggest that when employees have fewer alternative job prospects or financial safety nets, they may be more likely to tolerate or remain silent about harassment due to the fear of retaliation or job loss.

To circumvent these reporting issues, researchers have been trying to find ways to counter this underreporting bias. The most common technique used in surveys is a 'list experiment', listing specific behaviours instead of directly asking respondents about their experiences with sexual harassment. The latter has been shown to lead to significantly lower reported rates of harassment (12). Another method, the garbling method, is to measure harassment at the level of an organisation, rather than at the individual level. This method gives respondents plausible deniability, as they are told that by a probability X, a 'no' answer will be flipped to a 'yes'. Using a sample of workers in a large Bangladeshi garment manufacturer, where reporting is extremely low, Boudreau et al.'s (13) garbling method increased reporting of increases of sexual harassment by 271% compared to direct elicitation.

UNDERSTANDING THE SCOPE AND CONSEQUENCES OF WORKPLACE SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Despite the discussed intrinsic limitations, the data persistently indicates that sexual harassment spans geographies, environments, and genders. In this section, we explore the causes and the economic effect of sexual harassment in the workplace through the pioneered research work that has been done.

WHO ARE THE VICTIMS?

Several factors are correlated with the probability of being a victim of sexual harassment in the workplace. Existing literature has highlighted the role of being a gender minority: women working in male-dominated workplaces are more likely to report sexual harassment while men are more likely to report harassment in female-dominated workplaces (1, 14). Therefore, occupations play a crucial role: research in Sweden by Folke and Rickne (14) supports this, with women in occupations such as motor vehicle drivers (40%), engineers (35%), and college professors (28%) reporting more harassment. Men, by contrast, report higher rates in service and sales jobs (9%) and in female-dominated workplaces like nursing (17%) and social work (14%). Therefore, men are not unaffected, as shown in various sources: but women remain disproportionately more affected. In France, Batut et al. (1), women are disproportionately affected by sexual harassment in the sectors of extractive industries, energy, water and pollution control (46.4%), manufacturing of transport equipment (26.8%), and in accommodation and catering (22.1%).

Next, Batut et al. (1) show there exists a strong correlation between sexism in the workplace and the occurrence of sexual harassment. Women who report working in workplaces where they constantly hear derogatory jokes about women are over 110 times more likely to report having received insistent sexual propositions and about 40 times more likely to report having been physically or sexually assaulted in the past 12 months.

Financial stress can also play a key role in the likelihood of experiencing harassment or discrimination. Exploiting variation in financial stress over the pay cycle experienced by postal employees, Narayan (15) found that this stress increases incidents of harassment and discrimination by about 5% in the second week of the pay cycle compared to the first week.

Among the other important factors that play a role are age and hierarchy. Younger women are more likely to experience sexual harassment, as well as women with supervisory roles. Folke et al. (16) show that sexual harassment is more prevalent for women supervisors than for women employees, even though they are more likely to take action against the harasser. They show that, among supervisors, low- and mid-level supervisors are the most exposed to sexual harassment. Similarly in Finland, Adams-Prassl et al. (17) show that the perpetrators are more likely to be in managerial roles. Other demographic factors such as marital or parental status have shown no significant correlation with being a victim of sexual harassment in Sweden (14).

In summary, sexual harassment is not merely an isolated or random occurrence affecting individuals. Instead, its prevalence is closely tied to specific occupations and workplace characteristics, suggesting that structural and environmental factors play a significant role in its occurrence.

UNDERSTANDING THE CONSEQUENCES OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Sexual harassment plays a significant role in reinforcing gender segregation and wage inequality in the labour market. A Swedish study found that women report higher levels of harassment in male-dominated, higher-wage workplaces, while men experience more harassment in female-dominated, lower-wage settings (14). Through a vignette experiment where participants evaluated a potential workplace with a history of harassment, researchers showed that the likelihood of choosing that job dropped substantially. This avoidance led respondents to take an alternative job even though it involved a 10% wage cut. Additionally, administrative data revealed that those who self-reported harassment were more likely to switch jobs. Women who moved after experiencing harassment tended to join workplaces with fewer men and lower wage premiums, a trend not seen among women who had not reported harassment. For men, there was no difference in workplace change patterns between those who reported harassment and those who did not. These findings indicate that sexual harassment perpetuates gender inequalities, leading to increased workplace gender segregation and wage penalties for women.

In France, Batut and al. (1) examined the labour market impacts of the #MeToo movement using data from a Working Conditions Survey paired with an employer–employee dataset. They found that following #MeToo, women’s exit rates increased by 9% in high-risk firms (those with a higher prevalence of harassment) relative to men’s. Notably, about half of these exits were voluntary exits, making these women ineligible for unemployment benefits. These women were also at high risk of unemployment, with, 60% of those leaving high-risk firms facing a period of unemployment of on average 294 days. Similar to findings from Sweden, this study shows that many women moved to workplaces with a higher proportion of female employees and a lower risk of harassment, highlighting a ‘double penalty’: women not only face higher harassment rates but often incur significant economic costs by leaving toxic workplaces, including lost income and reduced benefits.

A subsequent paper using Finish data looked at the consequences on the labour market of violence between colleagues (17). This article adopts a broader focus by examining various acts of violence between colleagues, not only focusing on sexual harassment per se. By using reported cases to the police and linking them to individuals’ career trajectories, the authors document large, persistent labour market effects on victims and perpetrators, with male perpetrators facing substantially weaker consequences after attacking female colleagues. This asymmetry is partly explained by the relative economic power of perpetrators in male–female violence cases. The article also highlights that male–female violence within a firm leads to a decline in the proportion of women at that firm, both due to fewer new women being hired and due to current female employees leaving. This effect was influenced by the gender of management. At male-managed firms, female employees were more often lost after incidents of male–female violence, while at female-managed firms male perpetrators were less likely to remain employed after attacking their female colleagues.

While the previous papers highlighted research primarily focussed on Western contexts, another body of literature looks at the consequences of sexual harassment in developing countries. A study in India links the disturbing rise in crimes against women to the decades-long decline in women’s labour force participation rate in the country (18). The authors argue that the increasing instances of crime against women raise the non-pecuniary costs of travelling to work and elevate the risk of working, particularly in traditional societies where there is a stigma attached to victims of sexual crimes. Their findings suggest that women are less likely to work away from home in regions where the perceived threat of sexual harassment against women is higher. This deterrence effect responds both to the opportunity costs of work as well as the stigma costs of sexual crimes. Indeed, their results show that the deterrent effect of crime on women’s workforce participation is significantly stronger when potential wages are low

and when there is a stronger stigma attached to victims of sexual crimes. It further hinders women's participation in the labour market in contexts where it is already fragile.

In summary, this evidence collectively demonstrates that sexual harassment imposes substantial economic costs at multiple levels. At the individual level, harassment contributes to disrupted careers, unemployment periods, and loss of income for victims, who often feel forced to leave their jobs to avoid mistreatment. At the firm level, harassment can lead to a higher turnover, higher gender segregation, and difficulties in retaining and recruiting talented employees. At the societal level, harassment hence reinforces broader patterns of gender inequality in the labour market, undermining principles of equal opportunity for women and men.

THE POLICY SOLUTIONS

In recent years, policies have been developed at different levels to tackle sexual harassment going beyond laws to forbid harassment.

WHAT ARE THE EXISTING POLICIES IN PLACE?

At the government policy level, and in response to the #MeToo movement, countries like the UK announced plans in 2018 to address workplace sexual harassment, including gathering data on the prevalence of assault. In France, a law passed in 2019 mandated companies employing more than 250 employees to appoint a referent responsible for guiding, informing and supporting employees in the fight against sexual harassment and sexist abuse. However, such top-down measures have tended to focus more on punitive responses rather than on preventive solutions. They also fail to address the important issue of underreporting by victims who could benefit from better information about their rights and reinforced employment protection. In the Ifop survey for Défenseur des Droits, 2014, only three out of ten cases of sexual harassment are reported to management or the employer. For 40% of reported cases, the resolution was to the detriment of the complainant, with direct consequences on her employment (non-renewal of contract, career block, firing). Governments in the UK or France could follow similar initiatives to the ones in Canada to improve the underreporting issue. In Budget 2024, the Government of Canada announced \$30 million over three years to combat workplace sexual harassment. The funding will provide legal advice and resources for vulnerable individuals, increase awareness of rights and legal options, and support education on employer obligations. Indeed, government policies also often fail to allocate more resources to the justice system despite alarming numbers on the rate of dismissal of cases brought to court. In France, for example, 86% of cases of sexual violence are dismissed by courts. In other words, more resources must be allocated to the justice system.

At the organizational level, collective initiatives like France's #StOpE set out provisions for how the companies can fight ordinary sexism at work, and train employees in how to recognise harassment and to prevent it. In recent years, some governmental organisations in France have also made subsidies conditional on applicant companies' compliance with specific obligations related to the prevention and detection of sexual harassment. Yet the voluntary nature of such firm-level programmes can limit their reach and consistent implementation.

Finally, at the individual level, feminist movements in particular, are still trying to raise awareness of the issue. For instance, the 'Colleuses' movement in France has been pasting messages on city walls denouncing violence against women, while others continue to raise awareness of sexual harassment. While raising consciousness, such one-off and purposely shocking efforts may have minimal lasting impact without a broader cultural shift.

These policies are crucial first steps in addressing sexual harassment, but their fragmented approach and reliance on punitive measures limit their impact. Comprehensive strategies are needed to create lasting changes in organizational culture and societal gender norms.

WHAT DOES RESEARCH SAY?

Recent literature has been trying to tackle the question of which interventions could promote lasting changes against sexual harassment.

A pioneering project in India studied the effects of sexual harassment awareness training delivered separately to male and female students at colleges in New Delhi (19). The intervention provided training to men led to a 0.06 standard deviation reduction in overall sexual harassment reported by women in their peer groups. It also produced a 100% decrease in extreme forms of sexual harassment like groping or assault. However, the training also correlated with a decline in romantic heterosexual relationships in the short-to-medium term. Using a lab-in-the-field experiment, the author found that this reduction in cross-gender relationships was driven by women's revealed preferences to cooperate more with other women after the male training, and that men are more likely to think that their peers disapprove sexual harassment. She interpreted these results through a signalling framework – some men altered their behaviour to appear 'good' and to avoid disapproval from peers, even if their underlying attitudes favouring harassment remained. Long-run follow-up surveys 1–2 years later showed a weakly persistent reduction in overall harassment levels, but a stronger, more lasting decline in opposite-sex relationships.

Amaral et al. (20) evaluated a large-scale policing programme targeting sexual harassment in public spaces across Hyderabad, India. Using a novel observation tool to measure harassment at over 350 locations directly, the researchers found the increased visible police presence led to a 27% reduction in severe harassment cases like groping or stalking. This improved women's self-reported mobility, making them less likely to avoid certain streets due to harassment fears. However, the study also highlighted limitations to this kind of initiative: the experiment had null effects on reducing milder harassment offences like ogling, noting, or verbal comments. To understand this pattern, the researchers ran an artefactual field experiment measuring police officers' attitudes. They discovered officers generally exhibited a lower willingness to sanction and greater tolerance for milder harassment cases versus more severe incidents. Only deployments of officers with stronger anti-harassment norms yielded reductions across all harassment severity levels. These results underscore the challenges of combating deeply ingrained social attitudes that enable sexual harassment to persist. While targeted policing could make public spaces safer from egregious misconduct, improving norms and training remains crucial for more comprehensively impacting harassment behaviours.

While this evidence focuses mainly on India and on policies outside of the workplace, such as on the street and at universities, they offer important conclusions for future policy implementation. First, sexual harassment training and the presence of law enforcement (which could be translated to strict HR rules in firms) have a significant impact, especially on severe harassment. But they also show that these measures are not enough to foster lasting change and that there is a need to address the issue below the surface, by tackling norms and beliefs and not only behaviours.

Indeed, one piece of evidence suggests that these types of training are missing an important part of the picture: social desirability bias in the support for sexual harassment prevention. Using a 'list experiment' survey technique across male-dominated industries in France and the United States, evidence shows that there exists substantial overreporting of non-sexist attitudes and inflated support for DEI initiatives among both men and women respondents. Further, this discrepancy between stated and actual views was even larger among managers versus non-managerial employees (21). These results suggest organisations may be overestimating real buy-in for anti-harassment policies within their workforces based on employee survey responses. If left unaddressed, such attitude-reality gaps could severely undermine the effectiveness of policies and harassment prevention efforts that rely on broad cultural acceptance.

Therefore, new research projects are emerging to find ways to foster actual, effective, and long-term changes. In particular, our team has launched a new project to collect data on French workers and to run a survey experiment. Moving beyond the traditional victim-perpetrator dynamic, this study takes a novel approach by examining the crucial role of bystanders in the context of sexual harassment and investigate how bystanders' misbeliefs and biased perceptions about the prevalence and impact of sexual harassment influence their willingness to support victims. The results establish a clear link between these beliefs and an expressed willingness to tangibly support victims through actions like signing petitions or donating to relevant charities, suggesting room for policy intervention. Participants are randomly assigned to various informational treatments about the prevalence of sexual harassment, its consequences for victims and perpetrators, and practical guidance on responding to incidents

(bystander training). The findings show mixed results. Men respond positively to information about the prevalence of sexual harassment, but only in ways that are non-committal and cost-free. This effect is driven by non-sexist men, underscoring once again the persistence of gender norms and the challenges in changing them. Notably, there is a significant backlash against bystander training among men working in male-dominated sectors, where women are also more likely to report harassment. This highlights the difficulty of changing harassment norms, especially in environments where such behaviour may be normalised.

While our research shows that informational treatments alone have a limited impact on changing attitudes, emerging evidence on the influence of social norms offers a promising path. Although not focussing on sexual harassment, a study in Turkey (22) finds that highlighting what is the opinion of other respondents in the survey about IPV (intimate partner violence) increases support for policies against IPV by 3–4 percentage points, even though individual patriarchal values remain largely unchanged. The results suggest that social norms and perception of one's own environment play a critical role in shifting policy support.

This evidence highlights the strengths and limitations of current policies – such as training, policing, and diversity initiatives – in combating sexual harassment. While some progress is noted, research reveals that biases, accountability gaps, and attitudinal mismatches often reduce these interventions' effectiveness. Moving forward, policymakers and organisations may need to pair concrete actions like training with programmes targeting cultural norms and attitudes around gender and harassment to achieve consistent results.

PATHS TO FUTURE RESEARCH & CONCLUSION

In this article, we have underscored the profound impact of workplace sexual harassment on individuals, firms, and society. We also highlighted the scarcity of robust, systematic, and longitudinal data that limits deep understanding of these issues, as well as the gaps in identifying the origins of belief distortions critical for crafting effective policy solutions. Before concluding, we outline additional key areas for future research.

First, the workplace itself is rapidly evolving, particularly with the rise of remote work since the COVID-19 pandemic. This shift has significant implications for workplace harassment: while reduced in-person interactions might create safer environments by decreasing the opportunity for direct harassment, remote work may also create new avenues for harassment, such as through email or phone, where it can be more isolating and less visible. Investigating these dynamics requires detailed longitudinal data to capture how workplace-based gender violence evolves over time and across settings.

Moreover, the very concept of 'workplace' can vary significantly across occupations. Many individuals work in environments where they interact with clients, patients, or the public, such as in the healthcare, retail, and public service sectors. The French *Working Conditions Survey*, as used by Batut et al. (1), sheds light on this by including interactions with clients, customers, and patients in its data collection. Findings show that most harassment still comes from colleagues, but harassment by non-colleagues may be underreported due to differing perceptions of what constitutes harassment depending on the relationship. To address this, more nuanced definitions of harassment and qualitative research on experiences outside traditional coworker interactions are needed.

Finally, much of the existing research – and the focus of this review – centres on Western contexts, with limited evidence from the Global South. Although some studies from countries like India have been included, more comprehensive data and studies from a broader range of cultural and economic settings would enhance our understanding of workplace harassment globally. Addressing these research gaps is essential for developing inclusive solutions and for recognising the full spectrum of experiences across diverse workplaces.

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