

# Sexual Harassment and Human Resource Development

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## Abstract

The challenges of workplace sexual harassment and its effects on the development of human resources in an organization has been the focus of this study. Even though it happens at the workplace, sexual harassment has rippling, barely unnoticed, but devastating effects on all: the victim, the harasser, the organization, and society. Among other objectives, the study has attempted to determine level of awareness, status, reportage, and the physio-psychological effects of sexual harassment. A total of forty-four respondents provided data for the study. Descriptive statistical tools have been applied in the analysis of data; frequencies, and percentages. The study found men's level of awareness to be generally higher than women. Again, more men indicated having been harassed than women. Negative effects of harassment on productivity were also identified and discussed. The implications of these effects on performance and an organization's efforts to develop human capital have been emphasized. Recommendations have also been made.

**Keywords:** workplace sexual harassment, human resource development

## 1. Introduction

In every organization several issues fight against the propensity to be productive. These hindrances seem not to be direct. Such indirect effects emanate from the fact that organizations have no power on their own, but achieve goals through its human resources – considered its most important assets. Human beings are definitely not robots. To make the most out of employees requires constant training and development, sustained over the entire contracted period with the organization. The readiness of the organization to train and develop an employee is not always met with a ready, willing and able mind. The natural ability of the mind runs low when troubled. This study is conducted with the assumption that employees have varied learning capabilities, determined in part by their levels of adaptability to workplace challenges. Training and development programs may be very successful if such challenges (direct or indirect) are identified and corrected. Workplace sexual harassment (the focus of this study) is believed to be one of such setbacks.

To be more efficient and effective, it is imperative that employers pursue and achieve employee required level of readiness for training and development programs, ultimately leading to personal development and organizational productivity. Some organizations seem to have policies prohibiting workplace sexual harassment but are rarely re-visited and effectively implemented. Others probably have never had it as a matter of concern. Workplace sexual harassment seems to be existent, but not extensively discussed. Among the numerous suspected reasons is victims' hesitancy in reporting issues. Unfortunately, in our part of the world (on the African continent) many do not seem to accept it as a problem, unlike most developed nations.

In an attempt to liaise workplace sexual harassment and human resource development, the study focused on the following specific objectives: to determine the prevalence of workplace sexual harassment among organizations; to find out if a category of employees is associated with the practice; to investigate the frequency of reportage by victims; to determine the psychological/emotional effects of workplace sexual harassment on employees; and to examine how workplace sexual harassment influences organizational efforts to enhance employees' output. A major challenge for this study was the collection of data. Sexual harassment is a very sensitive issue and people are generally uncomfortable discussing it. Nevertheless, persistent efforts were made to make available the information needed for this study.

## 2. Human Resource Development

According to Sanda (class discussion in July 2011), "Human resources development is the design, implementation and maintenance of strategies to manage people toward enhancing business performance. This includes developing supporting policies and processes. Human resource constitutes the key factors in the success

of any organization. The core aspects the firm must plan for include, getting and keeping good people; training and developing, motivating and maintaining them. The effects of workplace sexual harassment have the potential of disturbing human resource planning in all these four areas as has been mentioned in subsequent sections.

### 3. Workplace Sexual Harassment

The term “sexual harassment” did not exist, and had different names around the globe until it was coined in 1970 by the International Labour Organization, ILO (AWARE, 2008). The ILO defines sexual harassment as any conduct (sexual in nature) that is unwanted, not consented to, insulting, terrorizing, or shameful and humiliating to a person. The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) expands it as any form of sexual advance, any request for sexual favors, or any verbal/physical sexual conduct that is not welcome. It adds that a conduct is considered sexual harassment when it “explicitly or implicitly affects an individual’s employment, unreasonably interferes with an individual’s work performance, or creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work environment” (EEOC, 2009).

According to Minnesota Advocates for Human Rights (2010; citing Langelan, 1993), there is sexual harassment when submission to such conduct is either explicitly or implicitly used as the basis for employment decisions, or as a term or condition of employment affecting such individual – also known as quid pro quo sexual harassment, or ‘something for something’. Also, there is harassment when an individual’s work performance is interfered by the conduct, or when it makes ones working environment very intimidating and offensive. This is known as hostile working environment sexual harassment.

Sexual harassment can be physical, verbal, or visual, as explained by the International Labor Organization (ILO). Physical harassment includes violence, touching, and proximity that suggests sexual intentions. Verbal harassment includes comments and questions about appearance, life-style, sexual orientation, offensive phone calls. Finally, visual (non-verbal) harassment includes gestures and display of materials that are sexual in nature, as well as whistling (ILO, n.d.).

It is clear from the definitions above that consensual sexual conduct does not fall under harassment. Even though both men and women suffer sexual harassment, women are more prone to be victims more than men (ILO, n.d.; ILO, 2010). Sexual harassment at work is measured by the International Labor Organization (2010) under the Metrics of Sexual Harassment at Work as, long stares at sensitive parts of one’s body or stares that are sexual in nature; physically approaching others with sexual intentions; using the phone to tease others sexually; sexual abuse; benefits offered in return for a sexual favors; exposing sexual organs or any obscene behavior that is sexual in nature; petting someone with force – hugging and kissing; forcing others into sexual intercourse (ILO, 2010).

The Western Cape Government (2005) provides a document with information on sexual harassment. Causes of sexual harassment has been explained to include socialization, power games (where some men harass women co-workers or subordinates in an attempt to prove themselves powerful), fallen moral values, divorce, and cultural differences, which has increased the confusion on acceptable and unacceptable practices. According to the document, *types of harassers* have been explained to include Mr. Macho, or One-of-the-boys, the Great Gallant, the Opportunist, the Power-player, the Serial Harasser, and the Situational Harasser. It further explains that women are the typical victims of workplace sexual harassment, especially

*women heads-of-household, who need their jobs badly; divorcées or widows are often psychologically vulnerable because of loneliness and personal loss; women who are timid or insecure about their abilities, and lack self-confidence and career-related education; who have limited potential for advancement and are easy to replace; women who are eager to be accepted and liked, and may find it difficult to be assertive and say ‘No’...friendliness and helpfulness is often misread as an invitation; saleswomen ... pressured by clients to meet sexual demands in exchange for their business, employers may urge them to comply* (Western Cape Government, 2005).

As used in this study, workplace is not only limited to the physical location of an organization. Any misconduct that takes place during any work-related activity, even outside the confines of the organization, constitutes sexual harassment (AWARE, 2010). A 2008 study revealed that 20% of all reported cases took place during work-related activities outside the organizations. The harasser in this case could be a superior, colleague, subordinate, supplier, customer or any person engaged in any form of activity related to the organization.

#### 3.1 The Trend

At both international and regional arenas, the incidence of sexual harassment goes beyond comprehension. As

mentioned earlier, this study has generalized information from other regions of the world due to limited information on the subject within the West African sub-region.

In the European Union, “between 40% and 50% of women experience unwanted sexual advancements, physical contact or other forms of sexual harassment at their workplace” (ILO, n.d.). A study with 110 respondents in Nigeria found that “38.2% seldom experienced sexual harassment, 25.4% always experienced it, 20.0% had never experienced it, 16.4% had experienced it only once” (Noah, 2008). Information available as at the time of study did not allow for yearly comparison of sexual harassment rates within any of the West African nations. That notwithstanding, available data in this section seem to indicate that sexual harassment cannot be considered to have assumed a back-stage position. Hong Kong: a 2007 published survey showed that almost 25% of workers suffered sexual harassment, one-third of them were men, and only 6.6% of these men (and 20% of women) reported their grievances. The rate of reporting is low because according to the study, the victims felt embarrassed and avoided ridicule (ILO, n.d.).

In a survey conducted in Shenzhen, China (2006), 32% of the 600 respondents said that they had experienced sexual harassment of various forms, and women victims accounted for 43% of the female respondents (ILO, 2010). Table 1 provides information on the total sexual harassment cases reported during the period from 1997 to 2010 in the United States of America (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission).

Table 1. Sexual Harassment Charges

	1997	1999	2000	2003	2005	2007	2008	2009	2010
No. of Charges	15,889	15,222	15,836	13,566	12,679	12,510	13,867	12,696	11,717
% filed by men	11.6	12.1	13.6	14.7	14.3	16.0	15.9	16.0	16.4

Source: EEOC (2011). Sexual Harassment Charges. Enforcement and Litigation Statistics.

Table 1 indicates that between 1997 and 2010, there was a 4.8% increase in sexual harassment charges filed by men in the United States. This shows an increase in the prevalence of workplace sexual harassment. It could also be inferred from the table that women are not the only victims of sexual harassment. Unfortunately, from the table, there is an increase in the rate of men falling victims to sexual harassment. A more recent study by Louis Harris and Associates using 782 workers (cited by Sexual Harassment Law Firms, 2012) disclosed the following findings:

*31% of the female workers claimed to have been harassed at work; 7% of the male workers claimed to have been harassed at work; 62% of victims took no action; 100% of women claimed the harasser was a man; 59% of men claimed the harasser was a woman; 41% of men claimed the harasser was another man. Of the women who had been harassed (no report on male counterparts): 43% were harassed by a supervisor; 27% were harassed by an employee senior to them; 19% were harassed by a co-worker at their level; 8% were harassed by a junior employee. These studies suggest anywhere between 40-70% of women and 10-20% of men have experienced sexual harassment at the workplace.*

Sexual harassment is increasingly catching the attention of many due to its dilapidating impacts on society. The ILO indicates that many nations are now coming up with laws prohibiting sexual harassment in the workplace. Several other companies have followed suit with established laws on sexual harassment prevention (Womens Watch, 2010; citing ILO, n.d.).

### 3.2 Unwillingness to Expose Harassers

In spite of its prevalence, it has been known that many people do not report sexual harassment cases. It then becomes difficult for employers to determine its effects on employee development and performance. Studies (AWARE, 2008; Minnesota Advocates for Human Rights, n.d.; Cohen, 2010; ILO, 2010) indicate that unavailability of data and low or no reporting of workplace sexual harassment cases could be attributed to several factors including: lack of awareness about sexual harassment; victim does not know how to report; prevented by harasser’s behavior; the harasser may be someone of prominent social standing; complaints will not be taken seriously; fear of being blamed (blaming the victim). Fear of being stigmatized; intentions to protect the harasser. unwillingness to see the harasser get punished or hurt; feeling that nothing can be done if it does not involve rape or sexual assault; the harasser may be able to negatively influence victim’s career movement; lack of awareness about what to do when sexually harassed; fear that nobody will believe them; ineffective grievance procedures in an organization; victims may be ashamed or embarrassed about it; fear of losing their income; and fear of losing their job.

### 3.3 Victims’ Responses

Available studies propose some types of responses as formal reports, informal reports, and personal efforts to

confront the harasser. Formal and informal complains seem to be the least adopted strategies by victims of sexual harassment, possibly due to perceptions of broken down organizational systems in handling such issues. Personal confrontation seems to have been helpful in most cases (USMSPB, 1995; Terpstra, 1986). Others also provide the following as some flight or fright response strategies generally adopted by sexually harassed victims. *Disregarding* – in this case the victim takes no notice of it. Hoping for an automatic cessation, victims ignore it initially. *Avoidance* – the employee, in an attempt to lessen the incidence, tries to avoid appearances and contacts with the harasser as much as possible. The probability of this strategy being successful is minimal. It also burdens the victim's morale and overall performance. *Playing along* – this coping strategy attempts to create a gender neutral environment. The victim tries not to be seen as an object for sexual attention but as a worker. A *protector* – the victim gets attached to someone (a co-worker or one outside the job), shows-off such relationship to send a signal of unavailability (inside or outside the firm) to deter the harasser. *Protesting* – this is seldom of victims, generally except in extreme cases (such as sexual assaults). The protest is usually lodged with a higher authority. *Quitting* – in some extreme cases the victim may quit the job; or they may quit after the grievance procedures in the organization have proven to be ineffective (Bingham, 1991; Bingham & Scherer, 1993; Cohen, 2010).

### 3.4 The Price

The effects of sexual harassment could be very devastating. Unfortunately, it seems to have been ignored in the West African sub-region, evidenced by the scantiness of available data. The impact of sexual harassment is embedded in its definitions: quid pro quo sexual harassment, and hostile environment sexual harassment. Sexual harassment has multiple negative impacts on the victim, the employer, and society in general. It creates unhealthy working environments (AWAKE, 2008). Studies have proven that sexual harassment can involve heavy costs, both to companies and to individuals concerned. According to the literature, such costs include anxiety, fatigue, depression, humiliation, anger, nervousness, shame, guilt, reduced motivation, and loss of self-esteem; stress-related physical and mental illness including weight loss/gain, loss of appetite, sleep disturbance, headaches, drugs and alcohol abuse; lowered work speed, less efficiency, tiredness of work, negative emotion, absence of mind, frequent mistakes and higher absence rate; isolation and deterioration of relationships; foregoing career opportunities, leaving employment or committing suicide. (Munson et al., 2000; Western Cape Government, 2005; Willness et al., 2007). The literature indicates that more than half of sexually harassed employees with disoriented personal well-being believe it is due to the direct result of sexual harassment (European Commission, 1998).

For most women, it may be an insulting experience that undermines self-confidence and personal effectiveness. It also undermines trust in people in authority. It can also cause serious psychological damage. Allowing such behaviors unchecked could lead to bad habits, affect interpersonal relationships and personal development at the workplace. The financial consequences of harassment is unmeasurable. The literature mentions that it leads to dissatisfaction towards work, co-workers, and superiors, leading to low motivation and productivity (Lengnick-Hall, 1995; Barling et al., 1996; Schneider et al., 1997; Willness et al., 2007). Effectiveness is reduced where repetition of such negative is expected due to poriferous control systems. This could lead to absenteeism and high employee turnover rate. Mere observation or the knowledge of the continuity of such unacceptable behavior due to indifference could undermine ethical standards and discipline. Applicants may stay away from such places where sexual harassment is suspected. Other consequences may include direct expenses due to legal expenses, compensation to victims, sick leaves, and health benefits. Such monies could be used toward human resource development. Such environments hinder innovation and progress (Hanisch & Hulin, 1990, 1991; Western Cape Government, 2005; Willness et al., 2007).

The impact of sexual harassment on societal relationships cannot be underestimated. The harasser or his/her relations may retaliate should the victim report a grievance; the victim ('accused') may come under public scrutiny, attacked, and humiliated/stigmatized (Women's Center, 2011). It leads to stressed relationships between employees and also weakened support network (Women's Watch, 2010). As indicated earlier, workplace sexual harassment does have a greater impact on the individual, the organization, and the society.

## 4. Methodology

This paper focused on the challenges of workplace sexual harassment and human resource development. Related literature on the subject was reviewed. Both questionnaire and interviews were used to collect data for the study. They were administered to gather firsthand data due to noticeable lack of adequate literature on workplace sexual harassment in the region under study. To achieve the objectives of the study, the questionnaire and

interview, informed by available literature, were structured and (among others) sought the following information: respondents' level of awareness, status (harassed or not), level of reportage, and the effects (physical and/or psychological) effects of sexual harassment.

Forty respondents for the study were sampled from employees of different organizations; four interviews were conducted. Both purposive and convenient sampling techniques were adopted. Guided by critics' comments over the biasness of the literature in comfortably presuming and proposing that women are the victims of sexual harassment, gender balance was considered a priority in sampling. The four respondents interviewed were also made of two females and two males. Microsoft Office's descriptive statistical tools (tables and percentages) were used in the analysis of data. Provided data was interpreted, inferences made, and conclusions drawn on the state of workplace sexual harassment and its influences on both employees and organizational efforts.

## 5. Findings and Discussions

The following information presents the results from questionnaire and interview data gathered for the research. Data collected with the questionnaire, with the exception of opinions sought through interviews on the effects of sexual harassment on human resource development, are here shown in tables. Table 2 presents the gender distribution of respondents.

Table 2. Gender

Gender	%
Males	50
Females	50
Total	100

Source: Survey results (Legend: % = percentage)

The respondents constituted 50% males, and 50% females. Gender balance was sought for in this study to test the claims made that women are not the only targets of sexual misconducts (McCabe & Hardman, 2005; Waldo et al, 1998).

Table 3. Level of Awareness

Variable	Male	Female
	%	%
No Awareness	2.8	30.6
Medium Awareness	22.2	13.9
High Awareness	25	5.6

Source: Survey results

30.6% of the respondents surveyed (25% males, and 5.6% females) registered a high level of awareness of sexual harassment at the workplace. Unlike other studies that found women to be better informed than men (AWAKE, 2008), this finding doesn't. Table 3 shows that women have more limited knowledge of sexual harassment at the workplace than men. The influence of culture and location could possibly be cited as one reason for such disagreement in literature. It was observed, during the study, that women were more retiring in discussing workplace sexual harassment related issues than men. The study further sought to determine the prevalence and source of workplace sexual harassment.

Table 4. Status

Variable	Male	Female
	%	%
I have been harassed	30.6	11.1
I have harassed others	2.8	5.6
I have witnessed/heard one	30.6	25

Source: Survey results

Table 4 does not support some research findings that women suffer sexual harassment more than men (McCabe & Hardman, 2005; Waldo et al, 1998). It has been indicated here that 30.6% of the male respondents had been harassed as compared to 11.1% females. This means a total of 41.7% of the respondents had been harassed at the workplace. The findings here show that 55.6% of the respondents have witnessed or heard about sexual harassment of other employees in their organizations. It could be observed here, that gender is not a predictor of

sexual harassment perpetrators.

Table 5. Relationship with Harasser

Relationship	Male	Female	Total
	%	%	%
Superior	5.6	8.3	13.9
Colleague	5.6	11.1	16.7
Subordinate	16.7	22.2	38.9
Client	2.8	2.8	5.6
Other	8.3	8.3	16.6

Source: Survey results

Table 5 provides information on the relationship of the harasser with the victim. It focused on assessing the possibility of harassers emerging from some other category of workers, beyond gender. Most harassers were subordinates on the job for both males (16.7%) and females (22.2%). It could be possible that subordinates' intention were to look for favors. Females were harassed by their colleagues and superiors (11.1% and 8.3% respectively) more than their male counterparts (5.6% in each category). Males were mostly harassed by their subordinates than by their superiors and colleagues.

Table 6. Frequency of Incidence Reportage

Gender	Yes	No
	%	%
Male	2.8	47.2
Female	0	50

Source: Survey results

It is evident from Table 6 that almost all victims of workplace sexual harassment, including those who have witnessed or heard about it, refused to report the incident for corrective actions. The information indicates that only 2.8% of male respondents did report cases. Several factors accounted for such low reportage of workplace sexual harassment, as shown in Table 7.

Table 7. Reasons Why Victims Refuse to Report Issues

Reason	Male	Female	Total
	%	%	%
Ineffective grievance procedures.	5.6	8.3	13.9
Gave a clear warning to harasser.	22.2	11.1	33.3
Cultural respect: harasser is elderly.	0	0	0
I quit my job.	5.6	0	5.6
Fear of harasser losing his/her job.	5.6	0	5.6
Fear of losing my job.	8.3	0	8.3
Fear of not being promoted on the job.	5.6	0	5.6
Afraid of harasser's threats/retaliation.	8.3	0	8.3
The harasser is a nice person.	8.3	16.7	25
I enjoy being harassed.	0	0	0
Past favors received from the harasser.	2.8	0	2.8
Ignored harasser	25	13.9	38.9

Source: Survey results

From Table 7, the most frequent reasons why victims refuse to report issues included ignoring the harasser (38.9%), giving clear warning to the harasser (33.3%), and ineffective grievance procedures (13.9). Other reasons, per the literature, included fear of stigmatization, and also the fear of being embarrassed about it (AWARE, 2008; Minnesota Advocates for Human Rights, n.d.; Cohen, 2010; ILO, 2010). According to data presented, several factors led to women's low reportage level. For some, the harasser appeared to be a nice person ((16.7%). Others either ignored the harasser (13.9%) or gave a clear warning to the harassers (22.2%).

The study then attempted to determine the possibility of any psychological and physiological influence workplace sexual harassment may have on its victims. Arranging these influences in their order of seriousness, Table 8 reports that mistrust (44%) has the highest effect, followed by anger (33%), confusion (27%), fear (25%), quarrels (19%), and depression (13%). Emotional effects seem higher than direct physical work related effects

such as work speed (11%), frequent mistakes on the job (8%), and absence from work (2.8%).

Table 8. Psychological and Physiological Influences

Variable	%
Excited	2.8
Mistrust	44.4
Anxiety	0
Depression	13.9
Bad temper	8.3
Insomnia – inability to sleep	8.3
Anger	33.3
Fear	25
Guilt	0
Confusion	27
Pain	8.3
Thoughts of suicide	0
Quarrelling with spouse	19.4
Lowered work speed	11.1
Absent mindedness	8.3
Frequent mistakes on the job	8.3
Boredom at work	8.3
Increased absence from work	2.8

Source: Survey results

### 5.1 Interviews

Four (4) heads of units from different businesses were interviewed for information on the prevalence of workplace sexual harassment and how it impacts human resource development in their organizations. All respondents admitted to its regularity but had no official reports. All reports had been rumors with no proven facts. According to these heads, reasons for employees' refusal to report such cases included shyness, fear of being stigmatized or blamed, or the victim normally giving up and giving in to harasser's misconducts. It was accorded to that workplace sexual harassment has both physical and psychological complications (even through rumors), affecting relationships and performance on the job. It was admitted that the effects of workplace sexual harassment could be devastating in situations where reporting rates are low, increasing the difficulty of directing and supporting employees toward the achievement of organizational goals. The International Labour Organization mentions that silence or a lack of complaints is not an indication that sexual harassment does not occur. Many instances of such occur out of sight ... "in one-on-one situations, resulting in emotional rather than physical injury to the victim, and produce extensive costs both for employers and for the victim. Often victims have limited protection from unfair dismissal and have few alternative job options" (ILO, 2011).

Workplace sexual harassment presents several hindrances and dangers for organizations in the area of human resource development. As indicated by the literature and in this study (Tables 8), it does have a greater impact on the victim, the harasser, the employer, and also society in general. Some specific negative impacts that are directly linked with employee performance and organizational productivity are lowered work speed, absent mindedness, frequent mistakes on the job, boredom at work, and increased absence. Other alarming effects with the potential of preventing the successful implementation of human resource development programs, in their order of seriousness were mistrust (27.8%), fear (22.2%), confusion (22.2%), anger (16.7%), depression (11.1%), bad temper (8.3%), insomnia (8.3%), pain (8.3%), and quarrelling with spouse (8.3%).

Sanda (2011) on human resource development, points out that an area where managing people effectively could help improve every organization is employee relations. Mistrust identified as having the highest effect on victims could place restrictions on employees' ability to relate well with others. An employee working in such an emotionally stressful environment will definitely not achieve much (Pennington Performance Group, 2004) irrespective of any human resource development efforts.

According to Pennington Performance Group (2004:4), "lack of trust has direct correlation to employee retention, performance, and morale"; it leads to "reduced loyalty and the ability to find and retain qualified workers". Other related problems included "lack of effort, motivation, commitment, and productivity..." (p. 4). There is also reduced communication due to mistrust which eventually leads to performance and profitability casualties. On depression and ability to learn, Weber (2000) states: "Depression cuts creativity, and blocks

memory, regardless of fights against frumps (dullness). Victims often fear or dread their future, suffering mood disturbances, from serotonin failure. So despair deepens and learning loss results” (p. 1). Other depression related effects found in this study include fear, confusion, anger, depression, bad temper, and insomnia (Table 8; Table 9). An organization seeking to develop a troubled employee stands the chance of failing (wasting resources) if such basic learning and performance blockades are not first identified and removed. The difficulty again is, low, almost no reportage of sexual misconduct at the workplace, hindering the tailoring of developmental programs after the needs of both the employee and the organization for performance, and growth. Based on the foregone information, it can be concluded that workplace sexual harassment does hinder the ability of an organization to effectively and efficiently develop its workforce; the hypothesis is rejected.

Harassment comes with monetary costs also. Such amounts could be expended in the development of human resources for productivity and profitability had it not been sexual harassment complaints and the obligation to compensate victims. In 2005, the U.S. Department of Labor estimated that businesses in the U.S. lose approximately one billion dollars annually as a result of sexual harassment suits (Boland, 2005). The cost of turnover has been identified as the largest single component of the overall cost of sexual harassment in the U.S. It has also been estimated that workplace sexual harassment will cost Fortune 500 companies in the U.S. approximately \$6.7 million per year in absenteeism, low productivity and employee turnover. (Sbraga & O’Donahue, 2000). No nation is an exception in this case since the phenomena is at least found in almost all organizations. Enough empirical evidence abounds to support the idea that workplace sexual harassment does have serious negative effects on organizational processes, including the development of human capital.

## **6. Conclusion and Policy Implications**

The issue of sexual harassment at the workplace is known to have existed for some time, but the problem seems to be the difficulty in understanding its dimensions. In certain cases culture influences its definition, calling for different attitudes and approaches in handling it. Different employees approach and handle sexual harassment at the workplace differently for various reasons mentioned in the study. But whichever form it takes, and whatever the strategic response adopted, workplace sexual harassment hinders the successful development of human capital in an organization due to the inevitable physical and psychological negative influences it brings on its victims: the harasser, the organization, and society. The seriousness of the problem stems from the fact that most victims do not report the issue even though they might have been affected gravely. There is therefore the need for organizations to identify ways of reducing workplace sexual harassment and at the same time encourage reportage rates. This will assist organizations in determining employees’ level of readiness, provide the needed support, and successfully implement human resource development programs toward enhancing performance, productivity, and profitability.

It is a challenge that needs the attention and responsibility of all – individuals, businesses, and governments. The study proposes some recommendations towards eradication of sexual harassment from our workplaces. Governments are responsible, and should initiate the institution and enforcement of policies on sexual harassment at the workplace.

Businesses should be encouraged to adopt a zero tolerance culture by strongly prohibiting sexual harassment. It is recommended that firms establish clear and easy to follow procedures for handling complaints, and ensure strict confidentiality in dealing with them. It is also commendable to establish units that provide support for victims of sexual harassment. Such units may conduct seminars to increase awareness and understanding of the issue. It shall also have the responsibility of ensuring effective implementation of policies toward the promotion and management of a better working environment.

Individuals should also be adequately educated and encouraged to openly confront sexual harassers; talk to trusted persons or counsellors; or confidently report issues to units responsible, or higher authorities with decision-making powers. Workplace sexual harassment is a problem that cuts across all levels of society, slowing down development of human capital. It is therefore the responsibility of all (governments, businesses, and individuals) to converge efforts in dealing with it for a healthy working environment.

## **7. Limitations and Further Studies**

It is suspected that several of the respondents reserved certain responses due to the nature of the issue under study – sexual harassment. It is therefore recommended that a similar study be conducted to either confirm or refute available conclusions. Further study is also recommended in determining the prevalence of workplace



sexual harassment at industrial level, to determine areas where attention should be focused most. Suggested areas for future research include analysis of factors that trigger workplace sexual harassment, empirical consideration of the impact of workplace sexual harassment on human resource development, and the effectiveness of existing protection measures among different organizations.

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