

Sex Work in the 21st Century

Kaitlin Martins



THE EFFECT OF A
HIERARHCY IN
WORKPLACE SEXUAL
VIOLENCE

The Effect of a Hierarchy in Workplace Sexual Violence

Kaitlin Martins

SUNY Oneonta

Sexual Assault is the most unreported act of violence in the United States (Holland, 2014). Both sexual harassment and sexual assault violence by men against women can happen in any setting, especially that of a workplace. Assault in the workplace will go unreported for several reasons, like fear of the humiliating institutional procedures that follow a sexual assault report, the harassment endured following the attack and the possibility of getting fired from their workplace (Alexander, 1994. Schneider, 1991. Petrocelli, 1998). In this review, it is evident that a hierarchy in the workplace is a major precursor to a sexual assault incident. It is also clear, despite limitations in the reviews, that there is a positive correlation between sexual assault and depressive symptoms.

Defining Sexual Assault

Sexual assault can be defined as any sexual act that is done against ones will. This can involve both noncontact and abusive sexual advances, attempted rape and completed rape (Chang, 2015). It has been an increasing problem in cultures around the world and has been the focal point of attention both societally and empirically (Chang et al, 2015. Harned et al, 2002. Omer, 2015). A term has been passed around that emphasizes this “trend” of sexual assault, rape culture. This term is coined when cultures practice the tolerating of sexual violence (Perez.

2016). Women are usually the main target of these unwanted sexual gestures or advances, and there are several reasons behind this, especially when this is done in the workplace (Petrocelli, 1998. Campell 2017). Sexual assault within a work environment has become an increasing issue. This is when there are unwanted sexual advances, or completions surrounding those involved in one's workplace. The military is an interesting example of workplace sexual violence because of its hyper masculine sub-culture and its institutional setting. This hierarchy of the organization can increase the likelihood of a sexual assault happening.

Causes of Assault in the Workplace

There is much more research to be done about this phenomenon. As of right now, the main reason behind this assault is to fulfill the tradition role society has for men, that they are the provider of the family (Petrocelli, 1998). The traditional role of the man in the house is to provide stability and income to his family. When a woman challenges this, it essentially poses a threat to one's masculinity. Cultures that are more lenient with violence, gender segregation and male dominance have the highest rape rates (Crosset et al, 1995). Often, the perpetrator usually offers economic benefit, to manipulate the individual being assaulted. These benefits can range from a promotion, a promise about stability, or a cash reward. This type of manipulation happens in most cases. In a study done at the University of California, 20.6% of the total recorded assaults (N=63) were offered some kind of economic benefit. 7.9% of these victims were also threatened with the loss of their job (Schneider, 1991). In some cases, the perpetrator can feel so empowered because of the age of the workers they have abused. In these cases, the cause could be the size and age of the individual, in which they feel like they can do anything to their younger workers. Socioeconomic status plays a role, because if they are considered at the lower

THE EFFECT OF A HIERARHCY IN WORKPLACE SEXUAL VIOLENCE

end of the spectrum, some abusers may feel it is okay to harm someone of this status. In a research study, 60% of the domestic working girls (ages 8-15) questioned confided that they had been physically tortured by their male supervisor (Omer, 2015). There are also several models proposing other ideas of what can lead up to a workplace sexual assault incident. This model highlights the issues of organizational power, supervisor satisfaction, gender context and sociocultural power (Harned et al, 2002. Crosset et al, 1995).

Sexual Assault in the Military

Workplaces are not limited to corporations or business firms. The military is considered a workplace as well. Sexual assault is a huge problem within the military and has been thrown under the rug and avoided for years (Rosellini, 2017. Holland, 2014). There has been training offered to every service member to try and prevent this “Invisible War” epidemic. The statistics have shown that women experience this assault more often than men. It has been said that a woman who signs up to protect her country is more likely to suffer from a rape encounter by a fellow soldier than to be killed in line of fire (Holland, 2014). In a study done, about 5% of women have undergone an attempted or completed incident of rape (Harned et al, 2002). The U.S military is a male dominated workforce, with hype-masculinity qualities.

Gender Differences

Sexual assault is an alarming problem with young adults, of all genders. The main target of these attacks are primarily women. Research is evident that about 9-13% of women in the

military, and 1-2% of men in the military endure some kind of sexual assault per year (Holland, 2014). Although this rate is alarming and saddening, less than 50% of individuals that encounter these situations are to report it (Chang, 2015. Alexander, 1994). Women are more likely to get assaulted than men because of the negative outlook on women around the world. In the workplace, there is a high number of male dominated companies that create this “glass-ceiling” phenomenon for females. A female’s drive towards success and equality may leave a hyper-masculine man to feel threatened, thus sexual assault and harassment is endured to keep their spot at the top (Petrocelli, 1998). In a study done, almost half of the assailants (that the sample population confided about) were their male supervisor or boss (Schneider, 1991). This shows how the hierarchy within a corporation effects the minds of the ones on top, and those at the bottom. There also has been this movement of “rape jokes” thriving through our culture. These rape jokes are primarily made by men for several different reasons. Some claim that they make these jokes to try and get a laugh about a serious topic, and some do it to blatantly disrespect and dehumanize women. In this case, women are left with two options, to laugh and be judged by her gender group; or to scowl at the joke and be humiliated and labeled a bad sport (Perez, 2016). This adds to the large gap regarding the gender difference regarding to sexual assault because this is done to display masculinity once again. Women almost never make rape jokes, because once again, statistically they are the main target of this epidemic.

Mental Health

Sexual assault has been shown to have a positive correlation with depressive symptoms (Chang, 2015. Rosellini, 2017). Along with these depressive symptoms, includes suicide attempts and completions. Those who have been assaulted, also show a negative correlation with

THE EFFECT OF A HIERARHCY IN WORKPLACE SEXUAL VIOLENCE

psychological needs. Theories suggest that sexual assault by a co-worker may have certain characteristics that lead it to have more negative consequences. Sexual assault goes hand in hand with a decrease in psychological outcomes (Harned et al, 2002). This deterioration of psychological health evidently leads some of these victims to quit the job they this assault happened, or to live in fear of the assailant and the loss of the victim's job. Several victims must get treatment for the trauma they have endured, which ultimately puts a strain on their lives in all aspects.

Limitations Found in the Literature

The studies that I reviewed had limitations. A good number of the studies relied on surveys for their data (Schneider, 1991. Holland, 2014. Harned et al, 2002. Chang, 2015. Crosset et al, 1995). Surveys are a very efficient way to find exactly what they need because this method can be used for almost any research study. Surveys also can be more generalizable to the population that we are studying. This kind of data collection not does explain causality though. The lack of random sampling in the studies I reviewed was alarming, almost all used secondary data for their data collection (Harned et al, 2002. Holland, 2014. Alexander, 1994. Rosellini, 2017). As said in many of the literature reviews studied, it would have been better if they conducted longitudinal studies, as that would have allowed causality to have a greater chance of being found. In that, they would have studied prior sexual assault cases or those that would happen in the future to try and explain a definite causality to this assault. If they had better a understanding of causality, they would be able to better predict sexual assault. There is also a very large range of data in a few of these studies. The data analyzed military individuals,

KAITLIN MARTINS

children, and adults ranging from emerging adolescents to middle aged. This data can be hard to compare because each of these groups are different. How do you compare the causes of sexual assault of an eight-year old domestic worker to the precursors of an attack on a thirty-year old military soldier. These studies also tried different models to try to explain causality but did not necessarily incorporate the thought of a spurious relationship between variables. Sexual assault has a positive correlation with depressive symptoms (Chang, 2015). If sexual assault has that of such correlation, especially in those who attend college, how would college not be a third variable of depressive symptoms. I believe these studies were strong in their analyses but could have done things in the future to make a stronger case for causality. We should be having observational studies if anything, to really get the full picture in an individual who has been sexually assaulted and see just how it affects them, truly, in their day to day lives.

THE EFFECT OF A
HIERARHCY IN
WORKPLACE SEXUAL
VIOLENCE

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KAITLIN MARTINS

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