

Effects of Sexual Harassment at the Workplace: a Ugandan Case Study

Frank Kiwalabye
Youth Crime Watch
Uganda/IgnitusWorldwide
Uganda
ycwuganda@yahoo.com

Introduction

Sexual harassment at the work place in Uganda is a common occurrence that goes un noticed by many and there are many incidents that are not reported to the authorities for a number of

reasons.

While a big number of women joined the work force since 1985, little is known about the extent of this problem and the damage that it inflicts on the victims who have to suffer in silence in most cases.

Objectives of this study



To increase knowledge about sexual harassment at the work place in Uganda



To promote dialogue about sexual harassment at the workplace.



To provide guidelines for addressing sexual harassment issues and how properly to deal with the harassers

What is sexual Harassment?

- Unwanted sexual attention
- Any unwelcome physical contact
- Sexual remarks about a person's clothing or body
- Sexual questions, jokes, anecdotes, or stories
- Sexually explicit materials in the classroom or workplace that have no educational or work-related purpose
- Being asked to respond sexually with the direct or indirect implication that a person's work situation would be improved if he/she complied or hurt if

Scope and limitation of the study

- The study took nine months; as a result, we could only cover the selected 3 districts of Uganda.
- Some appointments with senior managers were not honored at the last minute so we had to move along with the study.

Forms of Workplace Sexual Harassment

- Receiving career threats such as indications that a person will be fired or withheld promotion if you did not accede to requests for a date, or sexual favors
- Sexual assault and rape at the workplace
- Verbal sexual harassment – being addressed by unwelcome and offensive terms
- being pestered for dates or receiving unwelcome sexual suggestions or invitations etc.

Methods



The data used in this paper comes from a cross-sectional survey on Sexual harassment at the workplace carried out in 2008.



One-on-one individual structured interviews were conducted in the survey and a two-staged stratified random sampling technique was employed for the selection of the respondents.



Three districts Kampala, Entebbe and Mukono were selected with a total of 36 clusters (12 clusters times three districts)



Researchers were given proper training before conducting the research on some of the sensitive issues that were involved and a verbal informed consent was obtained before the participants were enrolled in the survey.



All interviews were conducted in a conducive environment with total privacy without any unwanted third party and those that were interviewed first were requested not share that information with others in the study.

Results



Two thirds of the 1,437 women were below the age of 35 years and about half of the women were low ranking employees.



Overall, about three in five women (58%) had experienced some form of sexual harassment by their employers.



Women who accepted to have sexual encounters with their bosses constituted 26% and these were less likely to be fired or demoted even if they were underperforming.



13% of the respondents were aware of the policies in their workplaces that protect individuals from sexual harassment

- Those in high ranking positions had a 28% less chance of experiencing sexual harassment at the workplace.
- Unmarried and new recruits in organizations were 36% more likely to be target of harassers.
- Though there are laws in place to address the issues of sexual harassment like the employment Act, there is widespread sexual harassment at the work place in Uganda which goes unnoticed and swept under the carpet because of fear of loosing jobs and the fear of being victimized.

Measures in Place to Address Sexual Harassment at the Workplace

- The penal code amendment Act 2009 includes clauses that are aimed at protecting women from sexual related offences with strict penalties.
- The Employment Act 2006, section 7 defines sexual harassment in employment and requires employers to put in place measures to prevent sexual harassment.

Discussion

- This study aimed to estimate the prevalence and examine the factors associated with sexual harassment at the workplace in Uganda
- This study found out that Many companies in Uganda either do not have specific policies in place to address sexual harassment in their work environment, or do not have the scope within other employment policies and procedures to deal with the problem should it arise.

Conclusion

- This study indicates that sexual harassment at the workplace is very common and widespread and sometimes leads to marriage breakups and the increase in the spread of HIV/Aids. The results of this study suggest that it is important for organizations to enhance and to encourage staff to report incidents of sexual harassment by making the process accessible to all and by being approachable and dealing allegations in a sensitive and confidential manner.