



MAKERERE UNIVERSITY

The kind of 'decent' overlooked: workplace sexual harassment.

Gender, Safety, and Decent Jobs

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Decent work

ILO's Violence and
Harassment
Convention C190
(2019)

- Work that is productive and delivers a fair income,
- Security in the workplace and social protection for families,
- Prospects for personal development and social integration,
- Freedom for people to express concerns, organise, and participate in decisions.



International
Labour
Organization

Workplace Sexual Harassment

Precariousness and safety at the workplace is deeply gendered, interacts with socio-cultural and gender norms.

Workplace sexual harassment is systemic and part of gendered power relations in the workspace (Ullah, 2017)

Laws and policies have limited scope and/or are weakly implemented (Henry & Adams 2018; HRW 2019; ILO 2016).

Sexual harassment is disempowering and deepens gender inequalities (UN Women 2015)

Women's voice and empowerment is necessary to tackle WSH (Henry & Adams 2018).

Uganda

- More than 75% of Uganda's population is below the age of 30.
- Over 90% of the youth (and relatively more females) are in informal employment.
- Potential for job creation for the low-skilled masses in agricultural commercialization and agro-processing (Fowler and Rauschendorf, 2019).
- Firms of >25 employees ought to have a sexual harassment policy.



Image: Zahra food Industries Ltd

Present Study

- Aim: To contribute to an understanding of the processes of empowerment of young females in response to workplace sexual harassment.
- Comparative study of **informal** domestic and market workers; and **formal** workers in agro processing firms.
- Qualitative methods: Safety Audits and Body Maps in focus groups; 40 individual interviews.
- Component of youth-led research with a youth team.

Dynamics of exposure to workplace sexual harassment

Market workers

- Female workers harassed by male co-workers and customers.
- Harassment part of sales process; employers asking them to dress in particular ways.
- New entrants more vulnerable.
- No rules enforced. Market committees dominated by men.

Domestic workers

- Intersectionality of exposure.
- Unexpected spaces create vulnerabilities; kitchen, dining, toilets and bedrooms.
- Absence of reporting mechanisms.
- Poverty prevents 'exit'.

Firm workers

- Jobs still partly informal.
- Multiple hierarchies at the work floor, gatekeeping to jobs and promotion.
- Managers and supervisions mostly male.
- No/ weak implementation of formal mechanisms.
- Unions/associations influenced by patriarchy.
- Employees social networks and influence.



Map: Safety audit reveals risks to exposure in most factory spaces, in red.

Voice and agency

- Social and gender norms condone male dominance and entitlement to perform masculinity - young girls expect and thus normalize it.
- Gender norms influencing society's compliance in SGBV and impunity of perpetrators; absence of language to confront harassment > Culture of silence.
- Some turn to family (mothers) or peers: informal structures for self care and support and are told not to confront or report WSH. Few challenge the perpetrators.
- Firm workers use a 'peer language' talking about harassment.

Can you add a quote and anecdote here that illustrate systemic nature of WSH from an FGD with firm workers

Implications of workplace sexual harassment

Health impacts: unwanted pregnancies and single parenthood; HIV and STD infections.

Mental health impacts: sexual harassment persists as “systemic trauma” (Fitzgerald, 2017) for women.

Social impacts: women stigmatized by their children, families and friends: “people just change totally”.

Productivity impact: work-related punishments like unpaid overtime.
Withdrawal from work, limited promotion for female workers.

Covid-19 implications

- Workplace sexual harassment worsened for the domestic workers with males being more at home.
- Market women experienced an increase because more job seekers came to the markets; and female workers stayed overnight.
- Risks of harassment increased for factory workers, who were afraid of being laid off and see wages cut in economic downturn.

What does this mean for youth employment interventions?

- Skill building programmes: missed opportunity for supporting women to discuss harassment and mechanisms of redress.
- Matching programmes: missed opportunity to target firms and employers and get workplace policies and monitoring; women-workers committees; female supervisors; and address culture of acceptance.
- Donor-government dialogues: promote ILO convention.
- Need to integrate gender-sensitive approaches that address social and gender norms.