



MAURITIUS RESEARCH COUNCIL
INNOVATION FOR TECHNOLOGY

**POWER AND SILENCE:
WORKPLACE SEXUAL
HARASSMENT IN MAURITIUS**

Final Report

February 2008

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This report is based on work supported by the Mauritius Research Council under award number MRC/RSS-0806. Any opinions, findings, recommendations and conclusions expressed herein are the author's and do not necessarily reflect those of the Council.

Draft

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Financial support for this project was provided by the Institute for International Education U.S. Student Fulbright program and the Small-Scale Research Grant Scheme of the Mauritius Research Council. The completion of this report would not have been possible without their generous backing.

My sincere thanks to my project supervisor, Dr. Uma Bhowon, who assisted me during all steps of this project and provided essential guidance and criticism. Your generous agreement to act as my adviser is a big reason why this project was successful.

I am extremely grateful to the following research assistants, who kindly gave their time and effort to data collection, interview transcription, translation and data analysis: Dorian Boncoeur, Sebastien Arokeum, Anusha Bussawon, Veshmi Doorgaya, Leena Gungabeesoon, Martine Li Voon Foong, Nawshin Mahadooda, Shabana Namah, Jayshree Padayachy, Roushma Seeparsad, and Sahirun Subadar Agathee.

Many individuals and organizations provided support and guidance over the course of the study. I greatly appreciate all the assistance, both logistical and emotional, I received throughout the research process.

The most heartfelt thanks of all to the victims, service providers and key informants who agreed to be interviewed and openly shared both your insights and time with me. I am extremely grateful to each respondent and appreciative of the experiences that you brought forward during the interviews.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The objective of this study was to elicit a description of sexual harassment as it occurs in the workplaces in Mauritius, including the types of behaviors, possible associated factors, and responses by targets. It also sought to uncover the governmental and non-governmental policies and programs currently in place to address sexual harassment.

METHODOLOGY

Considering the subjective and variant nature of sexual harassment and the dearth of local research on the subject, this study was qualitative and exploratory. Subjects were all men and women over the age of 18 and were selected from three different populations:

1. Victims of sexual harassment. Individuals who experienced sexual harassment at work or while traveling to and from work.
2. Service providers. Interviewees in this population were in a position to deal directly with incidents or victims of sexual harassment and were considered as representatives of the organizations, departments or ministries for which they worked.
3. Key informants. Academics, politicians and other individuals who had a unique or expert knowledge on the subject.

Although it is a nonprobability method, snowball sampling was utilized and proved effective and appropriate for this project. Victims who may have been unwilling to speak about their experiences to a stranger were more open when a reference was provided.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with service providers and key informants. While it was important to collect the same type of information from each respondent, it was essential to leave room for digression and unexpected pieces of information. Victims participated in unstructured interviews. This less standardized approach was taken to ensure that the stories of victims were told from start to end in their own words.

Data analysis was undertaken using computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software; two independent researchers completed coding. Study limitations include a lack of verification due to the use of only qualitative methods and a shortage of male victims in the respondent pool.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

In total, 61 individuals were interviewed as part of data collection. Twelve of these were interviewed as victims and the remaining 49 were interviewed as service providers and key informants. Seven of the service providers self-identified as victims, and therefore also provided an account of their experiences of sexual harassment.

Types of Harassing Behavior

Respondents noted that harassing behavior was often repeated, but may occur as an isolated experience. While a range of different types of harassment was discussed, examples demonstrated that a variety of abusive conduct occurs concurrently. Sexual harassment that is occurring in the workplaces in Mauritius includes the following:

- Verbal harassment: Jokes or statements that have sexual connotations but are not directed at a specific individual, inappropriate and unwanted “compliments,” and asking for sexual favors.

- Physical harassment: Unwanted pinching, grabbing, hugging, groping and kissing. Also, sexual coercion and rape.
- Gestural harassment: Inappropriate staring and indecent exposure. Often described as “a certain look in the eye” or “the way they look at you.”
- Visual harassment: Unwanted, sexually explicit pictures and posters, or other sexual items, displayed in the workplace.
- Phone and mail harassment: Verbally harassing phone calls, explicit or sexual text messages, explicit pictures or jokes sent by phone and email, and unwanted comments and advances.
- Street harassment: Unwanted comments and advances, groping, pinching, exposure, staring and phone-based harassment that occurs on the bus or while walking down the street.

Power and Response

Data from this study showed that power and power differentials that emerge from all levels of the socio-ecological model are important to understanding sexual harassment in Mauritius. Both victims and service providers directly and indirectly identified individual, situational, organizational and societal factors.

Further, data show that coping behavior is not merely an isolated aftermath of sexual harassment. Rather, it plays an essential role in determining the occurrence of sexual harassment. Victim, organizational and societal responses may both alter and be altered by the power dynamics of a situation.

Individual level. A range of individual-level characteristics is associated with the power structure of incidents of sexual harassment. The oft-cited factors of organizational

status and gender were discussed in the majority of the interviews, but participants by no means limited their discussion to only those two aspects. Other individual-level powers included the following:

- Informal organizational status
- Age
- Level of awareness of sexual harassment and related policies and programs
- Job security
- Legality of work
- Socio-economic situation
- Relationship status
- Personal character
- Breaking gender norms
- Citizenship

Discussion by participants clarified that many of these factors are often intimately related. At times, they may be mutually reinforcing and correlated outside of the context of sexual harassment. Relationships between factors also emerged in terms of dependence, where the existence or status of one may change the meaning of another.

As recounted by interviewees, victim coping strategies give even further insights into the power differentials that are associated with sexual harassment in the workplace. The strongest theme that emerged was that of victims remaining silent. Not only do targets forgo officially reporting the behavior, they may also refrain from discussing their experience with family, friends and colleagues. The reasons provided for this silence included fear of job loss, fear of damaged reputation, inability to provide proof of the incident, lack of awareness of sexual harassment and the law, lack of support, small size of the country, illegality of work and fears of being blamed for the incident. Other victim coping strategies included: officially reporting, confronting the harasser, indirectly responding, making job-related changes, avoidance, complying with requests, seeking

psychological support, seeking informal support and suicide/attempted suicide. Like remaining silent, these coping mechanisms were associated with other factors on all levels of the socio-ecological model.

Situational-level. Situational characteristics that give a potential perpetrator a degree of power over the target oftentimes include circumstances in which there is more privacy and fewer witnesses. Interviewees specifically mentioned individuals who work on night shifts, employees posted in offices separate from company headquarters, and staff who work one-on-one with a supervisor, such as confidential secretaries.

Organizational level. Interviewees made it clear that the existing organizational-level power structures often favor the perpetrator. Most organizational representatives admitted they had no anti-sexual harassment policy, even though study participants noted that such policies may empower targets. Some participants mentioned that enterprises may lack policies and programs dedicated to sexual harassment when it is an issue of little concern or not even seen as a problem.

Participants noted that in some situations, organizations may retaliate against victims, especially if they report or go public about the incident. This gives potential perpetrators increased power, as targets become the victims of marginalization, decreased benefits and sacking. Interviewees also provided examples of organizations unquestioningly and intensely siding with the accused.

Societal-level. As on the organizational level, the current character of Mauritian society nearly always tends to provide additional support and power to the perpetrator. In terms of attitudes, knowledge and beliefs, almost all interviewees mentioned the patriarchal nature of Mauritian society and connected the concept of male superiority to

sexual harassment in the workplace. Further, sexual issues, including sexual harassment, are silenced or considered taboo in Mauritian culture. Comprehensive sex education is only infrequently offered to students. There is also a lack of awareness regarding what is actually occurring in the workplaces in terms of sexual harassment. Interviewees had difficulty describing available services or identifying the best places to refer victims.

Although the importance of services for victims was identified, so was an overall lack of available programs. The only organization identified that specifically focuses on sexual harassment is the Sex Discrimination Division (SDD) of the National Human Rights Commission, and respondents disagreed on its effectiveness. The Ministry of Labour also provides a reporting mechanism, but most victims were unaware of their work in this area. Interviewees noted that most NGOs, women's association and the Ministry of Women have rarely touched on the issue.

Interviewees disagreed on whom and to what extent Mauritian legislation on sexual harassment is empowering. Some expressed concerns that the legislation gives victims too much power to accuse a perpetrator without sufficient proof. Other interviewees noted that, although there are laws that criminalize sexual harassment, it does not do enough to assist targets and are in fact relatively useless. There was widespread concern about the effectiveness of legislation implementation.

Societal response was frequently characterized as victim-blaming. Attitudes that pin all or partial responsibility for the harassment on the target were not only expressed by service providers, but also were attributed to the general public and family and friends of the victim. Targets themselves expressed self-blame.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As the data demonstrate, sexual harassment cannot be successfully addressed from one perspective, but requires a joint effort from individuals, organizations, the community and the government that targets all segments of the society. Awareness raising and sensitization campaigns should be carried out on all levels. Gender equality and women's empowerment should be promoted. Organizations should develop and implement appropriate policies and programs. Additional legislation should be passed that holds enterprises responsible for addressing sexual harassment. Increased legal protection should be provided for homosexuality. Finally, further research on sexual and street harassment should be conducted.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Sexual harassment in the workplace is both a human rights violation and a form of sex discrimination. Studies have shown it has severe consequences on the health and work-output of individual targets, as well as imposing high costs on their coworkers, businesses and the global economy (McCann 2005). Despite the current consensus that it is a worldwide phenomenon that hinders sustainable development and the advancement of gender equality, it was not until recently that sexual harassment was first formally addressed.

In Mauritius, there now exists two pieces of legislation dedicated to preventing sexual harassment. The Sex Discrimination Act (2002) provides penal and civil procedures for sexual harassment that occurs in the context of employment, education and beyond. This legislation also established the Sex Discrimination Division of the National Human Rights Commission to inquire into complaints and otherwise address issues of sexual harassment and other forms of sex discrimination. In 2004, the Labour (Amendment) Act incorporated sexual harassment, including harassment based on sexual orientation, as a type of workplace violence. The criminal code contains a section on sexual harassment as well.

Several international conventions to which Mauritius is a signatory or otherwise committed directly relate to sexual harassment. The Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (1981) states that signatories should take measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the field of employment, including the right to health and safety in working conditions and the right to equal treatment and opportunity in work. One of the specific actions included within the Beijing Platform for Action

(1995) involves the development of programs and procedures “to eliminate sexual harassment and other forms of violence against women in all educational institutions, workplaces and elsewhere.” The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (1993) encourages states to pursue policies to eliminate violence against women, which is defined to include sexual harassment. Finally, on the regional level, the Prevention and Eradication of Violence against Women and Children Addendum to the 1997 SADC Gender Declaration recognizes that violence against women includes sexual harassment and intimidation and resolves that signatories should adopt legal, social, economic, cultural and political measures to eradicate it.

In spite of this legislative response and Mauritius’ international commitments, there has been no local research conducted on sexual harassment in the workplace. Little is known about the nature of abusive behavior as related to employment. This study aimed to bridge this gap and provide useful and insightful data into what is actually occurring in the workplaces in Mauritius.

Historical and Local Context

Women and the Labor Market

Immediately following independence, women’s primary employment opportunities were in domestic services and agriculture, specifically as laborers on sugar-cane plantations (Women and SARDC-WIDSAA 1997) In the 1970s, when the government set up the export processing zones to counter a recession, their job opportunities diversified. Many of the unskilled jobs in the manufacturing sector were taken by young, working-class women who were responding to unprecedented

employment opportunities (Women and SARDC-WIDSAA 1997) (Lincoln 2006).

Today, women hold employment in all sectors, including the newer focuses of tourism and information technology that have sprung up to counteract Asian and African-based competition in the textile industry. Women have clearly played an important role in the development of what is considered the most successful economy in Africa.

That role, however, is frequently unrecognized and often under-rewarded.

Women's subordinate status in the labor market has been the norm since the earliest days of Mauritius (Bunwaree 1997). This trend has continued until today, as women are primarily found in low-skilled, low-paying jobs. Despite superior achievements in education, women's earnings remain less than men's (CSO 2006); in 2004, men were earning, on average, over Rs3,000 a month more than women (MWRCDFWCP 2005). According to one study, "almost three-quarter of the difference in the earnings of the average man and the average women is due to gender discrimination" (Khadaroo 2006). Women's unemployment rates are higher than men's, reported in 2005 at 16.5% and 5.8%, respectively (CSO 2006)

The literature has recognized the existence of both horizontal and vertical segregation (Bunwaree 1997). Even though female participation in the labor market has increased to 34% in 2003 from 21% in 1993, "women's occupation distribution has not changed significantly during the past ten years" (PriceWaterhouseCoopers 2003). Women continue to dominate in the professions most frequently considered 'women's work,' such as plant machine operators and clerks. Further, in the top one hundred private companies in Mauritius, PWC found that only 5% of the executive-level staff were women. In the public sector, women fare a bit better, holding 30% of senior staff

positions (PriceWaterhouseCoopers 2003). The political representation of women in Mauritius has been identified as one of the worst in the region, with women occupying only 12 out of the 70 parliamentary seats (Yoon and Bunwaree 2006).

Women also are responsible for the bulk of the unpaid and informal work, such as household duties and childcare (CSO 2006). Although no study of adult sex work could be identified, it has been noted that women were brought for such purposes since French settlement of the island and that the profession continues today (UNICEF and Ministry of Women's Rights 2002). Women also work as domestic help and street hawkers.

Explanations for Inequality

The literature attempts to provide some explanations for women's unequal role and treatment in the labor market. One elucidation is historical, suggesting that women's minor role in the public sphere can be traced back to colonial times, "when women's roles were mostly limited to reproduction and domesticity" (Yoon and Bunwaree 2006). It is argued that, from the beginning, women were not brought into Mauritius as laborers, but rather to people the colony with females who could serve domestic functions. That legacy continues until today.

Education may provide further clues as to the current, gendered-state of the Mauritian workplaces. Although education has been free and officially equal in post-independence Mauritius, there still exist barriers to true gender equality. Girls continue to predominate in "feminine" subject areas, while staying away from traditionally 'male' subjects, such as engineering, IT and math (Bunwaree 1997). This leads to a sexual division of labor and segregation.

Some of the literature also briefly mentions work-home balance as imperative to understanding women's progress. As mentioned above, women spend a large amount of time on unpaid work and carry out the majority of the domestic responsibilities. In fact, "the average woman spends 314 minutes per day on unpaid work, that is, almost 4 times the average of 80 minutes for the average man." This amounts to a "second shift" for working mothers. (CSO 2006). Even working women with paid domestic help may find it difficult to manage their responsibilities (Blin 2006). This unequal gender division of labor means that women may be unable to reach their potential or 'compete' with men in the formal workplace, both because of the true strain of their at-home workload and the perceptions of managers (Blin 2004).

All the above explanations focus on the wider cultural and societal framework to explain women's inequality in the labor market. Although working conditions have been identified by the international literature as important to understanding women's performance and achievements in the workforce, it is rarely touched on in the specific context of Mauritius. Only one related study could be identified (Ramgooty-Wong 2002). It showed that corporations in Mauritius have a "culture which is still crafted in a large part by its senior managements, and that these individuals are mostly insensitive to the real problems faced by women managers." Further, sexual harassment emerged as the one issue that the interviewed chief-executives considered major.

The relatively unexplored issue of workplace conditions for women therefore warrants further attention. This is especially true of sexual harassment, as it is considered important but has never been studied. Consequently, this report aims to shed light on some of the more personal workplace experiences of abuse suffered by women and men.

Study Purpose and Objectives

This study was exploratory and qualitative, being the first full-fledged research on sexual harassment conducted in Mauritius. It attempted to elicit a description of sexual harassment as it occurs in the workplaces, including the types of behaviors, possible associated factors, and responses by targets. Further, it sought to uncover the governmental and non-governmental policies and programs currently in place to address sexual harassment. The focus was not merely on existence of relevant policies, but also on their implementation as experienced by interviewees.

It is the hope of the researcher that this information can be used as a springboard for further studies, both qualitative and quantitative in nature. It should also assist stakeholders in creating more context-specific programmatic responses to sexual harassment; although legislation and other forms of policies exist, they were created without any scientific, research-based local knowledge on the subject. Therefore, this report and its findings should be of interest to academics, government officials, human resource professionals, police officers, certain non-governmental organizations and any other groups who deal with sexual harassment.

Chapter Two of this report provides a literature review, focusing specifically on the relationship between power and sexually harassing behavior. Literature on target, enterprise and government responses is also reviewed. The study's methodology is discussed in Chapter Three, including sampling techniques, sample population, data collection strategies and data analysis. Study limitations are covered in this chapter as well. Findings and analysis are presented together in Chapter Four. The results are divided into two main sections: types of harassing behavior and the exploration of power.

The final chapter includes a discussion of the findings and recommendations on addressing the issue of sexual harassment at work.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Definition of Sexual Harassment

In recent years, sexual harassment has evolved from a workplace norm to a situation that is widely considered abusive and unacceptable. As women have joined the workforce in greater numbers, sexual harassment has emerged as a serious consideration for academic scholars, politicians, employers, women's rights groups and trade unions. In various contexts it has been termed a violation of human rights, a form of sex discrimination, a type of violence against women, and a specific kind of workplace violence.

Despite growing consensus that sexual harassment should be treated as a serious workplace concern, a single definition remains elusive (Gutek 2001). Sexual harassment is probably most frequently defined as unwelcome and offensive conduct of a sexual nature (ILO 2001). The subjective character of such a definition is clear, as each individual, workplace and culture may consider different types of behavior unwelcome. "The justification usually offered for adopting this 'unwelcomeness standard' is that it permits consensual sexual behaviour while prohibiting workplace mistreatment" (McCann 2005). Factors that frequently influence an individual's definition of sexual harassment include characteristics of the behavior, the nature of the relationship between the actors, and the context (Gutek 2001). Legal and policy definitions also frequently ensure that a reasonable woman or, more generally, person, would also consider the behavior unwelcome, in order to provide a certain level of standardization and prevent abuse of the law.

Although it is impossible to make an exhaustive list of conduct that is considered sexual harassment, there are certain behaviors that, regardless of context or perspective, are universally considered unwanted and abusive. Examples of egregious behaviors that are inherently offensive and almost always illegal include sexual assault and physical violence (ILO 2001; McCann 2005). Quid pro quo harassment – literally meaning ‘this for that’ – involves an individual in a position of authority using threats or bribes to obtain sexual favors. This type of sexual coercion is also widely considered unacceptable, as it is a clear abuse of authority and has obvious and easily measured economic consequences (Farley 2001; ILO 2001).

Other types of conduct are often considered minor or simply annoying but still are acts of aggression that may have severe consequences (Farley 2001). The table below gives examples of behaviors that may be considered sexual harassment, depending on the context and perception of the victim.

Figure 1: Examples of Sexual Harassment

Sexual assault	Physical	Verbal	Visual/Written	Gestural
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sexual assault • Sexual coercion • Rape 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kissing • Hugging • Caressing • Pinching • Patting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comments about appearance or private life • Repeated requests for dates • Sexual jokes, comments or stories • Sexual advances 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Displaying pornographic material • Explicit or sexual mail or email • Unwanted text messages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Winking • Licking lips • Staring • Looking down a blouse or under a skirt • Hand gestures • Whistling

(Crosthwaite and Priest 2001; ILO 2001; McCann 2005)

Both men and women may be victims of sexual harassment, although research has found that females are more frequently targeted (McCann 2005). Evidence shows that most women are harassed by men, but same-sex harassment can occur (Gutek 2001). The experience of sexual harassment is also not limited by an individual's rank, age, occupation or marital status. Harassment may occur between peers or from a subordinate to a superior.

A final component of the definition of sexual harassment that must be considered is the meaning of "workplace." It is generally accepted that the consideration of sexual harassment at the place of work need not be restricted to the physical premise of the worksite (ILO 2001). Instead, sexual harassment at work is often extended to include any behavior that occurs under work-related circumstances. This may include incidents that occur while on business trips or as workers commute to and from their worksite. Further, individuals who stay at hostels or live on-site have an "employer-employee relationship 24 hours a day" (ILO 2001).

Target Responses

Targets of sexual harassment respond to and cope with their experiences by utilizing a number of mechanisms. Studies have shown that incidents of harassment are rarely formally reported, with many victims choosing alternative methods to cope with their experiences (Malamut and Offermann 2001).

Initially, coping was operationalized along a single continuum, with behaviors moving from passive to assertive. For example, Gruber created a framework that moved from avoidance up to confrontation. (Gruber, 1989 as cited in (Knapp, Faley et al. 1997). These simple models have since been replaced by more complex theories. Knapp, Faley

et al. (1997) classified response strategies using a two-by-two grid, with responses varying with respect to focus of response and mode of response. See below for a visual representation of their typology, which has since been verified through empirical research (Malamut and Offermann 2001).

Figure 2: Knapp, Faley et al.'s "Typology of Target Responses to Sexual Harassment"

		Mode of Response	
		Self-Response	Supported-Response
Focus of Response	Self-Focus	Avoidance/Denial	Social Coping
	Initiator-Focus	Confrontation/Negotiation	Advocacy Seeking

(Knapp, Faley et al. 1997)

Even the two-dimensional framework, however, falls short in providing a complete account of the coping experience of individual victims. It does not encompass the range of strategies a single individual may use even in a solitary instance of harassment. Further, it provides little reference to the outside forces, beyond the

individual, that may impact the choice of response. Cortina and Wasti (2005) addressed these problems by using the ecological model to explain coping behaviors, looking at the individual, the microcontext (organization) and the macrocontext (society). In their research, they found that “variables at each level of the framework had some explanatory power in accounting for complex responses to sexual harassment, but indicators of stressor severity and cultural affiliation proved to be the strongest determinants.” (Cortina and Wasti 2005). This typology is the most comprehensive and perhaps the most accurate way to conceptualize the responses of sexual harassment targets.

Sexual Harassment and Power

Sexual harassment is frequently discussed in terms of its relationship to power. Power, however, is a broad term with a variety of meanings. As discussed by Cleveland and Kerst (1993), power can be actual or perceived and can come from a wide range of sources. A number of theoretical models highlight the diversity of opinions about the definition of power and attempt to explain its relationship to sexual harassment.

Organizational Models

One type of explanation involves the organizational structure as its central feature. "Sexual harassment is the result of certain opportunity structures created by organizational climate, hierarchy, and specific authority relations." (Juliano 2007) According to these models, conditions of employment are of primary importance (Rospenda, Richman et al. 1998) and sexual harassment will occur most frequently in terms of a superior targeting a subordinate (Juliano 2007). Some data that illustrate certain workplace and occupational characteristics, such as the presence of anti-harassment policies, sex-ratios of occupations or workgroups and nature of the work,

contribute to sexual harassment, have been used to support this hypothesis (Rospenda, Richman et al. 1998). These models have also been considered the most reflective of the legislative environment (Rospenda, Richman et al. 1998).

The organizational model, however, fails to comprehensively and accurately explain sexual harassment. Contrapower sexual harassment (behavior targeted at a superior from a subordinate) and coworker harassment both cannot be explained using this theory. Further, it downplays many important social and cultural factors, especially gender, which clearly play a role in determining an individual's workplace status and experience (Rospenda, Richman et al. 1998). Focusing on only the organizational factors is therefore a perspective that fails to take into account the complexity of situations of sexual harassment.

Sociocultural Models

This theoretical perspective takes feminist views of power dynamics in wider society and applies them to the workplace. Therefore, since in patriarchal societies women are subordinate in all spheres, they will also lack power at work (Sigal 2006). It is this societal power gap that both causes sexual harassment, and results from it. The sociocultural model helps to explain why the majority of harassment is men-on-women, regardless of formal organizational status (Juliano 2007). It also successfully counters the false assumption of the organizational models that enterprises are gender-neutral (Rospenda, Richman et al. 1998).

Sociocultural models neglect, however, to explain the case of women harassing men or same-sex harassment. Further, beyond gender, other societal power structures

influenced by race, class and religion, are frequently ignored (Rospenda, Richman et al. 1998)

Integrated Models

A few more recent theories have attempted to integrate some of the aspects of the organizational and sociocultural models. They provide a more comprehensive explanation of sexual harassment and at times draw on additional power sources. They may also put more or less emphasis on power as a key determinant of sexual harassment.

Research has provided some support for Gutek's sex-role spillover model. This theory is based on the premise that gender-roles are inappropriately being asserted over work-roles within the workplace. "Sex-role spillover occurs when women, more than men in the same work roles, are expected to be sex objects or are expected to project sexuality through their behavior, appearance or dress" (Gutek 2001). This model is primarily based on the inappropriate belief in and application of stereotypes and has little to do with power dynamics.

Cleveland and Kerst, among others, have proposed a more integrated perspective (1993). They divide their analysis into three levels: societal, organizational and interpersonal and provide explanations regarding how factors at each level can contribute to sexual harassment. Their analysis is also more comprehensive due to the fact that it identifies victim and organizational response as playing an important role in determining "the nature and occurrence of sexual harassment" (Cleveland and Kerst 1993). The interaction between these power levels, however, is not sufficiently explained. Societal response to sexual harassment is also not included in their model.

Despite these small drawbacks, the integrated model provides the most comprehensive explanation for a complex and multi-faceted workplace problem. An organization is not an island, but rather societal and personal factors play a significant role in the experiences of employees. Additionally, it is important to recognize that how individuals, organizations and societies respond to harassment may impact future experiences of abusive workplace behavior.

THE ECOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

These concerns, along with the literature on coping, convinced me to utilize the ecological model as the theoretical basis for this report. In the past, this model has been used to address violence against women, child abuse and other forms of violence. “An ecological approach to abuse conceptualizes violence as a multifaceted phenomenon grounded in an interplay among personal, situational, and sociocultural factors” (Heise 1998). All versions of the framework are multi-dimensional and “all share the notion of embedded levels of causality” (Heise 1998).

For the purpose of this research, the framework has been adapted to better represent individuals’ experiences within the workplace and the local context in which this research was conducted (see Figure 3). Although the ecological model is often used to determine causes of violence, in this case it will be employed to organize the different sources of power that may be associated with sexual harassment in Mauritius. This model will not only help demonstrate the great variety of sources from which power differentials may emerge, but it also provides a basis for showing how those powers may combine or interact.

Figure 3: The Ecological Framework



(Adapted from Heise, 1998)

Further, data collected on victim response will be incorporated into the ecological framework, as in the research of Cortina and Westi (2005) discussed above. This will be done simultaneously with the power factors, to better demonstrate the idea discussed previously that victim response is an important determinant of the character and incidence of sexual harassment.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Considering the subjective and variant nature of sexual harassment and the dearth of local research on the subject, this study was qualitative and exploratory. Qualitative research often provides a more nuanced and in-depth understanding of an issue. Further, it “offers researchers access to people’s ideas, thoughts, and memories in their own words rather than in the words of the researcher” (Reinharz 1992). In this way, subjects become actively involved “in the constructing of data about their lives” (Reinharz 1992). This was especially important in this instance as the researcher was of a different nationality than the subjects.

Much about what human beings do and think are beyond numbers and figures. “Qualitative procedures provide a means of accessing unquantifiable facts about the actual people researchers observe and talk to...” (Berg 2004) This makes it especially good for developing theory, gaining a more complete understanding of a phenomenon and analyzing complex norms, beliefs and behaviors (Ellsberg and Heise 2005). The data can then be used to better address and respond to social problems.

Geographical Area

This research was conducted in the Island of Mauritius. Subjects lived and worked in all regions of the island, and came from both rural and urban areas. Since it was anticipated that it would be difficult to access targets of sexual harassment who would speak about their experience, it was deemed necessary to make the geographic area as broad as possible. Further, since the research was exploratory, it seemed wise to provide a representation of a wide spectrum of experiences. Rodrigues was excluded since the researcher was based in Mauritius and the costs of travel were prohibitive.

Subjects

Subjects were men and women, all of whom were adults over the age of eighteen. They represented a variety of ethnic and religious backgrounds. In order to obtain a more accurate and complete understanding of sexual harassment in the workplace, interviewees were selected from three different populations:

1. Victims of sexual harassment. Interviewees who experienced sexual harassment at work or while traveling to and from work. The situation could be ongoing or could have occurred in the past. All types of work, whether formal or informal, legal or illegal, were considered.
2. Service providers. Interviewees in this population were defined by their position in an organization, whether private, non-governmental or governmental. These individuals were considered in a position to deal directly with incidents or victims of sexual harassment and were considered as representatives of the organizations, departments or ministries for which they worked. Examples include human resource managers of corporations, directors or members of non-governmental organizations, lawyers, and officers of the Ministry of Labour. This population was broadly defined so that all possible programs addressing sexual harassment could be identified and explored.
3. Key informants. This final category includes academics, politicians and other individuals who had a unique or expert knowledge on the subject. It also included individuals who had experience as service providers but have since changed positions or professions.

Over the course of the study, it became clear that these three populations were not always as distinct as had been anticipated. More specifically, several of the service providers self-identified as victims. In such cases, they were encouraged to discuss their experiences of harassment but also continued to answer service provider-related questions.

Sampling Method

Sexual issues in Mauritius are often considered taboo and not discussed openly. Further, there is little information available on the services offered for victims of sexual harassment. Therefore, snowball sampling was used to locate interviewees. Interviewees that were initially identified were asked to provide contact information for future subjects. “This procedure is appropriate when the members of a special population are difficult to locate,” and it is also “used primarily for exploratory purposes” (Babbie 2004)

Although it is a non-probability method, snowball sampling proved effective and appropriate for this project. Victims who may have been unwilling to speak about their experiences to a stranger were more open when a reference was provided. All interviewees were asked to provide contacts for the three populations; not only did this create a diverse respondent pool, but it also gave the researcher data on how aware the interviewees were of the problem, relevant services and each other.

Ethical and Safety Concerns

It is especially important in studies on violence against women to ensure that there are proper measures in place to ensure the safety of the respondents and the researchers. Gender-based violence is a subject that is “potentially threatening and traumatic,” and requires a level of care that transcends even other sensitive topics

(Ellsberg and Heise 2005). Sexual harassment is no exception and studies on this topic must be handled with care and respect in an attempt to minimize potential harm and maximize study gains.

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the University of Mauritius Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. All respondents provided informed consent before participating. Consent forms varied slightly by population, but all warned of the focus on sexual harassment and the sensitive and perhaps difficult nature of some of the questions. The study purpose was briefly and simply outlined. Permission to audio record was obtained, or, if denied, no recording device was utilized. Interviewees were also informed that they could refuse to answer any questions or end the interview at any time.

All victims were interviewed confidentially, while the remaining participants had the option of keeping the interview confidential or allowing their name to be associated with their comments. If interviewees chose to remain confidential, the researcher signed the consent form on their behalf and their names were not present on any of the notes or associated documents. Interviews were conducted in private, at a time and location selected by the respondent.

Respondents who became emotional were given time to recover before continuing. Although all were aware that they could end the interview at any time, none chose to do so. Following the interview, all participants were offered a referral sheet for various support services, as well as the primary investigator's business card. Research assistants were encouraged to speak to the primary investigator following each interview

or whenever necessary to cope with any of the difficulties or emotions of the research process.

Data Collection

Data collection occurred from March to July 2007. The data for this study was collected using two different types of interviews. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with service providers and key informants. While it was important to collect the same type of information from each respondent, it was essential to leave room for digression and unexpected pieces of information. Victims participated in unstructured interviews. This less standardized approach was taken to ensure that the stories of victims were told from start to end in their own words. Also, unstandardized interviews are ideal for exploratory research, as researchers can “begin with the assumption that they do not know in advance what all the necessary questions are” (Berg 2004). This proved to be a useful approach for this particular study because it allowed victims, many of whom had been silent about their experiences, to express themselves in their own voice.

The interview schedules were written in English and then translated to Creole. The primary investigator was present at all the interviews. Respondents had the option to interview in English or Creole. If Creole was their preferred language, a research assistant accompanied the primary investigator and conducted the interview under her supervision. All researchers involved in the interviews took notes. If permission was granted, interviews were also audio recorded. Almost all interviews were conducted with one person at a time, with the exception of a single incident in which two service providers representing a single organization were interviewed together.

Data Processing and Analysis

Following each interview, interviewer notes were typed on the computer and expanded. The audio recordings were then transcribed. If the interview was conducted in Creole, it was then entirely translated into English.

Analysis was completed on the computer using MAXQDA, a software package designed especially for qualitative data analysis. First, researchers immersed themselves in the data, reading the interview transcripts and listening to the audio recordings. Open coding was then completed, with labels being derived as closely as possible from the text of the interviews. Codes were then combined and finalized. Two independent researchers coded the interviews. Their outputs were compared and differences were discussed, so as to verify the results and reduce bias. During and following this entire process, researchers looked for important patterns and other results. Different data display mechanisms were also utilized.

Limitations

While this study provides a good overview and introduction to the issue of sexual harassment in Mauritius, it cannot claim to be representative of any population. Relying completely on qualitative techniques, it also lacked an element of triangulation and, therefore, verification. It is important that additional studies be conducted using both quantitative and qualitative methods.

The primary investigator does not speak Creole, thus limiting her ability to get the most nuanced meanings of some of the interviews. Also, while being a foreigner gave her a unique perspective, it may have hindered her ability to understand the more subtle

cultural norms. It was hoped that working with local research assistants mitigated some of the negative consequences that may have had.

The study may have been under-representative of men as victims of sexual harassment. It was difficult to locate males who identified as victims. This may have been because men are not harassed, but, more likely, it is because of norms, stereotypes and certain connotations.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Description of Participants

In total, 61 individuals were interviewed as part of data collection. Twelve of these were interviewed as victims. All were eighteen years of age or older. One was a man and the eleven others were women. Their professions were wide-ranging and they represented a variety of occupational sectors, including: internet and communications technology, media, textile, politics, academia, tourism, finance, commercial service and food service. Two also had experience in the illegal occupations of sex work and drug dealing.

The remaining 49 respondents were interviewed as service providers and key informants. Thirty of these individuals were women and nineteen were men. Eleven were representatives of businesses, working as human resource managers, supervisors or directors of private enterprises. Ten interviewees were from ministries and government bodies, including the Ministry of Labour, the Ministry of Women's Rights, and the National Human Rights Commission. A further nine worked in the justice sector, acting as lawyers in the office of the Attorney General, private attorneys and barristers, police officers, and judges. Seven were health care providers, primarily in the field of psychiatry and psychology, but also including a gynecologist and a police medical officer. Another seven were representatives of non-governmental organizations whose focus was directly or indirectly related to sexual harassment and its consequences. Three respondents represented trade unions and one interviewee was a member of parliament.

Finally, one participant was interviewed as both a representative of an NGO and a privately-owned business.

Despite the formal categorizations, it became clear early on in the data collection process that many of the service providers and key informants interviewed were also victims. Therefore, seven of the interviewees provided information from the perspective of service providers while also providing an account of their experiences of sexual harassment. All of these were women and bring the total number of victims interviewed to nineteen.

Types of Harassing Behavior

All interviewees were asked about the type of sexually harassing behavior that occurs in the workplace in Mauritius, whether they had experienced it directly or indirectly. Besides personal experiences, interviewees often shared stories concerning family, friends or colleagues. Some participants noted that their information was second-hand or even simply their 'best guess' of what is occurring. Despite this lack of awareness, many of the responses were overlapping and reinforcing and provide a good overview of the range of sexually harassing behaviors that victims may be experiencing.

Some of the conduct discussed could be identified as gender harassment, such as making sexist comments. Interviewees also often mentioned that sexual harassment may occur concurrently with other types of harassment or workplace violence, such as bullying. The harassment identified by participants was often repeated, but sometimes occurred as an isolated incident.

Verbal Harassment

The verbal harassment discussed by participants was wide-ranging. One type involves the making of jokes or statements that have sexual connotations but are not directed at a specific individual. This mode of conduct may also include content that is not explicit but is sexist or degrading to one gender. If this form of workplace banter is offensive and unwelcome to an employee who is present, even though there is no direct target, it then creates a “hostile working environment” and is considered sexual harassment (McCann 2005). Interviewees gave the following examples of such behavior:

Verbal harassment, very often. Because even in our national language...even in our language there are some words which are very sexist in our own language, which is commonly used in the workplace and outside the workplace.
(Ministry Representative)

In Mauritius, the men like to make jokes of a sexual nature
(Justice Representative)

You'll find this idiot who will be cracking jokes, dirty jokes all morning. He's getting a kick out of it and this is a form of harassment.
(Health Representative)

Frequently mentioned by participants was inappropriate and unwanted “compliments” which are interpreted as sexual harassment. These include direct comments about someone’s appearance, personal character or sexual appeal. It may also involve marriage proposals or repeated and unwanted requests for dates. Insults regarding an individual’s appearance or sexuality were also reported.

So he, he took off his glasses and he looked into my eyes and said that I was the only woman in the office that was worth being with. And I just told him “Can we talk about work please?” and I went away.
(Victim)

...anyone can make you feel uneasy and bad simply with words, make you feel so small and down in such times. I thought that being a sega dancer automatically meant that I was a whore, just by the way he was talking.

(Victim)

Some participants noted that there is a lot of grey area around this concept. One interviewee emphasized that women should interpret such conduct as a compliment, and not be offended:

Most of the men in Mauritius to say their appreciation to you, they say, define you as sexy, you have something sexy, you have nice legs or things like that. Most of them say it just as a compliment and depending on how you react, this one is interested in me or this makes me feel uncomfortable when you say these kinds of things. So it's up to you.

(Business Representative)

Several others gave examples of how a certain statement can transform from compliment to harassment, either because it is repeated, comes from a different person, or it increases in seriousness:

You can have some colleagues that are very friendly and will, I don't know, make some jokes that could be just borderline and you can laugh at it, but I think that the same joke, made with another look in the eye or another way of doing it, could be sexual harassment, if it's repeated and if you feel that it's just not normal, it's not as it should be.

(NGO Representative)

It is very, I think it is very intangible, very. The limit, I'd say the line between let's say friendliness and harassment is very, very slim you see. It depends too much I think like I said on perception. That is a person may today, something that is said is being perceived, ok it is a joke and tomorrow that same thing is said maybe by another person and this is perceived as an harassment. You see, something that should not be said. I don't know. It is a question of attitude. It is also a question of how you...the relations between the people as I told you.

(Business Representative)

One interviewee pointed out that this confusion may emerge because the perpetrator is making the remarks intentionally subtle to avoid detection:

Most of the time when someone is just making a remark or comments about your sex or whatever, it's not direct. It's always indirect, just to make you believe that no, that's not it, you take me wrongly or that's not what I meant.
(Victim)

Asking for sexual favors, both directly and indirectly, was another type of sexual harassment that was discussed in many of the interviews. These requests are often coercive and insinuating and at times result in physical harassment.

Quite a number of times I've come across people looking for sexual favors. They think that the job that you're doing it permits you to...
(NGO Representative, Victim)

I hear a lot of stories of women who go to the workplace and they get a lot of pressure from their bosses or from their hierarchical superiors, for, you know, try to sort of make the point or make the message go through that if they are willing to flirt a little bit with them they might get ahead in their career.
(Parliamentarian)

Maybe with the drivers. We often travel with them. They may propose to you indirectly. They won't say this or that. They may propose to you indirectly, keep on... They may for some time pressurize you, keep on proposing...
(Ministry Representative, Victim)

Verbal harassment may also occur behind the back of the target. Several examples were provided in which the perpetrators spoke about an individual's love, sex or romantic life to a third party. Inappropriate gossip or rumors are also sometimes spread in the work environment.

They say you have slept with so and so or whatever. You know most of it, women are concerned, they stick up a sticker on your back at anytime. Just worst thing that you can think of, and they give time, particular time, date and everything, to make you believe that this was true.
(Victim)

During the first two weeks he started with his insults and talking to people on the phone telling them that you know, my boobs were his boobs and how he would like to take me into the bushes and take me into the forest and do all kind of things to me and he kept saying to me that I should give him a blowjob.
(Victim)

Physical Harassment

According to interviewees, unwanted pinching, grabbing, hugging, groping and kissing are all occurring in the workplaces of Mauritius. One case of an unwarranted and embarrassing strip search was also recounted. Interviewees mentioned that physical harassment often occurs simultaneously with verbal harassment.

I got inside the toilet to do the cleaning and he came behind me and he grabbed me, turned me around and kissed me.

(Victim)

He was with me in the hallway and he told me "Don't you...Will you not kiss me happy New Year?" I say I had to go, there was someone waiting for me. He took my hand, turned it back, kissed my hand and told me happy New Year. I felt so, um, sad, dirty and I didn't know what to say.

(Victim)

So there was one colleague who used to come and tell me everyday that "Oh, today you are looking sexy," and then when I...Because I wear everything, so the day I wear a sari, because when you are wearing a sari, this much is outside, so he would come and hold you by your waist. "Oh, you are looking sexy," or he pinched or things like that.

(Ministry Representative, Victim)

At its extreme, physical harassment may also take the form of sexual coercion and rape. Some perpetrators use bribery, threats or blackmail to obtain sexual favors.

Interviewees also gave examples of physically being forced into sexual activities.

In the ICT sector, people told us that if you don't sleep with the supervisor, you don't get overtime, ok, you have to wait for long hours after you have completed your normal working hours. You are punished by having to wait for the transport to come to get you, because you know where it is here, it is not easy to get transport facilities. So you have to wait for the other batch to come without being paid overtime. So either you go and sleep with your supervisor or you are...

(Trade Union Representative)

The supervisor told me to wash the van and another officer was there and I told him not to leave me alone here with this man. But he left me. Then the officer took me to some lonely place; I shouted but there was no one....He sodomized me.

(Victim)

He would ask her to wear specific kind of clothings and be very insulting, like, in front of clients, he would insult her and then one day she was cleaning and then he came and tried to rape her.

(Health Sector Representative)

I was getting drugs from another guy at first but then I stopped with him and took it from somebody else and that's this guy that asked me to sleep with him. when i didn't have any drugs left to sell, I asked him and he asked for my phone number and he called me and told me that he had other people to sell to and that I should come and meet him at some place where I would have to sleep with him or he would be giving the drugs to somebody else.

(Victim)

Gestural Harassment

Interviewees often described the gestural harassment that occurs in the workplace as “a certain look in the eye” or “the way they look at you.” Looking at someone in a certain way, although many participants found it difficult to explain, was something that several identified as sexually harassing. It was noted that it could occur both in conjunction with other forms of sexual harassment or on its own.

You know you have men standing around the corner and sort of...ripping the girl's clothes off of her just by the look of it, looking by the eyes, by the way they look at people, you know as if they are taking off your clothes out of you, by the way they are looking.

(NGO Representative)

The way you look at the person. Someone look at you. You don't want this person to look at you like this. Even in the way he's looking it could be sexual harassment.

(NGO Representative)

Inappropriate staring, such as trying to see under someone's skirt or looking down a woman's blouse, also takes place, according to interviewees. Further, some victims and service providers recalled incidents of indecent exposure.

The woman had her desk here. The boss was in the other room. He decided to put his desk opposite that woman so that he could see under the desk.

(NGO Representative)

At the beginning they came here as clients then they get used to talk to me. After some time, they touched and showed me their penis.
(Victim)

Visual Harassment

Most cases of visual sexual harassment discussed by interviewees were unwanted, sexually explicit pictures and posters displayed in the workplace. One participant discussed a slightly different scenario in which she found undesired sex-related objects in her office upon starting a new job.

And in the office he used to have boxes of wine, you know those wine holders in cardboard. So when I started clearing out the office when I arrived there, I found condoms stuck down there. Opened the draws where the files are and they're condoms and I took everything, put into a pack and then gave it to the messenger and said get rid of this. I don't want to see one of these things in the office.
(Victim)

Phone and Mail Harassment

Participants identified a number of ways that phones are used as tools of sexual harassment. Some targets experience verbally harassing phone calls, such as getting asked out on dates repeatedly. Text messaging was noted as being a new but popular means of harassment. Perpetrators may send inappropriate, unwanted and repeated messages. Interviewees noted that messages could include both explicit pictures and words. Requests for dates and marriage proposals also occur via mobile phone.

So in the end the relationship ended but given that they work together, given the relationship had ended, the man continues to harass constantly, sending SMS, phoning constantly at this person's phone and also making sexual remarks....
(Health Sector Representative, Victim)

Then I, after the new year, he phoned me at the office and he told me, I don't know how to say it in English, so he told me "I'm dying to be with you." That day I felt...I was terrified.

(Victim)

She committed, attempted at suicide, because her supervisor, who's already married, was just proposing the girl, keeps on sending messages "Come to me. We need to talk. Let's go for a ride." Such messages were always being sent to the girl...

(Health Sector Representative)

As with phones, mail and email can be used to send explicit pictures, sexual jokes and unwanted comments and advances.

Fifteen minutes before leaving the office, he sent me an email and he said "I have two big chocolates for you to eat," and I thought that was absolutely awful because I knew exactly what he was meaning by that...

(Victim)

A couple of interviewees also mentioned that letters and email messages had been used to begin rumors about people's sexual lives. Letters were sent to both family members and strangers regarding the target's personal life and supposed sexual exploits.

She explains to me that some of her male colleagues have been talking to other people and going to the extent of sending an anonymous letter to her husband to say that she is having an affair or she has several affairs.

(Business Representative)

Street Harassment

Although not always workplace related, the topic of sexual street harassment emerged spontaneously during the course of many interviews. Street harassment can affect one's job if it occurs while a target is commuting to and from work. The behaviors participants described were similar to what many individuals experience while physically at the workplace, including unwanted comments and advances, groping, pinching,

exposure, staring and phone-based harassment. Interviewees mentioned that these incidents occur on the bus and while walking down the street.

Even if you travel in the bus. You know, me personally, I've been traveling in the bus, you see the man rubbing his leg or behaving in a very indecent manner, trying to show his intimate part, etc. Because you know even when they sit, they try to press on you. This happens every day.
(NGO Representative, Victim)

Yeah, it's everyday, every time, and it doesn't matter how you are dressed. You can be with a skirt. You can be with a, how do you say it, col roulé, with long sleeves. It doesn't make any difference. You are a woman, you are walking on the street, the man are "Hey..." etc.
(NGO Representative)

I come to work on the bus. OK. And, um, there's this guy who's been taking photos of me with his mobile and I have no idea who he is. It's just a guy on the bus with me, and one day he was sitting on the opposite seat and he was looking at me and I thought "Ok, he's looking at me," and I kept looking on the other side. And then the other day he was sitting in front of me and he picked up his mobile. I saw him picking up his mobile and he placed it to his ear and then he turned his head and the way he turned it I could immediately realize that he was taking a picture. And I just went like that and I heard the click of the, of the phone going and I just went "Oh my god, he's taking a picture."
(Victim)

Power and Response

Power emerged as a key theme across many of the interviews. Power differentials and power dynamics were seen by participants as an integral factor associated with sexually harassing behavior. Even when not directly acknowledged, the ideas of strength, weakness, "levels", status and empowerment were incorporated into the dialogue of respondents:

Vulnerable...situations which sometimes render people vulnerable, might render them prone to harassment also.
(Ministry Representative)

I can't tell you exactly who could be at risk. I think it's a question of power relationship so...it's a question of who is in power and the person view the relationship. It could be a man or a woman...power plus misuse of power
(Justice Representative)

This perspective is consistent with much of what is found in the literature, linking sexual harassment to power (Crosthwaite and Priest 2001). It is argued that sexual harassment is both an expression of power differentials, especially between the genders, and an attempt to reinforce them (Bunch 1997).

Data from this study showed that power and power differentials that emerge from all levels of the socio-ecological model are important to understanding sexual harassment in Mauritius. Both victims and service providers directly and indirectly identified individual, situational, organizational and societal factors. Such results firmly contradict the theories that solely emphasize power associated with organizational status, while supporting more integrated models. As in other uses of the socio-ecological model (Heise 1998), it was also found that the different factors and levels are interrelated, and none can be considered in isolation.

Interviewees provide further support for the socio-ecological model in their discussion of victim, organizational and societal response. The interviews plainly demonstrate that coping behavior is not merely an isolated aftermath of sexual harassment. Rather, it plays an essential role in determining the occurrence and reoccurrence of sexual harassment. Victim, organizational and societal responses may both alter and be altered by the power dynamics of a situation. Further, coping was seen as associated with factors at all levels of the socio-ecological framework. Therefore, in the sections below, victim, organizational and societal response will be discussed simultaneously with the other associated factors.

Individual Level

The individual level of the socio-ecological model refers to characteristics or behaviors of the target. It is not meant to represent a profile of the “typical” victim, but rather to identify power dynamics or characteristics that may be associated with incidents of sexual harassment. There is also no presumption of cause and effect; the aspects discussed should rather be understood as risk factors.

Interviewees made it very clear that a range of individual-level characteristics may be associated with the power dynamics of a situation of sexual harassment. The oft-cited factors of organizational status and gender were discussed in the majority of the interviews, but participants by no-means limited their discussion to only those two aspects. Socio-economic situation and level of awareness of sexual harassment and related legislation also were frequently identified. A complete list of interviewee-recognized individual-level factors, with examples, is contained in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Individual-Level Factors

GENDER

It was assumed or stated by all participants that women are more frequently targeted than men. Almost all respondents noted that Mauritius is patriarchal; this means that women are understood to be weaker and treated as inferior both inside and outside the home (Vetten 2000). Interviewees pointed out that being raised in Mauritius often means an attitude, held by both men and women, that women are unequal to men, especially in the context of the workplace.

Mauritius is mainly a patriarchal society itself: it's the education, it's the culture, and it's the environment. It's systemic....And then you have things that continue, helping to keep the system going. For example, you have the Bollywood culture, the film, films that you see on the television. These are things that keep things going on. This is mainly what is making it more difficult to win the battle.

(Justice Representative)

Gender roles may encourage men to be more aggressive and women to be passive and shy, and may also explain why some men may not even be aware that their behavior is

sexually harassing. Being a man in Mauritius, according to some interviews, is defined as acting in such a way.

Some people are just like that. Some men it's, it's...well, I'm not excusing them. If I'm saying that they're just that way it's not, I'm not finding an excuse for how they are. They are this way. It's for them....They have to ask these questions to any women that go their way or otherwise they won't be a man. That's my point of view.
(Victim)

ORGANIZATIONAL STATUS

In the majority of the interviews, formal organizational status was acknowledged as a factor. Perpetrators were identified most frequently as those in high-ranking positions, while interviewees noted that the opposite would be true for victims. Formal status within a workplace may give an individual the opportunity to perpetrate “quid pro quo” harassment or simply the chance to use the power associated with higher rank more indirectly, by exploiting access to secluded work sites or control over certain job characteristics.

Most of the time those who occupy position, they are in a better position, they use their influence, because they know they have the...They think that by the fact that they occupy important function, they can do anything.
(Trade Union Representative)

INFORMAL ORGANIZATIONAL STATUS

Potential perpetrators need not have formal status to have more informal organizational power. “Power differences can be present among coworkers through informal networks, differential support and latitude of decision making provided by the supervisors (Kanter, 1977)” (Cleveland and Kerst 1993). Interviewees said that this might come in the form of some kind of control of resources or wages, such as a driver who is able to determine the route he uses to drop off workers or a subordinate who is able to supply input into annual employee reviews. Similarly, a power differential may emerge if one employee has a level of jurisdiction over another employee’s reputation or work output or has a high level of experience at a certain organization.

[He's a] coworker who's been here for a very long time, so he knows the people, he knows the people around here. He knows the people, you know, at the head office and since I'm considered relatively new...I'm still considered as new to the place, so he's got authority, he's got power.
(Health Representative, Victim)

AGE

Youth, related to innocence and lack of experience and confidence, was frequently identified as a factor. Interviewees sometimes put particular emphasis on age gap. Some participants also pinpointed older individuals as vulnerable because they may be less open about their sexuality or lack marketable workplace skills.

Well actually at that time it was like, I'm very just...You know...When I'm saying young, I'm still young, but when you, when you are in the professional workplace after schools and you don't have this confidence about you, you're just either, you know, as if you haven't heard or you just try to take this question as you don't see it as it has been delivered...

(Victim)

LEVEL OF AWARENESS

Employees who have an awareness of sexual harassment, what it is and that it is illegal may gain power through that knowledge. Interviewees identified awareness of workers' rights and the law as associated with sexual harassment.

Are these people conscious that there is some sort of unequal relationship, and the basis of this unequal relationship, the problem of sexual harassment may arise? If these people are not aware of the contradiction I do not really think that they will go forward and address the issue.

(Ministry Representative)

JOB SECURITY

A few interviewees mentioned job security and work conditions as factors. Working on contract, seasonally or being dependent on overtime all may act to decrease on individual's power. A unique example of this power element given by one interviewee was that of being a politician. Since politicians are dependent on public support to keep their jobs, they not only lack job security but also are vulnerable because they may seek to respond to their experience of abuse in a way that they expect will please their constituents.

...but when you don't get security of employment, when you are working on contract in some agriculture field or a cleaning company and it's, you know, they're gonna stop you after eight months, that you're very, very prone to sexual harassment because you need that job, and you know it's the system for working has changed so much. You get bonuses for overtime. You need that overtime or extra time. You're put into a position of dependency on some job contractor or work contractor. So the nature of transmission of work itself where there is less job security and makes women far more prone to sexual harassment.

(NGO Representative)

LEGALITY OF WORK

Working outside of the formal sector, especially in unlawful activities, can decrease a target's power. Individuals working in the professions of drug dealing or sex work may lack support structures and be more hesitant to contact the police.

Even if I would have gone to the police, they participate in such things, in things like I have been through. It could have been three policemen. Moreover, I'm a sex workers and I cannot have a case going on. It's worthless.
(Victim)

SOCIO-ECONOMIC SITUATION

Those who are in need of a job because of their financial situation may lack a certain aspect of power or perceived power. Financial power need not emerge directly from the amount of money an individual has, but may be related to the person's family responsibility or support network.

You know a woman who goes to work is...and her superior or her colleague knows that she is from a less fortunate family in the sense of financial difficulties or whatever, and therefore, she really needs that job, that might be a risk factor, because then the colleague who is in that office might prey on that fact that this woman would probably never denounce, because she really is so dependent on that job.
(Parliamentarian)

RELATIONSHIP STATUS

Interviewees mentioned relationship status as impacting individual power. Both having a partner and being single, however, were identified as sources of power depending on the societal power structures.

So then I had become more mature and I know this was sexual harassment and this is what men do to women who are alone or they think your husband is not around so they can allow themselves. Finally, for me in all the three cases, if I had to conclude, I would say that I was at risk because maybe they thought that I was, I'm single.
(Ministry Representative, Victim)

Let's imagine a young girl, or a girl who is just married, make a complaint of sexual harassment. This person may have problems with her husband, may have problems with her parents. People think a lot about their reputation, whatever people are going to say. You know you have got to find job, you are married, now her people will learn that...there is all these social constraints which makes that, sometimes when female workers face problem they don't report.
(Ministry Representative)

PERSONAL CHARACTER

Characteristics identified by interviewees that may indicate a lack of power in relation to a harasser or potential harasser included docility, submissiveness and shyness. On the other hand, respondents discussed assertiveness, boldness and confidence as powerful personality traits. In some instances, however, having a strong personality was also identified as a risk factor as it may break gender norms.

It would be, those naïve persons, I think, and then...those who don't express themselves enough. Those who don't communicate to say something is going wrong perhaps and they don't tell, and then perhaps afterwards, it's too late or its more difficult because as they don't express themselves, as they don't say no as well, they...it's...they are more exposed.

(Business Representative)

BREAKING GENDER NORMS

Women who have characteristics that are considered “manly” or men that are seen as effeminate may be in a vulnerable position. This also includes being homosexual or bisexual, or perceived as such. As mentioned before, women who are bold, aggressive or speak out against men may become targets of harassment. Similarly, men who have “feminine” qualities may lack a certain power or perceived power.

I have, one of my very good friends, he's not gay but he's a little bit effeminate right, because he grew up with five sisters...So that guy is seriously depressed, severely depressed because he's been a victim of constantly being nagged at work, being called a pussy, being called, you know... "You're not a man," or you know bullied in front of people, in front of the staff, in front of the clients.

(Health Representative, Victim).

CITIZENSHIP

Foreign workers lack the rights associated with citizenship. They may have less government protection and community support. Further, both victims and perpetrators can experience harsher forms of retaliation, such as deportation.

The Chinese girls, the workers, there is a lot of cases, sometimes you see it in the newspaper, of sexual harassment with supervisors who uses these women, sexually harass and then during the day they can sleep under the cutting table. This was voiced out in the newspaper. And if they don't do that they are thrown back to their country.

(NGO and Business Representative)

Even when multiple interviewees identified a single power source, there was not always agreement on how it would affect a potentially sexually harassing situation. For example, youth was often seen by respondents as a characteristic that would make a worker more vulnerable to sexual harassment, and was frequently related to innocence

and lack of experience and confidence. Some participants, however, pinpointed older individuals as vulnerable, particularly old women.

Old women will never go and say that I'm 65 years old and I have been raped. It will be as if it's, how do you say it, she will feel shy and she won't talk about her sexuality, etc.

(NGO Representative, Victim)

There was also strong emphasis on the part of many interviewees regarding exceptions to the norm. This was especially the case in terms of gender and organizational status.

While participants frequently discussed the ways that being a woman and lower in the organizational hierarchy may decrease an individual's power, they were quick to add that sexual harassment is not limited by position or sex.

Usually it's a male against a female. This is the usual schema, which may at times be the other way around. I don't know if you've come across cases of women harassing men. It's quite rare.

(Ministry Representative)

I'll speak about the boss, much more about the boss, because I think that every person who goes to work he has a purpose in mind. He has to work to earn money for his family or for himself. I don't think he's going to work to get that kind of unwelcome attention. It's the person who is in a higher position. I'm saying only higher position. I don't think it's only the bosses who do that kind of thing. I've heard of coworkers also, you know who, having their male ego is so, you know, so powerful.

(Trade Union Representative)

This further emphasizes the importance of a global view of power that takes into account multiple factors on multiple levels.

Relationship between powers. Discussion by participants clarified that many of these power sources are often intimately related. At times, they may be mutually reinforcing and correlated outside of the context of sexual harassment. For example, gender roles in Mauritius dictate that girls and women should be passive, shy and submissive, while boys and men are taught to be aggressive, sexually forward and

‘macho.’ This creates a situation that links two factors, personal character and gender, and connects both to the power dynamics of a single circumstance.

And also, in Mauritian culture, as I say is a patriarchal society. Women still have to be careful of how they behave, how they say things, because it is considered bad in certain societies...or what you do if you gonna be a woman who open up your mouth and say things. It's not gonna be a good thing because then you gonna lack of respect for your husband, lack of respect for your parents. So then you gonna keep it down and when you find yourself with a boss who says things to you, you can't open your mouth and say "You should go to hell," like I say.
(Business Representative)

Similar examples were uncovered in terms of socio-economic situation and organizational status, organizational status and gender, age and level of awareness, and legality of work and socio-economic status, among others. This same type of relationship may exist between individual level factors and those on the organizational and societal level as well, such as level of awareness and the presence of support services or organizational anti-harassment programs.

Some factors emerged in terms of relationships of dependence, where the existence or status of one may change the meaning of another. The clearest illustration of this point may be the connection between an individual's relationship status and other individual and societal level factors. According to interviewee accounts, different types of relationships may increase or decrease an individual's power depending on the existing societal power structures. Being married or having a partner can empower a person if potential perpetrators know or presume that the partner is providing a certain level of financial or emotional support to the victim. Interviewees discussed cases where husbands and boyfriends assisted targets in reporting, provided financially for the targets, and, in some cases, confronted the perpetrator directly. This same point was also reflected in the description of single targets being vulnerable:

...and the fact that she was engaged, her engagement was broken, was also the factor that made her even more vulnerable to the manager. Like this is a girl who is available, she is going through a tough time. So I think they kind of pick up on girls who are single, girls who are vulnerable and going through tough times and in exchange, they promise them favors.

(Health Representative, Victim)

On the other hand, if on the societal and familial levels there is blaming and retaliation aimed at victims of harassment, being married or having a partner may present as a risk factor. Individuals in situations of workplace abuse may be afraid of how their partner will react if he or she finds out. Interviewees mentioned that partners at times had a range of negative responses, including victim blaming and verbal abuse.

From the moment that her husband was made aware of this and being a traditional Hindu family...the first reaction of her husband was of course to blame the wife and decided to go to the police to report a case and then came to, to some sort of well reason himself out and said well, that would be splashing in public something which is quite private.

(Business Representative)

Another such case in point is found with regards to personal character. While it was generally agreed by interviewees that being submissive, shy and docile would be a “weakness,” at times having a strong personality may increase an individual’s vulnerability to harassment. This fits with a perspective presented in the literature that men use sexual harassment, and other types of violence against women as a means to keep women “in their place” and maintain the status quo of gender inequality (Cleveland and Kerst 1993). One interviewee provided a personal example, recalling that her sexual preference has become the topic of public discussion because of her outspokenness on certain women’s issues:

Because I’m also a rape crisis counselor, and I talk a lot. Since I’ve come to Mauritius I’ve talked a lot about violence against women and against children, rape, incest. I tend to think that people think of me as a feminist who’s anti-men and even tend to label me, and I was very surprised, being here for almost three

years, but since last year, like I have been very surprised that I get the lesbian name tag, which I am not, but you know...I'm not justifying, but it's almost like a woman who is heterosexual cannot be talking about those things. She needs to...In some ways it's not a direct form of harassment, you know, but it is a harassment. It's all sexual harassment but in other forms.
(Health Representative, Victim)

Therefore, the association of personal character with a worker's power may depend on acceptable gender norms, the patriarchal nature of the society and other factors.

Victim response. As recounted by interviewees, victim coping strategies give even further insights into the power differentials that are associated with sexual harassment in the workplace. How targets respond is related to other individual, organizational and societal level factors, as well as the incidence and seriousness of sexual harassment cases.

Each target of sexual harassment may respond using a combination of coping strategies. These strategies may be utilized consecutively or simultaneously and may change over time. Interviewee accounts of victim response provide an indication of the range of behaviors utilized by targets of sexual harassment in Mauritius and how they relate to other associated and risk factors.

The strongest theme that emerged throughout the interviews was that of victims remaining silent. It was repeatedly mentioned that not only do targets forgo officially reporting the behavior, they may also refrain from discussing their experience with family, friends and colleagues.

She couldn't tell this guy what had happened to her because he would never marry her then. He would never support her. He would say "No, you instigated," you know. When my husband would support me, she would be, how do you say it, pushed out. No one in her family would have believed her, say she did something to, to bring this down on her, you know. So they, what happened is that when I asked her if she'd support my case, she was petrified. She said "I can't, he doesn't know," you know.

(Victim)

The reasons provided for this silence included fear of job loss, fear of damaged reputation, inability to provide proof of the incident, lack of awareness of sexual harassment and the law, lack of support, small size of the country, illegality of work and fears of being blamed for the incident. These elements reflect the general power imbalance that exists in situations of sexual harassment.

The table below shows other types of victim responses that emerged during the interviews:

Figure 5: Individual Response Strategies

RESPONSE STRATEGY	EXAMPLES
Officially reporting	Reporting to a superior, the police, the Sex Discrimination Division, a trade union, a lawyer or a ministry <i>As from then until I, I explained myself to the management, I didn't went to the police or anywhere else. I wanted to settle everything with the management. But when he told me that I was nobody, I decided to go to the police. So I went to the police and filed a complaint and then he was arrested.</i> (Victim)
Confronting harasser	Responding directly to the harasser, demanding that he or she stop the behavior. <i>...and I told him "Now I'm going to shout. I'm going to shout and I'm going to call all the staff."</i> (Ministry Representative, Victim)
Indirectly responding	Laughing, smiling, ignoring the sexual connotation of a request or remark or providing a "technical" excuse for not wanting to partake in certain discussions or actions. <i>...but whenever you make as if, as if you are new to the topic. You make as if you don't understand what they are saying and then they will stop by themselves one day.</i> (Ministry Representative, Victim)
Making job-related changes	Transferring to a different department, leaving an organization or changing careers. <i>So when she came to me and I told her that was harassment,</i>

	<p><i>she was surprised and when I asked her if she wanted to confront him, she said no because she knew that he had don't that before with three other women who had left, you know. So she wasn't ready to take it any higher. She said she was gonna try to change jobs, and I think that's what most of them end up doing.</i></p> <p>(Health Representative, Victim)</p>
Avoidance	<p>Skipping days of work, changing work routines or any other behaviors that allow the target to avoid contact with the harasser.</p> <p><i>I refused to take the call whenever he called me....I didn't go to his office. I, if I want a pen, I wait until he's not in his office to go and ask for, with his secretary...</i></p> <p>(Victim)</p>
Complying with requests	<p>In cases that involve direct requests or demands for sexual or other favors, victims may comply.</p> <p><i>...she would just avoid him, and then one day he said to her "You know your mini skirt, you look very nice and sexy in your skirt and I would like to drop you home," and she said no and the next day when she went back to work he was extremely rude to her. He started humiliating her in front of her colleagues. So then the day after when he asked her to drop her home, she agreed, because she knew that if she didn't there would be coercion.</i></p> <p>(Health Representative, Victim)</p>
Seeking psychological support	<p>Going to see a counselor, psychologist or psychiatrist.</p> <p><i>Therapy's for this, because we are talk about the problem. We have seen how it happens and all this. The person is OK with it and most of the time they are OK. It's that they have never had the opportunity to talk about it.</i></p> <p>(NGO Representative)</p>
Seeking informal support	<p>Speaking with or seeking support and advice from family, friends or coworkers.</p> <p><i>Well, I told my fiancé, my boyfriend, um and my brother and actually told my close colleague that I consider as my best friend, and I told her so that if anything else could happen, other people knew, like the close people knew what happened before and what maybe could be related to it if something else could happen</i></p> <p>(Victim)</p>
Suicide/attempted suicide	<p>One service provider noted that a client had tried to commit suicide due to her experience of sexual harassment.</p>

	<p><i>She couldn't quit the job, so she, there was no other solution than at the time to commit, to attempt suicide for her.</i></p> <p>(Health Representative)</p>
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Like remaining silent, these coping mechanisms were associated by interviewees with other factors on all levels of the socio-ecological model. Certain responses, such as reporting and confronting the harasser, were linked with having a strong personality, a large amount of external support, higher organizational status, decent awareness of legislation and socio-economic stability. Other response strategies, such as avoidance, indirect response and complying with a request was spoken of in relation to being less well-off economically, being younger, and lacking experience. As will be discussed further, seeking informal support from family and friends may be mitigated by attitudes of victim blaming.

Situational Level

Certain situational characteristics may give a potential perpetrator a degree of power over the target. Such contexts typically include circumstances in which there is more privacy and fewer witnesses. Interviewees specifically mentioned individuals who work on night shifts, employees posted in offices separate from company headquarters, and staff who work one-on-one with a supervisor, such as confidential secretaries:

I thinking putting him out [in an isolated place] is the most ridiculous thing you could ever do to someone who sexually harassed people. You know, where I was placed, I mean on the other side of the world, away from the head office itself. We should never have been there in the first place and with him with his reputation....it's just looking for trouble.

(Victim)

Participants noted that these situations empower potential perpetrators by limiting the effectiveness of victim responses, i.e. by making it very difficult for a target to provide proof of the incident when filing a complaint.

It would depend on the physical layout of the place, I suppose that's one. It's a question of intimacy, you know.... We've seen some cases in, let's say in hotels. Is it because there is, what shall we say, not privacy but there is intimacy but at the same time the perpetrators would... think that they will not be caught in such places and, I don't know...
(Ministry Representative)

Organizational Level

As organizations are at the center of incidents of workplace sexual harassment, it is not surprising that their actions and reactions must be considered. The literature often puts a strong emphasis on the importance of organizational policies and procedures in preventing sexually harassing behavior. Further, scholars frequently identify a fair and strong response to harassment as key to avoiding further incidents. “While legal measures can redress complaints and play some part in the prevention of sexual harassment, the primary preventive role belongs to workplace policies and complaints procedures” (McCann 2005). Interviewees not only noted the important role organizations can play in altering power dynamics, but they also made it clear that the power balance at this level is very often in favor of potential perpetrators.

Organizational Policies and Programs: Some study participants, primarily NGO representatives, key informants and victims, alluded to the fact that company policies may assist victims by providing a precise definition of sexual harassment, dictating a clear reporting structure, indicating potential punishments for perpetrators or sending a

message that the enterprise is anti-harassment. In other words, organizational policies can empower victims.

I think, um, that when new employees come there should be sort of an induction period where sexual harassment would be one of the issues that could be, you know, dealt with, and I think that would be both for males and females so that both perpetrators and potential victims would be you know aware, for example, that the company or the organization has a policy on this issue and I think this might also work in a sort of preventive way. I think companies, organizations should have a policy with respect to sexual harassment or some sort of a procedure to help people with sexual harassment so they would know who to turn to if they were having problems.
(Health Representative, Victim)

No, I work here, I've never seen [the policy]. I don't know if tomorrow I want to file a complaint you know against someone for sexual harassment, I don't know what to do. I don't think any of the staff here would be able to answer you.
(Health Representative, Victim)

Interviewees identified an absence of policy as anything from neutral to negative in terms of preventing harassment and encouraging reporting. Most organizational representatives admitted they had no policy, but noted that they may eventually develop one. Some participants mentioned that enterprises may lack policies and programs dedicated to sexual harassment when it is an issue of little concern and not even seen as a problem. This was confirmed by a number of organizational representatives noting that they had no policy because they have never received a complaint of harassment.

Well, because I think it often goes untalked about, unnoticed and...I mean, I think a lot of ministries don't have a proper HR policy. Unless you have sufficient people complaining, I think, nothing I think will be done.
(Health Representative, Victim)

The only thing is that willingness generally comes after an impurity. I think that it's once a company experience this, then he will think about it and then implement something. We are not proactive, that is the only thing we can say.
(Business Representative)

It is reasonable to conclude that, especially for the big enterprises, no complaint has been made due partially to the fact that there is no policy or reporting procedure in place; previous studies have shown that “effectively communicated and implemented policies...encourage victims of harassment to report their experience to their employers” (McCann 2005).

Organizational responses: The way an organization responds to cases of sexual harassment can alter the power dynamics between targets and potential perpetrators. Participants mentioned that in some situations, organizations may retaliate against victims, especially if they report or go public about the incident. This gives potential perpetrators increased power, as targets become the victims of marginalization, decreased benefits and sacking. One interviewee noted how other power elements, such as organizational status, can also be intertwined with organizational response:

What management do in case of harassment or sexual harassment, there is a tendency to protect all these...there is a tendency to protect the supervisors or the other managers, ok. As in this case, this case in particular because in a small enterprise there may be one or two supervisors, not more than that, but sometimes you will see that, the worker is more going to be penalized in the process, transferred in another department and the person how has committed the offense, remains in the department.

(Ministry Representative)

Organizations may further alter the power balance by providing an unfair amount of support to perpetrators or targets. Most examples provided by interviewees involved unquestioned and intense siding with the accused. The outcome in many of these cases was that the target chose to leave his or her place of employment, experienced marginalization or was forcefully transferred:

I wanted the manager to send the letter to the director. My aim was not to get him fired from his job, nor to get him into any trouble. I just wanted him to know that I have reported the case and that everyone knows about it for I was not his

only victim. He did that to some other girls on other working sites, but these girls got also afraid. They also reported the case to their team leader, but they didn't dare to report it to the administration. The very same day that I've been to the administration to report the case, the manager told me that he received other complaints about the same person but no one wanted to voice it out or prove it because they are afraid of losing their job. He warned us that if we report, we could be transferred....He warned us but I didn't follow his advice and I got transferred.

(Victim)

This situation can be further magnified when organizations are willing to hire convicted perpetrators of harassment, but unwilling to employ targets who spoke out publicly about their experience:

I mean, if you have this problem regarding your employment, any other prospective employer knows about that, he wouldn't recruit you. This is a very conservative situation. This is what happens with one lady, when she was requested to go because she had made an allegation of sexual harassment. Her boss was harassing her, the guy was told to go because he was at the end of his contract, so nothing happened to him....

(Justice Representative)

With unfair organizational backing, the perpetrator gains a level of power to commit, and continue committing, abusive acts.

Societal Level

Societal level factors refer to characteristics or behaviors of the greater society that may be associated with workplace sexual harassment. Interviewees discussed attitudes, beliefs, services, policies and responses that exist on a nationwide or regional level. They were discussed in terms of their connection with incidents of sexual harassment and victim and organizational responses. It became clear in participants' discussion of these issues that societal factors can modify the power dynamics of a situation and impact individual and organizational level factors directly. Further, as on

the organizational level, the current character of Mauritian society nearly always tends to provide additional support and power to the perpetrator.

Attitudes, Knowledge and Beliefs: Almost all interviewees mentioned the patriarchal nature of Mauritian society. Widespread attitudes and societal structures that promote the inequality of men and women clearly affect the power dynamics in situations, or potential situations, of sexual harassment. Study participants recognized a connection between the overall mindset of male superiority and the experiences of sexual harassment at work:

We're a patriarchal society. We come from a lot of different cultural and religious backgrounds where patriarchy is perpetrated, whether it's catholic, Hinduism, Islam...women...Like the whole population, the whole religious population is being taught that women are less.
(NGO Representative)

Gender hierarchy lends men a level of power that has been shown to both encourage sexual harassment and assault and explain why victims are often either women or individuals whose personal identities deviate from gender norms (MacKinnon 2003).

The inequality caused by patriarchy and patriarchal attitudes also impacts other elements of power, such as the effectiveness of legislation and support services and victim responses:

You know, however much legislation you bring, if the mentality of the people is so patriarchal, the legislation will never be in touch with the social realities. So I'm, it's not that I am not concerned. I think the legislation has to be there, but I think the bulk of the work, the seriousness of the work, has to be on changing the mentalities and really getting, making some headway, with this really strong patriarchal structure. This is what worries me most. This is where I think the work needs to be done.
(Parliamentarian)

Interviewees often said that sexual issues, including sexual harassment, are silenced or considered taboo in Mauritian culture. Several mentioned that sexual education is not complete and only infrequently offered to students.

It's always something to be, not to be talked about, just like any sexual issues. This is Mauritius. We don't talk about sex at all. You're not supposed to talk about sex. It's not considered proper in any event.
(Business Representative)

Silence around sexual harassment gives power to potential perpetrators, as it prevents targets from gaining an awareness of sexual harassment, reporting the behavior, or accessing informal or formal support:

Usually sex is taboo in Mauritius. Sex at work, it is a bigger one probably. It is very hard to talk about sex in family, so talk about sex in the working place can be much more difficult. For me it's the first barrier we can find, and yeah, this is a taboo and people do not know what is sex and what is safe sex and what is just addiction and they don't know the difference here.
(Health Representative)

So these people have to feel secured if they want to come forward and make a complaint. This should not be regarded as a taboo, you know. So many things in Mauritius are regarded as taboo.
(Ministry Representative)

The quotes above demonstrate the negative impact widespread silence about sexual harassment and related issues can have on empowerment of victims and potential victims.

Service providers and targets both mentioned a lack of awareness regarding what is actually occurring in the workplaces in terms of sexual harassment. Some expressed concern that a dearth of accurate information, regarding such topics as prevalence, means that service providers do not know how to best address the problem. A network to connect stakeholders also does not exist, and interviewees had difficulty describing available services or identifying the best places to refer victims.

If they contact the Ministry of Women's Rights, I think they have psychologists and all, but if the complainant doesn't go through the Ministry of Women's Rights, I know at the level of the police there's a Family Support Unit, but I don't know if they deal with these types of complaints. That's it. I think they will deal mostly with other violences, like domestic violence and all, because there is a trained unit, Family Support Unit. I don't know about the Ministry of Labor, if they have something.

(Justice Representative)

Many interviewees mentioned that awareness of sexual harassment amongst the general public is improving but it is still not very high. This may be related to the fact that sexual harassment remains taboo. Much like awareness on the individual level, lack of societal awareness can deflate the strength from other power sources (such as support services and legislation) and may affect victim response.

The attitudes, knowledge and beliefs of Mauritians as they relate to sexual harassment indicate a situation of power dynamics in favor of perpetrators. Patriarchy, lack of awareness and a strong taboo around speaking about anything sexual paint a picture of a society that makes it difficult for victims to share or report their experiences and affords sexual harassment a certain level of legitimacy. As the examples discussed above demonstrate, they may also negatively impact target's individual-level power.

Programs and policies: Victims can be empowered by NGO or governmental services that provide them with guidance, advice, and counseling. Interviewees discussed the importance of services for victims, especially in terms of legal aide and mental health:

...there should be a supporting body, you know a supporting unit, where you have, how you say, psychologist who can support the ladies, because when somehow you feel bad yourself, the person who is reporting the case, at the back of their mind sometime they think that, maybe I'm the, I've been provoking, maybe I've been doing that, you know taking the blame, something like that. There should be a support unit for those people.

(Trade Union Representative)

Not having sufficient access to these services does little to rectify any existing power differentials. One victim discussed how a lack of services affects victim response and the ability of targets to speak openly about harassment:

I think non-governmental organizations should be able to, to be much more present with their women. They should....because I don't know, it's difficult to voice out something like that and whenever you do that there is a moment that you say to yourself "Oh god, what have I done? It would have been much better if I could just have kept quiet." So I think that if the NGOs were much more present and give much more help, psychologist help or encourage women to voice out, it would have been less taboo.
(Victim)

As in the above quote, many respondents noted that there exists a lack of support services for targets. The only organization identified that specifically focuses on sexual harassment is the Sex Discrimination Division (SDD) of the National Human Rights Commission. Respondents disagreed on the effectiveness of the work of the SDD. While some thought they handled cases thoroughly and effectively, others were concerned that they rely too heavily on reconciliation and are not accessible enough to the public:

We think it's quite effective, that it's very easy. You don't have to retain the services of a lawyer, so you can easily report a complaint. Well, on the whole I think it's effective, and the procedure is very informal.
(Ministry Representative)

I mean, if somebody is harassing you, how you can conciliate with them?...I think there should be a criminal case, and it should be punished, either fined or go in prison if he has a previous conviction of that. I think there should be some criminal follow-up for sex harassment, but for sex discrimination there might be conciliation.
(Justice Representative)

The Ministry of Labour also provides a reporting mechanism. While their labour offices are accessible, they deal with a wide variety of cases and most victims were unaware of their work in this area. Interviewees noted that most NGOs, women's association and the Ministry of Women have rarely touched on the issue. Some said that services and

programs developed by these bodies focus primarily on domestic violence or other forms of discrimination:

NGOs...I don't know, they're more into discrimination against women. I don't know if they address really, maybe in one of their topics of addressing discrimination of these women, they might have sexual harassment, but one NGO that concentrates only on sexual harassment, I'm not aware...
(Justice Representative)

A misunderstanding of the role of psychologists, as well as the inaccessibility of psychological treatment, also contributes to the lack of victim support services.

Interviewees mentioned that Mauritians associate psychological treatment with being crazy and that many people may be reluctant to speak about issues that are considered personal with a third party.

I think counseling has not fully integrated the culture, in the sense that it's looked upon as a betrayal, that you are going to talk about your family members, or your private stuff, to someone
(Health Representative, Victim)

Further, psychological treatment can be expensive and may not be covered by health insurance.

It is generally agreed that legislation against sexual harassment is important for all countries that wish to successfully address sexual harassment (McCann 2005).

Legislation has the potential of providing a degree of power to targets by affording legal protection and a means of reporting the sexually harassing behavior even if the organization does not respond effectively. Interviewees disagreed, however, on whom and to what extent Mauritian legislation on sexual harassment is empowering. Some expressed concerns that the legislation gives victims too much power to accuse a perpetrator without sufficient proof. This could result in the accused getting publicly labeled and shamed before a trial finds him or her guilty.

I mean if you put the law, then the definition, you know you, it's very restrictive and it can also be to the detriment of you know and epanouissement, like evolution of society, but anything can be interpreted as being harassment, sexual harassment, especially when it's male and female it's sexual harassment. So I believe we have to be careful. At the same time we come with law...I mean law should be the last resort.

(Trade Union Representative)

Other interviewees noted that, although there are laws that criminalize sexual harassment, it does not do enough to assist targets and are in fact relatively useless.

Ok, but we have got one complaint. And it's very difficult to...prove in practice, because according to the criminal law, if you want to take legal action, it has to be beyond reasonable doubt and this is all the difficulties we have to prove this case in court, because very often it takes place without any witnesses.

(Ministry Representative)

Failure to properly implement the laws emerged out of many of the dialogues.

Participants spoke about how police seem to be unaware of how to deal with sexual harassment cases sensitively and effectively. Accusations of secondary victimization surfaced during several of the interviews. At times, accounts of ill treatment by the police revolved around the fact that the target was a woman, a sex worker or homosexual and therefore elicited ill treatment and discrimination.

Because I'm a homosexual, [the police] would not care about it. They can take my deposition but would do anything about it... People tend to say that when you are a homosexual and if you report to the police that you were raped, they might rape you again.

(Victim)

Other participants noted that the complaint of sexual harassment itself may not be taken seriously by the officers, regardless of the target's background, simply because such a grievance is considered humorous or unimportant. Targets who chose to report to the police were sometimes met with victim blaming or even further harassment.

...the lady said the she had, when she went to the police, although she was accompanied by her mother and her father, on the occasion, she found that the

police officers were giggling amongst themselves. So there is a sort of attitude, this sort of mentality, you know, which is very much a handicap in the ...to the processing of cases of sexual harassment...and she told me for instance that the police officers would be getting her to repeat the same things over and over again, as if they were taking some type of, some kind of pleasure in getting her to say some of the most racy things.

(Justice Representative)

You go to the police, they'll throw you out. As long as there's no spillage of blood, they won't care less other than the physical violence.

(Health Representative)

Interviewed service providers were unable to accurately describe the existence or content of the relevant legislation. This was true of representatives of all sectors, including police officers, lawyers and human resource professionals.

I'm not sure. I'm not sure whether it's contained in a specific major piece of legislation, or it's an act of itself, sexual harassment act or something... or it could be Discrimination of Women Act.. I'm not sure... I cannot say....

(Business Representative)

Many factors on all levels, such as individual awareness level, organizational response and societal response, all seem to relate to the effectiveness of legislation.

I think there is a, you can put the legal framework so that people can feel safer to come and denounce cases, but if the societal fabric prevents them to do so...As I say again, it's all a question of empowering the women, not just financially but in their minds.

Mauritius is a very small country and interviewees noted that it is difficult to maintain anonymity and confidentiality in cases of sexual harassment. This may be empowering for the victim, in cases where the targets are getting sufficient support from the public and their enterprise and the accused gets, fairly or unfairly, shamed for his or her actions:

That the person might be innocent, might have been...evidence have been planted whatever, that person may be, his future may be jeopardize, and more so in a small country as you know, everybody will be aware

(Justice Representatives)

In situations where there is victim blaming and retribution, however, the size of Mauritius may actually serve to further empower the perpetrator. Interviewees noted that the small and close-knit population may affect victim responses:

We should ask ourselves why women don't disclose. They don't disclose because they are afraid of the repercussions, not only on...the families, not only on themselves and their environment as well. You see people talk in this country. It's small country, Mauritius, you see and then they are afraid of losing their, their job. They won't have food in the house for their children. You see these are constraints. These are huge constraints.
(NGO Representative)

Societal response. Societal response to sexual harassment can range from strong support of the victim to almost automatic defense of the accused. One of the most common remarks on this point that emerged during the interviews was victim blaming. This sentiment, which pins all or partial responsibility for the harassing behavior on the target, was demonstrated by both men and women interviewees. Blaming occurred in the form of chastising women for not being “strong” enough or pointed to the way women dress as provoking such behavior. It was also associated with targets being too friendly and sending mixed signals.

The problem of sexual harassment in Mauritius, not many people talk about them, because sometimes, what some people say that when you come forward with this, trying to say that your employer doing this or that, or immediate supervisor and so on, what they say is that you have looked for it yourself. You are to be blamed. Maybe you have smiled a bit too much and then he, this fault is always on the lady. So maybe that's another reason why they don't come forward; it is always on the blame the worker approach.
(Trade Union Representative)

Also if she denounces her boss, she might think that it would have a boomerang effect on her, because people would say that maybe she asked for it or she is a loose moral kind of woman. So in fact, the sort of blame game goes back to her.
(Parliamentarian)

Attitudes of victim blaming were not only expressed by service providers and attributed to the general public, but were also at times applied to families and intimate partners of the target.

Even towards their children, towards her children the women would hesitate before, if she ever been sexually harassed at her workplace. She wouldn't think about talking about that....and in some cases she might say they'll accuse her. Oh yes, maybe the way you are dressed, the way, you know, you, it's your fault. Yes, in some families it's like that.
(Business Representative)

Why I did not discuss it at the time with my husband is because he's very jealous person and if at the time he was, he changed afterwards, but to tell him that I have had remarks from colleagues or whatever, he at the time, he took it as if I asked for it, you know.
(Victim)

I was afraid of talking first because my parents would blame me because of my homosexuality and I was afraid that they come to know about it.
(Victim)

Finally, targets themselves also expressed self-blame, a feeling that can even further disempower.

Societal attitudes of victim blaming, and other similar responses, may change the power dynamic in such a way that victims become more vulnerable. Putting the blame of sexual harassment on victims implies that perpetrators need not take full responsibility for their behavior and may not be liable for the consequences. It may also make targets feel isolated and unsupported.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Sexual harassment of all types is occurring in the workplaces in Mauritius. Verbal, physical, visual, gestural and written harassment are taking place both on workplace premises and while employees commute by bus or on foot. These forms of harassment are similar to those identified by other studies around the world. Street harassment, although not formally included in this study, emerged as a recurrent and serious issue that deserves further consideration.

Study data confirmed that factors and power differentials at all levels of the socio-ecological model are associated with incidents and reoccurrences of sexual harassment. The interviewees discussed power in a much broader way than can be understood simply from organizational hierarchy. Not only does the idea of power and risk factors need to be considered above and beyond the individual level, but all the elements must be understood as interrelated. Understanding the influence of one factor cannot be done without awareness of the entire context and the state of other factors. This is perhaps best demonstrated by the strong relationship between societal response, patriarchy and the type of support a victim receives from his or her partner.

Victim, organizational and societal responses, rather than being viewed as the aftermath of sexually harassing incidents, were discussed by interviewees as factors that influence the power dynamics of certain situations. Responses, and expected responses, can both alter and be affected by the existing power dynamics. It is therefore important that they be considered alongside other factors that may make victims vulnerable.

Individual factors can be best understood as risk factors, demonstrating to a certain degree the characteristics of those who may be most susceptible to being the target of abusive workplace behavior. Some of the most salient elements on this level that emerged were gender, socio-economic situation, organizational status and victim response. These are all elements that are found as relevant factors in the sexual harassment literature.

On the organizational and societal level, the current situation as expressed by the interviewees seems to indicate a power imbalance that favors the (potential) perpetrators. Besides the existence of legislation and the presence of the Sex Discrimination Division and the Labour Offices, there exists very little that may empower victims beyond their own, individual traits. Few of the businesses and organizations represented in the study had sexual harassment policies in place or a clear idea of how incidents of harassment should be handled. The widespread acknowledgement of patriarchy and habit of victim blaming only reinforces pre-existing inequalities. Further, there is a lack of support services, as well as awareness and discussion of the issue. Therefore, the organizational and cultural climate do little to offset the power inequalities that exist on the individual and situational level.

These results are confirmed by some of the strongest themes that emerged in the interviews: patriarchy and silence. Naturally surfacing during the course of most of the dialogues, the acknowledgement of patriarchy indicates an understanding of widespread inequality based on sex. On the individual level, discussion involved factors such as gender, sex roles, and gender norms. It emerged on the societal level as well, while societal responses and cultural beliefs and behaviors of male dominance were discussed.

Silence, in its different forms, was talked about by almost all participants. On the individual level, it frequently emerged as a common form of victim response.

Organizations were also pinpointed as being silent on the issue of sexual harassment, along with NGOs and the government on a more national level. The idea of silence was especially strong when the taboo of sexuality was described.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Not only does the socio-ecological model provide an extremely useful framework for discussing factors associated with sexual harassment, it can assist communities in finding multi-sectoral and multi-level solutions to a complex problem. As the data demonstrate, sexual harassment cannot be successfully addressed from one perspective, but requires a joint effort from individuals, organizations, the community and the government. Like other forms of gender-based violence, it requires changes in behavior, attitude and policy. The following is an outline of recommendations based on study findings, organized in reference to the socio-ecological framework in terms of the target of the intervention:

Individual

- Campaigns to promote gender equality
- Efforts to increase awareness around sexual harassment, its definition and its legislation
- Increased protection of seasonal and contract workers
- Programs aimed at empowering women and girls
- Campaigns to change the attitudes of partners and encourage their support victims
- Campaigns demonstrating effective ways to respond to sexual harassment

- Encouragement, through policies and programs, of men and women who pursue vocations and interests outside the gender norms

Organizational

- Development and implementation of sexual harassment policies and programs, including reporting procedures and awareness raising
- Awareness raising for employers on sexual harassment, what it consists of and best-practice ways of handling cases
- Sensitization to help prevent victim blaming and encourage the development and maintenance of gender-equal and women-friendly organizations

Societal

- Development of a network and contact list of all service providers working to address sexual harassment
- Increased programming specifically to address sexual harassment on the part of NGOs and the Ministry of Women's Rights
- Provision of complete and accurate sexual education to all students, including, but not limited to, discussion of sexual harassment
- Campaign to change societal attitudes regarding people's perceptions of sexual harassment and the responsibility of the victim
- Sensitization campaign targeting police, lawyers, judges and any other individuals who implement sexual harassment legislation
- Efforts with the media to prevent disclosure of the names and details of sexual harassment victims and alleged perpetrators

- Passage of new legislation that holds organizations and enterprises responsible for addressing sexual harassment within their worksites
- Provision of increased support for and legal protection of homosexuality
- Conduct further research on sexual harassment and street harassment, including a quantitative study to estimate prevalence, uncover consequences and determine the most salient risk factors

CONCLUSION

Although not a quantitative study that can quote the prevalence of such behavior, this research clearly demonstrates that sexual harassment should be a concern for Mauritian society. Victims and service providers painted a picture of inequality and power differentials, at the center of which was workplace abuse. Their descriptions and insights provide an excellent starting point for moving forward and beginning a much needed public discourse on sexual harassment. It is hoped that academics and policy-makers use this data to successfully approach this complex and multi-faceted issue.

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