

A Comparative Analysis of Career Advancement between Employees with High and Low Levels of Sexual Harassment Experience in Organizations

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Abstract

Sexual harassment is a prevalent challenge that may hinder employees' career advancement across various sectors because it tends to create an unfavourable hostile work environment, lower employee morale, and restrict professional growth opportunities for affected individuals. Despite global advancements in workplace policies and legal frameworks, employees continue to experience harassment that may limit their upward mobility within organizations. The study was a comparative analysis of career advancement between employees with high and low levels of sexual harassment experience in organizations in Kontagora Local Government Area of Niger State. A cross-sectional design was adopted for the study. The sample for the study were 451 participants. The method of data analysis utilised for the was a Between-Subjects ANOVA, one-way analysis of variance. The finding revealed that the relationship between sexual harassment and career advancement in this sample is not statistically significant at the 5% level. The estimated means reveals that employees who experience high level of sexual harassment benefited more career advancement compared to those who experienced low sexual harassment.

Key words: Sexual Harassment, Career Progression

Introduction

Organizations are often set up to ensure that it maximizes profit. However, on the other hand, employees who are hired also have their own aim of working within the organization. One of their basic goals is to advance in their career. However, some of the passes through harsh work conditions that affect their career advancement (Nduati & Wanyoike, 2021). One of these harassments, is sexual. For some, when they do not comply, they remain static and never experience advancement for years. Globally, firms have realized that for their organizations to thrive and meet up with its expected vision and mission, it requires that employees enjoy a smooth career advancement which will make them motivated enough to pursue the goals set by their organizations. Therefore, when these workers experience career advancement, they put in efforts to ensure that they do the job given to them skilfully, which will in turn make their organizations to survive the constantly changing market environment. This is so because career advancement requires that workers grow in their professional life which makes them enjoy certain privileges such as promotion, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, upward mobility, skill enhancement, and the attainment of greater responsibilities and rewards which makes them emotionally, psychologically and physically fit to achieve the set goals of the organization. For employees to perform and progress in their organization as expected within a time frame, it is dependent upon whether these set of employees are treated well or are subjected to sexual harassment. This shows that employees who suffer from sexual harassment may experience psychological trauma, stress, and diminished self-esteem, which may impede their ability to concentrate, perform tasks effectively, and remain productive. An example is what ensued recently within the corridors of power in the Nigerian Senate between a high ranking Senator Godswill Akpabio and Senator Natasha Akpoti Uduaghan which, to date, the case is still in court. Consequently, she has been discriminated against and has lost her committee Chairmanship, a semblance to impairment on career advancement (Adabembe, 2025). This persistent threat of harassment may lead to heightened absenteeism and increased turnover as employees seek safer workplaces. It is against this backdrop that this study is interested in finding out whether employees who experience a high level of sexual harassment have significantly lower career advancement compared with those who experience a low level of sexual harassment in organizations in Kontagora Local Government Area. Thus, Nankya (2022), carried out a study in Equity Bank Katwe branch to

find out if employees who experience a high level of sexual harassment have significantly lower career advancement compared with those who experience a low level of sexual harassment in organizations. The study applied a descriptive and correlational research design. Thirty-five (35) participants were utilised for the study. A convenience sampling technique was used to get the participants for the study. The finding of the study shows that employees who experience a high level of sexual harassment have significantly lower career advancement compared with those who experience a low level of sexual harassment in organizations. The study concludes that employees who experience sexual harassment often fear retaliation from the harasser or even from their organization if they report the incident. This fear can prevent them from speaking up, seeking career advancement, or confronting their harasser. More so, workplace sexual harassment creates a hostile work environment that can impact teamwork, cooperation, and collaboration among employees. This can hinder career advancement as it becomes difficult to build professional relationships and gain support from colleagues. Hence, victims of sexual harassment may miss out on crucial opportunities for skill development, mentoring, networking, and promotions due to the negative impact the harassment has on their motivation, concentration, and overall performance.

Furthermore, Patel et al. (2021) investigated whether employees who experience a high level of sexual harassment have significantly lower career advancement compared with those who experience a low level of sexual harassment among staff of company X in Gujarat. The descriptive research design was used for the study. Fifty (50) employees were utilised for the study. The convenient sampling technique was used to get the participants of the study. The finding of the study reveals that workplace sexual harassment had a significant impact on career advancement and that employees who experience a high level of sexual harassment have significantly lower career advancement compared with those who experience a low level of sexual harassment in organizations. The study concludes that sexual harassment tarnish an individual's professional reputation. Victims may be seen as weak, unable to handle tough situations, or even as potential troublemakers. These perceptions can hinder career advancement and opportunities for advancement. Also, victims of sexual harassment may withdraw socially from their workplace, limiting their ability to build professional networks and connections that are crucial for career advancement.

More so, Adaobi, et al. (2021) did a study to examine if employees who experience a high level of sexual harassment have significantly lower career advancement compared with those who experience a low level of sexual harassment in among employee of non-teaching staff on the operations of the Ghana Education Service in the Sunyani Municipality. The study adopted a descriptive design. Two hundred and forty-six participants were utilised for the study. The finding relates that employees who experience a high level of sexual harassment have significantly lower career advancement compared with those who experience a low level of sexual harassment in organizations. The study closes on the perspective that workplace sexual harassment often leads to increased turnover rates as employees may choose to leave their job or organization to escape the hostile environment. Frequent job changes can disrupt career advancement and development. Thus, dealing with the aftermath of sexual harassment, such as investigations, legal proceedings, or even emotional distress, can significantly distract employees from their work and hinder their ability to focus on career growth.

In addition, Karibasappa (2021) examined whether employees who experience a high level of sexual harassment have significantly lower career advancement compared with those who experience a low level of sexual harassment in a garment industry. A sample of (164) participants were utilised. The study made use of a descriptive design. Findings indicates that employees who experience a low level of sexual harassment have significantly higher career advancement compared with those who experience a high level of sexual harassment in organizations. The study concludes that without a strong system of accountability in place for workplace sexual harassment, individuals may continue to engage in such behaviour without facing significant consequences. This lack of accountability can diminish the impact on career advancement for both the victims and the perpetrators. Also the study concludes that workplace sexual harassment often thrives in environments where there is a culture of silence and secrecy. Victims may choose not to speak out due to shame, guilt, or fear, which limits the impact on their own career advancement as well as the overall awareness and resolution of the issue. Hence, organizations that lack transparency in addressing issues of workplace sexual harassment may inadvertently downplay its impact on career advancement. When incidents are not openly acknowledged or addressed, victims may feel discouraged from pursuing any action that could positively impact their career prospects.

In a similar vein, Kanyutu (2021) conducted a study to examine if employees who experience a high level of sexual harassment have significantly lower career advancement compared with those who experience a low level of sexual harassment in organizations. The correlational design was used in the study. 200 employees from Cameroon Customs administration were utilised as the sample. The study made use of a regression analysis. The finding of the study reveals that there was a significant relationship between workplace sexual harassment and career advancement of affected employees and that employees who experience a high level of sexual harassment have significantly lower career advancement compared with those who experience a low level of sexual harassment in organizations. The study summarises that victims of sexual harassment may face legal battles, requiring significant time, resources, and emotional energy. These legal and financial implications can distract employees from their career advancement goals and limit their focus on professional growth. Therefore, workplace sexual harassment takes an emotional toll on victims, leading to emotional exhaustion, burnout, and a loss of passion for one's work. This emotional toll can hinder career advancement by diminishing motivation and enthusiasm for professional development. Furthermore, Horsfall (2020) did a study to examine if employees who experience a high level of sexual harassment have significantly lower career advancement compared with those who experience a low level of sexual harassment in Busokelo District Council. The qualitative design was used for the study. Finding reveals that workplace sexual harassment had a significant impact on career advancement of employee and that employees who experience a high level of sexual harassment have significantly lower career advancement compared with those who experience a low level of sexual harassment in organizations. Thirty-one employees participated. Purposive sampling technique was utilised for the study. Data analysis was done through content analysis. The result reveals that workplace sexual harassment had a significant impact on career advancement of employee. The study concludes that victims of sexual harassment may receive lower performance evaluations due to the negative impact the harassment has on their work. These lower evaluations can impede career advancement and opportunities for promotion. Also, Yu, et al. (2021) investigated whether employees who experience a high level of sexual harassment have significantly lower career advancement compared with those who experience a low level of sexual harassment of medical practitioners in the Health Care Corporation of St. John's Hospital. Random sampling technique was used to get participants for the

study who were 2,363. The study reveals that employees who experience a high level of sexual harassment have significantly lower career advancement compared with those who experience a low level of sexual harassment in organizations. The study concludes that if victims of sexual harassment do not trust their organization's human resource department or reporting systems to handle their complaints effectively and fairly, they may be less likely to report incidents. This lack of reporting can perpetuate a culture of harassment and hinder the organization's ability to address and prevent future incidents.

More so, Weziak-Białowolska, et al. (2020) carried out a study to examine whether employees who experience a high level of sexual harassment have significantly lower career advancement compared with those who experience a low level of sexual harassment in organizations. The descriptive design was utilised for the study. 100 participants were utilised for the study. Convenient sampling method was used to get the participants of the study. Finding states that employees who experience a high level of sexual harassment have significantly lower career advancement compared with those who experience a low level of sexual harassment in organizations. The study concludes that victims may experience increased absenteeism due to physical and mental health issues, or even to avoid encountering their harasser. Alternatively, they may engage in presenteeism, where they physically show up for work, but their productivity is significantly impacted. In recent times, inferential statistics seems to be more reliable than using descriptions which could easily be based on pretence.

Sexual harassment is a prevalent challenge that may hinder employees' career advancement across various sectors because it tends to create an unfavourable hostile work environments, lower employee morale, and restrict professional growth opportunities for affected individuals. Despite global advancements in workplace policies and legal frameworks, employees continue to experience harassment that may limit their upward mobility within organizations. Existing research has highlighted the negative psychological and professional consequences of these workplace challenges. However, there is a need for more empirical studies that explore and compare between those that experience high sexual harassment with those that don't and how it affects their career advancement. Thus, this study was undertaken to find out if employees who experience a high level of sexual harassment have significantly lower career advancement compared with those who experience a low level of sexual harassment in organizations in Kontagora Local Government Area.

Research question

1. Do employees who experience a high level of sexual harassment have significantly lower career advancement compared with those who experience a low level of sexual harassment in organizations in Kontagora Local Government Area?

Hypotheses

1. Employees who experience high level of sexual harassment will significantly experience low career advancement compared with employees with who experience low level of sexual harassment in organizations in Kontagora Local Government Area of Niger State.

Methodology

A cross-sectional design was adopted for this study. The justification for the adoption of this design was that the design was efficient for identifying associations between the variables of the study and also facilitates the comparison of experiences and outcomes among different demographic groups, aiding in understanding the broader implications of these issues in the workplace environment.

The sample for this study were employees from Kontagora Local government (30 participants), Kontagora Local Education Authority (109 participants), Federal University of Education Kontagora (42 participants), College of Nursing Sciences Kontagora (36 participants), National Association of Private Schools, (37 Participants), General Hospital (157 participants), Banks (9 participants), Nigerian Correctional Services (29 participants). Males were 258 and females were 193. In terms of age, those within the age group of 20 to 40 were 361 which accounted for 80 percent of the participants while those that fell within the age bracket of 41-60 were 40 which accounted for 8.9 percent of the participants and those that were 61 and above were 50 which accounted for 11.1 percent of the participants. The multiple stage sampling technique was adopted for this study. This technique comprised of four phases. In phase one, the researcher trained three research assistants on how the questionnaires will be filled and retrieved. Each Research Assistant including the researcher were assigned one of the four divisions of Kontagora to cover. In phase two, the researcher divided the research area (Kontagora) into four that is Kontagora North, Kontagora South, Kontagora West and Kontagora East. In phase three, the researcher selected organizations that were utilised for the study based on years of existence. That is, those up to 30 years of establishment, the ones that were

up to 20 years of establishment, the ones that were below 10 years of establishment. The reason behind this was to get a fair representation of generational philosophy of each organization and how that philosophy has shaped the vision and mission of organization. In phase four, the researcher and his assistants met the various Managers of the selected organizations in Kontagora North, South, West and East and engage them on the topic under study, explained to them the essence of the study and sought for their permission to allow the researcher to administer the questionnaires to employees of their organization. Thereafter, the researcher and his assistants appreciated all that participated in the study before leaving each organization. The Sexual Harassment Scale was developed by Fitzgerald in (1995) to measure workplace sexual harassment and experiences. The sexual harassment scale of 1995, consists of seventeen items. The workplace sexual harassment scale has a five-response category of the likert format with responses ranging from Never to most of the times. Measurement of the Fitzgerald sexual harassment scale was on this scoring format: 1= never; 2= once; 3= sometimes; 4= often; 5= most of the time. The Sexual Harassment Scale has psychometric properties with a Cronbach alpha of 0.94. The scale is highly valid and known to be widely used by different researchers (examples, Okeke, Chukwu, Eze, & Nwankwo, (2022); Onwe, Eze, & Eme, 2024).

The Professional Development/Career Advancement Scale was developed by Mourão, Tavares, & Sandall (2022) to measure state of professional development/career advancement of workers in different occupations. The scale has a five-response category of the likert format with responses ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Measurement of the scale was on this scoring: 1=Never; 2=Once; 3=Sometimes; 4= Often; 5=Most of the time. The Professional Development/Career Advancement Scale has psychometric properties with a Cronbach alpha of 0.82. The scale is very valid and have been used by different scholars (examples: Ogunleye, Ajayi, Ogunlade, & Ojedokun, 2021 & Adah, R. O., & Adah, 2024). The one way ANOVA was used as the method of data analysis.

Result

Hypothesis: Employees who experience high level of sexual harassment will significantly experience low career advancement compared with employees with who experience low level of sexual harassment in organizations in Kontagora Local Government Area of Niger State.

Table 1:

Source	Type III Sum of Square	df	Mean Square	F	Sig
Corrected Model	4869.636 ^a	52	93.647	1.317	0.078
Intercept	100652.522	1	100652.522	1416.021	.000
Sexual Harassment	4869.636	52	93.647	1.317	.078
Error	28290.329	398	71.081		
Total	314835.000	451			
Corrected Total	33159.965	450			

a. R Squared=.147 (Adjusted R Squared=.035)

The result in table 1 which reflects that: Employees who experience high levels of sexual harassment will significantly experience low career advancement compared with employees who experience low levels of sexual harassment in organizations in Kontagora Local Government Area of Niger State. To evaluate this, a Between-Subjects ANOVA was conducted with Career Advancement (CA) as the dependent variable and Sexual Harassment (SH) levels as the grouping variable. The finding yielded the following results: $F(52, 398) = 1.317, p = .078$. The p-value (.078) is greater than the conventional significance level of .05, indicating that the relationship between sexual harassment and career advancement in this sample is not statistically significant at the 5% level. The estimated means reveals that employees who experience high level of sexual harassment benefited more career advancement 27.615 compared to those who experienced low sexual harassment 25.014. The R^2 value is .147, with an Adjusted R^2 of .035, suggesting that about 3.5% of the variance in career advancement is explained by experiences of sexual harassment. This is a relatively small portion of the overall variance, and the adjusted figure reflects a limited explanatory strength when controlling for other factors. Therefore the hypothesis was rejected.

Discussion

The finding of the study indicates that the relationship between sexual harassment and career advancement is not statistically significant. The justification of the present finding is that workplace

sexual harassment thrives in an environment where there is a culture of silence and secrecy. With this culture, victims may choose not to speak out due to shame, guilt, or fear, which limits the impact on their own career advancement as well as the overall awareness and resolution of the issue. With this, the implication of this finding is that although workplace sexual harassment undeniably poses serious risks to well-being, its impact on career advancement is not a foregone conclusion. With resilient individuals, supportive cultures, robust policies, and fair leadership structures, many employees preserve and even continue to thrive in their career trajectories (Kim & Albrecht, 2025). The finding of Karibasappa (2021) supports the present finding. Nevertheless, the finding is contrary to some of the literatures reviewed such as Adaobi, Mohammed and Adam (2021).

Conclusion

This study was a comparative analysis of career advancement between employees with high and low levels of sexual harassment experience in organizations in Kontagora Local Government Area, using a cross-sectional design with 451 participants and analyzed with a one-way Between-Subjects ANOVA. Although sexual harassment is widely recognized as a major workplace challenge capable of limiting employees' growth and morale, the findings revealed that the relationship between sexual harassment and career advancement was not statistically significant. Surprisingly, the estimated mean scores indicated that employees who reported high levels of sexual harassment (27.615) appeared to benefit slightly more in terms of career advancement than those who reported low levels, suggesting that other organizational or contextual factors may be influencing advancement patterns.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, organizations within Kontagora Local Government Area are encouraged to reinforce workplace policies and mechanisms that protect employees from sexual harassment, including clear reporting channels, strict sanctions, and awareness programs aimed at fostering safe and respectful work environments. Additionally, organizations should adopt transparent, merit-based promotion systems to ensure fair career progression irrespective of employees' vulnerability to workplace misconduct. Future research is recommended to explore qualitative dimensions and alternative organizational factors such as power relations, personal coping strategies, or institutional culture that may explain why employees exposed to higher harassment still

appeared to advance in their careers, thereby generating deeper insights for policymaking and intervention planning.

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