

Sexual Harassment Impedes Targets' Careers and Women Empowerment

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ABSTRACT

Obstacles exist that prevent women from entering, remaining, and advancing in the workforce. While the obstacles vary at each phase, one obstacle is prevalent at every sector of the workforce—sexual harassment. This article addresses how sexual harassment in the workplace impedes women empowerment. A real-life incident of sexual harassment is interwoven with the research to substantiate global research findings regarding the disempowerment of women through sexual harassment. The incident presented involves a white female working in the United States of America at a large behavioral health organization in a midsize city. This article captures the firsthand account from the targeted individual about her experience. The target's narrative was substantiated with documents she kept to support the legal charges she brought against her white male supervisor. This case of Jaclyn and Mr. Paul highlights one of the leading obstacles to female empowerment through professional advancement.

Keywords: Sexual Harassment, Women Empowerment, Equality and Inclusion.

Introduction

On January 20, 2021, Kamala Harris checked a lot of boxes for powerful firsts. She became the first woman U.S. Vice President. She was in good company with Angela Merkel who is serving her fourth term as Chancellor of Germany, and Christine Lagarde as the first woman to head the European Central Bank. Perhaps the epitome of women empowerment is Queen Elizabeth II, who has been on the throne since 1952 as the longest-reigning monarch in British history. Women everywhere are showing the world the power they can possess. Like men, women's power is tied to money and influence that is connected to career advancement. Unfortunately, as exemplary as the greatest women leaders are, workforce trends tell a pessimistic story about women empowerment. Worldwide, less than 50% of working-age women are in the workforce, compared to 74% of men. When considering only single women, the statistic is more optimistic at 82%. However, even single women with no children significantly lag behind their male counterparts in advancing

into leadership positions (Ely & Padavic, 2020). Obstacles exist that prevent women from entering, remaining, and advancing in the workforce. While the obstacles vary at each phase, one obstacle is prevalent at every sector of the workforce—sexual harassment.

This article addresses how sexual harassment in the workplace impedes women empowerment. An incident of sexual harassment is interwoven with the research to substantiate global research findings regarding the disempowerment of women through sexual harassment. The incident presented involves a white female working in the United States of America at a large behavioral health organization. This article captures the firsthand account from the targeted individual about her experience. The target's narrative was substantiated with documents she secured to support the legal charges she brought against her white male supervisor. The victim and violator are referred to as Jaclyn, and Mr. Paul (pseudonyms), respectively. This case of Jaclyn and Mr. Paul highlights one of the leading obstacles to female empowerment through professional advancement.

Due to the sensitive nature of this work the author cannot reveal how this incident came to their attention. Anonymity is also preserved by omitting the direct source from the references. However, based on the documents that the target shared and her willingness to speak openly about her experience, a rare opportunity to authenticate the voice of a target is afforded. This work contributes to the research on sexual harassment in a significant way in that the violator's actions have been documented. Where typical research focuses on the target's experience, violators are often inconsequential, almost invisible. Here, attorney letters, Human Resource statements, court documents, and personal text message exchanges present the realism of sexual harassment and its violators.

Background Summary

On March 8, 2019, Jaclyn's attorney sent a letter to the Human Resource Department to advise the Healthcare Organization to cease retaliation after Jaclyn reported her supervisor, Mr. Paul, for sexual harassment. At the time, Mr. Paul was the Behavioral Health Administrator for the large organization. His oversight included the following departments: Crisis Observation Center, Psychiatric Urgent Care, Crisis Stabilization Center, Mobile Crisis, Inpatient Behavioral Health, and several others. The following letter was sent by Jaclyn's attorney as an attempt to prevent her from a retaliation job loss as a social worker. Several months had passed since she had reported Mr. Paul, what had ceased contact with her. The retaliation was coming from Jaclyn's new supervisor.

Mr. Paul, who is 56 years old, apparently became very attracted to Jaclyn [age 32]. He began bringing her food, asking her to join him for movies and other events. While Jaclyn appreciated the attention, she felt compelled to accept his invitations because he was her supervisor. As they did things socially together, Mr. Paul repeatedly made very suggestive comments to her like "I wanted to kiss you very badly when we were standing outside! A voice inside my head reminded me I am your supervisor!", "Each time I look into your eyes an urge to kiss you comes up." and "You are the most beautiful woman I have ever met." At times, he would look her up and down while they were working together, which he acknowledged in a text message. Finally, on December 15, [2018] Mr. Paul made a sexual advance towards Jaclyn and kissed her. Jaclyn was surprised and reminded him that he was her supervisor. On three other occasions, Mr. Paul kissed her but she did not reciprocate.

When Jaclyn did not reciprocate Mr. Paul's sexual advances, he retaliated. He gave her the cold shoulder, he took away her leadership assignments, he gave her

conflicting assignments, he undermined her with the staff and finally stopped talking to her altogether. Jaclyn was disturbed by the way Mr. Paul's conduct towards her had changed and ultimately felt compelled to raise her concerns with a colleague. That colleague then reported Mr. Paul's behavior and his retaliation to Human Resources.

You and your staff apparently did an investigation but dismissed her concerns as merely a "social relationship" gone bad. You completely failed to recognize the inappropriate nature of Mr. Paul's conduct, given that he was Jaclyn's supervisor and retaliated against her when she did not appropriately respond to his sexual advances...

In a personal interview with the author, Jaclyn explained that she was confused by Mr. Paul's loose boundaries around relating to his employees. But, she trusted him to lead with integrity even when she felt uncomfortable. Jaclyn enjoyed Mr. Paul as a supervisor. She loved his leadership style and how he trusted his employees. He did not micromanage. Jaclyn said she felt Mr. Paul cared a lot about her. He gave her leadership tasks, and he always praised her and showed his appreciation for her hard work. She did not recognize his frequent compliments about her work as harassment, and she had not been employed long enough to know the work culture. When Mr. Paul nominated Jaclyn for a prestigious award after she was employed only a few months, she thought he was grooming her for professional advancement, not workplace romance. She admitted, the more attention he gave her, the harder she worked toward advancing her career. Mr. Paul lived two blocks from Jaclyn. On one occasion, Mr. Paul and Jaclyn had planned an end of the day work meeting. Mr. Paul asked Jaclyn to meet him down the street from their houses at a restaurant. Jaclyn readily accepted the invitation out of convenience. After that occasion, Mr. Paul started inviting her to personal events such as hockey games, movies, and spending time together at his house. Jaclyn became increasingly uncomfortable with his persistent invitations to spend time together. She worked many extra hours alongside Mr. Paul while trying not to disturb his ego. The buildup from implicit to explicit to egregious behaviors of sexual harassment took approximately three months.

These types of barriers to workplace advancement have been corroborated in the research on sexual harassment and professional attainment, including restricted opportunity, intrusive boundaries, and compromised physical and psychological safety (Cassino & Besen-Cassino, 2019; Singh, 2016; United Nations 2020; Villegas, 2019). Saying no to sexual advances often means no to professional advancement. When evidence of "treatment that pressures, provokes, frightens, intimidates, humiliates,

or demeans a person" (Berdahl 2007, p. 641) is verified, a civil rights violation claim can be charged. However, the burden of proof is on the target, and the target alone. Cortina and Areguin (2021) explain, sexual harassment is often implicit rather than explicit and not always easy to verify. Misbehavior usually has to escalate to a traumatic degree before an accusation will be addressed.

Sexual Harassment

No profession or level of achievement is spared the burden of sexual harassment. When Maghraby, Elgibaly, and Gazzar (2020) studied sexual harassment among nurses, they found that close to 60% of the 296 nurses reported some type of sexual harassment. Although 53% of the victims reported that the harassment was verbal, 70% of victims reported they were negatively affected. The researchers concluded that sexual harassment at work could negatively impact the nursing work force. Spencer-Thomas and Joiner (2017) found that 21% of women firefighters in their studies had experienced sexual harassment on the job. The women who identified as victims of sexual harassment had higher rates of suicidality and mental health concerns than women who were not victimized. Zhu, Lyu, and Ye (2019) found an association between sexual harassment and depression when studying 266 participants in the hospitality industry in China. In an Australian survey of female scientists, nearly half of the participants reported at least one incident of sexual harassment at work in their prestigious fields (Nogrady 2019).

Confronting sexual harassment in the workplace comes with consequences that make reporting incidences difficult for targets on a global basis. Mogapaesi's (2019) research shows that the absence of laws concerning sexual harassment in the workplace makes it difficult for Botswana, South African women to seek justice. Malaysian organizations also have low legislation protection against workplace sexual harassment according to study results by Tan, Kwan, Yahaya, Maakip, & Voo (2020). In addition to legal tolerance, workplace tolerance also authorizes sexual harassment, even when policies are in place. Ford, Ivancic and Scarduzio (2021) recruited 187 online participants who experienced or witnessed sexual harassment at work. Participants completed surveys about their perceptions of workplace tolerance of sexual harassment based on their experience. Results were that the level of tolerance in the workplace did not influence victims' willingness to speak up. Women who had been targeted were unlikely to break their silence, regardless of policies in place concerning sexual harassment. Moreover, victims experienced more

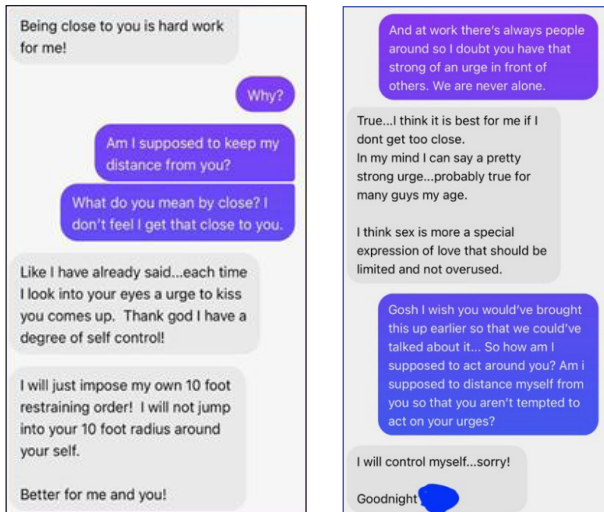
emotional distress when they formally reported their sexual harassment. Targets often make futile attempts to deal with the situation on their own.

The first several times Mr. Paul invited Jaclyn out to a hockey game, she declined by coming up with reasons why she could not go. However, persistent invitations made it clear that she would not advance her career without spending time with Mr. Paul. She attended a few movies and stopped by his house once when he requested her to meet his two school-aged sons. On one occasion, Jaclyn offered Mr. Paul a spare ticket to a mental health forum, but did not expect to go together. Her invitation was not exclusive to Mr. Paul and was not intended to advance a personal relationship with him. However, the types of interactions initiated by Mr. Paul were exclusive to Jaclyn as a target.

Mr. Paul made his affection towards Jaclyn known to her approximately three months after spending time together outside of work. He sent a text message to Jaclyn stating that when he sees her he has the urge to kiss her. Jaclyn, caught off guard, replied "what am I supposed to do with that?" Mr. Paul apologized for the inappropriate comment as her supervisor. However, a few weeks later Mr. Paul did eventually kiss her, four times over the course of their interactions. Text messages shown to Human Resources and Jaclyn's attorney confirm that on Christmas Day 2018, Mr. Paul expressed disappointment that Jaclyn declined his offer to come to his house. However, after insisting that she spend time with him, Jaclyn complied with his request. She went to his home on Christmas Day and visited with Mr. Paul and his children for an hour, which was less time than Mr. Paul desired.

Jaclyn observed Mr. Paul's advances creeping into their workspace as well. She asked Mr. Paul about his romantic stares that she noticed him making towards her at work. He confirmed that his gazes were intentional because she was the most beautiful woman he had ever known. Mr. Paul texted Jaclyn, "I cannot see how any normal single man who is interested in women could escape having a crush on you...myself included." Jaclyn typically deflected advances like this by downplaying them, such as suggesting to Mr. Paul that he needs his eyes checked. But sometimes Mr. Paul just expanded, such as the following stream of text messages.

Mr. Paul disclosed to Jaclyn that he met both of his ex-wives at his place of employment at the time. He often discussed his desire to have a family again. Jaclyn accommodated his attentiveness but her interest in him was professional. Coworkers became suspicious about



Jaclyn's relationship with Mr. Paul, noticing that he was spending more time in the department when Jaclyn was working. At one point, Mr. Paul requested Jaclyn to take time off because some colleagues complained about his preferential treatment towards her. Jaclyn became even more confused about her relationship with Mr. Paul. If she complied with his favoritism toward her she was disliked by coworkers, and if she resisted it, she feared retaliation by Mr. Paul. Jaclyn felt increasingly disempowered and that her career was in jeopardy.

Eventually, Mr. Paul began to withdraw his attention from Jaclyn. But, he did not just withdraw his personal interest; he began to show signs of retaliation. His professional responsibility toward Jaclyn waned. He took excessively long to respond even when his approval, as her director, was needed for her to adequately perform her job. He withdrew his attention, stopped praising her for her work, removed her leadership assignments, and cut off essential work-related communication with her. An end to the sexual advances brought an end to the professional support as well. Out of professional concern, Jaclyn disclosed, to a colleague, Mr. Paul's lack of professional responsiveness toward her. Jaclyn's colleague, who was higher ranking, insisted on reporting Mr. Paul to the Human Resource Department after finding out the extent of Mr. Paul's behaviors toward Jaclyn, particularly the text messages. Jaclyn's colleague reported to Human Resources that Jaclyn feared that Mr. Paul would further retaliate against her for reporting his behavior.

Response to Sexual Harassment

Following Jaclyn's claim, she was subjected to a hostile work environment and was retaliated against by

management staff as well as Human Resources for the duration of her employment. Her supervisors and the Human Resources Department held nearly twenty meetings with Jaclyn where she was aggressively interrogated for excessive periods. Prior to her complaint, she had never received any disciplinary actions. When she presented Mr. Paul's intimate text messages, she felt Human Resources focused more on her response and whether she told him to stop. They viewed her as a participant rather than a victim, ignoring the power imbalance. She felt re-victimized and unsupported.

According to the follow-up letter Jaclyn received from her complaint, the Human Resources Department determined no wrongdoing. Part of it read as follows.

"You and your supervisor had at least 4 social encounters outside of work that were initiated by your supervisor; at least two encounters that were initiated by you before and after the supervisors; the supervisor engaged in personal social media messages with you which included statements like telling you that you were "beautiful"; and that there had been at least one kiss between you."

However, unbeknownst to Jaclyn at the time, the consequences for Mr. Paul's behavior included a reduction in salary, a requirement to self-report his misconduct to the Social Work Licensing Board, and attend additional training. These consequences were revealed to Jaclyn during the legal process, long after her termination.

Having ignored the legitimacy of sexual harassment, the professional environment became a source of emotional distress for Jaclyn. Human Resources replaced Mr. Paul with a woman supervisor. The newly assigned supervisor was married to a police officer who had resigned after being accused of sexual harassment by multiple women. The lawsuit was publically noted in the news, however, the Human Resources Department refused to acknowledge the potential conflict of interest. Jaclyn felt targeted for conflict and intimidation. She said that the retaliatory harassment was more emotionally and professionally damaging than the sexual harassment. Feeling hopeless, in May, 2019, she filed a discrimination charge with the Civil Rights Commission and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). Despite policy against sexual harassment, research shows that many organizations fail to show support to targets when they report it (Fitzgerald, 1993; Tan, Kwan, Yahaya, Maakip, I., & Voo, 2020.)

"One thing I struggled a lot with was not understanding how management groomed the environment and put many of my coworkers against me. I had a really hard time

with that. I lost all my friends through this. My best friend was in another department and they started retaliating against her. They even banned her from coming to the department I worked in. She knew how they were treating me was wrong. But it was costing her her job. One day she texted me saying she can't be friends with me anymore. This ruined my relationship with the colleague I was really close with who initially reported it to HR. People didn't want to associate themselves with me at work in fear that they would be the next target. Management often created situations to make it look like I had conflict with coworkers so that coworkers were complaining about me to make it look like this wasn't retaliation because it's coming from coworkers and not Mr. Paul or management."

Tan, Kwan, Yahaya, Maakip, & Voo (2020) underscores the importance of understanding how victims and witnesses cope with sexual harassment experience in order to help prevent it. Most targets never report incidents at work, much less file a legal case, particularly in unsupportive environments. According to research by Cheung, Baum, and Hsueh (2018), Asian tour leaders use extremely passive coping strategies in response to sexual harassment. Most targets normalize the harassment or deny the effects for fear of losing their job. Ignoring the misbehavior ultimately backfires. Victims are often perceived as participants once they fail to identify and report any inappropriate activity of the violator. However, reporting comments or invitations to spend time together is rarely taken seriously, and as soon as the first report is made, target's employment become jeopardized. For example, if Jaclyn would have reported Mr. Paul's invitation to meet at the restaurant, the gesture likely would have been viewed as collegial. As long as targets feel like they can manage the situation, they do not report. The retaliation phase is often when reports are made, which backfires on the target. Investigators often confuse the victim of retaliation, focusing on the target as the problem.

Although targets may normalize what is happening, coworkers often do not. Mainiero (2020) documents that coworkers are often suspicious of relationships between workers and supervisors and such a relationship disrupts the work environment. Preferential treatment is a common complaint that ultimately lowers productivity of a team. In Jaclyn's case, Mr. Paul had nominated her for an award that she was not eligible to receive. The prestigious award he nominated her for after working there only three months required a minimum of six months of employment. This type of preferential treatment may have undermined Jaclyn's relationship with her coworkers and made it difficult for them to respond to her with empathy. Jaclyn felt like she had to walk on eggshells around everyone, and that she did not know who to

trust. She explained that Mr. Paul's retaliation was nothing compared to the four-management staff.

Mr. Paul's retaliation was mainly him cutting communication with me. He oversaw many departments so he was too busy to micromanage me and accuse me of things. He just stopped coming to my department and answering questions relating to patient care. After I filed a complaint against him, he left me alone and didn't engage in further retaliation. So, from February 2019–July 2019 when I was fired, he was out of the picture and had nothing to do with it. The management team went out of their way to accuse me of nonsense things. They had to make their accusations look like it wasn't related to my sexual harassment complaint and they had to make it look like it wasn't just one person targeting me. My supervisors, along with the Human Resources Department, came hammering down on me about things and they tried to make it look like a pattern of behavior... they made it broad like "communication issues" and they tried tying everything to me having communication problems. They would repeatedly claim that other coworkers made statements I knew were untrue, and they refused to allow me to discuss the issues with these coworkers to clarify what was said.

The fear of job loss is well-documented in sexual harassment research (Birinshikaj & Guggisberg, 2017; Cassino & Besen-Cassino, 2019; Fitzgerald, 1993; Ford, Ivancic, & Scarduzio, 2021; Hom, Stanley, Spencer-Thomas, & Joiner, 2017; Rugulies, Sørensen, Aldrich, Folker, Friborg, Kjaer, Nielsen, Sorensen, & Madsen, 2020; Zhu, Lyu, & Ye, 2019). Hart (2019) conducted causal research to demonstrate the stigmatization and bias against women who self-report. Participants in the United States of America were asked to complete a performance review on a hypothetical candidate for a job promotion. In the controlled case, the candidate had no history of sexual harassment. In the experimental case, the candidate had a pending case of sexual harassment based on a self-report. Results showed that participants were significantly less likely to recommend the promotion to the candidate with a pending sexual harassment case. Yet, women are constantly criticized for not reporting sooner. Women are forced into silence to keep their path to career advancement and empowerment open.

Experiencing workplace sexual harassment can deplete a target of emotional resilience even after the original harassment stops. The stigma and retaliation are long-lasting. Instead of trying to manage one person's inappropriate affection, Jaclyn had to manage an entire staff's aggression. Jaclyn's six-month performance evaluation was postponed 90 days and was told it was due to the change in supervisors. However, her other colleagues

in the department received their performance evaluations on time. Jaclyn also felt that her evaluation did not accurately reflect her work as a social worker in the department. Many statements in the evaluation were untrue and multiple events that were described occurred when Mr. Paul was her supervisor. However, Jaclyn was told that none of the information in her evaluation came from him. Jaclyn was placed on probation and denied a department transfer as an outcome of her evaluation. Jaclyn felt powerless, could not thrive, and admitted to having suicidal ideation. Several therapists she contacted turned her away and refused to work with her due to her current legal involvement from her sexual harassment claim. Most therapists she inquired with did not want to risk having to testify in court. This rejection deepened her depression as she felt isolated and alone.

Friborg, Hansen, Aldrich, Folker, Kjær, Nielsen, Rugulies, and Madsen, (2017) analyzed data from the Work Environment and Health in Denmark cohort study (WEHD) and the Work Environment Activities in Danish Workplaces Study (WEADW) collected in 2012. The data set included 7603 employees and supervisors in 1041 organizations within 5 occupations. Using regression analyses to adjust for gender, age, occupation, and socio-economic position, they concluded that a significant relationship exists between depression and workplace sexual harassment. Birinxhikaj and Guggisberg, M. (2017) found that self-blame was also a common response in their Australian study. Jaclyn blamed herself too. In an email to her attorney she wrote, "I don't know how I keep falling in these traps. I feel so stupid that I didn't see it coming."

Termination

Jaclyn also did not see termination coming. She knew management was trying to push her out, but was caught off guard on July 11, 2019. That morning, when she showed up to work as usual, she was greeted at the door by management staff, who took her directly to the Human Resources office. There, she was informed she was being terminated for an alleged complaint made against her by a coworker. Jaclyn was not given the coworker's name or an explanation of the accusations. Human Resources refused to answer any questions from Jaclyn during that time. She was given a letter to sign to acknowledge that she was being terminated, effective immediately. Then, she was escorted to her car without permission to claim any personal belongings. After filing a charge of harassment and retaliation with the Civil Rights Commission and the EEOC, a lawsuit was filed in November 2020. The case was settled in July 2021. Jaclyn asserted, in her

interview with the author, that there is no adequate compensation for the psychological harm endured as a result of her employment there.

McLaughlin, Uggen, and Blackstone (2017) examined the relationship between workplace sexual harassment and women's career attainment. Their findings indicated that women who identified as a target of sexual harassment had more financial stress and that the stress was mediated by a job change. Targets were six times more likely to change jobs than their peers. Bias in promoting candidates who report sexual harassment was shown by Hart (2019) using hypothetical situations. Despite the move toward gender parity among medical students, Raj, Kumra, Darmstadt, and Freund, (2019) showed a decline in female faculty as the rank gets higher. They contributed the decline to sexual harassment.

Sexual harassment is a disempowering experience. In the few percentages of cases where a formal complaint is filed, the majority of sexual harassment cases are settled outside of court. Time, money, and emotional investment are deterrents to taking a case to trial. Jaclyn's 2020 case was scheduled to go to trial in November 2022. Targets and businesses want to avoid damaging their public and professional reputations. Jaclyn feels like her earning potential has declined because of the lawsuit. She is fearful about misinterpreting male's professional courtesies for romantic interest and vice versa. She hopes to avoid further discrimination of being seen as a trouble-maker at work. Disempowerment in the workplace necessarily presents professional obstacles. The stigmatization of women, like Jaclyn, who self-report sexual harassment means that they also lose human capital. Colleagues often dislike them, so obtaining references is difficult. Therefore, obtaining future work is difficult. (Berdahl, 2007; Birinxhikaj, & Guggisberg, 2017; Cassino & Besen-Cassino, 2019; Fitzgerald, 1993; McLaughlin, Uggen, & Blackstone, 2017).

For several months, Jaclyn described herself as "living in crisis mode." She says the impact of the sexual harassment and the response to it did not hit her until after she was terminated. Jaclyn identifies her experience as trauma, and continues to recover. She stated to the author,

Today, I struggle with debilitating anxiety and have experienced panic attacks and have thrown-up after several in-person job interviews. Office settings with authority figures asking me questions with the door closed trigger traumatic memories from being abusively interrogated behind closed doors. Since being fired, I have been prescribed

medication to treat nausea and vomiting. I suffer every time I am triggered and reminded of my traumatic experiences. I suffer from symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, including suicidal ideations, feelings of detachment and isolation, insomnia or excessive fatigue, anxiety, depression, feelings of worthlessness, guilt, and shame. I am under the care of a counselor.

Despite Jaclyn's efforts, she has been unable to find long-term employment with benefits but has found part-time work outside of her county. This part-time employment without full benefits requires her to drive additional hours each week. She requests that meetings with her supervisor are held with office doors open and performs most of her duties outside of an office. She is happy that her lawsuit is over so that she can move on with her life. However, receiving a settlement did little for her trauma responses. She is a little more unsure of herself, and experiences dissonance about all relationships with men. Her trust has gone way down. She feels just as betrayed by women who protect men's dishonorable behavior. She feels this ruined her professional reputation and doubts that she will ever hold a high-ranking position in her field. Nevertheless, she still has some fight left in her and is regaining her sense of power.

Conclusion

Gender economic disparities contribute significantly to the continued disempowerment of women around the globe. Liu Zhenmin, UN Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, called on all nations to accelerate efforts toward empowerment of women and girls to ensure gender equality by 2030 (United Nations, 2020). Economic power is interwoven with political influence, health outcomes, and educational access, which are the cornerstones of personal authority. Independence, although not synonymous, is embedded in empowerment. The ability to choose and create outcomes that are personally desirable requires a significant degree of financial freedom. Thus, professional access and advancement are critical areas of women empowerment.

However, access is impeded where sexual harassment is allowed to fester. Creating opportunity without safety to pursue it impedes progress. Catch-22 circumstances surrounding women's economic power for empowerment keep gender equity out of reach. Entering fields, retaining jobs, and advancing make women susceptible to workplace sexual harassment. Some women opt to not work to avoid the pressure. Other women remain in positions less than their talent would support to avoid gender

isolation that makes them vulnerable to sexual harassment. Women who are targeted often remain silent to avoid retaliation. The small percentage of women who do report suffer emotional as well as economic consequences. In general, women have to be willing to accept lower salary and higher stress levels in unsafe environments to perform the same job as men peers. Raj, Kumra, Darmstadt, and Freund, (2019) concluded from their research on gender parity and sexual harassment in the workplace that gender parity is not sufficient to address workplace sexual harassment; normative changes are needed.

No wonder gains in educational achievement have had little impact on career field participation. Women remain overrepresented in "pink-collar" jobs characterized by low pay. Regardless of the fields women enter, they still earn a portion of the salary of their male counterparts. Moreover, women who work in male-dominated fields or at supervisory levels are targeted more often for sexual harassment. Professional achievement should not compromise one's personal empowerment. Yet, research on sexual harassment indicates that women lag in the ability to choose and create outcomes that are personally desirable. Talks of gender equity must go beyond financial comparisons. Women's ability to sustain mental wellness in the workplace must be considered. Environments must be physically and psychologically safe. When employees are harmed, justice must be accessible. Money and career advancements are not substitutes for safety and mental wellness.

Competing Interest Statement

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