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The incidence of sexual harassment at higher education institutions in South Africa: perceptions of academic staff

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This article aims to investigate the perceptions of academic staff relating to the incidence of sexual harassment at higher education institutions in South Africa. The results show a relatively low incidence level of sexual harassment, with gender harassment being more prevalent than unwanted sexual attention and *quid pro quo* harassment. No statistically significant effect of gender, age, population group or years of service was found on the perceptions of the incidence of sexual harassment.

Die voorkoms van seksuele teistering in hoër opvoedkundige instellings in Suid-Afrika: persepsies van akademiese personeel

Hierdie artikel het ten doel om die persepsies van akademiese personeel met betrekking tot die voorkoms van seksuele teistering te bestudeer. Die resultate het aangetoon dat daar 'n relatiewe lae voorkoms van seksuele teistering bestaan. Geslagsteistering kom meer voor as onwelkome seksuele aandag of *quid pro quo* teistering. Geslag, ouderdom, bevolkingsgroep of jare diens het nie 'n statisties beduidende effek op die persepsies van die voorkoms van seksuele teistering gehad nie.

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Although sexual harassment may appear to be a relatively new phenomenon in South Africa, it has been a problem since men and women have had to interact in the work environment (*cf* Basson 2007: 425, Rycroft *et al* 2005, Snyman-Van Deventer & De Bruin 2002: 197). The potential for sexual harassment exists as long as the power relationship between men and women in the workplace is unequal (Schultz 1998: 15). The perceived increase in the reporting of sexual harassment by the media may be ascribed to both the increasing number of women entering the workplace and an increased assertiveness of women who are now more aware of their rights. Male-dominated occupations and organisations are transforming to a state of equity, and the consequent challenge of this new organisational culture may contribute to an increase in reported cases. Higher education institutions in South Africa are no exception is this regard.

While relatively few court cases are reported in South Africa, Nel (1993: 244) indicates that 76% of all females are exposed to sexual harassment at some stage in their careers or professional lives. In the first reported case of sexual harassment in South African courts,[1] it was stated that 63% of all females in Johannesburg are subjected to sexual harassment. It should be noted that the absence or low rate of reporting is not necessarily an indication of no cases of sexual harassment.

Attempts at achieving employment equity results in increased diversification of the workplace, and increased levels of sexual harassment may occur due to the increased interaction of genders and races. While this is conjecture at present, it does warrant further scientific investigation. When considering the significantly high penalties imposed by the courts on employers who are found guilty of vicarious liability related to sexual harassment,[2] it is evident that employers cannot afford to disregard the negative consequences for themselves, their organisations and the individual employee. Any attempt to address the problems caused by sexual harassment in the workplace should commence with an audit of the present situation

1 *Cf* J v M 1998 10 ILJ 755 (IC) 757E-J.
2 *Cf* J v M 1998 10 ILJ 755 (IC) 757E-J.

in order to determine the extent of the problem. This entails a measurement of the level of the incidence of harassing behaviours. The case of *Orr & Another versus Unisa*[3] took place at the largest university in South Africa, which begs the question of whether this was an isolated incident or an example of widespread sexual harassment in South African universities. In the absence of previous research on the incidence of sexual harassment among academic staff in South Africa, the effective planning and managing of the phenomenon becomes problematic. Higher education institutions should set an example for other organisations by being free of any form of discrimination and harassment, including sexual harassment.[4]

1. Literature review

1.1 Sexual harassment

The diversity of the parties involved in sexual harassment, their backgrounds, cultures and perceptions makes defining what exactly constitutes sexual harassment a nearly impossible task. This uncertainty is highlighted by Glick (1997: 32) who states: "What is harassment to one woman may not be to another. While a shrinking violet may complain about anything, others wouldn't bat an eyelid". She further explains this by indicating that women workers are not homogeneous and that the atmosphere may differ between different types of working environments. Therefore, one definition may not satisfy every complainant, harasser, employer and lawyer. Despite these limitations, it is suggested that the definition provided by the 2005 Amended Code of Good Practice on the Handling of Sexual Harassment Cases,[5] which was issued in terms of the Labour Relations Act (no 66 of 1995) (RSA 1995), be used as a universally accepted definition of sexual harassment. In all probability, this definition will be used by courts and councils when a case of sexual harassment is arbitrated, and will

3 *Orr & Another versus Unisa* [2004] 9 BLLR 954 (LC)

4 In order to remain neutral and not to imply that only females are harassed by males, the gender-neutral terms "harasser" and "harassed" will be used throughout this article.

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aid employers in providing an objective and "legal" definition of sexual harassment. According to this Code, sexual harassment is defined as follows:

> Sexual harassment is unwanted conduct of a sexual nature that violates the rights of an employee and constitutes a barrier to equity in the workplace, taking into account all of the following factors: a) whether the harassment is on the prohibited grounds of sex and/or gender and/or sexual orientation; b) whether the sexual conduct was unwelcome; c) the nature and extent of the sexual conduct, and d) the impact of the sexual conduct on the employee.

1.2 Classification

Sexual harassment is broadly divided into two categories, namely *quid pro quo* and hostile work environment. The grounds for this distinction are the existence of employment actions that are linked to the sexual behaviour. *Quid pro quo* harassment occurs when sexual favours are demanded in exchange for work-related benefits such as promotion and salary increase. The use or abuse of power is tantamount to this type of harassment as the harasser usually has the ability to reward or withhold benefits from the employee. A hostile work environment is created when an employer, supervisor or colleague engages in behaviour regarded as sexually offensive by the harassed, and refers to actions such as sexual jokes, posters, e-mails and touching (Grobler *et al* 2003: 37).

The classification of behaviours into a specific category is not always possible, as some behaviour can be verbal, non-verbal, physical and threatening in the extreme. Any form of sexual harassment remains an extremely serious offence and employers should not concentrate on the classification but rather focus on the prevention, training and correct handling of complaints by collecting evidence and following a fair procedure. The classification of the 2005 Amended Code of Good Practice on the Handling of Sexual Harassment Cases in the Workplace[6] in terms of Section 203(2) of the Labour Relations Act (no 66 of 1995) (RSA 1995) will be used as a guideline in this article as it facilitates the structuring of the questionnaire according to a legal and universally acceptable format.

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When the multitude of examples of sexual harassment, as described in the literature, is considered, it is evident that a variety of actions can be considered sexually offensive. Notice should be taken at this stage of the subjective nature of this phenomenon and the difference in perceptions of different genders, races and cultures as to what constitutes sexual harassment and what does not (*cf* Corr & Jackson 2001: 537, Rotunda *et al* 2001: 914). Table 1 summarises examples of the different forms of sexual harassment, as reported in the literature.

Table 1: Forms of sexual harassment

Physical harassment	Verbal harassment	Non-verbal harassment	*Quid pro quo* harassment
Touching	Unwelcome suggestions or hints	Unwelcome gestures	Attempts to influence process of employment
Sexual assault	Sexual advances	Indecent exposure	Person in position of authority rewards only those who respond to sexual advances
Actual/attempted rape	Comments with sexual overtones	Display of sexually explicit pictures and objects	Insinuation that lack of sexual submission will affect employment
Strip search by opposite sex	Sex-related jokes or insults	Sexually suggestive looks, staring or ogling	Punishment for refusing to comply with propositions
Kissing and hugging	Comments about a person's body	Suggestive body language	Rewards for sexual co-operation
Fondling	Enquiries about a person's sex life	Sexually oriented letters, faxes or e-mails	
	Unwelcome whistling directed at a person/group		

Source: Green & Retief 2001: 48, Grobler *et al* 2003: 40

1.3 Effects of sexual harassment on the workplace

Sexual harassment is an intrapersonal phenomenon and a discussion of its effects should focus first on the effects – psychological, physiological and career-related reactions – experienced by the harassed. Psychological reactions include denial, avoidance, depression, shock, anger, fear, frustration, irritability, insecurity, embarrassment, confusion, feelings of powerlessness, shame, self-consciousness, low self-esteem, guilt, self-blame and isolation (O'Hare & O'Donohue 1998: 562, Schell 2003: 353). These psychological reactions may also manifest in different physiological reactions, such as headaches, lethargy, gastrointestinal distress, dermatological reactions, weight fluctuations, sleep disturbances, nightmares, phobias, panic reactions and even sexual problems. Employees who have been sexually harassed may suffer career-related effects, which may include decreased job satisfaction, loss of job or promotion, drop in work performance and a resultant impact on productivity. In addition, sexual harassment may lead to increased absenteeism and use of sick leave, a drop in morale of employees and a negative impact on the image of an organisation if the harassment becomes known publicly (Ramsaroop & Brijball Parumasur 2007: 25, 27).

The work of Luthar & Pastille (2000) on the perceptions of sexual harassment in superior-subordinate interaction has important implications for this study. They suggest, as far as the education of subordinates is concerned, that highly educated individuals may be more sensitive to sexual harassment behaviour and protective of their rights. This means that those with university degrees are less likely to experience sexual harassment, as this normally translates into higher levels of sensitivity as well as higher levels of personal power for the subordinate. This should lessen the tendency of superiors to become sexual harassers. Since this study is conducted among institutions of higher learning only, which consist to a large extent of relatively highly qualified employees (academics), this statement will be re-evaluated.

1.4 Role of power

A number of authors contend that power, and not sex, is the root cause of sexual harassment. To be more precise, power sharing between men and women, the unequal distribution of power between the genders, and the skewed representation of genders in different occupations, industries and job levels, seem to contribute to complaints of sexual harassment by workers (Caudron 1995: 52). This situation is not unique to the workplace, as society is characterised by examples of gender differences, in particular the insensitive treatment of these differences by either gender. In their study Pryor *et al* (1995: 76) found that the men who are most likely to engage in sexual harassment associate sex with social dominance. These men transfer their elevated positions of power in society to the workplace and seem unable to differentiate between appropriate and inappropriate sexual behaviour. A study by Caudron (1995: 53) reports cases of sex discrimination and sexual harassment of men in a female-dominated culture. Although these kinds of reports are rare in the literature, it serves to underline the notion that power, and not specifically gender leads people to oppress others.

Schultz (1998: 15) summarises the issue of power versus sex, stressing that, once it is realised that the problem is not sex but sexism, the concept of harassment can be fully understood to be a form of discrimination because it involves men exercising their power to punish women, as workers, who have the temerity to say no (to sex). It should be emphasised at this point that this situation can be equally applicable to women in positions of power who punish men for the same reason. This approach to sexual harassment is in line with the Employment Equity Act (no 55 of 1998) (RSA 1998), which lists sexual harassment as a form of unfair discrimination that is prohibited in the workplace.

2. Methodology

A survey design was used as it provides data both from a sample of academic staff representing different occupation levels in the

institution and from different genders, population groups, age categories and members with varying years of service (Burns & Grové 1993).

2.1 Participants

All 23 higher education institutions in South Africa were invited to participate in the study. Based on their responses, a purposive sample (Maree 2007: 178) of 10 institutions was used. In their analysis of sexual harassment policies at selected higher education institutions in South Africa, Wilken & Badenhorst (2003: 200) regard eight universities as being "sufficiently representative of the current higher education sector in South Africa". This sample contains five traditional and two comprehensive universities, as well as three universities of technology. As such, it is regarded as representative of the changed landscape of higher education in South Africa. The names of the academic staff members were obtained from the official Internet websites of the institutions and a random systematic sample of 10% of all participating institutions was drawn (Bless & Higson-Smith 2004: 88). Questionnaires were sent to 710 participants.

A response rate of 22.8% (n = 162) was achieved. The participants in this study represent academic staff on different post levels, and range from junior lecturers to professors and deans of faculties. Owing to the confidentiality and the sensitivity of the research topic, no individual responses for the participating institutions will be reported. The participants are representative of the population because they are in academic positions and are in interaction with the various role players at their respective institutions. This places them in a position to provide information on the perceived incidence of sexual harassment.

Of the participants 64% were female and the majority of participants (33.5%) fell in the 31 to 39 age groups, and 52.8% had a master's degree. The majority of the study population (20.5%) had been employed by their institutions for periods of between five and seven years.

2.2 Measuring instrument

The Sexual Harassment Questionnaire (SHQ) was developed to meet the research objectives and consists of two sections. Section A was designed to obtain biographical information from the respondents. Section B consists of 22 items designed to collect information about the opinions of staff on the incidence of sexual harassment at their institutions. The experience of the respondent was assessed using a 4-point scale, which allowed respondents to indicate whether they have personally experienced (1) or observed (2) incidents of sexual harassment or whether they are aware (3) or not aware (4) of these incidents.

The items correlate to some extent with the examples provided in the 2005 Amended Code of Good Practice on the Handling of Sexual Harassment Cases in the Workplace,[7] in terms of Section 203(2) of the Labour Relations Act (no 66 of 1995) (RSA 1995). These items are grouped into five dimensions, namely sexual favouritism, non-verbal harassment, verbal harassment, physical conduct and *quid pro quo* harassment. This section also contains the direct question (criterion item): "Have you ever been sexually harassed on campus?" This is followed by options to indicate gender, job level and relationship of the alleged harasser with the victim. Questionnaires were mailed during July 2008 to the selected sample after their addresses were obtained from the websites of their respective institutions. Participation in the study was voluntary and participants were requested to return the completed questionnaires via mail. For ethical reasons, neither the participants nor their respective institutions are identified.

3. Results

Figure 1 depicts the frequencies of the different forms of sexual harassment and gives an indication of the forms that were most personally experienced, that staff members have observed most and are aware of the most. This figure clearly shows that gender harassment is the most prevalent form of sexual harassment that

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was personally experienced, observed and that academic staff are aware of, followed by verbal and non-verbal harassment. *Quid pro quo* harassment was the least experienced, observed and aware of type of sexual harassment.

Figure1: Frequencies of types of harassment

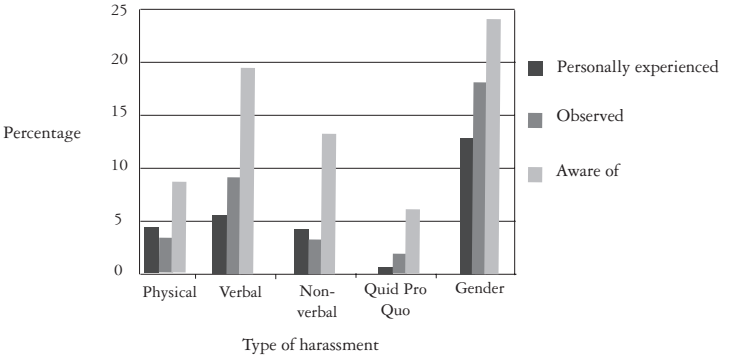

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of physical, verbal, non-verbal, *quid pro quo* harassment and sexism

	Mean	*SD*	Skewness	Kurtosis
Physical harassment	3.80	0.34	-1.99	3.67
Verbal harassment	3.46	0.64	-1.29	1.12
Non-verbal harassment	3.62	0.53	-1.64	2.43
Quid pro quo harassment	3.81	0.35	-2.17	4.89
Gender harassment	2.99	1.07	-0.63	-0.91

The Cronbach *alpha* value obtained for all the items intended to measure the incidence of sexual harassment is 0.89, which is higher than the guideline $\alpha > 0.70$. Therefore, it appears that all the measuring instruments in this study have acceptable levels of internal consistency. The information reflected in Table 2 indicates that the scores on all the variables have a normal distribution, with a negative skewness (skewed left) and a leptokurtic shape (Doane & Seward

2007). The z-values for skewness are > 1.96 (p < 0.01), except for gender harassment.

Table 3: Pearson correlation coefficients

	1	2	3	4	5	6
Physical harassment	-					
Verbal harassment	0.65**	-				
Non-verbal harassment	0.54**	0.73**	-			
Quid pro quo harassment	0.53**	0.45**	0.31**	-		
Gender harassment	0.47**	0.62**	0.49**	0.27**	-	
Sexual harassment	0.36**	0.44**	0.41**	0.30**	0.27**	-

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table 3 indicates a practically significant correlation coefficient (p < 0.01) with a large effect (r > 0.70) between verbal and non-verbal harassment. A practically significant correlation of a medium effect (r > 0.30) exists between physical, verbal, non-verbal and *quid pro quo* harassment and sexism, as well as between the control item of sexual harassment and physical, verbal, non-verbal and *quid pro quo* harassment. Analyses of variance were performed on various variables with the various demographic groups and no significant relationship was found between the individual characteristics of academic staff (gender, population group, age and years of service) and the perceived incidence of sexual harassment at higher education institutions in South Africa.

4. Discussion

The majority of existing research on sexual harassment in academia has examined sexual relations between academics and

students and/or among students.[8] Very few studies have focused on sexual harassment among academics and no study could be found that examined this phenomenon in South Africa in this context. Academics are regarded as role models for future professionals and they should always strive to maintain ethically sound relationships with colleagues and with students. Research results of the incidence of sexual harassment will increase awareness and understanding of this phenomenon, and will assist higher education institutions in evaluating their current approaches of dealing with and minimising incidents of sexual harassment on their campuses.

A frequency analysis of the responses indicates only four items with relatively high reported levels of the perceived incidence of the forms of sexual harassment. Two of the items (comments with sexual undertones and sex-related jokes/insults) are forms of verbal harassment, while the other two (different treatment because of gender and sexist remarks about gender role) are considered to be examples of sexism/gender discrimination. These two items also represent the highest frequency of incidents that were personally experienced (13%) and observed (19.8% & 18%) by respondents. Therefore, it appears that academic staff personally experience gender harassment more frequently than the traditional forms of sexual harassment. This may be an indication of prevalent gender discrimination on South African higher education campuses and may be explained by the transformation that has taken place since 1994. Higher education institutions were traditionally male-dominated and the increasing number of female academics may contribute to a perception of gender harassment/discrimination. Further research would be required to substantiate this observation. This finding is supported by the study of O'Hare *et al* (1998: 574), conducted at a large Midwestern university in the USA, which found that the most prevalent types of sexual harassment reported by academic staff and by students were gender harassment, followed by certain forms of unwanted sexual attention.

8 *Cf* Barak *et al* 2006, Gouws & Kritzinger 2007, Larocca & Kromrey 1999, O'Hare *et al* 1998, Ramsaroop *et al* 2007, Richman *et al* 1999.

Prevalence rates of cases of gender harassment, unwanted sexual attention and sexual coercion have been estimated by Fitzgerald & Omerond (Schell 2003: 352) to be 50% and over, 20-25% and over and 5-10%, respectively. The ratio of these different forms of harassment corresponds with those found in this study. The second most frequent form of harassment is verbal/non-verbal while very low levels of physical harassment have been reported. An interesting observation is made regarding the consistently higher frequencies of incidents that respondents were aware of in comparison to those that they experienced or observed. It would therefore seem that more incidents of sexual harassment exist than are reported by academic staff. Very few (8%) of the respondents indicated that they have been sexually harassed at their institution. This finding may be explained by previous research that suggests that sexual harassment in general is underreported (Bagilhole & Woodward 1995: 49, Gutek 1985). It is difficult to interpret this figure as no other study has attempted to determine the level of sexual harassment among academic staff at higher education institutions in South Africa. Another way of interpreting this figure is to apply it to the study population and to infer that 8% of all academic staff members at higher education institutions in South Africa have experienced some form of sexual harassment.

An analysis of the characteristics of the alleged harassers, as indicated by those who feel that they have been sexually harassed at their institution, shows that the majority of harassers were male colleagues at a higher job level than that of the harassed. This finding is consistent with previous research concerning the role of power in workplace relations.[9] This finding highlights gender differences in perceptions of sexual harassment. Males are possibly more likely to regard physical and verbal sexual attention as a compliment. This is contrary to women who are more likely to regard this type of attention as threatening and offensive.

The overall internal consistency (Cronbach *alpha* coefficient) of 0.89 for all the items of this section of the SHQ is consistent with

9 *Cf* Luthar *et al* 2000, Pryor *et al* 1995, Rudman *et al* 1995, Schutz 1998, Stockdale 1996.

other similar studies that have reported reliability coefficients ranging from 0.78 to 0.88 (Paludi & Barickman 1991: 168, Whatley & Wasieleski 2001: 4). These measurements are an indication that the items are indeed measuring the constructs that they are intended to measure and that they correlate with one another. The analysis of Pearson's correlations has shown that a practically significant correlation coefficient ($p < 0.01$) of a medium effect ($r > 0.30$) exists between verbal, non-verbal, physical, *quid pro quo* and gender harassment. This indicates that respondents view all forms of the sexual harassment measured as incidents of sexual harassment.

One-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) conducted on the participants' responses to the items measuring the incidence of sexual harassment did not show any significant differences. No significant effect of gender, age, population group or years of service was found on verbal, non-verbal, physical, *quid pro quo* or gender harassment. Contrary to common belief, no significant differences were found between male and female experiences of sexual harassment. Females reported only slightly more incidences of sexual harassment than males. This finding is supported by Timmerman & Bajema (2000: 198) who did not find significant gender differences when personal experiences of sexual harassment were reported in their study of the impact of organisational culture on perceptions and experiences of sexual harassment. This study therefore indicates that males and females, whether they are black, white, coloured or Indian, have similar experiences regarding sexual harassment among academic staff. In contrast with the studies of Fain & Anderton (1987) and Balogun & Olapegba (1999), no significant effect of age on the perception of sexual harassment was found. These studies reported that older people have a higher perception of harassment than younger people. Further research could investigate the reason for this difference.

The results of this study may be limited by the low response rate of 22.8%. The sensitive and personal nature of the information that respondents were required to provide may explain their reluctance to participate in the study. The questionnaire may also have reminded certain potential participants of specific incidents of sexual harassment, and the negative experience may have prevented them from

completing it. The possibility that those employees who are really threatened by sexual harassment did not complete the questionnaires cannot be excluded. Their contributions could have influenced the findings of this study. Other studies of a similar nature also report relatively low response rates. For example, Pryor *et al* (1995) report a response rate of 32%, Timmerman *et al* (2000) 40%, O'Hare *et al* (1998) 34%, Whatley *et al* (2001) 24%, and Peirce *et al* (1997) 21%. The study is also limited in its comparability, as no other study of which the researcher is aware has attempted to determine the incidence of sexual harassment among academic staff at higher education institutions in South Africa. Existing research focused on the public service (*cf* Brand & Silberman 2002, Du Plessis 2001, Van der Berg 2002) and the South African Police Service (Retief 2000).

A further limitation of the study is the isolation within which the results were interpreted. Limited data is available from higher education institutions regarding the number of complaints of sexual harassment received from academic staff. This makes it difficult to place the data on the incidence of sexual harassment in perspective. Notwithstanding this limitation, it should be noted that the objective of the study was to determine the perceptions of academic staff regarding the incidence of sexual harassment. With this in mind, the study clearly indicates that harassment is experienced and observed by academic staff. As such, the management of higher education institutions should take cognisance thereof.

The possibility that respondents applied different, subjective definitions of sexual harassment when they completed the questionnaire cannot be ignored. The failure to provide a definition was a deliberate action undertaken so as not to guide or lead respondents. In their study on sexual harassment risk factors, O'Hare *et al* (1998) define sexual harassment explicitly and comprehensively, and regard this as a contributing factor to the higher prevalence rates that they found. Interviews with respondents might have provided the researcher with insight into the definition and frame of reference that influence their perceptions of sexual harassment. The personal and threatening nature of sexual harassment leads to the use of an anonymous questionnaire rather than an interview to obtain data. The fact

that the majority of victims of sexual harassment at higher education institutions are women was a contributing factor in the exclusion of interviews as a data collection method.[10] The researcher is male and would have found it difficult to obtain personal, sex-related data from female respondents. The study also did not accommodate cultural variables. In a multi-cultural society such as South Africa, this may be regarded as a limitation, and it is recommended that research be conducted into the effect of different cultural backgrounds on the perception of sexual harassment.

5. Recommendations

In a young democracy such as South Africa, with its emphasis on human rights and equality, there should be no form of harassment, and academic staff, in particular, should be free of sexual harassment from their colleagues or from anyone else. Although this study reports relatively low levels of sexual harassment, these levels may still be regarded as unacceptable and any research that contributes to reducing or eliminating this form of discrimination is encouraged. While legislation in South Africa may be regarded as sufficient to protect and compensate victims of sexual harassment, it can only be applied as a remedy after individuals and organisations have experienced sexual harassment. It is recommended that employers undertake concerted efforts to create harassment-free workplaces by continuously monitoring the incidence levels of sexual harassment. Interventions by the management of organisations such as higher education institutions can only be successful if they are based on studies relating to the prevalence and prediction of sexual harassment. It is recommended that research be aimed at developing a model to predict sexual harassment, similar to the model of Pryor *et al* (1995).

No definition of sexual harassment was provided in this study, as the purpose was to measure perceptions of incidents of sexual harassment without guiding participants in what they perceived to be

10 *Cf* Dey *et al* 1996, Kelley & Parsons 2000, Robertson *et al* 1988, Williams *et al* 1992.

sexually harassing behaviour. Therefore, it is recommended that research be conducted into the subjective nature of sexual harassment in order to determine whether all academics in higher education apply the same definition in recognising cases of sexual harassment. Homosexuality is becoming increasingly acceptable and known in South African society. This might increase the incidence of same-sex harassment and employers should ensure that their policies address all types of sexual harassment, including harassment of males by females. The influence of personality types on perceptions of sexual harassment needs to be studied in order to enrich the body of knowledge on sexual harassment. The same holds true regarding the influence of characteristics such as marital status and religion.

This study involved only academics but it is recommended that all members of the higher education community, including management, students, administrative and service workers be included in studies of this nature in an effort to rid such institutions of this infringement on human rights. Higher education institutions should not only be centres of academic freedom, but also of personal freedom and safety. The indication that gender harassment/sexism is perceived as more prevalent than other forms of sexual harassment leads to questions regarding other forms of discrimination on campuses, in particular that of racism. It is recommended that research be conducted on the possible link between sexual harassment and race discrimination. This need becomes evident when considering South Africa's history of discrimination and the resultant transformation of its society. The effect of gender differences on sexual harassment perceptions and reactions also require more research.

The participants in this study represent a variety of institutions and it is possible that the organisational culture of these institutions differs, resulting in different perceptions and experiences of sexual harassment. Future research is needed to determine the relationship between organisational structure and organisational culture, especially research on changing this culture. The rate of transformation may also vary from institution to institution, and the management structures of some institutions may still be dominated by a particular gender. This leads to questions concerning the relationship

between the gender and racial equity profile of institutions, and the perception of the prevalence of sexual harassment. The possibility that sexual harassment is underreported in higher education institutions cannot be ignored and the reasons for this underreporting must be investigated and reported.

A once-off study of this nature cannot be regarded as sufficient to understand the complex phenomenon of sexual harassment, and it is recommended that longitudinal studies be conducted over a number of years to monitor the incidence and awareness rates of aspects related to sexual harassment.

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