

Realities Of Sexual Harassment In The Administrative Staff Of A Higher Education Institution

By

Dayanara de los Ángeles Peñafiel Salazar

Escuela Superior Politécnica de Chimborazo (ESPOCH). Facultad Salud Pública.
Chimborazo, Ecuador

Corresponding Author Email: dayanara.peniafiel@epoch.edu.ec
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-79669852>

Kathy Violeta Serrano Avalos

Escuela Superior Politécnica de Chimborazo (ESPOCH). Facultad Salud Pública.
Chimborazo, Ecuador

Email: kathy.serrano@epoch.edu.ec
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9129-7676>

Diego Fabián Vique López

Escuela Superior Politécnica de Chimborazo (ESPOCH). Facultad de Ciencias. Chimborazo,
Ecuador

Email: diego.vique@epoch.edu.ec
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0565-2908>

Ana Francisca Chiriboga Tapia

Escuela Superior Politécnica de Chimborazo (ESPOCH). Facultad Salud Pública.
Chimborazo, Ecuador

Email: a.chiriboga@epoch.edu.ec
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5494-1813>

Abstract

This is a quantitative, descriptive, retrospective research developed in a Higher Education Institution to identify situations of sexual harassment within the educational institution according to the availability of the work role they occupy. An online tool was used to collect information, and only certain indicators of the reality of sexual harassment present and consequent in the administrative and service personnel are considered. It is concluded as an existing problem and based on the resulting data, noting severe consequences in the personal and labor sphere of those involved.

Keywords: Harassment, sexual, higher education, administrative, realities

Resumen

Se trata de una investigación cuantitativa, descriptiva, retrospectiva, desarrollada en una Institución de Educación Superior con el objetivo de identificar situaciones de acoso sexual al interno de la institución educativa de acuerdo a la disponibilidad del rol laboral que ocupan. Se usó una herramienta en línea para el levantamiento de información, donde participan 376 servidores universitarios de los distintos ámbitos laborales en desarrollo. Para el presente artículo se considera únicamente ciertos indicadores de la realidad sobre el acoso sexual presente y consecuente en el personal administrativo y de servicio. Se concluye como un

problema existente y fundamentado con datos resultantes, notándose graves consecuencias en la esfera personal y laboral de los implicados.

Palabras clave: Acoso, sexual, educación superior, administrativo, realidades.

Introduction

Sexual harassment in the workplace is not a new phenomenon or of recent presence or origin. This type of social problem dates back to the 70s and 80s through the pressures of the media of that decade that echoed the voices of hundreds of women complainants afflicted by this problem (Frías, 2020, p. 104-105). The problem of sexual harassment in the workplace should be understood as a series or multiple forms of presentation, including situations that have been socially classified as normal or under the idea of protection.

In the workplace, sexual harassment is understood as a form or manner in which labor hierarchies and gender differences that have been socially constructed and consolidated by the population over time are presented, as stated by Sonia Frías (2020), who also analyzes that sexual harassment is a violation of human rights since it is associated with different consequences or repercussions on the health, both physical and mental, of the people who are victims of this type of relationship (p. 106).

From the point of view of legal analysis, Cuenca (2015) states that any behavior of a sexual nature, which may be verbal or physical, and that acquires a purpose or promotes as a consequence to break the decency and dignity of a person, is considered as sexual harassment, and more so when an intimidating environment has been created, the latter being able to be of two different typologies, he argues from what is established by the ILO (2007), sexual blackmail and environmental sexual harassment (p. 526).

The International Labor Organization (2007) mentions that sexual blackmail is produced by a hierarchical superior, that is, a person who has power at that moment, which is used to request sexual favors from a subordinate in exchange for a benefit or harm that affects the development of his or her work or academic life.

Navarro, Ferrer and Boch (2016) explain, based on the same ILO document, that environmental sexual harassment is any conduct that creates an intimidating, humiliating, even hostile work environment for the person coming from a hierarchical superior or persons of an equal or lower level, or third parties directly related to the work such as customers and suppliers (p. 372).

Higher Education Institutions do not escape this reality, considering that these, in addition to being the place of education of young people, are also the workplace of teachers, administrators, authorities, workers and others, so sexual harassment is present, but being silent causes or has caused a series of injustices, iniquities, illegalities and psychological abuse (Hernández et al., 2015, p. 64). The authors, citing Smit and Du Plessis (2011), describe that the spheres of Higher Education Institutions have been transformed into unsafe places, where there is discrimination, victimization for sexual reasons, blackmail and sexual harassment, which apparently are recurrent practices.

The problem is posed as silent, the invisibility of causes and consequences due to the situation of people's attitude towards victims and harassers, which negatively influences the perception of this problem, given that the psychological impact of the problem is minimized,

by blaming the victim or justifying the actions of the harassers, thus leading to tolerance of this situation, increasing the negative complications of the victims and consequently decreasing the likelihood that they will be reported (Herrera et al., 2014, p. 2).

The authors further point out that sexist ideology, formed by this misperception of the problem of harassment, is strongly related to a greater passivity towards sexual harassment, indicating that the more people adhere to traditional gender roles, the more likely they are to consider certain harassment situations as acceptable or to create a trend of apparent normality (p. 2-3).

The problem of sexual harassment in Higher Education Institutions exists and deserves to be analyzed and investigated under norms of legal legality and in a systematic way, never under the idea of the social construct or the range of accepted normality. For Navarro et al. (2016), the problem of harassment in the academic environment has not been investigated systematically. However, punctual studies in European universities state that the information obtained is the same as what has been exposed in the existing literature (p. 373).

The Realities of Sexual Harassment in Higher Education Institutions

In 2018, a group of researchers from several universities in Ecuador, make known the problem of harassment in Higher Education Institutions, leaving open the idea that it is a poorly researched topic, that there is invisibility to this serious problem, that certain situations or behaviors related to harassment are being naturalized, that there is misinformation about the protocols to follow, even in some cases, the nonexistence of them. Outside the HEIs, the legal system is not clear and lends itself to re-victimization, in addition to describing a certain ineffectiveness of the processes and even when there are sentences in the HEIs, the authorities themselves circumvent justice through unclear administrative actions that allow the aggressor to return to exercise his functions, which produces and reproduces conceptualizations and hegemonic practices of patriarchy, leaving the perception that the IES constitute spaces that perpetuate situations of inequality (Guarderas et al., 2018, p. 215-216).

These situations have created the need to expand the field of research on this daily reality that exists and is present under the perception of acceptance in certain situations of harassment, which generates the interest to discover the reality in the academic and administrative environment of one of the prestigious Institutions of Higher Education in the country, which houses approximately twenty-four thousand actors among authorities, teachers, administrative staff, workers or service personnel and students.

For the methodological development, the inter-institutional cooperation of several universities in the country is sought, audiences, deadlines, and legalities are defined, and the procedure for the collection of information by segments is validated, identifying strata of stakeholders so that the information can be segmented and presented individually by these strata.

This article only presents the HEI segment under study and, within it, the stratum of administrative and service personnel, with a total of three hundred and seventy-six university employees involved in this analysis.

Methodology

The total research is developed in three years, starting in 2019 with the development of the proposal and involvement of the cooperating HEIs, the definition of variables and the

analysis of the sample strata of each participating institution. From this, the resource is validated for collecting information for each segment; as explained, the entire data collection process was virtual due to the epidemiological conditions of health worldwide.

The methodology is empirical and correlational, of the cross-sectional type that runs between April 2019 and August 2021, during the population confinement caused by the COVID-19 pandemic as indicated above. The completion of the online form by the participants was voluntary in each stratum.

The meaning of the questions varies according to the type of stratum; for example, the questions addressed to the teachers' stratum are posed differently to the students' stratum, and from them, different to the other strata, resulting in being able to segment the information and present it in a particular way, without necessarily presenting global results of the total research.

The starting variable is considered when the participants indicate or not that they have suffered a situation of sexual harassment at some time while at the Higher Education Institution, and from there, other variables, such as consequences derived directly from the first condition, such as the fear of going to the place of study or work, being forced to change their communication channels, thoughts associated with dropping out of the

IES, absence, psychological support needs due to fear, nerves, and depression, among others.

On the other hand, results were sought on channels of intimidation, insinuation, and harassment action, as well as characteristics of the harasser, work situation and places where the harassment occurred. The collection instrument is a survey named for the study ASIES, ESPOCH 2020-2021.

Results

First of all, the analysis of the items of the ASIES Survey, ESPOCH 20202021 is carried out, obtaining quantitative data of the main study variable that describes whether the administrative and service personnel have suffered any situation of sexual harassment at some time while at the university, according to recognized and self-identified gender (Table 1), as a result, evidently there are cases of sexual harassment in the two main genders, male 29.6%, female 69%, ratifying in this way, the existing trend in a greater proportion of the problem on women, as described by Hernandez et al. (2015), on "the existing inequality in interpersonal relationships, which interpose and sometimes legitimize the control of men over women" (p. 65).

Table 1 Existence of sexual harassment by gender

		Have you ever suffered a sexual harassment situation? while at this university			
		No		Yes	
		Count	% of column N	Count	% of column N
Genre	Male	165	54.1%	21	29,6%
	<u>Female</u>	<u>140</u>	<u>45,9%</u>	<u>49</u>	<u>69,0%</u>
	Others	0	0,0%	1	1,4%

Source: ASIES survey, ESPOCH 2020-2021.

Sexual harassment in the workplace is an existing and socially significant problem, even more so when there is evidence of a growing expansion of women's participation in the labor market, situations that are described in several of the literature consulted (Cuenca, 2015, p. 526).

The situation of violation of people's rights is evident; hence the importance of understanding the different concepts related to sexual harassment and its consequences. In this regard, Samsel and Becerril (2017) conclude that it is a situation that is practiced in an imposed way and without a person's consent; therefore, it is also necessary to know what kind of consequences may exist behind the abuse of the victim's privacy. Furthermore, the vast majority of studies mention a common disorder called depression and its multiple sequelae, said disorder of mental order is known to be the silent killer, besides being a health problem, given that, cite the authors data from the World Health Organization (2017), this disorder has affected three hundred million people in the world (p.64).

It is undeniable that the consequences, before reaching the mental disorder, go through a series of signs or characteristics that the victims make evident a problem, and that socially are imperceptible due to the lack of understanding about the problem itself.

As noted, before reaching this disorder, people who are victims of sexual harassment give warning signs, some of which are manifested as fear of not wanting to go to their place of work or study, decisions to change environments or places previously visited, abandoning their studies or their job, absenteeism, unexpected resignations, social discomfort, among many others.

Samsel's publication refers to an article in BioMed (2015) that presents results of the relationship between work environment and depressive symptoms, evidently concluding that depressive symptoms are the direct consequence of a hostile work environment, showing that high psychological demand, intimidation, conflict with superiors, bad organizational climate, injustice are the most influential factors in the suffering of the disorder (Samsel and Becerril, 2017, p. 66).

In the study of the HEI presented in this analysis, as part of the research, several signs or manifestations in the study were observed, which are summarized in Table 2, on the behavior indicated by the administrative and service personnel of this institution, highlighting certain results such as the one manifested by 42.1%, 1% of the people that have suffered some situation of sexual harassment while at this university, are afraid to go to the workplace, 47.6% have moved or changed their function or place of work, and 2 of the cases found have resigned or temporarily deserted from their workplace

Table 2

Potential consequences of sexual harassment of administrative and service personnel					
Have you ever suffered a sexual harassment situation?					
while at this university					
		No		Yes	
		Count	% of row	Count	% of row
Fear of going to the place of study or work	No	294	11	63	17,6%
	Yes				
Moved, changed faculty or career/ place of work or function	No	294	11	61	17,2%
	Yes				
Have you thought about dropping out of college/quitting your position?	No	296	9	7	43,8%
	Yes				
Has resigned or temporarily defected	No	305	0	69	18,4%
	Yes				
You feel that your social life has been limited.	No	283	22	58	17,0%
	Yes				
You feel that your sexual and/or emotional life has been significantly disturbed.	No	303	2	63	17,2%
	Yes				
Has sought psychological support	No	294	11	66	18,3%
	Yes				

Source: ASIES survey, ESPOCH 2020-2021.

Other consequences of sexual harassment affect their social life and the perception that their sexual and emotional life has been significantly disturbed. For example, 37.1% of the personnel who have suffered some situation of sexual harassment at the university recognize that the event has limited their social life, and 80% of the cases found state that their sexual and affective life has been significantly disturbed and within the cases also found, 31.3% have needed to seek psychological support.

Table 3 Types of sexual harassment identified at the IES

Have you ever been harassed sexual ever while in this University			
		Count	% of N of the layer column
Verbal harassment	No	15	21,1%
	Yes	56	78,9%
Non-verbal harassment	No	21	29,6%
	Yes	50	70,4%
Physical harassment	No	46	64,8%
	Yes	25	35,2%
Harassment by abuse of power	No	60	84,5%
	Yes	11	15,5%

Source: ASIES survey, ESPOCH 2020-2021.

According to Flores (2019), the International Labor Organization (ILO, 2007) considers that behaviors that can be classified as harassment are differentiated into those of physical type (physical violence, touching, unnecessary approaches), verbal type (comments and questions about appearance, lifestyle and sexual orientation, offensive phone calls) and non-verbal type (whistling, gestures with sexual connotations, presentation of pornographic objects). However, in general, there is some disagreement about the key factor in determining which behaviors constitute sexual harassment (and differentiating them from a friendly, welcoming and mutual attitude). Thus, some international organizations insist that the key differentiating element is unwanted behavior for the person experiencing it (p. 347).

According to Cuenca (2013), similar data are provided by the American Association of University Women (hereinafter AAUW). Their report indicates that over half of the secondary and higher education students suffered some form of harassment at school during the years 2010 and 2011. Nearly half (44%) were victims of sexual harassment “in person” and 30% electronically, through their e-mail or social media. Many students experienced harassment physically and electronically (Hill and Kearn 2011:10, p. 431).

References

- Cuenca-Piqueras, Cristina. (2015). Factores precipitantes del acoso sexual laboral en España. *Revista mexicana de sociología*, 77(4), 525-554. Recuperado de http://www.scielo.org.mx/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S018825032015000400525&lng=es&tlng=es.
- Cuencas Piqueras, C. (2013). El acoso sexual en el ámbito académico. Una aproximación. *Revista de Sociología de la Educación-RASE*, ISSN-e 2605-1923, Vol. 6, N°. 3, págs. 426-440. Recuperado de <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=5144551>
- Flores-Bernal, R. (2019). Políticas de educación superior sobre acoso sexual en Chile. *Educación y Educadores*, 22(3), págs. 343-358. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5294/edu.2019.22.3.1>
- Frías, Sonia M. (2020). Hostigamiento y acoso sexual. El caso de una institución de procuración de justicia. *Estudios sociológicos*, 38(112), 103-139. Disponible en: <https://doi.org/10.24201/es.2020v38n112.1745>
- Guarderas, P., Larrea, M., Cuvi, J., Vega, C., Reyes, C., Bichara, T., et al. (2018). Acoso sexual en las universidades ecuatorianas: validez de contenido de un instrumento de medición. *Alteridad*, 13(2), 214-226. <https://doi.org/10.17163/alt.v13n2.2018.05>
- Hernández-Herrera, C., Jiménez-García, M. Guadarrama-Tapia, E. (2015). La percepción del hostigamiento y acoso sexual en mujeres estudiantes en dos instituciones de educación superior. *Revista de la Educación Superior*, 44(176), 63-82. Recuperado de http://www.scielo.org.mx/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S01852760201500040004&lng=es&tlng=es.
- Herrera, A., Pina, A., Herrera, C., Expósito, F. (2014). ¿Mito o realidad? Influencia de la ideología en la percepción social del acoso sexual. *Anuario de Psicología Jurídica*, Volumen 24; 1, Pag 1-7, ISSN 1133-0740, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.apj.2014.07.002>. Disponible en <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1133074014000075>
- Navarro-Guzmán, C., Ferrer-Pérez, V. A., & Bosch-Fiol, E. (2016). El acoso sexual en el ámbito universitario: análisis de una escala de medida. *Universitas Psychologica*, 15(2), 371-382. <http://dx.doi.org/10.11144/Javeriana.upsy.15-2.asau>

- Organización Internacional del Trabajo. (2007). Acoso sexual en el lugar de trabajo. Recuperado de http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/--declaration/documents/publication/wcms_decl_fs_115_es.pdf
- Samsel Zenil, Z., Becerril Isidro, J. (2017). Consecuencias del acoso sexual hacia hostess de los restaurants del área de San Ángel en la CDMX. Hospitalidad ESDAI, 32(1), 53-82. Recuperado de https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Javier-Becerril4/publication/336266080_Consecuencias_del_acoso_sexual_hacia_hostess_de_los_restaurants_del_area_de_San_Angel_en_la_CDMX/links/5d97ca71299bf1c363f8da03/Consecuencias-del-acoso-sexual-hacia-hostess-de-los-restaurants-del-area-de-San-Angel-en-la-CDMX.pdf