

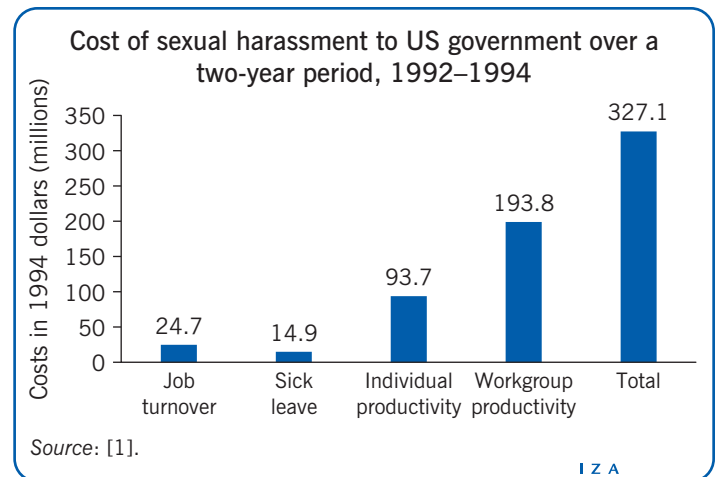
Sexual harassment in the workplace

Despite being illegal, costly, and an affront to dignity, sexual harassment is pervasive and challenging to eliminate

Keywords: sexual harassment, sex discrimination, workplace violence, productivity, earnings

ELEVATOR PITCH

Workplace sexual harassment is internationally condemned as sex discrimination and a violation of human rights, and more than 75 countries have enacted legislation prohibiting it. Sexual harassment in the workplace increases absenteeism and turnover and lowers workplace productivity and job satisfaction. Yet it remains pervasive and underreported, and neither legislation nor market incentives have been able to eliminate it. Strong workplace policies prohibiting sexual harassment, workplace training, and a complaints process that protects workers from retaliation seem to offer the most promise in reducing sexual harassment.



KEY FINDINGS

Pros

- + Largely overlooked until the 1970s, sexual harassment in the workplace is now internationally condemned as a form of sex discrimination and a violation of human rights.
- + More than 75 countries have legislation prohibiting workplace sexual harassment.
- + Legislation varies by country and includes protection against workplace sexual harassment under both civil and criminal law.
- + Like workers at risk of injury or death, those at risk of sexual harassment receive a pay premium.
- + Organizations have prohibited sexual harassment and have established complaint procedures.

Cons

- Sexual harassment is difficult to define, measure, and monitor.
- Sexual harassment is underreported, which reduces the efficacy of legislation and workplace policies prohibiting it, as these policies depend on reporting to discourage harassment.
- Workers who report sexual harassment are likely to be subject to retaliation.
- Women face a higher risk of sexual harassment than men.
- Sexual harassment is costly to its victims and to the organizations in which it occurs.

AUTHOR'S MAIN MESSAGE

Sexual harassment, a violation of human rights and a form of sex discrimination, is costly to workers and organizations. Yet although more than 75 countries have legislation prohibiting sexual harassment in the workplace, it remains pervasive and underreported. To date, laws and market incentives have been insufficient to eradicate workplace sexual harassment. Success may require policies to enhance market and legal incentives by raising the costs to organizations of tolerating an adverse work environment, promulgating strong policies against sexual harassment, and establishing a complaints process that protects workers from retaliation.