Sexual harassment and gender inequality in the labor market

Abstract

We show that sexual harassment imposes costs on men and women whose workplace choices help reduce sex segregation and close the gender pay gap.
We describe rates of harassment from colleagues and managers in nationally representative survey data from Sweden.
Comparing workplaces shows that women have a higher harassment rate than men in male-dominated and gender-mixed workplaces, and men have a higher rate than women in female-dominated ones.
We use a survey experiment with hypothetical job choices to quantify valuations of harassment against the gender with the high risk.
When respondents are randomized to see a vignette about a harassment incident in a prospective workplace, their probability of choosing that workplace drops by the same margin as if the job would have offered a 10 percent lower wage.
This negative valuation is similar for both men and women, but larger for respondents who themselves belong to the high-risk gender (17 percent compared to 6 percent for the low-risk gender).
Finally, we study relationships between sexual harassment, wages, and turnover by linking the nationally representative survey to annual administrative data. Women have a higher harassment risk in high-paying workplaces, while this risk manifests for men in low-paying workplaces.
After harassment, victims are more likely to leave the workplace, and these transitions produce more sex segregation and a larger pay gap.
We conclude that sexual harassment contributes to gender inequality by making it costly to become and remain a workplace gender minority.

This paper is joint work with Olle Folke (Uppsala University).

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