Written submission from 38 Degrees (SHW0025)

Foreword

38 Degrees is one of the UK’s biggest campaigning organisations. 38 Degrees is made up of more than two and a half million people right across the UK. They decide which campaigns to work on together, to bring about real change on issues they care about. One of the central tenets of 38 Degrees is the belief that democracy works better when more people are involved.

38 Degrees is not connected with any political parties, and is funded entirely by donations from members - that means people who take an action on any 38 Degrees campaign. That independence means we can campaign on issues which our members feel passionately about - like action to tackle sexual harassment in the workplace.

Executive summary

The testimonies which form the basis of this submission, from ordinary people across the UK, are just a snapshot of the 3,252 individual stories 38 Degrees received. If we could put that amount in here, we would. The sheer amount of responses - as well as their content - speaks to how widespread the problem of sexual harassment in the workplace is. How it spans generations and types of workplace, and the impact that it has had on the lives of the people who have been both directly and indirectly affected over many years.

38 Degrees is proud to provide the thousands of people who were willing to share their stories with a way of having their voices heard in this inquiry. Much has been reported on the issue of sexual harassment in high profile workplaces such as Hollywood and Westminster, yet these testimonies prove that the problem is far more widespread. The fact that so many people took time out of their day to share their own, often extremely traumatic, experiences is testament to the appetite for significant change and the weight of responsibility on government to act.

Here is a short summary of results:

- **14,791 38 Degrees members contributed** to our survey based on the terms of reference of the inquiry. Questions focused particularly on the inquiry questions on how widespread sexual harassment in the workplace is, who experiences and perpetrates it, and what can be done to stop it.

- **51% percent of participants said they had either experienced (29%), witnessed (19%), or heard from colleagues that sexual harassment takes place at their work (18%).**

- **Over 3,252 thousand participants shared personal testimonies about their experiences of sexual harassment at work.** These testimonies have been
anonymised and those which are indicative of the overall trends we noticed, are included as part of this submission.

- **The imbalance between genders of experiences of sexual harassment is stark** - with 47% of participants who identified as women saying they had experienced sexual harassment at work, compared to just 9% of participants who identified as male saying they had experienced it.

- **Our survey found that sexual harassment in the workplace happens in both the public and private sector** - from our hospitals and our universities, to factory floors and companies purporting to hold high standards - **spanning generations**. It seems that little of our society is left unblemished.

- **92% of participants said more should be done to prevent sexual harassment at work.** This shows the overwhelming appetite from the public for more to be done to put an end to the problem.

We’d welcome the opportunity to meet with the Women and Equalities Committee to talk further about the results included in this submission and, if preferred, give oral evidence to the inquiry. We can also liaise with our members to ask them if they would consider giving oral evidence to the committee, to talk through their personal experiences of sexual harassment in the workplace.

**Methodology**

38 Degrees sent a survey to its membership with questions based on the inquiry’s terms of reference. 14,791 number of people participated. You can see the survey question here: https://speakout.38degrees.org.uk/surveys/1301.

This is not a scientific poll. The sample of people who have taken part has its limitations and the people who took part are self-selecting.

Here are more details about the sample of people who responded as context in which to read our results:

- 44% of participants identified as female
- 54% of participants identified as male
- 0.9% of participants preferred not to say
- 0.5% of participants identified as other

Survey responses were shared with 38 Degrees under condition of anonymity. They were informed that responses would be collated and sent to MPs in a single report, in anonymous form.

38 Degrees informed respondents that information provided as part of this survey would not be reported to the police. And suggested that if respondents had information relating to criminal wrongdoing or if they suspected that a crime has been committed, that they should
Results

Evidence in response to bullet point 1 of scope of inquiry:

“How widespread sexual harassment in the workplace is, and whether this has increased or decreased over time.”

Experiencing sexual harassment

4,261 people told us they had experienced sexual harassment in the workplace - 29% of the total number of people who took part in the survey overall. With almost a third of participants reporting some direct experience, sexual harassment is clearly a widespread problem.

Interestingly, the gender split between those who experienced sexual harassment is divided. 47% of survey takers who identified as female had experienced sexual harassment, compared to just 9% of survey takers who identified as male.

Here are a few testimonies from people who shared their own experiences:

________________________________________________________________________

Female, Civil Servant: “It was along time ago. I was a young, naïve, civil servant. I went in to see my division head in his office about some work and he invited me to sit on his lap. I was shocked at his request but also disturbed as my annual report was due very soon. I said that I had to be elsewhere and his secretary would be coming in. I shot out of his office. I did not like to be near him after that. I never reported it. I thought he was a respectable, honourable family man. How many other young women had he treated that way?”

________________________________________________________________________

Female, Supermarket worker: “I worked for a large supermarket group, joining when I was 18 for money to see me through college. Working on the shop floor and frequently visiting the warehouse to replenish shelves.

A colleague in a different department took a liking to me, despite being fully aware I was in a serious relationship, a fact that I often mentioned. Over a couple of months his attentions when I was in the warehouse turned from polite conversation to dramatically bellowed insults across a huge room in front of any passing colleagues or worse; quietly hissed sexual threats. The change was brought on by my trying to keep a distance once he had made me uncomfortable. I cannot list the things he said, they still make me feel sick.

One such instance was witnessed by my supervisor, who was disgusted by an innuendo and told the offending party to get away from me and back to his own area - the colleague laughed in his face, telling the supervisor that he had no jurisdiction over staff of other departments.”
Female, NA: “I have been asked directly for sex while at work by a superior. I have been shown a pornographic video and asked for oral sex while at work by a line manager. I have been stalked by a line manager. I have been verbally harassed by a pair of male colleagues whose comments were sexually explicit and concerning the rape of women and intended to cause intimidation and distress for their personal amusement while at work. These are some of the most serious experiences but casual chauvinism and comments about my appearance, sexual desirability, and conversations that are demeaning or intended to insult women alongside inappropriate physical contact and inappropriate gaze have been a commonplace throughout my working life.”

Male, N/A: “Lady working in works canteen would put her hand down my trousers every time I came in... made me feel disgusted. [I] didn’t want to look like a prude in front of my work mates so would laugh it off. [I] feel for anyone who has to deal with that on a daily basis.”

Witnessing or hearing about sexual harassment

19% of participants said they had witnessed sexual harassment in the workplace. 18% said they had heard from their colleagues that it’s taking place in their work.

Here are some of their stories:

Female, Medical Professional: “I am a retired medical consultant. When I was working up until 18 months ago I would frequently witness behaviour at work which was occasionally overtly harassing but regularly demeaning to female colleagues. Nurses in particular were the main target of this behaviour but this was likely because they constitute the large majority of female staff. Female doctors whether trainees or full-time were also commonly targeted.”

Female, NA: “My daughter: currently subjected to older female boss essentially pimping her to a male sub contractor which has led to that man with a partner inappropriately contacting my daughter. On what level is it ok for anyone with boss status to say "you could have her"? This has led to an 'informal HR meeting' where the male Section Head thinks it's all been blown out of proportion. This in a 'company' with high moral values, strong union links and a penchant for promoting women in the workplace.”
Here is the table of results of participants’ experiences in full:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total % of participants who said “I have never been sexually harassed at work”</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total % of participants who said “I have experienced sexual harassment at work”</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total % of participants who said “I don’t know anyone who has been sexually harassed at work”</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total % of participants who said “I have witnessed sexual harassment at work”</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total % of participants who said “I have heard from colleagues that sexual harassment takes place at my work”</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total % of participants who said they’d “Prefer not to say”</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Evidence in response to bullet point 2 of scope of inquiry:

“Who experiences sexual harassment in the workplace, who perpetrates it and what the impact is on different groups.”

The impact of sexual harassment on different groups

From our survey responses, women have experienced sexual harassment on a wider scale than men. Breaking down the results of participants’ experiences according to gender highlights that imbalance, however it also sheds light on the fact that no one is immune.

Here is a table outlining the breakdown by gender:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% of participants who identified as female and had experienced sexual harassment at work</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of participants who identified as female and had witnessed sexual harassment at work</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of participants who identified as female and had heard from colleagues that sexual harassment had taken place at their work</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of participants who identified as female who had either experienced, or witnessed, or heard about sexual harassment at their work</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Many testimonies shared in the survey also noted that sexual harassment takes place more often in male dominated workplaces. They also spoke of the power imbalance (with harassment being perpetrated by managers) involved in their experiences, that had stopped them from coming forward.

Here are some of testimonies:

**Female, Engineering Professional:** “I worked in a largely male profession (engineering) and have encountered harassment in varying degrees throughout my career. During my degree (1974 to 1979) I worked in industry (sandwich course). I was told on numerous occasions that I couldn’t work as an engineer because of my gender. I had to be careful that I was not left alone in remote areas of the plant with some of the men. In the HQ building we worked flexitime. One evening I was cornered in an office, between 2 filing cabinets by a senior manager who grabbed my breasts. I rapidly mentioned my father (who worked in another area of the business) and the man backed off immediately. He really scared me. The women who worked in the office were sympathetic the next day and said they only ever stayed late if there were two of them.”

**Female, factory worker:** “I used to work in a factory that had 900 men working in it and less than 50 women, in admin positions. Whenever I set foot in the factory the men would make just a walk through the factory extremely uncomfortable for all of the women. There were whistles, cat calls and generally unpleasant noises coming from individuals that I could not see because of the manufacturing machinery. Eventually I won them round just by talking to them (when I actually saw them face to face) and convincing them that I was just another human being that they could talk to just like their male mates. It was a very intimidating environment to work in.”

**N/A, N/A:** “I now work in tv as a director and have received complaints from junior female
staff about a male camera operator who asked her intimate sexual questions when they were alone. She did not feel comfortable taking the complaint higher. He then repeated these offences on another job with various female staff. The issue was not escalated. All the senior figures were male and he is popular with them nobody wants to be the individual making a fuss especially in a freelance industry where you are employed not only on your skill but on your likability.”

Across professions and places of work

What is also notable is how varied the workplaces were in which participants had experienced sexual harassment - from factory floors to government, from churches to companies purporting to have strong values of inclusion.

Although submissions on this topic were limited, it was noted by some member testimonies that there were particular challenges presented by freelance job roles which might involve less contact with human resources or less rigorous systems/protections in place.

Here is a breakdown of how those who shared experiences of sexual harassment defined their workplaces. Our sample was weighted towards those who worked in professional workplaces however despite this, in every work place option that was given to participants, there were those who said they had experiences of sexual harassment:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Workplace Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration &amp; secretarial</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managerial and senior</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales and customer service</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate professional or technical</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unskilled or manual work</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skilled Trade</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal services</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factory or machinery operation</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Summary

In summary, the impact of sexual harassment is far reaching and complex. Submissions
showed that many people were signed off work, felt uncomfortable and scared, and in many cases didn’t come forward to report it having happened at all.

It is important for the government to ensure that any action to try to stop sexual harassment at work does not exclude certain workplaces or groups.

Evidence in response to bullet point 3 of scope of inquiry:

“Actions that the Government and employers should be taking to change workplace culture to prevent sexual harassment, give people more confidence to report sexual harassment, and make this issue a higher priority for employers.”

92% of survey participants said more should be done to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace. This is an overwhelming show of support for further action to remedy the unfair issues faced by people in their places of work.

Many testimonies from people who had been directly affected by sexual harassment in the workplace mentioned that they had either felt too scared to tell someone at the time, or that their employers did not take the issues they raised seriously enough, or deal with them appropriately.

There are also many testimonies written by people unsure about whether their experiences count as ‘sexual harassment’. This extended to experiences as severe as stalking. This demonstrates a need for wider public education about what should not be tolerated in the workplace - and what support should be available to those who experience this directly.

Here are some examples:

_________________________________________________________________________
Female, Nurse: “I used to be a nurse and it was common. It happened so many times to me and others I’d need to write pages. The worst was a locum doctor who would rub his hands against my breasts and pubic area. He did it to other student nurses and care assistants and I persuaded them to put in a complaint. We were made to go into graphic detail but we still had to work with him. Eventually we were promised he’d never work at the trust again. I moved to another rotation and there he was. The management had totally ignored us all.”

_________________________________________________________________________
Female, N/A: “I am unsure if it would be classed as ‘sexual’ harassment but within the last two years I have had to file multiple complaints about a male co worker who was stalking me, sending unwanted mail to my house and who cornered me in the car park at work. After multiple meetings with HR the co worker was told he could only speak to me in a professional manner. I don’t feel this was severe enough action in relation to the way he had behaved around me. I don’t feel as though my situation was treated seriously enough (none of my meetings with HR were recorded and it took days or weeks for them to implement any
actions after each meeting). It took me filing a complaint against him with the police and a letter of concern to my HR manager for my employer to actually do something about his advances and prevent him speaking to me, and even then they changed my shift and disrupted my life. Not his."

_________________________________________________________________________

Male, N/A: “It was about ten years ago. My boss who was a female would push herself against me whenever I was alone with her. It happened a few times. I was not especially affected by it but found it unpleasant at the time. I dealt with it by making sure that I was never alone with her. I also felt vulnerable as a male. Who would believe me?”

_________________________________________________________________________

Female, Administrator: “I was administrator in a large church & this sounds almost incredible, I suffered sexual harassment from the pastor. On reporting it to the other church leaders I was told to either shut up or leave my job. I was a single mum & needed the job so I put up with it for another 2 years. Eventually I broke down on a friend & she supported me by coming with me to the police. The pastor was eventually sacked but I was told to leave the church.”

_________________________________________________________________________

Female, N/A: “Attempted to take the company to a tribunal. They made a settlement the evening before but I had to sign an NDA. My solicitors agreed to this but I wanted justice not to be gagged. I have never worked within a company since and have arranged my life to be self employed. Financially this has had a massive impact.”

_________________________________________________________________________

Summary

Even when sexual harassment is reported to an employer - and it often isn’t - employers do not always take these issues seriously enough.

On occasions, an employer’s approach is hostile and causes further distress.

More could clearly be done to make HR reporting processes more transparent and trustworthy. When reporting sexual harassment, employees must have complete confidence that the employer will consider allegations seriously and take prompt action that puts the needs of the victim first.

More should also be done to clarify what constitutes sexual harassment and what is the appropriate action to take if you are sexually harassed in the workplace.

Conclusion

The member testimonies, of which these are just a small selection of those shared with the 38 Degrees office team, demonstrate the scale, depth and complexity of how sexual harassment operates in our society. From the factory floor to the boardroom, sexual
harassment remains pernicious. It has gone on in workplaces across the country for generations often unchallenged and with bystanders complicit. It often goes unreported and unresolved. When it is reported, we have received testimonies from people who claim it wasn’t taken seriously enough or dealt with in a confidential and sensitive way.

- It affects a wide number of people. It is notable that hierarchy seems to play a particular role, with many testimonies describing facing sexual harassment at the beginning of their career from more senior colleagues.

- More women told us they experience it, witness it and hear about it - although men shared their stories too.

- The problem is widespread. From factory floors to government, to male dominated industries, from churches to government, sexual harassment takes place in all workplaces.

- People who had been directly affected by sexual harassment in the workplace often feel too scared to tell someone. Or they are left angered that their employers did not take the issues they raised seriously enough, or deal with them appropriately.

- An overwhelming majority of those 38 Degrees members who participated in our survey wanted more to be done to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace.

There is overwhelming support from 38 Degrees members for action to tackle sexual harassment in our society - they expect government to step up to the plate and tackle an issue which, for too long, has been buried and ignored.

March 2018