In this document I am submitting evidence from my own research as well as this of others to specifically tackle questions 1, 2 of the parliamentary enquiry on sexual harassment in the workplace. I am a senior lecturer in forensic psychology at the University of Kent and I have been researching sexual violence and sexual harassment in particular for the last 12 years.

Executive summary:

- sexual harassment is a widespread phenomenon
- it affects 1 in 2 women and 1 in 5 men
- Sexual harassment has deleterious personal and organisational effects
- most prevalent form of harassment is gender harassment
- Perpetrators are predominantly men but women can also perpetrate harassment
- Harassers permeate all occupational levels, social strata and age categories
- Latest research points to sexual harassment as a moral transgression
- Perpetrators of sexual harassment use moral disengagement mechanisms to alleviate negative emotions and bypass moral self-sanctions
- Organisational climate is strongest predictor of sexual harassment occurrence with tolerant climates experiencing more sexual harassment.

1) How widespread is sexual harassment in the workplace, who experiences it and has this increased or decreased over time?

The detrimental effects of sexual harassment have been documented in the literature over the past 40 years, and recognized as a serious problem for all working women and men. Sexual harassment continues to be a widespread social phenomenon (Ilies, Hauserman, Schwochau, & Stibal, 2003; see McDonald, 2012 for a review) prevalent in both employment (e.g., Hulin, Fitzgerald, & Drasgow, 1996) and educational settings (e.g., Paludi, 1990; Page & Pina, 2015). Research shows that 1 in 2 women are affected by sexual harassment in their lifetime and although women seem to be the majority of those affected by sexual harassment, recent research and online movements (such as the #MeToo campaign) shows that men are also affected in high numbers.

Literature has recognised different forms of sexual harassment. The most commonly recognised form of sexual harassment is quid-pro-quo harassment. This refers to the situation where a person with more institutional (or perceived) power makes demands of a person with relatively less power, in exchange for career-related advancements or with the threat of reprisals (as seen in the Weinstein allegations). However, this form actually represents a small proportion (reports range from 3% to 16%) of sexual harassment experiences and sexual assault and rape at work represent an even smaller proportion (1% to 6%).

The most frequently experienced form of sexual harassment is gender
harassment. This encompasses unwelcome verbal comments, inappropriate and repeated requests for dates, remarks about figure, and unspoken behaviour such as staring, whistling, and suggestive gestures that frequently come from people of equal status and power as the victim (around 55% of reports, Pina & Gannon, 2012; Page & Pina 2015).

Whether sexual harassment in the workplace has increased or decreased over time is difficult to gauge because although statistics of sexual harassment experiences are showing an increasing pattern, it may well be that recognition of the phenomenon is now better, and more people are aware of their rights and willing to come forward with a report, thus contributing to the increase in cases recorded. Furthermore, it is useful to note that official reporting is always at a very low percentage as it is the most difficult and risky action for victims to take, with increased visibility, and emotional and organisational pressure. It is worth noting that relying on official sexual harassment reports may not reveal the true extent of its prevalence. If one considers the continuum of these behaviours, it appears that those at the lower end are more frequently experienced, but less likely to be recognised as sexual harassment by all. Nonetheless, it is important to recognise them if we are to fully understand the full extent of sexual harassment in the workplace, their contributions to a toxic organizational climate, and the full impact it has on those that experience it and how to combat it.

2) Who perpetrates sexual harassment?

A literature review by Pina, Gannon and Saunders (2009) extensively looked at the characteristics of sexual harassment perpetrators and highlighted the importance of examining the reasons behind why some people and not others will go on to exploit their environment by committing a sexually harassing act.

The majority of studies reviewed indicate that the sexual harasser is significantly more likely to be male (European Commission, 1998; MacKinnon, 1983; Ménard, Hall, Phung, Ghebrial, & Martin, 2003; Perry, Schmidtke, & Kulik, 1998; Pryor, 1995, USMSPB, 1981, 1988, 1995). However, the research is less directive regarding issues relating to marital status, age, and educational level. Some studies suggest that perpetrators are likely to be married, older and more educated than the victim, as well as being hierarchically superior to their victims (Fitzgerald & Weitzman, 1990; Gutek, 1985; Komaromy, Bindman, Haber, & Sande, 1993; Sev’er, 1999, Tangri, Burt, & Johnson, 1982).

Other researchers, however, dispute the hierarchical aspect of the harasser, finding harassment even in subordinates and peers, with peers being the most frequent type of harassers (Cleveland & Kerst, 1993; DeSouza & Fansler, 2003; Hartwell Hunnicutt, 1998; LaFontaine & Tredeau, 1986; USMSPD, 1995). Thus, these findings suggest that harassers may target those of similar status (or even superior status) and may well target those of a similar or superior educational level (DeSouza & Fansler, 2003). Furthermore, the types of workforces affected by sexual harassment are extremely diverse, covering both white and blue collar workers (e.g., police officers, medics, bus and taxi drivers and waitresses; Brown, 1998; European Commission, 1998; Gruber, 1992; LaFontaine & Tredeau, 1986;
Niebuhr & Boyles, 1991). Given these research findings, it may be misleading to generate a typical profile of the sexual harasser based upon sociodemographic factors. Sexual harassers appear to permeate all social strata, occupational levels, and age categories.

Perpetrators of sexual harassment have been found to lack social conscience and engage in immature and irresponsible behaviors, or manipulative and exploitative behaviors (Kosson, Kelly, & White, 1997; Rapaport & Burkhart, 1984). Rapaport and Burkhart, (1984) found that personality measures of irresponsibility, lack of social conscience, and exoneration and legitimization of aggression, particularly against women, where all related to the endorsement of sexually coercive behaviors. Research has supported this link between self-reported likelihood to engage in sexual harassment (LSH) and the acceptance of interpersonal violence towards women (Begany & Milburn, 2002; Malamuth & Dean, 1991; Pryor, 1987). Kosson, Kelly, and White (1997) used the Socialization Scale (Gough, 1960) and the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (Raskin & Hall, 1979), and found that men high on LSH (as measured by the Sexual Experiences Survey; Koss & Oros, 1982) were also likely to exploit intoxicated individuals and use manipulative intoxication. Callous exploitation of others and lack of empathy are both psychopathic traits commonly associated with rapists and other sexual offenders (Gannon, Collie, Ward, & Thakker, 2008). Thus, the potential risk of sexual harassment escalating to more serious sexual assaults, highlights the importance of future research into the pathology of sexual harassers, which is an area largely neglected.

Although researchers have endeavoured to identify the characteristics of male sexual harassers (e.g., Begany & Milburn, 2002; Krings & Facchin, 2009; Luthar & Luthar, 2008; Pryor, 1987; Stillman, White, Yamawaki, Ridge, & Copley, 2009), there has been a dearth of research attending to the social-cognitive mechanisms and self-regulatory processes that inhibit or facilitate sexually harassing behaviour. Indeed, many scholars now postulate that sexual harassment is a moral transgression (Bowes-Sperry & O’Leary-Kelly, 2005; Bowes-Sperry & Powell, 1996, 1999; O’Leary- Kelly & Bowes-Sperry, 2001; Vaux, 1993) and an act of goal-directed aggression (Farley, 1978; Fitzgerald, 1993; Kelly, 1988; O’Leary-Kelly, Paetzold, & Griffin, 2000; Page & Pina, 2015; Quina, 1990; Schweinle, Cofer, & Schatz, 2009) usually motivated by sexist antipathy toward women as a subordinate out-group rather than arising from a need for sexual gratification (e.g., Maass, & Cadinu, 2006; Hitlan, Pryor, Hesson-McInnis, & Olson, 2009; Holland & Cortina, 2013). This poses important questions that warrant further theoretical and empirical attention: How can law abiding, otherwise considerate people engage in sexually harassing acts despite recognition that their conduct is likely to be socially sanctioned and considered offensive by the recipient and bystanders? Are there social-cognitive strategies that people employ to neutralize and justify sexually harassing behavior?

Relevant to these questions, Page and Pina (2015) posit that sexual harassment arises from reciprocal interaction between individual predisposition to harass and favourable contextual factors (DeCoster, Estes, & Mueller, 1999; Dekker & Barling, 1998; O’Hare & O’Donohue, 1998; Perry, Schmidtke, & Kulik, 1998;
Pryor, LaVite, & Stoller, 1993; Pryor, Giedd, & Williams, 1995; Pryor & Whalen, 1997). Thus, individuals with a predisposition to harass will usually only do so when exposed to local social and management norms that are viewed as condoning and/or permissive of it. Page and Pina (2015) argue that sexual harassment may be facilitated and reinforced through the self-regulatory process of moral disengagement (Bandura, 1990, 1999). Mechanisms of moral disengagement are thought to be acting as self-serving cognitions assist in the exoneration of harassing acts that conflict with the perpetrator’s moral beliefs and self-concept of being an otherwise decent and rule abiding individual.

Indeed, our research validating a new moral disengagement in sexual harassment scale (MDiSH) shows that moral disengagement mitigated moral judgment, negative emotions (guilt, shame, and anger), sympathy, and endorsement of prosocial behavioral intentions (support for restitution) associated with a harassment case presented to participants (fictitious). Conversely, moral disengagement mechanisms increased positive affect (happiness) about the harassment and attribution of blame to the female complainant (Page & Pina 2015). More of our recent work confirms that moral disengagement (via its different mechanisms) has an indirect effect in predicting men’s proclivity to harass (in various forms e.g. gender or quid pro quo) by lowering their moral judgment and negative emotions about the harassment, while amplifying positive affect. Overall, the findings support Bandura’s social cognitive theory, indicating that moral disengagement may enable people to self-regulate their own behavioural inclinations to harass [Page & Pina 2018]. This work adds to the emerging literature examining the motivations for harassment and provides new avenues for further exploration with regards to potential anti-harassment campaigns and specific treatment/interventions with harassers.

2) What is the impact of sexual harassment on different groups?

Pina & Gannon in their 2012 review, review well documented consequences for victims and organisations in detail and categorise the impact consistently with Fitzgerald et al.’s (1995) model; work-related outcomes that are relevant to the victims’ professional lives, or psychological and health outcomes that are relevant to the victims’ personal lives (Munson et al., 2000; Pryor, 1995;).

**Work-related consequences**

Job satisfaction is one of the variables most frequently examined within the sexual harassment literature. Overall, sexual aggression and harassment in the workplace has been found to greatly reduce job satisfaction (Ironson, 1992; Mueller et al., 2001; Munson et al., 2000; Lapierre et al., 2005; USMSPB, 1981). Some studies have shown that this job dissatisfaction includes dissatisfaction towards work, co-workers and/or supervisors (e.g., Barling et al., 1996; Glomb et al., 1997; Schneider, Swan & Fitzgerald, 1997), and others have shown a direct pattern of increasing job satisfaction, with reduced perceptions of sexual harassment victimization (e.g., Mueller et al., 2001).
Sexually harassing experiences at work greatly reduce how attached and committed workers feel to their organization (Willness et al., 2007). Harassed employees often feel that their organization is partly responsible for their experiences and how often these occur, by failing to implementing strict no-harassment policies (Hogler, Frame & Thornton, 2002; Wilness et al., 2007). Such discontentment may lead to feelings of anger towards the perpetrator and the organization (for failing to protect them or tolerating such behaviours), and consequently greater detachment from the organization (Willness et al., 2007).

Sexual harassment incidences have also been linked to withdrawal from the organization (Gruber, 2003; Magley, Hulin, Fitzgerald & DeNardo 1999; Schneider et al., 1997). Withdrawal is usually measured by two different constructs, work withdrawal (being late, neglectful, avoiding work tasks) and job withdrawal (turnover, or intention to leave organization; Hanisch & Hulin, 1990, 1991). The meta-analytical study of Willness et al. (2007) indicates that sexual harassment and both types of organizational withdrawal are positively correlated, but work withdrawal is more strongly related to sexual harassment, with most employees reporting behaviours such as task avoidance and absenteeism rather than quitting their jobs.

Research conducted by Williams et al. (1999), in military workforce, showed that the stronger the anti-harassment policies were, the more committed women reported to be to their organization, and more importantly, implementation of those policies reduced the frequency of sexual harassment incidences. The findings of Willness et al.’s (2007) meta-analysis, however, show that the relationship between sexual harassment and organizational commitment is greatly influenced by the organizational climate and more research is needed to establish whether there is a directional relationship between sexual harassment and workers’ attitudes towards the organization.

**Personal consequences**

Sexual harassment experiences have negative impact on the psychological well-being of victims, which has been extensively documented. Many harassed employees report a great range of affect, from anger, fear and sadness, to depression, humiliation and mistrust (Crocker & Kalemba, 1999; Loy & Stewart, 1984; Pryor, 1995; USMSPB, 1981). Some even report stress-related psychosomatic symptoms as a direct consequence of sexual harassment at work. These symptoms include headaches and muscle pains, nausea, exhaustion, palpitations and sleeping disruptions (European Commission, 1998; Gutek & Koss, 1993; Magley et al., 1999; Willness et al., 2007).

There is also research proposing that sexual harassment is linked to the negative effects and symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder in a large proportion of the victims (PTSD; Avina & O’Donohue, 2002; Dansky & Kilpatrick, 1997; Gutek & Koss, 1993; Koss, 1990; Willness et al., 2007). Although some severe forms of sexual harassment involve actual bodily threat and injury, which meets some of the criteria of PTSD according to DSM-IV, according to Avina & O’Donohue (2002), more subtle forms of sexual harassment that may indeed accumulate to perceptions of physical threat, or feelings of helplessness currently do not meet criteria for PTSD, but need to be further explored to understand their full impact. Willness et al. (2007) indeed verified in their meta analysis that experiencing sexual harassment (usually the most severe quid pro
quoting types) is positively correlated with symptoms of PTSD. As experiences of sexual harassment are largely subjective, and the severity of the negative outcomes may vary greatly depending on type of harassment and victim personality characteristics, wider criteria may need to be applied to encompass what constitutes trauma (Avina & O'Donohue, 2002). Moreover, the negative effects of sexual harassment have a lasting impact on life satisfaction and usually persevere over time (Munson et al., 2001; Pryor, 1995; Willness et al., 2007).

Research has also linked indirect exposure to sexual harassment with negative psychological outcomes in what is termed “co-victimization” (Jacobson, Koehler & Jones-Brown, 1987; Shakoor & Chalmers, 1991), in which others directly witness or experience the victimization of another. Research conducted by Glomb et al. (1997) indeed shows that incidences of direct and indirect exposure to sexual harassment have a more profound impact than previously thought, exerting the same detrimental influence on personal and psychological well-being as well as job satisfaction. Consistent with their predictions, Glomb et al. (1997) found that women who perceived their organizations to be tolerant of sexual harassment were more likely to belong to a work group that is infused with sexual harassment, as well as being more likely to experience sexual harassment themselves.

The psychological impact of sexual harassment on its victims is undisputable, and multidimensional in its nature (Pryor, 1995). It can affect victims in both direct and indirect ways (Glomb et al., 1997), and is also heavily reliant on the type of sexual harassment perpetrated (Pryor, 1995). The organizational status and role of the harasser is directly linked with the type of experience for the victim, both in terms of professional and personal outcomes. For instance, a perpetrator that holds organizational power over the victim is more likely to cause negative worker productivity as well as negative attitudes towards the organization (Pryor, 1995). The type and severity of the harassment is also directly linked to the personal outcomes of harassment for the victim, with more coercive types of harassment tending to result in more severe emotional problems that tend to last over time (Pryor, 1995).

Recommendations:

- Clear and independent outlets must be formed for employees to report harassment experiences so that mediation procedures can be utilised at the outset to avoid escalation and resolve issue (where appropriate).
- Clear anti harassment policies with direct guidelines on unacceptable behaviour must be adopted by all workplaces.
- Independent tribunals are necessary so that employees do not feel threatened especially when the harasser is directly responsible for their future employment prospects (also where companies do not have HR departments).
- Strong agreed polices and a climate that fosters dignity at work will enable more people to directly challenge behaviours that affect them.
- Clear guidelines must be agreed as to what the procedure of reporting harassment is and what it entails and a streamlined reporting/complaint procedure must be agreed.
Sources of primary reference:


Other references utilised are clearly stated in text.

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