

Chapter 17

Sexual Harassment in Health Institutions in Turkey: Causes, Frequency, Effects, and Consequences

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ABSTRACT

Sexual harassment is a concept that has become a growing concern globally as it occurs in all areas of life and also in the workplace. In the workplace it is described as any undesirable sexual behavior that is perceived as a threat, border violation, and attack by the exposed person, negatively affecting the employee's ability to do his/her job. This problem disproportionately affects women and can negatively affect their economic and career outcomes. Studies show that sexual harassment cases in health institutions are quite pervasive. Studies examining the sexual harassment of nurses in Turkey determined that the rate of exposure to sexual harassment ranged from 1.5% to 75%. Sexual harassment incidents in health institutions usually occur by relatives of patients, patients, physicians, other healthcare professionals, and colleagues. In this chapter, the definitions, causes, frequency, effects, and consequences of sexual harassment will be discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Definition of Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment is a concept that has become a growing concern globally as it occurs in all areas of life and also in the workplace (Chaudhuri, 2007). Sexual harassment can take many different forms, overt or covert, and behavior perceived as sexual harassment may be characterized differently by every-

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Sexual Harassment in Health Institutions in Turkey

one. Therefore, it is difficult to make a precise and common definition of sexual harassment (Sarmaşık, 2009). However, in general sexual harassment is defined as unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature (Scholcoff et al., 2020). Although sexual harassment may seem like a situation that only concerns the abused person, it is actually a social phenomenon. It is because sexual harassment shows that there is a situation arising from inequality between the sexes (Durmuş, 2013).

Sexual harassment, which could be seen on the street, on travel and even in the family and which could be exposed by people whom the person knows or does not know, may also be perpetrated by colleagues or managers in the workplace. With the continuation of sexual harassment cases in different sectors for the last 30 years, more women are exposed to sexual harassment as more women join the workforce nowadays (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine, 2018). In the United States, more than a quarter of women reported having been sexually harassed at work (Edison Research, 2018).

On the other hand, sexual harassment in the workplace is any undesirable sexual behavior that is perceived as a threat, border violation and attack by the exposed person, negatively affecting the employee's ability to do his/her job (Adams et al., 2019; Çelik & Şenol Çelik, 2007). Sexual harassment is a term often used to describe the unwanted sexual attitudes and behaviors of men towards women in the workplace. Unwanted touching, speaking, insinuation, actions and attitudes are considered within the scope of sexual harassment. However, it is also possible for women, albeit to a lesser extent, to perpetrate passive sexual harassment by provoking men at a disturbing level (Arslan, 2001). Sexual harassment in the workplace has been handled from different perspectives by different countries and has been accepted as gender discrimination, violation of personal rights or abuse of power (authority) in order to gain sexual interest (Bakırcı, 2000). However, fundamentally, workplace violence and harassment are violations of basic human rights (International Labour Organization, 2019).

There are some elements for a behavior to be defined as sexual harassment in the workplace. These are listed below:

- The behavior in question must occur in the workplace or in a work-related environment. Harassment that occurs while away from the workplace for business is also considered as sexual harassment in the workplace.
- The behavior must be about the person's gender, sexuality or sexually suggestive subjects. A word expressing gender discrimination or anecdotes containing sexuality can be evaluated within this scope.
- The behavior must be done without the will or consent of the person was harassed.
- It must affect the person's working conditions or working environment. The behavior of a manager who dismisses or does not promote the employee that does not accept his offer of sexual intercourse or the decrease in the work efficiency of an employee due to the behaviors can be given as examples for these matters.
- For some behaviors, it must be a continuous behavior. Sometimes a single behavior can be considered as sexual harassment, and for some behavior to be considered as sexual harassment, it must be a repetitive behavior such as a colleague who persistently invites to a dinner/coffee date despite being rejected.

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