A new Gender, Work & Organization analysis of U.S. data from 1997–2016 provides new insights into workplace sexual harassment. The analysis found that declines in workplace sexual harassment complaints have been uneven, with African-American women experiencing an increased risk of sexual harassment, even as overall reported harassment complaints are down. In addition, higher unemployment rates were linked to increases in sexual harassment of women in American workplaces. Specifically, a higher unemployment rate in a particular month was followed by an increase in the number of reported harassment cases in the following month.

The authors noted that sexual harassment in the workplace appears to be an expression of power, or a way for men to assert their dominance. The shift from sexual harassment of white women to sexual harassment of African-American women indicates that harassers are conscious of power relationships and choose to target more vulnerable women in their workplaces. The link between changes in the unemployment rate and changes in sexual harassment indicates that men are more likely to engage in harassment behavior when they feel that their economic position in society is likely to be under threat.

“Over the past 20 years, we’ve made great strides in reducing sexual harassment in the workplace, but those benefits have all gone to white women, and mostly to young white women,” said co-author Dan Cassino, MA, PhD, of Fairleigh Dickinson University, in New Jersey. “It seems as though men have gotten more careful about who they’re harassing and have been targeting women of color, who may be less likely to report the harassment.”

Additional Information


About Journal

Launched in 1994, Gender, Work & Organization was the first journal to provide an arena dedicated to debate and analysis of gender relations, the organization of gender and the gendering of organizations. Since then Gender, Work & Organization has published multi-disciplinary, high quality qualitative empirical research on gendered power relations and identities in the study of work and organization exploring issues of inclusion and exclusion. It has also published quantitative work guided by critical epistemologies on issues such as the gender pay gap, flexible work, career patterns, women on boards and access to leadership positions.

Issues of critical importance as Gender, Work & Organization moves forward include feminist knowledge and practice, feminist philosophies and praxis, diversity, intersectionality, transnational, postcolonial, and decolonial feminisms, feminist ecology, postfeminist humanism/posthumanist feminism, embodiment, affect and organising, gendered power, resistance and activism, gender and global labour markets, critical analyses of neoliberalism, postfeminism, femininities and heroic versus post-heroic leadership approaches.

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