

Sexual harassment at workplace: Sri Lankan women's understanding of the notion.

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Background

The issue of 'sexual harassment at workplace' has been well researched and has attracted much popularity and interest, during the last few decades since it came into existence. Yet, the meaning of the term 'sexual harassment at workplace' still remains indefinite and ambiguous, surrounded by a lot of controversies and the need for a more unambiguous and culture-sensitive understanding of the meaning of sexual harassment, is constantly being highlighted by various scholars. Thus, the present study inquires the research problem 'What is the meaning Sri Lankan women associate with the concept 'sexual harassment at workplaces', in their day to day lives?'

Methods

Based on a social constructivist paradigm, due to its ontological and epistemological underpinning, the current study employed grounded theory as the strategy of inquiry, which directed the study's data collection and analysis. Purposive sampling at the initial stages of data collection and theoretical sampling in the successive stages was employed. Triangulation of data collection was carried out by using in-depth, person-to-person interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis. Data was analyzed in two stages as open coding and selective coding.

Results

The study found that, when a female experiences behaviours which are blatantly sexual in nature or which has a sexual undertone, perpetrated by a person related to her employment, in the workplace or other places associated with workplace or employment, that recipient would consider various factors in deciding whether that behaviour is unwanted and unwelcome to her and whether it makes her uncomfortable, offended or angry and would affect her work performance or psychological wellbeing. The different and specific forms/behaviours the study respondents commonly identified to mean sexual harassment/ unwanted behaviours of sexual nature are a) propositions to have sexual relationships, whether overt or implied; b) verbal conducts such as discussing or attempting to discuss sexual matters, jokes of a sexual nature and comments of a sexual nature; c) physical contact, whether overt or subtle; d) receiving unwanted attention; e) work demands with ulterior motives; f) invading personal space; g) rumours and locker room talk; h) showing and displaying of pictures or emails of sexual nature; i) leering; j) sexual assault and rape; and k) nuisance calls. It was interesting to note that unlike the findings of prior studies, none of the respondents of the present study identified sexist behaviour as sexual harassment at workplace. Also, the fact that some of the behaviours respondents identified as harassing were not blatantly sexual in nature is another interesting finding of the study.

Conclusion

It was thus revealed through the study, that Sri Lankan women tend to give a broader meaning to the concept 'sexual harassment at workplace' by identifying a range of behaviours as sexual harassment and by giving wider meaning to the notions 'workplace', 'perpetrator', and 'effects of harassment'. Some of the behaviours that were identified as sexual harassment at workplace/unwanted sexual behaviours, such as work demands with ulterior motives and rumours and locker room talk, were found to be rather unique to the Sri Lankan context, when compared with previous studies and established definitions of sexual harassment at workplace. While it was possible to identify these certain behaviours as harassing, a prominent finding of the analysis is that the boundary line which makes otherwise ordinary behaviour harassment was very indistinct, and in many instances, these behaviours cannot be considered in isolation, in deciding whether they are sexual harassment or not.

The Puzzle of Jobless Growth in Sri Lankan Manufacturing

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Background

Manufacturing is the main contributor to value added in industry and its relative share of GDP increased from 13 percent in 1990 to 17 percent in 2000 and reduced to 16 percent in 2006. An assessment of growth performance of the economy in terms of value added reveals high growth rates maintained by manufacturing as against the services sector and the national economy.

Method

This paper examines the employment effect of economic growth in the context of Sri Lankan manufacturing. This is also called 'employment elasticity' of growth and a weak relationship between economic growth and employment creation is reflected in declining employment elasticities. The causal relationship between economic growth and employment was first established in classical and neo-classical economic theory. Even in Keynesian economics, employment was defined as a determinant of economic growth assuming fixed wages. Neo-Keynesian economists (i.e. Hicks, Modigliani, Samuelson etc) also followed a same line of argument in explaining the links between economic growth and employment. In contrast, New Keynesian economists, emphasized the significance of institutional coordination failures, macro externalities and X-inefficiency as factors affecting employment elasticity. Subsequently, implicit contract theory and insider theory added new dimensions to employment and growth puzzle.