



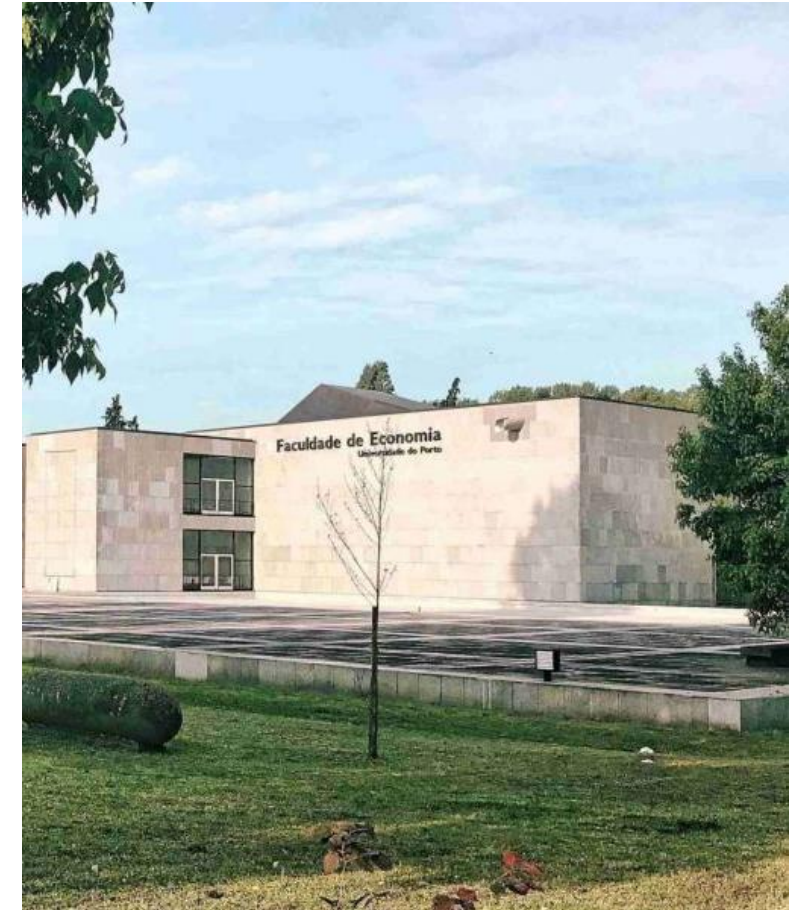
SCHOOL OF
ECONOMICS
AND MANAGEMENT
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Sexual Harassment In the Workplace

Which policies and practices are used by companies located in Portugal?

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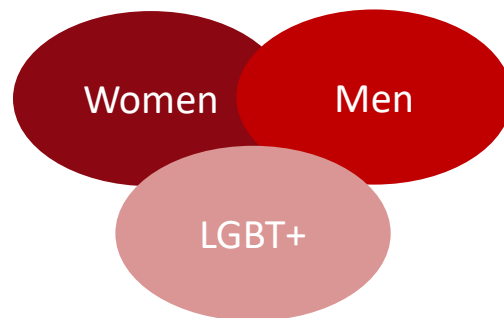
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INTRODUCTION

- ❑ Sexual harassment (SH) is a worldwide known phenomenon. → #MeToo movement
- ❑ Defined as ‘unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature’.
- ❑ Prior studies reveal a **negative impact** on careers’ success and satisfaction, raises mental health problems, and increases post-traumatic stress disorders.
- ❑ Affects – directly and indirectly – many people around the world:



YET

- Research has **overlooked the organizations’ approach to SH** and;
- What they **can and do to prevent this damaging problem, in different workplaces.**



Management research has **disregarded** managers' views on WSH and **largely neglected** the implementation of organizational policies against it in the national context.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- 1) Which are the **existing policies and practices** used by diverse organizations located in Portugal to address workplace sexual harassment?
- 2) What are the **major difficulties** experienced when spreading awareness about workplace sexual harassment?

Types of organizations targeted:

- Public and private;
- National and multinational;
- SMEs and large ones.

LITERATURE REVIEW

WSH **continues to be somewhat ignored** and disregarded **in many places**.

The role of preventing and handling SH when situations occur falls into the responsibility of the Human Resource (HR) professionals.

Preventive practices

(Becton et al., 2017)

- Training sessions;
- Zero-tolerance policy;
- Secure mechanisms to report complaints;
- Strategy to investigate complaints, protecting both parts interests;
- Monitor results and adjust if necessary.

- **Organizations** and **employees** gain from the formulation of a **WSH policy** to combat the prevalence of SH.
- However, this requires managers' **active engagement**, a **careful implementation** and **continuous assessment**.

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative methodology

❑ Data collected through semi-

❑ Participants: 23 organization
65 years old, and highly sk
multinationals, and 7 SMEs a

❑ Purposive sampling:

1. Being from the HR
2. Having knowledge
3. Representing an org

❑ Thematic content analysis

Company	N° of employees	Sector	Headquarters' location	Interviewee	Sex	Age	Residency	Education Level	Occupation	Position	Professional Experience
C1	1-99	Private	National	I1	F	36-45	Northern Portugal	Masters	HR Team	Staff	[1-5] years
C1	1-99	Private	National	I2	F	26-35	Northern Portugal	Bachelor	Administrative	Staff	[0-1] years
C2	1000+	Public	National	I3	F	36-45	Central Portugal	Bachelor	HR Team	Director	[1-5] years
C3	1000+	Private	Multinational	I4	F	36-45	Lisbon metropolitan area	Postgraduate	HR Team	Manager	[15-20] years
C4	1-99	Private	National	I5	F	26-35	Northern Portugal	Masters	HR Team	Staff	[1-5] years
C5	100-249	Private	National	I6	M	36-45	Lisbon metropolitan area	Bachelor	HR Team	Director	[1-5] years
C6	500-999	Private	Multinational	I7	F	26-35	Northern Portugal	Masters	HR Team	Staff	[0-1] years
C7	1-99	Private	Multinational	I8	M	26-35	Northern Portugal	Masters	HR Team	Staff	[1-5] years
C8	100-249	Private	National	I9	F	26-35	Northern Portugal	Masters	HR Team	Director	[5-10] years
C9	500-999	Private	National	I10	M	56-65	Lisbon metropolitan area	Postgraduate	HR Team	Director	[10-15] years
C10	1000+	Private	Multinational	I11	F	46-55	Lisbon metropolitan area	Bachelor	Ethic's Team	Staff	[10-15] years
C11	500-999	Private	National	I12	F	46-55	Central Portugal	Bachelor	Medical Team	Manager	[1-5] years
C12	1000+	Public	National	I13	F	36-45	Madeira	Bachelor	HR Team	Director	[5-10] years
C13	250-499	Public	National	I14	F	56-65	Central Portugal	Bachelor	HR Team	Manager	[10-15] years
C13	250-499	Public	National	I15	F	46-55	Central Portugal	Masters	Other Staff	Manager	[15-20] years
C14	250-499	Private	Multinational	I16	F	26-35	Northern Portugal	Masters	HR Team	Manager	[1-5] years
C15	1000+	Private	Multinational	I17	F	46-55	Lisbon metropolitan area	Masters	HR Team	Director	[20-25] years
C16	250-499	Private	Multinational	I18	F	46-55	Northern Portugal	Bachelor	HR Team	Director	[1-5] years
C17	1-99	Private	National	I19	F	36-45	Northern Portugal	Bachelor	HR Team	Director	[10-15] years
C17	1-99	Private	National	I20	F	26-35	Northern Portugal	Masters	Other Staff	Staff	[0-1] years
C18	500-999	Private	National	I21	F	46-55	Angola	Bachelor	HR Team	Director	[1-5] years
C18	500-999	Private	National	I22	F	46-55	Northern Portugal	Bachelor	Legal Team	Staff	[20-25] years
C19	1-99	Private	National	I23	F	36-45	Northern Portugal	Bachelor	HR Team	Manager	[1-5] years



RESEARCH FINDINGS

RQ1: Which are the existing policies and practices used by diverse organizations located in Portugal to address WSH?

Policies:

☐ Code of conduct:

- 10 organizations only stated what the law dictates while 7 had it more detailed (2 were still developing them);

☐ Specific policy on SH:

- 8 organizations had one; Discourages the prevalence of cases.

☐ Non-retaliation

- Only 5 organizations had one;
- Important to disseminate fear of reporting.

☐ Zero-tolerance

- Divergence of opinions: 8 had one, 8 did not have one, and 2 did not know.

Just because the policies exist does it mean that the employees know them? **Probably not.**

“We have it written in the code of conduct but do employees read it? Probably not...”

Policy disclosure is **essential!**

RESEARCH FINDINGS

RQ1: Which are the existing policies and practices used by diverse organizations located in Portugal to address WSH?

Practices:

Practices:	C1	C2	C6	C7	C8	C9	C10	C12	C13	C14	C15	C16	C18
Sexual harassment sessions		x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x
Conflict management training	x							x					
E-learning			x	x			x			x			
Quizzes			x	x			x			x			
Ethics' surveys							x						
Posters/Brochures		x		x						x	x		
Emails				x			x			x			
Personal development and emotional training	x												

SH training might include:

- The definition of SH;
- Examples of SH situations;
- Explanation of the investigation process;
- Possible consequences to perpetrators.



Through **lectures** or **videos** and **discussions**.



RESEARCH FINDINGS

RQ1: Which are the existing policies and practices used by diverse organizations located in Portugal to address WSH?

Mechanisms to report: there were 10 different mechanisms mentioned in the interviews, being the main ones the:

- Human Resources director/team;
- Immediate superior.

It is essential to have more than one mechanism to report.

“(...) I think it is essential to have other channels, in which the person handling the complaint is a woman”

Investigation Process: it was done differently in each organization, through committees, lawyers, and the HR team. Some care about being biased and others not so much.

Monitoring and evaluation: only 9 organizations have foreseen providing counselling:

- Psychological (most common);
- Medical;
- Juridic;
- HR Team.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

RQ2: What are the major difficulties experienced when spreading awareness about WSH?

- Fear of **reporting**;
- **Defining** SH and clearly **explain** its limits;
- The **age and level of education** of employees can also be a complication:
 - Younger generations are more prone to engage in improper behaviors **vs.**
 - Younger generations do not tolerate these type of behaviors.
- **Interest** shown by employees;
- **Hierarchization** of management: managers might think they are untouchable and do whatever they want;
- **Number** of employees/**turnover**: it can be hard to reach each and every employee.

“I think that they (employees) rarely take the report until the end.”

To the HR team:  **Lack of time** to prepare activities/training sessions.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

MNC vs. Local

- i. MNCs' harassment policies and practices are defined by the **headquarters company**;
- ii. MNCs focus more **on skills and knowledge** about the topic, while local organizations invest more in **conflict management**;
- iii. The way **complaints are reported**, and the **investigation** is done is the opposite.
- iv. MNCs offer **more counselling** options;
- v. MNCs have a **higher level of formalization** which includes WSH policies and practices.

‘Before any Portuguese legislation came out, I was already aware with this topic, by working on a multinational company at the time. (...) we are a little behind the practices and culture of other countries, by me previous experiences.’

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Public vs. Private

- i. Public organizations cannot choose the **consequences** for WSH cases;
- ii. **Confidentiality** of the codes of conduct and other policies is assured in private companies;
- iii. Practices are **not mandatory** in the public sector;
- iv. Private sector **invests in more different ways to report** complaints;
- v. The representatives of public organizations were **more open to talk** about WSH cases.

“We focus on spreading awareness and disclosing in an attractive way, so that we can attract employees.”

RESEARCH FINDINGS

SME vs. Large

- i. Neither SMEs has a **specific policy** on SH or a **non-retaliation policy** or a **zero-tolerance policy**;
- ii. SMEs **do not** offer any type of support to victims;
- iii. **Anonymity** of the victim is more ensured in larger organizations;
- iv. SMEs have **less resources** than larger ones and so, cannot invest that much in committees and specific teams to report/investigate.

“You know, we function differently from larger companies (...) By being such a small company, it wouldn’t be hard to identify the problem and “cortar o mal pela raiz”.”

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Limitations

- Methodological;
- Respondents;
- Willingness to collaborate;
- Sector of analysis;
- Country of analysis;
- SH between client/supplier-employer or vice versa.

Theoretical contributions

1. It is one of the **few studies providing empirical evidence for the policies and practices** employed by organizations located in **Portugal** in addressing WSH.
2. Contributes to a **better understanding of the role of HRPs** in helping employees and preventing WSH.
3. Proves that there are a number of actions to be taken by organizations to walk towards a better prevention of WSH, by **offering a “roadmap”** of what organizations can and should do.
4. Helps to **summarize the major difficulties and challenges** organizations are faced with when dealing with WSH.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Managerial contributions

- **Employers:** Findings reflect differences pertaining organizations' ownership and size. By learning from the larger and MNCs, one can recommend to local employers a plan of action to address WSH. They can learn new strategies and the most used tactics on SH prevention, to achieve good/better results.
- **Managers** need to set the example by attending to training sessions and be on the lookout for possible situations of harassment.
- **HRPs** can withdraw ideas from this study to implement in their workplace and be more prepared to deal with cases. It is crucial that they stay updated to this type of investigations and to how they can add value to their practices.
- **Employees:** Findings underscore the right of being informed about their workplace rights, including not being harassed.



CONCLUSION

This study reveals that each organization can use different practices to prevent SH, being the most used ones giving **specific training on SH** to all employees (used by 11 organizations) and **having several mechanisms to report complaints** (as the majority had more than one to do so).

The numbers reveal that for several organizations, the **employees' well-being is not a priority**.

There is still a **long way** to go when it comes to preventing WSH, especially for national organizations.

It cannot be just talking and no action, there **needs to be consequences and follow ups**.

Thank you!

