

No gender differences in sexual harassment of teachers in Germany

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Abstract

Sexual harassment is common in western societies with a tendency to blame victims of sexual assaults. For most young victims, a first response lays in seeking assistance and support by a teacher they trust. Victims of sexual harassment may avoid reporting those incidents due to the phenomenon of victim blaming. There are evidences that sexual harassment may occur with higher probability by man then women, however younger studies showed an effect of sexism of women toward their own gender, as well. Taking this into account, the present study examined the tendency for sexual harassment of male in comparison to female teachers. We found no significant statistical difference between both genders in the tendency for victim blaming by using the Illinois Sexual Harassment Myth Acceptance (ISHMA), indicating that there cannot be a gender related recommendation for victims which teacher they should consult. Although the study was restricted in using only a small sample, we believe a social trend can be seen here, as well as in other studies showing a wide distribution of victim myths in any gender. Given this at the group of teachers we recommend further investigation to allow programs for instruction about the appropriate handling of sexually assaulted victims.

Introduction

In Germany 13% of all females between the ages from 16 to 85 years became victims of molestation, while 58% have experienced sexual harassment and 40% physical and/or sexual abuse. The dark figure of all not announced cases is estimated at a 15-times higher value [1]. Despite illegal and prosecuted by the authorities, social judgments concerning the crime is often influenced by prejudice-afflicted factors beyond the judicial system: The appearance, the clothes, or the general attraction of the victim as well as their life-style and their behavior towards the culprit or the opposition against the infringement play a role by the judgement and perception of guilt concerning sexual violence [2,3]. These social images about how a woman has to look or to behave can be summated in the phenomenon of "sexism" with high impact on judgements of sexual harassments [4,5]. Presently sexism is valid as a gender-related social discrimination as well as suppression and concerns men as well as women [6]. Due to the fact that most victims are underage or young adults, they turn in particular to teacher according their bond of trust established in school. As we know that sexual harassment is socially widespread [7] with a trend towards man [5,8-11], its extension among teachers is especially important: Taking these information in account, it could be vital if a female victim of sexual violence should seek assistance by a female or a male teacher – or avoid a certain gender to prevent becoming an potential object of victim-blaming. To examine this, we examined the gender related distribution of sexual harassment among teachers.

Methods

The current study employed a survey instrument to answer the research question of this study: Do male and female teachers hold similar acceptance attitudes for sexist beliefs and sexual harassment?

To investigate this question, we decided to use the Illinois Sexual Harassment Myth Acceptance (ISHMA) scale [8] in its German translation [12] for its high psychometric qualities and its economic. The inventory consists of 20 items measuring the respondent's acceptance of

attitudes and beliefs about sexual harassment. The questionnaire was transformed in an electronic form by the authors to be used online.

The participants were asked to respond on the developed online questionnaire with a total of 28 items including demographic characteristics and the ISHMA scale. Demographic variables were gender, age, profession, employment (type of school). Prior to the questionnaire, each participant was shown an informed consent indicating that participation was complete voluntary, and that each data obtained was anonymous and would remain strictly confidential. Each participant was given a code name by using date and time the website was entered by the participant to remain anonymous. No clear names were obtained.

An ad-hoc sample of 42 respondents (19 male) was utilized in this study. The respondents were teachers from different schools (elementary schools, secondary modern schools, junior high schools, high schools) from Germany. Respondents were recruited via a web site of the corresponding author. 4 respondents were excluded from final analysis due not being a teacher, further 3 respondents were excluded for incompleteness of the questionnaire.

Results

Raw data of all items excluding distraction items were summed up for each respondent and an independent samples t-test was carried out with gender as grouping variable. The group of female responders show an mean sum score of 91.565 (SD = 7.698), the group of male responders show a mean score of 92.842 (SD = 7.798). The results show

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no significant statistical difference between male and female responders ($t = 0.532$; $df = 40$; $\text{Sig. [2-tailed]} = 0.598$). Power calculation by GPower [13] show a power of 0.647.

Discussion

The absent of any statistical difference between the two groups of teachers, separated by gender, can be interpreted as indifference in the tendency for acceptance of sexual harassment. Given the small sample size, this can only be seen as trend directing towards the mentioned interpretation. In this, however, implications may arise for social programs aiming at teachers: were teachers driven by sexist prejudices according women, victims may be already at young age confronted with victim blaming – independent of the gender of the teacher asked for assistance. Here our results indicate that even female teachers tend as well as male teachers to victim blaming. If further studies with greater sample sized confirm these findings, we see an urgent need for educational programs aiming at teachers to reduce the tendency to victim blaming and allow a more appropriate handling of sexual incidences.

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