Assessing Impact: Effectiveness of Sexual Harassment Training for Young Workers

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ABSTRACT

Sexual harassment (SH) policies and training directed at young workers is a generally overlooked area of research. In the current study, we investigated the impact of SH training on young workers' declarative and procedural knowledge. Additionally, we evaluated the impact of gender on training outcomes. Results indicated a positive training impact on participants' declarative and procedural knowledge. Further, gender significantly impacted the effect of training on procedural knowledge and attitudes but not declarative knowledge.

BACKGROUND & HYPOTHESES

Young workers, often in part-time or seasonal roles, may not receive SH training within organizations, leaving them unaware of workplace policies, their rights, and SH laws. This lack of understanding can impact their ability to recognize and respond to SH, affecting both individuals and organizations. This study evaluates the effectiveness of targeted SH training for young workers.

Hypothesis 1: SH training designed for young workers will have a positive effect on their declarative knowledge- *Supported*

Hypothesis 2: SH training designed for young workers will have a positive effect on procedural knowledge- *Supported*

Research Question 1: Does participant gender influence the effect of SH on SH-related a) declarative and b) procedural knowledge? – *Partially Supported*

Research Question 2: Does participant gender influence the impact of SH training on SH-related attitudes? - *Supported*

METHODS

Participants

117 undergraduate students (ages 18-25) preparing for the workforce.

- **Demographics:** 72.6% White, 3.4% African American, 0.9% Asian American, and 2.6% Hispanic or Latino/e/a.
- **Gender:** 45.3% Female, 49.6% Male
- **Mean Age:** 19.84 years (SD = 9.21).
- **Prior SH Training:** 40.2% had attended SH training before.

Procedure

Pre-training survey: Measured baseline SH knowledge, and attitudes toward SH reporting and intervention.

Training session: 45-minute instructor-led training focused on young workers was conducted in a regular class session, covering:

- *Definition of Sexual Harassment:* Legal definition & key concepts
- *Types of Sexual Harassment:* Quid pro quo, hostile work environment and discussion of third-party liability and retaliation

- *Impacts & Consequences:* Effects on victims, workplace culture, and legal risks
- *Response Strategies:* Reporting procedures, bystander intervention, and organizational policies

Post-training survey: Assessed knowledge retention, procedural understanding and behavioral intent.

Measures

Measure	Description	Example Item	Reliability
Declarative Knowledge	18 items (7 multiple-choice, 11 true/false) measuring SH knowledge based on training content.	T/F: Sexual harassment can occur off the work site and still be considered work-related (for example, texts or at office socials, etc.)	Time 1: α = 0.14 Time 2: α = 0.41
Procedural Knowledge	22 items assessing recognition of SH acts, adapted from prior scales (Kenig & Ryan, 1986; Bingham & Scherer, 2001; Knapp et al., 2019).	"Pressuring the employee to engage in activities of a sexual nature."	Time 1: α = 0.89 Time 2: α = 0.94
Sexual Harassment Attitudes Scale	25 items measuring attitudes toward SH, using items from Bingham & Scherer (2001) and Lonsway et al. (2008).	"Most employees secretly enjoy it when other employees 'come on' to them at work."	α = 0.88
Training Reactions	5 items evaluating participants' reactions to the training program (Lee & Pershing, 2002).	"The training content met the objectives of the workshop."	α = 0.93

RESULTS

Hypotheses 1 & 2

- Participants demonstrated a significant increase in declarative knowledge post-training (H1)
- Training significantly improved participants' ability to recognize SH behaviors (H2)

Variables	Post Training		Pre-Training	
	M	SD	M	SD
Declarative Knowledge	16.48[a]	1.16	15.95[b]	1.16
Procedural Knowledge	4.24[a]	.48	3.89[b]	.51

Note. Means followed by same letters are not significantly different.
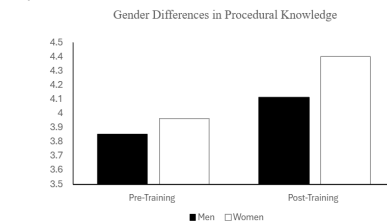
Research Questions 1 & 2

Gender Differences in Knowledge Gains **(RQ1)**

Declarative Knowledge: No significant gender differences in pre-post gains.

- $F(1, 105) = 0.375$, n.s.; partial $\eta^2 = .004$

Procedural Knowledge: Women showed greater gains than Men.

- Significant interaction: $F(1,105) = 8.51$, $p = .004$; partial $\eta^2 = .08$

Gender Differences in Procedural Knowledge

■ Men □ Women

Variables	Post Training		Pre-Training	
	M	SD	M	SD
Men	4.11	.62	3.85	.59
Women	4.40	.32	3.96	.31

- *Suggests training may be more effective in improving procedural knowledge among women*

Attitudes Toward SH **(RQ 2)**

- Men exhibited more permissive attitudes post-training than Women (Men: M = 2.32, SD = 0.39; Women: M = 2.13, SD = 0.38), $t(105) = 2.48$, $p = .02$, Cohen's d = 0.39

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations among Study Variables

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Declarative Knowledge T1	15.97	1.66	(.67)					
2. Declarative Knowledge T2	16.43	1.30	.26**	(.25)				
3. Procedural Knowledge T1	3.91	.48	.38**	.23*	(.89)			
4. Procedural Knowledge T2	4.26	.50	.46**	.27**	.78**	(.94)		
5. SH Attitudes	2.27	.45	-.24**	.05	-.27**	-.27**	(.88)	
6. Training Reactions	4.45	.54	.39**	.17	.38**	.50**	-.33**	(.93)

Note. N = 117. Coefficient alpha estimates for scales are listed in bold font on the diagonal.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

DISCUSSION

- Sexual harassment (SH) disproportionately impacts younger workers, yet targeted training is rare.
- Training improves knowledge, with young women showing greater gains, likely due to higher risk.
- Young men show smaller improvements and more permissive attitudes, highlighting a need for adjustments.

FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

- Enhancing Training for young men: Incorporate empathy-based activities to improve engagement and attitude shifts.
- Interactive & Extended Training: Longer, multi-method programs may boost retention and effectiveness in young workers.
- Targeted Learning Approaches: Address gender differences to ensure equitable knowledge gains.
- Ongoing Reinforcement: Implement follow-ups to sustain knowledge and encourage behavioral change.
- Future research should explore experiential learning, particularly for young men.

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