EFFECTS OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT ON EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE. EVIDENCE FROM BINDURA NICKEL CORPORATION.

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Abstract
The research sought to assess the effects of sexual harassment on employee performance at Bindura Nickel Corporation. The research was carried out in the form of a case study in which a sample of 205 employees from a population of 367 employees was used. Stratified random sampling procedure was employed in selecting elements from 15 managers and 277 general employees. Questionnaires and interviews were used in triangulation to collect data on the sample. After analyzing the collected data, it was found that sexual harassment resulted in hostile working environment, absenteeism, intention to leave, depression, work related stress and compromised employee performance. The study recommended that companies must have sexual harassment policy clearly stating reporting procedure and penalties available for sexual harassment misconduct.

Key words: Sexual harassment, performance, victim, harasser and stress

Academic Discipline: Human Resources Management

Subject Classification: Human Resources Practices

Introduction
Sexual harassment is an issue of concern in many organizations which has recently begun to receive widespread attention but, certainly not a modern phenomenon. According to Powell (2011), no occupation or profession is safe from sexual harassment and the work environment serves as a fertile breeding ground. It is becoming an extensive problem in most workplaces and over the years has transformed from subtle hints to inappropriate behaviour and now to blatant propositions. Employees are often exposed to severe emotional, mental and serious traumas that affect their professional and personal lives. In Zimbabwe it is deemed an unfair labour practice through the provisions of the labour act which shows the seriousness of the problem and also the urgent need to eliminate it. Therefore, the study of sexual harassment should be spread out more widely. Several studies on sexual harassment have been carried out, but little attention has been made to assess sexual harassment on employee performance.

Related Literature
This research is guided by Gutek et al’s (1990) sexual model and Ricky et al (2004)s aggressive harasser theory.

Gutek et al’s (1990) Sexual Based Model
Gutek et al’s (1990) sexual based model postulate that sexual harassment is a result of natural sexual attraction between men and women which occurs at the workplace. Gutek et al’s (1990) contact hypothesis suggests that sexual harassment is likely to occur when men and women engage in work related contact. They argue that the workplace facilitates contact by arranging the amount of interaction between men and women. Increased contact with the opposite sex at work creates great potential for sexualized work environment.

Ricky et al (2004)’s Aggressive/ Agentic Harasser Theory
The theory revealed that sexual harassment focuses on perpetrator’s motivation of endangering one’s life by forcing him or her to comply so as to accomplish some valued personal goal. Sexual harassment is a function of the perpetrators expectations and motivational beliefs.

Definitions of sexual harassment
Torrington et al (2010) define sexual harassment as an undesired conduct of a sexual nature that affects the dignity of men and women at work which can be either physical or verbal in nature. Zimbabwean Labour Act Chapter (28:01) further
defines sexual harassment as an undesired sexual behaviour towards any employee, whether verbal or otherwise, such as making physical contact or advances, sexually coloured remarks or displaying pornographic materials in the workplace.

**Forms of Sexual Harassment**

Sexual harassment can occur in three forms which are verbal, physical and non-verbal harassment. A study by Maricana and Rahman (2002) on sexual harassment revealed that visually related behaviours is the major form of sexual harassment, followed by physical, non-verbal and verbal form of behaviours. They further state that the above forms of sexual harassment affect the well-being of the victims.

**Verbal sexual harassment**

Aquinas (2007) postulates that verbal sexual harassment involves making of suggestive compliments about dress, sexual desirability, physique or sexual orientation. It includes joking about gender-specific qualities, sexual propositions, sexually related threats and insulting personal behaviour or person’s body. It can also include requesting sexual favours or sexual innuendoes, false stories about a person's personal or sexual life or to threaten a person. In addition Khan and Mawire (2005) reveal that verbal sexual harassment is the most common type of harassment harassers prefer.

**Physical sexual harassment**

Aquinas (2007) argues that physical harassment involves unwanted touching, pinching, standing or sitting too close with the intention of brushing against someone else's body. Physical sexual harassment can also include coercing sexual intercourse and assault, impeding or hindering movement, inappropriate contact with a person or a person’s clothing, kissing, hugging, patting and stroking. Moreover, MacKinnon (1990) alludes that sexual harassment involves conduct that is sexual, but conduct must not be sexual for it to result to sexual harassment. Aquinas (2007) further states that treating a person differently because of their gender amounts to physical sexual harassment. Many employees had been treated differently because of their gender.

**Non-verbal sexual harassment**

Aquinas (2007) propounds that non-verbal sexual harassment involves suggestive or insulting noises, obscene gestures, whistling, leering, displaying obscene pictures posters, drawings, pictures, screensavers, emails or text of a sexual nature. He further argues that derogatory gestures, facial expressions and emails or texts of sexual nature amount to non-verbal sexual harassment.

**Causes of sexual harassment**

Gateway (2009) states sexual harassment vary from individual to individual and the work environment create closeness and fog boundaries which are often crossed thereby exacerbating the room for sexual harassment.

**Lack of Policy**

Gateway (2005) argues that sexual harassment is caused by the lack of policy. Some companies lack the policy in sexual harassment or do not have well clarified policies, disciplinary and procedures to deal with sexual harassment. Thereby the harassed do not know the channels of reporting and some employees are not aware of the seriousness of sexual harassment and its penalty. Contrary a survey conducted by Ramsapoop and Brijball (2007) on the causes and forms of sexual harassment at South Africa University revealed that occupational sex segregation, supervisory relations, levels of interaction, appearance and personality are the major causes of sexual harassment at the workplace.

**Power and fear**

Employees depend on each other for support and depend much on their managers’ approval for opportunities and the success of their dreams in careers. Robbins (2008) postulates that employees view their supervisors or managers as role models. However, management often become accustomed to their power of authority over employees and tends to use it to harass their subordinates. Economic instability exacerbates the rate of sexual harassment because employees are to comply with sexual harassment in fear of losing their jobs. In support Rudman et al (1995) state woman’s role in life is to please men and that popularity with men equals success. Given such a background, it means men have power over women and this gives room for sexual harassment.Similarly, a study by Lunenburg (2010) on the causes and impact of sexual harassment showed that employees in higher positions who have formal power are strictly liable for sexual harassment. Contrary, research by Powell (2011) revealed that sexual harassment of female supervisors or female employees occupying higher positions is perpetrated by male employees in bid to minimise power differences.

**Socialization**

According Gateway (2005) moral values and cultural differences causes fuel sexual harassment, in societies were extramarital affairs are broadly accepted, some people equate monogamy with monotony. It is relatively easy for people to indulge in sexual affairs, whether one-sided or mutual. The person who tries, and does not accept rejection, or sees the unwilling colleague as a challenge, easily becomes a harasser, or may victimise the reluctant colleague. The prevalence of marital stress and divorce in western society which now influences many cultures globally means that some men and women come to work in a state of emotional distress that could make them vulnerable to sexual harassment. Some confusion results from cultural differences about what is, or is not, acceptable in our rapidly changing society.
Peer pressure

The way people behave when they are in groups is different. People in a gathering often behave differently from how they would as an individual hence is the cause of some of the gang harassment that occurs. Pellegrini (2001) postulates that employees in groups usually do cheering, whistling when a person gets to the plant or walks past a group of employee. This kind of behaviour would influence employees to indulge into undesirable behaviour which amount to non-verbal sexual harassment.

Effects of sexual harassment on employees’ performance.

Sexual harassment has some effects on employees’ performance as they might be affected emotionally, physically, financially and socially.

Emotional effect

Sexual harassment can have an emotional impact on employees which includes self-blame and guilt this is mostly common in women who tend to think it’s their fault. Rudman et al (1995) allude that employees who are harassed suffer from distress, denial, mood swings, depression, fear, anxiety, self doubt, irritability feeling of isolation, anger, feelings of intimidation, loss of focus, re-living of issues in one’s head, restlessness and uncertainty over the future. This reduces employee’s morale hence they do not perform to their best if they are harassed which decreases their performance hence there by lowering the output because of their emotional state. In support, a research carried out by Schneider, Swan and Fitzgerald (1997) to evaluate effects of sexual harassment revealed that sexual harassment leads to psychological outcome that is negative affective disposition and work related stress. Similarly, a study by Stockdale (1996) surfaced that individuals who are sexually harassed are prone to work related stress and may experience multiple abnormal stressors, which negatively affect job attitude and performance.

Physical effect

Pellegrini (2001) states that once sexually harassed, victims suffer from headaches, stress-related ailments and stomach ailments. In addition, Rudman et al (1995) state the results of physical effect affects employee well-being and lead to absenteeism.

Social effect

Social effect involves a physical or emotional withdrawal from friends, family and co-workers (Khan and Mawire 2005). They further state that victims experience difficulty in interacting with others and they end up limiting their social interactions and fear to go to work were the the incident occurred. Generalized fears of people or things that remind one of the harassment, others may distance themselves from a complainant because they do not want to get involved or do not understand what she/he is experiencing and also might indulge in alcohol or drug use/abuse and this goes a long way in affecting their performance.

Demotivated workforce

Maslow’s theory of motivation subscribe to the fact that human beings perform better when their needs are well catered for. Employees are intrinsically motivated from the internal traits that influence people’s behaviour. Employees are motivated when they feel that their work is interesting, challenging and important. However, according to Armstrong (2009) sexual harassment creates a hostile working environment, stress, anxiety and decreased job satisfaction which leads to demotivation. Armstrong (2009) further argues that sexual harassment victims suffer from insomnia, depression and work related stress and this negatively affect employee performance. A study by Merkin (2008) in Argentina, Brazil, and Chile on the effects of sexual harassment revealed that employees who are sexually harassed have intentions to leave the organization and are likely to absent themselves from work.

Costs of bad decisions

Since sexual harassment is unacceptable, the harasser may end up involved in making decisions which do not benefit the organisation but rather benefit him/her. These actions may be costly to the organisation. The bad decisions may be costly but hard to quantify. According to Aquinas (2007) costs of bad decisions include the costs of recruiting potential employee because of their outlook and to comply with demand of the job, rather than skills and competence. Moreover, the direct costs of perks and unearned increases for favourites. The travelling and subsistence costs, if employees are invited along on business trips or to conferences for personal rather than business reasons. Some managers end up issuing loans or overdrafts unwisely, or placing orders in the hope of gaining the victim’s compliance.

High Absenteeism

Armstrong (2009) propounds that absenteeism is a result or a possible symptom of sexual harassment, as the stress caused by such an unresolved problem, or the fear of being harassed again can either cause illness, or encourage employees to stay safely at home. Sexual harassment can make the working environment hostile and employees become ill when subjected to sexual harassment on a regular basis particularly where it is perpetrated by a supervisor. This is supported by Aquinas (2007) who argues that sexual harassment may lead to high labour turnover which affects output and organizational performance. In addition, Brough and
Frame (2004)’s study on the effects of sexual harassment showed that sexual harassment leads to absenteeism and increased labour turnover.

**Strategies to minimize sexual harassment**

Hunt (2007) suggests three types of intervention that can be implemented by organizations to reduce and eliminate sexual harassment. The three types of interventions are policy, complaints procedure and rehabilitation of victims.

**Policy**

Having a policy in place is one of the ways of preventing and avoiding sexual harassment. It is important as it guides handling of sexual harassment issues. Hunt (2007) alludes that organizations can institute a formal policy which guides the handling of sexual harassment issues and the policy must declare intolerance of interpersonal mistreatment and should state clearly that the company will not tolerate any case of sexual harassment. Armstrong (2009) postulates that a policy must define sexual harassment and clearly outline examples of sexual harassment, and penalties for such misdeeds.

**Complaints procedure**

A clear and well-communicated complaints procedure results in effective eradication of sexual harassment. This results in staff having confidence that their complaints are taken seriously and treated confidentially. They will also feel reassured that they will not be victimised and that the whole process is handled properly. Follow-up interventions in the aftermath of a complaint of sexual harassment include rehabilitation of the person who has suffered sexual harassment, the perpetrator and others involved. It is vital that procedures are in place to prevent victimisation of the victims.

**Effective communication**

According to Meyer (2008), organizations can prevent and avoid sexual harassment through communicating now and then and publicizing the organization’s serious intentions to eliminating workplace hostility. They can include careful recruitment, training and development strategies to promote a more accommodative working environment and to enhance interpersonal skills and sensitivity to co-workers. Moreover they should put in place pre-employment screening and reference checks regarding problems with interpersonal behaviour and relationships. In addition, Griffin (2004) argues that managers can eradicate sexual harassment by developing a sexual harassment policy which prohibits any form of sexual harassment.

**Education**

Gateway (2005) suggests the provision of workshops to educate and train all organizational members and managers on sexual harassment issues. Managers must educate employees on how to report incidents of sexual harassment.

**Challenges faced when dealing with sexual harassment**

Meyer (2008) argues that sometimes victims find it difficult to report their cases because they fear losing their job or facing other negative consequences. Given such a background it becomes hard for management to deal with sexual harassment as some of the cases are kept unreported.

**Research Methodology**

The research adopted a case study research design in which both qualitative and quantitative techniques were used. The case study was chosen because the researchers had insufficient funds to carry a census of all the companies in Bindura. Results of the findings will be used to infer to the population of Zimbabwean companies.

**Study Site**

The study was carried out in Bindura, 88 kilometres from Harare. The major nickel mine in Mashonaland Central is Bindura Nickel Corporation. Bindura Nickel Corporation Mine was chosen because it is located at a place which is highly convenient for the researchers.

**Sampling Method**

The study used a sample of 205 employees from a population of 367 employees. Two hundred and five employees comprises of 10 managers and 195 non managerial. The sample size comprised of 17 employees from human resources, 33 operations, 104 production, 31 marketing and 20 employees from finance and administration. The researchers used a stratified random sampling technique; the researcher divided the employees into two segments, that is management and for non-managerial workers. The researchers used 66 per cent of the population which is way above the recommended 10 percent by Best and Khan (2003).

**Data collection instruments**

The research instruments used in this research were formal questionnaires and key informant interviews. Questionnaires were used as appropriate research tools to reveal sensitive issues which respondents would otherwise feel uncomfortable to talk about in an interview. A pre-test survey was conducted in order to evaluate the validity and reliability of the
questionnaire. Questions that proved to be unclear to the respondents were modified, rephrased or discarded. Edwards (2003) posits that pre-testing of instruments in the field can serve as a reality check indicating to the researcher how well conceptualization of the problem matches the actual experience of the practitioner. Key informant interviews were used to obtain in-depth data from the selected few.

Data entry and analysis
The data was coded into the computer using SPSS, to allow analysis to be carried out. The analysis carried out was largely descriptive and comparisons were made between the results. All data was presented in tables.

Results
The table below shows responses by respondents to suggested statements on the effects of sexual harassment on employee performance.

Table 1. Responses to suggested statements (SS) on the effects of sexual harassment on employee performance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SS</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>NS</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Total Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SS1</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SS2</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SS3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SS4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SS5</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SS6</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SS7</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source of data: Raw Data

Key: SS on effects of sexual harassment on employee performance.
SS1: Sexual harassment is an unacceptable advances or request of sexual favours.
SS2: Verbal harassment is the major type of sexual harassment.
SS3: The major cause of sexual harassment is peer pressure.
SS4: There is a negative correlation between sexual harassment and employee performance.
SS5: Demotivation and absenteeism are the result of sexual harassment.
SS6: Sexual harassment policy is an effective strategy to minimize sexual harassment.
SS7: Victim’s fear is the major challenge in addressing sexual harassment issues.

Key: Responses to SS
SA: Strongly Agree; A: Agree; NS: Not Sure; D: Disagree; SD: Strongly Disagree

Suggested effects of sexual harassment on employee performance
The following effects of sexual harassment on employee performance were highlighted by the respondents: absenteeism increased labour turnover, demotivation and stress.
Analysis of table 1

The majority (70%) of the respondents agreed and strongly agreed that sexual harassment is an unacceptable advances or request of sexual favours while 20% of the respondents thought otherwise. On the statement that verbal harassment is the major type of sexual harassment, an overwhelmingly 71% agreed with the statement while 13% of the respondents strongly agreeing to it. However, 0% of the respondents did not agree with the suggested statement. On SS3, the majority (70%) of the respondents are against the statement that the major cause of sexual harassment is peer pressure or request of sexual favours while on the other hand only 20% of the respondents agree. On SS4, 81% of the respondents are against the statement while only 10% are supporting the statement.

On SS5 (64%), SS6 (45%) and SS7 (51%), the majority, in each case, support the suggested statement on the effects of sexual harassment on employee performance.

The table below, which is derived from the responses table above, explores the extents to which each statement was supported by respondents through the means of ranking the scores obtained by each suggested statement.

### Table 2: Scores of Responses and Rankings of SS.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SA(SA^2)</th>
<th>A(A^1)</th>
<th>NS(NS^0)</th>
<th>D(D^2-1)</th>
<th>SD(SD^2-2)</th>
<th>SCORE</th>
<th>RANK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SS1</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-11</td>
<td>-18</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SS2</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-13</td>
<td>-24</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SS3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-43</td>
<td>-54</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SS4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-26</td>
<td>-110</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SS5</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-21</td>
<td>-18</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SS6</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-36</td>
<td>-16</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SS7</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-27</td>
<td>-30</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SS1 and SS2 are the suggested statement to which the respondents significantly agreed to with a score of 74. The order cascaded down through SS5 (score 55); SS7 (score 34); SS6 (score 23); SS3 (score 65) until the least agreed SS4 with a score of -113.

**Discussion**

The findings on the major form of sexual harassment are consistent with Khan and Mawire (2005)’s studies which revealed that verbal sexual harassment is the most prevalent because the victim find it difficult to prove beyond reasonable doubt that he/she was verbally harassed. However, this contrasts with the Labour Act Chapter (28:01) which provides sexual harassment with other forms other than verbal. Section 8 (h) states that sexual harassment means engaging in unwelcome sexually-determined behaviour towards any employee, whether verbal or otherwise, such as making physical contact or advances, sexually coloured remarks, or displaying pornographic materials in the workplace. In short the Labour Act Chapter (28:01) is simply stating that there is no major form of sexual harassment but all the forms once committed amounts to sexual harassment.

The findings on the causes of sexual harassment are in line with the results of Gateway (2005) who argues that the major cause of sexual harassment is the absent of sexual harassment policy. Gateway (2005) confirmed that organisation without a sexual harassment policy face challenges in handling sexual harassment cases and ends up inconsistently handling them. In addition, the findings concurs with Lunenburg (2010) who states that abuse of power causes sexual harassment. In support of Lunenburg (2010), Robbins (2008) postulates that management often marry themselves to their power of authority over employees and tends to use it to harass their subordinates. Contrary, study by Zimbabwe Union of Journalists (1996) found that sexual harassment is just like domestic violence which is influenced by cultural, religious and social beliefs where a woman is supposed to be subservient and power of authority over employees and tends to use it to harass their subordinates. Given such a background, it means even if abused they are not recognized. Ramsarpoop and Brijball (2007) in their study found that occupational sex segregation, supervisory relations, levels of interaction, appearance and personality and types of behaviour are other significant causes on sexual harassment at the workplace.

Respondents revealed that sexual harassment resulted in decreased job performance. The above is supported by Aquinas (2007) who argues that sexual harassment may lead to high labour turnover and this has a negative impact on employee and organizational performance. The findings are also supported by Faley (1994) who established that sexual harassment leads to work related stress and finally affects employee performance.

Findings on the strategies to reduce sexual harassment at work concurs with the findings of Roberts and Mann (2008) who suggest that an organization can eradicate sexual harassment by developing a sexual harassment policy stating clearly how sexual harassment misconduct can be reported and dealt with. In support Griffin (2004) postulates that managers can eradicate sexual harassment by developing and clearly communicating a sexual harassment policy. However, a survey conducted by Zimbabwe Journalist Union (1993) confirmed that majority of sexual harassment policies failed to give a proper definition of sexual harassment and the reporting procedures and penalties were not clear. Gateway
(2005) suggests that besides sexual harassment policy, education is another strategy that can be used to mitigate sexual harassment at work.

The finding concerning the challenges faced by managers in trying to address sexual harassment issues are supported by Meyer (2008) who argues that sometimes victims find it difficult to report their cases because they fear losing their job or facing other negative consequences. Given such a background it becomes hard for management to deal with sexual harassment as some of the cases are kept unreported.

Conclusion
The research findings show that sexual harassment impacted positively on the employee performance. The weight of each statement has been shown on the Scores of Responses and Rankings of SS table in which SS1 and SS2 topped the rank while SS4 ranked last.

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References