

Attitudes Towards Women College Students Who Faced Sexual Harassment at Work



01. Introduction

This study was completed as a requirement of the course PSYC 4000 Honours Thesis. Today, the MeToo and Time's Up movements encourage women who have been sexually abused to report their aggressor. According to the Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics, ‘many women did not act because they felt uncomfortable (48% of those who did not act), because they feared negative consequences (28%), or because they feared for their safety (18%)’. According to Statistics Canada, in 2016, 4% of Canadian women reported being sexually harassed in the workplace. The current study used vignettes to investigate whether participants have empathetic attitudes towards female university students who have trouble in their university courses due to the hardship experienced from being sexually abused at their job relative to other reasons. A fictitious scenario described a female university student with a part-time job. In one condition (Scenario 1), she divulged that she was sexually harassed at her job and asked for accommodations in her course due to the hardship caused by sexual harassment at work. In the other condition (Scenario 2), the scenario described the same woman without mentioning that her hardship was due to sexual harassment. Participants rated the woman's likelihood of being granted accommodation for a class by pretending as a university professor. Hence, the measure was giving accommodation by answering the questionnaire positively or not to see how supportive our attitudes towards these women college students were. After agreeing to participate in the study, they first answered demographic questions. After that, there was one scenario for each group of participants, followed by a questionnaire and the TEQ (Toronto Empathy Questionnaire). I randomly assigned participants to do Scenario 1 (the disclosure of sexual harassment at work) or Scenario 2 (no disclosure of sexual harassment) according to their answer to the first sifting question (which popped up as choose the option that comes first - A or - B). The DV is the participants' supportive attitudes towards women college students who faced workplace abuse. The IV is the disclosure of the WA and SH.

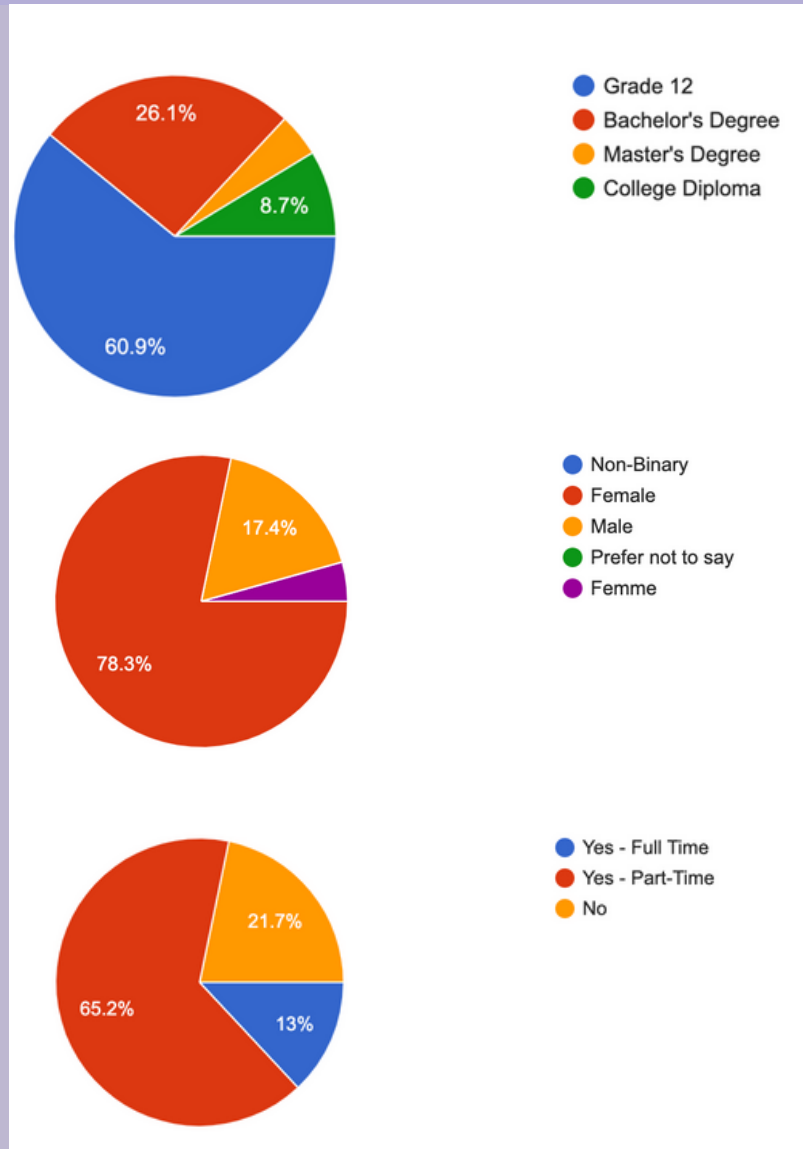
02. Hypothesis

The participants who were randomly assigned to receive Scenario 1 (Groups A) would have lower or similar scores on giving the accommodation than the control group (Group B), which was exposed to receive Scenario 2 (no disclosure of sexual harassment).

03. Methods

Participants

- Total number of participants was 23 (n=23, k=2), and the age range was between 19 to 35 years old. (nA=11, nB=12)
- 18 of the participants were female, 4 of them were male, and 1 of them was femme.
- 14 participants completed Grade 12, 6 held a Bachelor's Degree, and 2 had a College Diploma, while 1 had a Master's Degree.
- 15 participants were working part-time, 3 were full-time employed, and 5 were not working.
- Exclusive criteria: Participants were required to be a current university student.



Measures

- Participants were given a questionnaire which has three positive and three negative sentences to be agreed on a level of 5 (strongly disagree to strongly agree) Likert Scale to measure the supportive attitude.
- Participants also received the Toronto Empathy Questionnaire to keep the confounding factor a minimum for empathy skills.

Procedure

- Participants first answered demographic questions (age, gender, highest level of education completed, employment status).
- The sifting question was answered to be randomly assigned to the scenarios.
- After reading the assigned scenario, they answered the questions about giving leniency.
- Then, the completion of The Toronto Empath Questionnaire, they completed the study.

A

Please read carefully below to answer next questions.

Imagine you are a professor at York University, and you receive an e-mail from one of your students asking for lenience under exceptional circumstances. Please read and answer the following questions.

Hello Professor,

I am a student from your 400* class this year. I missed several lectures. I could not complete my last assignment, due two days ago, and I could not prepare for the exam next week yet. I work part-time, and I am having issues at my workplace due to sexual abuse and harassment, and for which I started a legal procedure. I have been feeling very depressed and cannot focus. I spent so much time in court proceedings, and still dealing with these issues.

Hence, I kindly wish to have an extension for my exam and my past due assignment. If possible, I would like to have recorded lectures, since I missed some classes.

I apologize for asking for leniency; however, I am not lazy and want to catch up with my class. Thank you in advance for your kind attention to this matter.

Best Regards,
Mrs. X (She, her)

B

Please read carefully below to answer next questions.

Imagine you are a professor at York University, and you receive an e-mail from one of your students asking for lenience under exceptional circumstances. Please read and answer the following questions.

Hello Professor,

I am a student from your 400* class this year. I missed several lectures. I could not complete my last assignment, due two days ago, and I could not prepare for the exam next week yet. I work part-time, and I am having some issues at my workplace, which I prefer not to disclose in detail, but for which I started a legal procedure. I have been feeling very depressed and cannot focus. I spent so much time in court proceedings, and still dealing with these issues.

Hence, I kindly wish to have an extension for my exam and my past due assignment. If possible, I would like to have recorded lectures, since I missed some classes.

I apologize for asking for leniency; however, I am not lazy and want to catch up with my class. Thank you in advance for your kind attention to this matter.

Best Regards,
Mrs. X (She, her)

QUESTIONNAIRE

I will give an extension for the late assignment.

Please carefully read and choose the one best describes your opinions.

I won't give extra time for the exam.

Strongly Disagree

1

2

3

4

5

Strongly Agree

I will provide the recorded lectures.

Strongly Disagree

1

2

3

4

5

Strongly Agree

Please choose 2

Strongly Disagree

1

2

3

4

5

Strongly Agree

I won't give an extension for the late assignment.

Strongly Disagree

1

2

3

4

5

Strongly Agree

Special treatment for this student would not be unfair to others.

Strongly Disagree

1

2

3

4

5

Strongly Agree

Please choose 3

Strongly Disagree

1

2

3

4

5

Strongly Agree

I think most of the people who claim workplace abuse are exaggerating.

Strongly Disagree

1

2

3

4

5

Strongly Agree

I will not provide the recorded lectures.

Strongly Disagree

1

2

3

4

5

Strongly Agree

I think most of the people who claim workplace abuse are not exaggerating.

Strongly Disagree

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Strongly Agree

I will not provide the recorded lectures.

Strongly Disagree

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Strongly Agree

TORONTO EMPATHY QUESTIONNAIRE

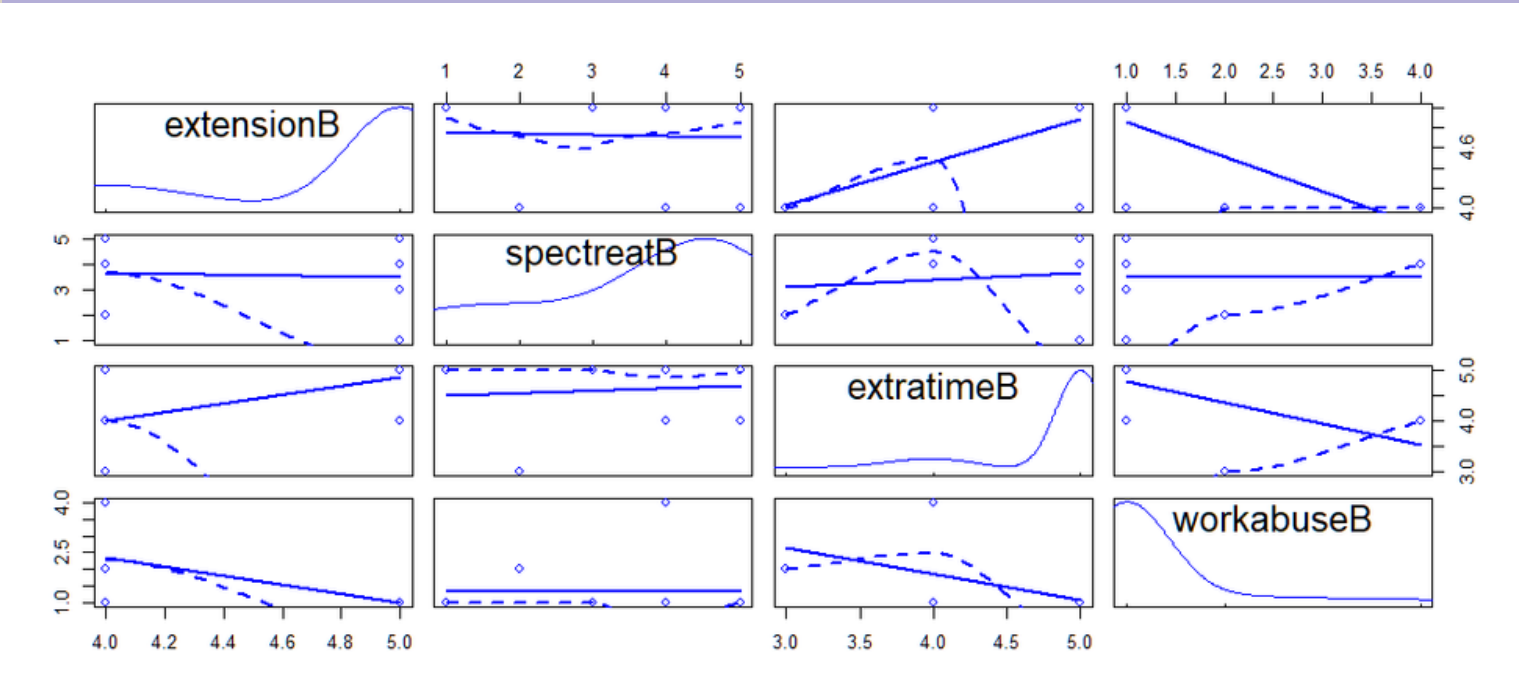
Below is a list of statements. Please read each statement carefully and rate how frequently you feel or act in the manner described. Circle your answer on the response form. There are no right or wrong answers or trick questions. Please answer each question as honestly as you can.

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1. When someone else is feeling excited, I tend to get excited too.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2. Other people's misfortunes do not disturb me a great deal.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3. It upsets me to see someone being treated disrespectfully.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4. I remain unaffected when someone close to me is happy.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5. I enjoy making other people feel better.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6. I have tender, concerned feelings for people less fortunate than me.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
7. When a friend starts to talk about his/her problems, I try to steer the conversation towards something else.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
8. I can tell when others are sad even when they do not say anything.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
9. I find that I am "in tune" with other people's moods.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
10. I do not feel sympathy for people who cause their own serious illnesses.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
11. I become irritated when someone cries.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
12. I am not really interested in how other people feel.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
13. I get a strong urge to help when I see someone who is upset.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
14. When I see someone being treated unfairly, I do not feel very much pity for them.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
15. I find it silly for people to cry out of happiness.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
16. When I see someone being taken advantage of, I feel kind of protective towards him/her.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

04. Results/Findings

- For both groups, participants who think that people who claim workplace abuse are not exaggerating tend to give extra time, recorded lectures, and extension.
- For group A (scenario includes sexual harassment), participants likely to think special treatments would be unfair to other students, and also think people who claim workplace abuse are not exaggerating.
- For group B (scenario does not include sexual harassment), participants likely to think that special treatments would not be unfair to other students, and that people who claim workplace abuse are not exaggerating.
- The difference between the empathy scores of the groups is considered to be not statistically significant.

Scatter Plot Matrix



Empathy Scores (Independent T-Test)		
Group	Group One	Group Two
Mean	18.64	21.17
SD	7.16	4.00
SEM	2.16	1.15
N	11	12

P value and statistical significance:
The two-tailed P value equals 0.2077
By conventional criteria, this difference is considered to be not statistically significant.

Confidence interval:
The mean of Group One minus Group Two equals -2.53
95% confidence interval of this difference: From -7.50 to 2.44

Intermediate values used in calculations:
t = 1.0589
df = 21
standard error of difference = 2.380

06. Conclusion

Although there is no significant difference in accommodating the woman student between the participants who read the scenario, including sexual harassment, and those who do not, there is a significant difference in special treatment. There is no significant difference between the empathic abilities of the participants. While participants who did not read the sexual harassment scenario thought special treatment would not be unfair to other students, the participants in the group A (sexual harassment scenario) were reluctant to say that special treatments would not be unfair to other students. **For future studies**, it would be more efficient to implement a study with more participants, in which the backgrounds of the participants can be examined in more detail. When it comes to special treatment, I intended to leave it vague for the imagination of the participants to look at the limits of positive behavior, but future studies may reveal and examine more clear behavioral patterns. Although both groups show a positive stance to give leniency, it is important that only the participants who read the scenario, which includes a sexual harassment, thought that special treatment would be unfair to others, to show the positive support needed by university student women who have been sexually harassed at work. In future studies, a more general situation can be evaluated by changing the sexual orientation of the person in the scenario. Since there are few studies on the behavior of peers toward women students who have been sexually harassed in the workplace, a different interpretation has been brought to the literature with this study.

