ABSTRACT

The topic of hostile environment sexual harassment (HE:SH) has received considerable attention because HE:SH is found to affect several employee outcomes. This paper is a preliminary study that measures the relationship between HE:SH and absenteeism. We first show the increased importance of HE:SH through the inclusion of several landmark cases. Then we develop scales to measure two of the major aspects of HE:SH, ubiquity and frequency. We also measure attitude towards absenteeism through these scales. We found that attitude towards absenteeism acts as a mediator for the relationship between HE:SH frequency (but not ubiquity) and actual absenteeism.

KEYWORDS: Hostile environment, Sexual harassment, Absenteeism, Attitude towards absenteeism

INTRODUCTION

In the last few decades, the topic of sexual harassment has received a lot of attention from researchers. Based on Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (the Act that protects against discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex or national origin), subsequent court rulings in the 1970s classified sexual harassment as a form of gender discrimination. Such an interest in
the topic is mainly due to the findings that show a high frequency of this phenomenon in the workplace. United States Merit Systems Protection Board in their 1981 and 1987 reports show that 40% of female workers have experienced sexual harassment behavior in the workplace. Furthermore, in 2011, 11,364 sexual harassment charges were filed with the EEOC, and the defendant companies paid the plaintiffs $52.3 million in punitive fees.

Sexual harassment can be viewed in terms of a quid pro quo situation, which is the request of a sexual act in exchange for a job benefit or prevention of a job detriment. However, sexual harassment can also occur as a hostile work environment, which is related to sexual advances, innuendos or even gender-related sexual comments that are severe enough to effect the offended employee’s work. This paper will focus more on the latter issue.

A major rationale for examining such a topic is because hostile environment sexual harassment (HE:SH henceforth) affects several employee outcomes. Various scholars have empirically linked hostile environment sexual harassment to numerous consequences in the work environment. Among others, researchers have found that the presence of HE:SH is associated with diminished psychological well-being and decreased work productivity, reduced job satisfaction, and increased withdrawal behaviors.

Another important employee outcome that has a negative effect on firms is absenteeism. Not only does absenteeism reduce productivity, but it can also be very costly for the firm. A 0.81 increase in absenteeism per year can cost the firm around 43,000 Canadian dollars, according to a Canadian study. Various costs are associated with absenteeism. Cascio and Boudreau (2010) categorize these costs as associated with: 1. Absentees themselves, in terms of wages or employee benefits, 2. Managing issues caused by absenteeism, such as supervisor time invested in fixing such problems, 3. Replacement employees, such as overtime or part time, and 4. Reduced quantity or quality of replacement employees. In certain instances, a HE:SH can lead to absenteeism. Gohman and Thacker state that the presence of a HE:SH can lead employees to take more sick days or be more absent at work. Therefore, a thorough examination of the processes in which sexual harassment affects absenteeism can provide many beneficial insights for organizational decision makers.

Our study contributes to the literature by developing a scale for workplace hostile environment sexual harassment and testing its effects on attitudes towards absenteeism and on actual absenteeism. More specifically, we categorize the occurrence of hostile environment in terms of ubiquity and frequency of sexual harassment and develop scales for each dimension. The ubiquity of sexual harassment is the degree to which an activity related to sexual harassment is expressed among organizational members. The frequency of sexual harassment, on the other hand, measures how often situations related to sexual harassment are encountered in the workplace. Both the ubiquity and frequency of sexual harassment are considered to be perceptual. According to Fitzgerald, Gelfand, and Drasgow (1995), the frequency of sexual harassment can be greatly influenced by individual differences such as a victim’s prior history, or the frequency of the situation. Ubiquity can also be perceived differently by individuals. As Antecol and Cobb-Clark (2006) found, women who receive at least one hour of sexual harassment training are less likely to report a sexually harassing behavior.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows: The next section will present a literature review on the relationship of HE:SH with attitudes toward absenteeism and actual absenteeism. This same section also includes our related hypotheses. In the following section, we will discuss the methodology of the study. Here we will talk about the scale that we developed to measure
each variable and the statistical techniques used to test the hypotheses. Subsequently, this paper will include the results yielded by the study. The final section will consist of a discussion about the study’s research and management implications, limitations of the study, and identify areas for future research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Background and Cases on Sexual Harassment

The term sexual harassment has existed since the 1970s. The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) defines sexual harassment as “unwelcomed sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature” that affect employment, work performance or creates a “hostile or offensive work environment”. While sexual harassment is not a new issue, legal protection in such situations is relatively new. Charges claiming sexual harassment have increased drastically throughout recent years. In 1981, 2,661 charges were recorded by the EEOC. In 1989, the EEOC could count 5,623 charges. The numbers kept increasing, and by 1990, 6,127 charges were cited. The peak was reached in 1997 with 15,889 charges of sexual harassment. The number of claims in subsequent years remained above 10,000. These numbers speak for themselves when it comes to understanding the importance of this issue.

In this paper we have included several landmark cases that have helped improve the protection of employees from sexual harassment throughout the years. These cases not only depict the importance of HE:SH, but also show how certain behaviors, which today constitute grounds for HE:SH, were not treated as such prior to these cases.

The inclusion of a hostile work environment as a form of sexual harassment was not recognized by a court until five years after the first sexual harassment case, Williams v. Saxbe, which dates back to 1976. The first case in which the Court made such recognition is when the judge decided in favor of Sandra Bundy in Bundy v. Jackson, 1981. Bundy was an employee of the District of Columbia Department of Corrections. Bundy claimed that she was facing various forms of sexual harassment not only from her co-workers but also from her supervisor. This was an interesting case because Bundy did not suffer tangible job consequences, and thus the existence of sexual harassment was difficult to interpret under Title VII. However, The U.S. Court of Appeals decided that an employee does not necessarily have to suffer tangible job consequences in order to file a claim for sexual harassment. As a result, this became the first case in which a U.S. Court recognizes hostile environment sexual harassment as a form of sex discrimination.

Another important precedent case in the history of HE:SH cases is Meritor Savings Bank v. Vinson, in 1986. In this case, Michelle Vinson was a teller-trainee at Meritor Savings Bank. During her career at the bank, she succeeded in advancing up the ranks and eventually become branch manager. After four years of employment, she was fired due to excessive use of sick leave. After her termination, Ms. Vinson filed a suit against the vice-president of the bank, Sidney Taylor, for sexually harassing her during her employment. She claimed that she had accepted offers to have sexual relations with Mr. Taylor for fear of losing her job, and that several other times Mr. Taylor had engaged in sexually offensive behavior toward her. Based on these facts, the District Court did not find a case for sexual harassment because Vinson initially voluntarily engaged in a sexual relationship with her supervisor, and that the subsequent harassment by her supervisor did not have any economic effects. The case was appealed all
the way to the Supreme Court. This legal body’s decision favored Ms. Vinson claiming that sexual harassment which leads to noneconomic injury is still a form of sex discrimination. Additionally, and more importantly, the Supreme Court concluded that even though Vinson engaged in a voluntary sexual relationship, it was considered as “unwelcome.” Therefore, the Supreme Court established that this was a case of HE:SH. This was the first case for which the U.S. Supreme Court recognizes HE:SH as a violation of Title VII.

Relatedly, in Ellison v. Brady, 1991, Kerry Ellison was employed at the Internal Revenue Service in San Mateo, California. Ellison had been approached several times by a coworker, Sterling Gray, who asked her for drinks, giving her a note, and writing her two love letters expressing his obsession with her. Ellison filed a formal complaint for sexual harassment. The district court did not find the actions of Gray as ill-intentioned and concluded that his actions were “genuinely trivial” and did not constitute grounds for sexual harassment. However, Ellison appealed, and the case reached the U.S. Court of Appeals, Ninth Circuit. The Court of Appeals disagreed with the decision of the district court because the decision was based on the “reasonable person” standard, which, as this Court of Appeals stated, is male-biased. The Court of Appeals also decided to use the “reasonable woman” standard, for which the decision premise would rest on whether a reasonable woman in the same position as the plaintiff would agree that there exists a case of sexual harassment. By using the “reasonable woman” standard as opposed to the male-biased “reasonable person” standard, the Court of Appeals decided that Gray’s actions were not trivial, and therefore the case decision favored Ellison. This is the first case in which the court uses the “reasonable woman” standard instead of the “reasonable person” standard.

During the same year, in the case Robinson v. Jacksonville Shipyards, the Federal District Court in Maryland addressed the issue of how tangible objects and overt expressions of a sexual nature such as sexual graffiti and pornography, as well as crude language in the workplace effected female employees. After determining that the pervasive presence of such factors used by male employees created a “men’s world” and effected the psychological well-being of Robinson and other female employees, the court decided that these objects of a sexual nature were considered to create a sexually hostile work environment.

Later, in the case Harris vs. Forklift Systems, Inc., 1993, Teresa Harris was a manager at Forklift Systems, Inc. Charles Hardy, Forklift’s president, would often insult her because of her gender, or ask her to do things that were perceived as offensive to her as a woman. Such behavior led Harris to quit her job and sue Forklift Systems for hostile environment sexual harassment. The United States District Court for the Middle District of Tennessee concluded that even though they used the reasonable woman standard, Hardy’s actions could have been offending, but they were not severe enough to affect Harris’ psychological well-being. However, the case progressed to the U.S. Supreme Court. The Supreme Court reversed the order of the District Court in favor of Harris, and concluded that the plaintiff does not necessarily need to show psychological injuries when she perceives a hostile environment.

Still another precedent setting case occurred with Oncale v. Sundowner Offshore Services, Inc, 1998. Joseph Oncale claimed that he was sexually harassed by three colleagues. The District Court as well as the Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit concluded that since Joseph Oncale was a male, there was no cause of action for sexual harassment. The U.S. Supreme Court reversed the decision of the Court of Appeals by concluding that Title VII offers protection even for males when the discrimination is “because of sex.”
Two similar cases decided on the same day during 1998, *Faragher v. City of Boca Raton* and *Burlington Industries, Inc v. Ellerth*, helped to further shape the legal treatment of hostile environment sexual harassment. In these two cases, the courts decided that the employer is vicariously liable for hostile environment sexual harassment. However, the employer can claim an affirmative defense to such vicarious liability if it has taken immediate action to remedy the situation but the employee has failed to take advantage of these opportunities. This defense is not available, however, if the employee has suffered tangible negative job consequences by a supervisor’s actions.

An even more recent precedent case of HE:SH is *Pennsylvania State Police v. Suders*, in 2004. In this case, Nancy Suders filed a claim of hostile environment sexual harassment by her supervisor. She stated that the degree of HE:SH was so pervasive and so severe that it culminated in her leaving the job, hence, resulting in a constructive discharge. The U.S. Supreme Court decided that in cases of constructive discharge, the employer is allowed to raise an affirmative defense to liability if no prior official action such as demotion or pay reduction has been taken against the employee. In cases when prior official action has been taken against the employee, the employer would be strictly liable for the supervisor’s actions.

**The Effect of Hostile Environment Sexual Harassment on Absenteeism**

Many studies focus on the “quid pro quo” type of sexual harassment. Fewer scholars have included a HE:SH in their research. Two important and related outcomes affected by the HE:SH are the willingness to be absent and actual absenteeism. Absenteeism can be defined as “any failure of an employee to report for or to remain at work as scheduled, regardless of reason”. While some scholars have tested the effects of hostile environment sexual harassment on the employee absenteeism, it is important to note that none of these studies tested how the pervasiveness of sexual harassment, measured through its ubiquity and frequency, affects absenteeism. Testing only the presence of sexual harassment might help us predict how it influences each job outcome in terms of direction, but it might not be enough to determine the seriousness of the situation. If we consider the case of *Harris v. Forklift Systems, Inc.*, the offensive conduct of Hardy toward Harris would not have been so serious if he did not act offensively at a high frequency. The continuous offenses that Hardy considered as simply jokes ended up with Harris quitting her job after a few years. Therefore, it is very important to examine not only the presence of sexual harassment in the workplace, but also its pervasiveness.

The relationship between HE:SH and absenteeism can be explained by the theory of cognitive appraisal (or Lazarus theory) proposed by Lazarus. This theory first introduces stressors, which are demands that arise from the external or internal environment and that effect an individual’s psychological well-being. The individual deals with these stressors by going through two stages, which are called primary appraisals and secondary appraisals. The primary appraisal is the stage in which the individual evaluates the importance of the stressor. The secondary appraisal, which can happen simultaneously with the primary appraisal, is the stage in which the individual evaluates ways of coping with the stressor. Lazarus further argues that there are two ways of coping with the stressor, emotional-focused and problem-focused. The emotional-focused coping strategy assumes the stressor is uncontrollable and therefore the individual changes his or her coping and attitudinal mindsets towards the stressor by using mechanisms such as avoidance, adaptation, or cognitive change. The problem-focused coping strategy, which is generally more present in the long run, assumes that the stressor is controllable and the individual takes action to change the stressor.
The Lazarus theory can be directly applied to HE:SH in the following ways. Hostile environment sexual harassment has been shown to cause psychological distress on an individual. Thus, HE:SH can be considered as the stressor that the employee is facing in the workplace. The significance of this stressor is determined by its frequency and ubiquity. Based on the evaluation of how significant this stressor is perceived to be, the employee will determine the appropriate coping strategy. Suls and Fletcher (1985) found that an avoidance coping strategy in the short term is more effective than a non-avoidance, while the latter seems to be more beneficial in the long run. A manifestation of the short-term coping strategy that the employee can adopt when dealing with HE:SH is absenteeism, while the long term non-avoidance can be expressed as a formal complaint or lawsuit.

A helpful example of how the Lazarus theory might explain how the ubiquity and frequency of HE:SH effect employee absenteeism is depicted in the case Robinson v. Jacksonville Shipyards, Inc. Robinson’s psychological well-being had been injured not only because she had to face such a hostile environment on a daily basis, but various forms of inappropriate sexual innuendos were given to her by several co-workers. Her testimony showed that she had to become mentally resilient every day in order to cope in such a hostile environment. As a result, such an environment impacted her feelings about showing up to work. She even testified that she took several days off work each year in order to avoid such a hostile work environment, confirming that the ubiquity and frequency of HE:SH not only changed her willingness to be absent but also made her actually take days off.

Focusing on the pervasiveness of HE:SH, we develop a theoretical model (shown in Figure 1) that shows how the two dimensions of pervasiveness – ubiquity and frequency – effect an employee’s willingness to be absent and actual absenteeism. The frequent acts of a HE:SH can constantly increase the stress level of the employee, and such stress might reduce the employee’s desire to come to work and to eventually take days off as a coping mechanism. Therefore, our first hypothesis is as follows:

\[ \text{H1: } \text{HE:SH frequency is significantly and positively related to absenteeism} \]

However, the effect of HE:SH frequency on absenteeism is unknown. So, in order to better understand this relationship, we propose three sub-hypotheses, which involve the attitude toward absenteeism as a mediator toward actual absenteeism. After all, the attitude to do something is a precursor to actually do that thing. From our perspective, a victim may consider many things before deciding to be absent. Being absent might result in pay reduction, lower raises, lower chances of promotion, and higher chances of employment termination. For some victims, the desire to be absent will endure for a long time before he/she decides to be absent. Some employees will act on that attitude, yet some will not. Therefore, we develop the following sub-hypotheses:

\[ \text{H1a: } \text{Attitude towards absenteeism fully mediates the relationship between HE:SH frequency and absenteeism.} \]

\[ \text{H1b: } \text{Attitude towards absenteeism partially mediates the relationship between HE:SH frequency and absenteeism.} \]

\[ \text{H1c: } \text{HE:SH frequency is directly and significantly related to absenteeism.} \]
In an environment where HE:SH is ubiquitous, it is hard for the victim to minimize its impact. Take for example, an individual who is being harassed at work. If the organizational culture is such that supervisors do not take actions against certain offensive behaviors, the number of perpetrators in the office can be high, creating a hostile environment in which the victim might find it hard to avoid instances where he/she does not feel harassed. As the Lazarus theory suggests, the victim will try to minimize or tolerate the stressor based on available resources. If the HE:SH is limited to only certain locations or individuals at work (i.e. low ubiquity of HE:SH), the victim might be able to avoid situations of HE:SH, and therefore might find it easier to limit the trauma faced in the workplace. As the HE:SH become more ubiquitous, the opportunities to tolerate and eradicate the stressor are reduced. Therefore, with an increase in HE:SH, the victim will be more likely to consider being absent. As such, we make the following the hypotheses:

\[ H2: \quad \text{HE:SH ubiquity is significantly and positively related to absenteeism} \]

Just as with HE:SH frequency, the relationship between HE:SH ubiquity with absenteeism is unknown. In response, we develop three sub-hypotheses to examine the role of attitude toward absenteeism on actual absenteeism. Therefore:

\[ H2a: \quad \text{Attitude towards absenteeism fully mediates the relationship between HE:SH ubiquity and absenteeism.} \]

\[ H2b: \quad \text{Attitude towards absenteeism partially mediates the relationship between HE:SH ubiquity and absenteeism.} \]

\[ H2c: \quad \text{HE:SH ubiquity is directly and significantly related to absenteeism.} \]

**Figure 1: Theoretical Model**

**METHODOLOGY**

**Participants**

Participants for this study were drawn from the Mechanical Turk Web site. This site provides a mechanism for posting job tasks, and these tasks can be completed by people across the globe for a specified payment. This potential respondent pool is a useful way of recruiting participants for psychological surveys and experiments. Huff (2014) tested the demographic characteristics
of USA Mechanical Turk workers and found that Mechanical Turk respondent work characteristics are very similar to the work characteristics of the general work in USA population. In addition, several study findings have demonstrated that Mechanical Turk responses are generalizable to the population as a whole. Also, Peer, Vosgerau, and Acquisti (2014) performed a study which found that the worker reputation feedback mechanism instituted on the Mechanical Turk site provided a strong motivation for respondents to answer accurately and conscientiously in research settings.

Respondents were recruited by posting a solicitation for workers in the USA who were willing to complete a survey on their workplace environment. Respondents were provided a monetary incentive of US $0.50 for survey completion. Completion time took an average of 21 minutes. This study was part of a larger investigation of the workplace environment. The recruitment and completion process took place over eight days, from 13 March 2015 to 21 March 2015. The solicitation was for 400 respondents However, 427 people completed at least some portion of the survey. Some participants who completed the survey did not submit their completion for compensation.

The proportion of respondents was slightly higher for females (53%) than males (47%). Most respondents had some education beyond high school, 20% with an associate’s degree, 38% with a college degree, 18% with a graduate degree, and 24% with a high school degree. The median respondent age was 32, with lower and upper quartile ages being 27 and 42 respectively. The vast majority of respondents were native born USA citizens (96%), with non-US born workers having spent a median of 15.5 years in the US.

Respondents had a median 11.5 years of overall full-time work experience, with a median of four years of work experience with their current employer, and a median of three years of work experience in their current position and with their current boss. For their current work situation, 87% self-classified as full-time workers, and 13% self-classified as part-time workers. Respondents were evenly divided on the size of the organization that they worked for, with 33% working in small (less than 100 employees), 36% in medium (100 to 1,000 employees), and 30% working in large (more than 1,000 employees) organizations. The greatest number of respondents self-classified as having highly skilled/professional jobs (46%), with 39% selecting skilled labor, and 14% selecting unskilled labor as their job type.

Respondents came from a wide variety of industry sectors, with industrials (production of goods used in construction and manufacturing) representing the largest single sector at 15%. Information technology and government were the next largest sectors at 13% each, with health care being represented by 12% of the respondents, and utilities making up 10% of the respondents. All other sectors amounted for less than 10% of subjects. Within these sectors, 21% of respondents classified themselves as professional workers, 19% as managers, 14% as office and administrative support, and no other category had more than 10% of the respondents.

Materials and Procedures

For this study, respondents were asked to complete a questionnaire relating to two elements of hostile environment sexual harassment: the frequency with which they encountered HE:SH events, and the ubiquity (number of organizational members) that participated in such activities. These scales were based on actions that are often cited as being major elements of a HE:SH – as detailed in the preceding literature review, and also suggested by experts in Human Resource Management.
In order to evaluate the scale’s validity, each scale was first tested for factor unity through a scree plot of the factors’ eigen values. The scree plot showed a strong indication of a single factor for each construct with a drop in eigenvalues from 8.52 to 1.67 for HE:SH frequency and 6.58 to 1.20 for HE:SH ubiquity. Additionally, variance accounted for in the data only increased by 7% when adding a second factor to the models, and the second factor lacked strong item loadings in both cases.

Once each scale’s factor structure was determined, the next step was to identify which items should be retained; which ones were clearly a part of the appropriate HE:SH scales. To select the items, an iterative process was employed. First, the scales’ factor loadings were examined to determine if any items loaded lower than 0.71. (This factor loading cut-off is fairly stringent, but it guarantees that the item in question will load more highly on the given factor than any other potential factor.) If there were one or more items that fell below the cut-off criteria, then the lowest loading item was removed. Once the item was removed, the factor analysis was run again. This process was repeated until all items loaded at or above 0.71. An iterative process was employed since a poorly fitting item can distort the overall factor structure and alter the loadings of other items. Therefore, removing multiple items at once may result in an overly aggressive pruning of scale items.

Initially each scale had seventeen items. After the scale examination using factor analysis, thirteen items were retained for the HE:SH frequency scale, and fourteen items for the HE:SH ubiquity scale. The single retained factor accounted for 69% of total variance for the frequency measure and 68% of the ubiquity measure. In both cases, the first factor of the trimmed scales was the only factor with an eigen value greater than one. The factor analysis results are presented in Tables 1 and 2.

**Table 1: Factor Analysis Results for Sexual Harassment-Hostile Environment: Frequency**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor Item</th>
<th>Loading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Someone at my organization has sent me nude pictures of him or herself.</td>
<td>0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Someone at my organization has made threats to me of a sexual nature.</td>
<td>0.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Someone at my organization has inappropriately touched me.</td>
<td>0.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Someone at my organization has sexually assaulted me.</td>
<td>0.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Someone at my organization has followed me in a way that was sexually</td>
<td>0.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>threatening.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Someone at my organization has shown me his or her genitals.</td>
<td>0.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Someone at my organization has spread rumors about my sexual activities.</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Someone at my organization has asked me for sexual favors.</td>
<td>0.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Someone at my organization has sent me pictures or videos of a sexual</td>
<td>0.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nature.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Someone at my organization has displayed pictures of a sexual nature.</td>
<td>0.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Someone at my organization has made sexually suggestive comments about</td>
<td>0.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>my body.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Someone at my organization has persisted in asking for dates even</td>
<td>0.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>though I said no.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Someone at my organization has stared at me in a sexually suggestive</td>
<td>0.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>manner.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of variance accounted for</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factor eigen value</td>
<td>6.38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2: Factor Analysis Results for Sexual Harassment-Hostile Environment: Ubiquity**
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor Item</th>
<th>Loading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Sent me nude pictures of him or herself.</td>
<td>0.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Made threats to me of a sexual nature.</td>
<td>0.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Inappropriately touched me.</td>
<td>0.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Sexually assaulted me.</td>
<td>0.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Has followed me in a way that was sexually threatening.</td>
<td>0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Has shown me their genitals.</td>
<td>0.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Has spread rumors about my sexual activities.</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Has asked me for sexual favors.</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Has made a sexually suggestive physical gesture.</td>
<td>0.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Has sent me pictures or videos of a sexual nature.</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Has displayed pictures of a sexual nature.</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Has made sexually suggestive comments about my body.</td>
<td>0.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Has persisted in asking for dates even though I said no.</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Has stared at me in a sexually suggestive manner.</td>
<td>0.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of variance accounted for</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factor eigen value</td>
<td>5.29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Once each scale's retained items were selected, the scales' reliabilities were tested. The frequency measure had a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.97 and a confidence interval of 0.95 to 0.98. There was no indication that removing an item would increase the reliability by more than 0.01, and removing most items would decrease the reliability score. The ubiquity scale had similar strong reliability properties, with an overall Cronbach’s alpha of 0.97, a confidence interval of 0.96 to 0.98, and no indicated substantial reliability improvement from removing any given item. The full scale is presented in Appendix 1, with an indication of which items were deleted.

In addition to the frequency and ubiquity scales, respondents were also asked to complete measures of their attitude toward absenteeism and their actual absenteeism rate. These measures were taken from existing tested scales. The attitude toward absenteeism measure had an acceptable reliability score of 0.79 and a confidence interval range of 0.77 to 0.82. This scale was coded so that the higher a person’s score, the less favorably that person felt about being absent from work. For the actual absenteeism measure, respondents were asked how many work days they had missed in the past month. No reliability measure is available for this item, but other studies have examined this metric and found it to have adequate validity for measuring the intended construct.

RESULTS

Statistics and Data Analysis

For analysis, the independent variables were created by averaging a participant’s responses for HE:SH frequency and their responses for HE:SH ubiquity. The same process was performed for a respondent’s attitude toward absenteeism. If responses were missing for a given variable item, the completed items were used to calculate the average. Since there were very few missing items across respondents, this method for dealing with data incompleteness seems appropriate and in-line with current methods. Once the variables were calculated, respondents with missing data were removed from the sample. After respondents were removed, there remained 413 complete response sets. Table 3 presents the relationship between all variables, and summary statistics for these variables.
Table 3: Variable Inter-relations and Descriptives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Ubiquity</th>
<th>Attitude</th>
<th>Days</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ubiquity</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude</td>
<td>-0.29</td>
<td>-0.25</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Days</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>-0.37</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>3.79</td>
<td>1.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variance</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>1.59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To test the study hypotheses, a path analysis test was implemented using partial least squares latent variable analysis. Path analysis allows for examining complex models with more than one dependent variable, and with moderated relationships between the variables. The analysis was performed using the `plspm` package of the R statistical analysis programming language. The data set was standardized using a z-transformation, so all effects are in terms of standard deviations – similar to standardized regression analysis results.

The statistical analysis showed that a worker’s attitude toward absenteeism was significantly and negatively related to their actual days absent with a path coefficient of -0.32 and a bootstrapped confidence interval of -0.41 to -0.24. This relationship is important since both HE:SH frequency and ubiquity are hypothesized to have direct effects on worker absenteeism and indirect effects as mediated by a worker’s attitude toward absenteeism.

Results also showed that HE:SH frequency significantly reduced a person’s positive attitude about absenteeism with a path coefficient of -0.28, and a bootstrapped confidence interval around this path of -0.41 to -0.16. However, frequency did not directly significantly affect actual number of days missed. The path coefficient was -0.05, with a confidence interval that included zero. Since attitude toward absenteeism is significantly related to worker absenteeism, frequency has a fully mediated effect on absenteeism. This effect is small, -0.07 with an estimated confidence interval of -0.01 to -0.19.

The ubiquity of HE:SH was not significantly related to attitude toward absenteeism. However, ubiquity was significantly related to the actual days missed with a path coefficient of 0.26 and a confidence interval of 0.04 to 0.47. Pertinent statistical results are presented in table 4 and a graphical representation of the results is presented in figure 2.

Table 4: Path Analysis Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Path</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>Coefficient Confidence Interval</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frequency to Attitude</td>
<td>-0.28</td>
<td>-0.41 to -0.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency to Days</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>-0.20 to 0.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ubiquity to Attitude</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>-0.14 to 0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ubiquity to Days</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0.04 to 0.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude to Days</td>
<td>-0.32</td>
<td>-0.40 to -0.24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The contributions of this paper were foremost, to investigate the relationships between hostile environment sexual harassment and employee absenteeism. More specifically, we focused on the two main aspects of measuring the pervasiveness of hostile environment sexual harassment, frequency and ubiquity. After reviewing the literature in regards to HE:SH and absenteeism, we developed two hypotheses, with each one having three sub-hypotheses. These hypotheses were developed to examine how HE:SH frequency and ubiquity are related to the willingness of employees to be absent and actual absenteeism. In addition, to examine such relationships, we developed two reliable and valid 17-item scales for HE:SH frequency and ubiquity. We also measured the attitude towards absenteeism through these scales. The collected data were analyzed to evaluate the developed hypotheses through a path analysis test. Moreover, the study covers a wide variety of business settings, and captures diverse demographics.

Based on the results of the study, attitude towards absenteeism appears to act as a mediator for the relationship between HE:SH frequency and actual absenteeism, supporting our hypothesis H1a. As for the other hypotheses, the statistical analysis yielded some unexpected results. Based on hypothesis H1a and the literature about the links between attitudes and behavior, we expected that the attitude towards absenteeism would act as a mediator for the relationship between HE:SH ubiquity and actual days absent. Surprisingly, the direct relationship between HE:SH ubiquity and an employee’s attitude towards absenteeism is statistically non-significant. HE:SH is instead directly related to actual days absent, providing support for our hypothesis H2c. These findings may be due to the preliminary nature of this research, and future examination should clarify the nature of these rapports, including psychological processes and relevant moderators and mediators.

**Research and Managerial Implications**

The ubiquity and frequency of HE:SH are two major aspects of hostile environment sexual harassment. Our study showed that these two aspects are differentially related to absenteeism. Therefore, researchers focusing on the relationship between HE:SH and absenteeism outcomes
should take the findings of this study into consideration. In terms of managerial implications, the key message for managers is that they should firmly address issues related to hostile environment sexual harassment in order to reduce the levels of absenteeism.

Limitations and Areas for Future Research

This study has some limitations. First, this was a preliminary investigation, and therefore, no moderators or additional mediators were examined. Future studies could examine a number of moderators including age or gender composition for both co-workers and supervisors. These new studies could also apply qualitative methods to better understand the relationships examined in this paper. Equally important, the data were collected from a survey instrument. Therefore, we run the risk of having a response bias. It should also be noted that the study was cross-sectional and linear in research design, thus limiting its generalizability and support for causality. Additional investigations could focus on longitudinal studies and experimental designs to corroborate results and measure causality. Finally, our study was conducted with only U.S. employees. Yet, global operations are dramatically increasing. As a result, generalizability should be explored by comparing the relationships between HE:SH and absenteeism outcomes among U.S. employees with other global sample groups and settings.

CONCLUSION

The bottom-line is that absenteeism can become quite costly for organizations and problematic for the workforce. Therefore, it is in the best interest of organizations to address factors that are significantly related with increased absenteeism. This study has explored one of them, hostile environment sexual harassment. This preliminary study contends that through a strong relationship with increased absenteeism, sexual harassment, which manifests in a hostile work environment, is more than just an ethical problem. It is also bad for business, including financial outcomes.

APPENDIX 1: Scale Measures

Hostile Environment-Sexual Harassment: Frequency

Listed below are brief statements about situations that you may have encountered in your workplace. (Please exclude situations that may have happened as part of a romantic relationship with someone who works at your organization.) For each statement, please select how often you encounter the situation from any person who works at your organization – co-workers, workers in other areas, superiors, or subordinates – from Never to Constantly.

1. Someone at my organization has sent me nude pictures of him or herself.
   - Never
   - Very Rarely
   - Rarely
   - Often
   - Very Often
   - Constantly

2. Someone at my organization has made threats to me of a sexual nature.
   - Never
   - Very Rarely
   - Rarely
   - Often
   - Very Often
   - Constantly

3. Someone at my organization has inappropriately touched me.
   - Never
   - Very Rarely
   - Rarely
   - Often
   - Very Often
   - Constantly

4. Someone at my organization has sexually assaulted me.
   - Never
   - Very Rarely
   - Rarely
   - Often
   - Very Often
   - Constantly

5. Someone at my organization has followed me in a way that was sexually threatening.
   - Never
   - Very Rarely
   - Rarely
   - Often
   - Very Often
   - Constantly

6. Someone at my organization has shown me his or her genitals.
   - Never
   - Very Rarely
   - Rarely
   - Often
   - Very Often
   - Constantly
7. Someone at my organization has spread rumors about my sexual activities.

8. Someone at my organization has asked me for sexual favors.

9. Someone at my organization has made a sexually suggestive physical gesture.

10. Someone at my organization has sent me pictures or videos of a sexual nature.

11. Someone at my organization has made sexual innuendos to me.

12. Someone at my organization has displayed pictures of a sexual nature.

13. Someone at my organization has made sexually suggestive comments about my body.

14. Someone at my organization has made jokes of a sexual nature.

15. Someone at my organization has persisted in asking for dates even though I said no.

16. Someone at my organization has made disparaging comments about my gender (male or female).

17. Someone at my organization has stared at me in a sexually suggestive manner.

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Hostile Environment-Sexual Harassment: Ubiquity

Listed below are brief statements about situations that you may have encountered in your workplace. (Please exclude situations that may have happened as part of a romantic relationship with someone who works at your organization.) For each statement, please select how many people at your place of employment (co-workers, workers in other areas, superiors, or subordinates) have engaged in such activities (from No One to Everyone).

1. Sent me nude pictures of him or herself.

2. Made threats to me of a sexual nature.

3. Inappropriately touched me.

4. Sexually assaulted me.

5. Has followed me in a way that was sexually threatening.

6. Has shown me their genitals.

7. Has spread rumors about my sexual activities.

8. Has asked me for sexual favors.
| 9. | Has made a sexually suggestive physical gesture. | No One | One Person | A Few People | Most People | Almost Everyone | Everyone |
| 10. | Has sent me pictures or videos of a sexual nature. | No One | One Person | A Few People | Most People | Almost Everyone | Everyone |
| 11. | Has made sexual innuendos to me. | No One | One Person | A Few People | Most People | Almost Everyone | Everyone |
| 12. | Has displayed pictures of a sexual nature. | No One | One Person | A Few People | Most People | Almost Everyone | Everyone |
| 13. | Has made sexually suggestive comments about my body. | No One | One Person | A Few People | Most People | Almost Everyone | Everyone |
| 14. | Has made jokes of a sexual nature. | No One | One Person | A Few People | Most People | Almost Everyone | Everyone |
| 15. | Has persisted in asking for dates even though I said no. | No One | One Person | A Few People | Most People | Almost Everyone | Everyone |
| 16. | Has made disparaging comments about my gender (male or female). | No One | One Person | A Few People | Most People | Almost Everyone | Everyone |
| 17. | Has stared at me in a sexually suggestive manner. | No One | One Person | A Few People | Most People | Almost Everyone | Everyone |

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REFERENCES


