

Global MBA survey finds workplace sexual harassment is rampant

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GNAM survey finds women in Africa more likely to report unwanted sexual attention but considerably less likely to report personal experiences of sexist and sexual misconduct.

At least 42% of women polled in a new survey and 15% of men experienced some form of sexual harassment or gender discrimination in the past year, according to a report from the Global Network for Advanced Management. Among them, fewer than one in 10 formally reported the incident(s) inside or outside the workplace. And two-thirds of total respondents agree that “the existence of a culture of sexual harassment at a workplace is a factor when you look for a job.”

The survey about desirable workplace conditions was distributed to students and alumni at 30 Global Network business schools. The 2,729 respondents had workplace experience in 84 countries. Member schools include the University of Cape Town Graduate School of Business; Haas School of Business; University of California Berkeley; Saïd Business School; University of Oxford; Hong Kong University of Science and Technology Business School; HEC Paris; IMD Business School; and the Indian Institute of Management Bangalore, among others.

Says survey co-designer and co-author Frances Rosenbluth, Damon Wells Professor of Political Science at Yale University: “New evidence suggests that establishing a reputation for a workplace free of sexual harassment is likely to be one of the most effective ways employers can compete for talent in a global workforce. Recognising the problem, and dealing with it effectively, offers employers a winning strategy for recruiting and retaining valuable human capital.”

“It’s hard because we are battling decades of entrenched workplace cultures that are resistant to change,” explains Kumeshnee West, director of executive education at the UCT Graduate School of Business. “To nudge change in the right direction we need to focus on practising inclusive leadership and changing the wider narrative about the role of women in society. We need a change of approach that takes an honest look at what’s happening on the ground in terms of company culture and our own roles in this. Are we doing enough to create truly enabling and inviting spaces for women and other minorities to thrive and progress to the highest levels? And if not, what can we do to change that?”

Sexual harassment remains prevalent in the global business community, even among the business elite.

Among the 2,642 respondents who have held a job in the last 12 months, 42% of women and 15% of men self-reported some form of sexual harassment or gender discrimination in the past 12 months. Even if we exclude complaints about sexism or misogyny, over a third of the women reported sexual harassment from a workplace manager or colleague in the past 12 months.

Most agree that victims should be trusted, but victims still fail to report.

Among the Global Network respondents who said they experienced sexual harassment or gender discrimination in the last 12 months, fewer than one in 10 victims formally reported the incident(s) inside or outside their workplaces. Of our respondents who said they experienced misconduct, only 5% consulted their boss, their human resources department or other units specialising in sexual harassment issues inside the firm. Reporting to outside entities was even rarer.

Women in Africa and South America were more likely to report unwanted sexual attention but considerably less likely to report personal experiences of sexist and sexual misconduct. Additionally, African women and men were least likely to consider the existence of a culture of sexual harassment in the workplace as a factor when looking for a job. There is however a cultural caveat here, as women may internalise the culture of tolerance to harassment that surrounds them.

Women in societies without a strong culture opposing sexist and sexual misconduct may not think of their experiences in the same way as women in countries with a deeper feminist tradition.

Tolerance of sexual harassment hurts recruitment.

About two-thirds of the survey respondents agreed that “the existence of a culture of sexual harassment at a workplace is a factor when you look for a job.” The frequency of this response was slightly higher among full-time students (67%) than among currently employed students and alumni (62%), and higher among women (78%) than among men (55%).

Read the full report [here](#).

About

Launched in 2012, the Global Network for Advanced Management is a collaborative platform for leading business schools from a diverse set of market-oriented economies that have become increasingly connected and interdependent. The mission of the Global Network is to drive innovation and create value by connecting leading global business schools, their resources and stakeholders. Taking advantage of network efficiencies, utilising new technologies, building strong institutional and personal relationships and operating with a minimum of bureaucracy, the Global Network has empowered member schools to launch initiatives that improve business education and deepen inquiry into issues of global interest.

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