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**WORKPLACE HARASSMENT AND ITS IMPACT
ON STAFF PERFORMANCE: A CASE STUDY OF A
SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION
INSTITUTION**

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ABSTRACT

Workplace harassment is a global phenomenon affecting the morale of employees negatively. A common misconception is that harassment is simply sexual in nature. While it is prominent, harassment includes unfair misuse of power or position generally by a senior member of staff who may display belittling or threatening behaviour towards individual workers or groups of workers. The reality is that harassment is directly responsible for workplace hostility and discord. It must be acknowledged that regardless of position, gender, religion, disability, race or sexual preference, every individual has the right to be free of abusive behaviour. Consequently, if workers are not accorded dignity, harassment can constitute unfair discrimination and therefore, a violation of human rights. While workplace harassment is a perennial problem, it is only since the mid-1980s that it has become a significant focus of public concern. This study investigates the impact of harassment on employees at a South African Higher Education Institute. The results of the study should assist management in recognising the need to urgently establish and implement procedures to deal with the negative impact of harassment in the workplace. Two hundred employees of varying academic levels within the institute were used to respond to a comprehensive questionnaire involving interpersonal relationships at the workplace. An analysis of the responses

clearly confirms the existence of harassment as well as the negative impact thereof. The findings support the need to develop a workplace environment that is committed to fostering transparency, equality and respect for human dignity. Furthermore, the findings clearly demonstrate that the impact of harassment is detrimental to both the employee as well as the institution if changes are not implemented.

Keywords: harassment, workplace, impact, discrimination, prejudice, promotion, performance

1. INTRODUCTION

Einarsen and Raknes (1997:259) assert that harassment is a particularly serious form of discrimination defined as any action, or practice, by a person or group of people which is unwanted and unreciprocated, objectionable and causes humiliation, offence and distress. In addition to deliberate harassment, an employee's behaviour may unintentionally give offence to others. Bullying is a form of harassment and is totally unacceptable behaviour. Abusive behaviours regarded as constituting harassment can span a range of categories, including psychological, sociological, racial, religious, sexual, and electronic behaviours, and also behaviour by the police. Forms of harassment include bullying, cyberstalking, physical, stalking, mobbing, hazing and police harassment.

Workplace harassment is a perennial problem; however, it is only since the mid-1980s that it has become a high-profile issue of public concern. Generally, workplace harassment is considered in the context of equal opportunities policies and anti-discrimination strategies such as management of diversity. Press reports tell of individuals being targeted for workplace harassment because of gender, race, ethnic origin, nationality, religion, political affiliation or sexuality. The range of behaviour that constitutes work harassment covers a very wide spectrum and in its extreme form can be a crime. This study investigates the impact of harassment on employees at a South African Higher Education Institute.

1.1 Objectives of the study

The central objective of this research was to explore the nature and extent of harassment and its impact on performance of staff at a Higher Education Institution in South Africa.

Sub-objectives

In order to achieve the central objective, the following sub-objectives were identified:

- To determine the form(s) workplace harassment take(s) at the selected HEI
- To establish the extent of workplace harassment of staff at the selected HEI
- To explore the impact of workplace harassment at the selected HEI
- To establish how workplace harassment affects the performance of individuals at the selected HEI
- To develop a model to address workplace harassment at the selected HEI

It is hoped that findings of this research will assist in:

- establishing procedures to be used to deal with workplace harassment
- organising a range of professional assistance which will help other organisations
- developing a workplace harassment policy for the selected HEI

1.2 Research questions

According to Hussey and Hussey (1997:126), research questions are not the detailed questions a researcher might use in questionnaires or interviews, but are questions that identify the nature of the research problem or the issue to focus on. Without asking appropriate questions, the researcher will not be able to collect suitable data and arrive at sensible conclusions. This is the crucial part of research.

The research questions for this study are as follows:

- What form/forms does workplace harassment of staff take at the selected HEI?
- What is the extent of workplace harassment at the selected HEI?
- How does workplace harassment affect the morale of staff at the selected HEI?
- How does workplace harassment affect the performance of individuals at the selected HEI?
- What can be done to prevent workplace harassment at the selected HEI?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

There has been very little research done throughout South Africa on workplace harassment in general. The research that has been done focuses mostly on bullying among learners at school. Little consideration has been given to the possibility of harassment in the workplace. The varied possibilities of what constitutes harassment has also not been adequately interrogated. Thus, the study sought to investigate, ascertain and collate the views of members of staff in general at the selected HEI on workplace harassment. It must be acknowledged that the views held by Nutesa, a trade union subscribed to by the majority at the HEI, did not represent the views of the entire staff.

Adams (1992:1) describes workplace harassment as persistently negative attacks on personal and professional performance, typically unpredictable, irrational and often unfair. This abuse of power or position can cause such chronic stress and anxiety that the employees gradually lose a sense of self-esteem and consequently suffer both physical ill health and emotional distress.

Einarsen (1998:28) reinforces a similar view. He believes that harassment emerges when one or several individuals persistently over a period of time perceive themselves to be on the receiving end of negative actions from one or several persons, in a situation where the target of harassment has

difficulty in defending himself/herself against these actions. This definition contains a number of features in need of further explanation for the sake of clarity.

2.1.1 Negative acts

The negative behaviours most frequently identified with harassment can be divided into the following categories: personal derogation (humiliation and personal criticism), work-related harassment (withholding of information and having one's responsibilities removed), social exclusion, violent threats, intimidation and work overload (Einarsen & Raknes, 1997:251; Hoel & Cooper, 2001).

2.1.2 Persistence

Harassment will normally refer to behaviour that is repeated and persistent. Therefore, while it can be unpleasant to be the target of someone's occasional aggressive behaviour, such behaviour would, in most cases, be excluded from the definition. The exception here would be those cases where intimidating behaviour of a severe nature (for example, physical violence or threat of physical violence) leaves the target in a permanent state of fear (Hoel & Cooper, 2001).

2.1.3 Long-term harassment

Workplace harassment, in some cases, may be resolved in its early phases by means of organisational intervention or by initiatives undertaken from those involved or other concerned parties. In other incidents, one of the parties involved may decide to leave thus resulting in no resolution. However, the long-term nature of the phenomenon is one of the most salient features of the problem. In a study of 5 300 British employees, two out of three people currently bullied reported that the process had lasted for more than one year (Hoel & Cooper, 2000b:11). The prolonged nature of the exposure is particularly significant for understanding the severe effects harassment may have on targets as well as the likelihood of finding a solution to the problem (Hoel & Cooper, 2000a:102).

2.1.4 Imbalance of power

When an equal balance of power exists between two individuals in a conflict situation, this would not qualify the situation as harassment. However, it is important to note that power may be formal, drawn from one's hierarchical position within the organisation, or informal, where sources of power are personal contacts, organisational standing and experience. Both the utilisation of formal or informal power disempowers harassed individuals. Knowledge of an opponent's vulnerabilities may be a further source of informal power often exploited in cases of harassment (Einarsen & Raknes, 1997:254).

2.1.5 Intent

Though central to many definitions of harassment at school level, intent is ironically left out of the definition above. The role of intent has, however, given rise to considerable discussion and controversy within the harassment field (see Keashly, 1998:85). There is disagreement on the usefulness of including intent among defining characteristics: for example, whether harassment (behaviour) is necessarily used to harm a target or, at times, may be considered instrumental behaviour, where harm can be regarded as a non-intended side effect of the behaviour. Owing to the difficulty of establishing intent in the context of litigation, it has been excluded as a defining feature in cases of other types of harassment (Hoel, Rayner & Cooper, 1999:197). As will be evident from the subsequent exploration of the phenomenon, this does not imply that the role of intent is unimportant in understanding harassment and the victimisation process. In fact, Einarsen (1999:16) concurs that the assertions made by targets may have as serious an effect on the victim as the negative behaviour itself.

HEIs are increasingly acknowledging the need to introduce proper policies and procedures to deal with cases of harassment should they arise (Rayner & Lewis, 2006:331). In response to such a need and to ensure an equal playing field, the social partners in Europe, represented by various employer associations (for example, Business Europe) and the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) signed a framework agreement in 2009 related to the prevention of violence and harassment. The agreement

ensures the right of employees to file complaints against alleged perpetrators with the aim of having their cases investigated impartially and given the outcome, the appropriate actions taken (European Social Dialogue, 2007).

In an increasingly diverse workplace (Rayner & Lewis, 2006:332), outlets or institutional mechanisms for dealing promptly and justly with complaints are essential. While increased diversity represents potential for organisational opportunities and strength, it also gives rise to situations where misunderstandings, disagreements and resentments may be rife (Baron & Neuman, 1998:451). Such situations can be minimised if they are properly managed, but all organisations should be prepared for the need to investigate allegations of behavioural misconduct. The presence of well-planned procedures for investigation and their proper implementation provide the organisation with an opportunity to make correct decisions, to ensure justice and also provide security for the individual. It would send a strong signal to employees that these issues are taken seriously and not tolerated by the organisation (Stockdale & Sagrestano, in press).

In contrast, where such response mechanisms are not in place, cases of this nature often remain unresolved for a long time, even for years, causing frustration and resentment to many or even all of those involved (Einarsen et al., 2010). In addition to the negative organisational impact, such ongoing cases or dissension are likely to impact negatively on the organisation's balance sheet (Hoel & Beale, 2006:243). Organisations may even face the prospect of litigation. In this respect, it is important to point out that while organisations vary with respect to the existence of harassment, no organisation can be considered "harassment-proof" (Rayner, Hoel & Cooper, 2002), thus the need to have in place policies and procedures on harassment applies to all organisations. Furthermore, the case for having a complaint of harassment heard and impartially investigated can equally be made on the grounds of justice and fairness, as reflected in the growing attention being paid to the dignity of individuals in terms of their work experience (Di Martino, Hoel & Cooper, 2003).

Where proper procedures exist and these are applied correctly in terms of a fair investigative process, the conclusions reached and the appropriate sanctions towards the perpetrators taken, their presence may also have a positive impact on behaviour within the organisation (Hulin, Fitzgerald & Drasgov, 1996:137). Although it is vital that organisations put in place mechanisms to prevent harassment in the first place, organisations must equally be ready to respond to those cases that slip through the safety net and where a formal investigation is warranted. Having procedures in place for such situations also ensures confident security for everyone involved and their recognition of the existence of procedural justice (Neuman & Baron, 1998), a key element in perceptions of fairness. In addition, a written procedure that precisely stipulates roles and responsibilities also acts as a guarantee of a planned and systematic process in which the impact of potentially interfering factors such as organisational politics (Salin, 2008) and heightened emotions can be reduced to a minimum.

Depression, anxiety, sleeplessness, shame and guilt, difficulty concentrating, headaches, fatigue or loss of motivation, stomach problems, eating disorders (weight loss or gain), alcoholism, feeling betrayed and/or violated, feeling angry or violent towards the perpetrator, feeling powerless or out of control, increased blood pressure, loss of confidence and self-esteem, withdrawal and isolation, overall loss of trust in people, traumatic stress, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), complex post-traumatic stress disorder, suicidal thoughts or suicidal attempts and suicide itself, are some of the psychological and health effects that can occur when an individual has been harassed. In view of the negative and detrimental impact of harassment, it is imperative that organisations monitor their work environment and implement workplace harassment policies (Keashly & Neuman, 2009:22).

2.2 Broad problem to be investigated

To be successful, organisations must create an atmosphere that inspires both innovation and risk-taking. In an increasingly competitive global economy, such innovation is more important than ever before. Not only does workplace harassment stifle productivity and innovative practices, but

harassers often target the organisation's most competent employees, individuals who are generally the most threatening to harassers (McCord & Richardson, 2001:23). As a result, creativity and productivity of the organisation's most valuable human capital is often negatively affected by this type of behaviour at work. In worst case scenarios, good employees may be driven out of the company as a result of harassment. Studies show that organisational climate and workplace environment are essential for understanding the conditions in which harassment is likely to occur and the way victims will be affected. However, research on specific policy, procedure, awareness and prevention strategies is lacking. Another element which increases the risk of harassment is the job's gender context. For example, having few women in a close working environment or practising in a field which is atypical for women might increase chances for harassment.

Lester (2009:451) states that the most effective way to avoid harassment in the workplace, and also influence the public's state of mind, is for the employer to adopt a clear policy prohibiting workplace harassment, which made it very clear to employees. According to the author, many women prefer to register a complaint and have the matter resolved within the workplace in order to avoid being criticised or alienated from colleagues and victimised by management,

Rayner and Cooper (2006:123) indicate that most employees prefer a pragmatic solution that would stop the harassment and prevent future contact with the harasser, rather than turn to the police. Felstiner and Sarat (1981:76) highlight the difficulty in seeking redress through legal action. The authors describe the three steps a victim of any dispute must go through before turning to the justice system: naming – giving the assault a definition; blaming – understanding who is responsible for the violation of rights and facing them; and finally, claiming – turning to the authorities. In sexual offences, going through these steps is very difficult for the victim, and the closer the relationship between victim and assailant, the harder it is to take each step.

2.3 Significance of the study

Through the lessons that can be derived from triangulated investigation of workplace harassment, staff performance, policies and judicial review, this study may influence debate, future legislation and material outcomes concerning workplace harassment. The study is significant for two reasons in particular: firstly, since the possibility exists for fighting workplace harassment through the comparative judicial review process, this study will substantively reinforce staff capacity to challenge workplace harassment practices and policies, thereby improving staff performance and reducing workplace harassment. Secondly, since policy-makers are constantly required to review policy effectiveness, this study will assist organisations in drafting their own workplace harassment policies. The study will also serve as a forerunner to further studies on workplace harassment and its impact on staff performance. It has been undertaken in the hope that it will provide a better understanding of the linkage between workplace harassment and staff performance and thereby enhance staff morale and confidence.

Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2003:3) suggest that "business research needs to address business issues and to provide a process for solving managerial problems". In this spirit, the present study sets out to assess the impact of workplace harassment on staff performance at the selected HEI. The rationale behind the research was to explore the nature and extent of harassment and its impact on performance of staff at the selected HEI. It is hoped that the findings of this research will assist in establishing procedures to be used to deal with workplace harassment, organising a range of professional interventions which will help other organisations, and developing a workplace harassment policy for the selected HEI.

Generally, most incidents of harassment occur between a superior and a subordinate. It must be noted that the majority of negative acts experienced are indirect and verbal in nature thus making it difficult to prove, and harassment behaviours are, for the most part, not gender specific. Race too, can play a role in harassment in the target organisations, especially in view of the historical legacy of apartheid in South Africa, and it therefore

behoves management to take note of racial tensions in an organisation and to put in place intervention strategies to deal with this problem.

In seeking to contribute to the existing body of knowledge, this research will hopefully stimulate other researchers in South Africa who share similar concerns to persist in their quest to broaden stakeholders' understanding of the impact of workplace harassment on performance and productivity and to help organisations and individuals manage the problem. Pietersen (2007:61) suggests that there is a definite need for more in-depth research on the impact of workplace harassment, including workplace bullying, discrimination and sexual harassment, in the South African work context.

Finally, it is envisaged that drawing from international successful practices will enable the study to integrate different ideas on the best possible models to improve awareness on workplace harassment in South Africa.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Primary data were gathered using a purposefully-designed questionnaire. The procedure for the data-collection method was as follows:

- The questionnaire was initially piloted at one campus of the selected HEI using 10 academic and non-academic staff members. A number of changes were made based on the results of the pilot study.
- The improved, piloted questionnaire was hand-delivered to potential respondents.
- Emails were sent to remind respondents to complete and return the completed questionnaire.
- Once respondents completed the questionnaire, it was either collected by the researcher or the selected individual sent the return via the HEI's internal mail service to the researcher.

The total population of full-time staff at the selected HEI (both academic and academic support), in 2012, was 1 319. Although all of them were potential participants, a sample of 200 was selected. These included members of management, academic and non-academic staff in all six

faculties. An equal balance of males and females. African, Coloured, Indian and White staff were selected in proportion to their respective numerical distribution in the institution. This data was obtained from the HR Department and the Department of Management Information at the HEI. To ensure that the sample was fairly representative of selected HEI staff demographics and legitimate, a stratified random sampling method was used.

3.1 Management of research tools

Questionnaires, (sometimes referred to as self-administered questionnaires) were used to collect data. Research assistants were employed to administer the questionnaire at the selected HEI. Both closed- and open-ended questions were included in the questionnaire.

In compiling the typed composite schedule, each employee belonging to the target population was numerically tabulated; the name of the employee, rank, faculty, department, gender, race and category (academic or supporting staff) were indicated. The target population thus ensured that the composite schedule was valid and met the following criteria:

- It contained accurate and complete information.
- There was no duplication.
- It only included those employees who met the selection criteria.

3.2 Description of the questionnaire

The instrument used for this survey was a pre-coded questionnaire which was carefully constructed to facilitate accurate, concise and legitimate responses. The questionnaire was directed to executive management, senior management, academic staff and support staff of the selected HEI.

Given that data to be collected was extensive and unique to this study, a questionnaire was deemed the most appropriate data-collection instruments. Although they have shortcomings, questionnaires are easy to administer, economical in terms of time and cost, good for wide coverage, ideal for direct comparison, have a fairly good response rate and enhance ecological, external and population validity. An additional advantage is that

respondents are able to give frank responses and relay their views in their own words, once confidentiality and anonymity are guaranteed.

The questionnaire for this study comprised the following six sections:

- Section A: Background information
- Section B: Form(s) of workplace harassment
- Section C: Extent of workplace harassment
- Section D: Impact of workplace harassment
- Section E: Workplace harassment, performance and staff morale
- Section F: Prevention of workplace harassment

The questionnaire had 77 structured questions, which aimed at eliciting precise and accurate data from the respondents selected for the survey.

Apart from obtaining respondents' data, the questions in the main were derived from the literature review and research objectives. They were also directed towards applying the various descriptive and inferential statistical tests which generate the quantitative analysis using the Microsoft Excel and SPSS packages.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The following section incorporates the findings of the study.

4.1 The extent of workplace harassment at the selected HEI

The results revealed that workplace harassment exists at the selected HEI. They further suggested that:

- Many respondents (55%) have been victims of workplace harassment.
- The majority of respondents (64%) knew victims of workplace harassment.
- None of the respondents was a perpetrator of workplace harassment, surprisingly.
- The majority of the staff (55%) knew the perpetrators of workplace harassment.

- The most common harassment is by superiors to subordinates (55% agreed).
- Harassment of superiors by subordinates was uncommon.
- Harassment by staff to other staff members is common (41%).
- Most common perpetrators of harassment are male staff (48%).
- Harassment is not gender-based (73%).
- Most harassment occurs within departments (62%).
- Most harassment occurs across the institution (54%).
- The level of harassment was high in the institution (68%).
- The level of harassment is low in the institution (34%).
- Bullying occurs at departmental level (43%).
- Favouritism was practised (56%).

4.2 The impact of workplace harassment at the selected HEI

The empirical data from the respondents revealed that the impact of workplace harassment at the selected HEI was huge and affects employee-supervisor (line manager) relationship and/or employee-employee relations. Most of the respondents revealed that:

- Discreet meetings occurred amongst selected members of staff. (50%).
- There was a lack of transparency (49%).
- People who speak their minds were victimised (50%).
- There were informants (60%).
- Direct communication with management was difficult (49%).
- Management is authoritarian – a minority of 27% agreed.
- There was emotional violence against workers (62%).
- Some colleagues enjoyed preferential treatment (64%).

- To a certain extent, some colleagues were frequently reprimanded (49%).
- A lack of security/stability existed in departments (63%).
- There seems to be discontent through animosity (42%).
- Staff did not speak well of other staff (57%).
- Staff did not speak well of the boss (55%).
- Staff have to be cautious of selected individuals (59%).
- There is a great deal of confidential talk (only 35%).
- Staff are frequently criticized (only 35% agreed).
- Members of staff were treated with disrespect (62%).
- Employees are undermined, especially in front of others (33%).
- Staff are denied information or resources essential for work (62%).
- Staff are marginalised (42%).
- Staff were blamed unfairly (58%).
- Staff were subjected to excessive monitoring and micromanagement (55%).

4.3 Workplace harassment, performance and morale of individuals at the selected HEI

The empirical data confirmed and consolidated the theory discussed in the literature review that there is a definite relationship between workplace harassment, performance and staff morale. The majority of the respondents indicated that:

- Workplace harassment can affect the performance of individuals (99%).
- Job descriptions are vague (65%).
- Job descriptions are open-ended (62%).
- Job functions overlap with colleagues (only 23% agreed).

- There is a lack of opportunities for upward mobility or professional development (60%).
- There was a high rate of absenteeism (70%).
- There was a high staff turnover (53%).
- Undignified behaviour persists (41%).
- Human dignity and professionalism is not valued (39%).
- Staff seldom speak well of the institution (32%).
- Staff were not happy with their resources (50%).
- Staff are not loyal to the institution (only 21% agreed).
- Staff morale was minimal (34%).
- Staff are insecure (35%).
- Cliques are common in the department (55%).
- Cliques have protection of seniors (44%).
- Staff have false concerns raised over their performance (only 27% agreed).
- Staff are isolated and excluded from what is happening (minority of 21% agreed).
- Some members of staff are treated differently from the rest of their colleagues (44%).
- Staff are subjected to disparaging remarks about their work and personal life (30%).
- Staff were humiliated especially in front of others (57%).
- Staff were criticised where the intention was to embarrass and humiliate (51%).
- Staff were set unrealistic goals which were unachievable and often fluctuated without notice (69%).

- Staff were denied support and found themselves working in a management vacuum (62%).
- Staff were overloaded with work, making it harder to achieve targets (62%).
- Staff were finding that their responsibilities increased, but authority removed (55%).

4.4 Prevention of workplace harassment

Based on the responses of the respondents and the empirical data, the researcher can conclude that:

- There is no policy on workplace harassment at the selected HEI (55%).
- Necessary measures should be taken to prevent workplace harassment (67%).
- Harassment topics should be part of the induction programme (96%).
- There are no clear guidelines on the procedure to be followed to report harassment (89%).
- Harassment practices are not reported (81%).
- Harassment practices are not properly investigated (39%).
- Workplace harassment policy is included in the employment contract (95% disagreed).
- There is someone or an office assigned to handle harassment cases (only 7% agreed).
- There are clear guidelines on how to handle harassment cases in the institution (only 13% agreed).
- There are clear guidelines on the sanctions to be imposed on perpetrators of harassment (only 15% agreed).
- There are clear guidelines on how to assist(s) the victims(s) of harassment and to prevent victimisation (only 9% agreed).

4.5. Cost of harassment to organisation

Some factors that need to be considered when estimating the impact of harassment financially on an organisation are sickness absence, replacement costs incurred by employee turnover, reduced productivity/performance, knock-on effects on witnesses or observers of harassment, premature retirement, grievance and complaints (significant under-estimation of reporting and investigation down-time), litigation and compensation, and organisational intervention.

4.6 Inductive method for calculating the financial cost of harassment

Brun and Lamarche (2006) argue in favour of the inductive approach, which they applied in a Canadian study of occupational stress. As far as possible, they attempted to identify the various categories of costs and their indicators. With reference to this study and armed with data from Hoel et al. (2001) and other recent studies on harassment, Brun and Lamarche (2006) attempted to build a picture of cost of harassment to the organisation, with specific emphasis placed on costs associated with absenteeism, turnover and productivity.

4.7 Absenteeism

With respect to harassment, the figures most frequently quoted are those emerging from a nationwide study of harassment in the United Kingdom by Hoel and Cooper (2000a:103). By comparing figures from those who reported harassment with those who had no experience of harassment, they calculated that targets of harassment on average reported absenteeism of seven days more per year than those who had not experienced harassment. Brun and Lamarche (2006) also claim that, as far as they know, no other studies have provided alternative figures. They further suggest that there are several ways of assessing absenteeism costs using this figure. One approach would be to use the so-called human capital method, which was the number of lost days multiplied by the average salary within the organisation or sector. It must be noted, however, that using this approach suggests that harassment is normally distributed among income groups and that the cost of absenteeism is restricted to an individual's salary.

4.8 Turnover costs

Unison (1997) suggests that 25% of employees who are harassed are likely to leave as a result of their experiences. However, since not all these employees are likely to leave the organisation immediately, Brun and Lamarche (2006) make an estimate that this figure will be reduced by a further quarter (6.25%).

CIPD (2007) figures suggest that the main costs incurred as a result of turnover relate to administration, recruitment and selection, temporary cover and induction training. They highlight that the cost of turnover per employee averages thousands of pounds.

4.9 Productivity

Exact measures of organisational productivity and performance levels are difficult to determine. However, it is possible to make estimates based on the human capital method assuming that lost productivity is equivalent at least to wage/salary costs. The percentage loss figure is based on Hoel and Cooper's (2000a) evidence highlighting a self-reported reduction in performance for both targets and perpetrators of harassment, suggesting that a drop in productivity of between 1½-2% may be attributable as a result.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Dealing with workplace harassment and discrimination

The evidence for workplace harassment having a detrimental impact at individual, organisational and societal levels was established and explored in the research. A united, supportive workforce is essential and any form of discord needs to be eliminated.

From a national economic and organisational development perspective, it makes sense that the skills set of the whole workforce is utilised fully, rather than creating barriers for individuals because of differences in gender, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation or religion. As a result, there is much discussion on the business case for diversity, with arguments that a diverse workforce brings with it the development of a wider range of skills

and experiences, improvement in understanding the needs of diverse populations, and a general improvement in the image of organisations through their association with diverse groups (Noon, 2007:773). Similarly, it may also be argued that harassment is likely to become more intense with the increasing globalising trend for work and workers (Hoel & Cooper, 2001:5). This evolution of economic activity has seen greater movements in skilled workers geographically or through embedding overseas employees into organisations that operate globally (Lin, 1999:467).

Operations that encourage multiple variations of culture and subculture, particularly within a short time span, must be aware that such variation can have an unsettling impact on the cultural norms of groups and affect intergroup relations (Baron & Neuman, 1998:446). Of particular concern are the power relationships between, and sometimes even within, minority groups, with the conflicts that often arise between ethnicity or religion and sexual orientation serving as a case in point. Thus, as Yamada (2003:402) comments, this situation has created complex legal and moral issues associated with tackling harassment. If national and global spheres of operation are likely to create tensions around cultural norms, the likelihood makes a compelling case for tackling harassment and discrimination together.

While the cost argument is compelling, Einarsen et al. (2010:275) caution against an overemphasis on an economically rational argument for tackling harassment and discrimination. If diversity and equality of opportunity are human rights based on moral legitimacy (Noon, 2007:776), then there appears to be a strong case for placing harassment within the same category. If managers and organisations simply adopt an economic rationality for tackling harassment, the moral imperative could be lost behind a business veneer. Furthermore, if managers alone own the problem, then tackling harassment becomes a managerial agenda rather than a moral one. Under such circumstances, the long-term benefits of tackling harassment might be seen by managers as not offering a quick win, specifically where managers are often driven by short-term targets. It therefore seems to be more sensible to argue that linking harassment to

discrimination on moral grounds is likely to have stronger foundations for dealing with both.

5.2 Recommendations

Arising from the analyses and discussion of the results, a number of recommendations are made.

- Develop a workplace harassment policy. If the policy is to meet the needs of all employees, it should include the following (Einarsen et al., 2010:277):
 - a time-tabled complaints procedure;
 - training for management and trade unions representatives;
 - provision of confidential counselling and support for the victim and the perpetrator;
 - taking care of the supporters, and
 - monitoring and evaluation.
- Offer education and training on workplace harassment.
- Improve the statutory response.
- Give a fair hearing. Allegations of workplace harassment should be responded to promptly and thoroughly. When there are allegations of actions that would violate the employer's rules, an investigation is necessary. This means carefully interviewing the accused, the accuser and witnesses, and then coming to a reasoned conclusion. By doing so, the employer is complying with the law and, in many instances, this type of investigation will shield the employer from liability for discriminatory harassment, wrongful termination and defamation.
- Investigate all harassment complaints.
- Counsel employees. By paying attention to the stated recommendations and implementing them, all stakeholders at the selected HEI can ensure that workplace harassment and its

impact on staff performance is handled legitimately and appropriately.

This study has provided insight into the perceptions of employees at the selected HEI regarding workplace harassment and its impact on staff performance. These perceptions ranged from fear and concern to anxiety and demotivation. Thus, the study has come up with a diagnosis of the situation and it is envisaged that these recommendations will be implemented in an attempt to improve staff performance.

5.3 Directions for future research

Finally, there are several dimensions in need of further research, arising from this study, including the following:

- Development and enactment of a single legislation that governs workplace harassment.
- Development of workplace harassment policy relevant to South African industries.
- The correlation between workplace harassment and absenteeism.
- The costs of workplace harassment in the South African context.
- Development of a systemic model on workplace harassment.
- Workplace harassment and its impact on the South African private sector.
- The prevalence of workplace harassment in state-owned enterprises and government departments.
- Investigating the common forms of harassment in South African higher education institutions and how to address them.
- The relationship between workplace harassment and workplace violence.
- The role of counsellors in dealing with victims and perpetrators of workplace harassment.

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