

Insights on Canadian Society

Harassment in Canadian workplaces



CENTRE FOR GENDER, DIVERSITY
AND INCLUSION STATISTICS

by Darcy Hango and Melissa Moyser

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Harassment in Canadian workplaces

by Darcy Hango and Melissa Moyser

Today, *Insights on Canadian Society* is releasing a study in partnership with Statistics Canada's Centre for Gender, Diversity and Inclusion Statistics. This study uses data from the General Social Survey on Canadians at Work and Home.



Overview of the study

Harassment in the workplace can come in a variety of forms, with the potential for far-reaching effects on the health and well-being of workers, as well as on their job tenure, job stability and job satisfaction. Using data from 2016 General Social Survey on Canadians at Work and Home (GSS), this study focuses on workplace harassment experienced by respondents at some point in the past year. The target population includes those who were aged 15 to 64 and worked for pay in the past year.

- Overall, 19% of women and 13% of men reported that they had experienced harassment in their workplace in the past year. Workplace harassment includes verbal abuse, humiliating behaviour, threats to persons, physical violence, and unwanted sexual attention or sexual harassment.
- The most common type of workplace harassment was verbal abuse—13% of women and 10% of men reported having experienced it in the past year. The next most common type was humiliating behaviour—6% of women and 5% of men reported having experienced it, while about 3% of each said they had experienced threats.
- Women were more likely to report sexual harassment in their workplace (4%) than men (less than 1%). Among women who reported sexual harassment, more than half were targeted by clients or customers.
- Workers in health occupations are the most likely to report having been harassed on the job in the past year. The differences between those in health and other occupations are more pronounced for women than men.
- About 47% of men and 34% of women who had been harassed by a supervisor or manager had a weak sense of belonging to their current organization, compared with 16% of both women and men who said they had not been harassed at work in the past year.

Introduction

Workplace harassment refers to objectionable or unwelcome conduct, comments, or actions by an individual, at any event or location related to work, which can reasonably be expected to offend, intimidate, humiliate or degrade. Harassment in the workplace comes in a variety of forms, as it can range from interpersonal mistreatment,¹ such as disrespect, condescension and degradation (often referred to as workplace incivility²),

to more physical forms of harassment such as physical assault (which may also be referred to as workplace violence), sexual assault, bullying or the threat of harm.³

Harassment in the workplace has far-reaching effects on the health and well-being of workers, as well as on their job tenure, job stability and job satisfaction.

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It may also have an impact on the overall economy resulting from costs associated with absenteeism, lost productivity and job turnover.⁴

This paper uses data from the 2016 General Social Survey (GSS) on Canadians at Work and Home to examine experiences of workplace harassment in the past year among Canadians aged 15 to 64 who worked for pay during the past 12 months (see the [Data sources, methods and definitions](#) section).⁵ In the GSS, workplace harassment refers to experiences of verbal abuse, humiliating behaviour, threats, physical violence, and unwanted sexual attention or sexual harassment that are reported by Canadians.⁶

In the first half of the paper, statistical information about the prevalence of workplace harassment, as well as information on the type and source of harassment, is presented. It also

identifies personal and workplace characteristics that increase the likelihood of experiencing workplace harassment.

The second part of the paper explores the relationship between workplace harassment and various indicators of personal well-being (such as mental health and stress) and workplace well-being (such as job satisfaction and sense of belonging to the organization).

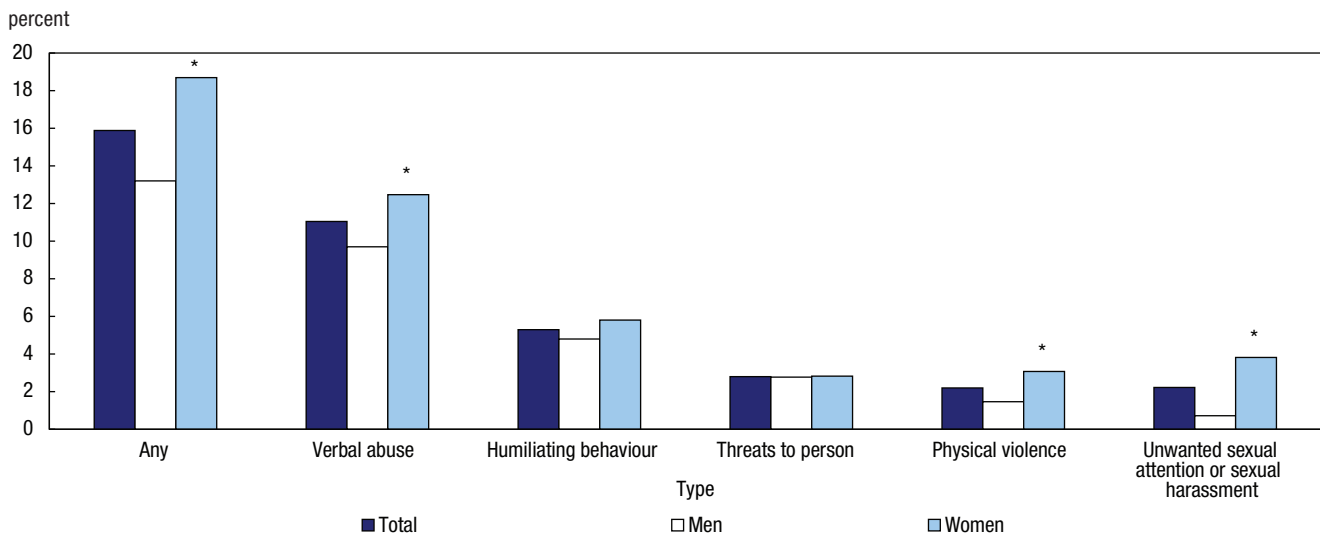
Women report higher levels of workplace harassment than men

In the 2016 GSS, respondents can report if they suffered from verbal abuse, humiliating behaviour, threats, physical violence, and unwanted sexual attention or sexual harassment in the workplace over the past 12 months. Even though this definition can differ from past studies of workplace harassment,

the five dimensions of workplace harassment examined in the GSS align relatively well with other harassment constructs observed in the literature.⁷

On the basis of this definition, 19% of women reported that they had experienced harassment in their workplace in the past year, while 13% of men reported it. The most common type of workplace harassment was verbal abuse, with 13% of women and 10% of men reporting having experienced it in the past year (Chart 1). The next most common type was humiliating behaviour, which was reported by 6% of women and 5% of men, while 3% of each had experienced threats. Physical violence in the workplace was experienced by significantly more women than men, at 3% versus 1.5%. Sexual harassment or unwanted sexual attention was more prevalent among women (4%) than men (less than 1%).

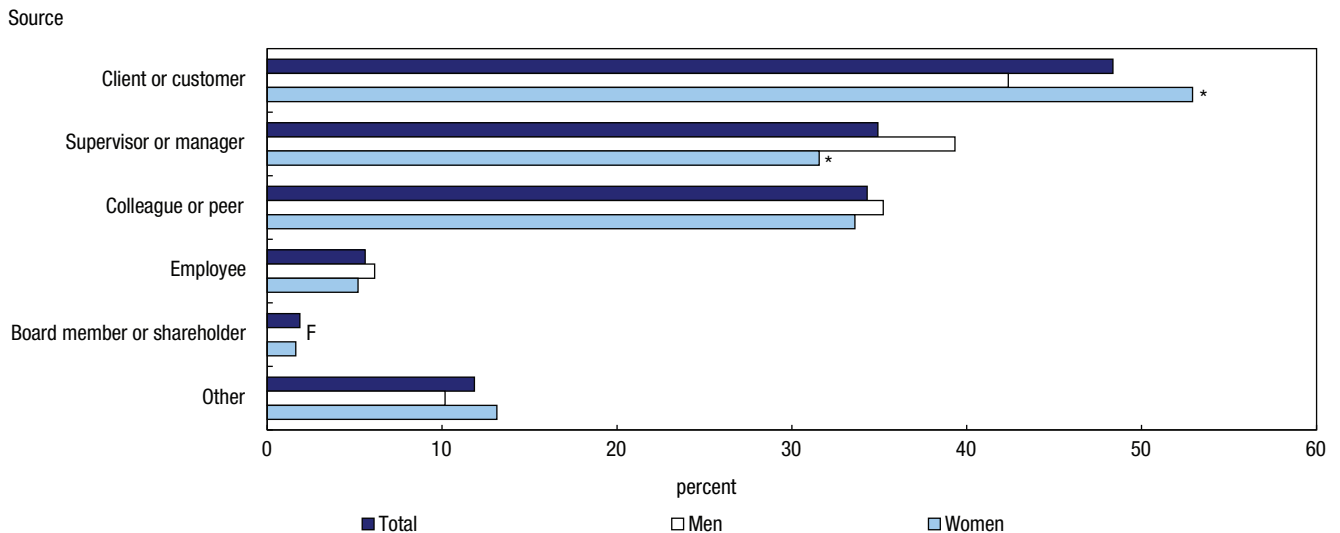
Chart 1
Proportion of men and women who reported workplace harassment in the past 12 months, by type, 2016



* significantly different from men ($p < 0.05$)

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2016.

Chart 2
Source of harassment among those who reported workplace harassment in the past 12 months, 2016



F too unreliable to be published
 * significantly different from men (p < 0.05)
 Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2016.

Source of workplace harassment differs for men and women

In the 2016 GSS, six different perpetrators are listed as potentially responsible for harassment in the workplace in the past year: supervisor or manager, colleague or peer, employee, client or customer, board member or shareholder, and other sources. The source of the harassment, or the relationship between the harasser and the person being harassed, matters.⁸ For instance, it may be worse for a worker if they are being harassed by a person in a position of authority over them.^{9,10}

Among people who said they were harassed in the past year at work, 53% of women said a client or customer was responsible for the harassment, compared with 42% of men (Chart 2). For men, the next most common source of harassment

in the workplace was their supervisor or manager, at 39%, while 32% of women said the same.¹¹ It was also relatively common for both men and women to have been harassed by a colleague or peer, at 35% for men and 34% for women, while it was less common to have been harassed by an employee, or a board member or shareholder.

Gender differences in non-sexual workplace harassment driven by occupation type

In order to better understand the pertinent characteristics of those who reported being harassed at work in the past year, two separate subsamples are used. The first subsample includes all types of harassment listed in Chart 1, while the second subsample excludes those who said they had experienced sexual harassment. By examining

characteristics in this way, it is possible to somewhat isolate the effects of sexual harassment, which are described later in the paper.¹²

The factors examined in this section are separated into (a) sociodemographic factors, including gender, age, highest level of education, ethnicity, immigration status, sexual orientation, province of residence, personal income, marital status, presence of young children in the home, and physical mobility limitation; and (b) workplace characteristics, including workplace size (number of workers), terms of employment (which takes regular work hours into account), union status, and occupational group.¹³

In the discussion that follows, results are expressed as predicted probabilities, which can be interpreted as the likelihood that people belonging to a certain group will experience workplace

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harassment when other factors are taken into account. This can be done with a logistic regression model, with workplace harassment as a dependent variable, and the groups of variables listed above as independent variables.

According to the results, women reported higher rates of workplace harassment than men. When all types of harassment—including unwanted sexual attention—are considered, women reported a higher probability (18%) than men (14%) of being harassed at work in the past year (Table 1). These rates are adjusted for numerous sociodemographic

variables (Model 1). The difference between women and men remains significant when workplace factors (Model 2) are factored in. In contrast, in the sample that excludes sexual harassment, there is a 2 percentage point gap separating women and men (15% versus 13%)—a gap that disappears once workplace characteristics (including occupations) are taken into account (Model 2). In other words, the gender gap in reported workplace harassment disappears when the occupational group is factored in, but only if sexual harassment is not included in the definition of harassment. In cases where sexual

harassment is included in the overall harassment indicator, the gender gap persists.

Other significant sociodemographic characteristics of workplace harassment include education, income, visible minority status, marital status and physical mobility limitations. With respect to education, the probability of experiencing harassment was 21% among those who had a bachelor's degree or higher, a finding that is almost 10 percentage points higher than for those whose highest level of education is a high school diploma. This result is present in both

Table 1
Predicted probability of reporting workplace harassment in the past 12 months, 2016

	Workplace harassment, including sexual		Workplace harassment, excluding sexual	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
	predicted probability			
Sociodemographic characteristics				
Gender				
Men (ref.)	13.6	14.1	12.9	13.5
Women	18.2**	17.6**	15.1*	14.4
Age				
15 to 24 (ref.)	13.2	13.7	10.3	10.8
25 to 34	16.6	16.6	14.0	14.1
35 to 44	16.7	16.8	15.0*	15.2*
45 to 54	17.0	16.8	15.6*	15.3*
55 to 64	15.5	15.1	14.6	14.0
Highest level of completed education				
Less than high school	11.2	11.4	10.1	10.6
High school (ref.)	13.8	14.0	11.9	12.1
Trades	18.9*	18.2	16.9*	16.2
College, CEGEP or university certificate below bachelor's level	15.5	15.3	13.7	13.7
Bachelor's	17.4*	17.5	15.5*	15.5
Above bachelor's	20.9**	20.8*	17.5*	17.0*
Visible minority status				
Visible minority	12.8*	12.6**	11.1*	11.0*
Not a visible minority (ref.)	16.8	16.9	14.8	14.9
Self-reported Aboriginal identification				
Aboriginal	14.3	14.8	9.9*	10.1*
Non-Aboriginal (ref.)	15.9	15.9	14.1	14.1
Sexual orientation				
Heterosexual (ref.)	15.6	15.6	13.8	13.8
Homosexual or bisexual	22.9*	22.8*	18.6	18.7
Immigrant status				
Recent immigrant (less than 10 years)	13.4	14.0	12.6	13.3
Established immigrant (more than 10 years)	14.8	15.0	13.2	13.5
Canadian-born (ref.)	16.2	16.2	14.2	14.1
Personal income				
Less than \$20,000	16.5	17.1	13.9	14.7
\$20,000 to \$39,999 (ref.)	17.0	17.6	15.0	15.7

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Table 1
Predicted probability of reporting workplace harassment in the past 12 months, 2016

	Workplace harassment, including sexual		Workplace harassment, excluding sexual	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
			predicted probability	
\$40,000 to \$59,999	16.4	16.2	14.7	14.5
\$60,000 to \$79,999	15.3	14.7	13.9	13.3
\$80,000 to \$99,999	16.0	14.8	14.7	13.5
\$100,000 to \$119,999	15.6	14.9	12.8	12.1
\$120,000 or more	10.0**	10.4**	8.7**	9.1**
Province of residence				
Newfoundland and Labrador	12.7*	12.9*	10.9*	11.1*
Prince Edward Island	14.0	14.1	10.6	10.7*
Nova Scotia	18.3	18.4	15.0	15.2
New Brunswick	14.9	15.2	13.6	14.0
Quebec	12.7**	12.3**	11.9*	11.4**
Ontario (ref.)	17.0	17.2	14.8	15.1
Manitoba	19.6	19.3	16.5	16.1
Saskatchewan	18.3	17.8	16.8	16.4
Alberta	17.5	18.0	14.9	15.4
British Columbia	15.7	15.6	13.5	13.5
Marital status				
Married	13.8**	13.9**	12.7*	12.7*
Common law	15.7	15.5	13.8	13.6
Widowed	19.5	18.4	16.6	16.0
Separated	16.7	15.7	13.3	12.4
Divorced	21.2	21.5	17.7	18.0
Single or never-married (ref.)	18.2	18.3	15.8	15.9
Children under 6 living at home				
Yes	15.3	14.9	13.0	12.5
No (ref.)	16.0	16.0	14.1	14.2
Presence of a mobility limitation affecting daily activity				
Yes	22.5*	22.3*	20.6*	20.5*
No (ref.)	15.6	15.7	13.7	13.7
Current workplace characteristics				
Workplace size				
Small business (1 to 99 employees)	...	15.1	...	13.4
Medium-sized business (100 to 499 employees)	...	16.8	...	14.7
Large business (500 or more employees) (ref.)	...	17.5	...	15.2
Terms of employment				
Regular employee (ref.)	...	16.2	...	14.3
Seasonal employee	...	12.1	...	10.0*
Term employee	...	16.9	...	14.7
Casual or on-call employee	...	14.6	...	12.8
Union status				
Unionized	...	19.9**	...	18.0**
Not unionized (ref.)	...	13.9	...	12.0
Occupation (NOC 4-digit)				
Management	...	16.7*	...	15.2
Business, finance and administrative	...	12.4**	...	11.4**
Natural and applied sciences	...	9.2**	...	7.3**
Health (ref.)	...	22.8	...	20.2
Education, law, social and related	...	15.3**	...	14.5*
Sales and service	...	17.8*	...	14.8*
Trades and related	...	16.7	...	14.8*
Unweighted Sample size		9,203		8,990
Weighted Sample Size		16,248,795		15,888,673

... not applicable

* significantly different from reference category (ref.) (p < 0.05)

** significantly different from reference category (ref.) (p < 0.01)

Note: The predicted probabilities are derived from average marginal effects, based on logistic regressions.

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2016.

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subsamples. In addition, respondents at the highest income level (\$120,000 or more) reported a significantly lower risk of workplace harassment in the past year than individuals who earned less than \$40,000 after controlling for occupation.

Across all models, visible minority workers said they were less likely to have experienced workplace harassment in the past year. For example, the probability to report harassment was 13% among visible minorities, compared with 17% for non-visible minorities.¹⁴ Meanwhile, with respect to marital status, a consistent finding is that married people were less likely to experience workplace harassment than the single or never-married population. Lastly, the likelihood of reporting workplace harassment was 23% among individuals who had a mobility limitation affecting their daily activity—7 percentage points higher than those who did not report a similar mobility limitation.

Health occupations and unionized jobs have the highest rates of workplace harassment

The results in Table 1 show that workplace characteristics are also related to workplace harassment,

particularly unionization and type of occupation. Across all workers, with respect to unionization, those who worked in a unionized position were more likely to say they were the victim of harassment in the workplace in the past year.¹⁵ Specifically, workers in unionized jobs had a 6 percentage point higher probability (regardless of whether sexual harassment was included or not) than workers in non-unionized jobs (20% versus 14% for all forms of harassment); this finding remains even after adjusting for a wide range of sociodemographic and other workplace characteristics. However, it was found that workers in unionized jobs who had been harassed were more likely to say they had tried to address the harassment than workers in non-unionized jobs. The difference was especially pronounced in instances of reported verbal abuse. For instance, 12% of workers in unionized jobs reported that the verbal abuse had been addressed compared with 6% of workers in non-unionized jobs.

In order to examine the effect of occupation on the experience of workplace harassment in this analysis, the 2016 10-category National Occupational Code (NOC) is used. The 10 categories are combined into

7 categories to accommodate sample size. The following 7 occupational categories are used: management occupations; business, finance and administrative occupations; natural and applied sciences occupations; health occupations; education, law, social and related occupations; sales and service occupations; and trades and related occupations.¹⁶

Workers in health occupations had the highest probability of reporting harassment on the job in the past year at 23%. Relative to workers in health occupations, the probability was significantly lower in most of the other occupational categories, particularly in natural and applied sciences (9%).

It is informative to examine the predicted probabilities of workplace harassment across occupational groups separately for men and women. The results, shown in Table 2, are based on a series of logistic regressions.¹⁷ Results show that 27% of women and 21% of men in health occupations indicated that they had been harassed in the workplace in the past year. The difference between health and other occupations is more pronounced for women, even after adjusting for a wide range of factors. Women in health occupations experienced

Table 2
Predicted probability of reporting workplace harassment in past 12 months, by occupation and gender, 2016

Occupation (NOC 4-digit)	Total	Men	Women
	predicted probabilities		
Management	16.7*	11.7	23.9
Business, finance and administrative	12.4**	12.8	13.7**
Natural and applied sciences	9.2**	5.8*	16.5*
Health (ref.)	22.8	21.4	26.6
Education, law, social and related	15.3**	14.6	16.9**
Sales and service	17.8*	14.6	21.1
Trades and related	16.7	14.7	13.8**

* significantly different from reference category (ref.) (p < 0.05)

** significantly different from reference category (ref.) (p < 0.01)

Note: The probabilities are derived from average marginal effects, based on logistic regressions. Full model results for the total population are available in Table 1.

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2016.

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workplace harassment significantly more than women in all other occupations, with the exception of management and sales and service occupations. The finding of a relatively high rate of workplace harassment in health occupations is consistent with past evidence pointing to the same conclusion.^{18,19}

About 4% of women reported being sexually harassed in the workplace

The *Canada Labour Code* establishes employees' rights to employment free of sexual harassment, and requires employers to take positive action to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace. The *Canada Labour Code* (R.S.C., 1985, c. L-2) defines sexual harassment as “any conduct, comment, gesture or contact of a sexual nature **(a)** that is likely to cause offence or humiliation to any employee; or **(b)** that might, on reasonable grounds, be perceived by that employee as placing a condition

of a sexual nature on employment or on any opportunity for training or promotion.”

In 2016, 4% of Canadian women reported being sexually harassed in the workplace in the past year, compared with less than 1% of men. This section focuses on women's experiences of sexual harassment in the workplace (the number of men with these experiences is not sufficient to support a more detailed analysis). Although most of the women who reported being sexually harassed in the workplace in the past year were targeted by one perpetrator (74%), just over one-quarter of them were targeted by multiple perpetrators (26%).

While the 2016 GSS does not include information on the sex of perpetrators, it does nevertheless demonstrate that supervisors and managers are less likely to be perpetrators than clients or customers, and colleagues or peers. Among women who were sexually

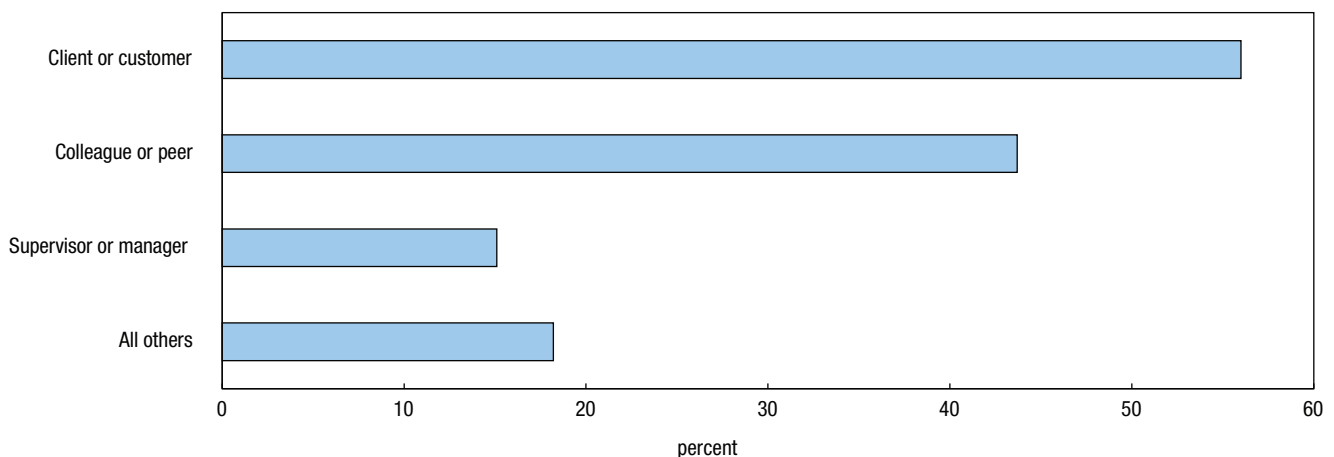
harassed in the workplace in the past year, 15% were targeted by supervisors or managers (Chart 3).²⁰ In comparison, 56% of women who reported that they had been sexually harassed in the workplace were targeted by clients or customers, and 44% were targeted by colleagues or peers. Some research suggests that clients and customers as well as colleagues and peers are more frequent perpetrators of sexual harassment in the workplace than supervisors or managers because they have more opportunities to interact with potential targets.²¹

Certain personal characteristics are associated with greater vulnerability to sexual harassment in the workplace among women. Specifically, young and unmarried women were more likely to report being sexually harassed in the workplace in the past year than older and married women. For example, 7% of women aged 15 to 24 reported that they had been sexually harassed in the

Chart 3

Source of harassment among women who reported sexual harassment in the workplace in the past 12 months, 2016

Source



Note: Among women who reported any sexual harassment in the workplace in the past year.

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2016.

workplace, compared with 1% of women aged 55 to 64 (Table 3). Furthermore, 7% of single or never-married women reported having been sexually harassed in the workplace, compared with 2% of married women. While such results suggest that perpetrators are more likely to target young and unmarried women, it may also be that age and marital status are proxies for less seniority at work and poor job quality—factors that may increase the likelihood of experiencing sexual harassment in the workplace to the extent that they imply low organizational power.^{22,23,24} In addition, it was found that lesbian and bisexual women were more likely to report being sexually harassed in the workplace in the past year than heterosexual women (11% versus 4%).

No significant differences were found between foreign-born and Canadian-born women, or between visible-minority women and women who were not part of a visible minority group. Aboriginal women, however, were more likely to report such experiences than non-Aboriginal women (10% versus 4%). These results are in line with other research showing that Aboriginal women are generally more vulnerable to sexual violence.²⁵ Furthermore, Aboriginal women also tend to be younger than non-Aboriginal women, and they are overrepresented in lower-level occupational groups that require less skill, training and experience.^{26,27}

Workplace harassment is associated with adverse effects both in terms of workplace well-being and life away from work

This part of the paper focuses on the relationship between workplace harassment and indicators that tap into both workplace well-being (such

as connectedness, stability and risk of turnover) and personal well-being (such as stress and mental health). Since it is not possible to disentangle cause and effect from the measures in this study, it focuses on exploring the association between concepts. In this section, harassment refers to any form of harassment (i.e., sexual or otherwise) reported by survey respondents in the previous 12 months.

The four workplace well-being indicators examined in this study are satisfaction with their current job; level of motivation to perform their best at the current organization; likelihood of leaving their job in the next 12 months; and sense of belonging to the current organization. Each of these factors can be potential indicators of feelings of connectedness to the current place of work and the risk of looking for new employment in the near future.

The four personal well-being indicators examined in this study are stress in daily life; general health;²⁸ mental health; and hopeful view of the future. Each and every one of these is related to the more general well-being of the respondent not specifically associated with the workplace. However, since well-being, health and work are intertwined,²⁹ it is often difficult to completely disassociate issues at work with those outside the workplace.³⁰ In each case, two sets of results are presented: unadjusted results and adjusted results, which take other factors that may also affect personal and workplace well-being into account.

Each of these factors has a significant relationship with workplace harassment; for the most part, the association appears to be about the same for both men and women.³¹ That said, workplace harassment

Table 3
Proportion of women who reported that they had been sexually harassed at work in past year, by characteristic, 2016

	percent
Total	3.8
Age	
15 to 24 (ref.)	7.2
25 to 34	5.6
35 to 44	2.5*
45 to 54	2.2*
55 to 64	1.2*
Self-reported Aboriginal identification	
Aboriginal	10.1*
Non-Aboriginal (ref.)	3.6
Sexual orientation	
Lesbian or bisexual	10.9*
Heterosexual (ref.)	3.5
Marital Status	
Married	1.6*
Common-law	3.4 ^F
Widowed	F
Separated	F
Divorced	5.5
Single or never-married (ref.)	6.6

^E use with caution

^F too unreliable to be published

* significantly different from reference category (ref.) ($p < 0.05$)

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2016.

has a relatively strong relationship with job dissatisfaction: for example, the proportion of women who said they were dissatisfied with their current job more than tripled from less than 4% for those who had not experienced harassment to 14% for women who had experienced harassment (Table 4a). Similarly, the proportion of men who said they were dissatisfied with their current job was two times higher among those who experienced harassment (14%) than it was among those who had not (5%).

Almost as strong for men is having low motivation to perform their best at their current organization: the proportion who reported this increases from 9% if they experienced no workplace harassment in the past 12 months

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Table 4a
Relationship between past year workplace harassment and select indicators of workplace well-being, 2016

	Men		Women	
	Experienced workplace harassment	Did not experience workplace harassment	Experienced workplace harassment	Did not experience workplace harassment
	percent			
Unadjusted results				
Dissatisfied with current job	13.7	4.9*	13.6	3.4*
Planning on leaving current job in next 12 months	23.6	16.6*	22.4	15.3*
Low motivation to perform their best at current organization	24.0	9.2*	19.5	7.7*
Weak sense of belonging to current organization	30.9	16.2*	26.7	16.1*
	predicted probabilities			
Adjusted results¹				
Dissatisfied with current job	12.9	5.1*	11.9	3.4*
Planning on leaving current job in next 12 months	25.0	17.5*	19.7	14.7
Low motivation to perform their best at current organization	23.2	9.4*	17.7	7.8*
Weak sense of belonging to current organization	30.3	16.4*	25.6	16.2*

* significantly different from those who experienced harassment ($p < 0.05$)

1. Adjusted for age, highest level of education, visible minority status, Aboriginal status, sexual orientation, personal income, province of residence, marital status, presence of children under 6 at home, presence of a mobility limitation, number of employees at workplace, work type, union status, and occupation.

Note: The predicted probabilities are estimated from logistic regressions.

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2016.

to 24% if they did experience workplace harassment. This relationship holds even after taking a wide range of sociodemographic factors into account. A similar result is found for women: 8% who did not report that they had been harassed said they had low motivation to perform their best, compared with 20% among those who reported that they had been harassed.

Workplace harassment also had a strong association with a lower sense of belonging to men's and women's current organizations and it increased their likelihood of saying they planned on leaving their job in the next 12 months, but for women the association disappears once a wide range of work and non-work factors are taken into account.

There is also a link between workplace harassment and personal well-being indicators such as stress, mental health and outlook on life (Table 4b). The largest association for men appears to be with poor mental health: 18% of men who reported experiencing workplace

harassment in the past year said they had poor mental health, compared with 6% for men who were not harassed. The increase was also seen among women: 16% of women who were harassed in the workplace in the past year said they had poor mental health, compared with 8% for women who were not harassed. The proportion of those who reported stress was also significantly higher among those who experienced workplace harassment. This association remained even when a wide range of sociodemographic and work-related factors were taken into account.

Being harassed by someone in a position of power is associated with negative perceptions about work

Evidence suggests that being harassed in the workplace by a supervisor or another person in a position of power can potentially have more harmful consequences for victims than being harassed by someone without the power

imbalance.³² In the present context, a person in a position of power is defined as either a supervisor or manager. Recall that supervisors or managers were responsible for 39% of workplace harassment for men. For women this proportion was 32%.³³

For the most part, the relationship between workplace indicators and workplace harassment was even stronger when the harassment came from a supervisor or manager (Table 5a). For example, among men who were harassed by a manager or supervisor, 23% reported low levels of job satisfaction, compared with 9% of those who were harassed by someone other than a person in a position of power. In contrast, 5% of men who did not report workplace harassment had low levels of job satisfaction. Women who were harassed by a person in position of power were also significantly more likely to be dissatisfied with their job, relative to those who had not been harassed.

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Table 4b
Relationship between past year workplace harassment and select indicators of personal well-being, 2016

	Men		Women	
	Experienced workplace harassment	Did not experience workplace harassment	Experienced workplace harassment	Did not experience workplace harassment
	percent			
Unadjusted results				
Life is quite a bit/extremely stressful	30.1	17.7*	33.5	21.4*
Fair/poor general health	13.5	8.6*	12.6	8.3*
Fair/poor mental health	18.2	6.2*	16.4	7.5*
Rarely/never has hopeful view of future	9.8	3.7*	3.7	2.1
	predicted probabilities			
Adjusted results¹				
Life is quite a bit/extremely stressful	31.2	18.5*	32.0	20.6*
Fair/poor general health	12.7	9.1	11.8	7.9
Fair/poor mental health	17.8	6.5*	14.8	7.4*
Rarely/never has hopeful view of future	8.2	3.7*	3.6	2.3

* significantly different from those who experienced harassment ($p < 0.05$)

1. Adjusted for age, highest level of education, visible minority status, Aboriginal status, sexual orientation, personal income, province of residence, marital status, presence of children under 6 at home, presence of a mobility limitation, number of employees at workplace, work type, union status, and occupation.

Note: The predicted probabilities are estimated from logistic regressions.

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2016.

Table 5a
Relationship between the source of past year workplace harassment and select indicators of workplace well-being, 2016

	Men			Women		
	Harassed in the workplace by person in position of power	Harassed in the workplace, but not by a person in position of power	Not harassed in the workplace	Harassed in the workplace by person in position of power	Harassed in the workplace, but not by a person in position of power	Not harassed in the workplace
	percent					
Unadjusted results						
Dissatisfied with current job	23.0	8.6*	4.9*	21.4	10.2	3.4*
Planning on leaving current job in next 12 months	27.9	21.3	16.6*	33.3	17.8*	15.3*
Low motivation to perform their best at current organization	37.0	16.9*	9.2*	30.0	15.0*	7.7*
Weak sense of belonging to current organization	47.4	22.0*	16.2*	33.5	23.8	16.1*
	predicted probabilities					
Adjusted results¹						
Dissatisfied with current job	23.0	7.9*	5.2*	17.5	8.9	3.4*
Planning on leaving current job in next 12 months	31.9	21.5	17.5*	28.2	15.6*	14.7*
Low motivation to perform their best at current organization	38.0	15.9*	9.5*	28.4	12.8*	7.7*
Weak sense of belonging to current organization	47.7	21.2*	16.5*	30.8	22.8	16.1*

* significantly different from those who were harassed by a person in position of power ($p < 0.05$)

1. Adjusted for age, highest level of education, visible minority status, Aboriginal status, sexual orientation, personal income, province of residence, marital status, presence of children under 6 at home, presence of a mobility limitation, number of employees at workplace, work type, union status, and occupation.

Note: Position of power is defined as supervisor or manager. Predicted probabilities estimated from logistic regressions.

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2016.

On a related note, especially strong is the relationship between being harassed by a manager or supervisor and having a weak sense of belonging to the organization. Approximately

16% of both women and men who said they had not been harassed at work in the past year had a weak sense of belonging to their current organization, compared with 47%

of men and 34% of women who had been harassed by a supervisor or manager. Also noteworthy is that being harassed by a person in power significantly lowers men's sense

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of belonging to their organization compared with being harassed by someone who is not a supervisor or manager. This relationship holds even in models that control for various sociodemographic measures, while for women the difference between the sources of harassment is not significant in unadjusted or adjusted models. Being harassed by a supervisor or manager is also associated with lower employee motivation to perform their best, above and beyond the effect from being harassed by someone who is not a supervisor or manager. The relationship remains even in adjusted models and is present for both men and women.

With respect to non-workplace outcomes, being harassed by a supervisor or manager was also associated with lower self-rated physical and mental health and higher levels of reported stress (Table 5b). However, being harassed by a supervisor or manager showed similar patterns as being harassed by someone who is not a supervisor or manager. In other words, workplace

harassment appears to be similarly associated with non-workplace outcomes regardless of the perpetrator. The exception to this was self-rated mental health among men: 25% of men who reported that they had been harassed by a person in a position of power said they had poor mental health, compared with 13% for men who were reported that they had been harassed by someone else. This result is also present for women, but only in unadjusted models.

Conclusion

This paper found that overall, women experienced workplace harassment slightly more than men, at 19%, compared with men, at 13%. While men and women reported similar rates of humiliating behaviour and threats, women were more likely to report verbal abuse, physical violence and unwanted sexual attention or sexual harassment in the workplace. The least frequent type of workplace harassment for women was threats to their person (3%), while for men it was sexual

harassment (less than 1%). A closer examination of sexual harassment of women found that over one-quarter of them reported that they were targeted by multiple perpetrators, and that most women (56%) were targeted by clients or customers.

With respect to all forms of workplace harassment, men and women differed slightly on who they were most likely to report as the perpetrator. Men reported that it was a supervisor or manager in greater proportions than women, while women conversely reported a higher proportion of clients or customers. Generally speaking, workplace harassment was also associated with lower levels of workplace well-being and personal well-being for both women and men. The association between workplace harassment and workplace well-being was especially important in the case of those who had been harassed by a supervisor or manager.

Consistent with other research,³⁴ workers in health-related occupations (which have a higher proportion of women) were more

Table 5b
Relationship between the source of past year workplace harassment and select indicators of personal well-being, 2016

	Men			Women		
	Harassed in the workplace by person in position of power	Harassed in the workplace, but not by a person in position of power	Not harassed in the workplace	Harassed in the workplace by person in position of power	Harassed in the workplace, but not by a person in position of power	Not harassed in the workplace
	percent					
Unadjusted results						
Life is quite a bit/extremely stressful	38.2	24.7	17.7*	41.4	29.9	21.4*
Fair/poor general health	15.9	12.0	8.6*	18.0	10.1	8.3*
Fair/poor mental health	25.2	13.7*	6.2*	24.5	12.7*	7.5*
	predicted probabilities					
Adjusted results¹						
Life is quite a bit/extremely stressful	39.8	25.7	18.6*	39.1	28.4	20.5*
Fair/poor general health	15.3	11.2	9.2	15.0	10.1	7.9
Fair/poor mental health	25.7	13.1*	6.5*	20.8	11.6	7.3*

* significantly different from those who were harassed by a person in a position of power ($p < 0.05$)

1. Adjusted for age, highest level of education, visible minority status, Aboriginal status, sexual orientation, personal income, province of residence, marital status, presence of children under 6 at home, presence of a mobility limitation, number of employees at workplace, work type, union status, and occupation.

Note: Position of power is defined as supervisor or manager. Predicted probabilities estimated from logistic regressions.

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2016.

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likely to experience workplace harassment. The probability of reporting workplace harassment in the past year was 23% among workers in this category; they were predominantly harassed by clients or customers.

In sum, this paper provided a look into not only the prevalence of workplace harassment across the employed population in Canada, but also into the correlates of harassment, the characteristics of

those who were harassed, and the association between harassment and a number of personal and workplace well-being indicators. Workers who reported workplace harassment were more likely to be dissatisfied with their current job, have low motivation to do their best work, be more likely to say they are planning to leave their current work, and have a weak sense of belonging to their workplace. These workers also had worse health—general and

mental—as well as higher levels of reported stress, and a less hopeful view of the future. Harassment in the workplace therefore has a considerable impact not only on people's lives but also on employers.

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Data sources, methods and definitions

Data sources

The article uses data from the 2016 General Social Survey (GSS). The GSS is a voluntary annual cross-sectional survey that started in 1985. Each cycle contains a core topic and a standard set of sociodemographic questions. The theme for the 2016 cycle was Canadians at work and home. The survey takes a comprehensive look at the way Canadians live by incorporating the realms of work, home, leisure and overall well-being. Included are questions on purpose in life, opportunities, life aspirations, outlook and resilience.

The target population for the survey is non-institutionalized persons aged 15 and over, living in the 10 provinces of Canada. The survey was conducted from August 2016 to December 2016. The overall survey response rate was 50.8%, while the total sample size was 19,609. This article focuses on people aged 15 to 64 who worked for pay during the past 12 months, which consisted of approximately 9,000 respondents.

In the GSS, several questions were asked about workplace harassment. In the 2016 GSS, five types of workplace harassment were examined: (1) verbal abuse; (2) humiliating behaviour; (3) threats; (4) physical violence; and (5) unwanted sexual attention or sexual harassment. The following question on sexual harassment in the workplace was asked: ***“In the past 12 months, have you been subjected to unwanted sexual attention or sexual harassment while at work?”*** Readers should note that the definition of sexual harassment includes those who experienced reported sexual harassment, as well as those who reported unwanted sexual attention. It is not possible to distinguish the two concepts in the GSS. The sample size of those who answered “Yes” to the question above totalled 235 paid workers aged 15 to 64.

The association between work environment and workplace harassment

In this study, the reference period for experiences of workplace harassment is the year preceding the 2016 General Social Survey on Canadians at Work and Home. Given that employees who have experienced workplace harassment are more likely to leave their job, the characteristics of respondents' current job do not necessarily pertain to the job they held when the workplace harassment occurred. For this reason, a subsample of respondents aged 15 to 64 who were employed in the same job for all 52 weeks in the past year, including the week before they were interviewed, was used to examine the association between work environment and workplace harassment (representing a sample of about 5,700 respondents).

The characteristics of the subsample of continuously employed workers in the same job in the past year differ from those of the subsample of workers who were employed at any point in the past year in important ways. Workers who were continuously employed in the same job in the past year were older; more likely to be married; have higher levels of completed education; less likely to be employed in sales and services occupations; more likely to work regular hours; and earn more than workers who were not employed in the same job during the entire past year.

Previous research suggests that the psychosocial quality of the work environment is an important determinant of workplace harassment.³⁵ For this reason, several work conditions were analyzed in relation to workplace harassment: (1) opportunity to provide input into decision making; (2) receipt of help and support from their manager or supervisor; (3) manageability

of their workload; (4) degree of choice in the sequencing of tasks; (5) degree of competition with colleagues; (6) conflicts with managers or supervisors, and (7) number of good friends at work.

Workplace harassment in the past year is associated with indicators of a poor-quality work environment. Specifically, continuously employed workers in the same job in the past year were more likely to report workplace harassment if they had fewer opportunities to provide input into decision making; less support from their managers or supervisors; unmanageable workloads; limited choice in the sequencing of tasks; more competition among colleagues; more frequent conflicts with managers or supervisors; and fewer good friends at work (Table 6).

Notably, the association between workplace harassment and work environment tends to be stronger for women than men. For example, 40% of continuously employed women who rarely or never consider their workload to be manageable reported that they had been harassed in the workplace, compared with 22% of their male counterparts. Similarly, 34% of continuously employed women who reported that they always or often felt that they were competing with their colleagues reported that they had been harassed in the workplace, compared with 19% of their male counterparts. Having good friends at work seems to be a factor when it comes to workplace harassment among women, which was reported by close to 30% of women who had no friends at work, compared with 16% of men.

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The association between work environment and workplace harassment (continued)

Table 6
Workplace harassment among continuously employed workers in the same job, by indicator of work environment, 2016

	Harassed at work in past year	
	Men	Women
	percent	
All continuously employed people	13.2	20.3 *
I have opportunities to provide input into decisions that affect my work.		
Strongly agree/agree (ref.)	9.8	17.2*
Neither agree nor disagree	21.5 [†]	22.8
Strongly disagree/disagree	31.7 [†]	36.6 [†]
How often does your manager or supervisor help and support you?		
Always/often (ref.)	9.5	15.0*
Sometimes	15.8 [†]	26.3 [†] *
Rarely/Never	29.0 [†]	37.9 [†]
How often do you consider your workload manageable?		
Always/often (ref.)	11.2	15.8*
Sometimes	17.6 [†]	27.1 [†] *
Rarely/Never	22.2 [†]	40.3 [†] *
How often can you choose the sequence of your tasks?		
Always/often (ref.)	10.0	16.2*
Sometimes	18.8 [†]	27.0 [†]
Rarely/Never	21.2 [†]	31.8 [†]
How often do you feel you have been competing with your colleague(s)?		
Always/often (ref.)	19.1	33.9*
Sometimes	15.8	24.8
Rarely/Never	11.4 [†]	17.9 [†] *
How often have you had conflicts at work with managers or supervisors?		
Always/often (ref.)	33.5	53.8
Sometimes	24.3	37.3*
Rarely/Never	9.7 [†]	16.2 [†] *
How many good friends do you have at work?		
None (ref.)	15.5	27.6
One or two	14.9	24.7*
A few	13.2	20.6*
Many	11.5	14.8 [†]

* significantly different from men ($p < 0.05$)

[†] significantly different from reference category (ref.) ($p < 0.05$)

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2016.

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Supplementary information

Table A1
Proportion of workers reporting workplace harassment in the past 12 months, by characteristic, 2016

	Workplace harassment, including sexual	Workplace harassment, excluding sexual
	percent	
Total	15.9	14.0
Sociodemographic characteristics		
Gender		
Men (ref.)	13.2	12.6
Women	18.7**	15.5**
Age		
15 to 24 (ref.)	14.5	10.7
25 to 34	17.2	14.5*
35 to 44	16.0	14.6*
45 to 54	16.1	15.1**
55 to 64	15.0	14.4*
Highest level of completed education		
Less than high school	11.3	9.9
High school (ref.)	14.5	12.0
Trades	17.6	16.5*
College, CEGEP or university certificate below bachelor's level	16.1	14.3
Bachelor's	17.0	15.3*
Above bachelor's	18.8*	16.2*
Visible minority status		
Visible minority	12.8**	11.2**
Not a visible minority (ref.)	16.8	14.8
Self-reported Aboriginal identification		
Aboriginal	15.8	10.7
Non-Aboriginal (ref.)	15.9	14.1
Sexual orientation		
Heterosexual (ref.)	15.5	13.8
Homosexual or bisexual	24.6**	18.7
Immigrant status		
Recent immigrant (less than 10 years)	12.1*	11.4
Established immigrant (more than 10 years)	13.6	12.5
Canadian-born (ref.)	16.6	14.4
Personal income		
Less than \$20,000	15.4	11.9
\$20,000 to \$39,999 (ref.)	16.8	14.5
\$40,000 to \$59,999	16.7	15.3
\$60,000 to \$79,999	15.6	14.7
\$80,000 to \$99,999	17.0	16.3
\$100,000 to \$119,999	16.3	14.2
\$120,000 or more	10.4**	9.8**
Province of residence		
Newfoundland and Labrador	13.3	11.4
Prince Edward Island	14.5	10.9
Nova Scotia	19.3	15.7
New Brunswick	15.4	14.2
Quebec	13.5*	12.8
Ontario (ref.)	16.5	14.4
Manitoba	19.2	16.0
Saskatchewan	17.5	15.9
Alberta	17.1	14.5
British Columbia	15.4	13.2

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Table A1
Proportion of workers reporting workplace harassment in the past 12 months, by characteristic, 2016

	Workplace harassment, including sexual	Workplace harassment, excluding sexual
	percent	
Marital status		
Married	14.2*	13.4
Common-law	16.1	14.5
Widowed	21.2	18.3
Separated	18.2	15.1
Divorced	22.8*	19.6**
Single or never-married (ref.)	17.1	13.8
Children under 6 living at home		
Yes	14.6	12.7
No (ref.)	16.1	14.2
Presence of a mobility limitation affecting daily activity		
Yes	23.7**	22.0**
No (ref.)	15.6	13.7
Current workplace characteristics		
Workplace size		
Small business (1 to 99 employees)	14.8*	12.9**
Medium-sized business (100 to 499 employees)	17.0	15.0
Large business (500 or more employees) (ref.)	18.5	16.6
Terms of employment		
Regular employee (ref.)	16.1	14.4
Seasonal employee	11.6*	8.8**
Term employee	17.4	14.9
Casual or on-call employee	15.9	13.6
Union status		
Unionized	21.2**	19.5**
Not unionized (ref.)	13.5	11.5
Occupation (NOC 4-digit)		
Management	14.4**	13.5**
Business, finance and administrative	13.1**	11.9**
Natural and applied sciences	8.4**	7.0**
Health (ref.)	28.1	24.6
Education, law, social and related	18.5**	17.0**
Sales and service	16.7**	13.3**
Trades and related	14.2**	13.5**
Unweighted sample size	9203	8,990
Weighted sample size	16,248,795	15,888,673

* significantly different from reference category (ref.) ($p < 0.05$)

** significantly different from reference category (ref.) ($p < 0.01$)

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2016.

Notes

1. See Cortina et al. (2001).
2. See Hershcovis (2011); Hershcovis and Barling (2010); Schilpzand et al. (2016).
3. See Schilpzand et al. (2016)
4. While no direct figures on the economic costs of workplace harassment exist for Canada, a 2008 report from the United Kingdom estimated that costs associated with absenteeism, turnover and productivity resulting from workplace bullying in that country in 2007 were estimated at about £13.75 billion (Giga et al. 2008). Specifically, the report found that 33.5 million days were lost by organizations in the U.K. due to bullying-related absenteeism, and that close to 200,000 employees may have left organizations as a result of bullying.
5. Self-employed individuals were excluded in order to focus on employees, which was necessary due to the power dynamic inherent in work relationships between owners and employees. Individuals aged 65 and over were also excluded in order to focus on the working-age population.
6. It is important to note that self-reported workplace harassment does not necessarily imply that an official complaint was made.
7. See Hershcovis (2011); Schilpzand et al. (2016). Readers should note that differences in how workplace harassment, as well as different reference periods and data-collection methods, make it difficult to compare estimates from one study to another.
8. See Hershcovis (2011); Hershcovis and Reich (2013).
9. See Tepper (2000).
10. Past work (McLaughlin et al. 2012) identifies the importance of examining the gender of both the person being harassed and the perpetrator of the harassment. Unfortunately, because the GSS did not ask the gender of the harasser, this study was unable to examine that aspect of workplace harassment.
11. Respondents may have reported more than one type of harasser, therefore, totals will not add up to 100%.
12. The exclusion of workers who reported having experienced sexual harassment eliminated more than 200 paid workers aged 15 to 64 from the sample, mostly women. The issue of women facing sexual harassment is discussed in more detail in the Sexual harassment of women in the workplace section. There were too few men in the sample to carry out any additional descriptive analyses on sexual harassment.
13. The proportion of those who reported workplace harassment across these characteristics are shown in the [supplementary information](#) section (Table A1).
14. Some past work suggests that some minority groups may be less likely to perceive an action against them at work as harassment. See Welsh et al. (2006).
15. However, because of the way the questionnaire is structured, it cannot necessarily be determined whether the job in which the harassment occurred is the same as the current job or whether it is unionized.
16. The more detailed labels corresponding to those listed in the text are Management occupations; Business, finance and administration occupations; Natural and applied sciences and related occupations; Health occupations; Occupations in education, law and social, community and government services, **and** Occupations in art, culture, recreation and sport; Sales and service occupations; and Trades, transport and equipment operators and related occupations, **and** Natural resources, agriculture and related production occupations, **and** Occupations in manufacturing and utilities.
17. The results from these logistic regressions are available upon request.
18. See Shields and Wilkins (2009).
19. In some supplementary analysis not shown here, workers in health-related fields were significantly more likely to have been harassed by a client or customer in the past year than any other kind of perpetrator. Moreover, the proportion of workers in health occupations who were harassed by clients or customers was significantly greater than any other occupational group.
20. Multiple responses were possible.
21. See O'Connell and Korabik (2000).
22. See Welsh (1999).
23. See Buchanan et al. (2008).
24. See Settles et al. (2012).
25. See Conroy and Cotter (2017).
26. See Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (2012).
27. See Moyser (2017).

28. It has been suggested that the employed population is healthier than the unemployed population (Martin 2018), which could be because employment raises health levels or because already healthy people are more likely to be employed and stay employed. This type of argument cannot be examined in more detail in this study, however, some past work suggests that both mechanisms are at play when health and work are examined (Ross and Mirowsky 1995).
29. See Mirowsky and Ross (2007); Pavalko et al. (2003).
30. See Ferguson (2012).
31. Note that the relationships discussed in this section may be bidirectional: a person who dislikes their job may be more prone to poor performance, which may lead supervisors, clients, etc. to react to them negatively, which in turn may be considered to be harassment by the respondent.
32. See Hershcovis and Barling (2010); Hershcovis et al. (2017). Furthermore, conflict situations between employees and their supervisors may also lead to different interpretations of harassment on the part of employees.
33. In some supplementary analyses, being harassed by client or customer was also examined; in this case, the association between workplace harassment and well-being was less strong than in the case of harassment from a supervisor. Hershcovis and Barling (2010) suggested that separating perpetrators by power differential is somewhat unclear. On the one hand, managers and supervisors undoubtedly have power over their employees; on the other hand, clients and customers do have some degree of control over employees, who may be subjected to disciplinary action by their employer. However, this supplementary work seems to suggest that the harm is more pervasive if the person responsible was either a supervisor or a manager.
34. See Shields and Wilkins (2009).
35. See Einarsen et al. (1994); Vartia (1996); Skogstad et al. (2011); Agervold and Mikkelsen (2004).

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