

# Redefining sexual discrimination

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verbal and nonverbal behaviors that convey insulting, hostile and degrading attitudes to women - is just as distressing for women victims as sexual advances in the workplace. According to Emily Leskinen, Lilia Cortina, and Dana Kabat from the University of Michigan in the US, gender harassment leads to negative personal and professional outcomes too and, as such, is a serious form of sex discrimination. In their view, there is a case for interpreting existing legislation as including gender harassment, so that it is recognized as a legitimate and serious form of sex-based discrimination in the workplace. Their work[1] is published online in Springer's journal *Law and Human Behavior*.

The generally accepted view of [sexual harassment](#) sees unwanted sexual attention as an essential component. What Leskinen's work shows is that nine out of ten harassed women in her sample had experienced gender harassment primarily in the absence of sexual advances in the workplace. And yet, within the current legal conception of sexual harassment, gender harassment involving no sexual advances routinely gets neglected by the law.

Leskinen, Cortina, and Kabat analyzed survey data from women working in two male-dominated environments: the US military (9,725 women) and federal legal practice (1,425 women). Their analyses revealed five typical profiles of harassment: low victimization (sexist behavior); gender harassment (sexist and crude harassment); gender harassment with unwanted sexual attention; moderate victimization (moderate levels of all types of harassment); high victimization (frequent harassment). The large majority (90 percent) of harassment victims fell into one of

the first two groups, which describe virtually no unwanted sexual advances, yet are the most common manifestations of sex-based harassment.

Compared to non-victims, gender-harassed women reported negative personal and professional outcomes in the two different work environments. In the military, victims scored significantly lower on all work attitudes and reported greater performance decline due to both physical and emotional health. They also described less overall psychological well-being and health satisfaction and had more thoughts and intentions of leaving their jobs. Among attorneys, gender-harassed women reported lower satisfaction with professional relationships and higher job stress. These results suggest that gender-harassed women, like [women](#) who experience sexual advance harassment, fare poorly in the workplace.

**More information:** Leskinen EA, Cortina LM, Kabat DB (2010). Gender harassment: broadening our understanding of sex-based harassment at work. *Law and Human Behavior*.  
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