

# The dynamics of workplace sexual harassment in the US

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A new *Gender, Work & Organization* analysis of U.S. data from 1997-2016 provides new insights into workplace sexual harassment.

The analysis found that declines in workplace sexual [harassment](#) complaints have been uneven, with African-American women experiencing an increased risk of sexual harassment, even as overall reported harassment complaints are down. In addition, higher unemployment rates were linked to increases in sexual harassment of women in American workplaces. Specifically, a higher [unemployment rate](#) in a particular month was followed by an increase in the number of reported harassment cases in the following month.

The authors noted that sexual harassment in the workplace appears to be an expression of power, or a way for men to assert their dominance. The shift from sexual harassment of white women to sexual harassment of African-American women indicates that harassers are conscious of power relationships and choose to target more vulnerable women in their workplaces. The link between changes in the unemployment rate and changes in sexual harassment indicates that men are more likely to engage in harassment behavior when they feel that their economic position in society is likely to be under threat.

"Over the past 20 years, we've made great strides in reducing [sexual harassment](#) in the workplace, but those benefits have all gone to white women, and mostly to young [white women](#)," said co-author Dan Cassino, MA, Ph.D., of Fairleigh Dickinson University, in New Jersey. "It seems

as though men have gotten more careful about who they're harassing and have been targeting women of color, who may be less likely to report the harassment."

**More information:** Dan Cassino et al, Race, Threat and Workplace Sexual Harassment: The Dynamics of Harassment in the US, 1997-2016, *Gender, Work & Organization* (2019). [DOI: 10.1111/gwao.12394](https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12394)

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