

**SEXUAL HARASSMENT AT WORK AND LABOUR
TURNOVER VIA JOB POSITIONS: A QUALITATIVE
STUDY OF SERVICE INDUSTRY EMPLOYEES
IN VIETNAM**

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ABSTRACT

Sexual harassment at work creates hurdles for employees to contribute and become committed to organisations. Labour turnover arising from sexual harassment at work is dangerous for the long-term development of any service company since it leads to a loss of talent and an increase in costs. Although Vietnam's workplace is relatively safe, sexual harassment is still a prevalent problem in employment, albeit hidden by cultural perspectives. This qualitative research is conducted to revisit the relationship between sexual harassment and labour turnover through the lens of job positions among Vietnamese service employees. This study uses focus

groups to obtain feedback and insights into sexual harassment at the workplace and its implications on turnover intentions among service staff. The findings show that sexual harassment is still a prevalent issue that is under-researched and addressed in the Vietnamese service workplace. The research results provide different viewpoints and relevant recommendations for service companies in Vietnam to embed the company's values and clarify the workplace behavioural expectations to strengthen employee protection and reduce labour turnover.

Keywords: Sexual harassment, labour turnover, job positions, service industry, Vietnam

INTRODUCTION

Sexual harassment is a severe form of sex discrimination and a breach of civil rights, which could be defined as any physical, verbal, or non-verbal sexual behaviour, as well as other sex-based behaviour affecting the integrity of all sexual orientations (Ineson et al. 2013; Kensbock et al. 2015; Li et al. 2016; Scarduzio et al. 2018). Sexual harassment may thus include a wide variety of sexual behaviours and activities, such as inappropriate sexual remarks or advances, sexual jokes, display of images or posters objectifying people, physical touching, or sexual violence (Cheung et al. 2018). Sexual harassment at work creates an unhealthy and abusive work environment for any individual witnessing or experiencing it, observers, and co-workers (Madera et al. 2018; Robinson et al. 2014). Sexual harassment at work has two main elements: 1) quid pro quo and 2) a hostile work environment (International Labour Organization [ILO] 2019; ILO and UN Women 2019).

MacKinnon (1979) states that quid pro quo represents any physical, verbal, or non-verbal lead of a sexual nature which is unwanted, nonsensical, and hostile. An individual's dismissal of, or accommodation to the quid pro quo, influences that individual's work. An example of quid pro quo is a pattern of sexual harassment that occurs when approval or rejection of a sexual offer is equivalent to appointments, career advancement, pay increases, bonuses, work, task distribution, or contract extension or renewal.

A hostile work environment makes the recipient's working environment frightening, unpleasant, or humiliating. Unwanted or embarrassing sexual jokes, insults or depictions of undesirable sexually explicit content are typical examples of a hostile work environment (ILO and UN Women 2019). A sexually contaminated or hostile working environment may also contribute to sexual harassment. Sexual harassment at the workplace can be perpetrated by

many people, including co-workers, managers, assistants, and external parties (Ram et al. 2016; Zhu et al. 2019). The high human involvement in the service industry often sets the scene for potential sexual harassment (Hofmann and Stokburger-Sauer 2017; Ineson et al. 2013).

Additionally, the normalisation of sexual harassment at work because of its persistent frequency can lead to negative consequences, including great personal suffering, reputational harm, and lack of dignity and self-esteem for victims (Bongiorno et al. 2019; Cheung et al. 2018; Fitzgerald et al. 1995; Ineson et al. 2013; Li et al. 2016). The organisational costs of sexual harassment include health effects with high economic costs impacting business operations as well as the labour market (Tracey and Hinkin 2008; Wen et al. 2020). The costs of medical treatment and counselling, work commitment reduction, or lawsuit resolution loss of employer's image and victims' welfare, finances, and careers (Cheung et al. 2018; Herbenick et al. 2019; Jung and Yoon 2020) all impact the performance of the organisation as a whole.

One of the problems of sexual harassment at work is labour turnover, (Wright and Bonett 2007; Zopiatis et al. 2014). Labour turnover is used to assess job satisfaction and retention by evaluating the percentage of workers who quit a business due to attrition, dismissal, and resignation to the overall number of paid employees over a specific period (Hom et al. 2017; Ghiselli et al. 2001; Zopiatis et al. 2014). There are four main types of labour turnover namely voluntary, involuntary, functional, and dysfunctional. Labour turnover caused by sexual harassment at work is dysfunctional (Merkin 2008). Labour turnover that is affected by sexual harassment varies from one industry to another, and is commonly observed in different fields such as banking (Giao et al. 2020), hospitality and the food industry (Brown et al. 2015; Jung et al. 2021; Koo et al. 2019) and modelling (Seo et al. 2020). According to Cheung et al. (2018) and Herbenick et al. (2019), sexual harassment at work leads to the highest labour turnover rates in accommodation and food service, retail trade, manufacturing, health care, and social assistance. Besides the negative consequences of absenteeism, low productivity, or low commitment to the organisation (Koo et al. 2019; Wen et al. 2020), labour turnover caused by sexual harassment creates barriers to the development of any organisation, requiring remedies such as considerable investments in staff employment, training and development (Hom et al. 2017; Jung et al. 2021). It also creates an additional workload for management levels as they have to take on the work of those who have left or even harassers (Saleh and Kabalan 2020; Wang et al. 2020). With a high frequency of communication and interpersonal interactions, sexual harassment can happen to all genders by different perpetrators, such as

co-workers, managers, or customers (Ram et al. 2016). Nonetheless, labour turnover intention may be reduced if victims have enough support from supervisors or managers (Robinson et al. 2014). Therefore, revisiting this issue is crucial to analyse the significance of sexual harassment on labour turnover and the factors that could moderate this relationship.

At work, sexual harassment and its impact on turnover vary from one individual to another, depending on the job position within the organisation's hierarchy of power (Cheung et al. 2018; McDonald and Charlesworth 2016; Warren et al. 2019). McDonald and Charlesworth (2016) and Bongiorno et al. (2019) state that women, rather than men, encounter sexual harassment. However, recent research by Scarduzio et al. (2018) and Schuyler et al. (2020) assert that it happens in any sexual orientation, including among males and homosexuals. The victims of sexual harassment at work are mostly at lower levels (Zurbrugg and Miner 2016). Being at this vulnerable level creates fear among victims of sexual harassment resulting in stress and untrustworthiness in the working environment (Choi et al. 2019; Koo et al. 2019; Wen et al. 2020).

Although the working environment in Vietnam is relatively stable and safe (ILO and International Finance Corporation [IFC] 2017), sexual harassment exists in different ways. Sexual harassment at work in Vietnam is typically seen from a gendered and cultural perspective (Hoang et al. 2018). However, Vietnamese legislation has made significant inroads to protect employees, primarily through the Labour Code. On 1 January 2021, the amendments to the code stated that sexual discrimination at work would result in punishment (Government of Vietnam 2020). Those who commit acts of sexual harassment will be administratively sanctioned. According to Clause 84, 85, and 86, decree 145/2020/NĐ-CP, rude gestures, teasing, provocative, or insulting the dignity of others are considered sexual harassment. Offenders may be subject to higher penalties if there are aggravating factors. Specifically, Point 3, Clause 3, Article 11, decree 12/2022/NĐ-CP stipulates that those who have rude and provocative gestures and words, teasing or insulting the honour and dignity of others at the workplace shall be subject to a warning or a fine ranging from VND15 million (USD700) to VND30 million (USD1,300).

Research and reports about sexual harassment and its labour turnover costs are not readily available (Giao et al. 2020). Sexual harassment persists in Vietnamese society, especially in the service industry, but it has received insufficient attention (Hoang et al. 2018); as a result, this industry has the fastest and largest turnover rate (Jung et al. 2021). According to Yap and Ineson (2016), Tuan (2018), Oosterhoff and Hoang (2018), and Giao et al.

(2020), in-depth research on sexual harassment shows a negative impact on employees' attitudes and behaviours. However, the consequences of these issues have not been carefully examined from the human resource (HR) management perspective. In Vietnam, HR management seems under-organised and the application of labour protection standards still faces many limitations (Alang et al. 2020). Victims are not protected entirely because they are usually advised to forgive harassers. Due to issues of cultural barriers, power imbalances, and gender biases (Hoang et al. 2018), the problem of sexual harassment and its related issues have led to adverse outcomes, such as job dissatisfaction, burnout, and turnover intentions (Giao et al. 2020; Tuan 2018). Labour turnover is no longer a simple problem with only financial consequences but also has human rights and long-term sustainability concerns.

This study examines sexual harassment and labour turnover in the Vietnamese service industry context. It is carried out with four focus groups using open-ended questions about sexual harassment and labour turnover intentions. The study also aims to determine if the job position is a determinant factor in sexual harassment incidences. Identifying the relationship between sexual harassment and labour turnover will help adjust the company's regulations, terms, and conditions by protecting workers, helping them cope with the service-oriented business, limiting financial risks, and ensuring organisational success.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory and Cultural Dimensions Theory (CDT) in the Relationship between Sexual Harassment, Labour Turnover, and Job Positions

The theory of conservation of resources (COR) by Hobfoll (2001) describes the desire to push individuals to retain and pursue new resources such as unusual objects, conditions, and situations. The COR theory is viewed as an alternative to other stress theories since it emphasises the objective and cultural perspectives of the environment in affecting the stress process rather than the individual's point of view (Hobfoll 2001). According to COR theory, resource loss is the primary factor in the stress process. Therefore, retaking the lost resource is vital to balance people's lives and prevent further losses (Thakur and Bhatnagar 2017; Yan et al. 2021). Sexual harassment creates job stress and leads to labour turnover intentions in the service industry because

victims lose their resources, i.e., a safe working environment, and they tend to find a better place to work (Ghiselli et al. 2001; Robinson et al. 2014; Saleh and Kabalan 2020). In the service industry, employees are critical sources of competitive advantage (Baarspul and Wilderom 2011; Cheng et al. 2013; Choi et al. 2019; Hofmann and Stokburger-Sauer 2017). Therefore, organisations must recruit talents and keep them remaining for future development and sustainability by reducing potential risks (Jung et al. 2010; Karatepe 2011; Lee and Ok 2014; Li et al. 2019).

Employees who consider leaving their employment are more likely to have been subjected to some form of sexual harassment. Because turnover is an indicator of dysfunction in the overall organisational system rather than specific difficulties; it is one of the most telling behavioural variables in illustrating organisational decline. Sexual harassment hinders worker productivity and economic mobility by disrupting professional advancement and causing financial stress to individuals subjected to it. Employee turnover costs include the time and effort spent acquiring and developing new employees (e.g., recruiting, interviewing, and orienting) in addition to resentment among co-workers who may be requested to take on additional job responsibilities that the harassed individual or harasser has left unfinished. The consequent financial and non-financial costs may be prohibitive.

Nevertheless, to apply COR in any particular context like Vietnam, cultural dimensions theory (CDT) (Hofstede 2001) should be considered since it is an excellent resource for comprehending the effect of culture on work and life (Wu 2006; McSweeney 2002). The CDT is used to differentiate between different national cultures, the aspects of culture, and the effects of culture on a corporate context (Hofmann and Stokburger-Sauer 2017). Since CDT has various dimensions focusing on the influence or moderation of job positions on sexual harassment and labour turnover intentions, the Power Distance Index (PDI) segment is utilised. According to Wu (2006), the PDI considers the degree to which inequality and power are permitted since inequality and authority are seen via perceptions of lower-level employees: the higher the PDI, the higher the tolerance and acceptance of gender and power differences and authority rank (Wu 2006). Based on Hofstede Insights (2021), Vietnam has a high level of PDI (70/100) which indicates that Vietnam has a significant hierarchy of power. Therefore, identifying and measuring the perception and intention of different job positions regarding sexual harassment and labour turnover is essential and adds value to the research in this area within Vietnam.

With the theories, the conceptual framework for this study is formed (see Figure 1).

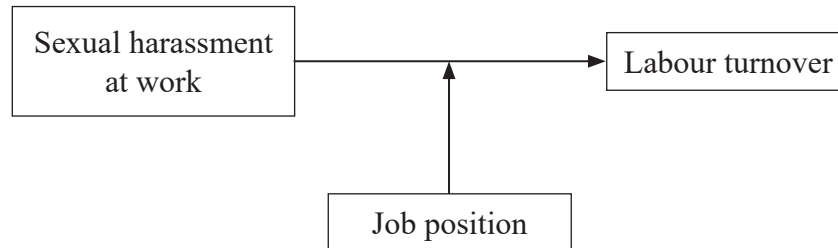


Figure 1: Conceptual framework.

Sexual harassment in the service industry

Identifying service industry characteristics related to the risk of sexual harassment at work may help eliminate sexual harassment in particular vocations and contexts (Minnotte and Legerski 2019). To analyse the situation of sexual harassment in the service industry, several dimensions need to be considered, including the ratio of genders in the organisation hierarchy, the perception that “customers are always right”, aesthetics, and emotional labour.

First, the ratio of genders working in a particular company is critical to examine the risks of sexual harassment. In the service industry, the ratio of women is higher than men in general (Kara et al. 2012; Kensbock et al. 2015; McLaughlin et al. 2017; Morgan and Pritchard 2019), but the number of male managers is significantly higher than female ones (Zurbrugg and Miner 2016; Warren et al. 2019). Thus, female employees in lower-level positions, working under a male supervisor or manager, may be uncomfortable about raising incidences of sexual harassment to their male superiors (Ineson et al. 2013; Zurbrugg and Miner 2016).

Secondly, the perception that “guests are right” exists in the service industry (Korczynski and Evans 2013). Despite experiencing harassment and mistreatment from clients, service staff frequently do not complain or report these occurrences. Managers can also be more lenient towards sexual harassment by customers by ignoring the issue or changing the servers rather than arguing with customers (Mohsin et al. 2013; Wen et al. 2020). Madera et al. (2018) state that managers tend to underestimate the sexually harassing conduct of a customer, leading to a biased and potentially unsafe work environment. The adverse outcomes of this unfair treatment can lead to job dissatisfaction and intention to leave.

Thirdly, employees are usually encouraged to appear aesthetically pleasing and emotionally resilient when working in the service industry. Because maintaining a beautiful and neat outlook is a given expectation for front-line employees, such appearances are often the excuse used by customers and managers to justify sexual harassment, sexual discrimination or gender harassment (Hsu et al. 2019; Tsaur and Tang 2013). Additionally, the demand that employees regulate their emotions via surface or deep acting to cater to customers' expectations results in a lack of room for employees to express their frustrations or dissatisfaction. The internalised total stresses, which arise from managing sexual harassment without compromising service performance, can lead to the adverse outcomes of job burnout, productivity reduction, and increased labour turnover intentions (Hwang et al. 2020).

The relationship between sexual harassment and labour turnover intentions

Sexual harassment is generally associated with incivility and can result in higher degradation of employees' well-being in organisations (Hom et al. 2017; Jung et al. 2021). Sexual harassment creates harmful impacts on workplace participation, which can be seen in work satisfaction, organisational commitment, absenteeism, health compensation claims, and desire to leave (Ghiselli et al. 2001; Robinson et al. 2014; Saleh and Kabalan 2020; Seo et al. 2020; Wang et al. 2020; Wen et al. 2020). Sexual harassment has an equivalent influence on both genders regarding work satisfaction, job withdrawal, and career commitment (Merkin 2008; Nadiri and Tanova 2010; Wright and Bonett 2007; Yan et al. 2021). Sexual harassment diminishes job satisfaction by overstepping personal boundaries and potentially exacerbating turnover intentions (Merkin 2008; Nadiri and Tanova 2010; Robinson et al. 2014; Saleh and Kabalan 2020). However, cultural perspectives offer different perceptions in responding to sexual harassment (McSweeney 2002). In the Vietnamese context, cultural dimensions should be taken to examine the influence of sexual harassment on labour turnover intentions.

Job positions moderate perceptions of sexual harassment at work and labour turnover intentions

Hofstede's CDT mentions that cultures influence differently to the service industry. Hofstede (2001: 352–55) states that individualism and collectivism are essential cultural features. Individualistic cultures emphasise the private

self, autonomy, and personal success, and people perceive themselves as independent of their ingroups. In this cultural setting, people are encouraged to follow their preferences, promote their aims, and feel good about themselves. On the other hand, collectivistic societies tend to regard themselves as interdependent. Individual conduct is heavily influenced by the norms and objectives of ingroups (Hofstede 2001). Power distance from CDT is utilised to understand the impacts of job position on the turnover intentions arising from sexual harassment. The impact of cultural beliefs on perceptions of sexual harassment has frequently been studied through cross-cultural comparisons. It becomes increasingly necessary to explore the influence of individual-level cultural beliefs on workplace behaviour as the workplace gets more diverse (Choi et al. 2016).

The PDI is defined as how members of society tolerate unequal power distribution in institutions and organisations. A high PDI score shows that society accepts unequal, hierarchical power distribution and recognises “their position” in the system. A low PDI score, in contrast, indicates that power is shared and widely distributed and that society does not accept unequal power distribution. Individuals primed at high power distances are more tolerant of sexual harassment than those primed at low power distances (Khatri 2009). Bao et al. (2021) state that power distance explains the fairness of distribution through power comparison in social interactions. At the individual level, power distance orientation indicates an individual’s acceptance of an organisation’s uneven power allocation. It represents how workers see their authority and prestige inside the business and how well they perceive and react to management choices and leadership approaches. PDI also reflects the acceptance of sexual harassment at work, which could turn into internal stress and burnout before deciding to leave the organisation.

According to Mishra and Stair (2019), cultures that believe superiors should have a considerable deal of authority over subordinates are thought to have a high power distance, whereas cultures that believe a modest amount of power is suitable are said to have a low power gap. High power distance cultures’ norms legitimise inequalities in decision-making capacity between people in high and low power positions, while low power distance cultural norms, on the other hand, diminish power disparities among persons in positions with varied amounts of formal decision-making power. Previous research shows that females are victims of sexual harassment by male perpetrators (Bongiorno et al. 2019; Hwang et al. 2020), but recently, males and individuals of other sexual orientations, for instance, LGBTQ+ communities are also victims of workplace harassment (Schuyler et al. 2020;

Zurbrugg and Miner 2016). Therefore, examining the sexual harassment issue and its outcome should be expanded to dimensions such as job positions since hierarchical differences significantly impact perceptions and experiences of sexual harassment and labour turnover. Perpetrators in higher hierarchical positions engage in sexual harassment by identifying the vulnerability of targets, especially those with lower positions or lower incomes, because when in financially disadvantaged situations, they are more susceptible to sexual harassment due to lower prestige and less control (McLaughlin et al. 2017; Minnotte and Legerski 2019). People from cultures with high levels of power distance react differently to associated concerns, are more likely to accept status distinctions, and are inclined to obey the judgments of perceived superiors or those in powerful positions. It contributes to a workplace environment where those in lower positions are disempowered, putting them at risk for sexual harassment.

Younger employees, part-time workers, and homosexual individuals are typical targets of sexual harassment (Schuyler et al. 2020). Even women in supervisory or management positions or with higher education and long-term experience are subject to sexual harassment. According to Hoover et al. (2019), societal prejudice against women in employment also contributes to the harassment of women in the workplace. Moreover, as women assume power, men may feel compelled to defend power they see as a threat. When men's status, privilege, and dominance in the gender system are lower than women's, backlash becomes a strategy to protect or defend males, leading to extreme harassment (Hoover et al. 2019). The link between power and sexual harassment is shown in the job hierarchy and masculine working environments in Vietnam. According to Hofstede Insights (2021), Vietnam has a high score on the power distance index (PDI) (70/100), indicating that people accept a hierarchical order in which everyone has a place, and no further justification is required. In an organisation, hierarchy reflects inherent inequalities and widespread centralisation, and subordinates expect to be told what to do. Mishra and Stair (2019) state that victims consider a superior's insult to be at least partially legitimate. Because of the harasser's higher position, they will consider mild forms of sexual harassment justifiable.

METHODOLOGY

The main objective of this study is to revise the influence of sexual harassment on labour turnover and identify whether job positions may have moderation effects on that relationship in Vietnam. A qualitative method was adopted

to achieve the target. Four focus groups of six respondents were formed to discuss the research area's issues. Since this research was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, online discussions via Google Meet were utilised from March 2021 to May 2021. Each discussion was approximately 45 minutes long, with a voice recording for further examination.

Participants

Each participant was selected based on their experiences in sexual harassment in four dimensions i.e., gender discrimination, gender harassment, unwanted sexual attention, and sexual coercion. The respondents were business partners and friends of the researchers working in different positions, and they were invited to join the interview after being persuaded to share their problems. The respondents had experienced different sexual experiences, such as discriminated against by gender, shown unwanted sexual actions or materials, and forced to have sex. The respondents are of different genders and had job positions only in the service industry, including hospitality, education, healthcare, beauty care, banking and finance, and retail. All respondents were anonymous and agreed to respond to this research thoroughly. The respondents were all Vietnamese working in three main cities (Ho Chi Minh City, Vung Tau city, and Ha Noi capital). Due to the difficulties of the pandemic, the study could not include a broader range of respondents. Still, with the various industry backgrounds and experiences of the present respondents the results showed interesting outcomes besides the expected results.

Measures

The study was conducted using the elements of the Sexual Experience Questionnaire (SEQ), three open questions for reactions to sexual harassment, and three questions from the turnover intention survey shown in Table 1. The statements of SEQ by Fitzgerald et al. (1995), amended by Mazzeo et al. (2001), were selected and translated into the Vietnamese language to ensure respondents could categorise themselves in suitable groups. Three questions for interviewing the turnover intention were adapted from Mobley et al. (1978). The measurement sequence was from demographics to awareness of SEQ dimensions, reactions, and turnover intentions. The demographics part was in multiple-choice questions, the SEQ was in yes/no questions, and the reactions and labour turnover intentions were open questions. Respondents consequently responded to the given statement and were recorded by the researchers.

Table 1: Questionnaire for respondents: SEQ and open questions

Scale		Response		Source
Sexual experience questionnaire (SEQ)		Yes	No	
Group 1: Gender discrimination (AGD)				
AGD1	I used to be treated differently because of my gender.	Yes	No	
AGD2	Someone displayed, used, or distributed sexist or suggestive materials in front of me.	Yes	No	
AGD3	Someone made offensive sexist remarks to me.	Yes	No	
AGD4	Someone put me down or was condescending to me because of my gender.	Yes	No	
Group 2: Gender harassment (AGH)				
AGH1	Someone repeatedly told sexual stories or jokes that were offensive to me.	Yes	No	
AGH2	Someone whistled, called, or hooted at me in a sexual way.	Yes	No	
AGH3	Someone made unwelcome attempts to draw me into a discussion of sexual matters.	Yes	No	
AGH4	Someone made crude and offensive sexual remarks, either publicly or to me privately.	Yes	No	
AGH5	Someone made offensive remarks about my appearance, body, or sexual activities.	Yes	No	Mazzeo et al. (2001)
AGH6	Someone made gestures or used body language of a sexual nature which embarrassed or offended me.	Yes	No	
AGH7	Someone stared, leered, or ogled me in a way that made me feel uncomfortable.	Yes	No	
AGH8	Someone exposed themselves physically in a way that embarrassed me or made me feel uncomfortable.	Yes	No	
Group 3: Unwanted sexual attention (AUS)				
AUS1	Someone made attempts to establish a romantic sexual relationship with me despite my efforts to discourage it.	Yes	No	
AUS2	Someone continued to ask me for dates, drinks, dinner, etc., even though I said “No”.	Yes	No	
AUS3	Someone touched me in a way that made me feel uncomfortable.	Yes	No	
AUS4	Someone made unwanted attempts to stroke, caress, or kiss me.	Yes	No	
AUS5	Someone attempted to have sex with me without my consent or against my will but was unsuccessful.	Yes	No	

(Continued on next page)

Table 1: (Continued)

Scale		Response		Source
Sexual experience questionnaire (SEQ)		Yes	No	
Group 4: Sexual Coercion (ASC)				
ASC1	Someone made me feel like I was being bribed with some sort of reward or special treatment to engage in sexual behaviour.	Yes	No	
ASC2	Someone made me feel threatened with some sort of retaliation for not being sexually cooperative.	Yes	No	Mazzeo et al. (2001)
ASC3	Someone mistreated me for refusing to have sex.	Yes	No	
ASC4	Someone implied faster promotions or better treatment if I was sexually cooperative.	Yes	No	
ASC5	Someone made me afraid I would be treated poorly if I did not cooperate sexually.	Yes	No	
Open questions for reactions (OQR) and labour turnover (OQL) intentions by sexual harassment				
OQR1	Who committed the alleged harassment?			Kantola (2021)
OQR2	What exactly occurred or was said?			
OQR3	How often did it occur?			
OQR4	How did you react?			
OQR5	How would you like to see the situation resolved?			
OQL1	Within the following years, after being sexually harassed at work, how did you look for a new job?			Mobley et al. (1978)
OQL2	When you experience sexual harassment, how often do you think of leaving the organisation? To which extend?			
OQL3	What were your conscious choices when you were sexually harassed at work if you could choose again?			

Procedure

This qualitative study was carried out using focus groups. Although the suitable number of respondents is 25 to 30 (Dworkin 2012), the number of respondents (24 respondents) was constrained by the sensitive nature of sexual harassment and the COVID-19 pandemic. The respondents were selected from different service industries. The responses were organised using demographics and SEQ before being categorised based on experiences. If any participant had experienced more than one type of sexual harassment, the more complicated problem was selected. Each focus group had six respondents and was organised into four groups: Group 1 (victims of gender discrimination), Group 2 (victims of gender harassment), Group 3 (victims of unwanted sexual attention), and Group 4 (victims of sexual coercion). After being grouped, open-ended questions were asked to elicit respondents' reactions toward

sexual harassment experiences and the extent to which such harassment led to their organisational turnover. Descriptive coding was used to determine and classify the range of responses from participants. The second stage of coding used pattern coding to organise responses into a smaller number of themes (Saldana 2016: 13–20).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The collection of responses shows that sexual harassment varies from job to harasser and the way of toleration. Among 24 respondents categorised into four focus groups, the demographics indicate eight dimensions, including gender, age, working field, type of company, working years, current job position, turnover frequency, and previous training about sexual harassment at work. The total number of male victims agreeing to participate in this study was only 17%, while 87% were females. The respondents were aged between 22 and 33 years old (19 respondents), 31 and 45 years old (four respondents), and 45 years old and above (one respondent). The researchers attempted to capture different fields in the service industry. Therefore, half of the respondents were from tourism and hospitality, and the rest were distributed among spa, massage and therapies, banking and finance, education, and retail. Most of them were from private companies; interestingly, four respondents from state-owned companies and state-owned joint-stock companies (JSC) agreed to participate in this study.

Fourteen respondents have been working for one to three years. Three people have been working less than a year, three respondents from three to five years, and only one with five years of experience. Most of the respondents were staff (16 out of 24), while others were from supervisor and above positions (eight respondents). The labour turnover rate is reflected by the number of companies the respondents have worked for: 13 people have changed their company twice, followed by three companies (seven people), and two respondents have changed their companies more than three times. Furthermore, there is an equality of respondents who have undergone training about sexual harassment and those who have not. Table 2 shows details of the demographic results.

Table 2: Demographics results

Content		Experience with sexual harassment				Total	
		<i>Group 1</i>	<i>Group 2</i>	<i>Group 3</i>	<i>Group 4</i>	No.	%
Gender	Male	1	0	1	2	4	17
	Female	5	6	5	4	20	83
Age (years)	22 to 30	3	5	5	6	19	79
	31 to 45	2	1	1	0	4	17
	45 and above	1	0	0	0	1	4
Field	Tourism and hospitality	2	4	3	3	12	50
	Spa, massage and therapies	0	0	1	2	3	13
	Banking and finance	0	1	0	0	1	4
	Education	2	0	2	0	4	17
	Retail	2	1	0	1	4	17
Type of company	State-owned	0	1	0	1	2	8
	State-owned JSC	1	0	1	0	2	8
	Private	3	4	4	4	15	63
	Foreign	2	1	0	0	3	13
	Foreign JSC	0	0	1	1	2	8
Working experiences in current company	Less than one	1	1	2	2	6	25
	One to three	4	4	3	3	14	58
	Three to five	1	1	0	1	3	13
	Five and above	0	0	1	0	1	4
Job positions	Top management	0	0	1	0	1	4
	Middle management	2	1	2	0	5	21
	Supervisor	1	0	1	0	2	8
	Staff	3	5	2	6	16	67
Turnover frequency	Two companies	3	4	2	4	13	54
	Three companies	1	2	3	1	7	29
	Four companies	1	0	1	0	2	8
	More than four companies	1	0	0	1	2	8
Sexual harassment training	Yes	2	3	3	4	12	50
	No	4	3	3	2	12	50

The results were organised into four groups to examine victims' reactions toward sexual harassment before analysing the intention of leaving the company and changing the job. Employees' reactions to harassers include keeping silent without sharing, reporting to the direct supervisor, reporting to the HR department, and fighting against the harasser (Tables 3 and 4).

Table 3: Summary of reactions of respondents

Reaction	No.	%	Case	%
Silent	7	29.2	4	100
Report to direct supervisor	7	29.2	3	75
Report to the HR department	1	4.2	1	25
Fighting against the harasser	9	37.5	4	100

Table 4: Results of respondents' comments based on open questions

Content	Group 1		Group 2		Group 3		Group 4		Total	
Sexually harassed by									No.	%
Customer	5	83%	2	33%	2	33%	3	50%	12	50
Manager	0	0	3	50%	1	17%	0	0%	4	17
Colleague	1	17%	1	17%	3	50%	3	50%	8	33
Total									24	100
Reaction of victim										
Silent	1	17%	1	17%	1	17%	3	50%	6	25
Report to direct supervisor	0	0%	3	50%	2	33%	1	17%	6	25
Report to the HR department	1	17%	0	0%	0	0%	1	17%	2	8
Fighting against a harasser	4	67%	2	33%	3	50%	1	17%	10	42

The results in Table 3 show the reactions of all the respondents, with the highest proportion belonging to “fighting against the harasser”, followed by “silent” and “reporting to a supervisor”, and only one case reported to the HR department. Furthermore, Table 4 indicates that half of the respondents are victims of sexual harassment by customers, followed by colleagues (33%) and managers (17%). Although most of the respondents are staff, they are willing to fight against the harasser (42%) rather than be silent (25%) or report to their supervisor (25%) and the HR department (8%).

Additionally, based on their comments, there are two segments of labour turnover namely 1) changing to a new company in the same field with

the same tasks and 2) changing to a different company in a different field with different expertise. Based on types of labour turnover, most of the respondents selected to stay in the same industry with the same task (in a different company) (20 respondents) compared to those who decided to change entire expertise (4 respondents). The first segment shows the exact proportions of harassers' and victims' reactions. Furthermore, it captures the frequency of leaving the company, with 85% of respondents thinking once or twice before leaving the industry rather than thinking more about it after being sexually harassed. Only four respondents decided to change their entire job field and expertise in the second segment. They choose to stay silent or report to the management level rather than fight back after being sexually harassed by their customers (25%) or colleagues (75%). Three persons think once before leaving, but one respondent needs more time to decide whether they could stay or leave.

To differentiate labour turnover by sexual harassment via job positions, there are two main groups based on their levels in companies i.e., management and staff. The results by job positions show that labour turnover varies by level. Staff tend to stay at a company for less than one year, showing that it may be easier to leave the company if sexual harassment happens. After being sexually harassed, by all means, contracted employees (including staff or management level) tend to leave the organisation. Different factors, such as working environment, salary, regulations, and job relevance, lead to different turnover ratios. Table 5 shows the details of the data.

Table 5: Average turnover ratios (years) by job positions

Average turnover ratio	Management level		Staff	
1 year/company and below	1	13%	3	19%
1.08–3.00 years/company	4	50%	7	44%
3.08–5.00 years/company	2	25%	4	25%
5.08 years/company	1	13%	2	13%
Total	8	100%	16	100%

DISCUSSION

The study demonstrates that most of the victims are females (83%), which is consistent with previous studies by Hoang et al. (2018), Bongiorno et al. (2019), Hwang et al. (2020), and Schuyler et al. (2020). However, it also indicates the new dimensions of sexual harassment in male respondents, supporting the results of Scarduzio et al. (2018).

The survey shows that most respondents do not risk changing jobs and prefer choosing other companies in the same fields to step into a brand-new environment. It aligns with the COR theory since employees tend to reserve their remaining expertise (resources) after losing job satisfaction due to sexual harassment. It is also adaptable to job positions and labour turnover results when CDT indicates that different job positions react to and tolerate sexual harassment and leave the organisation differently. It is pertinent to note that in Vietnam, lower-level staff are more likely to exit the organisation when sexually harassed, whereas, among managerial levels, the decision to leave is more measured as they consider responsibilities and opportunity costs. The results also stress that sexual harassment is dangerous for organisational health because employees' reaction to deal with the situation is to exit the organisation culminating in labour turnover. Therefore, managers must consider this problem thoroughly to ensure that employees, especially the good ones, remain unchanged and reduce recruitment costs.

The research shows that sexual harassment at work and its influences on employees are significant. Sexual harassment at work creates cognitive burdens in the intention to leave the company. The COR theory supports the results of labour turnover after being harassed. Because victims must protect their values and emotions for potential new work, they are ready to leave the toxic workplace. Employees only perceive sexual harassment as sexually hostile and violent actions, but they must carry the burden of minor harassment. CDT also explains how different hierarchical positions perceive sexual harassment and their degree of tolerance towards such harassment. It may make sexual harassment at work and its outcomes more severe and unpredictable.

CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study identifies the interrelationship between sexual harassment, labour turnover, and job positions. The problem of sexual harassment at work and its outcome on labour turnover has been examined in different countries, but the research in Vietnam seems limited (Yap and Ineson 2016; Tuan 2018; Oosterhoff and Hoang 2018; Hoang et al. 2018; Giao et al. 2020; Alang et al. 2020). The sexual dimensions were applied to categorise the answers by interviewing respondents through focus group methods. According to the

results, sexual harassment has different reactions and intentions to labour turnover and personal turnover ratios. Employees perceive and solve the problem of harassment differently. While labour turnover is a considered option in response to sexual harassment in the service industry, employees who do leave appear to change organisations rather than change their jobs or industry, and they remain in the service industry despite being cognisant of the nature of sexual harassment. Analysis of the responses from this study shows that Vietnamese employees' decisions to leave the organisation where they experienced sexual harassment are tempered by factors such as salary, working environment, personal goals, or even regulations in new companies. Therefore, there is a potential for future research in Vietnam to explore how each of these factors can be utilised to mitigate the prevalent problem of sexual harassment in the service industry.

The findings also show the limitation in enforcing laws pertaining to harassment. The instance of sexual harassment must be clearly evidenced, which can be subjective and supported by witnesses. Without these corroborations, victims cannot prove that they have been harassed. Furthermore, the border between sexual harassment and over-friendliness is very vague. Given the position of power from which harassers operate, the employee may be subject to other pressures to withdraw the complaint or even threats of loss of employment. Applying the law will be tenuous, given that the legal action is subject to complex situations. Secondly, the punishment is not strict enough to deter harassers, and the law seems to be just a guide without significant ramifications for the harassers.

Two implications are attached with recommendations for enterprises in Vietnam to protect employees and ensure long-term sustainability. All state-owned, private, or foreign investment organisations should adequately train employees at all levels on sexual harassment issues at work. The high awareness of sexual harassment and how it will be dealt with will help prepare employees to seek the appropriate redress should they find themselves in such a situation. It is also recommended that managers protect their staff from the problem of sexual harassment, irrespective of whether the harassment is from a colleague, a supervisor, or a customer. It can be done by implementing disciplinary rules and processes involved in reporting and investigating any claims of sexual harassment. The HR department, like middle management, must help employers and employees realise the importance of protecting themselves from sexual harassment through continuous training and meetings. Employees' sense of belonging will increase when their concerns are given consideration and not dismissed out of hand by the organisation. There must

also be a strong emphasis on workshops to train staff on recognising sexual harassment and the strategies to deal with such incidents. The need to report sexual harassment must be emphasised as well as assurances that a degree of anonymity will be provided to complainants. Employees in all positions must view sexual harassment seriously and engage in appropriate behaviour to create a safe work environment for all employees.

With clear strategies to mitigate the consequences of sexual harassment at the hierarchical levels, it would be possible for service industry organisations in Vietnam to minimise negative repercussions and action in a positive work environment, leading to a competitive advantage.

Limitations

This study was conducted in Vietnam. Therefore, the results only partially reflect situations at work and may not be widely applied to other countries. Even inside Vietnam, the perceptions of northern and southern areas about sexual harassment are different. Further examination is required to ensure that Vietnamese employees have a fair working environment in Vietnam. Additionally, the respondents are mainly millennials or Generation Y. It is challenging to apply the results to Generation Z, which will start working soon, because of differences in perception and working motivations. With future research on Generation Z about this issue, organisations will identify and strengthen the internal regulations to protect them and keep them working as effectively and passionately as possible. Lastly, the limited number of respondents is the main challenge. Since this article is mainly for revising the problem of sexual harassment in labour turnover with the new prospect of job positions, only 24 participants agreed to join this survey. Due to the pandemic constraints in approaching respondents, the results cannot represent all Vietnamese enterprises or employees. Nevertheless, it will be an opportunity for other Vietnamese researchers to apply quantitative methods and examine further these issues and better solutions for a safe working environment in Vietnam.

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COMPLIANCE WITH ETHICAL STANDARDS

This study followed the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the laws of Vietnam and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards. Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants of this study.

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