

An exploration of first response emergency workers' experiences of sexual harassment and bystander interventions

Case study exploring First Response Emergency (FRE) workers' experiences of sexual harassment/unwanted sexual attention and bystander interventions.

Key details

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Police region	Wales
Level of research	PhD
Project start date	September 2022
Date due for completion	September 2026

Research context

This research is a qualitative exploration of sexual harassment/unwanted sexual behaviour and bystander interventions experienced by first responders while at work in three UK organisations: police, fire and rescue, and the ambulance service. It is in line with the Welsh Government's Violence Against Women and Girls Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV) national strategy for 2022–2026, which stresses the importance of taking a 'whole society approach' to tackle gender-based violence.

Previous research into the phenomenon indicates sexualised banter as a contributing factor to misogynistic attitudes at work (see Bennett and others 2014, Robinson and others 2022, Baillie and

others 2022).

Although there are studies that have explored the barriers to intervening in sexual assault incidents, there are a limited number of studies that have looked at this in the context of sexual harassment. There are even fewer studies that have explored sexual harassment or unwanted sexual behaviour experienced by ambulance and fire and rescue employees.

This study aims to fill this gap in the literature and contribute both theoretically and practically to academia. Theoretically, in being a critical test of Garland's (1994) responsibilisation theory by examining the nature and extent to which bystanders accept or reject responsibility for the safety of others, and the reasons why. In addition, it considers Eliasian sociologists' de-civilising theories and power dynamics, such as the outsider and insider 'figuration' – for example, men as insiders use sexual harassment to maintain male-dominated spaces (see, for example, Fletcher 2013, Weenink 2013).

In doing so, it aims to understand the reasons behind intervening, or not, in sexual harassment incidents, and contribute practically by providing evidence to inform Active Bystander Training (ABT) courses in First Response Emergency (FRE) workplaces and beyond.

Research questions

1. Why and how do bystanders to sexual harassment at work intervene/not intervene?
2. What are the barriers, if any, to reporting incidents of sexual harassment at work as a first response emergency worker?
3. What are the impacts of experiencing sexual harassment at work as a first responder?

Research methodology

This study is a qualitative, explorational study using interviews and focus groups to collect data and theoretical analysis to analyse data. Interviews and focus groups will be conducted via Microsoft Teams or in a bookable room at Cardiff University. Interviews will be between 30–60 minutes, and focus groups will consist of 6–8 participants lasting between 40 minutes and 1.5 hours.

Interviews and focus groups are transcribed using the Microsoft Teams transcription feature and manually transcribed by listening to the recording and re-writing mistakes. Transcripts will be

analysed using NVivo, or manually. Theoretical analysis will be used. Initial codes will be identified and revised until overarching themes emerge. After analytic saturation has been achieved, the PhD student will write about the results of the study in a thesis and submit this to Cardiff university for the purpose of achieving a PhD in Social Sciences.

References

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