



BLACK WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES OF WORKPLACE SEXUAL HARASSMENT

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Following previous research exploring unions' efforts at 'racialising' the agenda (Kirton, Guillaume 2022), we carried out a literature review on Black women's experiences of workplace sexual harassment for the TUC. Sexual harassment has gained media attention and greater prominence in public discourse over the past few years on account of the anti-sexual harassment #MeToo online movement that went viral in late 2017 sparked by revelations and allegations involving high profile individuals. #MeToo has helped to shift the narrative from an understanding based on the notion of 'a few bad apples' to one that positions sexual harassment as a systemic issue present in all domains of public life. Yet despite the recency of #MeToo, sexual harassment is an age-old workplace issue that unions have long sought to tackle since the concept was first named in the late 1970s by feminist activists. While the public conversation has been rekindled, it is largely focused on public sexual harassment (such as street harassment), which does not include the workplace where sexual harassment perpetrators may be clients, customers, patients, etc. as well as co-workers, supervisors and managers (Boateng and Brown, 2022). Equally, the discussion around Black women's experiences of sexual harassment is beginning in the UK but is muted compared to the general category of 'women'.

The purpose of this review is to better understand the experiences of Black women regarding sexual harassment in the workplace at the intersection of race and sex discrimination. In terms of the specific focus on Black women and sexual harassment, it is useful to note that throughout the review, the term 'Black' is used in line with the TUC's approach. The TUC Race Relations Committee uses Black (with a capital 'B') as an umbrella term to bring together people with a shared history. 'Black' is used in a broad political and inclusive sense to describe people in the UK who have suffered





from colonialism and enslavement in the past and continue to experience racism and diminished opportunities in today's society. The available evidence suggests that workplace sexual harassment is prevalent yet under-reported due to fear of reprisals and victimisation (Cassino & Besen-Cassino, 2019; EHRC, 2020; Fielden et al., 2010; Ford et al., 2021; Marin et al., 2020). This means that robust data based on formal reporting is lacking, however, there is enough evidence to draw the conclusion that workplace sexual harassment is widespread across sectors and occupations. As regards formal reporting, targets/victims who do take action may find that there are no consequences for the perpetrator (Adams et al., 2020; Atwater et al., 2019). Reporting is particularly problematic where the perpetrator is a line-manager (and normally the person to report such incidents to) or where the woman has another marginalised identity that makes her especially vulnerable (such as migrant status) (Villegas, 2019; Welsh et al., 2006). In short, an organisation's tolerance for sexual harassment combined with pressure to stay silent impacts reporting rates as well as women's future collective vulnerability to sexual harassment in that organisation (Ford et al., 2021). These findings suggest a systemic problem requiring further investigation and robust policy solutions to tackle a wide range of factors that 'allow' sexual harassment to occur at workplaces. Trade union action is also crucial given the apparent ineffectiveness of currently available legal and policy mechanisms for providing redress for individual targets let alone tackling the workplace problem systemically through preventative measures that would work for the benefit of all workplaces and all working women (TUC, 2022).

Sexual harassment at work is studied in multiple academic disciplines and subject areas including psychology, sociology, industrial relations, management and organisation studies, law, gender and race studies. There are also numerous stakeholders that have produced reports on the topic including government departments/bodies and non-profit organisations. Useful insights can be gained from all the available sources; therefore, this literature review reflects the extant multi-disciplinary knowledge base and includes 'grey' literature on the topic.

