

# SURVIVING SEXUAL VIOLENCE

*A Guide to  
Recovery and  
Empowerment*



EDITED BY THEMA BRYANT-DAVIS

# Surviving Sexual Violence

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## **A Guide to Recovery and Empowerment**

Edited by Thema Bryant-Davis

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## **Dedication**

To my mother, Rev. Cecelia Williams Bryant, my first feminist role model, whose life is a testament that healing, recovery, growth, and empowerment are possible. Thank you for your fire.

## **Acknowledgments**

Thank you to Shaquita Tillman and Monica Unique Ellis for your detailed administrative assistance in the compilation of this important text. Your dedication and spirit of excellence are appreciated always. I am excited about the great paths that are ahead for each of you.

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# Introduction

*Thema Bryant-Davis*

Sexual violence is a violation of survivors and society as a whole. It disrupts mental and physical well-being and devastates the fabric of social relationships. While many have written about the high global prevalence of sexual violence and its injurious consequences, less has been published about the multiple ways people can and do heal. Editing this book was important to me personally and professionally. I am a survivor of sexual violence, and I can honestly say the possibilities for my life did not end in the multiple moments of violation I have lived through. Additionally, I work as a licensed clinical psychologist and trauma researcher in the area of sexual violence. My work is based on the understanding that women and men, girls and boys around the globe have been sexually violated and yet many have found ways to move toward recovery and empowerment. This book is an acknowledgment of those who have started the healing journey as well as a resource for those who would like to get started on the path of reclaiming themselves and their lives.

The premise of this book is that survivors of sexual violence may develop pathology, but they also have incredible possibility to grow and live full lives. The book title speaks of survival because it is important to not centralize the mentality of victim but to know that survival is possible. It is also critical to not end at survival but to seek thriving. In other words, the healing pathways in this book aim to help people to not only reduce or eliminate post-trauma symptoms, but to also help survivors develop positive self-esteem, life purpose, relationships, and self-efficacy. In this way, the recovery process does not end at the point of cessation of symptoms of distress but moves through that place to the point of empowerment and life fulfillment.

There are diverse aspects of sexual violence. As a result, the beginning of this book provides an overview of the primary forms of violation one may have encountered. In reading through the prevalence and dynamics of these experiences, one will see similarities and differences. One important commonality is the abuse of power and the objectification of victims. While these forms of violence are sexual in nature, it is important to recall the clear issues of power and control that are the basis of these violations. Survivors of sexual harassment, trafficking, assault, and abuse all experience a level of dehumanization with the needs and desires of the perpetrator being prioritized over the rights to safety. There is no hierarchy of violation. In other words, it is critical that we avoid minimizing our experiences by comparing them to others. Whether you were sexually harassed, trafficked, assaulted, or abused, your trust was broken and your rights were violated. Recognizing that what happened to you should not happen to anyone is an important step in the recovery process.

Once the dynamics of these various types of sexual violation are described, the remainder of the book provides in-depth descriptions of various pathways to recovery and empowerment. The pathways include traditional psychotherapy (such as cognitive-behavioral, psychodynamic, and eye movement desensitization reprocessing) as well as nontraditional approaches (such as mind-body practice, spirituality, and expressive writing). This is the first book to include an in-depth description

of these various pathways with a focus on sexual violence recovery. These chapters are authored by esteemed health professionals and scholars. I am pleased with the steps the authors have taken to make this resource accessible and applicable. Specifically, these chapters include both case studies of persons or groups of persons who have made use of these pathways as well as specific suggestions for those who would like to explore each pathway. A final but incredible asset of this text is that, as opposed to ignoring culture or segregating it into one chapter, the contributing authors explore the use of the various healing pathways within various cultural contexts, including but not limited to gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation.

This resource guide is beneficial for counselors and survivors, as well as the support team for survivors. Regarding counselors, we can often get stuck in one orientation and approach to counseling. It is important to recognize the various ways that people heal, recover, and grow. This will allow us to adopt a strengths-based orientation that acknowledges and honors the diverse ways that people have survived. It will also allow for a more integrative approach that considers the possibility of referral and collaboration as well as the pursuit of continued education in various therapeutic methodologies.

For survivors, I would first like to thank you for picking up this text. I hope this guide serves as an important resource for your next steps toward healing and recovery. While you may be interested in reading a specific chapter, I would encourage you to read about all of the pathways. You may discover an interest in a new pathway that could be quite empowering. The reason the pathway chapters have suggestions within them is that it is important that you not only *read* about recovery but also take follow-up steps toward your empowerment. During the period of violation you were not in control, but you do have the ability to regain control over your life and shape the next stage of your journey. Sexual violence, in any form, is a devastating experience, but it does not have the final say in what your life will be nor what you will become.

For family members, romantic partners, and friends of survivors, I am glad that you are reading this book. Your support, belief, and presence make a huge difference in the lives of survivors. This guide can help you understand, in part, the experience of survivors as well as the various options that are available to them in the recovery process. It is also essential for you to listen to the survivor's experience, feelings, and thoughts, as the specifics of the trauma they endured will vary and be shaped by their personal history and the context they were in at the time of the violation. My hope is that this book will give you greater insight into both the struggles facing survivors and the possibilities for healing and growth.

I am pleased to share with you the expertise of both established and emerging authors. My hope is that you will find this body of work informative, insightful, and even inspiring. The aim of this book is to give you a sense of the urgent needs facing survivors and to highlight the phenomenon and possibilities that survivors have for recovery and empowerment.

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## OVERVIEW OF SPECIFIC SEXUAL VIOLATIONS



# Surviving Sexual Harassment: Coping With, Recognizing, and Preventing Unwanted Sexual Behaviors in the Workplace

*NiCole T. Buchanan and Zaje A. Harrell*

When most women reflect on their lives, they can recall at least one event that could be considered sexual harassment. For many, these events harken back to high school, or earlier, and include comments made about her body, requests that she perform a sex act, or being groped by a boy, or a group of boys, as she walked down the hallway. By college, a young woman may recall an instructor commenting on her body or hinting that she might discover her grade will improve if she will go on a date. By the time she finally enters the workforce, she may have a plethora of harassment experiences that have been so commonplace that few would recognize them as abusive. Once employed, she may be confronted by coworkers, bosses, and even supervisees that repeatedly make comments about her body, what sexual activities they would like to see her perform, or direct demands for sexual compliance that include the promise of a promotion if she does or a demotion if she refuses. Such experiences are not uncommon for the vast majority of girls and women, making sexual harassment one of the most common educational and occupational hazards girls and women face.

Many studies have substantiated that during their working lives, approximately half of all working women will experience at least one sexually harassing incident at work.<sup>1,2</sup> Those who have been sexually harassed are likely to experience a variety of negative psychological, health, and work/academic outcomes, such as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress; job and supervisor dissatisfaction; diminished work productivity; and physical health problems.<sup>3,4</sup> Once harassment has ended, these symptoms often do not go away quickly and may persist for many years.<sup>5</sup> Sexual harassment is also directed toward men more frequently than previously assumed, and some of the men experience many of the same negative consequences as women.<sup>6</sup> For example, approximately 15% of men have had at least one experience of sexual harassment at work,<sup>7</sup> and some environments are associated with even greater rates of male harassment (more than 35% of male military personnel experience some form of sexual harassment each year).<sup>8</sup> As further evidence of its occurrence, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, which investigates workplace discrimination complaints, reported that men filed 2,204 (15.9%) of the sexual harassment complaints reported in 2008.<sup>9</sup>

To date, sexual harassment research has largely examined the experiences of White adult working women and has focused little attention on the harassment experiences of other groups, such as working teen girls, harassed men, and ethnic minority women. Thus, questions remain regarding

potential differences and similarities in the nature, frequency, and perceptions of sexual harassment across diverse groups of men and women. This chapter reviews current research findings on sexual harassment, including how it is defined as a behavioral and a legal construct, how men experience sexual harassment, and how sexual harassment is often infused with racial undertones when directed toward women of color (*racialized sexual harassment*).<sup>10,11</sup> Finally, the chapter concludes with an example of sexual harassment, representing the experiences of countless victims of harassment.

## DEFINING SEXUAL HARASSMENT

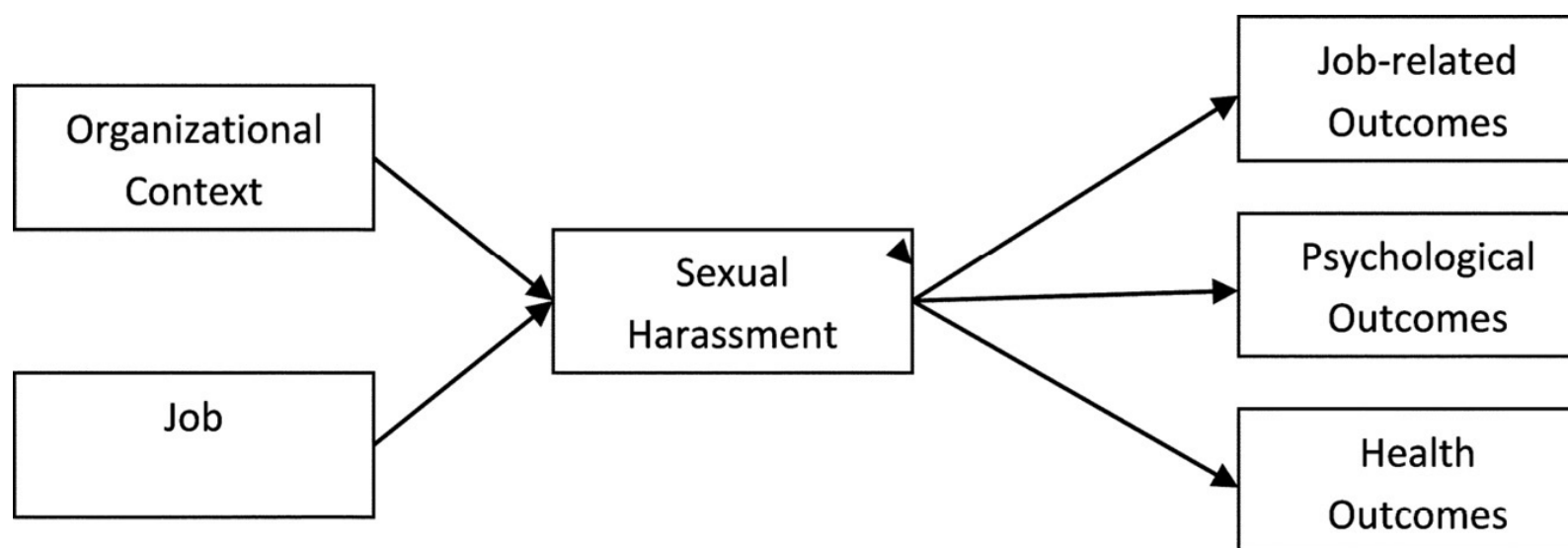
Sexual harassment is both a psychological and a legal construct. Behavioral scientists define sexual harassment psychologically as unwanted gender-based comments and behaviors that the targeted person appraises as offensive, that exceeds his/her available coping resources, and/or that threatens his/her well-being.<sup>12</sup> Three subtypes of sexual harassment behaviors have been identified.<sup>13,14</sup> *Gender harassment* refers to nonsexual, negative, gender-based comments and behaviors, such as comments that women are not as smart as men or that certain jobs are “men’s work” that women should not have. *Unwanted sexual attention* includes nonverbal and verbal comments, gestures, or physical contact of a sexual nature, such as repeated requests for dates or attempts to kiss or fondle someone against his/her will. *Sexual coercion* includes compelling someone to comply with sexual demands via job-related threats or benefits, such as promising a promotion if the worker is sexually cooperative or threatening to fire the employee if uncooperative. Sexual harassment can be perpetrated by employers, coworkers or customers or can involve a subordinate sexually harassing his or her superior (*contrapower sexual harassment*).<sup>15</sup>

The legal framework defining sexual harassment is based upon precedent and evidence of threatening behaviors in the workplace. In *Meritor Savings Bank v. Vinson*<sup>16</sup> the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that sexual harassment constitutes a form of sex discrimination and as such, is a violation of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.<sup>17</sup> More specifically, they ruled that sexual misconduct can be defined as sexual harassment, even if the target did not suffer any tangible economic losses. Thus, sex-based discrimination includes circumstances in which unwanted negative, gender-based experiences become pervasive enough that an employee perceives it as hostile and/or it negatively affects his/her job performance (*hostile work environment*).<sup>16,18,19</sup> The second legal standard used to define sexual harassment is *quid pro quo* (equivalent to sexual coercion) and includes any attempt to coerce sexual interactions by threatening one’s employment status.

## CAUSES AND OUTCOMES OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT

The *Integrated Process Model of Sexual Harassment in Organizations* by Fitzgerald and colleagues outlines how workplace sexual harassment is related to an organization’s climate and job-gender context and then harms an employee’s work, psychological, and physical health (see figure 1). In the model, organizational climate refers to the organization’s tolerance of sexual harassment (e.g., harassment is modeled by superiors, harassers are not reprimanded). The job-gender context refers to a workgroup’s ratio of men to women and whether the job is traditionally considered a man’s or woman’s job. Workplaces that are generally tolerant of harassment, traditionally male-dominated occupations, and workgroups comprising more men than women typically have increased rates of harassment.

**Figure. 1.1. The integrated Process Model.** The integrated process model of the antecedents and outcomes of sexual harassment in organizations (Fitzgerald et al., 1995b; 1997a). Fitzgerald, L.F., & Shullman, S. L. (1993). *Sexual*



The integrated process model of sexual harassment also indicates that increased harassment associated with a number of negative outcomes, such as lowered work satisfaction, increased absenteeism, depression, post-traumatic stress symptoms, and gastrointestinal problems.<sup>4,21,22</sup> Stress appraisal theories<sup>23</sup> posit that how an individual perceives, or appraises, an event influences one's distress in response to an experience. How a target appraises a sexual harassment experience mediates the relationship between sexual harassment and negative outcomes.<sup>24,25</sup> The appraised severity of the harassment is affected by a variety of factors, such as being threatened or fearful as a result of the harassment,<sup>26</sup> the length of time over which one was sexually harassed, whether or not physical contact was made, and what type of harassment occurred. Harassment incidents that continue over a long period of time, occur frequently, and involve unwanted physical touch or sexual coercion are associated with more negative appraisals of the harassment.<sup>27</sup> In addition to the harassment itself, factors related to who the perpetrator and target are also matter. For example, harassment by someone of higher organizational status is associated with more distress.<sup>24</sup> Further, being singled out for harassment versus knowing that harassment is also directed toward others in the workgroup is associated with worsened outcomes.<sup>27</sup> Among Black women, sexual harassment by White men was associated with greater distress than harassment by Black men, and experiences that included racialized sexual harassment further increased their distress.<sup>28</sup>

Sexual harassment harms those targeted,<sup>29,30</sup> and this harm may persist for years after the harassment has ended.<sup>5</sup> Many studies have documented the extensive physical and emotional costs for those who have been harassed. It is believed that costs to emotional well-being are directly related to harassment, whereas the physical health consequences are by-products of the increased psychological distress associated with sexual harassment.<sup>20</sup> More specifically, sexual harassment has been linked to gastrointestinal (heartburn, diarrhea, stomach pains), musculoskeletal (headaches; pain in joints, muscles, back, and neck), and cardiovascular symptoms (chest pain, tachycardia), headache, eyestrain, skin problems,<sup>24,31</sup> and chronic diseases, such as hypertension, neurological disorders, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, and so on.<sup>32</sup>

The negative effect of sexual harassment on psychological well-being is far reaching. As a pervasive, chronic, and often traumatic event, sexual harassment can lead to symptoms of posttraumatic stress.<sup>3,33,34</sup> Initially, sexual harassment was not considered sufficiently traumatic to warrant a diagnosis

of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Many researchers have challenged this assumption, arguing that sexual harassment meets the criteria for a diagnosable trauma as defined by the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition* (DSM-IV).<sup>35</sup> If post-traumatic symptoms are examined, it is clear that the frequency and severity of post-traumatic stress symptoms are strongly associated with the frequency and severity of the sexual harassment experience.<sup>3,4</sup> This relationship is found when studying rates of harassment and discrimination across one's lifetime or only examining recent events and is found across situations (e.g., harassment in the workplace, in school, or by strangers in public).<sup>5,20,33</sup> Post-traumatic stress symptoms related to sexual harassment have also been documented across several studies and populations, such as college students,<sup>3,4,36</sup> Marines,<sup>31</sup> litigants,<sup>32</sup> Turkish women,<sup>37</sup> and Black women.<sup>28,38</sup> These studies show that sexual harassment is traumatic and commonly leads to symptoms of post-traumatic stress; therefore, a PTSD diagnosis is warranted when the criteria have been met.

Sexual harassment may also explain a portion of the difference in rates of depression and eating pathology among women and men. Women are twice as likely to develop depression<sup>39</sup> and more likely to experience sexual harassment compared to men.<sup>40,41</sup> Further, depression is higher among those who have experienced sexual harassment compared to their nonharassed counterparts, leading some to theorize that gender differences in the rates of certain disorders are related to women's higher risk of experiencing discrimination and sexual harassment.<sup>42,43</sup> Eating pathology and body dissatisfaction are also associated with sexual harassment, but this can occur for multiple reasons. Sexual harassment often damages self-esteem, particularly body-based self-esteem, which then puts one at risk for increased eating pathology (sexual harassment syndrome).<sup>44,45</sup> Sexual harassment also increases one's body scrutiny and dissatisfaction, which further increases one's risk for disordered eating.<sup>45,46,47</sup> Finally, when women's bodies are evaluated and objectified through sexual harassment experiences, targets may internalize this image (self-objectification) and spend increased time monitoring their bodies (self-objectification theory).<sup>48</sup> In turn, excessive body monitoring can increase body image distortions, shame, anxiety, restrictive eating, binge eating/bulimia,<sup>49</sup> and depression.<sup>50,51,52</sup>

Self-medicating via the misuse of cigarettes, prescription medications (e.g., sedatives and antidepressants), and alcohol are not uncommon among those who have been sexually harassed.<sup>53</sup> Clearly, many victims of sexual harassment use such substances to reduce their associated feelings of stress, depression, anxiety, hostility, and a perceived lack of control related to being sexually harassed.<sup>53-55</sup> These negative health behaviors used to cope with harassment are detrimental to long-term health.<sup>56,57</sup>

Work-related tasks and perceptions are also harmed by sexual harassment. For example, those who have been sexually harassed report increased absenteeism and lower job satisfaction, work productivity, supervisor satisfaction, and organizational commitment.<sup>21,24,58</sup> These behaviors not only reflect employee distress but also result in soaring organizational costs. The U.S. Merit System Protection Board analyzed the costs of sexual harassment in terms of these negative work behaviors and determined that the U.S. government loses more than \$327 million dollars every year due to factors such as employees' decreased productivity and absenteeism related to sexual harassment. However, this figure is a vast underestimate of the true costs of sexual harassment because it does not include the cost related to the harasser (e.g., decreased productivity while engaging in harassment), changes in work behaviors by coworkers that have witnessed the harassment (e.g., decreased morale and productivity), or any of the costs of investigating, mediating, or litigating harassment charges.<sup>60</sup>

## **COPING WITH SEXUAL HARASSMENT**

Problem-focused or emotion-focused coping strategies refer to a variety of cognitive or behavioral methods used to reduce the stress of a traumatic event.<sup>23</sup> Problem-focused strategies focus on managing or changing the situation (e.g., reporting the incident) while emotion-focused strategies attempt to manage one's own thoughts and feelings about the situation (e.g., avoiding thinking about it). Knapp and colleagues<sup>61</sup> proposed four categories of coping with sexual harassment: *avoidance-denial* (avoiding being physically close to the perpetrator or avoiding thinking about the harassment); *social support* (receiving emotional support and advice from others); *confrontation-negotiation* (directly communicating with the perpetrator that the harassment must end); and *advocacy-seeking* (reporting the perpetrator's behavior to appropriate individuals within the organization). The type of coping method one uses is influenced by characteristics of the target and perpetrator, the harassment, and his/her own cultural norms.<sup>62</sup> For example, more upsetting, frequent, and persistent harassment will result in the use of multiple strategies to try to end the harassment and decreased reliance on ignoring the perpetrator's behavior.<sup>62,63,64</sup> Those harassed by a superior, especially if they are fairly low in organizational status, are more likely to talk with trusted sources and eventually report the harassment than those harassed by coworkers.<sup>63,64</sup> Although rates of reporting sexual harassment remain extremely low overall,<sup>65</sup> women from collectivistic, patriarchal cultures are less likely to confront harassers than to try to avoid the perpetrator.<sup>62</sup> Among one sample of Black women, avoidance and denial were common, but as harassment increased in frequency and severity, they utilized additional coping strategies, including confrontation.<sup>66</sup> These findings reflect that coping with sexual harassment is a dynamic process,<sup>67</sup> and targets adapt their coping strategies in an attempt to end the harassment.

The question remains as to whether or not there are advantages to using certain coping strategies rather than others. Many organizations require that targets formally report sexual harassment to someone in authority within the company and more generally, many assume that confronting the perpetrator or filing a complaint are indicators that the target really did not want or enjoy the harassment. "Passive" responses, such as trying to avoid the harasser, are frequently viewed negatively; however, passive strategies often reflect well-thought, deliberate attempts to balance the harm of being harassed and the potential risks of angering or alienating the perpetrator and supporters (e.g., being ostracized by other coworkers, demoted, or fired).<sup>63,67</sup> In fact, over two-thirds of those who have voiced concerns about harassment faced retaliation as a result.<sup>68</sup> For example, among Black women in the military, those who filed formal complaints against their harassers experienced negative work outcomes; conversely, confronting the harasser (without filing a report) resulted in better psychological well-being.<sup>66</sup> Taken together, these studies indicate that the responses often assumed to be most appropriate may come with a high price to one's psychological and occupational well-being.

## SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND WOMEN OF COLOR

Despite considerable progress over the past several decades, gender and racial inequalities remain across all sectors of the labor market; thus, working women of color are disadvantaged in the employment sector,<sup>69,70</sup> and this reality may influence how they are sexually harassed. Although sparse, theoretical and empirical work examining women of color and sexual harassment is growing, but many questions about their experiences remain unanswered.<sup>71</sup> *Double or multiple jeopardy* theory informs much of this body of research and suggests that because women of color are marginalized across multiple domains due to their race and gender, they are at increased risk of being victimized. Thus, sexual harassment is likely to be more frequent and more severe for women with multiple intersecting marginalized identities.<sup>73,74,75</sup> A small, but growing, body of research supports this assertion.

that women of color experience more frequent and severe sexual harassment.<sup>76-78</sup>

Women of color are also at greater risk for experiencing more than one type of harassment (e.g. racial and sexual harassment). Little research has simultaneously measured multiple forms of harassment, but research with adult Black women<sup>38</sup> and Black, Asian, and multiracial college students<sup>39</sup> indicates that experiencing both sexual and racial harassment is associated with greater detriment to psychological, academic, and occupational outcomes. Moreover, because women of color cannot disaggregate their racial selves from their gendered selves, they are likely to experience harassment that addresses their race and gender concomitantly in the form of *racialized sexual harassment*. Racialized sexual harassment is similar to, yet distinct from, racial and sexual harassment, making it impossible to discern where the racial harassment ends and the sexual harassment begins (e.g., calling someone a “Black bitch”).<sup>10,11</sup> Thus, when sexual harassment is intertwined with multiple forms of workplace mistreatment, victims experience increased distress.<sup>38,40,79</sup>

## SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND MEN

There is a paucity of research examining the sexual harassment experiences of men; yet men do experience higher rates of sexual harassment than the small body of research would suggest. Approximately 15% of men report at least one negative sexual harassment experience in the workplace.<sup>9</sup> Similar to research on women of color, data suggests that on average, Black men experience more sexual harassment compared to White men, particularly those with lower organizational status.<sup>80</sup> When men are harassed they are frequently targeted by other men,<sup>59</sup> and they experience all forms of sexual harassment.<sup>6</sup> However, research has also revealed that men frequently experience “not man enough” harassment—a type of gender harassment that targets men for failing to conform to male gender-role stereotypes—which has been associated with negative outcomes among harassed men.<sup>81</sup> “Not man enough” harassment may include saying he is not “a real man” if he performs traditionally female activities, such as cooking dinner or missing work to care for a sick child.

Findings regarding how men interpret and appraise sexual harassment have varied, and few have included “not man enough” harassment in examining men’s appraisals. When examining the three primary categories of sexual harassment (gender harassment, unwanted sexual attention, sexual coercion), research suggests that sexual harassment from women is often appraised positively by men,<sup>82,83</sup> rarely evaluated as stressful or bothersome,<sup>6,82</sup> and associated with few changes in work-related psychological outcomes, as compared to women.<sup>84</sup> Conversely, when men and women experience harassment that is similar in severity and frequency, men show detriment in work, psychological, and health outcomes that is on par with those of women.<sup>40,41</sup> Additional research must expand to include “not man enough” harassment, more severe forms of harassment, and same-sex harassment before strong conclusions about men’s perceptions of sexual harassment can be made.

## IN THEIR OWN WORDS: AN EXAMPLE OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Below is an example of sexual harassment giving voice to the silenced whose stories are never told. This is a fictionalized example combining the autobiographical accounts of several women and representing a prototypical case rather than a specific woman or company.

*After finishing graduate school I was excited about my new position. My supervisor, Dan, mentored me and led me to believe he was committed to my success. While working on the end-of-the-year fiscal reports, he asked me to join him to grab a bite to eat and discuss what work remained. At the restaurant, I felt somewhat uncomfortable by how close he sat to me and how many times*

his leg brushed against mine, but I dismissed these thoughts, thinking I was being too sensitive. As we left, we agreed to get to work early on Friday to meet our deadline.

Friday morning he started talking about how much he enjoyed spending time with me, how attracted he was to me, and how he wanted to help me rise in the organization. He then grabbed me around my waist and kissed me. He refused to stop as I begged him to let me go. His hand slipped inside my shirt; I yelled in surprise and managed to get out of his grasp. Moments later, his secretary knocked to let him know she had arrived and would bring his coffee shortly. I used the opportunity to get out of his office and avoided him the rest of the day.

I felt sick to my stomach and my heart started racing whenever someone passed my office. I could not sleep the next several nights and I worried about being fired the entire weekend. Monday morning I had to force myself to go into work. He called me into his office and began discussing how well the reports were done as if nothing had happened. As I turned to leave he said he had another urgent project for me and needed me to stay late to get it done on time. After everyone else had left, he started saying he was my special project and tried to kiss me again. I told him it was unacceptable and unprofessional. He apologized and left the office.

A few months later he started making comments about wanting to take me to a three-day conference and “show me a good time.” I started getting sick to my stomach every time I saw him. When I told him I could not go, he said it was required as part of my position and I needed to be there if I wanted to keep my job. I was afraid of what he might do if we went out of town and began having nightmares. I decided to report him to Human Resources, but after I did so, he began criticizing my work and telling coworkers that I lied about him to hide my poor performance. I talked to Human Resources again and a few days later received a negative performance review and was put on probation. A week later I was accused of losing an important client file and fired.

I have a new job at another company, but I have a hard time accepting mentoring or support, especially from my boss. I am still always “on guard” for him making advances and I cannot seem to relax. My work has suffered and I have lost faith that my efforts will be recognized and rewarded. That is the worst part. Not only did Dan sabotage my job with that firm, but he has robbed me of my ability to trust people at work. In addition to that, I cannot muster the desire to work as hard as I used to because I do not believe doing so will make any difference in how I am treated.

## CONCLUSION

For the past three decades sexual harassment research has explored proper ways of defining sexual harassment, understanding why it occurs, and mitigating the associated risk factors and outcomes. Depression; post-traumatic stress; health problems; lower job satisfaction, work productivity, and supervisor satisfaction; increased absenteeism; and turnover have all been associated with sexual harassment, making it costly to those who are targeted and the organizations within which they work. Further, an increasingly diverse workforce requires greater attention to the needs and experiences of marginalized workers (e.g., women of color and gay and lesbian workers) who are likely to experience multiple types of harassment as well as fused forms of harassment that target them on the basis of multiple salient identities (e.g., racialized sexual harassment based on gender and race). Focusing on these factors will not only advance research on sexual harassment but will also better enable individuals to protect themselves and organizations to prevent harassment from occurring.

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# Human Trafficking: Not an Isolated Issue

*Michelle Contreras and Melissa Farley*

Human trafficking is not an isolated issue. Rather it is a crime that intersects with some of the most challenging psychological issues that mental health professionals deal with. There is a complex relationship between human trafficking and sexual violence, domestic violence, political captivity, torture, and cults.<sup>1-3</sup> Human trafficking for the purpose of prostitution is sexual violence, a topic that we will discuss in this chapter. In order to understand the psychosocial needs of survivors, we will also discuss the overlaps between human trafficking, sexual violence, and prostitution. We will also briefly discuss the macro issues contributing to the proliferation of this crime, which explain some of the reasons why human trafficking is the global phenomenon that it is today.

Human traffickers search for victims who are vulnerable and desperate. The goal of the trafficker is to lure the person by presenting her with a false promise of a job that appears to have the potential for solving the victim's predicament. In some cases, even when the potential victim knows that the job will be degrading or even that she will be expected to prostitute, she doesn't picture just how bad it really will be. Furthermore, when a woman is trafficked for domestic servitude or sweatshop labor, she is usually sexually exploited in prostitution-like activities as well. The converse is also true: In Thai prostitution, for example, women are expected to wash laundry and prepare meals for sex buyers.

## **VULNERABILITIES TO HUMAN TRAFFICKING AND PROSTITUTION**

*Risk factors.* Prostitution and trafficking are rooted in social inequality: the inequality between men and women, between the rich and the poor, and between ethnic majorities and minorities.<sup>4</sup> The macro forces and individual risk factors contributing to human trafficking are multiple and relate to each other in complex ways. At their roots, risk factors include varying combinations of being young, poor, female, and being a member of a marginalized ethnic minority. Risk factors vary depending on the individual's country, region, city, community, and family and community supports. For example, in Latin America the growing problem of trafficking is exacerbated by sexist environments that discriminate against women and girls including by their physical and sexual abuse;<sup>5</sup> by limited economic opportunities for women;<sup>6</sup> by multinational corporations' demand for inexpensive labor; by sophisticated recruitment methods used by traffickers; by government corruption and disinterest in the protection of vulnerable people; immigration policies that force people into anonymity, unemployment; illiteracy; homelessness; drug and alcohol abuse; and gang membership.<sup>7</sup> A woman from Nicaragua described how her husband, a Salvadoran man, took her to live close to the Guatemalan border with Mexico shortly after they married. Every weekend he transported her to a Mexican brothel to be sold in prostitution. She escaped her husband/pimp/trafficker when he brought

her to the United States to gain greater profits from the commercial sexual exploitation. She broke into tears when she recalled failed attempts to obtain help in Guatemala, stating, “One day I was fed up and decided to go to the police. I told them what was happening, and they laughed and told me I should shut my mouth and instead work on being an obedient wife. I wanted to kill myself, but my son kept me going.” Three common characteristics of Central American cases of human trafficking are lack of control and exploitation of victims including their delivery to sex trafficking markets across borders, lawless environments, and the rampant sex-based discrimination at all levels of society.

*Limited economic opportunities.* Women are increasingly channeled into prostitution as the opportunities for work in other sectors of the economy shrink. A prostituting Yemeni woman angrily accused her government of making her “worthless and of no value, oppressing us with these unstable conditions, moreover forcing us to indulge in actions that will haunt us for generations to come.”<sup>8</sup> The prostitution of desperately poor women in Yemen may seem worlds apart from the prostitution of women and girls in the United States. But as globalized economies feminize poverty and as public health services and emergency networks collapse because of malignant governmental neglect, more U.S. women turn to prostitution to survive. This process of women’s economic survival under the oppressive harm of poverty and conditions of war can not be described as a free choice to prostitute, as some would insist. The economic and social forces that channel young, poor, and ethnically marginalized women into prostitution are evident in post-Katrina New Orleans. One report pointed out that economic devastation of the hurricane increased prostitution and domestic trafficking into the region.<sup>9</sup>

Like domestically trafficked women, internationally trafficked women tend to be poor and unemployed and to come from countries that are in economic and social transition.<sup>10</sup> Trade liberalization policies have failed to diminish power imbalances between men and women, with impoverished women having dramatically less access to land, credit, and education than men, which places them at higher risk of vulnerability to pimps and traffickers.<sup>11</sup>

*Ethnic and racial discrimination.* Women’s vulnerability to trafficking increases when they belong to an ethnically and/or racially marginalized group. A study that looked at the prevalence of lifetime violence and post-traumatic stress disorder of women prostituting in Vancouver, Canada, included 52% percent Aboriginal women, an overrepresentation in prostitution of Aboriginal women compared with less than 8% representation in the general population.<sup>12</sup> The authors point out that the same vulnerabilities of race, class, and gender that have been recognized as multiplicative risk factors for a wide range of health problems are also multiplicative risk factors for prostitution and conclude:

In Canada, the triple force of race, class and sex discrimination disparately impacts First Nations [term of respect used by the authors to refer to people whose ancestors were the first nations of people in North America] women. Prostitution of Aboriginal women occurs globally in epidemic numbers with indigenous women at the bottom of a racialized sexual hierarchy in prostitution itself. (p. 17)<sup>12</sup>

The social forces that are assumed to cause human trafficking, such as poverty, human rights violations, gender disparity, and discrimination, are the same as those that channel women, men, and children into prostitution.<sup>10,6</sup> Magda, a Mayan Indian woman, described her trafficking experience during the thirty-six-year armed conflict in Guatemala. Magda narrated how the soldiers kidnapped her from her village after killing her family. She described how they forced her to travel with them over the course of several weeks and used her to have sex with soldiers stationed in remote mountain areas. Reflecting on these traumatic childhood experiences, Magda said, “People saw me with them and they didn’t do anything to help me. Maybe it’s because I was an Indian girl. Maybe they would have helped if they saw a Ladina [term used to refer to westernized, biracial, or white Guatemalan]

girl with a bunch of soldiers.” This case illustrates the intersecting contextual factors of war, ethnic, racial, and gender-based discrimination that contribute to human trafficking.

The invisible coercions of prostitution are evident when we take a closer look at individual cases: the woman in India who worked in an office where she concluded that she might as well prostitute and be paid more for the sexual harassment and abuse that was expected of her anyway in order to keep her job; the teenager in California who said that in her neighborhood, “Boys grew up to be pimps and drug dealers and girls grew up to be ’hos.” She was the third generation of prostituted women in her family. The woman in Zambia who said that five blow jobs paid for a bag of cornmeal and that this is how she could feed her children. The young woman sold by her parents at age sixteen into a Nevada legal brothel. Ten years later, she took six psychiatric drugs that tranquilized her so she could make it through the day selling sex. The narratives have a common thread: the women had extremely limited options for economic survival and all lived in cultures that were accepting of prostitution.

*Sexual violence against women.* Violence against women, which increases women’s vulnerability to trafficking, is at pandemic levels. Conservative international statistics indicate that at least one in three women has been beaten, coerced into sex, or otherwise abused in her lifetime.<sup>13</sup> A World Health Organization study found that as many as 47% of women report that their first sexual experience was rape. In some communities laws prioritize family values over the rights of women to be free of sexual assault.<sup>14</sup> Every year, as many as five thousand women around the world are victims of honor killings—murders that are rationalized because a woman engaged in sex without community approval. Many societies have laws with loopholes that allow perpetrators to act with impunity. For example, in a number of countries, a rapist can go free under the penal code if he proposes to marry the victim, with women often blamed for having been raped by men.<sup>15</sup>

## **PROSTITUTION AND HUMAN TRAFFICKING UNDER THE LENS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN**

Women in prostitution suffer extremely high rates of violence from pimps and from men who buy them for sexual use. Farley and Barkan<sup>16</sup> found that among 130 people in prostitution interviewed in San Francisco 82% had been physically assaulted, 83% had been threatened with a weapon, and 68% had been raped while prostituting.

A Korean woman who was overwhelmed with credit card debt was led to believe by traffickers that if she traveled to the United States, she could work in the entertainment industry, quickly earn a lot of money, and then return home. A college student from a poor family who wanted to impress her new friends, You-Mi quickly generated \$40,000 in debt. Naively believing traffickers who told her she would pour drinks as a hostess (but would not have to sell sex) for \$10,000 a month in Los Angeles Korea Town, she was supplied a fake passport, and once in the United States and under the control of traffickers, she was moved between Los Angeles and San Francisco in massage parlors controlled by Korean organized criminals. In 2006 she prostituted fifteen hours a day at massage brothels with blacked-out windows and double metal security doors. You-Mi was allowed outside only if escorted by cabbies that were paid by the traffickers. Unable to speak more than a few basic sentences of English, she was unaware of where she was and dependent on her captors for food and shelter. You-Mi was isolated, terrorized, and prostituted in a massage brothel under prisonlike conditions of debt bondage. After a long struggle, she was finally recognized as a victim of trafficking.<sup>17</sup>

Regardless of the nature of the freely made, deceived, tricked, or coerced decision a woman makes to move to another country for prostitution, after she has actually moved she will be “recruited

transported and controlled by organized crime networks,” Sullivan<sup>18</sup> wrote about Australian prostitution. The same is true in the United States. There is an evolving public awareness about the human rights violations of sex trafficking in the United States. This awareness and public outrage about trafficking, however, exists primarily for victims who have been transported across international borders.

Domestic trafficking—the sale of women in prostitution from poorer to more prosperous sex markets within a single country—can be as devastating for the women as international trafficking. This is true in countries where there is assumed to be significant wealth such as New Zealand and the United States as well as countries where there is more visible poverty such as India and Zambia.

The apparently civilized transaction between elite prostitutes and their clients in luxury hotels is underpinned by the same logic that underpins the forcible sale of girls in a Bangladeshi brothel. This logic is premised on a value system that grades girls and women—and sometimes men and boys—according to their sexual value. (p. 247)<sup>4</sup>

Wherever there is a market, and wherever they can wrest control from other gangs or from local pimps, organized criminals run prostitution rings both inside countries and across international borders. Traffickers are businessmen who pay close attention to men’s demand for prostitution. They obtain the women and girls who supply that demand wherever women are vulnerable because of economic factors and cultural practices that devalue women.

Although physical violence may or may not occur, in all cases of trafficking for prostitution, psychosocial coercion happens in contexts of sex and race inequality and under conditions of poverty or financial stress, and often a history of childhood abuse or neglect. Women may legally and seemingly voluntarily migrate from a poorer to a wealthier part of the world, for example with a work permit and the promise of a good job from a friend who turns out to be a trafficker. Once she has migrated, away from home and community support, she is dependent on traffickers and their networks. At that point the pimp/trafficker’s psychological and physical coercion expands while her options for escape rapidly shrink.

Prostitution is the destination point for sex trafficking. Legal prostitution is a major contributing factor to the human rights violations of sex trafficking. Where prostitution is legal, states in effect send a message to the world: we accept the selling of women for sex; we consider pimps and traffickers to be successful entrepreneurs rather than organized criminals; we consider men who buy women for sex to be consumers of sexual services rather than predators. That same message is sent when governments look away from prostitution in their jurisdictions, refusing to enforce existing laws against buying and prostituting women.

There is widespread misunderstanding about the legal and conceptual differences between prostitution and trafficking.<sup>19</sup> Sex trafficking is not about transportation; rather, it involves coercive control. Any prostitution that involves third-party control or exploitation or pimping meets the definition of human trafficking. What is relevant is how she is abused in prostitution, the control over her sale and sexual use of a human being. Women who are used as maids or field workers are used in prostitution-like activities by traffickers. Women and girls are especially vulnerable to sexual abuse when used in domestic servitude.<sup>20</sup> An International Labor Organization (ILO) assessment in El Salvador found that two-thirds of girls in domestic service had been physically or psychologically abused, and many had also been sexually abused. The girls lived in constant fear of sexual advances from their employers, by the adult men in the extended family, the stronger children, or by other male workers of the household. When the girls became pregnant, they were often abandoned to the streets. Not surprisingly, another ILO study on the sexual exploitation of Tanzanian girls found that many prostituted children were evicted by employers who had sexually abused them while they were

## PSYCHOLOGICAL CONSEQUENCES OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING AND PROSTITUTION

*Exposure to violent and nonviolent forms of abuse.* Traffickers frequently use a combination of nonviolent and violent forms of coercion like those used by perpetrators of domestic violence, torture, and cults.<sup>2</sup> Like abusive partners, traffickers alternate acts of kindness with unexpected abuse and degradation. Like cult leaders, traffickers isolate people and force victims to witness abuse perpetrated on others. Schwartz, Williams, and Farley<sup>23</sup> illustrate through case examples how traffickers and pimps use the same methods of mind control as those used by torturers to keep the victims under control including social isolation, sensory deprivation, deliberately induced exhaustion, and physical debilitation, threats to self and family, occasional reprieves and indulgences, pimps and traffickers posturing as omnipotent, degradation, enforcing capricious rules, the deliberate creation of dissociated parts of the self who willingly prostitute, drugging and forced addiction, and forced pregnancy. Violent forms of abuse include physical and sexual abuse, often equivalent to the experiences of survivors of torture in the context of war. The Nicaraguan woman referred to earlier described how her trafficker deliberately broke one of her leg bones in order to prevent her escape. Another trafficked woman described how she was forced to service as many as thirty-five sex buyers a day, which kept her in a permanent state of exhaustion. “I couldn’t even fully open my eyes sometimes,” she stated. “I couldn’t think, and sometimes I forgot where I was.”

*Related mental health problems.* A nine-country study of prostitution found that 68% of women, men, and transgendered people in prostitution [had post-traumatic stress disorder](#) (PTSD), a prevalence that is comparable to that among battered or raped women seeking help and survivors of state-sponsored torture.<sup>1</sup> Across widely varying cultures on five continents the traumatic consequences of prostitution were similar whether prostitution was legal, tolerated, or illegal. Hossain and colleagues interviewed 204 trafficked girls and women in seven European countries and found that 77% met criteria for PTSD with high comorbidity rates for depression and anxiety.

As a result of multiple experiences of betrayal by family, community, and governmental agencies, trafficking survivors and prostituted women have difficulties in establishing trusting relationships which in turn presents many challenges for health care professionals. Loss of control can leave survivors of trauma feeling powerless and helpless.<sup>25</sup> Human trafficking victims lose control of many parts of their lives and may experience long-term relational consequences as a result. Treating this patient population poses unique challenges, as the therapy relationship will inevitably create a power differential.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, in cases of human trafficking and prostitution, therapists will also need to consider frameworks that address the relational abuses and lifetime social injustices that these populations have faced.

## HUMAN TRAFFICKING ISSUES AND DEBATES

*Victims of human trafficking and men who buy sex.*

Trafficking victims have shared testimony regarding the ways in which traffickers used them as products to be bought, sold, and discarded. Discussing the torture and abuse used by traffickers, Sarson and MacDonald<sup>28</sup> described one young girl’s testimony in which she told how her trafficker “rented her out” to local pedophiles. They also explain how traffickers, like pimps, exploit women and

children to meet men's sexual needs.

Farley, Macleod, Anderson, and Golding's<sup>27</sup> interviews with sex buyers illustrate how men remove women's humanity in prostitution. Buying a woman in prostitution gives men the power to turn women into a living version of his masturbation fantasy. He removes those qualities that define her as an individual, and for him she becomes sexualized body parts. She then acts the part of the thing he wants her to be. For example, a sex buyer said prostitution was like "renting an organ for ten minutes." Another man said, "I use them like I might use any other amenity, a restaurant, or a public convenience."

As shocking as these observations may sound to those who have an idealized notion of prostitution, the buyers' descriptions closely match women's descriptions of prostitution. Prostituted women explain how it feels to be treated like a rented organ. "It is internally damaging. You become in your own mind what these people do and say with you. You wonder how could you let yourself do this and why do these people want to do this to you."<sup>29</sup> Women who prostitute have described it as "paid rape" and "voluntary slavery," and women exploited by traffickers use similar words. Prostitution is sexual harassment, sexual exploitation, and sometimes torture. A sex buyer's payment does not erase what we know about acts of sexual violence and rape.

A common myth is that sex buyers are harmless when it comes to prostitution. However, in the case of trafficking for the purpose of prostitution, the same sex buyers who purchase sex from alleged "voluntary" prostitutes are also purchasing sex from trafficked women. One sex buyer said, "You get what you pay for without the 'no.'" Non-prostituting women have the right to say "no" and are legally protected from sexual harassment and sexual exploitation. But tolerating sexual abuse is the job description for prostitution and sex trafficking. Research shows that a majority of sex buyers refuse condoms, pay high prices to desperately poor women to not use condoms, or rape women without condoms.<sup>30-31</sup> In research [comparing frequent and infrequent sex buyers](#), the men who most frequently used women in prostitution were also those most likely to have committed sexually aggressive acts against non-prostituting women.<sup>32</sup> In interviews with more than a hundred U.K. sex buyers, although a majority believed that most women have been lured, tricked, or trafficked into prostitution, [they bought them anyway](#).<sup>27</sup>

Several studies have explored beliefs that sex buyers have about women's motivation to prostitute. One sex buyer stated, "All prostitutes are exploited. However, they also have good incomes." Some people have made the decision that it is reasonable to expect certain women to have sex with up to ten sex buyers a day in order to survive.<sup>33</sup> Women who have been trafficked for prostitution tell us that they perform sex acts with as many as twenty to thirty sex buyers a day. Those women most often are poor and most often are racially marginalized. A neocolonial economic perspective is enshrined in a Canadian prostitution tourist's comment about women in Thai prostitution, who stated, "These girls gotta eat, don't they? I'm putting bread on their plate. I'm making a contribution. They'd starve to death unless they whored." The sex buyer's sympathetic attitude avoids the question: Do all women have the right to live without the sexual harassment or sexual exploitation of prostitution—or is that right reserved only for those who have sex, race, or class privilege?

*Human trafficking and the legalization of prostitution.* All women should have the right to survive without prostituting and to live in environments that condemn the practices that make human trafficking possible. However, even when extensive research data shows that the women in prostitution are victims of pimps and traffickers, in cities where prostitution is illegal, the women themselves are the ones who are arrested, abused, and persecuted by local authorities. On the other end of the spectrum, in cities where prostitution is legal or decriminalized, prostituted women are left



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