Sexual harassment in academia: From individual harm to collective action

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From individual harm to collective action

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Abstract

Background: Sexual harassment remains a widespread problem in academia, both internationally and in Sweden, despite preventive efforts such as policy development, reporting systems, and training initiatives. This highlights the need for more effective, evidence-based strategies. However, research on workplace sexual harassment is complicated by definitional ambiguity and contextual variation, which limits the generalisability of findings and underscores the need for more context-specific studies.

Aim: The overarching aim of this thesis is to examine experiences of sexual harassment among university employees at a large Swedish university. It examines mental well-being outcomes, co-occurrence of other types of mistreatments as well as contextual-level risk and protective factors. Gender-stratified analyses were conducted to identify differences between men and women. The findings aim to inform preventive measures at the organisational level.

Methods: Papers I–III are based on cross-sectional survey data collected from employees at Lund University. Logistic and Poisson regression models were used to examine associations between sexual harassment and mental well-being, other types of harassment as well as contextual factors. Paper IV draws on qualitative data from focus groups and employs content analysis to explore perceptions of workplace culture and prevailing norms related to sexual harassment.

Results: Paper I shows that workplace sexual harassment is associated with poor mental health and low vitality in women, and with low vitality in men. Women who reported exposure to both non-soliciting and soliciting behaviours experienced the most adverse outcomes, whereas for men, only exposure to non-soliciting behaviours were significantly associated with negative outcomes. Paper II reveals a strong co-occurrence between sexual harassment and other forms of mistreatment, suggesting that sexual harassment is part of a broader pattern of harmful behaviours that disproportionately affect women. Paper III identifies perceived relational injustice and authoritarian leadership as contextual-level risk factors for sexual harassment. Paper IV demonstrates that perceptions of sexual harassment are shaped by organisational silence and inaction, ambiguous and inconsistent institutional response, and a lack of a shared understanding of what constitutes sexual harassment.

Conclusion: Workplace sexual harassment harms university employees but often involves, or co-occurs with, ambiguous behaviours that are difficult to define and interpret. These behaviours are embedded within organisational structures, hierarchies, and prevailing norms, and are more frequently reported by employees who perceive management as authoritarian and unjust. Addressing the issue requires organisational accountability, deliberate structural change, and collective action.

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Abstract

Background: Sexual harassment remains a widespread problem in academia, both internationally and in Sweden, despite preventive efforts such as policy development, reporting systems, and training initiatives. This highlights the need for more effective, evidence-based strategies. However, research on workplace sexual harassment is complicated by definitional ambiguity and contextual variation, which limits the generalisability of findings and underscores the need for more context-specific studies.

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Abbreviations

AT	Authoritarian treatment
CI	Confidence interval
FGD	Focus group discussion
GBV	Gender based violence
GHQ	General health questionnaire
LUSHI	Lund University Sexual Harassment Index
LV	Low vitality
OR	Odds ratios
PMH	Poor mental health
RJ	Relational justice
PR	Prevalence ratios
SH	Sexual harassment
SI	Synergi index

Populärvetenskaplig sammanfattning

Sexuella trakasserier är ett pågående problem på arbetsplatser världen över, även inom universitet och högskolor. Det sker trots att många lärosäten har infört utbildningar, policys och system för att förebygga och hantera sådana beteenden. Sexuella trakasserier drabbar framför allt kvinnor, men också män, och får negativa konsekvenser, både för individers hälsa och för organisationer i stort. Den här avhandlingen handlar om varför problemen kvarstår, och vad som krävs för att åstadkomma förändring. Den bygger på analyser av data från en enkätundersökning som riktades till samtliga anställda, inklusive doktorander, vid Lunds universitet 2019 samt gruppdiskussioner med medarbetare. Syftet med studien har varit att förstå hur sexuella trakasserier påverkar medarbetares hälsa och välmående, att identifiera vilka faktorer i organisationen som bidrar till att trakasserier uppstår eller förhindras, samt att undersöka hur anställda uppfattar både trakasserierna och den arbetsmiljö där de förekommer. Studien har även analyserat om och hur kvinnors och mäns erfarenheter skiljer sig åt.

Resultaten visar på att sexuella trakasserier påverkar anställdas välmående negativt, särskilt bland kvinnor, men även bland män. Detta resultat är i linje med annan forskning som visar att erfarenheter av sexuella trakasserier på arbetsplatser kan påverka hälsan negativt. Kvinnor som utsatts för både direkta trakasserier (till exempel ovälkomna inviter) och mer "omgivande" ovälkomna beteenden (som sexistiska skämt eller en miljö där sådant tillåts) rapporterade sämre välmående. För män var det framför allt den omgivande miljön som påverkade negativt. Detta tyder på att kvinnor och män möjligen reagerar olika beroende på vilken typ av trakasserier de upplever, och att män inte påverkas i samma utsträckning av direkt riktade sexuella trakasserier, något som även bekräftas av tidigare forskning.

Avhandlingen visar också att sexuella trakasserier ofta förekommer tillsammans med andra former av trakasserier, till exempel på grund av kön eller ålder, och/eller kränkande särbehandling. Det rör sig sällan om enskilda händelser, utan trakasserierna är ofta en del av ett större och mer komplext problem som drabbar kvinnor i högre grad än män. Studien visar också att anställda som upplever chefer som orättvisa eller auktoritära oftare rapporterar erfarenheter av sexuella trakasserier. Många medarbetare upplever också en tystnadskultur, otydliga gränser och brist på samsyn kring vad som utgör sexuella trakasserier, vilket gör det svårt att sätta ord på vad som händer och rapportera oönskade erfarenheter. När ovälkomna beteenden inte ifrågasätts eller uppmärksammas riskerar de att bli en del av kulturen, något man förväntas att acceptera.

Slutsatsen är tydlig: sexuella trakasserier kan inte lösas enbart genom reaktiva åtgärder baserade på enskilda anmälningar. Många av de beteenden som upplevs som oönskade är tvetydiga, svåra att definiera, och därför också svåra att rapportera. För att skapa en trygg arbetsmiljö måste fokus ligga på organisationen och

arbetsklimatet som helhet, inte uteslutande på hanterande av enskilda händelser. Arbetsgivaren behöver ta ett tydligare ansvar, utmana skadliga normer, stärka det proaktiva förebyggande arbetet, och ett uttalat avståndstagande från alla former av trakasserier måste förverkligas i praktiken. Detta inkluderar även tvetydiga beteenden som inte nödvändigtvis skulle leda till en formell åtgärd, men som ändå påverkar arbetsmiljön negativt. Det handlar om ett gemensamt ansvar att aktivt skapa en kultur och ett arbetsklimat där alla känner sig trygga, ett arbete som måste bedrivas aktivt från ledningen i organisationen men där alla anställda kan bidra.

List of scientific papers

I. **Pilgaard F,** Östergren P-O, Priebe G, Agardh A. Workplace sexual harassment is associated with poor mental well-being among employees at a large Swedish university. *Global Health Action*. 2025; 18(1),2465050. https://doi.org/10.1080/16549716.2025.2465050

II. **Pilgaard F,** Agardh A, Östergren P-O, Priebe G. Association between Experiences of Different Types of Harassment or Derogatory Treatment and Sexual Harassment among Employees at a Large Swedish University. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*. 2023; 20(1):11. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph20010011

III. **Pilgaard F**, Agardh A, Östergren P-O, Palmieri J, Asamoah BO. Workplace authoritarianism and relational injustice as risk factors for sexual harassment at a large Swedish university, results from a cross-sectional study. *Submitted*

IV. Palmieri J, **Pilgaard F**, Agardh A. Navigating the unspoken: a qualitative study of employees' perceptions of culture and norms surrounding sexual harassment at a Swedish university. *Submitted*

Preface

For as long as I can remember, I have been deeply disturbed by inequalities, which have always stirred a strong sense of injustice in me. With a background in public health, my professional life has also come to centre around this topic in various ways, as health inequalities are a core concern within the field. The specific issue of workplace sexual harassment, however, was not one I had reflected much on before I was given the opportunity to become involved in this project. Grateful for the chance to begin a PhD journey on what seemed like an interesting topic, I had little idea of just how deeply the work would come to affect me.

Workplace sexual harassment is a complex issue, and often difficult to navigate. It evokes strong emotions, such as shame and a sense of being misunderstood, among those subjected to it, as well as among perpetrators and bystanders. It is also difficult to define and capture: what are we really talking about when we talk about sexual harassment? Many incidents may even seem trivial when viewed in isolation. However, over time, I have come to realise the importance of this topic. Although isolated incidents may seem harmless, they form part of a broader and more serious problem, one that affects women (mainly) in multiple ways and workplace environments as a whole.

The phenomenon of workplace sexual harassment is often framed as an individual problem, placing the responsibility to act (speak up) or adapt on the victim. This individualisation reduces the perceived seriousness of the problem and allows it to persist within organisations. It is time for cultural and organisational change, shifting perspectives from the individual responsibility to the collective. My hope is that this thesis contributes to such a shift.

Introduction

In late 2017, the #MeToo movement brought widespread attention to sexual harassment and abuse in workplaces across different sectors all over the world. In Sweden, the movement led to a wave of collective initiatives through which women from different professional fields voiced their experiences. Within academia, the #Akademiuppropet gathered over 2,400 signatures and testimonies, revealing that sexual harassment was far from an isolated problem, it was systemic, pervasive, and deeply rooted in academic structures and cultures (1, 2). Something not unknown, but rarely spoken of, was suddenly made visible. In response to this movement, Lund University launched the Tellus project in 2018, a university-wide initiative aimed at strengthening the prevention of and response to sexual harassment among both students and staff (3). This thesis builds upon data collected within the Tellus project and aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of workplace sexual harassment within a Swedish academic context.

Sweden is often described as one of the global leaders in gender equality, consistently ranking high in international equality indices (4, 5). Women's access to the labour market, political representation, and education is comparatively high. Yet structural gender inequalities persist: women still take the majority of parental leave (about 70%, with no major change since 2015), generally spend more time than men on activities such as cooking, cleaning, doing laundry, and caring for their own children, report higher levels of stress than men (primarily due to having an excessive workload or too many responsibilities), earn less than men and are generally underrepresented in managerial positions (6). Furthermore, the labour market is heavily gender-segregated, meaning women and men tend to work in different sectors and occupations, with women concentrated in lower-paid and lower-status positions (7, 8).

Workplace sexual harassment is both a consequence of and a contributor to these inequalities. The phenomenon persists in contexts shaped by gendered power structures and norms, with men at the top. It affects the health and well-being of those subjected to it, mainly women, and furthermore, undermines equal participation in working life by pushing women out of workplaces, contributing to a gender segregated labour market (9) and slowing women's career progression (10). As such, workplace sexual harassment is a matter of justice and human rights; women and men should have equal right to work in a safe and respectful environment and to realize their full potential in their professional lives.

Background

Workplace sexual harassment as a concept was first introduced in the United States in the 1970s, and in 1979 legal scholar Catharine MacKinnon framed it as a form of discrimination on the basis of sex (11, 12). Since then, it has been the subject of extensive research, however, marked by conceptual ambiguity due to the absence of a universally accepted definition (13-17). Research has been conducted mainly in the USA (13), but increasingly also in Europe (18), focusing on definitions (19), measuring levels of the phenomenon in organisations (20) and consequences related to both individuals and organisations (21, 22). The body of evidence speaks clearly about a persistent problem in organisations, with severe consequences for individuals and organisations, that does not seem to decline (14).

Development of effectful recommendations and prevention strategies to reduce its occurrence and mitigate its effects, requires evidence-based research. However, research on workplace sexual harassment has been criticised for methodological shortcomings impairing the validity of the findings (23). Main issues concern a variation in conceptual and operational definitions (20) and use of convenience sampling procedures not allowing for generalisation (24). The variation in how workplace sexual harassment is conceptualised among researchers, in combination with a lack of a universally accepted definition and non-representative study-designs makes it difficult to generalise study results across countries, and even within countries across different workplace sectors as well as between different target populations (25).

The focus of this thesis is workplace sexual harassment, understood as *unwanted sexual behaviours with a perceived sexual connotation*, within a Swedish academic context. It encompasses both women and men's experience and examines to what extent age, background (Swedish/foreign), type of employment or professional position moderate relevant associations. It is based primarily on cross-sectional data, but also on data from ten focus group discussions. As cross-sectional data is limited in its ability to establish causal inference, the findings are interpretated in the light of previous research. Nonetheless, the quantitative dataset includes responses from 33% of all employees at Sweden's largest university (in terms of number of employees), and is deemed representative of the target population. As such, this constitutes a rigorous study with findings that merit attention.

The thesis begins by examining workplace sexual harassment consequences, specifically, its relationship to individual mental well-being, including vitality, contributing with insights regarding possible gender differences in Study I. Study II expands the focus to investigate how sexual harassment co-occurs with other forms of harassment and derogatory behaviours in the workplace, as one of few existing studies examining workplace sexual harassment in relation to other types of mistreatments. Finally, Studies III and IV shift the attention to the organisational context in which such behaviours occur, broadening our understanding of factors that, if addressed, may help reduce this persistent problem in organisations.

The following sections provide a relevant background to the issue of workplace sexual harassment and how the studies included in this thesis aim to contribute to addressing key gaps in the existing literature.

Workplace sexual harassment research

Defining and measuring workplace sexual harassment

Conceptualisation and perceptions of what constitute workplace sexual harassment

Sexual harassment can be viewed from three different perspectives: the legal, the psychosocial, and the lay perspective (14, 26), each offering a variation of definitions and framing of the phenomenon. Legal definitions vary across countries and are typically narrower in scope than psychosocial ones (14). For example, in Sweden, the legal definition of sexual harassment refers to *conduct of a sexual nature that violates an individual's dignity* (27). However, for behaviour to meet the legal definition, the perpetrator must have known, or should have known, that the conduct was unwelcome (27). As a result, many behaviours that would be classified as sexual harassment from a psychosocial or lay perspective may not qualify as such from a Swedish legal perspective. The psychosocial perspective offers broader definitions of sexual harassment, emphasising individuals' subjective experiences of specific behaviours (26). However, there is no scholarly consensus on which behaviours should be classified as sexual harassment, and therefore definitions vary across studies (15). In general terms, sexual harassment behaviours are often categorised into three types: verbal (e.g., comments, jokes), non-verbal (e.g., staring, gestures), and physical (e.g., touching, hugging) (28).

Since the 1990s, the leading conceptualisation among researchers of what constitutes workplace sexual harassment has been the tripartite model introduced in USA by Fitzgerald and colleagues (19). This model identifies three interrelated but distinct dimensions: *sexual coercion*, *unwanted sexual attention* and *gender*

harassment. *Sexual coercion* describes the so called “quid pro quo” scenarios, where sexual cooperation is explicitly or implicitly linked to job-related benefits or avoidance of negative consequences, and *unwanted sexual attention* encompasses unwanted verbal or physical sexual advances, including sexual assault. *Gender harassment* refers to a broad range of verbal and non-verbal behaviours. These behaviours can be both sexual and non-sexual in nature, generally not aimed at sexual encounters but instead express insulting, hostile, and degrading attitudes, often directed towards women and rooted in gender-based hostility (19). The tripartite model reflects the broader interpretation and legal practice of workplace sexual harassment in USA, where gender harassment has the potential to meet the legal criteria for sexual harassment in the form of illegal ‘‘hostile work environment” harassment (19, 29). According to this conceptualisation, sexual harassment functions as an umbrella term, with gender harassment, so-called "put-downs", being the most prevalent form (29) while unwanted sexual attention and sexual coercion, referred to as "come-ons", are reported less frequently (17, 30).

Sexual harassment is, as such, generally understood as behaviours that are not aimed at sexual encounters motivated by sexual desire (although it is possible that different types of SH are fuelled by different motivators (29)), but rather represent exercises of power and domination, typically directed at women, with the effect of keeping them "down and out" in male dominated jobs, roles and spaces (10, 14, 29). More recently, the term sex-based harassment (SBH) has emerged in the North American research literature as an alternative to sexual harassment, de-emphasizing the sexual connotation of the term (31, 32). This shift reflects a concern that the label sexual harassment may misleadingly imply that the behaviour is driven by sexual desire, rather than by gendered power or control, contributing to conceptual unclarity. SBH is defined as behaviour that derogates, demeans, or humiliates an individual based on that individual’s sex and can include both sexual and non-sexual forms of harassing behaviours (29, 31).

In the European research context, gender harassment and sexual harassment are generally treated as separate concepts (28, 33). Researchers often focus exclusively on unwanted conduct of a sexual nature (33), thereby excluding non-sexual forms of harassment based on gender. Although generally treated separately from gender harassment in research, sexual harassment is recognised within the European policy context as an expression of structural gender inequality and power asymmetries. The Istanbul Convention, an international human rights treaty adopted by the Council of Europe in 2011 and ratified by Sweden in 2014, aims to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence (34). It explicitly defines sexual harassment as a form of gender-based violence. More recently, in 2019, the International Labour Organization (ILO) adopted a convention aimed at combating violence and harassment in the workplace, explicitly recognising sexual harassment as an aspect of gender-based violence and harassment, that in turn constitutes a specific aspect of the broader concept of violence and harassment (35). In line with

this conceptualisation, sexual harassment is also increasingly researched in Europe under the umbrella term gender-based violence (28, 36-39).

How scholars and policymakers understand sexual harassment is important, as their perspectives inevitably shape both research and policy frameworks. What is not recognised as a problem is unlikely to receive attention or action. Equally important, however, are lay perceptions, how individuals in the workplace define and interpret sexual harassment, since it is within these settings that the behaviours occur and are either challenged or normalised (14, 26). Furthermore, individual perceptions of what constitute sexually harassing behaviours influences whether or not such behaviour is reported (40) and consequently affect the visibility of sexual harassment in society at large (28). Generally, lay perceptions of sexual harassment tend not to align with the tripartite model developed by Fitzgerald and colleagues, which includes gender harassment as a central component. This disconnect is effectively illustrated by Lilia M. Cortina and colleagues through the metaphor of an iceberg (10) (illustrated in an adapted version in Figure 1). In this metaphor, the tip of the iceberg represents the more visible but less common 'come-ons', explicit sexual advances that reach public awareness (40). Beneath the surface lies the much larger, often overlooked base: the 'put-downs', not necessarily sexual in nature, but which forms the basis for more overt behaviours (14) and, according to the tripartite model, is an integral part of what constitutes sexual harassment (19).

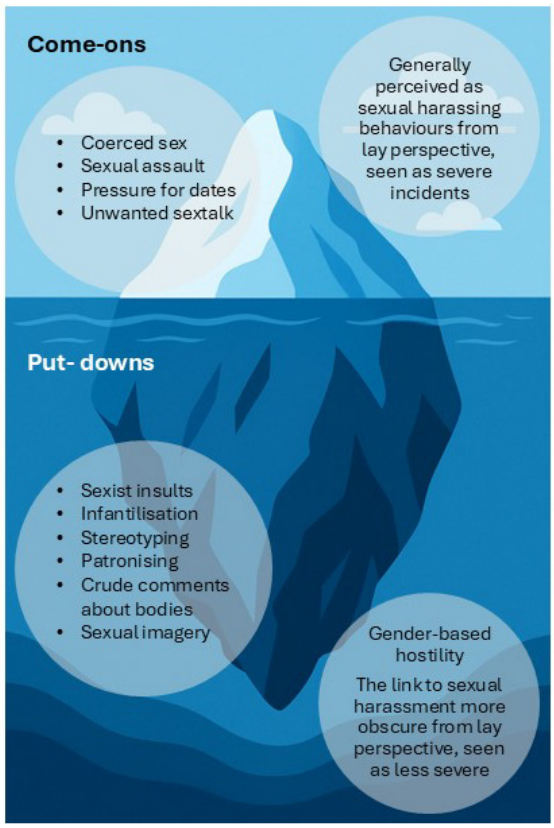

Figure 1 Illustration of perceptions of different forms of sexual harassment. Adapted from Cortina et al (10), generated with the assistance of ChatGPT, an AI-based language model.

Moreover, the lay perception of workplace sexual harassment has been shown to differ by gender. Results from a meta-review covering 62 studies of gender differences in harassment indicate that women generally perceive a broader range of behaviours to be harassing than does men, and that the gap is broader when it involves hostile work environment harassment, derogatory attitudes against women, dating pressure or physical contact and smaller when it comes to sexual propositions or coercion (41). In a study from USA, surveying 238 manufacturing and social service workers and 1,004 non-managerial university staff, Berdahl and Aquino found a substantial gender difference in how sexual behaviour at work was experienced: 46% of the men reported enjoying it, compared to only 10% of the women (42). Interestingly, the results indicated that regardless of how the behaviour was evaluated, positively or negatively, it was generally associated with adverse work-related and psychological outcomes (42). That women tend to perceive sexual

harassment more negatively than men has been attributed to gender-based power imbalances, limiting women's control over the situation and constrain their response options (42, 43).

Workplace sexual harassment in the broader context of workplace mistreatment

Although workplace sexual harassment has received substantial attention in research, the field has largely developed independently from adjacent fields examining other counterproductive workplace practices and cultures (13, 26). Other forms of mistreatment are identified in research under a variety of definitions and overlapping concepts such bullying (44), incivility (45) or generalized harassment (46). All are prevalent in workplaces, linked to adverse health effects and generally reported to a larger extent by women compared to men. In the 2015 European Working Conditions Survey, 12% of participants reported experiencing verbal abuse and 6% reported humiliating behaviour during the previous month (47). Additionally, 5% reported bullying or harassment, and 7% reported discrimination based on gender, age, race, religion, nationality, disability, or sexual orientation within the past 12 months. These adverse social behaviours were reported more frequently by women than by men (47).

When studied together, different types of workplace mistreatment have shown to often co-exist. For example, Lim and Cortina found that women's experiences of sexual harassment often co-occur with more general, non-sexualised workplace incivility (48). Workplace incivility refers to rude, disrespectful, or discourteous behaviours that demonstrate a lack of regard for others and may potentially escalate into more coercive actions (49). Examples include ignoring or interrupting a colleague, making dismissive remarks, or excluding someone from important communications. The ambiguity of these behaviours is a characteristic shared with many forms of sexual harassment, which can also be interpreted in various ways and are sometimes attributed to other causes such as ignorance, personality, or cultural misunderstanding (45, 49). Lim and Cortina reported that almost all women who were subjected to gender- or sexualised harassment also reported experiencing general incivility (but not vice versa), concluding that "it appeared that sexual harassment often took place against a backdrop of generalized disrespect in the workplace" (48, p.484). Although still generally under-researched, the co-occurrence of workplace sexual harassment with other forms of identity-based harassment and incivility has gained some attention, also in Sweden (50, 51). For example, a report from the Royal Institute of Technology (KTH), concludes that clear gender differences exist in exposure to both incivility and sexual harassment, with women experiencing higher levels of both (52).

In an extensive review of the workplace sexual harassment research field, Paula MacDonald points out bridging this research gap to be one of the most important tasks for researchers in order to provide effectful evidence-based recommendations (13). As MacDonald puts it, "..behaviours such as workplace bullying, mobbing,

racial harassment and sex-based harassment, as well as sexual harassment, have hierarchical power relations at their core" (13, p.12), and researching them together would give a better understanding as to how a more general "cultural misogyny" sanctions sexual harassment at workplaces (17).

Measuring workplace sexual harassment

As there is no established consensus on which behaviours constitute sexual harassment, there is also no agreement among researchers on how the phenomenon should be measured (23, 33). One critical issue in the measurement of sexual harassment in general is whether to use a single-item question (the self-labelling method) or a predefined list of specific behaviours (list-based method), as research has shown that the chosen method has a substantial impact on prevalence estimates (20, 53). The self-labelling method, in which respondents are asked directly whether they have experienced sexual harassment, reflects the respondent's subjective interpretation of the concept, which is related to, as mentioned above, gender, but also other factors, for example culture contexts (41, 54). Furthermore, a respondent may choose not to adopt the label sexual harassment for several reasons including avoidance of negative social stigma (be seen as a complainer or weak) or to remain a positive self-image (55). Uncertainty of whether their experience actually meets the definition of sexual harassment and fear of repercussions might further influence the labelling process (55). It is well established in research that experiences of sexual harassment are generally underreported (28).

In contrast, the list-based method asks respondents whether they have experienced specific behaviours that the researcher has pre-defined as sexual harassment, with or without mentioning the term sexual harassment to the respondents (33). While this method is considered more 'objective' and allows for greater consistency in identifying specific behaviours, the prevalence rates will increase the more behaviours are included in the list.

Studies have shown that using the self-labelling method results in substantially lower prevalence rates, often less than half, compared to when a list of pre-defined behaviours is used (20). In a study form Norway targeting the Norwegian working population found that 1.1% labelled themselves as victims of workplace sexual harassment, while 18.4% reported exposure to at least one out of eleven unwanted behaviours with a sexual connotation that could be experienced as harassing (23). A similar study conducted in Denmark resulted in 2,5% employees self-labelling as sexually harassed while 19% reported experiences of at least one type of sexual or gender-based harassment captured by using a behavioural list method (53).

A widely used instrument for measuring workplace sexual harassment, although predominantly in North America, is the Sexual Experience Questionnaire (SEQ), introduced by Fitzgerald and colleagues, originally developed to measure male-to-female harassment based on the tripartite conceptualisation of sexual harassment

(56). SEQ consists of a list of potentially offensive behaviours aligning with the American multidimensional conceptualisation of sexual harassment capturing gender harassment, unwanted sexual attention and sexual coercion (19). The instrument has since its introduction undergone a series of evaluations and adaptations, and today there are several variations of the instrument available, such as a shorter version with 13 items (57), and versions adjusted to a variety of samples, for example military staff (58), medical students (59) and men (43). The fact that it exists in various versions has generated critique and questioning of the entitlement of it being a standardised instrument (60). Furthermore, studies employing the SEQ instrument commonly collapse experiences of gender harassment, unwanted sexual attention and sexual coercion into one measure, examining these dimensions as a holistic phenomenon. However, this approach may obscure important distinctions in the nature, prevalence, and impact of different types of harassing behaviours (29).

In Europe, researchers have more frequently used a variety of different behaviour lists for measuring unwanted sexual attention, excluding non-sexual gender harassment (33), although, initiatives to develop standardised instruments to measure workplace sexual harassment exists. One example is the Bergen Sexual Harassment Scale consisting of two parts, a behavioural list part and a self-labelling part (23). The behaviour list includes 11 items capturing unwanted verbal sexual attention, unwanted physical sexual behaviours and sexual pressure in connection to work during the last six months (23). Another recent example comes from Denmark, where Dahl Nielsen MB and colleagues have developed the Inventory of Workplace Sexual and Gender-based harassment (IWS), an instrument aiming at capturing unwanted sexual attention as well as non-sexual gender harassment inspired by Fitzgerald's Tripartite Model and broad understanding of sexual harassment (53). IWS consists of a behaviour list of 21 items capturing experiences during the last 12 months in connection to work. A last example is the list-based instrument developed by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) in 2024 including 10 items covering physical, verbal and non-verbal as well as online acts with a perceived sexual connotation experienced in connection with work (37).

As part of the Tellus project, a new instrument for measuring sexual harassment (LUSHI – Lund University Sexual Harassment Inventory) was developed and validated (61). This is the instrument used for measuring sexual harassment in this thesis. LUSHI is a list-based instrument including ten items capturing unwanted behaviours perceived as having a sexual connotation. It aims to cover both 'everyday' SH and sexual assault, cover both 'traditional' forms of sexual harassment and 'new' forms, such as online harassment, capture only unwanted behaviours, and to be inclusive of the experiences of, and possible to use, for men and LGBTQ individuals. Although the instrument, capturing unwanted behaviours with a perceived sexual connotation, was not originally designed to distinguish between different "subtypes" of workplace sexual harassment, such as sexual

harassment targeting a particular individual and sexual harassment in the form of a more general sexist climate (not necessarily aimed at a specific target) these dimensions emerged as distinct subscales during the validation process. This warranted further examination of whether these subtypes differ in their associations with mental well-being, an analysis that was possible within the scope of this thesis.

Consequences

Women are the main targets of workplace sexual harassment and they are predominantly harassed by men (10, 26, 28, 62). Younger women (13), women in positions of power (63), and gender non- conforming women (64) have been shown to be particularly vulnerable to sexual harassment. Men also report experiences of sexual harassment, though to a lesser extent than women, and their perpetrators include both men and women (43, 62, 65). Research further indicates that men may be subjected to slightly different forms of harassment, such as so-called 'not-man-enough' harassment (43, 66) which targets behaviours perceived as "non-masculine" challenging current gender roles. This pattern suggests that if such behaviours are excluded from measurement instruments, the prevalence of sexual harassment, especially against men, may be systematically underestimated.

There is a convincing body of literature, including longitudinal studies, showing negative consequences of workplace sexual harassment at both the individual and organisational level (10, 36, 67) including mental health outcomes (36, 46), absence due to sickness (68), organisational withdrawal, decreased job commitment (21) and costs for organisations (13). Recent studies from Scandinavia examining the general workforce show increased risk of depressive symptoms, psychotropic medication, long-term sickness absence and suicidal behaviour after workplace sexual harassment exposure (68-72). Furthermore, evidence points at harm extending to bystanders and influence team processes (30, 73, 74). Moreover, it is suggested that workplace sexual harassment as a phenomenon contributes to the gender segregated job-market by pushing women out from male dominated sectors as well as potentially men away from female dominated workplaces as gender minorities face higher risk of workplace sexual harassment (9, 10).

Sexual harassment is likely to cause harm regardless of type, challenging the common lay assumption that "come-ons" are more damaging than "put-downs" (10, 29, 75). In a meta-analysis including 73,877 working women, Sojo et al. categorised sexual harassment by intensity, distinguishing between high-intensity experiences (sexual coercion, unwanted sexual attention) and lower-intensity but more frequent experiences (gender harassment, sexist organisational climate) (76). The findings indicated that both forms had similarly detrimental effects on women's well-being. The analysis focused exclusively on women, and research examining the consequences of different forms of sexual harassment among men remains limited.

This highlights the need for studies that assess mental health outcomes in relation to specific harassment subtypes separately by gender.

Power relation between the target and the harasser (76, 77) and perceived organisational support have been suggested to modify the harm of sexual harassment (26). Minority ethnicity status of the target has also been suggested to exacerbate the harm of sexual harassment, although more research is needed specifically comparing outcomes for minority and non-minority women (26). Studies examining gender differences in harm following sexual harassment show mixed results (14, 26). In a meta-analytic review examining psychological outcomes of workplace sexual harassment, Chan and colleagues found no significantly stronger impact on women compared to men (67). Similarly, in a systematic review of prospective studies Blindow et al. did not find consistent evidence for gender differences (36). However, other studies indicate that male targets tend to perceive such experiences as less anxiety-provoking, bothersome, or stressful than female targets (26). Despite these mixed findings on gender differences in the consequences of sexual harassment, the overall evidence suggests that women are more severely affected, primarily because they are exposed to such behaviours at a significantly higher rate than men.

Workplace sexual harassment is understood as a work-related stressor and is mainly examined within a stress theory framework grounded in the work of Lazarus and Folkman (78, 79). From this perspective, harassment represents a psychological demand that exceeds employees' coping resources, resulting in negative psychological outcomes such as depression, anxiety or substance use. Negative outcomes related to victims' psychological well-being are probably the most commonly studied health outcomes (13, 21, 36). However, few, if any, studies have examined the relation between sexual harassment and vitality. Vitality refers to an individual's subjective experience of energy and fatigue, reflecting both mental and physical aspects of well-being (80). It captures both psychological (e.g. feeling full of life) and physical (e.g. feeling tired) aspects of vitality, making it a valuable indicator of overall functioning and health-related quality of life. Research has shown that high vitality is positively associated with sustainable employability (81), effective job performance, employee engagement, as well as creativity and innovative behaviours (82, 83), while low vitality is linked to increased societal costs due to for example sickness absence and productivity loss (84). Given the cognitively demanding and innovation-driven nature of academic work, vitality is of particular importance in higher education. If experiences of sexual harassment have a negative impact on vitality, this may have consequences not only for the individual's health and professional development, but also for the functioning and productivity of academic institutions. However, the relationship between sexual harassment and vitality remains largely unexplored, pointing to a gap in the current research literature.

Explaining the problem

Antecedents

Perpetrators of workplace sexual harassment is generally an under-researched group. However, some research exist and there is evidence indicating that men with a high likelihood of sexually harassing women tend to cognitively associate social dominance with sexuality (85). Moreover, men who hold sexist attitudes (86) or strongly identify with traditional male gender roles (87) have been shown to be more prone to engage in sexually harassing behaviours. However, whether individuals with such proclivities actually act on them is heavily influenced by contextual factors (86). In fact, it is widely accepted in the research community that organisational factors, rather than individual characteristics, are the strongest predictors of workplace sexual harassment (17, 21, 22). As noted by Willness et al. in a comprehensive meta-analysis of the antecedents and the consequences of workplace sexual harassment, this speaks to the potential for organisations to actually prevent such behaviour (21).

A well-established organisational predictor is the sexual harassment climate, referring to the extent to which an organisation tolerates harassing behaviours and the degree to which it implements preventive practices, such as formal policies, accessible reporting mechanisms, and training initiatives (88). A non-tolerant climate has been shown to reduce the likelihood that individuals with a propensity to harass will act on it (21, 48, 89), or in other words, for sexual harassing behaviours to occur a permissive sexual harassment climate seems to be a necessary condition (21). Higher levels of harassment have also been reported in male-dominated workplaces, particularly in sectors with traditionally masculine norms, where gendered power dynamics are more pronounced (21). Moreover, workplace environments characterised by a masculinity contest culture, marked by norms such as showing no weakness and prioritising work above all else, have been linked to higher levels of sexual harassment (90).

Research on organisational predictors are essential as it guides the development of effective preventions strategies. However, research on organisational context antecedents of sexual harassment has been criticised for adopting too narrow a perspective, primarily focusing on climate for sexual harassment, failing to explore more general organizational factors that would provide a more comprehensive understanding of sexual harassment within the broader organisational context (91). As a result, critics claim, organisational responses have largely centred on developing policies, training programmes, and reporting systems, measures that have proven insufficient in effectively reducing workplace sexual harassment (10, 91). More recently, the concept of organisational justice climate has been introduced into the field as a potentially important predictor of sexual harassment, and as a moderating factor influencing how gender imbalance and perceived tolerance of harassment affect its occurrence (91). These developments are significant as they

expand our understanding of which organisational-level interventions may be most effective in addressing and preventing such behaviours.

This thesis aims to contribute to the growing body of research on organisational-context predictors of workplace sexual harassment by examining organisational climate factors capturing relational aspects of leadership, *perceived relational justice* and *authoritarian treatment*, and their associations with the occurrence of sexual harassment. The focus lies on employees' perceptions of how they are treated by superiors and management, grounded in the idea that leaders in an organisation exert powerful normative influence, shaping local workplace norms about what behaviours are acceptable (89). Relational justice is a component of organisational justice and refers to whether employees perceive their treatment by superiors as respectful and fair (92). Justice in the workplace, including relational justice, has previously been linked to outcomes such as self-rated health (93), sickness absence (94), perceived work stress (95), and counterproductive work behaviours like organisational aggression, antisocial behaviours, and bullying (96). Importantly, workplace injustice not only impacts individual targets but can also affect the attitudes and behaviours of entire work groups (97). Authoritarian treatment refers to employees' perceptions of being treated in a controlling and domineering manner by superiors and represents a dimension of social vulnerability within precarious employment, as captured by the EPRES scale (98). Authoritarian leadership style has been suggested contributing to workplace climates that are conducive to bullying and harassment (44). These styles are often characterised by a lack of open communication and top-down decision-making, which can foster a climate of fear (99-101). Such an environment may discourage individuals from voicing concerns about mistreatment, either their own or others', potentially enabling higher levels of sexual harassment. Given that authoritarian leadership may thrive in hierarchical organisations, and that universities are often structured in this way, this represents a particularly relevant organisational climate aspect to examine.

Theories

As with the challenge of defining the phenomenon, there is currently no single, widely accepted theory that fully explains why sexual harassment occurs (102), and several scholars have highlighted the need for further theoretical development within the field (13, 102, 103). However, a number of theoretical approaches have been proposed, some more empirically supported than others (13, 102). The natural-biological model proposes that sexual harassment stems from natural feelings of sexual desire. According to this perspective, sexual harassment should not be viewed as discriminatory or sexist, but rather a natural expression of men's higher sex drive, or the result of mutual sexual attraction (104). This model is largely rejected by the research community. One reason for this is its inability to account for atypical scenarios, such as the sexual harassment of men (43), or to explain the

consistently documented negative consequences for victims, effects that would not be expected in the case of mutually desired interactions (105).

Sex-role spillover is another explanatory model, suggesting that men and women carry pre-existing gender beliefs and expectations about appropriate behaviour into the workplace (102). When a perpetrator's sex-role stereotypes conflict with the actual work role of the target, for example when the target occupies a position that challenges traditional gender norms, these stereotypical beliefs may override beliefs of workplace equality and trigger sexually harassing behaviours from perpetrators attempting to reassert conventional gender roles (102). This theory helps explain why women in traditionally male-dominated or male-coded occupations, or women in high positions, face an increased risk of sexual harassment, as their roles challenge conventional gender expectations (63, 102, 106). However, the sex-role spillover theory fails to acknowledge the role of perpetrator characteristics (not all men sexually harass women) as well as the relevance of organisational factors for occurrence of sexual harassment (21, 22). A related, and probably the most widely used theoretical approach is the so called socio-cultural model (107). According to this approach, sexual harassment is a logical consequence of existing gender inequality, and the gendered hierarchies present in society. It represents a feminist perspective that views workplace sexual harassment as closely linked to male dominance, functioning as a mechanism to preserve and reinforce existing gender power structures, keeping women out of desirable jobs and dependent on men economically (31, 102). It recognizes that sexual harassment, most of the time, is not about sexual desire, but sexism, acts aimed at putting women down, reinforcing the existing gender order (108). This model aligns well with the empirical pattern showing that women are the primary targets of workplace sexual harassment and men are most often the perpetrators (13, 22). It also acknowledges that the consequences of sexual harassment disproportionately affect women, contributing to their exclusion or marginalisation from male-dominated roles and sectors (13, 22). However, this model fails to explain atypical situations, such as women sexually harassing men (65), and has, like the sex-role spillover theory, been critiqued for oversimplifying the problem by ignoring the relevance of factors such as perpetrator characteristics and organisational climate (24). Furthermore, it has been argued that this model might inadvertently reinforce gender segregation by portraying men as inherently threatening, and women as inherently vulnerable, thereby framing women as in need of protection rather than empowerment (31).

More recently, Jennifer Berdahl proposed an alternative approach that moves beyond viewing sexual harassment as primarily driven by sexual desire or male domination (31). She acknowledges that power, understood as “the relative control over outcomes through the capacity to withdraw rewards or impose punishments” (31, p.664) is a critical component of harassment. Typically, harassment requires an actual or perceived power imbalance between the perpetrator and the target, leaving the latter with limited resources for resistance or retaliation (31). Berdahl suggests

that sexual harassment is fundamentally driven by a desire to protect or enhance one's social status, functioning as a source of power, in response to perceived threats (31). This desire is not specific to one gender. However, as social status in society is generally stratified along gender lines (109), Berdahl posits that men have a greater incentive to protect their sex-based social status by derogating women who pose a potential challenge or threat to their position, which helps explain why the most typical scenario involves a man harassing a woman. It also sheds light on why men who do not conform to traditional masculine norms, such as gay men, may be especially vulnerable to harassment (110). It also explains the increased risk of sexual harassment faced by women in positions of power (63), whose roles disrupt conventional gender hierarchies. It also opens up for women as perpetrators of sexual harassment, which also exists (65). From this perspective, sexual harassment is not an isolated behaviour, but rather part of a broader pattern of actions aimed at preserving existing power hierarchies. Consequently, its co-occurrence with other forms of workplace mistreatment, such as incivility or identity-based harassment, is to be expected.

Other models emphasise power and status inequalities within organisations as central to explain the occurrence of sexual harassment (102). Organisational theories recognise the importance of power but do not necessarily view power differentials as gender specific. In this view, the overrepresentation of men as perpetrators of sexual harassment is attributed to their more frequent occupancy of positions of power within organisational hierarchies.

Most existing theories tend to focus on single explanatory factors for workplace sexual harassment. However, scholars have called for the development of multifactorial theories that integrate individual, sociocultural, biological, and organisational dimensions to better understand its occurrence (102). Furthermore, existing theories mainly conceptualise sexual harassment in line with the tripartite model, which includes gender harassment within its definition. However, this approach obscure distinctions between different forms of sexual harassment and potentially overlook the possibility of varying underlying drivers behind different types of sexual harassment.

Generally, there is broad agreement among scholars that the phenomenon is driven more by power, dominance, and gendered hierarchical structures than by sexual desire (31, 64, 106). Berdahl and Bhattacharyya illustrate how dominance and sexual behaviour intersect to produce different forms of harassment (see Figure 2) (32). Sexual behaviour per se at the workplace is not the problem, it may be consensual and less problematic, although research indicates that even welcomed sexual attention in professional settings may have harmful consequences (42), it is the dominance part that is the core problem, compromising the victim's ability to consent.

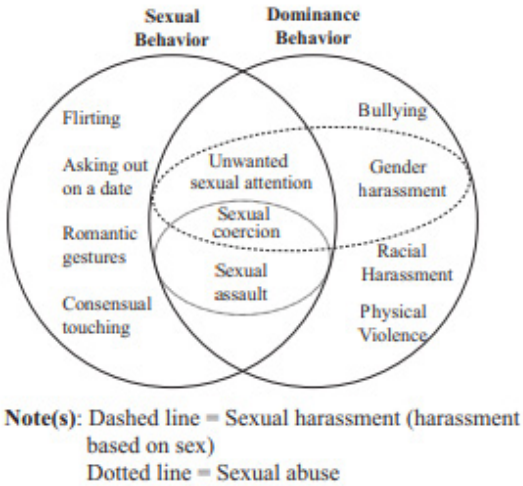

Figure 2 Distinguishing between sexual behaviour and dominance behaviour (32). CC BY 4.0

Sexual harassment in the academic context

Universities and higher education institutions, primarily engage in teaching, research and dissemination of knowledge. Academic work consequently involves a wide range of activities, all closely tied to the traditions, practices, and academic cultures of the respective disciplines (111). Three recent systematic reviews, focusing on sexual harassment specifically, or as an aspect of workplace harassment or gender-based harassment, indicate that such behaviours are prevalent among academic staff and require greater attention and action (18, 103, 112). Most research so far in the area origins from North America and less from Europe (103). Although partly under-researched (103, 112), sexual harassment in academia has recently gained increased attention in Europe, including Sweden, in isolation or as an aspect of gender-based violence (see for example (38, 39, 113, 114)). In a large EU-wide survey conducted 2022 across 15 countries and 46 universities, including both women and men, 35% reported having experienced sexual harassment at some point during their time at their institution (115). The prevalence was measured using an eight-item behavioural list covering verbal, non-verbal, and physical acts of a sexual nature. Swedish data from Lund University shows that 24.5% of women, 7.0% of men, and 33.3% of non-binary staff report experiences of at least one form of sexual harassment (measured using a 10-item behaviour list) during their time at the university (62). The most commonly reported forms of harassment were unwelcome

comments, suggestive looks or gestures, and 'inadvertent' brushing or touching. A large majority of exposed participants reported male perpetrators (80%) while a smaller proportion reported female perpetrators (15%). Most reported incidents among staff occurred during the everyday operations of the university. Notably, women were more likely to report being in a subordinate power position in relation to the perpetrator compared to men (62).

Academic workplaces are characterized by both formal hierarchies and power structures as well as informal ones. Professors and senior researchers, for example, may have formal management roles as heads of faculties (deans), departments (prefects) or of research groups, alongside strong informal power, based on their intellectual authority, academic reputation, or control over financial resources. They might also have access to a broad network through for example, membership in various committees or boards. Doctoral students, on the other hand, are often highly dependent on their supervisors, who play a crucial role in their academic careers. Other characteristics of academic workplaces include a high proportion of temporary positions, often held by PhD students, postdoctoral researchers, and numerous scientists involved in various research projects. In addition, academia is a highly international environment, with many employees and students from different parts of the world. The general gender pattern (although varying by faculty and area of research) in academia is that women are overrepresented at the lower levels, such as among students and doctoral students, but that their proportion decreases at each step up the academic career ladder, with women making up barely one third of Swedish professors (116).

In a theoretical contribution to the field, O'Connor et al. identified three power-related certain characteristics of the hinger educational sector suggested to facilitate gender-based violence and harassment (including sexual harassment): male-dominated hierarchies, a neoliberal managerialist ethos (highly individualised, hyper-competitive and performance driven), and gender- and intersectionality-incompetent leadership (117). While the sector faces specific challenges, academia, being devoted to knowledge production and innovation, logically holds both the competence and the responsibility to serve as a model for other sectors in creating safe and inclusive work environments. Until this is fully achieved, there remains a need to contribute with relevant research in the field.

The legal context

There is a distinction between legal and research perspectives on sexual harassment. While the law focuses on what is illegal, sexual harassment research has a broader focus, examining the impact on individuals' health and well-being. A behaviour does not need to be strictly illegal to be inappropriate or harmful to individuals and

organisations. However, the legal and policy framework influence people's perceptions of what constitutes sexual harassment and governs employers' responsibilities within the area.

In Sweden, sexual harassment is primarily regarded as a form of discrimination and is regulated under the Discrimination Act, where it is defined as conduct of a sexual nature that violates an individual's dignity (27). Sexual harassment may also constitute a criminal offence, such as unlawful invasion of privacy or sexual molestation, and is then regulated by the Swedish Penal Code. Other types of harassment, defined as conduct that violates a person's dignity, must be linked to one of the seven protected grounds of discrimination (i.e. sex, transgender identity or expression, ethnicity, religion or other belief, disability, sexual orientation, or age) in order to fall within the scope of the Discrimination Act. Sexual harassment or harassment involves unwelcome behaviour, and it is the person subjected to the behaviour who determines whether it is perceived as unwelcome or not. Consequently, the Discrimination Act does not list specific behaviours as constituting sexual harassment or harassment; instead, the focus lies on the victim's experience. However, for the conduct to be legally classified as sexual harassment or harassment, the perpetrator must have understood, or should have understood, that the behaviour was unwelcome, thereby placing a responsibility on the victim to speak up about their experiences (27).

Another form of workplace mistreatment regulated under Swedish law is defined as offensive or abusive actions directed at one or more employees, which may lead to ill health or exclusion from the workplace community (in Swedish kränkande särbehandling) (118). In this thesis, this phenomenon is referred to as derogatory treatment and includes experiences of insulting behaviour such as withholding information, making derogatory comments, or social exclusion.

Swedish employers are legally obliged to prevent sexual harassment, harassment, and other forms of mistreatment in the workplace, in accordance with the Discrimination Act (27) and the Swedish Work Environment Authority's provisions on organisational and social work environment (118).

Thesis rationale

Sexual harassment remains a pervasive issue within academia, both internationally and in Sweden, despite prevention efforts such as policy development, reporting mechanisms, and training initiatives. This highlights the need for more effective, evidence-based approaches grounded in science. However, the research field of workplace sexual harassment is challenged by definitional ambiguity and contextual variation, which limit the generalisability of findings and underscore the need for more context specific research. This thesis offers insights from multiple perspectives: it examines individual-level harm (mental well-being including vitality), explores the co-occurrence of sexual harassment with other forms of workplace mistreatment, and identifies contextual factors that may mitigate or exacerbate its occurrence. Importantly, it includes not only women's experiences, but also those of men and, to some extent, non-binary employees, perspectives that remain underrepresented in existing research. In doing so, this thesis contributes with relevant knowledge to the scientific foundation for understanding and addressing workplace sexual harassment within the Swedish academic context.

Aim

The overall aim of this PhD project is to examine experiences of sexual harassment among employees in an academic workplace environment including mental-health consequences for the individual and contributing and protective factors at the organisational level. Further, the statistical analyses are stratified by gender to identify relevant differences between men and women. New knowledge generated from this thesis may help to inform preventive strategies at the organisational level to counteract the problem.

Specific aims

1. To examine the association between workplace sexual harassment and mental well-being, including vitality, among employees at a large Swedish university and the possible moderating effects of gender, age, background (Swedish/foreign), academic position and type of employment on this association (Study I).
2. To examine associations between different forms of workplace harassment and derogatory treatment and workplace sexual harassment among employees at a large Swedish university, including the possible moderating effect of gender on these associations (Study II).
3. To investigate associations between employees' perceptions of workplace relational justice and authoritarian treatment, respectively, and experiences of workplace sexual harassment, including possible moderating effects of gender, age, background (Swedish/foreign), type of employment and academic position on these associations (Study III).
4. To explore how employees at a Swedish university perceive the organisational culture and workplace norms surrounding sexual harassment (Study IV).

Conceptual framework and theoretical underpinnings

The conceptual framework model used in this thesis builds upon an integrated model of antecedents and consequences of workplace sexual harassment proposed by Louise F. Fitzgerald and colleagues 1994 (79). In their work, workplace sexual harassment is primarily understood as a function of organisational and job context factors, and Fitzgerald et al. argued that it should therefore be conceptualised and studied in those terms. Their framework aimed to predict both the occurrence of sexual harassment and its potential outcomes, as well as part of the processes through which these outcomes emerge. Specifically, the organisational context refers to the workplace climate of tolerance or intolerance towards sexual harassment, while the job context captures mainly the gender composition. The model also incorporates a range of negative consequences, job-related, psychological, and health-related, and posits that these outcomes may be moderated by individual factors related to vulnerability and response styles of the person exposed (79). Since this work, numerous studies have been conducted that support the model, and additional antecedents, moderating factors, and consequences have been identified (13, 21, 119-121).

Including more recent research findings, an extended model was developed and used as a conceptual framework for this thesis (Figure 3). The model organises factors associated with the occurrence of sexual harassment as well as modifiers of these associations, as identified in the research literature, in the order in which they are understood in this thesis. It is framed by the socio-cultural context and workplace context. This framing illustrates that the processes occurring within a given workplace do not take place in a vacuum, but are interwoven with broader societal contextual factors such as gender norms, values and beliefs (122) as well as specific workplace context related to type of job and sector, shaping the overall setting in which workplace sexual harassment occurs. The framework is not intended to provide an exhaustive account of all existing research on these factors (for a thorough review of these see for example Berdahl and Corina (26) or MacDonald (13)), but rather to illustrate how workplace sexual harassment is understood as a process in terms of antecedents, consequences and moderators within the context of this thesis.

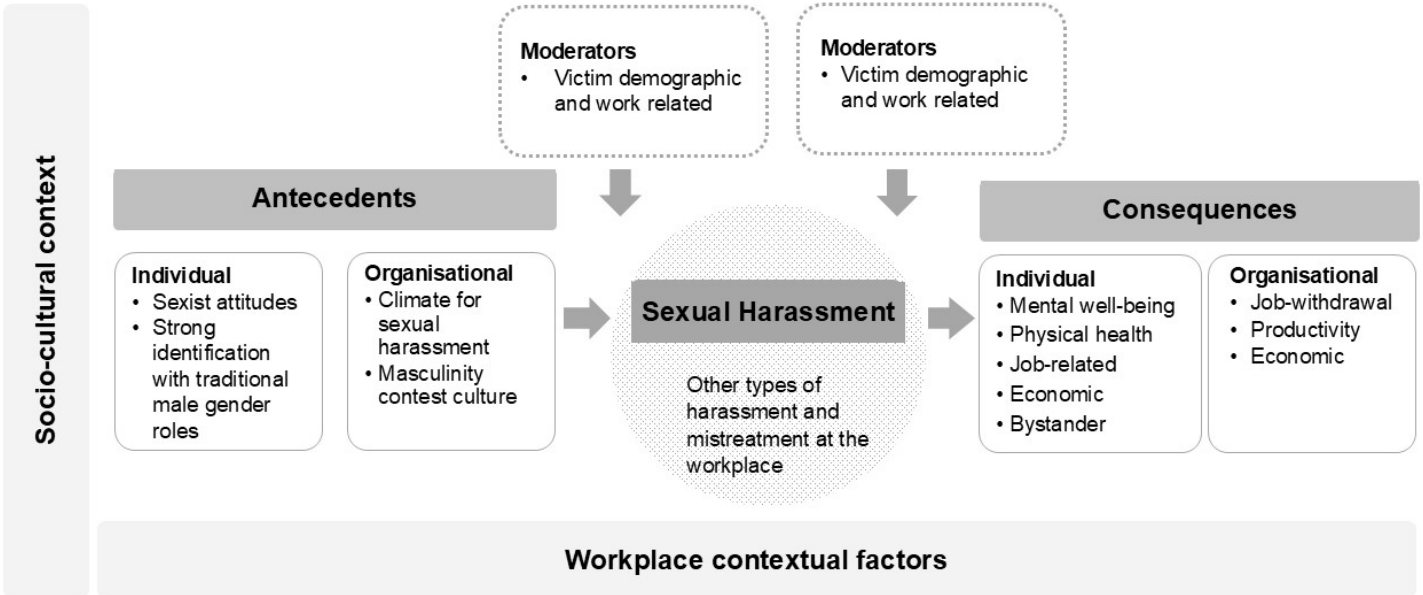

Figure 3 Conceptual framework model

This framework has served as a "backdrop" when determining variables of interest to examine as exposures, outcomes, and moderating factors in this thesis, and formulating hypotheses. The figure below situates the four studies included in the thesis within the conceptual framework (Figure 4)

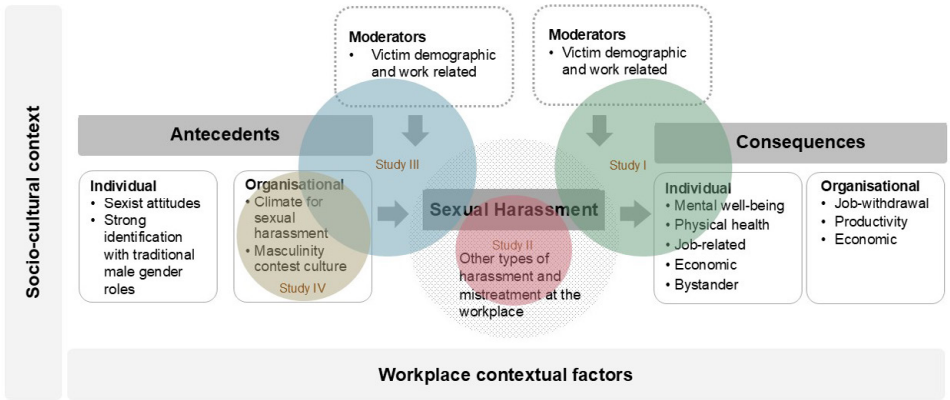

Figure 4 An illustration of how study I-IV are situated within the conceptual framework model

While the framework conceptualises workplace sexual harassment as a process, it does not, in itself, offer a comprehensive explanation of the underlying causes of its occurrence. As outlined in the background section, several theories have been proposed to explain the underlying drivers of sexual harassment. It is a complex phenomenon that likely cannot be explained by any single theoretical approach. In this thesis, sexual harassment is understood primarily as an act of dominance, following the perspective proposed by Berdahl and Bhattacharyya (32). When dominance intersects with sexual behaviour, it can manifest as sexual harassment. However, this thesis adopts a conceptualisation more closely aligned with the European tradition than the American, focusing specifically on unwanted behaviours with a perceived sexual connotation. As such, the definition used here is narrower than broader models that also include gender-based harassment without sexual content. Figure 5 illustrates how sexual harassment is understood in this thesis as the intersection of sexual and dominance-related behaviours, and how Study II captures the co-occurrence of various dominance-related behaviours, including identity-based harassment and derogatory treatment.

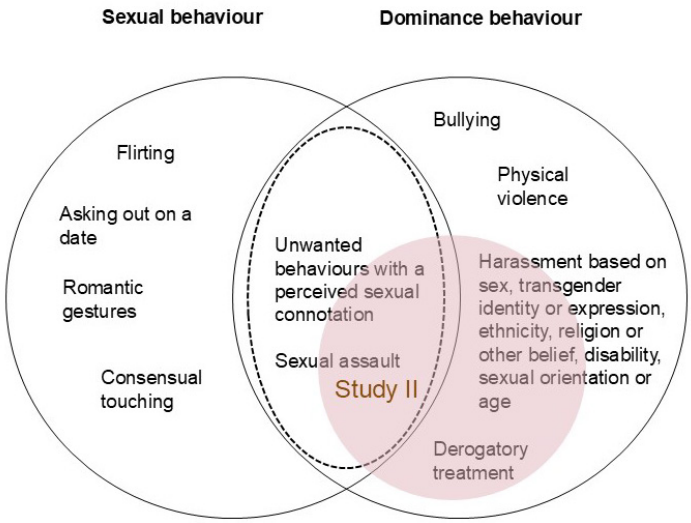

Figure 5 Distinguishing between sexual behaviour and dominance behaviour in this thesis. Dotted line sexual harassment. Adapted from Berdahl et al (32).

As to what are the underlying drivers of these acts of dominance, this thesis does not rest on a single explanatory theory. Rather, it considers Berdahl's theory of the protection or enhancement of one's social status in a hierarchy sorted mainly by gender (31) as one possible motivational mechanism, interacting with individual and organisational antecedents as well as broader societal and organisational contextual factors, as outlined in the conceptual framework.

Material and methods

Summary of materials and methods

A summary of materials and methods used in this thesis is presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Summary of materials and methods used. All analyses were performed separately by gender when data allowed.

	Study I	**Study II**	**Study III**	**Study IV**
Study design	Quantitative Cross-sectional	Quantitative Cross-sectional	Quantitative Cross-sectional	Qualitative FGD
Data source	Tellus survey	Tellus survey	Tellus survey	Tellus FGD n=10
Population	2736 employees	2732 employees	2736 employees	40 employees
Exposures	○ SH at LU last three years ○ SH by type	○ Harassment ○ Derogatory treatment ○ Multiple forms of harassment ○ SH (non-workplace)	○ Perceived relational justice ○ Perceived authoritarian treatment	n/a
Outcome(s)	○ Mental health (QHQ-12) ○ Vitality (SF-36)	○ SH at LU last 12 months	○ SH at LU last 12 months	n/a
Analysis	○ Logistic regression ○ Additive interaction	○ Logistic regression ○ Additive interaction	○ Poisson regression ○ Additive interaction	Qualitative content analysis
Covariates	○ Age ○ Background (Swe/foreign), ○ Type of employment, ○ Prof position	○ Age ○ Background (Swe/foreign), ○ Prof position	○ Age ○ Background (Swe/foreign) ○ Type of employment, ○ Prof position	n/a

Note: LU=Lund university, SH=sexual harassment, FGD=focus group discussions.

Use of AI

During the writing process of this thesis, I have used artificial intelligence (AI) assistance, specifically OpenAI's language model ChatGPT, for language refinement and generation of one illustration. I have processed the generated text to assure accuracy and take full responsibility for the content.

Study context

Lund University consists of approximately 8,600 employees and 46,000 students spread across nine faculties with around 75 departments. The university also includes a range of important infrastructures and institutions, including the University Library, the MAX IV Laboratory, and several interdisciplinary research centres. The roles of deans and prefects are assigned through election and are three-year appointments. The sizes of the faculties vary considerably, from approximately 200 employees at the Faculty of Fine and Performing Arts, to 1900 at the Faculty of Science. The gender balance also varies, from women constituting 37% of all employees at the Faculty of Science to 65% of all employees at the Faculty of Law. Of all employees about 40 % are international employees and about 35% have temporary employment (personal communication HR-controller Johan Eliasson 2025 June 4). In other words, Lund University is a large and diverse workplace, encompassing a wide range of roles, disciplines, and professional environments.

If an employee at Lund University experiences harassment, including sexual harassment, they are encouraged to report the incident to their closest manager. If the manager is the source of the harassment, the employee is instead referred to the manager's superior. The university provide central support functions that can help and support managers in case of harassment.

Tellus

This thesis utilises data collected within the Tellus project. The Tellus project was launched in 2018 by then Vice Chancellor Torbjörn von Schantz at Lund University, as a response to the #MeToo movement and the Swedish #Akademiuppropet (3). The project was a three-year, research-based initiative aimed at generating evidence-informed proposals to strengthen the university's preventive work against sexual harassment. To investigate the current situation, both qualitative and quantitative methods were used. Individual interviews and focus group discussions were conducted as well as a university-wide survey, the Tellus survey. The Tellus survey was distributed separately to all employees and students in both English and

Swedish. Data from the Tellus project have since been used in several articles (see for example (62, 123, 124)).

Material and methods Study I-III

Data collection and study population

Tellus survey

Data used for Study I-III in this thesis were drawn from the Tellus survey conducted with the Tellus project (3). The survey was sent out in November 2019, in both English and Swedish, by email to all employees (N=8,238). Full time PhD students were included as employees as they hold employment status at Swedish universities. To ensure anonymity, responses could not be linked to individual email addresses. The survey remained open for nine weeks, during which two reminders were sent out by email. The final response rate was 33% (n = 2,750). Participants with missing data on both sex and gender, age and those who did not answer any of the 10 questions on experiences of sexual harassment (n=14), were excluded from the study population. This yielded a final study population of 2,736 individuals for Study I and III. For Study II, an additional four individuals were excluded who did not provide information about when the SH incident occurred.

Basic characteristics were compared between the study participants and the total target population. Minor differences were observed in terms of gender and age, with women slightly over-represented and both male and female participants marginally older than the overall target population. Furthermore, there was a slight overrepresentation of employees with permanent employment compared to those with temporary employment. Despite these differences, the overall, assessment was that the respondents closely resembled the total population of employees, and were therefore likely to be representative of the target population. Table 2 present data on participants and target population for comparison.

Table 2 Comparison between characteristics of the study participants and the target population (employment data as of November 12, 2019) regarding age, gender, position and type of employment. Information was missing about professional position for two study participants and type of employment for 50 study participants.

	Women (%)		Men (%)	
	Study population (N=4114)	Study participants (n=1551)	Study population (N=4124)	Study participants (n=1161)
Age group				
≤ 30	16	12	16	12
31 – 40	27	24	27	21
41 – 49	25	30	22	26
50 – 59	22	24	21	27
≥ 60	11	10	14	13
Professional position				
Professors	6	5	15	18
Senior Lecturers	10	12	15	16
Lecturers/Researchers	21	15	27	20
PhD Student	17	14	18	15
Admin/Technical	43	49	25	29
Other	2	4	1	3
Type of employment				
Permanent	62	73	59	72
Temporary	38	27	41	28

Variables

Sexual harassment

Sexual harassment was measured using a list-based instrument called the Lund University Sexual Harassment Inventory (LUSHI) (61). LUSHI was developed within the framework of the Tellus project, drawing on existing research literature, as well as insights from interviews and focus group discussions conducted as part of the project. Prior to the distribution of the questionnaire, the face validity and feasibility of the sexual harassment items were evaluated against findings from the interviews and focus group discussions, carried out by members of the core research group. Feedback from a small pilot group of employees and students was also incorporated, resulting in minor linguistic adjustments to improve clarity and relevance.

The LUSHI instrument builds on the definition of sexual harassment provided in Swedish law (27), which defines sexual harassment as conduct of a sexual nature that violates a person's dignity. This legal definition was considered to best reflect public perceptions of what constitute sexual harassment. The instrument includes a broad spectrum of behaviours and situations, ranging from "everyday" unwelcome conduct to sexual assault (see Table 3 for items included). The section of the survey

covering sexual harassment experiences was introduced to the participants with the following information:

> We will now ask some questions about your experiences of sexual harassment and sexual violence.
>
> Sexual harassment is defined as conduct of a sexual nature that violates someone's dignity. This can be, for example, through comments or words, groping or indiscreet looks. It can also include unwelcome compliments, invitations or suggestive acts.
>
> Sexual violence is defined in this study as attempts to conduct, or the conduct of sexual acts in which the person did not participate voluntarily.

Study participants were asked whether they had experienced any of the listed behaviours or situations in connection with their employment at Lund University. Response options were: "Yes, once", "Yes, more than once", and "No". If a participant reported having experienced any of the behaviours, a follow-up question was posed regarding the timing of the incident: "more than three years ago", "between one and three years ago", or "within the last 12 months". Participants who indicated they had experienced at least one of the ten listed behaviours/situations were categorised as having been exposed to sexual harassment at Lund University. Based on the timing indicated, they were further categorised as exposed during the last three years (used as exposure variable in Study I) or last 12 months (used as outcome variable in Study II and III).

Since its development, the LUSHI instrument has been evaluated in terms of reliability and construct validity, with results indicating satisfactory psychometric properties (61). In addition, exploratory factor analysis identified two distinct factors reflecting different dimensions of sexual harassment labelled "unwanted sexual attention of non-soliciting type" and "unwanted sexual attention of soliciting type". These dimensions are measurable through two subscales (rape/attempted rape fell outside of the two factors) (61). The "unwanted sexual attention of non-soliciting type" is understood to reflect a more generalized sexual harassment climate in the workplace, including behaviours such as unwelcome suggestive looks or gestures. In contrast, the "unwanted sexual attention of soliciting type" refers to more direct attempts to initiate a sexual relationship, including behaviours such as unwelcome solicitation or pressure for dates. In Study I, these two subscales were used to examine potential differences in the association between sexual harassment and mental well-being, depending on the type of harassment experienced.

See Table 3 for information on all 10 items included in the full LUSHI scale as well as the two subscales soliciting and non-soliciting sexual harassment.

Table 3 Items included in the Lund University Sexual Harassment Index (LUSHI), including distinction between types of sexual harassment. Scale items were introduced with the text: Have you experienced any of the following situations during your employment at Lund University?

LUSHI items	Full scale	Non-soliciting subscale	Soliciting subscale	Violence
Unwelcome suggestive looks or gestures	x	x		
Unwelcome "inadvertent" brushing or touching	x	x		
Unwelcome bodily contact such as grabbing or fondling	x	x		
Unwelcome comments	x	x		
Unwelcome soliciting or pressuring for "dates"	x		x	
Unwelcome gifts	x		x	
Unwelcome contact by post or telephone	x		x	
Unwelcome contact online for example social media or email	x		x	
Stalking	x		x	
Attempts to conduct or the conduct of oral, vaginal or anal sex or other equivalent sexual activity in which you did not participate voluntary	x			x

Note: Response alternatives included: "Yes, once", "Yes, more than once", and "No"

Harassment (other than sexual)

Experiences of harassment was measured by a survey question introduced to the participants with the following text:

> The simplified definition of harassment provided in the Discrimination Act is that harassment occurs when someone is subjected to an act that violates their dignity and that this violation is associated with one of the seven grounds for discrimination: sex, transgender identity or expression, ethnicity, religion or other belief, disability, sexual orientation or age. Harassment can be both individual and isolated events as well as subtle, almost imperceptible events that continue over time, so-called microaggressions. It can also be a process that is ongoing and permeates the entire working life.

Participants were asked whether they had experienced harassment, as defined above, in connection with their work at Lund University during the past 12 months. The response options were: "No"; "Yes, once"; "Yes, more than once"; and "Yes, in the form of microaggressions or ongoing process". Participants could select more than one response option to indicate whether the harassment was in the form of

isolated incidents, microaggressions or both. All participants who responded "Yes, once", "Yes, more than once", or "Yes, in the form of microaggressions or ongoing process" were categorised as having been exposed to harassment, while all others were categorised as not exposed. The variable was used as an exposure measure in Study II.

To obtain information about the type of harassment, participants were asked to indicate which of the seven legal grounds for discrimination (sex, transgender identity or expression, ethnicity, religion or other belief, disability, sexual orientation, or age) they perceived the harassment was related to, with multiple selections allowed.

Derogatory treatment

Experiences of derogatory treatment was measured by a survey question introduced to the participants with the following text:

> This refers to derogatory or insulting acts directed at one or more employees. Examples of such acts include withholding information, derogatory comments and exclusion. The Swedish Work Environment Authority includes other examples such as the use of derogatory nicknames, shutting out, exclusion from meetings, unfair accusations, public personal attacks, and referring to someone in offensive terms in front of others.

Participants were asked whether they had experienced derogatory treatment in connection with their work at Lund University during the past 12 months. The answer options were: "No"; "Yes, once"; and "Yes, more than once". All participants who responded "Yes, once" or "Yes, more than once" were classified as exposed to derogatory treatment, while all others were classified as not exposed. This variable was used as an exposure measure in Study II.

Mental well-being

In this thesis, a distinction is made between **mental health** and **vitality**, which are understood as two aspects of a broader concept of mental well-being, used as an umbrella term throughout the work.

The current **mental health** status of participants was assessed using the 12-item version of the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12), a widely recognised screening instrument for psychological distress, also validated in a Swedish context (125). The instrument includes twelve items, with response options on a four-point Likert scale, measuring symptoms of psychological distress, such as anxiety, depression, self-confidence, reduced coping ability, and overall mental well-being, experienced during the past few weeks.

Responses were dichotomised in accordance with the standard scoring method (0-0-1-1), generating a total score ranging from 0–12 for each individual. The mean score in the sample was 2.15, and the threshold for defining a 'case' was therefore set at ≥3, in line with existing recommendations (126). Participants who responded to fewer than eight of the twelve items were excluded (n=42). For the remaining participants, missing responses on individual items (n=105) were imputed using the mean value of the available responses. The variable was used as an outcome measure in Study I.

To assess participants' **vitality**, the vitality scale of the Short Form Health Survey (SF-36) was used (80). The SF-36 is widely used and validated instrument, including in a Swedish context (127), designed to capture health-related quality of life across eight domains, one of which is energy/fatigue measured by the vitality scale. The vitality scale consists of four items assessing experiences of energy and fatigue over the past four weeks, measured using a four-point Likert scale. The response format used in this study differed slightly from the original six-point scale, which prompted an assessment of internal consistency. Cronbach's alpha was calculated and yielded a value of 0.84, indicating good reliability.

Each item was scored on a 0 to 100 scale following the RAND-36 scoring recommendations (128), with the scoring values 0, 33, 66, or 100. Individual scores were calculated by averaging the values across the four items. Participants with missing responses on any of the four items (n=125) were excluded from the scale score calculation. Low vitality was defined as scoring in the lowest tertile of the sample distribution (≤40). The variable was used as an outcome measure in Study I.

Relational aspects of leadership

Two variables are used in this thesis capturing relational aspects of leadership: **relational justice** and **authoritarian treatment**.

To assess perceived **relational justice**, a slightly modified version of the relational justice construct developed in the Whitehall II study was used (93). The scale included the five items presented in Table 4. Internal consistency of the scale was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, yielding a value of 0.82, indicating good reliability.

Responses to each item were coded on a 0–3 scale, and mean scores were calculated for participants who answered all five items, resulting in a possible total score range of 0–15. Based on the tertile distribution in the total sample, participants were categorised as perceiving high relational justice (score 0-3) or low relational justice (score 4–15). The variable was used as an exposure measure in Study III.

Table 4 Items included in the relational justice scale, introduced by the text: Indicate how often in your work…

Item
You feel unfairly treated by your closest supervisor/manager
You get clear information from your closest supervisor/manager
You get enough information from your closest supervisor/manager
Your closest supervisor/manager is willing to listen to your problems
You receive credit for your work

Note: Answer options “Most of the time," "Some of the time," "A little bit of the time," and "None of the time

Authoritarian treatment refers to employees’ perceptions of being treated in an authoritarian or controlling manner, primarily by their superiors, and reflects a social dimension (vulnerability) of precarious employment, as defined by the Employment Precariousness Scale EPRES (98). EPRES is a Spanish-developed questionnaire designed to assess six dimensions of precarious employment and has been adapted and validated for use in a Swedish context (129). Authoritarian treatment was measured by the four items presented in Table 5. The internal consistency of the scale was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, yielding a value of 0.77, indicating acceptable reliability.

Each item was coded on a 0–3 scale. For participants who responded to all four items, the scores were summed to create a total scale score ranging from 0 to 12. Based on the tertile distribution in the total sample, participants were categorised as perceiving low authoritarian treatment (score 0–3) or high authoritarian treatment (score 4–12). This variable was used as the exposure measure in Study III.

Table 5 Items included in the authoritarian treatment scale, introduced by the text: Indicate how often in your work…

Item
You are worried about demanding better working conditions
You are worried about being fired or not having your contract extended if you don't do as your employer asks
You are treated in an authoritarian manner
You are treated in a way that makes you feel replaceable

Note: Answer options “Never”, “Rarely”, “Sometimes”, “Often”

Covariates

Gender, age, background (Swedish/foreign), professional position and type of employment were included as covariates in this thesis. The survey included two questions related to **gender**: "What gender were you assigned at birth?" (female/male) and "What is your current gender identity?" (female/male/I do not identify as male or female). Participants were classified as women, men, or non-binary based on their response to the second question. If data for this question was missing (n=15), the response to the first question was used for categorisation. **Age** was assessed by asking participants to indicate their age group from the following categories: 30 years or younger, 31–40 years, 41–49 years, 50–59 years, or 60 years or older. Foreign **background** was categorised according to the definition used by Statistics Sweden (130): participants were categorised as having a foreign background if they were born abroad or had two parents born abroad. Participants with missing information on parental country of birth were assumed to have a Swedish background if they themselves were born in Sweden (n = 5). **Professional position** was initially captured through nine categories in the survey, which were subsequently aggregated into six groups for analytical purposes: professors, senior lecturers, lecturers and researchers, PhD students, administrative and technical support staff, and others. **Type of employment** was assessed by asking participants to indicate whether their position was permanent or temporary.

Analytical approach

For study I-III, when data allowed, analyses were made stratified by gender. We decided to include data for non-binary gender participants in the descriptive statistics, as this is rarely done due to often small numbers. By including them, our data is available for future pooled studies. However, due to small numbers, this gender group was excluded from further analysis.

For all three studies, as a first step, preliminary analyses, including cross-tabulations and chi-square tests, were conducted to explore associations between variables. Possible associations between covariates and the outcome variables were further examined by bivariate regression analyses. All statistical analyses work were performed using Stata, version 13 (Study II) and 17 (Study I and III).

Study I

In Study I, the associations between two exposure variables, *experiencing sexual harassment during the last three years at Lund University* and the *type of sexual harassment* experienced (soliciting/non-soliciting/both), and two binary outcome variables related to mental well-being, *mental health* and *vitality*, were examined.

Following preliminary analyses exploring associations between variables, and bivariate regression analyses, multivariable logistic regression analyses were

conducted. Adjustments were made stepwise for potential confounders. The selection of these confounders was informed by initial bivariate logistic regression analyses, as well as by previous research identifying factors associated with both exposure to sexual harassment and also recognised as related to mental well-being. The first model adjusted for age only, as this was considered to be the most important confounding variable. In the second model, background (Swedish/foreign), type of employment, and professional position were added to obtain the fully adjusted estimates. The results were reported as odds ratios (ORs) with corresponding 95% confidence intervals.

Possible effect modification of *gender, age, background* and *academic position* on the associations between exposure to sexual harassment and mental well-being were examined using additive interaction analyses, calculated as proposed by Rothman. According to this approach, a synergy index (SI) greater than one indicates a synergistic (positive) interaction, while an SI less than one indicates an antagonistic (negative) interaction (131). Unadjusted ORs were calculated for dummy variables combining sexual harassment with gender, age (≤40 years vs 40+ years), background (foreign vs Swedish) and academic position ('high' vs 'low or other'). Academic position was defined based on participants professional positions, categorising Professors and Senior lecturers as having "high" academic positions, and all the remaining participants grouped in the "low or other" academic position category. As a sensitivity analysis, the same interaction analyses were repeated using ORs adjusted for age.

Study II

In Study II, the associations between several exposure variables; *harassment, derogatory treatment, multiple forms of harassment* and previous *experience of sexual harassment outside Lund University*, and the binary outcome variable *sexual harassment during the last 12 months at Lund University* were investigated. No assumptions were made regarding the causal direction between the variables. A similar analytical approach to that used in Study I was applied, including bivariate and multivariable logistic regression analyses, as well as additive interaction analyses following Rothman's approach.

The multivariable analyses examined the associations between each exposure variable and the outcome, adjusting for potential confounders introduced stepwise across three models (model 1 crude). The selection of potential confounders was informed by initial descriptive and bivariate analyses, along with prior research identifying factors associated with sexual harassment and considered potentially relevant to experiences of harassment and derogatory treatment.

Possible effect modification of gender on the associations between the exposure variables and the outcome sexual harassment were examined using additive interaction analyses, calculated as proposed by Rothman. Dummy variables were

created combining gender with exposure to harassment and gender with exposure to derogatory treatment, using men not exposed to either as the reference group. When data allowed (not feasible for all types of harassment due to small sample sizes), interaction analyses were also conducted by combining gender with specific types of harassment.

Study III

In Study III, the associations between two exposure variables, perceived *relational justice* (RJ) and *authoritarian treatment* (AT) and the binary outcome variable *sexual harassment during the last 12 months at Lund University* were examined.

Following preliminary analyses, exploring associations between variables, both bivariate and multivariable regression analyses were conducted using Poisson regression models with robust variances (132). This method can be used as an alternative to logistic regression, allowing for the direct estimation of prevalence ratios. The multivariable analyses adjusted for potential confounders added stepwise across two models. The selection of potential confounders was informed by the initial descriptive and bivariate analyses, as well as previous research identifying factors associated with sexual harassment and considered potentially relevant to the perception of RJ and AT in the workplace. Results are presented as prevalence ratios with 95% confidence intervals.

To facilitate interpretation of the findings, the 'margins' post-estimation command in Stata was used (133) to calculate fully adjusted predicted prevalence rates of sexual harassment across different levels of the independent variables. This approach enables comparison of predicted prevalence between groups, accounting for covariates included in the model, and provides a more intuitive understanding of group-level differences in sexual harassment exposure.

As in studies I and II, possible modification effects of *gender, age, background, type of employment* and *academic position* on the associations between the exposure variables and the outcome sexual harassment were analysed through additive interaction analyses conducted following Rothman's approach. Unadjusted ORs were calculated for dummy variables combining the RJ and AT (respectively) with gender, age (≤ 40 years vs 40+ years), background (foreign vs Swedish), type of employment (permanent vs temporary) and academic position ("high" vs "low or other") (see study I for categorisation criteria of high vs low/other). As a sensitivity analysis, the same calculations were repeated using ORs adjusted for age.

Material and methods Study IV

Study population and data collection

In Study IV, qualitative material from focus group discussions (FGDs) was used to explore how employees at Lund University perceive organisational culture and workplace norms related to sexual harassment (134). The FGDs were held in 2019 as a part of Tellus project and were led by core team members Professor Anette Agardh and Jack Palmieri, who served as moderator and co-moderator. Participants were recruited through posters, digital newsletters, and internal staff communications. All employees were welcome to participate, regardless of whether they had personal experiences of sexual harassment or not, provided they had an interest in the subject. A semi-structured guide was used to support the discussions, covering perceptions of sexual harassment, contextual factors, ways it manifests, workplace dynamics, and views on how the university should respond in the future. Although the university's definition of sexual harassment aligns with that of the Swedish Discrimination Act (135), no definition was introduced prior to the discussions. This was done intentionally to avoid influencing participants and to allow for open-ended reflections on what sexual harassment means in their context. Instead, participants were asked whether they believed sexual harassment occurred at Lund University, followed by questions about what it might look like and how it might be expressed. The guide was pilot tested with academic staff at Malmö University.

To reduce the possible impact of hierarchical structures, groups were stratified based on managerial role. Separate discussions were held for those in managerial positions and for those without such responsibilities. A total of 40 individuals participated in 10 focus groups, five with managers and five with non-managers. Participants could choose to join either Swedish- or English-language sessions. Group sizes varied from 2 to 7 members (mean = 4), and discussions lasted between 53 and 84 minutes (mean = 67 minutes). All sessions were conducted in facilities owned by the university. A summary of participant demographics is provided in Table 6.

Table 6 Focus group participant characteristics

FGD#	# Participants	#Female	#Male	Managerial responsibility	Language
1	6	2	4	Yes	Swedish
2	3	0	3	Yes	Swedish
3	4	3	1	No	Swedish
4	4	4	0	No	Swedish
5	4	2	2	No	Swedish
6	3	3	0	Yes	Swedish
7	4	1	3	Yes	English
8	2	2	0	No	Swedish
9	7	3	4	Yes	Swedish
10	4	4	0	No	Swedish

Analytical approach

The focus group data were analysed using qualitative content analysis in accordance with the approach described by Graneheim and Lundman (136). This method is well suited for exploring variations in perceptions and processes of social meaning-making, allowing for abstraction from manifest content to the identification of latent themes. All discussions were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Each transcript was read several times by all co-authors to gain familiarity with the material. Jack Palmieri identified meaning units relevant to the aim of the study and then inductively coded the material in English. These codes were subsequently grouped into sub-categories and categories through a combination of inductive and deductive reasoning, involving iterative movement between the empirical data and the emerging interpretations. In the next phase, categories were examined to development of latent sub-themes by looking for recurring patterns and engaging in conceptual interpretation. This process led to the formulation of a single overarching theme. The thematic framework was collaboratively developed, with all co-authors participating in the review of coding decisions and contributing to the refinement of the analysis.

Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations are a fundamental aspect of research, as the potential benefits must always outweigh the possible risk of harm to participants (137). The research included in this thesis involves the handling and analysis of sensitive personal data, which needs thorough ethical consideration to, for example, ensure confidentiality. In the Tellus survey, participants were asked about experiences of sexual harassment, other forms of harassment, perceptions of leadership, as well as

questions concerning ethnicity and gender, including non-binary gender identity. In addition, focus group discussions were conducted on a sensitive topic—sexual harassment in the workplace. This type of research requires ethical review and approval before data collection.

At the time I was involved in this research, the data, both the qualitative and the quantitative, had already been collected. Ethical review and approval had been provided by the Regional Ethical Review Board in Lund (Dnr 2018/350), and several ethical considerations already been made by other researchers. For example, to ensure confidentiality, anonymous data collection was used for survey data, and a deliberate decision made not to ask for information about participants faculty and institutional affiliation as this was considered likely to discourage participation. Participants in the focus groups discussions were encouraged to respect confidentiality of other participants and to avoid personal disclosures during the discussions. Also, arrangements were made in order to make sure secure storage of data. Furthermore, as sensitive topics, such as experiences of workplace sexual harassment, might trigger emotional distress in study participants, information was provided to study participants about services available should they need additional support after their participation. In addition, only researchers experienced with qualitative and quantitative research on sensitive topics conducted the data collection.

Ethical considerations are also relevant at the stage of analysing collected data. In our quantitative material, 24 individuals identified as belonging to the non-binary gender group, a group that is generally perceived as vulnerable. Non-binary gender participants are often excluded from studies due to limited sample size and is generally under-researched. In this thesis, a deliberate decision was made to include non-binary individuals in the descriptive statistics, while excluding them from further analysis due to the low number. Including their data in the descriptive overview ensures that it remains available for future pooled analyses. Before deciding to include them, confidentiality was carefully considered and deemed not to be at risk, as no information regarding faculty or institutional affiliation was available in the descriptive data.

Main results

Characteristics of the sample (Study I-III)

In total, 2,736 individuals participated in Studies I–III[1], of whom 57% were women, 42% men, and 1% identified as non-binary. No major gender differences were observed in background characteristics, except that men generally reported holding higher professional positions than women (see Table 7).

Experiences of sexual harassment (Study I-III)

Among women, 24% reported having experienced sexual harassment (SH) at some point during their employment at Lund University, 14% within the past three years and 8% within the last 12 months (Table 7). Among men, such experiences were less common, with 7% reporting SH at some point during their employment (Table 7). The highest proportion was observed among non-binary participants, of whom one in three reported experiences of SH at some point during their employment at LU (Table 7).

The most common sub-type of sexual harassment reported was non-soliciting SH exclusively in all gender groups (Table 7). Among women, it was also relatively common to have experienced non-soliciting and soliciting types of SH combined (5%).

A majority of women (61%) reported previous experiences of sexual harassment or sexual violence outside the university setting, with no restriction on when the incident had occurred. The corresponding figure among men was 16% (data not shown).

[1] In Study II, four additional participants were excluded, resulting in a final study population of 2,732. However, for the sake of simplicity, the sample characteristics presented are based on the study population used in Studies I and III

Table 7 Characteristics of the study population, including experiences of sexual harassment (SH) at Lund University (LU), by gender. University staff & PhD students at Lund university, N=2736.

	Women (n=1551)		Men (n=1161)		Non-binary (n=24)		Total (n=2736)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Age group								
≤ 30	188	12.1	144	12.4	3	12.5	335	12.2
31 – 40	373	24.1	250	21.5	11	45.8	634	23.2
41 – 49	467	30.1	300	25.8	5	20.8	772	28.2
50 – 59	365	23.5	320	27.6	2	8.3	687	25.1
≥ 60	158	10.2	147	12.7	3	12.5	308	11.3
Professional position								
Professors	81	5.2	203	17.5	2	8.3	286	10.5
Senior Lecturers	189	12.2	193	16.6	3	12.5	385	14.1
Lecturers and Researchers	243	15.7	227	19.6	5	20.8	475	17.4
PhD Student	223	14.4	170	14.6	5	20.8	398	14.6
Admin & Technical	758	48.9	334	28.8	7	29.2	1099	40.2
Other	56	3.6	33	2.8	2	8.3	91	3.3
Missing	*1*	*0.1*	*1*	*0.1*	*0*	*0*	*2*	*0.1*
Type of employment								
Permanent	1111	71.6	817	70.4	15	62.5	1943	71.0
Temporary	420	27.1	314	27.1	9	37.5	743	27.2
Missing	*20*	*1.3*	*30*	*2.6*	*0*	*0*	*50*	*1.8*
Background								
Swedish	1183	76.3	868	74.8	15	62.5	2066	75.5
Foreign	368	23.7	291	25.1	9	37.5	668	24.4
Missing	*0*	*0*	*2*	*0.2*	*0*	*0*	*2*	*0.1*
SH at LU								
Ever	376	24.2	81	7.0	8	33.3	465	17.0
Last three years	216	13.9	55	4.7	5	20.8	276	10.1
Last 12 months	119	7.7	34	2.9	3	12.5	156	5.7
SH at LU (last three years) by type								
Non-soliciting exclusively	116	7.5	32	2.8	3	12.5	151	5.2
Soliciting exclusively	22	1.4	12	1.0	0	0	34	1.2
Non-soliciting and soliciting combined	78	5.0	11	1.0	2	8.3	91	3.3

Note: Missing reported for all variables where it occurs.

Prevalence of poor mental health and low vitality (Study I)

A larger proportion of women were categorised as having poor mental health (33%) or low vitality (29%) compared to men, of whom 23% reported poor mental health and 19% low vitality (Table 8). The highest proportions of participants with poor mental health or low vitality were observed among non-binary individuals (Table 8).

Table 8 Proportion of participants categorised as having poor mental health and low vitality, by gender. University staff & PhD students at Lund university, N=2736

	Women n=1551		Men n=1161		Non-binary n=24	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Poor mental health	517	33.3	267	23.0	12	50.0
Missing	*19*	*1.2*	*23*	*2.0*	*0*	*0*
Low vitality	451	29.1	217	18.7	8	33.3
Missing	*63*	*4.1*	*60*	*5.2*	*2*	*8.3*

Experiences of harassment, derogatory treatment (Study II)

Harassment related to any one of the seven Swedish legal grounds for discrimination (gender, transgender identity, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion and ethnicity) was reported by 10% of the women and 4% of the men (Table 9). The most common grounds for harassment among both women and men were gender and age (Table 9).

As many as 19% of women and 9% of men reported experiences of derogatory treatment. Regarding exposure to single or multiple forms of harassment or derogatory treatment, 15% of all women reported experiencing one form, while 7% reported two or more forms. The corresponding figures among men were 8% and 3%, respectively. The highest proportions of reported experiences of harassment and/or derogatory treatment were found among respondents identifying as non-binary (Table 9).

The perpetrator of harassment (associated with any of the Swedish legal grounds for discrimination) or derogatory treatment was most often a man, regardless of the gender of the exposed individual. Among participants who reported experiences of harassment, 75% indicated that the perpetrator was a man, and 42% a woman (multiple responses were allowed) (Table 10). For derogatory treatment, 64% reported a male perpetrator and 48% a female perpetrator (Table 11). Furthermore, the perpetrator was most commonly another university employee in a dominant or higher position relative to the exposed individual. (see Table 12 and Table 13).

Table 9 Reported prevalence of harassment and derogatory treatment, by gender. University staff & PhD students at Lund university, N=2732.

	Women (n=1547)		**Men** (n=1161)		**Non-Binary** (n=24)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Harassment any legal ground[a]						
All forms	155	10.0	45	3.9	6	25.0
Microaggressions only	65	4.2	11	1.0	5	20.8
Isolated events only	75	4.9	31	2.7	1	4.2
Microaggressions *and* isolated events	15	1.0	3	0.3	-	-
Harassment by legal ground						
Associated with *gender*	97	6.3	16	1.4	2	8.3
Associated with *transgender identity*	1	0.1	3	0.3	5	20.8
Associated with *sexual orientation*	10	0.7	5	0.4	3	12.5
Associated with *age*	46	3.0	12	1.0	-	-
Associated with *disability*	10	0.7	4	0.3	-	-
Associated with *religion*	5	0.3	4	0.3	1	4.2
Associated with *ethnicity*	28	1.8	10	0.7	-	-
Derogatory treatment	290	18.8	108	9.3	5	20.8
Multiple forms of harassment/ derogatory treatment[b]						
Exposed o*ne* form	234	15.1	96	8.3	4	16.7
Exposed *two or more* forms	108	7.0	29	2.5	4	16.7

[a] Harassment associated with any of the Swedish legal grounds for discrimination.
[b]Summarising experiences of different types of harassment linked to the legal grounds for discrimination and derogatory treatment

Table 10 Gender of the perpetrator/perpetrators of harassment associated with any of the Swedish legal grounds for discrimination.

	Gender of participants exposed to harassment[a]							
	Women n=90		Men n=34		Non-binary n=1		All n=125	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Gender perpetrator								
Male	70	77.8	23	67.6	1	100.0	94	75.2
Female	34	37.8	18	52.9	-	-	52	41.6
Non-binary	1	1.1	1	2.9	-	-	2	1.6
Unknown gender	3	3.3	1	2.9	-	-	4	3.2

Note: Exposed persons could mark several options. The percentages are given as the percentages of 'yes' answers out of the total number of exposed persons in each gender group.
[a] Information on gender of the perpetrator was missing for all participants reporting experiences of harassment in the form of microaggressions only (81 participants), and therefore they were excluded from the total number of exposed

Table 11 Gender of the perpetrator/perpetrators of derogatory treatment

	Gender of respondents exposed to derogatory treatment							
	Women n=290		Men n=108		Non-binary n=5		All n=403	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Gender perpetrator								
Male	186	64.1	68	63.0	3	60.0	257	63.8
Female	142	49.0	51	47.2	1	20.0	194	48.1
Non-binary	2	0.7	2	1.9	-	-	4	1.0
Unknown gender	3	1.0	5	4.6	-	-	8	2.0

Note: Exposed persons could mark several options. The percentages are given as the percentages of 'yes' answers out of the total number of exposed persons in each gender group.

Table 12 Role and power position of perpetrators of harassment associated with any of the Swedish legal grounds for discrimination in relation to victim

	Gender of respondents exposed to harassment							
	Women n=155		Men n=45		Non-binary n=6		All n=206	
Perpetrator	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
University employee	**134**	**86.5**	**36**	**80.0**	**6**	**100.0**	**176**	**85.4**
Dominant/upper position	104	67.1	24	53.3	3	50.0	131	63.6
Dependent/lower position	9	5.8	7	15.6	1	16.7	17	8.3
Other person/relationship	41	26.5	15	33.3	4	66.7	60	29.1
PhD student/research student	**8**	**5.2**	**10**	**22.2**	**-**	**-**	**18**	**8.7**
Dominant/upper position	2	1.3	2	4.4	-	-	4	1.9
Dependent/lower position	1	0.7	3	6.7	-	-	4	1.9
Other person/relationship	5	3.2	7	15.6	-	-	12	5.8
Student	**14**	**9.0**	**6**	**13.3**	**1**	**16.7**	**21**	**10.2**
Other person that the exposed person met through work at the university	**21**	**13.6**	**5**	**11.1**	**-**	**-**	**26**	**12.6**

Note: Exposed persons could mark several options. The percentages are given as the percentages of 'yes' answers out of the total number of exposed persons in each gender group.

Table 13 Role and power position of perpetrators of derogatory treatment in relation to victim

	Gender of respondents exposed to derogatory treatment							
	Women n=290		Men n=108		Non-binary n=5		All n=403	
Perpetrator	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
University employee	**273**	**94.1**	**98**	**90.7**	**5**	**100.0**	**376**	**93.3**
Dominant/upper position	226	77.9	76	70.4	4	80.0	306	75.9
Dependent/lower position	15	5.2	10	9.3	1	20.0	26	6.5
Other person/relationship	56	19.3	23	21.3	2	40.0	81	20.1
PhD student/research student	**9**	**3.1**	**11**	**10.2**	**-**	**-**	**20**	**5.0**
Dominant/upper position	2	0.7	2	1.9	-	-	4	1.0
Dependent/lower position	3	1.0	2	1.9	-	-	5	1.2
Other person/relationship	5	1.7	8	7.4	-	-	13	3.0
Student	**15**	**5.2**	**11**	**10.2**	**-**	**-**	**26**	**6.5**
Other person that the exposed person met through work at the university	**24**	**8.3**	**7**	**6.5**	**-**	**-**	**31**	**7.7**

Note: Exposed persons could mark several options. The percentages are given as the percentages of 'yes' answers out of the total number of exposed persons in each gender group.

Perceptions of relational justice and authoritarian treatment (Study III)

A larger proportion of women reported perceived low relational justice (RJ) (37%) and perceived high authoritarian treatment (AT) (40%) in the workplace, compared to men, of whom 31% reported low RJ and 30% high AT (Table 14). The highest proportions of participants reporting low RJ or high AT were found among non-binary individuals.

Among women and men who perceived either low RJ or high AT (n = 1,302), 42% reported both low RJ and high AT (Figure 4).

Table 14 Perceived workplace relational justice and authoritarian treatment, by gender. University staff & PhD students at Lund university, n=2736

	Women (n=1551)		**Men (n=1161)**		**Non-binary (n=24)**		**Total (n=2736)**	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Relational justice								
High	941	60.7	766	66.0	12	50.0	1719	62.8
Low	567	36.6	355	30.6	11	45.8	933	34.1
Missing	*43*	*2.8*	*40*	*3.5*	*1*	*4.2*	*84*	*3.1*
Authoritarian treatment								
Low	890	57.4	783	67.4	8	33.3	1681	61.4
High	615	39.7	348	30.0	16	66.7	979	35.8
Missing	*46*	*3.0*	*30*	*2.6*	*0*	*0*	*76*	*2.8*

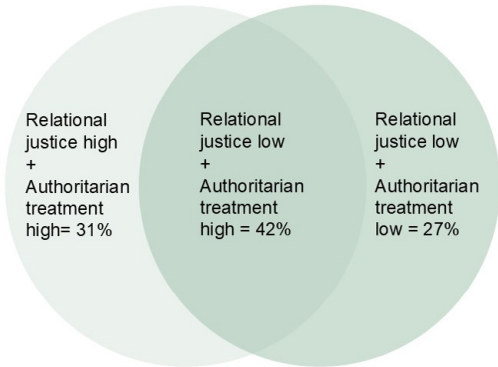

Figure 4 Venn diagram showing the proportions of participants perceiving the relational justice to be low or the authoritarian treatment to be high, or both. University staff & PhD students at Lund university, n=1,302

Association between workplace sexual harassment and mental well-being (Study I)

After adjusting for potential confounders, the multivariable logistic regression analysis revealed a significant association between experiences of sexual harassment and poor mental well-being among women, with an odds ratio (OR) of 1.5 (95% CI: 1.1–2.0) for poor mental health (PMH) and 1.8 (95% CI: 1.3–2.5) for low vitality (LV) (Table 15). Among men, a significant association was found between experiences of SH and LV, with an OR of 2.0 (95% CI: 1.1–3.9) (Table 15).

A further examination of the subtypes of SH associated with the outcome variables showed that, among women, experiences of both non-soliciting and soliciting forms of SH combined were significantly associated with PMH and LV after adjusting for potential confounders. The ORs were 2.5 (95% CI: 1.5–4.1) for PMH and 2.6 (95% CI: 1.7–4.2) for LV. Among men, only experiences of non-soliciting SH were significantly associated with LV after adjustment, with an OR of 2.5 (95% CI: 1.2–5.5).

Moderating effects

Interaction analyses examining potential effect modification by gender on the association between SH and mental well-being, suggested that women exposed to SH might be more vulnerable, compared to men, to poor mental health and low vitality. However, these findings were not stable in sensitivity analyses using ORs adjusted for age. Similarly, after sensitivity analyses using ORs adjusted for age, no indications of interaction remained between sexual harassment and any of the studied variables (age, academic position and foreign background) influencing the probability of poor mental health.

In contrast, we found indications of effect modification regarding vitality. Among women, having a foreign background appeared to increase probability of low vitality (SI 2.6) (Table 16). Among men, younger age was associated with increased vulnerability (SI 10.0), whereas having a foreign background seemed to mitigate the effect (SI 0.3). However, these findings should be interpreted with caution due to the small number of individuals exposed to both risk factors for each dummy variable (Table 16). Having a low or non-academic position appeared to increase the vulnerability to LV among both women (SI 2.1) and men (SI 5.5) (Table 16). All interaction analyses were performed unadjusted for potential confounders, but the results remained stable in sensitivity analyses using ORs adjusted for age.

Table 15 Association between exposure to sexual harassment (SH) at Lund University (LU) during the last three years and poor mental health (PMH) and low vitality (LV). Odds ratios and 95% confidence intervals presented for two different multivariable logistic regression models, by gender.

	MODEL 1[a] PMH		MODEL 2[b] PMH		MODEL 1[a] LV		MODEL 2[b] LV	
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
SH at LU last three years								
Not exposed	1.0 (ref)	1.0 (ref)	1.0 (ref)	1.0 (ref)	1.0 (ref)	1.0 (ref)	1.0 (ref)	1.0 (ref)
Exposed	1.4 (1.1-1.9)	1.4 (0.7-2.7)	1.5 (1.1-2.0)	1.6 (0.8-3.0)	1.8 (1.3-2.4)	1.8 (0.99-3.5)	1.8 (1.3-2.5)	2.0 (1.1-3.9)
Age group								
≤ 30	7.4 (4.3-12.7)	6.8 (3.2-13.7)	5.9 (3.2-11.1)	2.9 (1.2-6.8)	3.4 (2.0-5.8)	2.7 (1.4-5.3)	2.8 (1.5-5.2)	1.8 (0.8-4.1)
31 – 40	4.3 (2.6-7.2)	6.5 (3.3-12.7)	4.0 (2.3-6.9)	3.7 (1.7-8.0)	2.9 (1.8-4.8)	4.0 (2.2-7.5)	2.7 (1.6-4.5)	2.7 (1.3-5.6)
41 – 49	2.9 (1.7-4.7)	3.6 (1.8-7.1)	2.9 (1.7-4.8)	3.2 (1.5-6.6)	2.4 (1.5-3.9)	2.2 (1.2-4.1)	2.3 (1.4-3.8)	1.7 (0.9-3.4)
50 – 59	2.3 (1.4-3.9)	2.8 (1.4-5.4)	2.4 (1.4-4.1)	2.6 (1.3-5.3)	1.7 (0.9-3.2)	1.7 (0.9-3.2)	1.7 (0.99-2.8)	1.5 (0.8-2.9)
≥ 60	1.0 (ref)	1.0 (ref)	1.0 (ref)	1.0 (ref)	1.0 (ref)	1.0 (ref)	1.0 (ref)	1.0 (ref)
Background								
Swedish			1.0 (ref)	1.0 (ref)			1.0 (ref)	1.0 (ref)
Foreign			1.0 (0.7-1.3)	1.2 (0.8-1.6)			0.9 (0.7-1.1)	1.1 (0.8-1.6)
Professional position								
Professors			1.0 (ref)	1.0 (ref)			1.0 (ref)	1.0 (ref)
Senior Lecturers			1.4 (0.7-2.7)	1.1 (0.6-1.9)			0.6 (0.3-1.2)	1.6 (0.8-3.0)
Lecturers/ Researchers			1.3 (0.6-2.5)	1.8 (1.01-3.3)			0.7 (0.4-1.4)	1.9 (0.99-3.0)
PhD Student			1.4 (0.7-3.0)	2.2 (1.1-4.6)			1.0 (0.5-2.1)	1.7 (0.8-3.8)
Admin/Technical			1.2 (0.7-2.3)	1.4 (0.8-2.4)			0.8 (0.5-1.4)	1.6 (0.9-3.0)
Other			1.5 (0.6-3.4)	1.0 (0.4-3.1)			0.7 (0.3-1.5)	0.8 (0.2-3.2)
Type of employment								
Permanent			1.0 (ref)	1.0 (ref)			1.0 (ref)	1.0 (ref)
Temporary			1.2 (0.8-1.8)	1.4 (0.9-2.3)			1.1 (0.7-1.6)	1.2 (0.7-1.9)

[a] Model 1: Adjusted for age. Number of observations included in PMH model 1; women = 1,532, men =1,138. Number included in LV model 1; women=1,488, men =1,101.

[b] Model 2: Adjusted for age, background, professional position and type of employment. Number of observations included in PMH model 2; women = 1,511, men = 1,110. Number included in LV model 2; women=1,468, men =1,172.

Table 16 Interaction analyses result, combining age, background (Swedish or foreign) and academic position, respectively, with sexual harassment (SH) exposure during the last three years. Unadjusted ORs with 95% CI and synergy index (SI) presented for low vitality, by gender.

	Women			Men		
Dummy variables	n	OR (CI 95%)	**SI**	n	OR (CI 95%)	**SI**
Age + SH exposure (≤ 40 years vs 40+ years)						
Old + no SH	827	Ref category		689	Ref category	
Old + SH	107	1.8 (1.2-2.8)		38	1.0 (0.4-2.4)	
Young + no SH	440	1.6 (1.3-2.1)		360	1.9 (1.4-2.5)	
Young + SH	104	2.9 (1.9-4.4)		14	9.6 (3.2-29.1)	
			1.3			**10.0**
Background + SH exposure						
Swedish + no SH	979	Ref category		789	Ref category	
Swedish + SH	156	1.7 (1.2-2.4)		39	2.0 (1.01-4.1)	
Foreign + no SH	298	0.9 (0.7-1.2)		259	1.4 (1.01-2.0)	
Foreign + SH	55	2.6 (1.5-4.5)		13	1.4 (0.4-5.1)	
			2.6			**0.3**
Academic position + SH exposure ("high" vs "low or other")						
"High" + no SH	206	Ref category		347	Ref category	
"High" + SH	48	1.5 (0.8-3.1)		23	0.9 (0.3-3.2)	
"Low" or other + no SH	1070	1.4 (0.98-2.0)		701	1.7 (1.2-2.4)	
"Low" or other + SH	163	3.0 (1.9-4.6)		29	4.3 (2.0-9.5)	
			2.1			**5.5**

Co-occurrence of different forms of workplace harassment and derogatory treatment with workplace sexual harassment (Study II)

A crude logistic regression analysis indicated a sixfold increase in the likelihood of reporting SH among women who also reported experiences of harassment based on any of the seven legal grounds for discrimination (Table 17). This association remained significant after adjusting for age, background (Swedish/foreign), and professional position, with an adjusted OR of 6.1 (95% CI: 3.9–9.4). Similarly, women who reported experiences of derogatory treatment had a threefold increased likelihood of reporting SH compared to those who did not, with an adjusted OR of 3.2 (95% CI: 2.1–4.7) (Table 17).

The probability of reporting SH was significantly higher among women who had experienced multiple forms of harassment or derogatory treatment—defined as two or more instances related to the seven legal grounds for discrimination and/or derogatory treatment. After adjusting for age, background (Swedish or foreign), and professional position, these women were more than eight times as likely to report SH compared to women without such experiences (OR 7.5, 95% CI: 4.5–12.5) (Table 17). A similar pattern was observed among men, although with wider confidence intervals due to smaller numbers.

A clear association was also observed between prior experiences of SH or sexual violence outside the university setting (time unspecified) and SH during the past 12 months at Lund university, among both women and men. After adjusting for age, background (Swedish or foreign), and professional position, the probability was doubled among women (OR 2.3, 95% CI: 1.4–3.6) and nearly tripled among men (OR 2.8, 95% CI: 1.3–5.9) (Table 17).

Table 17 Association between harassment (linked to any of the Swedish legal grounds for discrimination), derogatory treatment, experience of sexual harassment (SH)/sexual violence outside of Lund University (LU) and SH during the last 12 months at Lund University, by gender. Odds ratios (OR) and 95% confidence intervals (CI) are presented for three logistic regression models. Model 1: crude, Model 2: adjusted for age and background (Swedish or foreign); Model 3: adjusted for age, background (Swedish or foreign) and professional position. University staff & PhD students at Lund university, women n = 1546, men n = 1158

Exposure variables	Women						Men					
	Model 1 (crude)		Model 2		Model 3		Model 1(crude)		Model 2		Model 3	
	OR	95% CI	OR	95% CI	OR	95% CI	OR	95% CI	OR	95% CI	OR	95% CI
Harassment												
Not exposed	1 (ref)		1 (ref)		1 (ref)		1 (ref)		1 (ref)		1 (ref)	
Exposed	6.4	4.2-9.8	6.3	4.1-9.7	6.1	3.9-9.4	9.0	3.8-21.3	9.7	4.0-23.4	11.0	4.4-27.3
Derogatory treatment												
Not exposed	1 (ref)		1 (ref)		1 (ref)		1 (ref)		1 (ref)		1 (ref)	
Exposed	3.3	2.3-4.9	3.3	2.2-4.9	3.2	2.1-4.7	7.7	3.8-15.7	7.6	3.7-15.6	8.2	3.9-17.0
Multiple forms of harassment[a]												
Not exposed	1 (ref)		1 (ref)		1 (ref)		1 (ref)		1 (ref)		1 (ref)	
Exposed to one form	2.9	1.8-4.6	2.9	1.8-4.6	2.8	1.8-4.5	4.9	2.1-11.4	4.9	2.1-11.5	5.2	2.1-12.0
Exposed to two or more forms	8.1	4.9-13.2	7.8	4.7-13.0	7.5	4.5-12.5	17.0	6.5-44.5	17.7	6.6-47.6	20.5	7.4-57.0
SH/sexual violence Outside LU at any time												
Not exposed	1 (ref)		1 (ref)		1 (ref)		1 (ref)		1 (ref)		1 (ref)	
Exposed	2.4	1.6-3.8	2.3	1.5-3.6	2.3	1.4-3.6	2.6	1.3-5.5	2.6	1.3-5.5	2.8	1.3-5.9

[a]Summarising experiences of different types of harassment linked to the legal grounds for discrimination and derogatory treatment

Moderating effects

Interaction analyses indicated a moderate synergistic effect of female gender on the association between harassment and reported experiences of SH, with a synergy index (SI) of 1.53 (Table 18). A similar analysis combining gender and exposure to derogatory treatment did not reveal any interaction with respect to SH (Table 18). Additional interaction analyses were conducted by combining gender with specific types of harassment, limited to age, gender, and disability due to small sample sizes. but no evidence of effect modification on SH was observed in these analyses.

Table 18 Interaction between gender and harassment (linked to any of the Swedish legal grounds for discrimination), and gender and derogatory treatment, regarding sexual harassment at Lund University.

Dummy variables	n	n SH	% SH	OR	95% CI	SI
Gender and harassment						
Man not exposed harassment	1116	26	2.3%	ref		
Man exposed harassment	45	8	17.8%	9.06	3.8–21.4	
Woman not exposed harassment	1392	77	5.5%	2.45	1.6–3.9	
Woman exposed harassment	155	42	27.1%	15.58	9.2–26.4	
						1.53
Gender and derogatory treatment						
Man not exposed derogatory treatment	1053	20	1.9%	ref		
Man exposed derogatory treatment	108	14	13.0%	7.69	3.8–15.7	
Woman not exposed derogatory treatment	1257	71	5.7%	3.09	1.9–5.1	
Woman exposed derogatory treatment	290	48	16.6%	10.24	6.0–17.6	
						1.0

Note: n=number, OR=odds ratio, SI=synergy index, CI=confidence interval. All harassment and SH took place at LU during the last 12 month

Association between employees' perceptions of workplace justice climate factors and workplace sexual harassment (Study III).

The multivariable regression analysis, adjusting for potential confounders (age, background (Swedish or foreign), professional position and type of employment),

showed that the prevalence ratio (PR) of SH was statistically significantly higher among participants who perceived the relational justice (RJ) to be low, with a PR of 1.8 (95% CI: 1.3-2.6) among women and PR 2.2 (95% CI: 1.01-4.6) among men (Table 19). A similar pattern was seen among participants who perceived high authoritarian treatment (AT), with a PR of 2.0 (95% CI: 1.4-2.9) among women and PR 3.4 (95% CI: 1.7-6.9) among men (Table 19).

Table 19 Adjusted prevalence ratios (PR) for sexual harassment during the last 12 months at Lund University, in relation to perceived workplace relational justice and authoritarian treatment, by gender. University staff & PhD students at Lund University, n=2736

	Women			Men		
		Model 1[a]	**Model 2[b]**		**Model 1[a]**	**Model 2[b]**
	Cases/ exposed	PR (95% CI)	PR (95% CI)	Cases/ exposed	PR (95% CI)	PR (95% CI)
Relational justice						
High	57/941	1.0 (ref)	1.0 (ref)	16/766	1.0 (ref)	1.0 (ref)
Low	60/567	1.8 (1.3-2.5)	1.8 (1.3-2.6)	15/355	2.0 (0.98-4.1)	2.2 (1.01-4.6)
Authoritarian treatment						
High	66/615	1.9 (1.3-2.8)	2.0 (1.4-2.9)	18/348	2.7 (1.4-5.4)	3.4 (1.7-6.9)
Low	47/890	1.0 (ref)	1.0 (ref)	15/783	1.0 (ref)	1.0 (ref)

[a] Model 1: Adjusted for age
[b] Model 2: Adjusted for age, background, professional position and type of employment

Estimated prevalence of sexual harassment by levels of relational justice and authoritarian treatment

The predicted adjusted prevalence of SH by levels of RJ and AT for women were as follows; low RJ 10.9% SH (95% CI: 8.2–13.5), and high RJ 5.9% SH (95% CI: 4.4–7.4), high AT 10.6% SH (95% CI: 8.1–12.0), low AT 5.3% SH (95% CI: 3.8–6.8). The corresponding results for men were; low RJ 4.0% SH (95% CI: 1.9–6.2), high RJ 1.9% SH (95% CI: 0.9–2.9), high AT 5.3% SH (95% CI: 2.9–7.7), low AT 1.6% SH (95% CI: 0.7–2.4) (Figure 5).

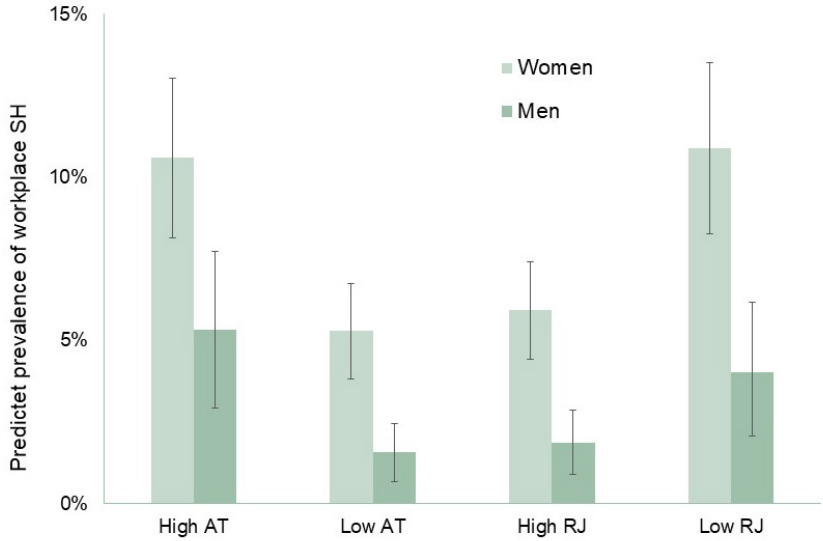

Figure 5 Estimated prevalence of workplace SH experienced during the last 12 months by gender and perceived authoritarianism (AT) and relational justice (RJ). Differences are statistically significant at the 5% level.

Moderating effects

Interaction analysis results indicated that women perceiving low RJ or high AT had a higher probability of SH compared to men with the same perceptions (SI 1.5 (RJ) and 1.4 (AT)) (Table 20). Similarly, participants with a foreign background who perceived low RJ or high AT had an increased probability of SH compared to those with a Swedish background reporting the same perceptions (SI values 2.1 (RJ) and 3.0 (AT)) (Table 20).

Furthermore, indications of antagonistic interaction were observed between RJ and academic position: participants in lower or non-academic positions who perceived low RJ had a lower probability of SH compared to those in high academic positions with the same perception (SI 0.5) (Table 20). A similar pattern was found for type of employment, where participants in temporary positions perceiving low RJ had a lower probability of SH compared to those with permanent employment (SI= 0.2) (Table 20).

Finally, a synergistic interaction was identified between AT and type of employment, though this finding was not robust in the sensitivity analysis. All other interaction results remained stable in sensitivity analyses using odds ratios adjusted for age.

Table 20 Interaction result, combining background characteristics with the perception of relational justice and authoritarian treatment. Unadjusted odds ratios (OR) with 95% confidence interval (CI) presented for the outcome sexual harassment (SH) during the last 12 months and the synergy index (SI) result. University staff & PhD students at Lund university, n=2736.

Relational justice				Authoritarian treatment			
	SH Yes/no	OR (CI 95%)	SI		SH Yes/no	OR (CI 95%)	SI
Gender							
Man + RJH	16/750	1 (ref)		Man + ATL	15/768	1 (ref)	
Man + RJL	15/340	2.07 (1.01-4.2)		Man + ATH	18/330	2.79 (1.4-5.6)	
Woman+ RJH	57/884	3.02 (1.7-5.3)		Woman + ATL	47/843	2.85 (1.6-5.2)	
Woman + RJL	60/507	5.55 (3.2-9.7)		Woman + ATH	66/549	6.16 (3.5-10.9)	
			1.5				**1.4**
Age							
Old + RJH	37/1062	1 (ref)		Old + ATL	35/1100	1 (ref)	
Old + RJL	44/558	2.26 (1.4-3.6)		Old + ATH	43/528	2.56 (1.6-4.1)	
Young + RJH	36/572	1.81 (1.1-2.9)		Young +ATL	27/511	1.66 (0.99-2.8)	
Young + RJL	31/289	3.08 (1.9-5.1)		Young + ATH	41/351	3.67 (2.3-5.9)	
			1.0				**1.2**
Background							
Swe + RJH	54/1218	1 (ref)		Swe + ATL	53/1255	1 (ref)	
Swe + RJL	53/664	1.80 (1.2-2.7)		Swe + ATH	54/632	2.02 (1.4-3.0)	
Foreign + RJH	19/415	1.03 (1.03-1.8)		Foreign + ATL	9/355	0.60 (0.3-1.2)	
Foreign + RJL	22/183	2.71 (1.6-4.6)		Foreign + ATH	30/247	2.9 (1.8-4.6)	
			2.1				**3.0**
Academic position							
“High” + RJH	17/395	1 (ref)		“High” + ATL	21/428	1 (ref)	
“High” + RJL	23/207	2.58 (1.3-4.9)		“High” +ATH	18/176	2.08 (1.1-4.0)	
“Low” + RJH	56/1238	1.05 (0.6-1.8)		“Low” + ATL	41/1183	0.71 (0.4-1.2)	
“Low” + RJL	52/639	1.89 (1.08-3.3)		“Low” + ATH	66/701	1.92 (1.2-3.2)	
			0.5				**1.1**
Type of employment							
Perm + RJH	52/1178	1 (ref)		Perm + ATL	48/1214	1 (ref)	
Perm + RJL	51/603	1.92 (1.3-2.9)		Perm + ATH	51/573	2.25 (1.5-3.4)	
Temp + RJH	20/437	1.04 (0.6-1.8)		Temp + ATL	12/373	0.81 (0.4-1.5)	
Temp + RJL	23/241	1.16 (1.3-3.6)		Temp + ATH	33/308	2.71 (1.7-4.3)	
			0.2				**1.6**

Note: RJH= Relational justice high, RJL= Relational justice low, ATH=Authoritarian treatment high, ATL=Authoritarian treatment low.

Employee's perceptions of culture and norms surrounding sexual harassment at the workplace (Study IV)

The qualitative content analysis of the focus group discussions resulted in one overarching theme, four sub-themes and eight categories, capturing how employees at Lund University perceive the organisational culture and workplace norms surrounding sexual harassment (Figure 6). The overarching theme – *Perceiving sexual harassment through the lens of organisational silence, power relations, and negotiated boundaries* – is supported by four sub-themes and eight categories. The sub-themes are: (1) Negotiating collective norms and meanings, (2) Navigating power relations and organisational management, (3) Facing a culture of silence and normalisation, and (4) Offering peer support for collective action. Each sub-theme is constructed from categories that reflect how harassment is not merely an issue of individual behaviour, but one that is deeply embedded in organisational climate, power structures, and everyday interactions.

Overarching theme: Perceiving sexual harassment through the lens of organisational silence, power relations, and negotiated boundaries

The overarching theme reflects how participants understood sexual harassment not simply as individual acts of misconduct, but as a phenomenon deeply embedded in the fabric of university life, shaped by institutional culture, informal norms, and relational hierarchies. Perceptions of what constitutes sexual harassment were contingent, evolving through peer interactions, managerial responses, and broader societal developments such as the #MeToo movement. The boundaries of what was considered sexual harassment appeared gendered and negotiable. Women frequently sought peer confirmation to validate their experiences, experiences male participants at times perceived as non-problematic. Formal and informal hierarchies reinforced this ambiguity: senior researchers with grant-generating prestige were seen as "untouchable", and managers expressed uncertainty about how to act in the absence of formal reports or clear procedural guidelines. Silence emerged as a strategic response aimed at protecting careers and collegial relationships. This, in turn, contributed to the normalisation of borderline behaviours through humour, minimisation, or rationalisation. Nevertheless, participants also described discreet acts of peer solidarity, such as staying with vulnerable colleagues after meetings or subtly redirecting collaborations, that reflected a sense of shared responsibility in contexts where institutional support was perceived as insufficient or absent.

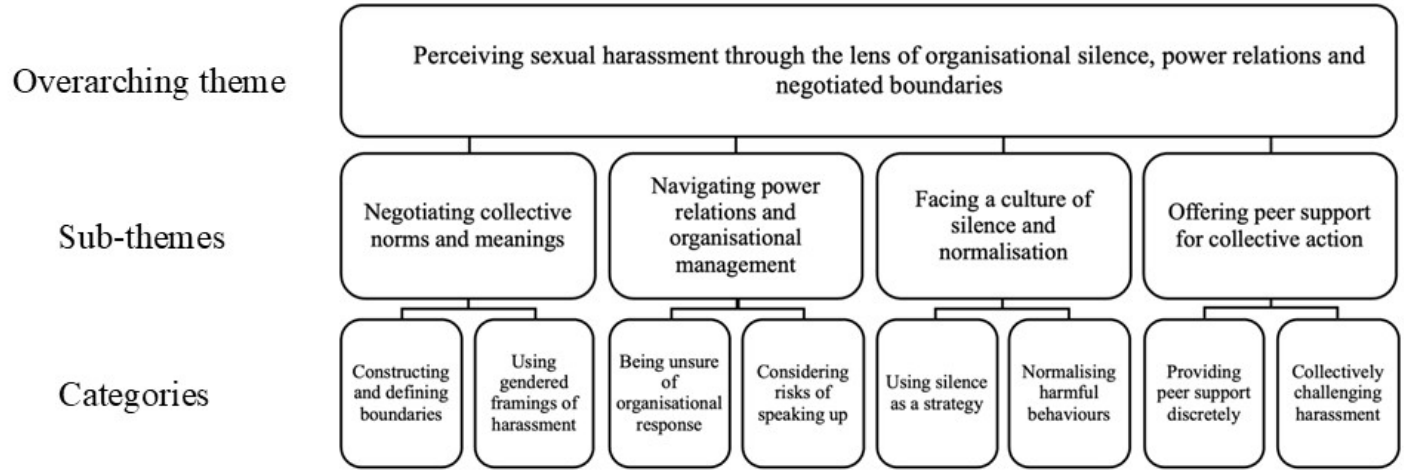

Figure 6 Overview of the main findings of study IV: overarching theme, sub-themes and categories

Sub-theme: Negotiating collective norms and meanings

This sub-theme is supported by two categories: *Constructing and defining boundaries* and *Using gendered framings of harassment*. It captures how participants collectively shaped, challenged, and reinforced understandings of sexual harassment. Participants noted that definitions of what constitutes workplace sexual harassment in their specific context were lacking and expressed difficulties in establishing clear definitions and shared understandings.

> *"And that the question might also be asked… 'what could it be?', to students and staff. So that there is something to start from. That way it becomes easier to identify if something like that were to happen. Or to know how not to behave in a certain situation. Or to create a tool that makes it easier for someone who is unsure to ask, 'is what I'm doing now sexual harassment?' To create some kind of tool that allows one to even ask the question, 'do you feel uncomfortable when I do this?' or 'does this feel weird?' or 'how do you experience this now?' Because those tools are missing, at least that's my experience." (FGD 1, F)*

Gender differences became apparent in the discussions, particularly in how behaviours were interpreted and what consequences were expected to follow. At times, participants struggled to understand each other's lived experiences and the perceived impact of certain behaviours. Female participants reflected over behaviours and language used by male colleagues that had made them feel uncomfortable, but where the male colleague had not at all understood the seriousness and consequences of their words.

> *"…he said, about her, something like 'she's damn hot, but with an ass like that maybe she shouldn't be wearing that skirt'. He said it because he thought we had that kind of relationship, God knows why, but she didn't hear it, so it didn't affect her directly. At the time, I just told him I didn't appreciate that kind of comment, but I didn't do anything more. But it was such a strange… A strange thing to say, and what was so frightening was the ease with which he said it, as if he might just as well have said 'the meatballs were good at lunch'." (FGD 4, F).*

These challenges contributed to a broader problem: the absence of a common understanding and language to discuss sexual harassment within the university setting.

Sub-theme: Navigating power relations and organisational management

This sub-theme is supported by two categories: *Being unsure of organisational response* and *Considering risks of speaking up*. It captures how employees perceive uncertainty surrounding organisational structures and leadership responses to sexual harassment. Participants described a lack of clarity about what would happen if they reported an incident, expressing concerns that responses might be arbitrary,

inconsistent, or heavily influenced by the individual competencies of managers and informal power dynamics.

> *"We're entirely dependent on the head of department. And if you're unlucky, that's it. There's no system that lets you go above someone." (FGD 5, F)*

Questions of fairness and transparency were raised. Managers, too, expressed uncertainty about their roles and responsibilities, discussing the challenge of balancing rule-following with providing support. A perceived limitation appeared in their ability to act unless a formal report had been made.

> *M6: "At the same time, it's important to report."*
>
> *F1: "Yes, absolutely."*
>
> *M6: "As a manager and leader, it becomes incredibly difficult if no one dares to come forward. You hear rumours, and there's whispering and secrecy and so on… but if no one can give a concrete example and dare to say, "my experience" or "I know," then it's simply not possible to address it properly either. I think there's a large dark figure. I think there's a huge dark figure." (FGD 1)*

Across focus group discussions, a sense of risk emerged, with participants fearing both social and career-related consequences for speaking up. Concerns ranged from being excluded from opportunities to long-term impacts on career advancement.

Sub-theme: Facing a culture of silence and normalisation

This sub-theme is supported by two categories: *Using silence as a strategy* and *Normalising harmful behaviours.* This sub-theme captures participants perceptions of a prevailing culture of silence and a perceived normalisation of sexual harassment behaviours in the work context. Silence was not framed as mere passivity but rather as a deliberate strategy shaped by feelings of fear of repercussions, hierarchical dependencies, and a perceived pointlessness in reporting.

> *"As a PhD student, you don't report the guy supervising your thesis. Even if something happens. You just try to get through it, because you're dependent on them for everything, your career, your funding, your future." (FGD 9, F)*

Participants described how inappropriate conduct becomes normalised through everyday interactions, such as humour and informal exchanges, as well as through institutional inaction. Behaviours like sexist jokes, boundary-crossing, and dismissive comments were often trivialised or explained away as cultural misunderstandings, generational differences, or unintentional missteps.

"…it was again one of those senior men who thinks he's in love and can't manage a private relationship at work… they're not vile in the same way, just old men being silly." (FGD 6, F)

"What we perceive as… let's just call it harassment in general, has a lot of different levels. Depending on your culture, where you came from, your background… a myriad of things." (FGD7, F)

"I don't think it's always intentional, like it's not as if someone planned to do something inappropriate." (FGD 1, M)

Together, these dynamics foster an organisational culture in which speaking out is perceived discouraged and misconduct goes unrecognised and unchallenged.

Sub-theme: Offering peer support for collective action

This sub-theme is supported by two categories: *Providing peer support discreetly* and *Collectively challenging harassment*. It captures how participants expressed a sense of resistance to the prevailing structures and silence surrounding sexual harassment at the university. Some participants described efforts to support one another, often discreetly and through informal channels. Colleagues were perceived as the most trustworthy individuals to confide in when seeking validation of their experiences, and peer support was regarded as crucial.

"Luckily, I had other male colleagues I could tell about this, and they helped me navigate things in the research context, without it getting difficult. Like, I could say, 'I'm not comfortable, could you handle this conversation?' or 'this has happened, so you should know that our collaboration isn't working anymore', and so on…" (FGD10, F)

A shared sense of accountability for the collective work environment also emerged. Participants expressed that if they chose not to report inappropriate behaviour, they felt complicit in exposing others to similar forms of harassment in the future.

F2 "(...) by not reporting, by not reacting, you're exposing others to it. You have to weigh that, 'Is this about me, or about the person doing this?' You're responsible for others too."

M3 "There are informal channels,"

K2 "But not doing anything still means you're taking on responsibility for what might happen to someone else." (FGD 5)

Discussion

In this Discussion section I will begin by briefly summarising the main findings and contributions to the field, followed by a more detailed discussion structured around central findings, methodological considerations and finally present my thoughts on what implications this thesis has for policy, practice and research.

Main findings

Study I: Results showed that experiences of workplace sexual harassment were associated with poor mental health and low vitality among women, and with low vitality among men. Further analysis by type of sexual harassment revealed that, for women, experiencing both non-soliciting and soliciting behaviours was associated with poor mental health and low vitality. Among men, only non-soliciting sexual harassment behaviours were significantly associated with low vitality. Interaction analyses did not indicate any modifying effects of sociodemographic factors on the association between sexual harassment and mental health. However, among men, younger age appeared to increase the probability for low vitality, while having a foreign background seemed to buffer this effect, although low numbers in the combined exposure groups limit the certainty of this result. Among women, foreign background was associated with an increased probability of low vitality. Additionally, having a low or non-academic position appeared to increase the likelihood of low vitality for both women and men.

Study II: Results showed that women who had experienced other forms of identity-based workplace harassment (attributed to sex, transgender identity or expression, ethnicity, religion or other belief, disability, sexual orientation or age) had a sixfold increased likelihood of also reporting workplace sexual harassment. Similarly, women who reported experiences of workplace derogatory treatment had a threefold higher probability of also reporting sexual harassment. These findings indicate a clear co-occurrence between sexual harassment and other types of workplace mistreatment. A similar pattern was observed among men, although the confidence intervals were wider, most likely due to the overall lower prevalence of reported mistreatment in this group.

Study III: Results showed that the prevalence of sexual harassment was significantly higher among both women and men who perceived the relational justice to be low. A similar pattern was observed for perceived high authoritarian treatment. Interaction analyses indicated that women and participants with a foreign background who perceived the relational justice to be low or authoritarian treatment to be high had a higher probability of experiencing sexual harassment compared to their male or Swedish-background counterparts. Participants with low or non-academic positions who perceived the relational justice to be low had a lower probability of sexual harassment compared to those in high academic positions.

Study IV: The Qualitative content analysis of focus group discussions resulted in formulation of the following overarching theme: *Perceiving sexual harassment through the lens of organisational silence, power relations, and negotiated boundaries*. The theme reflects participants perceptions of workplace sexual harassment not being an isolated misconduct, but embedded in university culture, shaped by norms, hierarchies, and silence. Perceptions of what constitutes sexual harassment varied and appeared gendered, women often sought peer confirmation, while male colleagues sometimes downplayed the same behaviours. Ambiguity was reinforced by power dynamics and managerial uncertainty in the absence of clear definitions, procedures or formal complaints. Silence emerged as a strategy to protect careers, contributing to the normalisation of inappropriate conduct. Still, subtle acts of peer solidarity reflected a sense of shared responsibility in the face of weak institutional support.

Contribution to the field

This thesis makes several contributions to the research field on workplace sexual harassment in an academic setting. Study I adds novel insights by examining the association between sexual harassment and vitality, a mental well-being outcome that to our knowledge has not been examined in relation to sexual harassment previously. The findings suggest that low vitality may be a negative consequence of workplace sexual harassment among both women and men. Additionally, this study distinguishes between soliciting and non-soliciting forms of harassment, indicating that men primarily react to non-soliciting behaviours, while women are affected by both types in combination.

Study II contributes with analyses of co-occurrence of sexual harassment with identity-based harassment and derogatory treatment. This responds to calls within the literature to examine sexual harassment within the broader landscape of workplace mistreatment. The result shows clearly that workplace sexual harassment is not an isolated phenomenon but rather exists in a larger context of mistreatment, mainly affecting women. Study III provides novel findings on how individual

perceptions of managerial treatment, specifically relational justice and authoritarian treatment, are associated with the likelihood of experiencing sexual harassment. These results advance our understanding of climate-related possible risk factors that may contribute to or shape organisational environments in ways that facilitate or prevent sexual harassment. Moreover, Study IV brings a unique contextual perspective by exploring employees' perceptions of culture and norms related to sexual harassment at a large Swedish university. These qualitative insights deepen our understanding of how organisational contexts influence how sexual harassment is perceived, discussed, and responded to in a Swedish academic setting. In addition, by including non-binary employees in the descriptive data, this thesis contributes to a more comprehensive picture of a group that remains under-researched in the context of workplace sexual harassment.

Gendered patterns in mental well-being consequences of workplace sexual harassment

As hypothesised, the result from Study I, indicates that exposure to workplace sexual harassment is a significant risk factor for reduced mental well-being, primarily among female, but also among male university employees. Sexual harassment was statistically significantly associated with poor mental health and low vitality among female employees. Among men, experiences of sexual harassment were statistically significantly associated with low vitality.

It is well established in the literature that poor mental health is a possible consequence of workplace sexual harassment (17, 21). A recent systematic review summarizing findings of prospective associations of workplace sexual violence and harassment and health outcomes, available mainly from USA and northern Europe, conclude that the evidence of work-related sexual violence and harassment as a risk factor for subsequent poor mental health is consistent (36). The studies included in the review examined a range of mental health outcomes, assessed through self-reported measures or register-based data. These outcomes included depressive symptoms, psychological distress, self-harming behaviours (including suicide attempts), utilisation of mental health services following exposure to sexual harassment, and use of psychotropic medications. Two Norwegian longitudinal studies found a statistically significant prospective association between exposure to workplace sexual harassment and subsequent development of psychological distress (72, 138). Both studies used the Hopkins Symptoms Checklist for measuring psychological distress, a validated screening tool designed to detect symptoms of anxiety and depression, while sexual harassment was measured using the self-labelling and list-based method respectively. In the one study using the list-based method a significant association was found only among women (72), while the other

study, using the self-labelling method found possibly stronger association in men than women (138). A suggested explanation for this difference is the choice of sexual harassment measurement used, where the self-labelling method captures experiences influenced by the individuals subjective understanding of the phenomenon. This method only captures a fraction of behaviours that could be perceived as harassing (23, 25), and is problematic as sexual harassment behaviours does not need to be labelled sexual harassment to be harmful (17). As a result, using the self-labelling method may also underestimate its negative effects, particularly for women. Results from Study I in this thesis show significant association between sexual harassment and poor mental health only among women, like the Norwegian study also using a list-based method for measuring sexual harassment. More research is needed to resolve the question whether men and women respond differently to sexual harassment in terms of mental health outcomes.

However, in Study I, workplace sexual harassment was found to be associated with low vitality in both women and men. To our knowledge, the relationship between sexual harassment and vitality (referring to the individual's subjective experience of energy and fatigue) has not been examined previously. Vitality has been linked to important work-related outcomes such as creativity and innovative behaviour (82), which are particularly valuable in academic settings where the production of new knowledge and ideas is central to innovation and societal advancement. Given that our results suggest sexual harassment as a potential risk factor for low vitality, it is plausible that reducing such behaviours in the workplace may contribute to improved creativity and innovation among staff, ultimately enhancing the quality of research and education. As the current analysis is based on cross-sectional data, future longitudinal research is needed to examine possible long-term consequences of this relationship.

Moreover, in Study I, it was possible to distinguish between two subtypes of sexual harassment: non-soliciting and soliciting behaviours. Non-soliciting sexual harassment reflects a broader workplace climate marked by inappropriate or hostile attitudes, while soliciting behaviours involve more explicit attempts to initiate a sexual interaction between individuals (61). The findings suggest that men are primarily affected by non-soliciting forms of sexual harassment, whereas soliciting behaviours appear to have a comparatively lesser impact on this group. This aligns with other studies that differentiate between ambient sexual harassment, indicative of a hostile work environment, and direct sexual harassment, which involves targeted sexual advances (42). For example, in a survey among university staff, Berdahl et al. found striking gender differences in how these experiences were perceived: while the majority of women viewed direct sexual harassment negatively, men were more likely to respond positively. In contrast, ambient harassment was viewed negatively by both genders (42). These findings echo the pattern observed in our study, where men primarily reported non-soliciting sexual

harassment, and this subtype was the only one significantly associated with any negative outcomes among men, specifically, low vitality.

Among women, experiences of non-soliciting sexual harassment were associated with both poor mental health and low vitality when combined with experiences of soliciting harassment. It has been suggested that women may perceive sexual harassment as more threatening than men due to gender-based power differences that limit women's control over the situation and their options for responding (42, 43). This may help explain why men are less likely to perceive direct sexual harassment as threatening and may experience fewer mental well-being consequences as a result. These findings highlight the complexity of sexual harassment experiences and suggest that their impact on mental well-being may vary by gender and type. However, this findings regarding gender differences in harassment subtypes and mental well-being outcomes should be interpreted with caution, given the relatively small number of men reporting both sexual harassment and poor mental well-being. More research is needed to explore the gendered impact of different types of sexual harassment.

Although the interaction analysis did not confirm the hypothesis that women would be more vulnerable to negative mental well-being outcomes following exposure to sexual harassment compared to men, gender-stratified analyses still suggest differences. Among men, only the association between sexual harassment and low vitality reached statistical significance, while for women, sexual harassment was significantly associated with both low vitality and poor mental health. Additionally, the overall prevalence of sexual harassment exposure in the last three years was significantly higher among women (14%) than among men (5%), suggesting greater cumulative risk for adverse outcomes among women.

Indications of age, background and academic positions moderating individual harm

Interaction analysis results from Study I indicated that younger men may be at greater risk of negative mental well-being outcomes following exposure to workplace sexual harassment compared to their older counterparts. One possible explanation is that younger individuals may perceive and respond to such experiences differently, potentially due to generational shifts in awareness and understanding of what constitutes sexual harassment. Younger workers in general may also have less knowledge about their rights in the workplace, and more limited resources in terms of for example networks compared to older making them more vulnerable. However, this finding is based on a relatively small number of younger men who reported exposure, and should therefore be interpreted with caution.

Further research using larger, prospective study designs is needed to confirm and clarify this potential age-related vulnerability.

Study I also revealed indications that women with a foreign background may be more vulnerable to negative mental well-being outcomes following exposure to sexual harassment than women with a Swedish background. This aligns with research suggesting that minority groups may face additional stressors, such as racism, discrimination, or lack of social support, which can exacerbate the psychological effects of sexual harassment (26, 66). Furthermore, having a lower academic or professional position, compared to holding a higher academic rank, appears to intensify the negative impact of sexual harassment for both women and men. The academic workplace has distinct features, including complex formal and informal power structures shaped by professional rank, teacher–student relationships, career progression, and access to informal networks. Our results suggest that employees in less powerful positions may be more adversely affected by sexual harassment. Interestingly, this interaction effect appeared stronger among men than among women. Considering that women in leadership positions face higher risk of sexual harassment (63, 106), our findings indicate that women may derive less protective benefit from occupying a high academic position compared to men. In other words, women might benefit less from a high academic position compared to men, for example, when exposed to sexual harassment experiences.

The tip of an iceberg

As hypothesised, findings from Study II demonstrate that workplace sexual harassment frequently co-occurs with other forms of mistreatment among employees at Lund University. Women who reported experiencing identity-based harassment, most commonly attributed to gender or age, had a sixfold higher probability of also reporting sexual harassment. Similarly, women who had experienced derogatory treatment, were three times more likely to report sexual harassment. The highest probability of sexual harassment, eight times higher, was found among women who reported exposure to multiple forms of mistreatment. A similar pattern was observed among men, although their overall reported prevalence of mistreatment was lower. Moreover, a moderate synergistic effect of gender was observed: women with experiences of other forms of harassment had a higher likelihood than men with similar experiences of also reporting sexual harassment.

These results echo previous research, for example by Lim and Cortina, who identified a strong co-occurrence between sexual harassment and workplace incivility (48). Such findings support the conceptualisation of sexual harassment as one aspect of a broader pattern of workplace mistreatment. Borrowing from Cortina's iceberg metaphor (10), the behaviours captured in this thesis, limited to

unwanted behaviours with a perceived sexual connotation, can be viewed as the "tip" of the problem. Beneath the surface lies a broader foundation of gendered and identity-based mistreatment. This differentiation warrants consideration. If other forms of harassment and derogatory treatment are excluded when measuring sexual harassment, the broader problem of workplace mistreatment, disproportionately affecting women and marginalised groups, is likely to be systematically underestimated (30). At the same time, subsuming diverse forms of mistreatment under the umbrella term "sexual harassment" may be conceptually problematic. As noted by North American scholars, the term "sexual harassment" can be misleading, as it may imply that the behaviour is motivated by sexual desire rather than functioning as an expression of power and dominance, a view not supported by the prevailing literature (31). Although efforts to develop measurement tools that encompass both sexual and gender harassment have been initiated in the European context (53), this seems to remain an area in need of further conceptual and methodological development.

The result from Study II also indicate that power relations play a role in situations of harassment and derogatory treatment, as most of the victims reported that the perpetrators were in a dominant/higher position in relation to themselves. Previous results from the Tellus survey published in another paper showed a similar pattern regarding sexual harassment, where a majority of the perpetrators of sexual harassment were in a dominant/higher position in relation to the victim (62). This result supports the theory that sexual harassment and other types of harassment may be driven by the need to defend or reinforce one's power position (31). In this light, the identification of sexual harassment at the workplace can be an indicator of a larger problem, i.e., the existence of an unequal organisational culture where multiple types of abusive behaviours rooted in power imbalance and the defence of power contribute to unequal opportunities among employees. A problem in need of structural level change rather than merely handling individual incidents. This will be further discussed below.

Action for shared understandings and respectful treatment as a way forward

Findings from Study IV reveal that employees, including those in managerial positions, lack a shared understanding of what constitutes workplace sexual harassment. Boundaries were perceived as negotiable and situational, often shaped by peer interactions, managerial responses, and broader societal influences. Participants described challenges in defining ambiguous behaviours, situations that generated discomfort but were frequently trivialised, rationalised, or dismissed. Participants asked for definitions and a shared language to talk about workplace

sexual harassment, particularly in relation to non-physical behaviours, seemed to be missing. This absence of common understanding, especially when combined with unequal power dynamics and hierarchical structures, contributes to an organisational silence and a normalisation of problematic behaviours. Such normalisation not only discourages reporting but also allows inappropriate conduct to persist unchallenged. These findings echo those of Hagerlid et al., who conducted qualitative interviews and focus group discussions with students across five European countries, including Sweden (114). In their study they identified several key barriers to recognising sexual harassment: preconceived notions about what constitutes harassment that do not necessarily align with lived experiences; blurred boundaries between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour; and competing interpretations of what actually occurred (114). Recognition is a prerequisite for identifying and reporting incidents, making it an important aspect of addressing sexual harassment. However, placing too much emphasis on reporting may be counterproductive, as it risks shifting focus away from the structural changes needed to address the deeper inequalities embedded in the workplace, thereby preserving the root causes of the problem. As noted by Carstensen (16), definitions of sexual harassment typically emphasise the notion of unwanted behaviours, and it is widely accepted that the victim should determine whether a behaviour is perceived as unwanted. However, for an organisational response to be triggered, the employer must ultimately agree with the victim's assessment. When these perceptions diverge, the likelihood of any formal action being taken diminishes, leaving the individual affected in a difficult position. As a result, only a subset of problematic behaviours, those that clearly align with institutional definitions, are likely to be reported and addressed (16). This creates a problematic dynamic. Ambiguous or "borderline" behaviours often remain unattended and unchallenged, hidden beneath the surface of formal reporting systems. These behaviours, while seemingly less problematic, may contribute to a permissive climate that leave more severe forms of gender and sexual harassment unchallenged. Cortina and Areguin (10) argue that subtle insults or microaggressions help normalize hostility toward marginalised genders and foster organisational climates that are permissive of escalating harassment and gender-based violence, highlighting the importance of addressing such behaviours at an early stage. Left unaddressed, they become embedded in organisational structures and culture, reinforcing silence and maintaining the conditions under which harassment can persist.

In a way this mechanism was also observed in Study IV; managers expressed uncertainty regarding their mandate to act without formal complaints, leaving them inactive. This is notable as legislation mandates proactive responsibility (27). This mismatch between legal obligation and perceived responsibility contributes to inaction, reinforcing silence and preserve unjust structures, while placing the burden on victims to report incidents that are ambiguous and not considered harmful enough to sanction.

Employees in Study IV described difficulty navigating behaviours perceived as inappropriate but not clearly sanctionable. These ambiguous acts, occupying what Taylor (139) terms the "yellow zone," generate discomfort and at the same remain plausibly deniable and rarely trigger formal responses. Despite their subtlety, such behaviours can have significant psychological consequences. This is supported by Sojo et al.'s meta-analysis, which showed that frequent, low-intensity gender harassment is associated with increased anxiety, depression, and reduced job satisfaction (76). Importantly, such harm is not limited to women; research on ambient harassment shows that men too are negatively affected by these climates (140), also supported by findings in Study I.

A gendered understanding of sexual harassment also emerged in Study IV. Women more frequently sought peer confirmation to validate their interpretations, while men tended to dismiss similar behaviours as harmless. This echoes earlier findings highlighting consistent gender differences in perceptions of sexual harassment (41, 42). Although documented in prior research, this finding remains highly relevant, especially in light of men's overrepresentation in leadership positions. According to Statistics Sweden, men continue to hold a disproportionate number of managerial positions in both public and private sectors, a trend that remains relatively unchanged (8). At Lund University, women held only 28% of professorships and 41% of senior lectureships in 2019 when the data was collected (141). These gender imbalances at senior levels risk reinforcing tolerance for "yellow zone" behaviours, as male-dominated decision-making structures may be less sensitive to their seriousness. What is not perceived as a problem is unlikely to be addressed. Interestingly, there are research findings suggesting that increased awareness of victim's harm following sexual harassment reduces men's proclivity to harass, which underscores the importance of targeting men's attitudes towards sexual harassment in intervention programs (142).

Participants in Study IV also raised concerns about the consistency and fairness of organisational responses to sexual harassment. Fear of social and career-related consequences discouraged reporting and contributed to the persistence of questionable behaviours. These findings align with those of Study III, which demonstrated that perceptions of low relational justice and high authoritarian treatment by managers were associated with a significantly increased prevalence of sexual harassment. Taken together, these findings point to a problem that is deeply embedded in organisational structures, hierarchies, and power dynamics, rather than being solely the result of individual deviant behaviour. Study III further revealed that women and foreign-born employees were particularly vulnerable in unjust or authoritarian work environments. Notably, women in senior academic positions appeared especially at risk, potentially because their authority and visibility challenge traditional power structures. This supports theoretical perspectives that frame sexual harassment as a mechanism for maintaining dominance and control, rather than one motivated primarily by sexual desire.

Perceived and actual respectful and fair treatment from superiors appears to be a critical factor. This interpretation is supported by previous research showing that men who feel unfairly or disrespectfully treated by supervisors report a greater likelihood of engaging in sexually harassing behaviours (143). This may partly explain the higher prevalence of sexual harassment among participants in our study who perceived leadership as unjust or authoritarian. Additionally, perceived injustice has been suggested to function as a job stressor, potentially contributing to counterproductive work behaviours, which may include sexual harassment (96). In a climate where management is seen as unjust, employees may interpret their own or others' inappropriate behaviours, such as harassment, as being acceptable according to local workplace norms, thus activating individuals with a proclivity to harass. Authoritarian treatment may also contribute to a work climate marked by fear and silence, as expressed in Study IV, where reporting is discouraged, allowing harmful behaviours to persist. These findings broaden our understanding of contextual factors that may contribute to and facilitate workplace sexual harassment, and raise important questions about the implications for prevention.

Much of the sexual harassment research to date has been limited in scope, often treating workplace sexual harassment as an isolated phenomenon (144) and countermeasures has largely focused on policy, training, or reporting systems, approaches that have proven insufficient (10). However, sexual harassment rarely occurs in isolation, but rather in a broader context of disrespect and mistreatment, a finding also supported by results from Study II in this thesis. This suggests that prevention efforts should not be confined to sexual harassment alone. Scholars have proposed a broader strategy (91, 145), advocating for the promotion of a general climate of fairness and respectful treatment, combined with a strong norm of zero tolerance for any form of harassment. Such a comprehensive approach could not only reduce sexual harassment, but also mitigate other forms of identity-based mistreatment, such as discrimination based on ethnicity or sexual orientation (145). It may also yield additional organisational benefits, including improved productivity, stronger employee commitment, and reduced stress, all of which have been linked to perceptions of organisational justice (92). Moreover, fairness and respectful treatment are concerns shared by all employees, potentially making this approach more widely accepted and feasible than interventions targeting sexual harassment alone. Importantly, such an approach would also shift the focus from individual-oriented solutions (such as reporting) to organisational-level interventions, which are more likely to address and impact underlying structural inequalities (16).

Finally, Study IV also revealed a sense of shared responsibility among employees. While not universal, there was a pronounced desire for collective action, peer support, and proactive managerial effort, suggesting that organisational initiatives aimed at improving workplace climate are likely to be well received by many.

Methodological considerations

Sexual harassment is a sensitive topic, largely dealing with individual experiences of unwanted behaviours, and researchers rely on observational studies as we cannot control over, and randomly assign, who experience these behaviours and not. Studies in the field are therefore predominantly cross-sectional in their designs (13, 30). Cross-sectional survey data provide a 'snapshot' of associations at a single point in time, limited in the ability to determine the temporal ordering of events, whereas longitudinal studies are more similar to a 'moving picture', capturing changes and causal pathways over time. However, cross-sectional surveys, given that they contain validated instruments and are representative of the target population, can be useful in estimating the prevalence of experiences, and determining correlates of established antecedents and outcomes and moderating factors influencing these associations (30). Focus group discussions, on the other hand, can provide more nuanced insights into lived experiences, perceptions and attitudes toward sexual harassment and organisational cultures and contexts in which such behaviours occur (13, 30, 134), something that has been shown to differ and thus require localised attention (146). This thesis applied a double method approach, including both quantitative (survey) and qualitative (focus group discussions) data. This combination of data and methods is a strength as it allows for examination and exploration of the phenomena from different perspectives. In this section the strengths and limitations linked to the study design will be discussed, starting with the survey data and moving on to the focus group discussions.

Methodological considerations Study I-III

Study I–III utilise cross-sectional survey data, which, as already mentioned, limits the ability to establish the order of the events. Although the interpretation of findings in this thesis is grounded in a conceptual framework supported by prior research, suggesting that organisational climate influences the likelihood of harassment, which in turn leads to negative health outcomes, alternative explanations remain plausible. For example, it is possible that individuals with poorer mental well-being are more inclined to perceive certain behaviours as sexually harassing, or be targets of harassment, or that experiencing sexual harassment may negatively influence how individuals perceive their superiors in terms of fairness and justice. If so, this would challenge the internal validity of the study. However, the problem of internal validity may vary across the three studies. That workplace sexual harassment predicts negative mental health outcomes are well established in previous research (21, 36, 138). Few studies support a reversed association, although one Norwegian prospective study reported that psychological distress predicted subsequent experiences of sexual harassment among men (but not among women) (72). A proposed explanation for this association is that men experiencing psychological

distress may be more vulnerable to harassment. Potentially this reflects a form of "not man enough" harassment, where behaviours perceived as non-masculine are punished through harassment, as emotional distress might be viewed as non-masculine (43). However, in Study I no statistically significant association between sexual harassment and mental health was found among men. In Study II, no assumptions were made about the direction of the observed associations, which reduces the methodological concern related to causal inference. However, this issue becomes more critical in the interpretation of findings from Study III, where relatively novel working climate-related factors, perceived relational justice and authoritarian treatment, were examined in relation to sexual harassment. The proposed interpretation is that employees' perceptions of managers as unjust or authoritarian precede, and possibly contribute to, the occurrence of sexual harassment. However, this temporal order cannot be verified in the current cross-sectional design. Importantly, it is plausible that the experience of being sexually harassed by a manager influences how that manager is subsequently perceived, particularly in terms of fairness and authoritarianism. In this case, perceptions of relational injustice and authoritarian treatment may not be antecedents but rather consequences of the harassment itself. This potential bias could have been mitigated if group-level data had been available, as it would have enabled the construction of aggregate measures of workplace climate at unit level. However, such data were not accessible in the current study. Thus, while the findings suggest a link between perceptions of workplace climate and the occurrence of sexual harassment, the results should not be interpreted as evidence of a causal direction. Instead, these associations may best be viewed as indicators of a broader organisational context in which sexual harassment is more likely to occur, one marked by perceived unfairness and authoritarian leadership. Longitudinal research is needed to further examine these relationships and clarify the temporal ordering of events.

The target population for the survey included all employees at the university, encompassing academic and administrative staff as well as PhD students. The overall response rate was 33%, which, although relatively low, is comparable to response rates reported in similar recent national studies on related topics (38, 147). To ensure that findings can be generalised to the broader employee population, it is important that the characteristics of respondents reflect those of the target population. A comparison between the two groups based on gender, age, position, and type of employment showed a high degree of similarity (62). However, there were some minor deviations: women were slightly overrepresented among respondents, the sample was somewhat older, and employees with temporary contracts were slightly underrepresented. In addition to demographic representativeness, the risk of response bias must be considered. In surveys addressing sensitive topics such as sexual harassment, there is a possibility that individuals with relevant experiences choose not to participate due to discomfort or a desire to avoid revisiting distressing events, which could lead to an underrepresentation of those exposed. Conversely, individuals without such

experiences may perceive the survey as irrelevant and chose not to participate, potentially resulting in an underrepresentation of those unexposed. Furthermore, there is a risk that individuals whose mental well-being was negatively affected by sexual harassment may have left their workplace before the survey, leading to systematic underrepresentation compared to the "underlying cohort", a phenomenon commonly referred to as the healthy worker effect. This could contribute to an underestimation of both exposure prevalence and its consequences. Taking these factors into account, the sample was still considered largely representative of the target population and, as such, the findings are likely generalisable to other similar academic settings.

Efforts have also been made to minimise measurement bias by using validated instruments. The instrument used to measure sexual harassment, the LUSHI instrument, has been validated and demonstrated good psychometric properties (61). However, regarding the subscales, which differentiate between non-soliciting and soliciting forms of sexual harassment, it should be noted that these were not originally developed to specifically reflect the theoretical distinction between non-soliciting (or ambient), and soliciting (more direct) types of sexual harassment. Rather, the two-factor structure was identified through an exploratory factor analysis of the overall scale. As such, it is possible that some relevant aspects of these sexual harassment subtypes may not be fully captured by these subscales. Nevertheless, the emergence of these distinct factors in the validation process supports the relevance of studying them as analytically separate constructs (61). Another important consideration is that the LUSHI instrument capture unwanted behaviours with a sexual connotation. While this approach aligns with the Swedish legal definition of sexual harassment and likely also with the lay understandings (in Sweden) of the concept, it may nonetheless present a limitation. Behaviours without a clear sexual connotation, such as gender-based hostility or general incivility, are often intertwined with, and contribute to, the broader problem of mistreatment in the workplace. Capturing a wider spectrum of unwanted behaviours could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the various problematic dynamics present in organisational settings. This could be achieved by consistently supplementing the LUSHI instrument with additional constructs that reflect other dimensions of workplace mistreatment, thereby enabling a more nuanced and accurate assessment of harassment in future research. The GHQ-12 and SF-36 instruments used in Study I to assess mental health and vitality as well as the instrument used to measure authoritarian treatment in Study III, have all been adapted and validated in Swedish context (125, 127, 129). Relational justice was measured used a slightly modified version of the relational justice construct developed and applied within the Whitehall II study (93). The modification consisted of a minor variation in wordings. Internal consistency of the scale was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, yielding a value of 0.82, indicating good reliability.

The outcome variables in Study I-III were dichotomised, and multivariable regression was deemed an appropriate analytical approach given the cross-sectional nature of the data and the primary aim of investigating associations. However, alternative analytical approaches could have been considered, particularly for Study II. For example, latent class analysis might have provided better insights into how different types of harassment co-occur. In Study III, modified Poisson regression with robust standard errors was used to estimate prevalence ratios, as an alternative to logistic regression, which is increasingly recommended for analysing cross-sectional data with common outcomes (132). Unlike odds ratios, prevalence ratios are generally more intuitive and easy to interpret for public health and policy audiences. Related to the analytical approach, an important strength of this work was the ability to adjust for key potential confounders, including gender, age, background (Swedish/foreign), professional position, and type of employment. This adjustment helps to reduce confounding bias and enhances the validity and reliability of the observed associations.

Methodological considerations Study IV

Study IV employed focus group discussions (FGDs) for data collection, a method well suited for exploring social norms and attitudes, as well as for addressing sensitive topics (134). The FGDs were conducted by my main supervisor, Professor Anette Agardh, and colleague Jack Palmieri. The research team, including myself from the point of the analytical phase, adopted a range of strategies to enhance credibility and transferability of the findings.

At the time of data collection, both moderators were affiliated with Lund University positioning them as insiders. While insider research offers advantages, such as contextual understanding and easier access to the field (148), it also presents challenges including role conflict, confidentiality concerns, and potential bias (149). To address these risks, reflexivity and open dialogue among all involved researchers were prioritised throughout the research process, helping to ensure methodological rigour and awareness of power dynamics. The group format allowed observation of the dialogical processes through which participants navigated and made sense of workplace norms and organisational culture. This enabled the research team to identify illustrative excerpts that grounded categories and sub-themes in the empirical material, thereby strengthening the credibility of the findings.

Systematic documentation of the research process, including notes and seating plans, contributed to the dependability of the study. A robust analytical approach was applied, following the principles outlined by Graneheim and Lundman (150), and later expanded by Lindgren (151). Before engaging in the analysis, I familiarised myself thoroughly with all the discussions. Efforts to reach analytical consensus among all co-authors, further contributed to the confirmability of the results. By clearly describing the study context and setting, the transferability of the

findings was also strengthened. Moreover, including both employees with and without leadership responsibilities (in separate groups) helped capture diverse perspectives, enhancing the authenticity of the material and further supporting transferability.

One limitation of the study concerns the sampling strategy, which may have attracted participants already engaged in or concerned about the topic. As fear of consequences related to reporting sexual harassment was raised in the FGDs, it is possible that some employees chose not to participate due to this concern. To protect participants' anonymity, no data were collected on their respective units. While ethically justified, this limits insight into what voices are heard, and how the discussions should be interpreted.

Implications for policy, practice and research

Based on the findings of this thesis, several implications can be drawn for policy, practice, and future research. From a policy perspective, the results indicate that sexual harassment should not be addressed in isolation, but rather in conjunction with other forms of workplace mistreatment. As demonstrated in Study II, sexual harassment rarely occurs in isolation, but often coexists with other types of harassment and degrading behaviours. To avoid a fragmented response, these should be understood as interconnected expressions of unacceptable conduct, which disproportionately affect women and individuals from minority groups.

In terms of practice, the findings from this thesis, together with existing research, underscore the need to move away from reactive strategies focused solely on individual cases. Instead, there is a need for a more proactive approach aimed at cultivating an overall culture of justice and respect. As highlighted in Study IV, many forms of harassment are expressed through subtle, ambiguous, or low-intensity behaviours, which are often difficult to define or assess as harassment. These behaviours may not be considered reportable individually, especially if they fall outside formal definitions or are viewed as "mild" and there for non-sanctionable, yet they contribute to a permissive environment in which more severe forms of misconduct can emerge. Rather than placing responsibility on individuals to report such incidents, organisations should foster collective engagement and shared responsibility, ensuring that all forms of harassment are actively discouraged. The role of managers appears particularly important in this context. Both Study III and IV emphasized that perceptions of leadership as unjust, authoritarian, or unclear in how they would respond to a complaint are associated with increased probability of sexual harassment and contribute to strategic silence among colleagues. This is also what organisations are obliged to do according to legal frameworks, to *proactively* prevent future harassing events.

Regarding research, there is a need for longitudinal studies that focus on developing, implementing, and evaluating the effectiveness of interventions aimed at shaping a just and respectful workplace climate and preventing harassment. Such research is essential for generating evidence-based strategies that support healthier and more equitable organisational environments, ultimately contributing to a shift in the current trajectory of workplace sexual harassment.

Conclusion

This thesis offers insights into workplace sexual harassment within the Swedish academic context, drawing on multiple perspectives. It begins by examining individual-level harm, focusing on mental well-being outcomes for both women and men. It further investigates the co-occurrence of sexual harassment with other forms of mistreatment and identifies contextual-level factors that appear to sustain or enable such behaviour. For organisations, the thesis presents several important observations. Workplace sexual harassment harms university employees. However, it often involves ambiguous behaviours that are difficult to define and may be interpreted in diverse ways, making it challenging both to develop a shared understanding of the phenomenon and to report experiences. Sexual harassment is deeply embedded in hierarchies, structural conditions, and prevailing norms, and perceived and actual respectful and fair treatment from superiors emerge as critical factors for its occurrence. Existing countermeasures, primarily based on individual reporting, appear to have limited impact, leaving underlying problematic conditions unchanged. To effectively address workplace sexual harassment, intentional efforts to challenge and transform structures and norms that shape working conditions in which such behaviours are tolerated or go unchallenged is needed. The ultimate responsibility for action rests with the organisation's management, which is accountable for proactively fostering a working climate where all employees are treated with respect and fairness, and for ensuring that no forms of harassment are tolerated.

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