

Sexual harassment and sexual blackmail at work

Years 2008-2009

Sexually-based harassment and blackmail

During their life around half the women aged 14-65 (10,485,000 equal to 51.8 percent) have experienced at least one episode of blackmail with a sexual base at work or one episode of harassment in a broad sense, for example verbal harassment, shadowing, exhibitionism, obscene telephone calls and physical harassment. Those women who live in the centres of metropolitan areas (64.9 percent) and in the peripheral municipalities of metropolitan areas (58 percent) are more at risk.

During the last three years, 3,864,000 women from 14-65 years of age (19.1 percent of the total) have suffered at least one episode of sexual harassment or blackmail at work. Those who suffer most from this phenomenon are young women from 14-24 years of age (38.6 percent).

Sexual harassment

More at risk women

During the last three years, young women of 14-24 years of age are more likely to be sexually harassed or blackmailed, followed by women of 25-34 years of age.

During their life, however, women of 25-44 years of age are harassed most.

TYPE OF HARASSMENT	During their life		During the last 3 years	
	thousands	%	thousands	%
Verbal harassment	5.384	26,6	1.839	9,1
Shadowing	4.377	21,6	1.436	7,1
Exhibitionism	4.125	20,4	562	2,8
Physical harassment	3.836	19,0	827	4,1
Obscene telephone calls	3.679	18,2	1.124	5,6

Perpetrators, places and seriousness of the physical harassment

Physical harassment is, for the most part, perpetrated by strangers (59.4 percent) or people who are known by sight (14.1 percent). The more familiar harassers, however, are friends (7 percent), colleagues (5.1 percent) or employees (4.7 percent) and schoolfellows (1.4 percent).

Physical harassment occurs more frequently on public transport (28.8 percent), in the street (18.8 percent), at the workplace (12.6 percent) and in public places such as discotheques, pubs, bars or restaurants (10.5 percent); harassment at home or at a friend's house is less frequent.

The seriousness of the physical abuse experienced during life is high: 72.2 percent of the harassment is considered very or quite serious by the victim (30.7 percent and 41.5 percent respectively), while 22.8 percent not very serious and 4.6 percent not serious at all.

Sexual harassment and blackmail at work

Considering the working world only, 1,224,000 women have experienced harassment or sexual blackmail in the workplace as a possible counter-party for having the job or for improving career or maintaining the actual job, equal to 8.5 percent of current or past workers, including women who were looking for employment.

During the last three years, 347,000 women (2.4 percent) suffered these episodes.

Harassment represents 31.2 percent of these situations, while blackmail and requests for sexual availability represent the remaining 68.8 percent, with sexual availability alone at a quota of approximately 35 percent.

Sexual blackmail at work

The number of victims

TYPES OF BLACKMAIL	During life		During the last 3 years	
	thousands	%	thousands	%
Blackmail for employment	247	1,7	61	0,4
Blackmail for career progress/maintaining job position	234	1,7	65	0,5
Request for sexual availability	488	3,4	140	1,0

The dynamic of the blackmail and the reaction of the victim

In 75.9 percent of cases, victims receive only one sexual blackmail from the same person, even if this percentage frequency is very different according to the type:

among blackmail episodes for a new job, 19.1 percent of the victims experienced more than one episode from the same person,

regarding requests for sexual availability, 16.6 percent of women experienced more than one episode,

with sexual blackmail to progress in a career or maintain a job, the figure rises to **43.3** percent

Evidently, the victim-perpetrator closeness favours the initiative of the second.

Female employees and women in the technical professions are among those who suffer most from blackmail.

JOB CARRIED OUT/SEARCHED FOR	Blackmail for maintaining a job	Blackmail when looking for a new job
During life		
Intellectual, scientific and highly specialised professions, legislators, businesswomen, managers	7,8	9,4
Technical professions	18,0	13,6
Employees	40,4	35,1
Qualified professions in commercial activity and services	17,0	18,9
Artisans, skilled labourers and farmers	1,8	1,6
Plant operators and semi-qualified labourers working with fixed and mobile machinery	6,9	4,8
Unqualified professions	6,4	5,5
No answer	1,6	11,1
Total	100,0	100,0

When a woman endures sexual harassment, in 81.7 percent of the cases (80.2 percent during the last three years) she does not speak to anyone in the workplace about it. Only 18.3 percent of those who have been blackmailed during their life told of their experience, above all to colleagues (10.6 percent).

Almost none of the victims reported the episode to the police (only 1.1 percent).

The most common reason for not reporting is the scarce seriousness of the episode (28.4 percent), followed by managing on one's own or with one's family (23.9 percent), lack of faith in the police or its impossibility to act (20.4 percent) and by the fear of being judged and treated badly when going to report (15.1 percent).

Regarding the seriousness of blackmail, the majority of women (67.7 percent) feel that it is very or quite serious, a little more than 20 percent feel that it is not very serious and less than 10 percent feel that it is not serious at all.

Among those who had been blackmailed during their life and answered the question on the result of sexual blackmail at work, 57.2 percent voluntarily changed their job or gave up their career, 2.5 percent was dismissed, 3.3 percent continued working in the same place, and 2.7 percent took sick leave, while in 3.8 percent of cases there was no result.

After ten years overall stability with some exceptions

The data that emerged from the survey carried out in 2002 demonstrated a partial difference in comparison with the results coming from the first survey carried out in 1997-1998. As an example, physical sexual harassment, obscene telephone calls, sexual blackmail made when in search of work were considerably lower in 2002 with respect to 1997-1998. The results of the third survey on safety (2008-2009) do not present, instead, any significant difference to those signalled in 2002, with the only exception of obscene phone calls continuing the decrease.

A decrease in physical harassment

The number of victims of physical harassment in 2008-2009 appears to have decreased greatly when compared to 1997-1998 that is 10 years ago, but the decrease was already evident in 2002. The current level is the result of the consolidation of the situation observed in 2002, created by changes in the legal framework, but even by the different role of the media during the last years, as well as by the emergence of a new female conscience.

The situation has remained constant even as regards sexual blackmail, excluding the request for sexual availability that slightly decreased from 2002 to 2008-2009.

For more details please refer to the Italian version

Contact persons:

ISTAT – Italian National Institute of Statistics
Viale Liegi, 13 - 00198 Rome, Italy
Division for Surveys on Living Conditions
and Quality of Life

Maria Giuseppina Muratore
ph. + 39 06 4673.7250