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### Developing a framework of effective prevention and response strategies in workplace sexual harassment

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## Abstract

Sexual harassment remains a widespread workplace phenomenon, despite laws that proscribe it. Drawing initially on a typology from the violence prevention literature that conceptualizes prevention and response approaches according to when they occur, the paper synthesizes strategies identified in literature addressing workplace sexual harassment, as well as other workplace injustices or grievances. The paper utilizes this previous research to develop a framework of sexual harassment prevention strategies along two dimensions: *functions* and *timing*. The framework offers a research-informed set of organization-wide preventative and remedial approaches, a systemic approach to what is often seen as an individual problem, and a means to better focus interventions

that are often disparate and unco-ordinated. The paper also highlights important areas for future research including a stronger focus on longer-term (tertiary) corrective actions.

## Enhanced Article Feedback

### Key points

1. This article reviews preventative and remedial approaches to workplace injustices that are, or may be relevant to addressing workplace sexual harassment.
2. The strategies identified are presented according to a two-dimensional typology that delineates the timing of interventions and their functions.
3. The framework offers practical guidance for managers and organizations in developing an approach to sexual harassment that includes multiple organizational actors, tasks and responsibilities.

Sexual harassment (SH) is a persistent and pervasive workplace problem. Although prevalence (the total number of cases to a population) and incidence (the number of new cases in a given time period) estimates diverge markedly according to methodological protocols (Cogin and Fish [2007](#) ; McDonald [2012](#) ), studies suggest that between one and four out of five working people have experienced SH in the workplace (e.g. Aggarwal and Gupta [2000](#) ; Australian Human Rights Commission [2012](#) ) and that the phenomenon has endured over time (e.g. Australian Human Rights Commission [2008](#) , [2012](#) ; Elkins, Phillips and Ward [2008](#) ). The development of effective responses to SH has been limited by conceptual and pragmatic issues. Organizations face significant practical challenges in implementing remedial action, including variations in perceptions of what constitutes SH (Jensen and Kleiner [1999](#) ) and the need to balance the confidentiality of the parties involved with the ineffectiveness of secrecy and stonewalling (Dziech and Hawkins [1998](#) ). Another pragmatic challenge is the extent to which the occurrence of SH can be inferred from the frequency and patterns of formal complaints. That is, fewer complaints may indicate a lower incidence of SH, or alternatively, a workplace climate in which employees are reluctant to lodge a formal grievance (McDonald [2012](#) ). Indeed, despite significant efforts over many years by researchers, senior managers and HR practitioners to identify and implement effective grievance-handling mechanisms, targets of SH rarely make formal complaints through internal organizational processes or to external agencies (Firestone and Harris [2003](#) ; Wayte et al. [2002](#) ). Under-reporting and ineffective complaint-handling have significant organizational consequences. Employers may be held vicariously liable under antidiscrimination and employment laws unless they can establish that they took all reasonable steps to prevent the conduct or that they promptly addressed the SH after it was reported or became evident (Walters [2008](#) ).

The conceptual framing of SH as an individual problem, rather than one with causes and consequences at a systemic level (McCann [2005](#) ; McDonald and Charlesworth [2013](#) ), has limited

the development of effective organizational responses. The development of comprehensive response frameworks that address workplace SH has also been conceptually limited in that the SH literature has developed as largely distinct from other potentially relevant perspectives on workplace misconduct and injustice. That is, while the SH literature is cross-disciplinary, underpinned by concepts from sociology, psychology, organizational and feminist studies, and law, it has evolved in a relative silo from other perspectives on organizational wrongdoing that could provide useful insights in preventing and redressing SH.

This article seeks to integrate scholarship concerned with organizational responses to SH, with a number of hitherto distinct perspectives on workplace injustice. These perspectives, which include for example employee voice, alternative dispute resolution and whistleblowing, are synthesized and used to develop a framework of SH prevention strategies, thereby offering insights that would not be possible in a singular focus on SH. The framework, which adopts a prevention strategy typology originating from the violence prevention literature, comprising primary, secondary and tertiary prevention (e.g. Chamberlain 2008 ; Cornelius and Resseguie 2006 ), offers two important contributions. First, it provides conceptual rigor in understanding the functions as well as the timing of organization-level prevention strategies (for a review of theoretical links between interpersonal violence and workplace SH, see Stockdale and Nadler 2012 ). Second, in light of strong evidence that many organizations do not adopt these strategies, nor utilize them effectively, the framework offers practical guidance for managers and organizations in responding to SH. It also contributes to minimizing the many organizational costs associated with SH that have been identified where there are few systemic preventative or remedial strategies in place. These include obvious and tangible costs associated with lawsuits (e.g. Posthuma 2012 ) but also less tangible, but nonetheless significant organizational losses associated with reduced workforce morale, increased absenteeism, turnover, team conflict and occupational stress, damage to external reputation, and loss of shareholder confidence (Chan et al. 2008 ; Fitzgerald et al. 1997 ; Fitzgerald, Drasgow and Magley 1999 ).

In order to inform the development of the framework, we turn first to a review of prevention and response strategies relevant to SH, which we present according to when they are utilized. Attention to the timing of prevention strategies, as outlined in the violence prevention literature, offers the advantage of a systemic and co-ordinated approach to the problem of SH; a form of (workplace) violence. Primary prevention refers to activities which take place *before* any injustice has occurred to prevent any initial harm; secondary prevention incorporates immediate responses *after* the event has occurred; and tertiary prevention refers to long-term response strategies which aim to deal with any ongoing consequences of the problem. Notwithstanding these conceptual distinctions, strategies may overlap between prevention categories. For example, grievance procedures in secondary prevention are typically articulated through HR policy and training, which are generally considered primary prevention activities. Nonetheless, the tri-level typology offers a degree of conceptual clarity in distinguishing between different organizational activities.

## Primary prevention strategies

Primary prevention strategies, as framed in the violence prevention literature, strive to circumvent violence (Cornelius and Resseguie 2006 ), remove the causes or determinants of violence, prevent

the development of risk factors associated with violence, and/or enhance protective factors against violence (Chamberlain 2008). The main primary prevention strategies discussed in the literature on SH and other workplace injustices focus on policy and training.

## Prevention policies

With respect to policies addressing organizational injustice, six features are consistently emphasized. First, policies should be underpinned by a clear understanding of what constitutes wrongdoing in the organization. Drawing on the notion of 'moral agency', studies of whistleblowing in particular have noted that in order to enlist the support of all organizational members in addressing unethical workplace practices, senior management must clearly understand what constitutes wrongdoing and injustice, and the penalties the organization may suffer if the conduct continues (Miceli, Near and Morehead 2008; Near and Miceli 2008). The issue of how organizational members understand the parameters of SH was raised by Deadrick, McAfee and Champagne (1996) using an organizational change perspective, and Thomas (2004) in a study of approaches to developing and implementing SH policies in UK universities. The more effective approach in the latter study was a consultative one, whereby harassment was constructed as a community concern, emphasizing the ambiguity of the problem and making it acceptable for people to seek advice in 'grey area' situations which might not be considered to warrant a formal complaint. The less effective approach to developing SH policy was top down, conveying the message that harassment is an individual problem and employing reactive, disciplinary action against offenders.

The second feature of effective SH policy is visibility. Bell, Cychota and Quick (2002) suggest that clear behavioral norms should be set and that policies on SH should be widely known, with open and visible statements that harassment will not be tolerated widely disseminated in public work spaces. The third element of effective policy considers the way grievance procedures and protections are framed (we address the procedures themselves in secondary prevention). This is a complex issue. While 'no tolerance' policies may help prevent SH (Parker 1999), they may also focus more on organizational image than on the wishes of complainants who fear reprisals (Firestone and Harris 2003). However, there is general consensus that perceived accessibility of informal advice and the provision of multiple communication channels are crucial management strategies for increasing employee's confidence in using SH policies (Miceli, Near and Morehead 2008; Thomas 2004).

Fourth, preventative organizational actions rely on effective high-level management and modeling, including the formulation and communication of policies relevant to SH as well as to gender equality more broadly, and the allocation of appropriate resources for policy and training (Bell, Cychota and Quick 2002). Policy-related management strategies that prevent other forms of organizational injustice have also been raised in the whistleblowing literature. These include building incentives for accurate internal reporting into the reward structure and providing feedback and giving credit to line managers for taking action (Miceli, Near and Morehead 2008).

The fifth element of effective policy identified in the SH literature is the inclusion of a statement of intent to enforce seriously and promptly, and a clear specification of the penalties for violation (Masters and Albright 2002). O'Leary-Kelly, Paetzold and Griffin (2000) argue that certainty of punishment for SH may provide more effective prevention than severity of punishment. Indeed, while SH is rarely reported due to a range of factors including fear of job loss, lack of knowledge of rights and self-doubt, a major

factor is the expectation that the harasser will not receive any penalty (Handy 2006 ; Wear, Aultman and Borgers 2007 ).

The sixth element of effective policy is a commitment to broader gender equality goals. Zippel ( 2003 ) proposes for example that a focus on gender relations is essential, whereby SH policies are defined in gender-specific terms, taking power differentials into account. In work environments which are systemically male-dominated and privileged (e.g. mining, defence), it also appears important to provide explicitly articulated opportunities for women to collectively and democratically participate so they can challenge prevailing regimes of control and strive for an inclusive environment (Eveline and Booth 2002 ).

## Prevention training

The second arm of primary prevention is training. Studies on SH and other workplace injustices have provided recommendations for appropriate content and process. In delivery, for example, education sessions should be conducted regularly and universally, that is, at all sites and across all hierarchical levels and not only to targeted groups or those who attend voluntarily (Bell, Cycyota and Quick 2002 ). Studies suggest that universal training has an effect on organizational cultures over and above the impact of individual training in that it leads to a greater recognition of SH (Antecol and Cobb-Clark 2003 ). Another recommendation is that SH training be included in orientation or induction programs for new employees, with 'booster-shots' to ensure harassment is recognized and addressed (Bell, Cycyota and Quick 2002 ; Smiley-Marquez 1999 ).

Four principles appear to be important in training content. First, training should be developed from information gathered from organizational assessments (Buhler 1999 ). Assessing early risk factors includes identifying situations in which SH is more likely to occur, gauging women's roles, status and positions in the organization, and conducting regular and anonymous attitude surveys which include measures of SH (Bell, Cycyota and Quick 2002 ). Second, training should raise awareness and clarify misconceptions about what constitutes SH (Laabs 1995 , in York, Barclay and Zajack 1997 ) while highlighting and reinforcing acceptable behavioral norms. Studies have also highlighted the importance of modeling and rehearsal in clarifying misconceptions around SH. These techniques are variously described and include case studies used in role playing, enabling participants to practice interpersonal skills in challenging situations (see Takeyama and Kleiner 1998 ); role negotiation, a technique designed to clarify expectations of supervisors and co-workers (see Licata and Popovich 1987 ); and group techniques which encourage mutual-respect work environments and employee responsibility for enacting and enforcing change (Deadrack, McAfee and Champagne 1996 ). The use of modeling and rehearsal in training is thought to develop not only resolution-handling skills but also sensitivity to behaviors that might be interpreted as SH (York, Barclay and Zajack 1997 ).

Third, research suggests that training for managers should include conflict management, including the managing of emotions and facilitation techniques (Cloke 2001 ; Masters and Albright 2002 ). In a study on employee voice, Harlos ( 2001 ) recommended including communication and emotional skills training to ensure managers demonstrate empathy, actively listen and probe effectively, helping them to deal with tendencies to become defensive or to deny the legitimacy of complaints. Training managers in conflict management is also thought to successfully address not only the fears of SH targets about retaliation after making a complaint, but also negative outcomes that may not be



anticipated (Vijayasiri **2008** ).

Fourth, training should challenge gendered organizational cultures. Cross-sectional and meta-analytic studies consistently demonstrate that SH is more prevalent in male-dominated occupations and work contexts than in gender-balanced or female-dominated workplaces (Illies et al. **2003** ; Willness, Steel and Lee **2007** ). However, it is not the organizational sex-ratio of the workplace that renders SH problematic, but rather organizational environments that are hierarchical, especially those where cultural norms are associated with sexual bravado and posturing and where the denigration of feminine behaviors is sanctioned (Chamberlain et al. **2008** ; de Haas and Timmerman **2010** ). Hence, training should explicitly address gender-relevant cultural issues (Zippel **2003** ). A study of safety cultures in high-risk environments (offshore oil platforms) demonstrated how organizational initiatives designed to enhance safety and effectiveness had the effect of breaking gender stereotypes that conflate displays of masculinity with competency, thereby disrupting the gender status quo ('undoing gender') which often supports SH and other gendered workplace harms (Ely and Meyerson **2010** ).

## Secondary intervention

Secondary intervention involves an immediate response after the problem has occurred and aims to prevent further perpetration and deal with short-term consequences, including the victimization of those at risk. In SH, organizational grievance procedures are the most common mechanism through which employee rights are enacted. However, a substantial body of work suggests that procedures for raising a complaint of SH do not adequately translate to effective voice mechanisms and often undermine reporting. Indeed, there is strong evidence to suggest that employees often perceive grievance processes to be: adversarial and hostile (Marshall **2005** ; Vijayasiri **2008** ); lacking confidentiality (Marshall **2005** ); risky in terms of isolation or reprisal from the workgroup (Bowen and Blackmon **2003** ; Vijayasiri **2008** ); and likely to fall on deaf ears (Harlos **2001** ). Men in particular, who are less likely than women to name sexually harassing behaviors as SH (Nielsen, Bjørkelo, Notelaers and Einarsen **2010** ), appear to be less willing to engage with formal complaint processes because doing so calls attention to their non-conformity to a traditional masculine stereotype (O'Leary-Kelly, Paetzold and Griffin **2000** ; Stockdale, Visio and Batra **1999** ). It has been argued that grievance procedures in SH are often ineffective because the dual discourses of legal compliance and risk management in corporate policies (Charlesworth **2002** ; Thornton **2002** ) do more to protect employers from liability (a 'bureaucratic vaccine against lawsuits') than to protect or assist complainants (Dobbin and Kelly **2007** , 1234; Edelman, Erlanger and Lande **1993** ; Marshall **2005** ).

Another challenge in effectively responding to reports of SH raised in the whistleblower literature is that SH frequently involves a low quality of evidence, often occurring away from witnesses (creating a 'he said, she said' scenario) and without the direct observation of wrongdoing. Studies have found quality of evidence to be a significant predictor of whistleblowing and to be more tenuous in cases of unlawful discrimination than other cases of legal violation such as safety problems, waste and mismanagement (Miceli and Near **1992** ; Near et al. **2004** ).

Attempting to address the challenges associated with reporting has led to a number of recommendations for secondary prevention. These include ensuring appropriate manager responses to complaints, the availability of multiple reporting channels, the timeliness of investigations, the application of appropriate sanctions, and the use of mediation. A consistent theme is that effective complaint-handling requires that the complainant perceives the process as fair and effective, even if they do not agree with the outcome (Walker and Hamilton 2011). Bemmels and Foley (1996) argue that perceived fairness is the preferred method for evaluating grievance procedure effectiveness generally, as it is difficult to interpret from other measures such as settlement levels and arbitrations rates.

With respect to sanctions, studies suggest that where a choice of disciplinary measures for a harasser is available, it is common for the least stringent to be selected, such as a formal or informal warning (European Commission 1999; Salin 2007). Weak sanctions deflect any managerial or broader organizational responsibility for discrimination and indicate a climate of tolerance, indicating a need to shift the burden of identifying unprofessional behavior from the (more vulnerable) target to the institution itself (Wear, Aultman and Borgers 2007). This was illustrated in a whistleblower study of military employees who observed wrongdoing but did not report it because they believed nothing could be done to rectify the situation (Near et al. 2004). Hence, perceptions of distributive justice depend on the level of satisfaction with the outcome, such as terminating the wrongdoing and not retaliating against the complainant or whistleblower (Near, Morehead and Miceli 1993).

A study of US management personnel who handle EEO complaints found that discrimination complaints were frequently recast by managers as personality clashes or interpersonal difficulties (Edelman, Erlanger and Lande 1993), eroding employee trust in grievance procedures (Vijayasiri 2008). Limited work on investigations in harassment complaints suggests that individuals dealing with the complaint should be neutral and experienced and that they should document all steps taken from the point of first contact, prepare a written report using guidelines to weigh credibility, and communicate the determination to all parties (McQueen 1997; Oppenheimer 2004). Older research (Stewart and Davy 1992) on grievance processes however, demonstrated an inverse relationship between the number of steps in a procedure and the incidence of early resolution. This finding may be accounted for by 'escalation of commitment theory' which predicts that senior managers become committed to decisions made at lower points in the hierarchy, such that when a grievance is not resolved at a supervisory level, middle and senior managers support the decisions of first-line supervisors (Staw and Ross 1987).

Speed of grievance processing has also been emphasized in both the SH and employee voice literatures as an important criterion of perceived fairness in complaint-handling (Bell, Cycyota and Quick 2002; Goldman 2001; Oppenheimer 2004). In contrast, a study by Harlos (2001) concerning employees' expectations of voice systems argues that attributes such as safety (protection from retribution) and credibility (objectivity, neutrality) were important factors in employees' perceptions of system effectiveness, whereas accessibility and timeliness of outcomes were less important. In explaining these findings, Harlos (2001) proposed that employees would rather deal with complex systems that take longer to reach decisions than with simple systems that, despite quicker responses, may be biased or unsafe.

The establishment of multiple channels of reporting has also been identified as an important secondary

prevention measure. Recommendations include the creation of decentralized complaint handlers who are responsible for outreach, education and dispute resolution, with other employees spread widely through all levels of management who are trained in assisting with informal solutions (e.g. low-key conversations with harassers to stop the behavior) (Bell, Cycyota and Quick **2002** ; Marshall **2005** ). In contrast, Hoffman's ( **2005** ) dispute resolution study found employees perceived greater opportunities for procedural justice in the formal dispute processes than through informal grievance processes.

Conciliation or mediation is a prominent component of the broader array of employment dispute resolution (EDR) measures that fall within secondary prevention. Shaped by anti-discrimination laws, these include programs offered by administrative agencies and courts, as well as employer-based systems (Walker and Hamilton **2011** ). Mediation involves a third party who guides the individuals in dispute to try to reach a compromise (Liebmann **2000** ; Ridley-Duff and Bennett **2011** ). This is distinct from arbitration where an impartial third party makes a final, usually binding agreement (Ridley-Duff and Bennett **2011** ). Various models are in popular use in different countries (see for example Bingham and Pitts, **2002** on 'problem-solving' versus 'transformative' approaches in the United States; and Ridley-Duff and Bennett **2011** on 'directive' and 'facilitative' approaches in the United Kingdom). Relatively little work has compared the roles and relative effectiveness of inside and outside mediators in discrimination complaints. However, one study by Bingham and Pitts ( **2002** ) found evidence that mediation is an effective means for resolving workplace conflict and favored outside mediation using Bush and Folger's ( **1994** ) transformative model.

## Tertiary intervention

Tertiary interventions involve longer-term responses *after* the problem has occurred to deal with lasting consequences, minimize its impact, restore health and safety, and prevent further perpetration and victimization (Chamberlain **2008** ). Tertiary interventions are relevant to SH because of the significant negative psychological, health and job-related consequences that targets have been found to experience. Consistently demonstrated in previous work, these consequences range from anxiety to anger, powerlessness, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder, lower job satisfaction, commitment and productivity, and employment withdrawal (e.g. Fitzgerald, Drasgow and Magley **1999** ; Magley et al. **1999** ; Willness, Steel and Lee **2007** ). Longer-term outcomes are rarely measured, perhaps in part because of the difficulties in following targets of SH over longer time frames. However, a recent study by Houle et al. ( **2011** ) suggests the effects of SH are long-lasting, with early-career harassment experiences being associated with heightened depressive symptoms 10 years later.

Further illustrating the importance of tertiary intervention is that SH poses longer-term organizational consequences in terms of employee turnover, reduced morale, absenteeism, the cost of investigations and those arising from legal actions, damage to external reputation and loss of shareholder confidence (Fitzgerald et al. **1997** ; Lengnick-Hall **1995** ). Lasting victimization of those who make complaints has also been consistently demonstrated in grievance-management research of (e.g. Boswell and Olson-Buchanan **2004** ; Klaas, Heneman and Olson **1991** ). Three older studies of post-settlement outcomes for grievants compared to non-grievants (in a range of workplace complaints), demonstrated

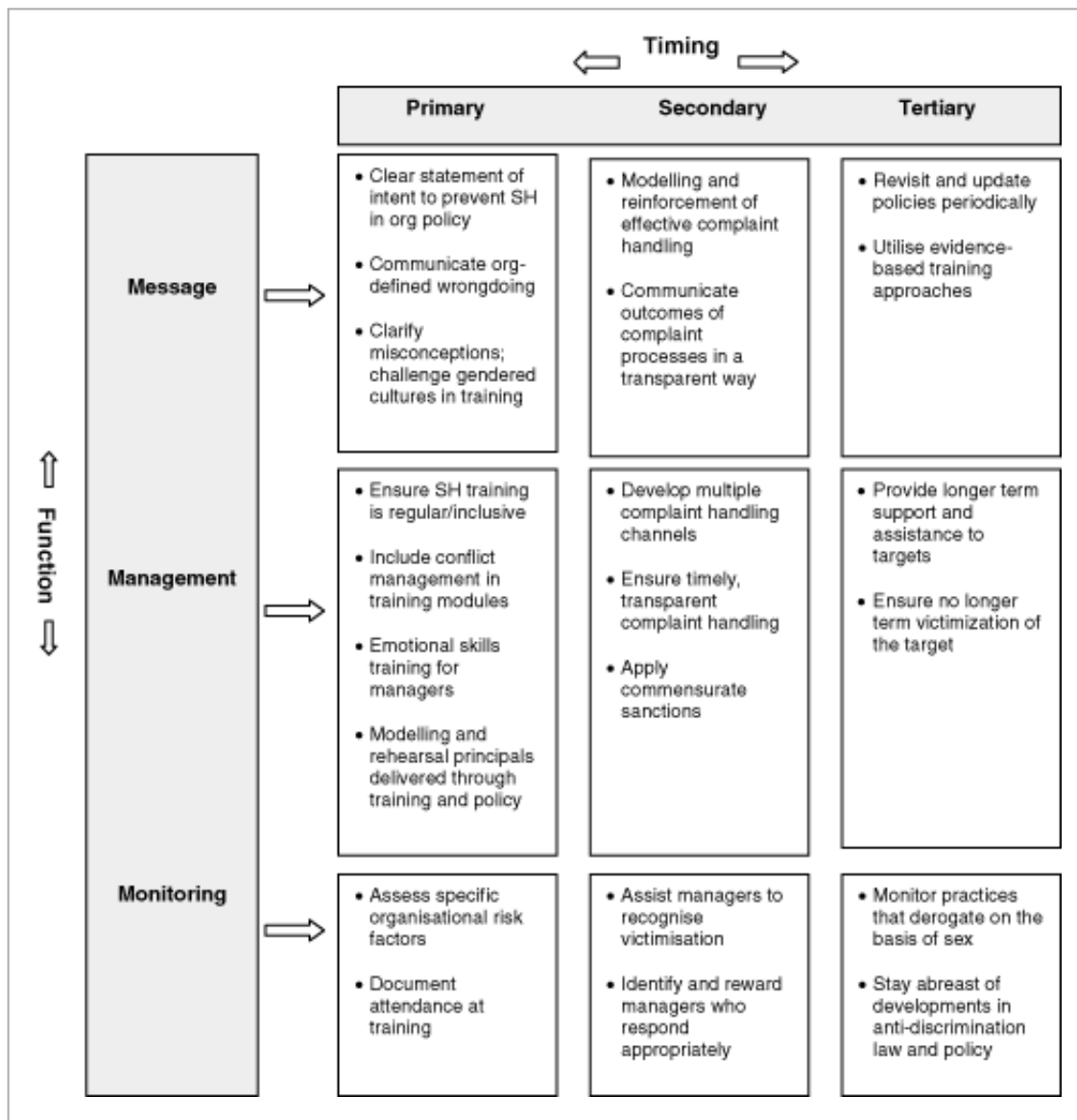


that those who had made a complaint had lower performance ratings, promotion rates and attendance rates, and higher quit rates in the year following the grievance (Klaas and DeNisi 1989 ; Lewin and Peterson 1988 ). Despite these imperatives for longer-term responses to SH or other workplace injustices, interventions detailed in the literature have been almost exclusively focused on primary and secondary levels, with tertiary interventions relatively neglected. One exception is Oppenheimer's ( 2004 ) recommendation of proactive and longer-term follow-up with both the complainant and the respondent to ensure that retaliation had not occurred. Another exception stems from Larsen and Fitzgerald's ( 2011 ) argument that in assisting complainants to recover, it is important to minimize the focus on blaming the harasser, which decreases a sense of control over the present, and diverts attention to controllable aspects of recovery.

## A framework of prevention strategies

This review of preventative and remedial approaches to workplace injustices revealed a broad array of organizational strategies that are, or may be relevant to addressing SH specifically. All the perspectives examined share a number of common elements, including ambiguity about whether the behaviors were intentional; a violation of standards of workplace behavior generally considered to be ethical; a reduction in the quality of working life; and an undermining of full and equal participation in employment (McCann 2005 ; Popovich and Warren 2010 ). The integration of these different perspectives, and conceptualizing strategies according to an established framework in the violence prevention literature of when they occur, offers a systemic, organization-wide approach to what is often seen as an individualized problem, as well as a means to better focus interventions that are often disparate and unco-ordinated.

The strategies identified are presented according to a two-dimensional typology that delineates the timing of interventions and their functions (see Figure 1). Considering both the timing (when they occur) and the key functions, or tasks associated with preventative actions, helps explain why SH remains a persistent workplace phenomenon, despite laws proscribing it. That is, many organizations fail to implement effective strategies across organizational functions and/or at appropriate times. The lack of proactive, co-ordinated and responsive actions to SH and other negative workplace behaviors can create work environments that allow such injustices to flourish. The framework also offers practical guidance for managers and organizations in developing a co-ordinated approach to SH that includes multiple organizational actors, tasks and responsibilities, and recognizes the systemic nature of SH and its organizational impact. Indeed, four decades of research and evaluation of efforts to change attitudes, behaviors and social norms which prevent other forms of interpersonal violence have confirmed the effectiveness of prevention strategies that are designed as comprehensive rather than as singular and isolated (Casey and Lindhorst 2009 ; Nation et al. 2003 ). However, future work in the area could usefully employ in-depth action research approaches within different types of workplaces to test the context-specific implementation of the prevention and response strategies identified in the framework. We draw out the salient aspects of this model in the remaining discussion.



**Figure 1.**

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Timing and functions of effective sexual harassment prevention

With respect to timing, classifying strategies that address wrongdoing according to when they occur is well-established in the violence prevention literature but has only recently been recognized as being useful in the field of SH (see McDonald and Flood 2012 ). Although strategies aligned with primary, secondary and tertiary prevention strategies may not always be mutually exclusive, we argue for the utility of this tri-level classification in providing conceptual clarity between the temporal aspects of organizational activities. Indeed, distinguishing between organizational actions that 1) circumvent and remove the causes of SH; 2) respond immediately and appropriately once SH has occurred to deal with the short-term consequences; and 3) address the lasting consequences of SH including restoring health and safety (Chamberlain 2008 ; Cornelius and Resseguie 2006 ) has significant practical value in informing organizations about the need for preventative, as well as short- and longer-term

remedial strategies.

The strategies outlined in the review are categorized in the framework according to three functions that constitute the second dimension of the resulting model: Messages, the way SH is defined, legally and behaviorally, and communicated within the workplace; Management, how organizational actors with the authority to prevent or intervene in SH do so; and Monitoring, including organizational tasks designed to identify risk factors that lead to SH and assess professional standards and norms across the organization.

The area of complaint-handling in secondary prevention is a deficit in organizational practice that is consistently highlighted in the literature. By definition, SH involves sexual conduct that is often experienced (and managed) as a highly personal affront. This necessitates a complaint-handling process that is mature, expert, timely, sensitive and transparent. Indeed, the literature is clear that effective organizational voice systems should be characterized by timely responses and investigations and an open and supportive environment where employees feel safe to express their views and can expect management to take them into account (Goldman 2001 ; Harlos 2001 ). A well-functioning voice system is considered especially important in certain contexts, such as when targets are employed in precarious and lower-level positions and hence are not part of a high-status group more likely to receive support (Goldman 2001 ). Both the SH and organizational justice literatures are also clear about the significant organizational costs of ignoring or minimizing the development of effective voice climates. SH in particular may involve high-risk stakes in terms of reputation (for the complainant, the alleged harasser and the organization itself), workplace relationships and related productivity, and the potential for legal and compensatory costs if the complaint escalates to a legal sphere. The literature is replete with the failures of many operational response characteristics of secondary prevention approaches, and highlights a far greater emphasis on initiatives geared towards the primary prevention of SH (Michelson and Kramar 2003 ). Ensuring effective organizational response mechanisms to complaints of SH which avoid delay and inaction, and facilitate appropriate investigation and avoid consequent victimization, may prevent many complaints escalating to legal jurisdictions.

The issue of victimization, which in Australia is a ground for discrimination separate to SH, often accompanies a legal claim of SH (McDonald, Charlesworth and Cerise 2011 ) and is central to designing effective complaints procedures. Studies of whistleblowing, though rarely aligned with SH specifically (see Lee, Gibson Heilmann and Near 2004 for a rare exception), may provide useful insights for preventing victimization as a component of secondary intervention strategies. SH is a clear example of broader notions of wrongdoing evident in the whistleblowing literature because both areas focus on organizational processes, and both whistleblowing and SH complaints processes can be viewed through justice theories, particularly procedural and distributive justice in organizational models (e.g. Greenberg 1990 ). Notwithstanding the current separation of definitions, theory and research, these similarities point to strong arguments for linking these conceptual areas more closely. Strategies to encourage whistleblowing and prevent the victimization of whistleblowers have received significant political emphasis and media attention in recent years, laws continue to be strengthened, and efforts to protect whistleblowers have arguably had strong public support (Australian Department of Parliamentary Services 2004–05 ). Hence, opportunities to leverage emphasis on, and support for whistleblowers also appears promising for the prevention of SH.

The review highlighted some limitations in implementing the strategic approaches to SH outlined in Figure 1 in a holistic, comprehensive way. One significant limitation is the lack of attention given to tertiary prevention strategies and also gendered organizational practices, particularly in message and monitoring functions, that allow SH to persist. Longer-term interventions in particular have been largely neglected in the extant literature, highlighting the need to balance the current emphases on policy and training (primary prevention) and short-term responses (secondary prevention) with strategies that address some of the significant longer-term damage caused by SH (e.g. Boswell and Olson-Buchanan 2004 ; Houle et al. 2011 ).

Explanations of the way gendered forms of hierarchical power manifest in organizations, in the sense of enabling coercion and exploitation, have been at the forefront of the SH literature (MacKinnon 1979 ; Zalk 1990 ) but are often neglected in organizational prevention strategies. Attention to organizational norms and practices are important components of prevention, particularly in shifting strategies from an individualized focus on aberrant behavior to a more systemic level where the status quo can be effectively challenged. Indeed, the strategic importance of transforming corporate cultures is said to be critical, not least because changes that occur in large organizations are frequently modeled in smaller companies though industry associations, unions and training (Parker 1999 ). SH is also linked to (specifically gendered) organizational practices that threaten respectful and hospitable work environments and denigrate individuals on the basis of their sex (Berdahl 2007 ). Similarly, workplace practices designed around the ideal male worker contribute to an environment where SH is more likely to occur (see Ronalds ( 2006 ) on how SH in policing is linked with work organization such as limits on part-time work).

Another key systemic issue which has been relatively neglected in discussions of SH prevention strategies is the role of broader employment and social policies. Workplaces operate not in isolation from their societal contexts but as integral parts of local, national and increasingly, globalized environments. Thus, a potentially important area for future research lies in linking gendered concerns at the meso- or organizational level with broader social and labor market policies and patterns at the macro- or society level. An illustrative approach is the gender-based violence framework promoted by the International Labour Organization. The ILO conceptualizes SH as a serious form of discrimination that undermines the dignity of women and men and negates gender equality (Cruz and Klinger 2011 , 8). Accordingly, it links the risks of SH and other gender-based forms of violence to social policies and labor market norms including the sex-segregation of workplaces and the location of workers in particular occupations and specific contract types. Future research needs to explore the types of employment and social policies that can better support effective SH prevention and response strategies at the level of organizations.

In considering preventative and remedial SH strategies in the context of the broader literature addressing organizational injustices, we have highlighted the potential utility of bridging multiple and intersecting areas of theory and research to inform effective solutions to a specific workplace problem. Such an approach offers significant promise for balancing competing needs within the employment relationship. With respect to management strategy, this means fostering harmonious workplace relationships and avoiding legal liability, while simultaneously ensuring employees can conduct their work in a safe and productive environment and be treated fairly if they make a complaint. By distinguishing both the timing and functions of prevention strategies, the framework also offers a

degree of clarity in developing and implementing effective strategies, and, where strategies are absent or ineffective, explains the continued prevalence of SH as a significant workplace harm.

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