

Professionals' perceptions of sexual harassment: An analysis of journalists in the sport industry

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Over the past few years there have been numerous actions, revelations, and allegations of sexual harassment in the world of sports. A recent high-profile example involved Madison Square Garden (MSG) which made history when a jury – after determining that MSG and Isiah Thomas (the then coach and president of the New York Knicks, one of the teams owned by MSG) had sexually harassed Anucha Browne Sanders, a former team executive – ordered MSG and its owner, James Dolan, to pay over \$11 million to Sanders. The jury members found Thomas guilty but they decided MSG and Dolan were financially liable for the harassment and hostile work environment. Some of the other occurrences and alleged incidences of sexual harassment have involved professional co-workers, supervisors, front office employees, and broadcast personnel employed by high profile sport and media organizations (i.e., Memphis Grizzlies, NASCAR, ESPN). While some may consider these sexual harassment incidents isolated occurrences, others may believe they are systemic in sport organizations.

While the impact of sexual harassment in the workplace has been well documented, little sexual harassment research has been conducted focusing on working professional females in the sport industry. This study attempted to determine the extent that one particular group of professional females in the sport industry (e.g., women sport print media professionals such as sports editors, sportswriters, and sports columnists) were subjected to sexual harassment in the workplace. This study also investigated how various social and environmental factors (e.g., level of education, sexual harassment policy in workplace) affect sexual harassment incident. While a few of the females in the sport print media who have been subjected to sexual harassment have received media attention, this study sought to quantify the prevalence of perceived sexual harassment incidents involving female sport print media professionals.

Of the women who participated in the study (N = 112), 57 (50.9%) of the respondents had encountered some form of sexual harassment over the previous year from various individuals with whom they came into contact while working in a sport context and employed by their primary employer. In determining the sources (i.e., perpetrators) of the sexual harassment, through statistical analyses using McNemar's test the results showed that co-workers (n = 31, 28.30%) than from all other groups including supervisors (n = 9, 8.49%, $p < .01$), coaches (n = 15, 14.71, $p < .01$), and other sport organization employees (n = 4, 3.96%, $p < .01$). This study included numerous other unique findings. For instance, multiple regression with educational level and ages as independent variables suggested that age was a significant predictor of having encountered sexual advances ($\beta = -.11$, $F(1,94) = 6.87$, $p < .05$, $R^2 = .068$). Age was also a significant predictor of being asked for sexual favors ($\beta = -.065$, $F(1,94) = 7.375$, $p < .05$, $R^2 = .073$). The study also found that if a female print sport media professional experienced one type of sexual harassment (i.e., verbal conduct of a sexual nature, unwelcome sexual advance, physical conduct of a sexual nature, request for sexual favor), she was more likely to face other types of sexual harassment as well. Pearson's Product-Moment Correlations indicated there were positive correlations between each type of sexual harassment. For instance, there was a strong correlation between sexual advances and requests for sexual favors ($r = .71$, $p < .01$). There was also a significant correlation between requests for sexual favors and physical harassment ($r = .66$, $p < .01$). Furthermore, the study also found that employers play an important role in reducing sexual harassment in sport media workplace. For instance, independent samples t-test showed that those female sports media professionals who were satisfied with their employers' response to sexual harassment were less likely to experience sexual advances ($t = -4.26$, $df = 8$, $p < .05$), sexual favors ($t = -7.59$, $df = 8$, $p < .05$), and total sexual harassment ($t = -2.60$, $df = 8$, $p < .05$). By identifying sexual harassment and determining its prevalence in one segment of the sport industry, the problem is recognized and those facing it are legitimized. Once this occurs steps can be taken by sport and media organizations/personnel to address the problem. Suggestions on how to prevent harassment towards women in the sport industry are also discussed.