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Women researchers and sexual harassment: It
is not a labour of love!

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SEXUAL HARASSMENT: HOW TO DEFINE IT?

- **EU law:** where any form of unwanted verbal, non-verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature occurs, with the purpose or effect of violating the **dignity** of a person, in particular when creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment
- **Till (1980):** Academic sexual harassment is the use of **authority** to emphasize the sexuality or sexual identity of a student in a manner which **prevents** or impairs that **student's full enjoyment** of educational benefits, climate or opportunities.
- **Schacht and Atchison (1993):** sexual harassment is an instrument by which males **erode female's career** aspirations. It is strictly related to **power**.

THE FIVE LEVELS OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT (TILL, 1980)

Gender Harassment

- Most common
- Especially from traditional male dominated disciplines

Seductive Behavior

- Inappropriate and offensive behaviours
- Sanctions-free

Sexual Bribery

- Sexual activities requested by promise of rewards
- Not punishment if sex not allowed

Sexual Coercion

- Sexual activities allowed or threat of punishment
- Put out or get out

Sexual Assault

- Considered a crime
- Consent is considered defence



SEXUAL HARASSMENT: SOME DATA

A study conducted by Ilies et colleagues (2003) in the U.S. shows that Academic Workplace has the 2^o highest rate of Sexual Harassment following the Military Workplace which register the 1^o highest rate. (Ilies et al., 2003).



Military workplace

- Direct query results: 36%
- Behavioural experiences reports: 69%

Academic workplace

- Direct query results: 16%
- Behavioural experiences reports: 58%

Government sector

- Direct query results: 31%
- Behavioural experiences reports: 43%

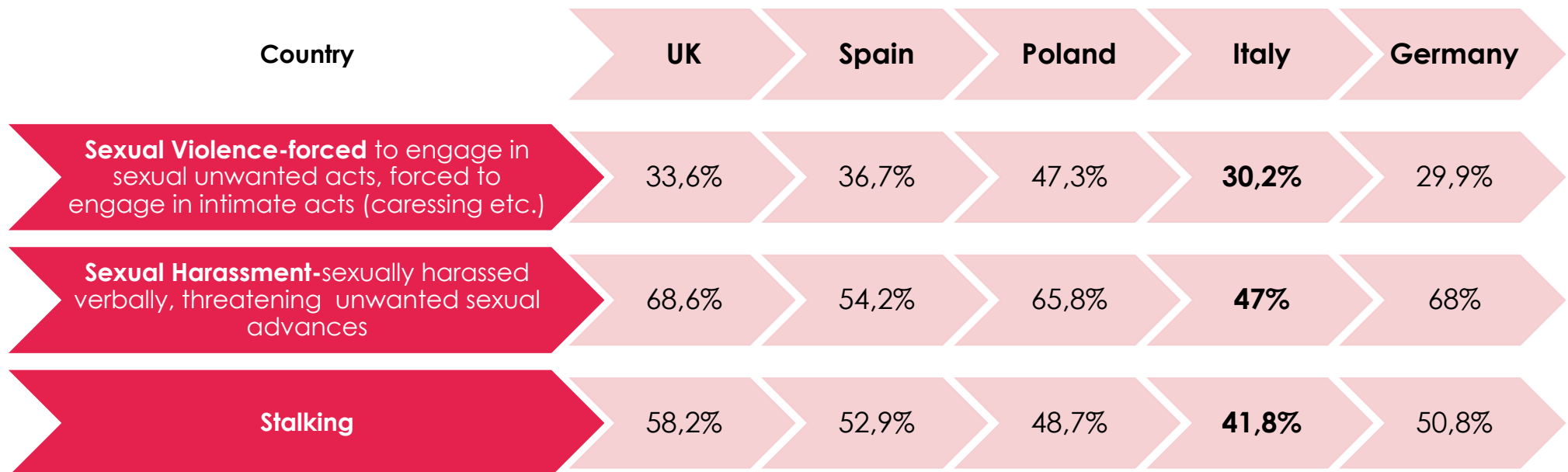
Private sector

- Direct query results: 23%
- Behavioural experiences reports: 46%

SEXUAL HARASSMENT: SOME DATA

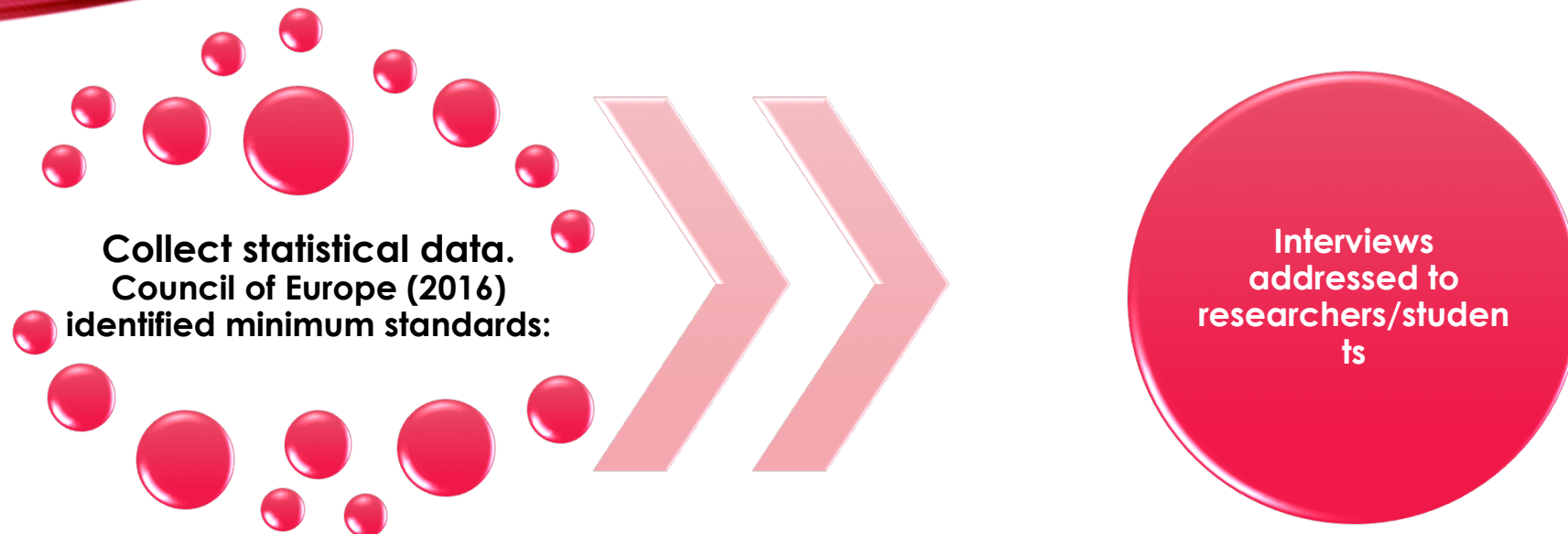
An EU-funded Project Gender-based violence, stalking and fear of crime (2012 - 2015) reported on sexual violence and harassment of women students

Country	UK	Spain	Poland	Italy	Germany	Total
No. Higher education Institutions	3	4	7	4	16	34
No. Respondents	707	323	4,759	3,064	12,663	21,516



Gender-based violence, stalking and fear of crime: European Union project (2012)

METHODOLOGY: HOW TO SURVEY SEXUAL HARASSMENT?



- Sex
- Age
- Type of violence
- Relationship of the perpetrator to the victim
- Geographical location

• Warnings!

- Poorly conducting survey is unethical because it could needlessly re-traumatize the respondent
- Many women are not likely to label their experiences as sexual harassment
- Women who experience gender harassment are less likely to label their experience as sexual harassment



SOME REMOVALS FROM INTERVIEWS ADDRESSED TO CNR - RESEARCHERS

« It is not because we are women but **it is because it exists an embedded cultural issue**. Men tend to speak from the top to the down with us, only because we are woman, but this is everywhere. When during a meeting the people orally strike you, with a language or something....

These are not episodes of discrimination, these are their standard behaviour..

Many men used to treat the women as “dolls/bambolette” or.. If women speak up, as a virago.. virago only because you simply say what you think. I used to see women doing secretarial activities, and I developed a mental mechanism that leads me to treat them as they are all secretariats. And this is true for me too, I can notice that during meetings, do not even look at me when I speak».

Physicist, 38.



SOME REMOVALS FROM INTERVIEWS ADDRESSED TO CNR - RESEARCHERS

«After I got my job I experienced a serious mobbing episode which obstructed me to work for lot of time. I was just hired and my head of department starting harass me. **I tried to stay away from him, to take off my body his hands**, but his requestes were getting heavier. I tried to surrender, **after my refusal, he took revenge**.

I get away with this problem only by changing my research topic even if everithing was managed with layers. Such an ashamed story!!

This was **because I refused sexual attentions** coming from my head of the laboratory. Of course I cannot prove that but this is my experience. Everything started because the only peaceful relationship I had was with the laptop. The others colleagues disliked my presence and it was clear at me. And this was from both women and men. **This man has been cunning and he has created around me a climate of hostility and exclusion**. A colleague of mine told me: "sorry for this but I got paid from his funds and I have to do what he says". Only one women out of 20 researchers came to me. The rest of them simply started ignoring me. So I decided to file a lawsuit, otherwise I had to leave my job!"

Biologist, 57



SOME REMOVALS FROM INTERVIEWS ADDRESSED TO CNR - RESEARCHERS

«He was by my teacher, during my doctoral thesis, every time we met, he greets to me hugging me... shortly after he wanted me to sit beside him, the comfort space between us disappeared. Meeting by meeting he started trying to get hands around me, on my knees, on my legs and **when I was writing at the computer he often tried to touch my hands** in an allusive way that I would not well how to describe it, even if in my mind it was not so inappropriate.

One afternoon, close to concluding the job thesis, **he spoke to me about the possibility to work together on a university project** which it would have lead us to work together. From a professional point of view, the project was interesting and it would have given me the opportunity to strengthen the collaboration with the university. I enjoyed the idea.... ... That same day he spoke to me about this project, while I was leaving, he wanted to say bye to me and I thought that he would have had the same approach as the months before. However, he started looking in my eyes deeper and caressing me on my cheeks and he was keeping on repeating me **“we have to do a good job, we have to do a good job”**. **I was standing still and I was not able to say anything when he suddenly kissed me. I took all my stuff and left. I was shocked.** He could not have did that in his office, in the university department!!!

I have never talked with anyone about this neither at the university neither in my workplace”

GENDER-BASED DISCRIMINATION

Subtle

Relational: sex discrimination is often unnoticed, that people have internalized as «normal» or «natural», «acceptable»

I did not notice sex discrimination even if men are more present in manager roles, but this is everywhere..

Psychological: sex discrimination is more innocent or manipulative, intentional or unintentional, well-meaning or malicious

I do not know if is the status to be a doctor to push them to overestimate theirself or if it is the status as a men...

Covert

Relational: sex discrimination is hidden, purposeful, and difficult to prove.

You go to a meeting and take aware that you are the only female present

Psychological: individuals may say that they favour GE but engage in behaviours that intentionally undermine women

In an ambiguous way there were several behaviours that thwart me...

Blatant

Relational: sex discrimination is typically intentional, quite visible, and easily documented.

Because I did not give into his advances I stayed without contract for months

Psychological: sex discrimination endorses traditional gender role

Everybody told me: you are a woman, really do you study physics?



WHICH KIND OF EFFECTS SEXUAL HARASSMENT PRODUCES ON WOMEN?

- **Physical symptoms** : like headache, backache, nausea, weight loss
- **Psychological symptoms**: like insomnia, depression, and nervousness.

The reactions to symptoms of emotional stress can cause:

loss of motivation, absenteeism, diminished productivity, loss of the desire and the ability to work efficiently (Goodman, 1981; Crull, 1979).

The more an individual is harassed on the job, the less she/he likes that job!

BUT.... WOMEN ARE NOT LIKELY TO REPORT

Why?

For the harassed: **fear of blame, disbelief, humiliation, ostracism, damage to one's career and reputation** (Cortina and Berdhal, 2008).

From the Organisation: **permissive climate toward sexual harassment, lack of sanctions against offenders, the awareness that organisations are not neutral** (hulin, fitzgerald and dlasgow, 1996).

Sexual harassment could constitute one of the causes and damaging barriers to women's career success and satisfaction.

Sexual harassment is not referred only to women researchers but also to young female with their professors "hidden issue".





**THANK YOU FOR YOUR
ATTENTION!**

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