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July 2023
e12695

SPECIAL SECTION

Workplace sexual harassment as a feature of precarious work in Uganda's agro-processing factories: "Mince your words and watch yourself"

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First published: 04 February 2023 | <https://doi.org/10.1111/dpr.12695> | [VIEW METRICS](#)

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Summary

Motivation

The agro-processing sector in Uganda provides jobs to large numbers of workers. While paid work is supposed to be empowering for women, the factory jobs are informal and unsafe, and workplace sexual harassment undermines women's empowerment. To enable decent jobs for women, it is important to understand what constrains their voice and agency in responding to workplace sexual harassment.

Purpose

The article aims to show how workplace sexual harassment is a key feature of precarious work for women working in low-skilled, informal jobs in factories. The study asked how gender norms and informality in labour arrangements that are part of global capitalist labour relations influence young women's voice and agency in response to sexual harassment at work.

Methods and approach

Twenty in-depth interviews were carried out with factory workers in seven different agro-processing factories in Uganda's capital Kampala, supplemented with participatory methods like Safety Audits and Body Mappings.

Findings

We show the informal nature of jobs in factories and how precarious working conditions create the risks of experiencing sexual harassment by managers and supervisors. Keeping jobs informal enables factories to eschew workplace policies. Young women's experiences and articulation of sexual harassment are constrained by social and gender norms; and norms influence factory-based mechanisms, where they exist. Women rely on informal tactics to prevent sexual harassment.

Policy implications

The policy implications of the research include the importance of improving the implementation of formal complaints mechanisms; and especially developing young women's political capacities to protest collectively against harassment and seek redress, and addressing social and gender norms.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

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