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SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

A Study of Staff and Students at Umeå University

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Summary

Sexual harassment and other forms of offensive behaviour are serious problems within academia. They affect students and staff alike and are found in all disciplines. In this study, we consider the various forms and expressions of harassment. In addition to sexual harassment, this includes bullying, cyberbullying, victimisation and incivility, all of which we examine under the umbrella term *gender-based violence*.

The purpose of this report is to describe the occurrence of and analyse the correlation between sexual harassment, and other forms of gender-based violence, and the work environment and health of staff and students at Umeå University. The report is based on a national study of the prevalence of sexual harassment in academia conducted within the framework of *the Research and Collaboration Programme on Gender-based Violence*.

In answer to a direct question regarding whether the respondent had been subjected to unwanted sexual attention in their place of work/study, 2.2% of staff and 6.4% of students replied in the affirmative. Among women, prevalence is higher among female students than female employees, with 7% of this group having been subjected to such behaviour, and the same is true of men, with more male students (5.5%) reporting incidents. When the question of sexual harassment is broken down into specific situations and acts, the figure increases substantially, with as many as 51% of female employees and 29% of men stating that they had experienced at least one of the specified situations. Notably, levels among female employees of Umeå University are significantly higher than the figure for the Swedish higher education sector as a whole. The corresponding figure for students at Umeå University is, however, lower than the national average for the higher education sector, with 16% of women and 9% of men responding in the affirmative.

There are also notable gender-based disparities with regard to bullying, with twice as many women as men reporting problems, and reporting a higher frequency of offences. However, bullying is reported to a greater extent by male than female students. There are also gender disparities in incivility, with significantly more female employees reporting incidents than men.

Sexism in the form of sexual harassment and gender-based violence can of course be understood as a means of academic reproduction; i.e., as one of the components that maintains and recreates the various structures, hierarchies and gender-inequitable workplaces in academia. As this study makes clear, sexual harassment and gender-based violence create a systematic and recurring pattern of unwelcome events that can be understood as institutional mechanisms and behaviours that risk being normalised. This also produces other problems in addition to gender inequality. In the study, we find clear correlations for both staff and students between sexual harassment and other forms of gender-based violence and experiences of the psychosocial and organisational work environment and health.



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The present report presents the results of a study commissioned by the Vice-Chancellor of Umeå University.

The assignment to the authors of the report was to work jointly on the design and analysis of results. B-IK and JL have coauthored the sections of the report dealing with its background, theory, previous research, terminology, discussion and analysis. NE wrote the section on methodology and performed data processing. All authors contributed to the section on results.

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