



Exploring the job-related, psychological and physical health impacts of sexual harassment allegations on non-victim employees at McDonald's in the UK

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Abstract

This study investigates the job-related, psychological and physical health impacts of sexual harassment allegations on non-victim employees at McDonald's in the UK. The research rationale is founded on the significant effects of workplace sexual harassment on organisational reputation and employee well-being, extensively documented in literature across job-related, psychological and physical domains. However, there is a notable gap in the understanding of these impacts on non-victim employees, particularly within the context of McDonald's in the UK. Utilising an interpretivist philosophy, the study adopts an inductive approach to generate new insights from qualitative data. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 non-victim employees, employing a case study strategy to provide detailed insights into their experiences. Thematic analysis findings reveal substantial job-related impacts, including decreased job satisfaction, eroded organisational commitment, declined job performance, increased job withdrawal and decreased work engagement. Psychological effects identified include declined mental well-being, heightened anxiety, symptoms of depression and reduced self-esteem. Physical health consequences were manifested as stress-related symptoms, disrupted sleep patterns and increased fatigue. The study also highlights the inadequacies in existing sexual harassment prevention programmes at McDonald's, pinpointing the need for enhanced training and education, improved support and counselling services and increased transparency and communication. The study provides actionable recommendations to develop comprehensive strategies aimed at preventing sexual harassment and supporting both victims and non-victim employees. These strategies include implementing mandatory, detailed training sessions, providing on-site counselling and creating transparent reporting systems.

Keywords: sexual harassment allegations; non-victim employees; job-related outcomes; psychological well-being; physical health; organisational commitment; work engagement

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1. Introduction & research background

The scrutiny over workplace sexual harassment has increased significantly, as it is widely recognised to damage both company reputation and employee well-being. A BBC survey (2023) found that UK McDonald's receives around two sexual harassment claims weekly, totalling over 400 complaints between April and November 2023, highlighting its frequency and severity. McDonald's UK CEO Alistair Macrow noted that the company employs over 170,000 people across 1,300 restaurants, with over 1,100 franchised which complicate efforts to fully eliminate harassment due to reduced control over daily operations (The Independent, 2023). Sexual harassment has become a critical issue that many modern employers are actively engaging to tackle, characterised by Chan et al., (2008) to include unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favours and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature that can create a hostile or intimidating work environment. Furthermore, it is found to severely undermine job satisfaction, morale and productivity, causing victims to lose trust in their organisation, reduce commitment and increase turnover intentions (Hansen et al., 2020). The Trades Union Congress (TUC, 2023) reported that 52% of women and 63% of young women aged 18-24 have experienced workplace harassment, leading to high staff turnover, recruitment challenges and increased training costs, ultimately affecting operational efficiency and financial performance.

1.1 Research rationale & contributions

Increasing research attention on workplace sexual harassment underscores its significant impact on both organisational reputation and employee well-being, as various studies have empirically categorised the effects of sexual harassment into job-related, psychological and physical domains. For instance, Chan et al., (2008) conducted a meta-analytic review highlighting that workplace sexual harassment leads to job dissatisfaction, reduced organisational commitment and decreased job performance. Similarly, Willness et al., (2007) emphasised that victims of sexual harassment often experience higher levels of job withdrawal and turnover intentions, underscoring the detrimental effects on job-related outcomes. From a psychological perspective, Friborg et al. (2017) found that sexual harassment is closely associated with depressive symptoms, especially when the harassment originates from clients or customers. This aligns with the findings of Acquadro et al., (2022), who reported that both witnesses and non-witnesses of sexual harassment suffer from decreased perceived self-efficacy and increased psychological distress. These studies indicate that the psychological repercussions of sexual harassment extend beyond the direct victims, affecting the broader workplace environment and employee mental health. The physical health impacts of sexual harassment are equally concerning. Hansen et al., (2020) demonstrated that sexual harassment leads to various health issues, including stress-related symptoms such as headaches, gastrointestinal problems and sleep disturbances. Hanson et al. (2020) further explored the severe consequences, revealing a link between workplace sexual harassment and an increased risk of

suicide and suicide attempts, highlighting the critical need to address the physical health impacts of sexual harassment comprehensively.

Nonetheless, despite extensive research on the direct victims of sexual harassment, there is a notable gap in the literature regarding the broader effects on other employees within the same organisation. This gap is particularly evident in studies focusing on McDonald's in the UK. While Gupta & Garg (2020) discussed the prevalence and legal implications of workplace sexual harassment, they did not explore into the specific impacts on non-victim employees. Similarly, Lapierre et al., (2005) highlighted the overall job satisfaction impacts of workplace aggression but did not examine the experiences of employees who are not direct victims. Given the limited empirical studies specifically addressing the consequences of sexual harassment allegations at McDonald's, there is a clear need for primary data collection. This study addresses this gap by exploring the job-related, psychological and physical health impacts of sexual harassment allegations on other non-victim employees at McDonald's in the UK as it seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how these allegations affect the entire workplace environment, thereby informing more effective prevention and support strategies. The existing literature predominantly focuses on the direct victims of sexual harassment often overlooking the broader organisational impacts with Zeighami et al., (2021) highlighted the loss of individual and social identity among victims, but there remains a lack of studies examining how these dynamics affect other employees.

Therefore, addressing this gap is of substantial research importance as the repercussions of sexual harassment allegations can permeate the entire organisational culture, influencing the well-being and performance of all employees and not just the direct victims. This research will contribute to theoretical advancements by providing a deeper understanding of the organisational-wide impacts of sexual harassment, extending beyond the existing focus on direct victims. Practically, the study is particularly timely and necessary due to the inadequately explored effects of sexual harassment allegations at McDonald's. Collecting primary data through in-depth qualitative interviews with McDonald's employees will provide valuable insights into the job-related, psychological and physical health impacts of these allegations. These insights will pave the way for developing comprehensive strategies to mitigate the negative effects and foster a healthier and more supportive work environment at McDonald's in the UK.

1.2 Research aim & objectives

This study aims to investigate the job-related, psychological and physical health impacts of sexual harassment allegations on non-victim employees at McDonald's in the UK. Despite extensive research on the direct victims of sexual harassment, there is a notable gap in understanding the broader effects on other employees within the same organisation. This study aims to address this gap by providing a comprehensive understanding of how these allegations affect the entire workplace environment, thereby informing more effective prevention and support strategies via

the findings from gathered primary data. To achieve these research aims, the following objectives will be completed:

- 1) To assess the job-related impacts of sexual harassment allegations on non-victim employees at McDonald's in the UK including job satisfaction, organisational commitment, job performance, job withdrawal and work withdrawal.
- 2) To explore the psychological effects of sexual harassment allegations on non-victim employees focusing on mental well-being, anxiety, depression and self-esteem.
- 3) To examine the physical health consequences of sexual harassment allegations on non-victim employees such as stress-related symptoms, sleep disturbances and fatigue.
- 4) To evaluate the effectiveness of existing sexual harassment prevention programmes at McDonald's and identify areas for improvement based on the experiences of non-victim employees.
- 5) To provide recommendations for developing comprehensive strategies to prevent sexual harassment and support both victims and non-victim employees within McDonald's in the UK.

1.3 Research question

How do sexual harassment allegations at McDonald's in the UK impact the job-related, psychological and physical health of non-victim employees?

1.3.1 Research sub-questions

- 1) How do sexual harassment allegations affect job satisfaction, organisational commitment, job performance, job withdrawal and work withdrawal among non-victim employees at McDonald's in the UK?
- 2) How do sexual harassment allegations influence affect employee psychology including mental well-being, anxiety, depression and self-esteem of non-victim employees at McDonald's in the UK?
- 3) What are the physical health consequences in areas of stress-related symptoms, sleep disturbances and fatigue experienced by non-victim employees following sexual harassment allegations at McDonald's in the UK?
- 4) How effective are the existing sexual harassment prevention programmes at McDonald's in supporting non-victim employees and what areas need improvement?

- 5) What comprehensive strategies can be developed to prevent sexual harassment and support both victims and non-victim employees at McDonald's in the UK?

1.4 Chapter summary and structure of study

This study is structured with six chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the background, rationale, aims, objectives and research questions to set the stage for the study. Chapter 2 provides an in-depth literature review to examining existing research on workplace sexual harassment and identifying research gaps. Chapter 3 outlines the methodology, detailing the research philosophy, approach, strategy, choice, time horizon data collection and analysis methods. Chapter 4 presents the results and findings from the qualitative interviews, incorporating a discussion of key findings in relation to the literature, highlighting key insights and implications in accordance to research objectives and questions. Chapter 5 concludes the study by summarising the study's findings, contributions and suggesting directions for future research.

2. Literature review

This chapter reviews empirical studies on workplace sexual harassment, exploring key themes and research scopes in current literature to establish theoretical foundation. The aim is to identify research gaps that this study will address, enhancing academic knowledge and shaping the study's design.

2.1 Definition of workplace sexual harassment

According to McDonald's (2012) review of workplace sexual harassment literature, workplace sexual harassment is commonly defined as unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favours and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature that affects employment, interferes with work performance and creates a hostile work environment. Chan et al.'s (2008) meta-analysis identified common themes such as inappropriate touching, suggestive comments, lewd jokes and the display of explicit materials, indicating that harassment ranges from subtle verbal to overt physical actions, significantly impacting individuals. Friberg et al. (2017) reinforced these claims, arguing that such behaviours create a toxic work environment, leading to decreased job satisfaction and increased mental health issues for both victims and witnesses. Gupta and Garg (2020) noted that these behaviours violate workplace policies and legal standards, resulting in severe consequences for organisations and employees.

2.1.1 Current research scope on workplace sexual harassment

There has been increasing research attention dedicated to the field of workplace sexual harassment since the turn of the 21st century, primarily focusing on the direct impacts it has on victims in areas of psychological, physical and job-related impacts as discussed in Chan et al.'s (2008) meta-analytic review and McDonald's (2012) systematic review of workplace sexual harassment literature. Similarly, Willness et al., (2007) conducted a meta-analysis that highlighted significant adverse effects on victims' mental health and job performance, drawing similarities with Chan et al.'s (2008) study that investigated broader psychological outcomes such as anxiety and depression experienced by victims. However, the existing literature often overlooks the organisational-wide effects particularly on non-victim employees, this gap is particularly evident as inadequate empirical studies attempt to address how sexual harassment allegations impact overall workplace dynamics and morale, representing a key research gap for this study to contribute to. Moreover, it is apparent that there exist no unified paradigms when measuring workplace sexual harassment impacts due to the different dynamics and nature of companies, as empirical studies often adopt a case study approach to accustom to the unique cultures and responses to harassment (Zeighami et al., 2023; Cortina & Areguin, 2021; Folke & Rickne, 2022), highlighting the importance of a case study approach in exploring workplace sexual harassment impacts as this research will adopt. Furthermore, despite the widely scrutinised sexual harassment allegation at McDonalds in recent years, limited empirical studies have explored its impacts on McDonald's employees, with Weinhold et al. (2023) attempting to study within McDonald's in New Zealand, representing another research gap for this study to address the increasingly scrutinised issue of sexual harassment as reported in UK's McDonalds (The BBC, 2023).

2.2 Job related impacts of workplace sexual harassment

As one of the key themes of workplace sexual harassment impacts, job-related dimensions such as job satisfaction, organisational commitment and job performance show direct correlations in Griffin et al.'s (2010) study. Oriade et al. (2023) found that harassment leads to lower job satisfaction, reducing morale and productivity, echoing Willness et al.'s (2007) findings on decreased organisational commitment and increased turnover intentions. Additionally, Chan et al. (2008) reported that employees experiencing or witnessing harassment exhibit higher levels of job and work withdrawal behaviours. The following sub-sections will discuss the individual dimensions of key job-related impacts of workplace sexual harassment, detailing its effects and identified indicators.

2.2.1 Job satisfaction

The measurement and meaning of job satisfaction was originally explored by Wanous & Lawler (1972) that refers to the level of contentment employees feel regarding their job roles and work environment. More recent studies by Dziuba et al.'s (2020) and Penconek et al.'s (2021) further

expanded on this original measurement approach to include factors such as work conditions, relationships with colleagues and the overall organisational culture. According to Lapierre et al. (2007), sexual harassment significantly undermines job satisfaction which leads to reduced morale and increased dissatisfaction, finding that victims of workplace harassment report significantly lower job satisfaction due to the hostile work environment. Similarly, Willness et al., (2007) highlighted that the presence of harassment leads to a pervasive negative impact on employees' attitudes towards their job, resulting in increased absenteeism and a decline in overall productivity.

2.2.2 Organisational commitment

Another dimension of job-related impacts from workplace harassment is organisational commitment, which refers to the psychological attachment an employee feels towards their organisation, influencing their desire to stay (Arasanmi & Krishna, 2019). Aranki et al. (2019) categorised organisational commitment into three types including affective (emotional attachment and identification with the organisation), continuance (perceived opportunity costs of leaving) and normative (feeling of obligation to remain). Rubino et al. (2018) found that sexual harassment significantly diminishes employees' commitment across all three types, reinforcing Chan et al.'s (2008) argument that harassment erodes trust in the organisation, leading employees to disengage and consider leaving. This reduction in organisational commitment also disrupts team cohesion and increases recruitment and training costs for the company (Alrawadieh et al., 2023).

2.2.3 Job performance

Another critical dimension of job-related impacts from workplace harassment is job performance, which refers to the efficiency and effectiveness with which employees execute their job responsibilities with key indicators of job performance including productivity levels, quality of work produced and the successful achievement of key goals (Darmawan et al., 2020). According to Gupta & Garg (2020), sexual harassment in the workplace is found to significantly impair job performance by creating a stressful and hostile environment that distracts employees from their tasks. Similarly, Fitzgerald & Cortina (2018) found that employees experiencing harassment exhibit decreased work performance due to increased stress and inability to concentrate. Furthermore, Rubino et al. (2018) also highlighted a clear decline in job performance due to workplace sexual harassment, which is found to affect individual productivity as well as the overall performance and profitability of the organisation, illustrating the importance of understanding the organisational wide job-related effects from workplace sexual harassment.

2.2.4 Job withdrawal

Job withdrawal is another dimension of job-related impacts from workplace harassment, referring to behaviours like increased absenteeism and intentions to quit (Ford et al., 2021). De Cieri et al. (2021) state that this phenomenon often arises from adverse working conditions, with workplace sexual harassment prompting employees to escape the hostile environment. Similarly, Park et al. (2022) found that harassment increases turnover intentions and absenteeism rates, reinforcing Ollo-Lopez and Nunez's (2018) findings that job withdrawal behaviours disrupt workflow, reduce team productivity and increase organisational recruitment and training costs. Effective organisational policies and support systems are essential to mitigate these adverse outcomes and retain valuable employees by developing anti-sexual harassment systems to combat isolation and tolerant climates (Ollo-Lopez & Nunez, 2018).

2.2.5 Work withdrawal

Work withdrawal encompasses behaviours where employees reduce their effort and engagement in their job tasks, including presenteeism, decreased task involvement and reduced discretionary effort, as found in Chong et al.'s (2020) study on work withdrawal during the COVID pandemic. According to Ford et al. (2021), sexual harassment increases work withdrawal behaviours as employees become disengaged due to the hostile environment, leading to lower productivity and less involvement in team projects. Ford et al. also argue that victims' resilience decreases when they formally report harassment, resulting in further work withdrawal. Rubino et al. (2021) noted that work withdrawal hampers individual and team performance, negatively impacting organisational dynamics and effectiveness. This calls for fostering a supportive work environment to mitigate work withdrawal in response to workplace sexual harassment.

2.3 Psychological impacts of workplace sexual harassment

According to Chan et al.'s (2008) meta-analytic review of sexual harassment studies, workplace sexual harassment are found to cause major psychological impacts that impact the victim's mental well-being including increasing anxiety levels, depression and reduced self-esteem. Similarly, McDonald's (2012) argued that these impacts can have far-reaching consequences on both individual and organisational levels, influencing employees' ability to function effectively at work and maintain personal health. The following subsections explore these specific psychological dimensions in detail.

2.3.1 Mental well-being

Mental well-being is widely recognised as the overall psychological state of an individual, encompassing emotional, psychological and social aspects of health as defined by Fusar-Poli et al., (2020). Moreover, workplace sexual harassment is found to severely undermine the victim's

mental well-being which leads to increased stress and emotional turmoil especially among Asian American women as demonstrated in Buchanan et al.'s (2020) study. According to Gupta & Garg (2020), employees who experience or witness harassment report significantly lower levels of mental well-being, identifying a correlation between the occurrence of sexual harassment and a toxic work environment that contributes to chronic stress and burnout. Furthermore, the decline in mental well-being is found to also lead to decreased job satisfaction and productivity, especially in the face of self-perceived embarrassment and peer pressure in the workplace (Burn, 2019).

2.3.2 Anxiety

According to Chan et al.'s (2008) meta-analytic review, anxiety is a common psychological response to workplace sexual harassment, characterised by feelings of worry and fear, whereby employees whom are subjected to harassment often experience heightened anxiety levels, impacting their ability to concentrate and perform tasks effectively. Moreover, Ciby & Sahai (2023) argues that workplace sexual harassment induced anxiety can manifest in various forms including generalised anxiety, panic attacks and social anxiety that affects both personal and professional domains. Similarly, Lange & Young (2019) found that anxiety resulted from workplace sexual harassment would cause other psychological issues including insomnia and PTSD, causing further exacerbation on workplace disengagement in a toxic loop that continuously deepens the psychological damages caused to the victim. More specifically, persistent anxiety is found to reduce overall job satisfaction and increases the likelihood of job withdrawal behaviours including absenteeism and turnover intentions (Ciby & Sahai, 2023).

2.3.3 Depression

According to Lorr et al. (1967), depression is characterised by persistent sadness, constant hopelessness and a lack of interest in activities, posing severe risks to psychological and physical health. In relation to workplace sexual harassment, depression is a common psychological impact that can lead to severe consequences like suicidal ideation and self-harm (Friborg et al., 2017). Milder consequences include difficulty concentrating and chronic fatigue, increasing absenteeism and demotivation, as seen in the Danish workforce (Rugulies et al., 2020). Diez-Canseco et al.'s (2022) systematic review identified depression as the primary psychological impact of workplace harassment, urging organisations to implement immediate solutions to combat its detrimental effects.

2.3.4 Self-esteem

Another key psychological impact commonly associated to workplace sexual harassment is the loss of self-esteem and sense of self-worth, causing victims to question their abilities and worth as

a result as found in Malik et al.'s (2014) study. According to Malik et al., (2014), sexual harassment victims often experience a significant drop in self-esteem that impacts their confidence and engagement at work, whereby lowered self-esteem would often result in withdrawal behaviours and a lack of motivation to participate in team activities. Similarly, Acquadro et al., (2022) also found that sexual harassment toward female workers would result in higher chances of lower self-esteem in comparison to male workers in the food and beverage industry, indicating apparent gender influences in the loss of self-esteem resulted from workplace sexual harassment.

2.4 Physical impacts of workplace sexual harassment

According to Chan et al.'s (2008) meta-analytic review of sexual harassment studies, workplace sexual harassment causes significant physical health impacts on victims, this is further reinforced in McDonald's (2012) systematic review, argued that physical impacts such as stress-related symptoms, sleep disturbances and fatigue would directly impact employees' physical health, ability to function effectively at work. Therefore, the following subsections explore these specific physical dimensions in detail.

2.4.1 Stress-related symptoms

According to Malik & Farooqi (2014), stress-related symptoms are common physical responses to workplace sexual harassment which can be manifested in forms of headaches, muscle tension and gastrointestinal issues. Similarly, Willness et al., (2007) also found that employees experiencing harassment often report heightened stress levels, commonly leading to chronic pain and hypertension from the posttraumatic stress caused. Another study by De Cieri et al. (2019) found that the constant stress from a hostile work environment exacerbates these symptoms, contributing to long-term health problems, impairing daily functioning and reducing overall job performance.

2.4.2 Sleep disturbances

Sleep disturbances is defined by Magnavita et al., (2019) as disorders in initiating and maintain sleep including insomnia and disrupted sleep patterns. According to Porkka-Heiskanen et al.'s (2013) study, sleep disturbances are key physical impacts of workplace sexual harassment whereby victims often experience difficulty sleeping due to anxiety and stress caused by harassment. Furthermore, sleep deprivation is found to lead to further health issues such as weakened immune function and cognitive impairments, negatively affect employees' ability to concentrate and perform effectively at work (Hansen et al., 2020). Persistent sleep issues are also found to contribute to long-term health risks such as diabetes, obesity, heart attack and strokes, representing a severe condition that requires immediate solution to address (El-Zoghby et al., 2022).

2.4.3 Fatigue

According to Philips' (2015) multi-dimensional approach to defining fatigue, it is characterised by persistent tiredness and lack of energy, affecting one's capability to focus and become motivated. Similarly, harassment-induced stress and anxiety are found to cause chronic fatigue, as victims often suffer from severe fatigue, impairing their ability to perform daily tasks efficiently (Ford & Ivancic, 2020). De Cieri et al. (2019) found that fatigue resulting from harassment can exacerbate other health issues such as depression and cardiovascular problems, posing a prominent physical risk for employees suffering from the aftermath of workplace sexual harassments. Ford & Ivancic (2020) coined this notion of fatigue under the term sexual harassment fatigue, characterised by feelings of helplessness, anger and being in an emotionless state with perceived vulnerability to future sexual harassment.

2.5 Theoretical review

The following sub-sections critically review prominent theories and models used in empirical studies when examining the impacts of workplace sexual harassment, establishing strong theoretical foundations to support the development of a conceptual framework with academic rigour at the end of this section.

2.5.1 Organisational justice theory

Baldwin's (2006) organisational justice theory focuses on employees' perceptions of fairness within their workplace, encompassing distributive justice (fairness of outcomes), procedural justice (fairness of processes) and interactional justice (fairness in interpersonal interactions). This theory provides strong foundation for understanding how perceptions of fairness impact employee attitudes and behaviours (Colquitt et al., 2013). In the context of workplace sexual harassment, the organisational justice theory is particularly relevant as it helps explain how non-victim employees perceive the organisation's response to harassment allegations. If employees perceive the organisation's actions as unfair or insufficient, it can lead to decreased job satisfaction, organisational commitment and increased withdrawal behaviours (Colquitt et al., 2013).

2.5.2 Job demands-resources (JD-R) model

The job demands-resources (JD-R) model posits that job demands (e.g., workload, emotional demands) and job resources (e.g., support, autonomy) interact to affect employee well-being and performance whereby high job demands can lead to stress and burnout, while job resources can buffer these effects and enhance engagement and motivation (Bakker et al., 2004). In the context

of workplace sexual harassment, the JD-R Model is relevant for examining how harassment increases emotional demands on non-victim employees, potentially leading to stress and reduced job performance. Additionally, the availability of job resources, such as social support and effective coping mechanisms, can help mitigate these negative impacts and highlights the importance of providing adequate resources to support employees and manage the additional demands created by a hostile work environment.

2.5.3 Proposed conceptual framework

Based on the above empirical and theoretical reviews, the proposed conceptual framework for this study is presented in figure 1 below. Each component of the conceptual framework will be operationalised through semi-structured interviews, for example job-related impacts will be assessed by questions targeting job satisfaction, organisational commitment, job performance, job withdrawal and work withdrawal. Psychological impacts will be explored via questions addressing mental well-being, anxiety, depression and self-esteem. Physical impacts will be evaluated through questions focusing on stress-related symptoms, sleep disturbances and fatigue. Recommendations to prevent sexual harassment will be derived from analysing these interview responses to identify the effectiveness of existing programmes and areas needing improvement, specifically tailored to the McDonald's UK context.

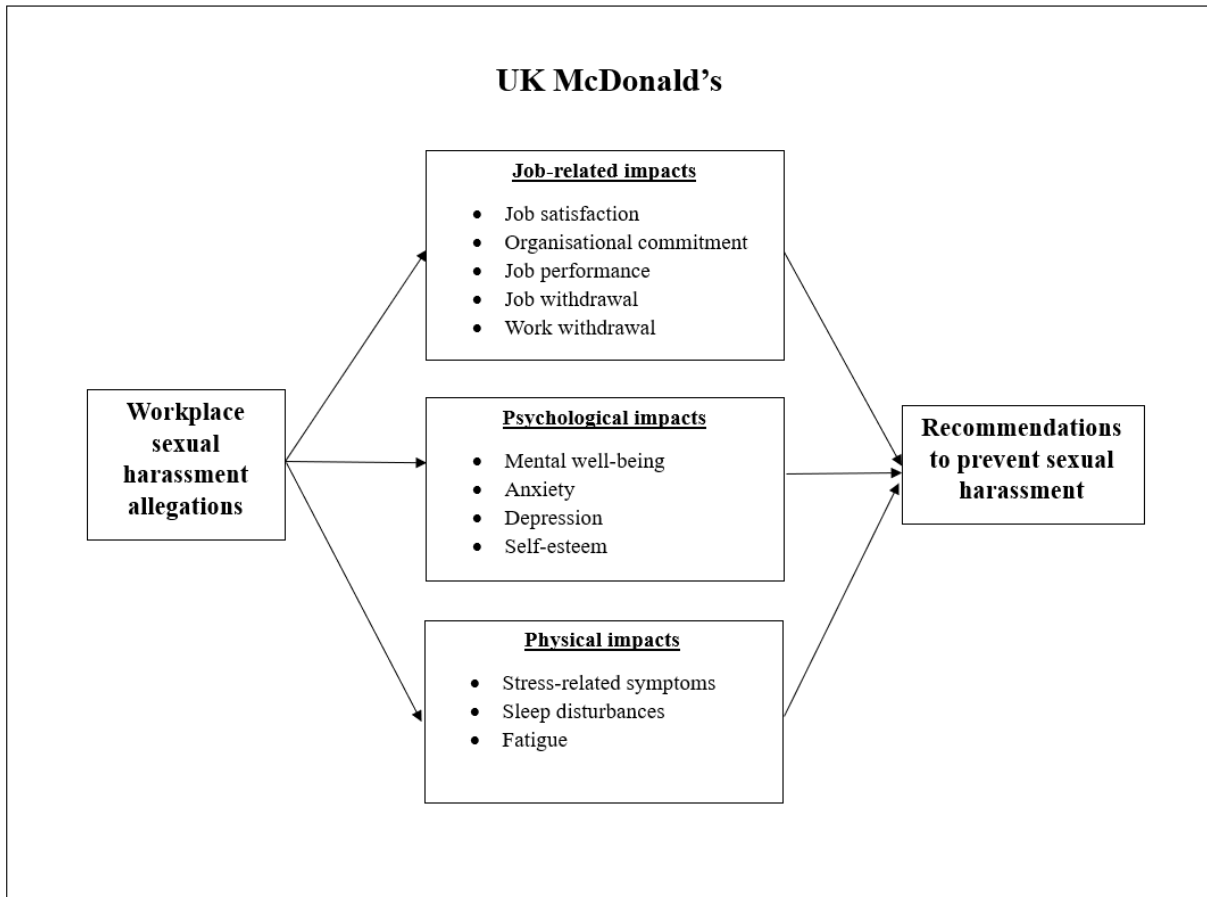


Figure 1: Conceptual framework

2.6 Summary of literature

The literature review chapter highlights the key research themes in psychological, physical and job-related impacts of workplace sexual harassment from empirical studies. Psychological impacts include increased anxiety, depression and reduced self-esteem, affecting both victims and the overall workplace environment (Chan et al., 2008; McDonald, 2012). Physical impacts encompass stress-related symptoms, sleep disturbances and fatigue, further impairing employee health and productivity (Lim & Lee, 2021; Ford et al., 2021). Job-related impacts involve reduced job satisfaction, organisational commitment, job performance and increased job withdrawal behaviours (Willness et al., 2007; Chan et al., 2008). Moreover, current research primarily focuses on the direct effects on victims, often neglecting the broader organisational impacts on non-victim employees. This study aims to fill this gap by examining how sexual harassment allegations affect overall workplace dynamics and morale, particularly in McDonald's UK. The unique organisational cultures and responses to harassment underscore the need for a case study approach

to accurately capture these impacts and develop effective interventions (Zeighami et al., 2023; Cortina & Areguin, 2021; Folke & Rickne, 2022).

3. Methodology

This chapter is structured according to Saunders et al.'s (2009) research onion framework as shown in figure 2, aiming to systematically guide the research process with the selection of the most appropriate research methods at each research layer. This chapter begins with justifying the chosen methods in the outer layers of the onion model, discussing the rationale behind the broader methodological choices such as research philosophy and approach. The subsequent parts of this chapter proceed to specific research strategies, choices of methods and the time horizon of this study. The core focuses on data collection techniques and analysis procedures are also discussed to ensure a coherent and thorough examination of this research study, concluding the chapter with discussion of ethical considerations to maintain research integrity and participant welfare throughout the research process.

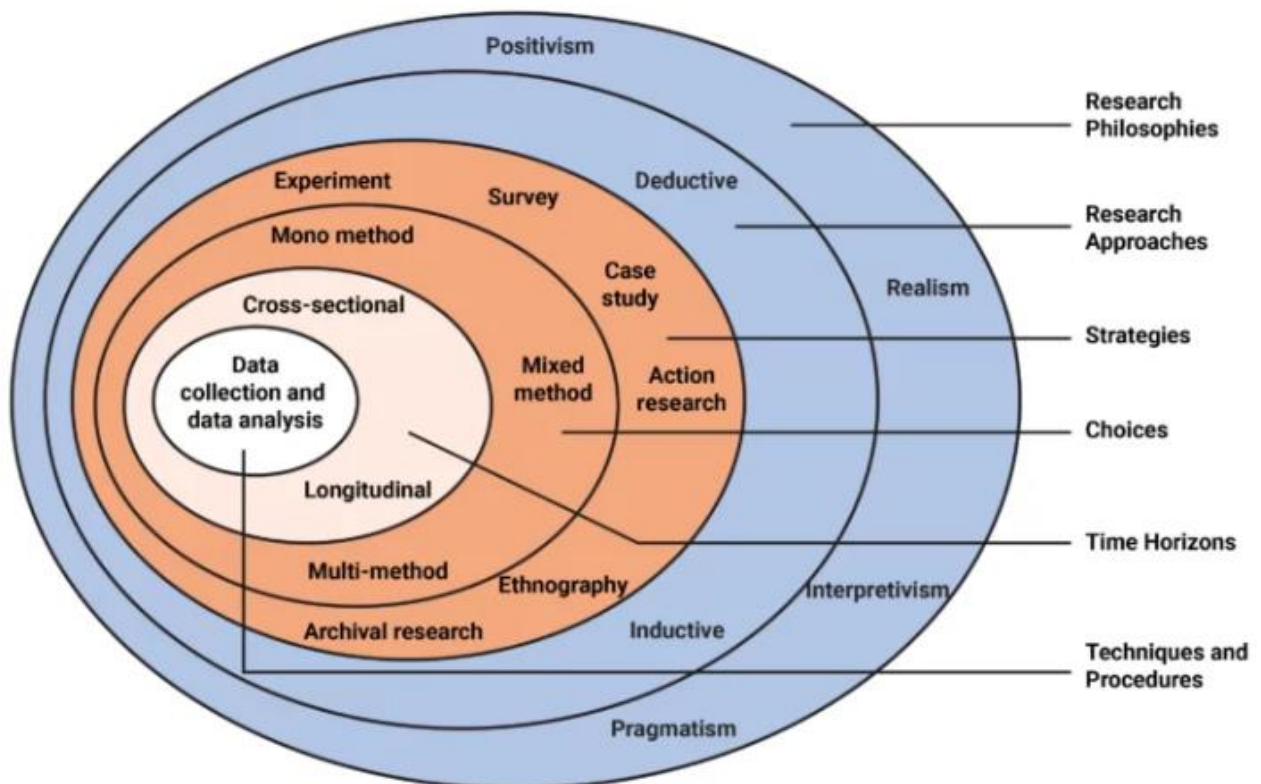


Figure 2: Research onion (Saunders et al., 2009)

3.1 Research philosophy

According to Saunders et al., (2009), the philosophy of a research governs the way in which knowledge about a chosen research phenomenon should be developed, directly affecting how data is gathered and utilised. Consequently, this study adopts an interpretivism research philosophy that emphasises understanding the meanings and subjective experiences individuals attach to their social world (Chowdhury, 2014). The interpretivism research philosophy is suitable for this study as it allows for an in-depth exploration of the personal impacts of sexual harassment allegations on non-victim employees at McDonald's in the UK, enabling the researcher to capture the diverse and complex perspectives of employees that would provide richer understanding of how they perceive and are affected by a workplace influenced by harassment allegations. Moreover, this philosophical approach aligns with the study's aim to generate new insights from qualitative data, enabling a comprehensive exploration of the complex social dynamics within UK McDonald's (Gray, 2021).

3.2 Research approach

An inductive research approach is adopted for this study as it involves generating new insights based on the data collected rather than testing existing hypotheses (Thomas, 2006). This contrasts with the deductive approach which starts with a theory and tests it through empirical observation. The inductive approach is particularly suitable for this study due to the limited existing research on the impacts of sexual harassment allegations on non-victim employees at McDonald's in the UK, as this inductive approach will enable the collection and analysis of primary data from these employees, building a comprehensive understanding of their experiences and perceptions. This approach allows for the emergence of new themes and patterns that might not be evident in the existing literature, providing valuable insights that can inform the development of practical recommendations for McDonald's and similar organisations (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019).

3.3 Research strategy

To effectively address the identified research gap where inadequate research studies have been adopted to focus on the impacts of workplace sexual harassment towards non-victims and for UK McDonald's employees, a combination of case study and semi-structured research strategies are adopted for this study. According to Yin (2018), a case study approach involves an in-depth, contextual analysis of a specific instance or small number of instances of a phenomenon within its real-life context, as this is particularly suitable due to its capability to capture detailed exploration of McDonald's in the UK with rich insights into the experiences of targeted non-victim employees. Additionally, semi-structured interviews are used as the primary data collection strategy, combining predefined questions with the flexibility to explore new topics that emerge during the conversation, making them ideal for capturing detailed and personal accounts (Bryman, 2016).

Moreover, the combination of the case study approach and semi-structured interviews enables a comprehensive understanding of the complex and multidimensional impacts of harassment allegations, facilitating the development of practical and actionable recommendations tailored to the specific setting of McDonald's in the UK.

3.4 Research choice

This study adopts a mono-method approach to utilise only qualitative data to explore the impacts of sexual harassment allegations on non-victim employees, focusing on obtaining more in-depth understanding on the meanings, experiences and perspectives of participants through rich descriptive data which is identified as the main benefits of qualitative data according to Denzin & Lincoln's (2011) handbook of qualitative research. The benefits of using qualitative data include its ability to provide deep insights into complex social phenomena, capture the dynamics of participants' experiences and allow for the emergence of new themes and patterns, enabling the research to explore deeply into the personal and contextual factors influencing employees' perceptions and reactions that would otherwise not be accurately attainable through quantitative methods.

3.5 Time horizon

This study adopts a cross-sectional time horizon, focusing on gathering data at a single point in time to capture the current state of employee experiences and perceptions at McDonald's in the UK. This is the only suitable time horizon due to the limitations of time and resource constraints for this study unlike a longitudinal time horizon where repeated collection of participant behaviours is conducted (Bryman, 2016).

3.6 Data collection

This study employs semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection method, using a purposive sampling technique to target UK McDonald's employees who were not direct victims of sexual harassment as purposive sampling involves selecting participants based on specific characteristics relevant to the research question, ensuring that the sample is representative of the population being studied (Patton, 2002). A sample size of 15 employees is chosen which is considered sufficient for qualitative research to reach data saturation and provide a depth of understanding (Guest et al., 2006). Data saturation will be achieved by ensuring the sample includes a variety of roles, tenures and locations within McDonald's UK, capturing a diverse range of experiences and perspectives that will enhance the richness of the data and ensure that multiple viewpoints are represented. These employees will be identified through the researcher's personal network of UK McDonald's employees, reaching them via social media platforms such as

Whatsapp, Facebook and Instagram to arrange a suitable time to conduct an online semi-structured interview via Zoom, whereby all communicated information will be recorded into written transcript for further analysis. Moreover, by focusing on this specific group, the research aims to uncover the broader organisational impacts of sexual harassment allegations and develop targeted recommendations for McDonald's. An example of the predefined semi-structured interview open-questions are shown in appendix A below.

3.7 Data analysis

This study employs thematic analysis to analyse the qualitative data collected from semi-structured interviews, following Terry et al.'s (2017) five-step thematic analysis guideline. The first step involves the familiarisation of all gathered data as the research will read and re-read interview transcripts to become deeply acquainted with the content. The next step involves generating initial codes on interesting features across the entire data set and collating relevant data under each code. The third step involves searching for themes and collating these codes into potential themes. The fourth step reviews all produced themes and checks if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts and the entire data set, producing a thematic map of the analysis. Finally, the final step involves defining and naming themes, refining each theme to clearly define what it captures and generating precise names for each prior performing the write up of the results and findings chapter (Terry et al., 2017).

3.8 Ethical considerations

To ensure all research ethical concerns are addressed and consideration in this study according to university protocols, informed consent is obtained from all participants to ensure that they are fully aware of the study's purpose and their right to withdraw at any time (Bryman, 2016). Confidentiality is strictly maintained at all times by anonymising participants data and securely storing all information and voluntary participation is emphasized to ensure that all involvement is free from coercion. These measures ensure that the research is conducted ethically and respects participants' rights and well-being.

4. Results & discussion

This chapter critically presents the findings from gathered interview data toward 15 UK McDonald's employees, discussing the key themes and implications on how sexual harassment allegations affect the job related, psychological and physical impact of non-direct victim employees, followed by attitudes toward existing sexual harassment prevention programmes and areas for future improvements. This chapter will triangulate key findings in relation to academic

knowledge, discussing areas of new insights in the sequential order of each research objectives and questions.

4.1 Job related impacts

The first research objective explores job related effects of sexual harassment toward non-direct victim employees at UK McDonald's. As shown in table 1, the responses indicate that sexual harassment allegations have led to decreased job satisfaction with key themes including demotivation, a hostile work environment and dissatisfaction with management that echoes the findings of Dziuba et al. (2020). Employees also reported feeling demotivated and less enthusiastic about their work, with a tense atmosphere negatively affecting productivity and expressed a lack of enjoyment in coming to work, describing it as a hostile environment similar to Willness et al.'s (2007) discussion on pervasive negative impact from workplace sexual harassments on victims. Additionally, there is clear dissatisfaction with how management handled the situation. These insights align with existing literature on the job-related impacts toward direct victims of sexual harassment (Lapierre et al., 2007), raising the need for improved management practices and supportive measures to minimise job related impacts of harassment allegations on all employees. Moreover, the dissatisfaction with management's handling of harassment allegations reflects a perceived lack of justice, contributing to a hostile work environment and decreased motivation as indicated by Baldwin's (2006) organisational justice theory.

Table 1. How have the sexual harassment allegations at McDonald's affected your overall job satisfaction?

Key Themes	Description	Examples
Decreased job satisfaction	Employees reported a significant decline in their job satisfaction due to the negative work environment created by the allegations.	- "I feel demotivated and less enthusiastic about my work since the allegations surfaced." - "the atmosphere has become tense and it affects my mood and productivity." - "I no longer enjoy coming to work; it feels like a hostile environment now." - "the allegations have made me question the company's values and my place within it." - "I am dissatisfied with how management is handling the situation." - "the constant tension has made my job less enjoyable." - "I used to take pride in my work, but now it feels overshadowed by these issues."

The thematic analysis in table 2 shows that sexual harassment allegations have substantially eroded organisational commitment among non-direct victims, whereby key themes such as loss of loyalty, decreased commitment and reconsideration of future plans with the company demonstrate the loss of long-term commitments, reinforcing Arasmi & Krishna’s (2019) arguments on loss of attachment in event of workplace harassments. Employees also reported feeling less loyal due to perceived mismanagement of the allegations and expressed reduced commitment, believing the company does not value their safety, opening up new insights as inadequate studies have explored the attitudes of post sexual harassment management at McDonalds. Many are reconsidering their long-term plans with McDonald's and feel less proud and connected to their jobs, aligning with empirical findings by Rubino et al. (2018) and Aranki et al. (2019) on the broader impacts of workplace harassment. Nonetheless, this finding shows that sexual allegations negatively affect organisational commitment to all employees at McDonalds, highlighting the need to rebuild trust and loyalty within the workforce.

Table 2. In what ways have the sexual harassment allegations influenced your commitment to McDonald's?

Key Themes	Description	Examples
Eroded organisational commitment	Employees expressed a loss of commitment to the company due to perceived mishandling of the allegations.	- "I feel less loyal to the company after seeing how the allegations were managed." - "my commitment has dropped because I don't feel the company values our safety." - "I am reconsidering my long-term plans with McDonald's." - "I used to be proud to work here, but now I am not so sure." - "the company's response has made me feel less connected to my job." - "I no longer feel as dedicated to my role as I once did." - "seeing how the situation was handled has made me question my future here."

The thematic analysis in table 3 reveals a noticeable decline in job performance among non-direct victims is evidential, as key themes including difficulty concentrating, decreased productivity and reduced engagement are commonly emphasised amongst interviewees. Employees reported finding it hard to concentrate on their tasks, experiencing lower productivity and subsequently making more mistakes due to distractions, reinforcing Fitzgerald & Cortina’s (2018) findings that job performances are impaired due to loss of concentration. Many also felt less motivated and less engaged in their work due to induced stress and perceived hostile environment created that distracts their capability to perform likewise to Gupta & Garg’s (2020) findings. These identified

themes support the findings of existing studies by Darmawan et al., (2020), Rubino et al., (2018) and Fitzgerald & Cortina (2018), extending with new insights that these detrimental effects of workplace harassment on job performance are not limited to direct victims of sexual harassment but for the entire workforce. Moreover, this echoing Bakker et al.'s (2004) job demands model where imbalance between job demands and performances would lead to decreased productivity and concentration, as observed among non-direct victims.

Table 3. Can you describe any changes in your job performance since the sexual harassment allegations surfaced

Key Themes	Description	Examples
Decline in job performance	Employees noted a reduction in their job performance as a result of the stress and distraction caused by the allegations.	- "I find it hard to concentrate on my tasks now." - "my productivity has decreased since the allegations came to light." - "I am making more mistakes at work because I am distracted." - "I feel less motivated to do my best." - "the stress from the situation has affected my performance negatively." - "I am less engaged in my work tasks." - "I struggle to maintain my usual performance levels."

The thematic analysis in table 4 indicates that sexual harassment allegations have increased job withdrawal considerations among non-direct victims, as the identification of a toxic atmosphere, discomfort and active job searching demonstrate the level of withdrawal experienced after the alleged sexual harassments. It is apparent that employees frequently thought about quitting due to the negative work environment and expressed discomfort working at the company, echoing the findings of Ford et al., (2021) where workplace harassment would increase absenteeism and intentions to quit. Many are claim to be actively seeking other job opportunities and questioning their fit within McDonald's, aligning with De Cieri et al's (2021) arguments that employees would seek escape as response to adverse working conditions. The identified key themes align with empirical academic knowledge on workplace harassment, which often leads to increased job withdrawal (Park et al., 2022; Ollo-Lopez & Nunez, 2018). Based on these findings, it is clear that organisations accused of sexual harassment must prioritise strategies to improve workplace climates and establish support systems to retain employees give the detrimental of job withdrawal impacts in forms of loss of talent and high employee turnover which are costly to replace.

Table 4. Have you considered leaving your job at McDonald's as a result of the sexual harassment allegations? If so, why?

Key Themes	Description	Examples
Increased job withdrawal	Employees have considered leaving their jobs due to the negative impact of the allegations on the work environment.	- "I have thought about quitting because of the toxic atmosphere." - "the allegations have made me want to find a new job." - "I don't feel comfortable working here anymore." - "I am actively looking for other job opportunities." - "the situation has made me question if this is the right place for me." - "I am considering leaving because I don't see the situation improving." - "the stress and discomfort have made me want to resign."

The thematic analysis in table 5 reveals that sexual harassment allegations at McDonald's have significantly decreased work engagement (work withdrawal) among non-direct victims with key themes including reduced motivation, loss of enthusiasm and reduced commitment to tasks. Several employees reported feeling less motivated and enthusiastic about their jobs, describing daily work as a chore with reduced discretionary effort (Chong et al., 2020). Many employees also expressed feeling disengaged and disconnected from their tasks with a noticeable decrease in task efficiency and overall motivation, echoing the findings of Ford et al., (2021). It is apparent that the negative atmosphere created by the allegations has made it difficult for employees to stay focused and engaged, directly hampering both individual and team performances likewise to Rubino et al.'s (2021) arguments. The adverse work withdrawal effects of alleged sexual harassment are found to negatively impact employee engagement, as a lack of procedural and interactional justice results in employees feeling undervalued and disconnected from their tasks reinforcing the organisational justice theory (Baldwin, 2006).

Table 5. Have the allegations affected your engagement or motivation to perform your daily work tasks? How?

Key Themes	Description	Examples
Decreased work engagement	Employees reported a decline in their engagement and motivation due to the ongoing situation.	- "I am less motivated to give my best at work." - "the allegations have made me less enthusiastic about my job." - "I feel disengaged and disconnected from my tasks." - "my daily work feels like a chore now." - "I am not as committed to completing my tasks efficiently." - "the negative atmosphere has affected

my motivation to work." - "I find it hard to stay focused and engaged with my work."

4.2 Psychological impacts

The second research objective explores the psychological effects of sexual harassment toward non-direct victim employees at UK McDonald's. As shown in table 6, a general consensus is reached on the declined mental well-being of McDonald's employees due to several key causes including constant stress, overwhelming tension and mental exhaustion. These findings support empirical literature knowledge whereby employees experienced a persistent sense of stress and overwhelming pressure which have led to deteriorated mental health (Fusar-Poli et al., 2020), the ongoing tension at work has caused mental exhaustion making it difficult for employees to relax and unwind (Buchanan et al., 2020), as increased irritability and short-temperedness were also common indicators of impaired mental well-being (Burn, 2019).

Table 6. How have the sexual harassment allegations impacted your overall mental well-being?

Key Themes	Description	Examples
Declined mental well-being	Employees reported a significant decline in their overall mental well-being due to the stress and tension caused by the allegations.	- "I feel constantly stressed and overwhelmed by the situation." - "My mental health has deteriorated since the allegations came out." - "I struggle to find peace of mind at work." - "The ongoing tension has made me feel mentally drained." - "I am more irritable and short-tempered because of the stress." - "I find it hard to relax and unwind after work." - "The allegations have taken a toll on my mental well-being."

The thematic analysis in table 7 indicates heightened anxiety levels among employees due to the public nature of the sexual harassment allegations and ongoing discussions by both the public and within the company. Several key indicators such as constant worry, unease during work hours and fear of repercussions were commonly mentioned as employees reported persistent anxiety related to job security. Concerns over the company's handling of the situation and potential repercussions of speaking up have contributed to increased anxiety, echoing the findings of Ciby & Sahai (2023). The constant stress of the situation represents a recurring factor that has significantly increased their anxiety levels, affecting their ability to concentrate and work effectively, reinforcing Lange & Young's (2019) notion of a toxic loop that continuously deepens the psychological damages caused by workplace harassments. These findings echo both the organisational justice theory and

the job demands- resources model highlighting increased anxiety due to perceived unfairness and insufficient support, significantly affecting employees' concentration and work effectiveness.

Table 7. Have you experienced increased anxiety since the sexual harassment allegations were made public? Can you describe how?

Key Themes	Description	Examples
Increased anxiety	Employees noted heightened anxiety levels due to the public nature of the allegations and the ongoing discussions surrounding them.	- "I feel anxious every time the topic is brought up at work." - "The allegations have made me constantly worry about job security." - "I am nervous about how the company is handling the situation." - "I feel uneasy and tense during work hours." - "I am afraid of potential repercussions if I speak up." - "The stress of the situation has significantly increased my anxiety levels." - "I am constantly on edge, fearing more bad news."

The thematic analysis in table 8 shows that the negative atmosphere resulting from the sexual harassment allegations has led to symptoms of depression among employees including the feelings of sadness and hopelessness, decreased motivation and isolation. Many employees experienced a persistent sense of sadness and loss of interest in activities which has subsequently created the feelings of isolation amongst peers likewise to Rugulies et al's (2020) findings conducted in Danish workforce. The depressive symptoms have decreased their motivation to work and impacted their overall mental health, aligning with findings from Diez-Canseco et al.'s (2020) systematic review on the link between workplace harassment and depression, highlighting clear detrimental impacts that requires immediate and proactive solutions for the safety of the workforce.

Table 8. Have you noticed any symptoms of depression that you attribute to the atmosphere created by the sexual harassment allegations?

Key Themes	Description	Examples
Symptoms of depression	Employees reported experiencing symptoms of depression linked to the negative	- "I feel a constant sense of sadness and hopelessness." - "My motivation to get out of bed and come to work has decreased." - "I have lost interest in activities I

atmosphere created by the allegations. used to enjoy." - "The situation has made me feel isolated and alone." - "I struggle to find joy in my work or personal life." - "I have been feeling more tired and lethargic than usual." - "The allegations have made me feel depressed and unmotivated."

The thematic analysis in table 9 reveals substantial reduction in self-esteem and confidence at work among employees due to the sexual harassment allegations, particularly in areas of diminished confidence, self-doubt and feelings of being undervalued likewise to the findings of Malik et al., (2014). Employees reported feeling less confident in their abilities, experiencing increased self-doubt and questioning their professional worth and value to the company, whereby this erosion of self-esteem and confidence has negatively impacted their performance and engagement at work (Acquadro et al., 2022). These findings echo both the organizational justice theory and the job demands-resources model, highlighting reduced self-esteem and confidence due to perceived undervaluation and insufficient support, negatively impacting employees' performance and engagement.

Table 9. How have the sexual harassment allegations at McDonald's influenced your self-esteem or confidence at work?

Key Themes	Description	Examples
Reduced self-esteem	Employees indicated a decrease in self-esteem and confidence at work due to the negative impact of the allegations.	- "I feel less confident in my abilities at work." - "The situation has made me doubt my value to the company." - "I am more self-conscious and insecure in my role." - "I no longer feel proud of being associated with the company." - "The allegations have made me question my professional worth." - "I feel less respected and valued at work." - "My confidence has taken a hit because of the ongoing issues."

4.3 Physical impacts

The third research objective explores physical effects of sexual harassment toward non-direct victim employees at UK McDonald's. As shown in table 10, the majority of interviewed employees claimed to have developed physical stress symptoms such as frequent headaches, muscle tension and overall physical strain which supports the findings of Malik & Farooqu (2014). Moreover, some employees reported experiencing persistent headaches, neck and shoulder tension and stress-induced migraines (Willness et al., 2007), whilst some also claimed to clench their jaws and grind their teeth more often which causes additional discomfort and contributes new insights as these conditions were not previously discussed in literature. These physical manifestations of stress support the recognition of physiological impacts of workplace harassment and contributes with new insights that these impacts are apparent for all employees and not only direct victims of harassment.

Table 10. Have you experienced any physical symptoms of stress, such as headaches or muscle tension, since the sexual harassment allegations?

Key Themes	Description	Examples
Physical symptoms of stress	Employees reported experiencing physical stress symptoms, such as headaches and muscle tension, due to the harassment allegations.	- "I have been getting frequent headaches since the allegations came out." - "My shoulders and neck feel constantly tense and sore." - "I experience muscle tension that I never had before." - "The stress has caused me to have persistent back pain." - "I find myself clenching my jaw and grinding my teeth more often." - "I have developed stress-induced migraines." - "My body feels physically drained and tense due to the ongoing stress."

The thematic analysis in table 11 indicates that sexual harassment allegations have disrupted employees' sleep patterns and quality of sleep, as many employees claim to have increased trouble falling asleep with frequent awakenings and overall decline in sleep quality, echoing the findings of Porkka-Heiskanen et al., (2013). Employees reported difficulty falling asleep due to persistent thoughts about work and stress, frequent nightmares and for some, insomnia, whilst many claim to wake up feeling as tired as when they went to bed, highlighting the ongoing anxiety's impact on their rest (Hansen et al., 2020). These findings suggests that alleged sexual harassment would lead to stress that cause sleep disturbances, underlining the need for interventions to help employees manage stress and improve their sleep hygiene, aligning with the job demands-resources model where high job demands negatively impact employee physical well-being.

Table 11. Have the sexual harassment allegations affected your sleep patterns or quality of sleep? If so, how?

Key Themes	Description	Examples
Disrupted sleep patterns	Employees noted significant disruptions in their sleep patterns and quality of sleep due to the stress and anxiety from the allegations.	- "I have trouble falling asleep because I keep thinking about work." - "My sleep is interrupted frequently by nightmares about the situation." - "I wake up feeling just as tired as when I went to bed." - "The stress has caused me to develop insomnia." - "I can't seem to get a good night's sleep anymore." - "I wake up multiple times during the night, feeling anxious." - "My overall sleep quality has significantly declined since the allegations."

The thematic analysis in table 12 shows that the stressful work environment created by sexual harassment allegations has led to increased fatigue and exhaustion among employees. The identified key themes include constant tiredness, mental and physical exhaustion with decreased energy levels which echoes Philip's (2015) multi-dimensional components of fatigue. Employees reported feeling perpetually tired and drained, struggling to keep up with their usual work pace and find energy for daily tasks as the stress from the situation has left them feeling exhausted all the time, ultimately impacting their focus and productivity likewise to Ford & Ivancic's (2020) arguments of fatigue induced impairments on performing daily tasks effectively. These findings align with existing literature on workplace stress leading to chronic fatigue, even when applied to non-direct victims.

Table 12. Do you feel more fatigued or exhausted than usual as a result of the work environment influenced by the sexual harassment allegations? Can you explain?

Key Themes	Description	Examples
Increased fatigue and exhaustion	Employees reported feeling more fatigued and exhausted than usual due to the stressful work	- "I feel constantly tired and drained, even after a full night's sleep." - "The stress has made me feel exhausted all the time." - "I don't have the energy to keep up with my usual work pace." - "I feel more physically and mentally exhausted by the end of the day." - "I struggle to stay awake and focused during

environment created by work hours." - "The ongoing stress has left me the allegations. feeling perpetually fatigued." - "I find it hard to muster the energy for both work and personal activities."

4.4 Effectiveness of existing sexual harassment prevention programmes

The fourth research objective evaluates the effectiveness of existing sexual harassment prevention programmes at McDonald's and identify areas for improvement based on the experiences of non-victim employees. As shown in table 13, three key themes are identified including inadequate support mechanisms, limited training and awareness and lack of transparency and accountability. Firstly, the theme of inadequate support mechanisms highlights that the current programmes fail to provide sufficient support for both victims and non-victims, as many employees feel that the support mechanisms in place are weak and ineffective in practice. Many employees report that victims do not feel safe coming forward and non-victims feel ignored due to a lack of follow-up support after initial complaints are made, indicating a gap in the continuous support system needed to address ongoing concerns and the aftermath of allegations. These findings extend on empirical academic knowledge that emphasise the need to establish a safe and supportive work environment to mitigate damages from harassment (McDonald, 2012). However, the insights from this study add a new dimension by highlighting the specific neglect of non-victims, who also require psychological support and reassurance.

Table 13. How effective do you think the current sexual harassment prevention programmes at McDonald's are in supporting victim and non-victim employees?

Key Themes	Description	Examples
Inadequate support mechanisms	Employees felt that the current programmes do not provide sufficient support for both victims and non-victims.	- "I think the support mechanisms are weak and don't really help those affected." - "Victims don't feel safe coming forward and non-victims feel ignored." - "The programmes are there, but they don't seem effective in real situations." - "There's a lack of follow-up support after initial complaints are made." - "Support for non-victims is almost non-existent." - "I don't see any tangible support being offered to anyone." - "There's no real psychological support for employees dealing with the aftermath of these allegations."

Limited training and awareness	Employees believe that the training provided is insufficient and does not raise adequate awareness.	- "The training sessions are too basic and infrequent." - "Employees don't take the training seriously because it's not thorough." - "There needs to be more regular and detailed training on harassment." - "Awareness campaigns are lacking in depth and engagement." - "Training doesn't cover the nuances of handling such sensitive issues." - "More interactive and scenario-based training could help." - "Many employees are still unclear on what constitutes harassment."
Lack of transparency and accountability	Employees highlighted a lack of transparency and accountability in handling harassment cases.	- "The process of dealing with complaints is very opaque." - "There's no clear communication about what happens after a complaint is made." - "It's hard to trust the system when there's no accountability." - "Management doesn't seem to be held accountable for mishandling cases." - "The outcomes of investigations are not communicated clearly." - "There's a general feeling that higher-ups protect each other." - "I don't feel confident that complaints are taken seriously."

Secondly, limited training and awareness are significant issues identified by employees as the training sessions provided are seen as too basic and infrequent, often lacking the depth required to effectively raise awareness about sexual harassment. Employees also noted that the training is not taken seriously, partly because it does not thoroughly cover the complexities of handling such sensitive issues with no concrete solutions. Additionally, the need for more regular, detailed and interactive training sessions is evident, as current programmes do not adequately engage employees or clarify what constitutes harassment. This is consistent with findings in the literature that stress the importance of comprehensive and continuous training programmes to foster a harassment-free workplace (Willness et al., 2007). The study further extends this understanding by emphasising the inadequacy of current training methods at McDonald's and the necessity for more engaging and scenario-based training. Lastly, the lack of transparency and accountability in handling harassment cases represents a critical concern as employees highlighted the opaque nature of the complaint process, unclear communication about what happens after a complaint is made and a general lack of accountability among management, reducing trust in the system and diminishes the perceived effectiveness of the prevention programmes, causing some employees to feel that higher-ups protect each other and that complaints are not taken seriously, which aligns

with existing studies that point out the detrimental effects of poor management practices on workplace culture (Fitzgerald & Cortina, 2018). The new insight here is the pervasive lack of confidence among non-victims in the company's ability to handle harassment complaints effectively.

4.5 Recommended strategies

The final research objective aims to provide recommendations for developing comprehensive strategies to prevent sexual harassment and support both victims and non-victim employees within McDonald's in the UK. As shown in table 14, three key themes are identified including enhanced training and education, improved support and counselling services and increased transparency and communication. Enhanced training and education were highlighted as key areas that demands improvement as employees suggested the necessity for more effective and accessible education for staff on harassment issues. The current training is perceived as insufficient, lacking depth and infrequent whereby employees believe mandatory, detailed training sessions and regular refresher courses for all employees are essential. Training should also incorporate real-life scenarios and role-playing exercises to help employees recognise various and subtle forms of harassment, truly understanding its impact on non-victims and bystanders with the use of interactive and engaging methods to improve retention of information and emphasise the importance of a respectful workplace culture. These new insights stress the importance of engaging and scenario-based training which are currently lacking at McDonald's, making sure its mandatory, regular in frequency and comprehensive to educate all subtle and various forms of sexual harassment.

Table 14. What areas of the sexual harassment prevention programmes at McDonald's do you think need improvement to better support victim and non-victim employees?

Key Themes	Description	Examples
Enhanced training and education	Employees suggested more comprehensive training programmes to better educate staff on harassment issues.	- "There should be mandatory, detailed training sessions for all employees." - "Regular refresher courses are needed to keep everyone informed." - "Training should include real-life scenarios and role-playing exercises." - "There needs to be more focus on recognising subtle forms of harassment." - "Training should also cover the impacts on non-victims and bystanders." - "Interactive and engaging methods could improve retention of information." - "More emphasis on the

		importance of a respectful workplace culture is needed."
Improved support and counselling services	Employees recommended better support systems, including counselling for those affected by harassment.	- "There should be on-site counsellors available for employees." - "Victims and non-victims need access to mental health resources." - "Follow-up support should be standard practice after a complaint." - "Confidential counselling services could help those affected feel more secure." - "Support groups for employees dealing with harassment-related stress could be beneficial." - "Providing clear pathways for seeking help is crucial." - "Offering wellness programmes could help improve overall employee well-being."
Increased transparency and communication	Employees called for greater transparency and better communication regarding harassment cases.	- "There needs to be a clear, transparent process for handling complaints." - "Regular updates on the status of investigations should be provided." - "Clear communication about the outcomes of cases is essential." - "Management should be more open about the steps they are taking to address issues." - "Creating a transparent reporting system would build trust." - "Ensuring accountability at all levels would improve confidence in the process." - "Better communication can help reassure employees that their concerns are taken seriously."

Secondly, improved support and counselling services were recommended to better support those affected by harassment which employees emphasising the need for on-site counsellors and access to mental health resources for both victims and non-victims. Follow-up support is recommended as a standard practice after a complaint is made, providing continuous care and reassurance, whereby confidential counselling services could help affected employees feel more secure and support groups for those dealing with harassment-related stress could be beneficial. Providing clear pathways for seeking help and offering wellness programmes can significantly improve overall employee well-being. These recommendations extend on empirical literature that highlights the importance of robust support systems in mitigating the effects of workplace harassment (Hansen

et al., 2020), offering new insights that highlight the vital need for ongoing support for all employees and not only direct victims. Lastly, increased transparency and communication are essential for building trust and ensuring accountability as many employees called for a clear and transparent process for handling complaints, demanding regular updates on the status of investigations and clear communication about the outcomes. It is recommended that McDonald's management should be more open about the steps they are taking to address issues, creating a transparent reporting system would build trust and confidence in the process to ensure accountability at all levels and improving communication can reassure employees that their concerns are taken seriously echoing to the arguments of Gupta & Garg (2020). The new insights from this study emphasise the pervasive lack of confidence in McDonald's current handling of harassment cases, highlighting the need for greater transparency and communication. Overall, these recommendations address several key impacts as enhanced training and education can enhance job satisfaction, reduce job withdrawal and increase work engagement, whereby better support services and transparency can rebuild organizational commitment, reduce anxiety and boost self-esteem, ultimately improving stress management to improve sleep patterns and reduce fatigue.

5. Conclusion

This study critically examined the job-related, psychological and physical impacts of sexual harassment allegations on non-victim employees at McDonald's in the UK, as well as the effectiveness of existing prevention programmes and areas for improvement. Through conducting 15 semi-structured interviews, it became clear how profoundly these allegations can affect various aspects of employees' professional and personal lives even for non-direct victims of sexual harassment, contributing to the literature gap where inadequate studies have focused on impacts on non-direct victims in the same company. Firstly, the study assessed job-related impacts and revealed apparent declines in job satisfaction, organisational commitment and job performance with increased job and work withdrawal. Employees reported feelings of demotivation, a hostile work environment and dissatisfaction with management's handling of allegations, aligning with existing literature (Dziuba et al., 2020; Lapierre et al., 2007). Secondly, the exploration of psychological effects showed that allegations led to declined mental well-being, heightened anxiety, increased symptoms of depression and reduced self-esteem. Employees experienced constant stress, overwhelming tension and persistent anxiety related to job security and management's response (Ciby & Sahai, 2023).

Thirdly, the examination of physical health consequences revealed that employees experienced frequent headaches, muscle tension, sleep disturbances and increased fatigue due to the stressful work environment. These physical symptoms corroborate with existing studies on the physiological impacts of workplace harassment (Malik & Farooqu, 2014; Porkka-Heiskanen et al., 2013), stressing the importance of addressing workplace stress to maintain employee health.

Fourthly, the evaluation of existing sexual harassment prevention programmes at McDonald's identified critical shortcomings, including inadequate support mechanisms, insufficient training and awareness and a lack of transparency and accountability. Employees felt that current programmes did not effectively support victims or non-victims and lacked follow-up support and psychological services (McDonald, 2012; Willness et al., 2007). Based on these findings, the study provided recommendations for developing comprehensive strategies to prevent sexual harassment and support all employees including enhanced training and education, improved support and counselling services and increased transparency and communication as key areas for improvement. Implementing mandatory, detailed training sessions, providing on-site counselling and creating transparent reporting systems are recommended to foster a safer and more supportive work environment for all direct and non-direct victims of alleged sexual harassments in UK McDonalds'.

5.1 Limitations and implications for future studies

Despite successfully fulfilling all proposed research objectives given apparent time and resource constraints, this study has several limitations which offers valuable implications for future studies to address. The sample size of 15 employees, while sufficient for qualitative analysis may not fully represent the broader experiences of all McDonald's employees in the UK, hence future studies are recommended to adopt a larger and more representative sample size or at a different country context. Moreover, the study focused exclusively on non-victim employees, which, while providing new insights does not capture the full scope of impacts experienced by direct victims. Therefore, future studies can adopt longitudinal time horizons to provide deeper insights into the long-term effects of harassment allegations on both direct victims and non-victims. Additionally, incorporating quantitative methods alongside qualitative approaches could offer a more comprehensive understanding of the impacts. Future research should also explore the effectiveness of specific interventions and prevention programmes to identify best practices for supporting all employees in similar contexts.

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