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Exploring the perceptions of female academics regarding cyber-sexual harassment at the School of Law, University of the Witwatersrand

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ABSTRACT

The internet and the digital technologies have drastically transformed the world of work. An enormous rise in the use of the internet has provided unavoidable grounds for abuse and exposure to cyber-sexual harassment. Cyber-sexual harassment can be understood as the use of digital platforms and tools for unwanted sexual advances, comments, and sexual coercion. This phenomenon is affecting women profoundly as studies have demonstrated that cyber-sexual harassment has the same effects on victims as physical sexual harassment, nonetheless this is often overlooked in workplace sexual harassment policies. This study attempted to explore the perceptions of female academics on cyber-sexual harassment at the School of Law in the University of the Witwatersrand. The study used a qualitative approach, and purposive sampling was employed in the selection of twelve participants. The study population comprised of female academic employees of University of the Witwatersrand. The researcher used a semi-structured interview schedule to conduct face-to-face interviews. Thematic analysis was carried out to code the data, and transcriptions were done verbatim. The findings of this study demonstrate that institutional culture and the intrinsic nature of our societal norms fuelled by patriarchy and masculinity play a significant role in aggravating cyber-sexual harassment in South African institutions of higher learning. The study suggests that Occupational Social Work should always be part of the institutions' strategic interventions into cyber-sexual harassment, adding value to the institutions' readiness to create a sexual harassment free environment in the 21st century and beyond.

Key words: Cyber-Sexual harassment, Female academics, Gender discrimination, Institution of higher learning, Workplace,