

**Křížková, A. – Maříková, H. – Uhde, Z. (eds.): Sexualised Reality of Labour Relations: Analysis of Sexual Harassment in the Czech Republic**

Institute of Sociology of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, Prague 2006, 156 p.

Presented book is a result of sociological project *Occurrence analysis of harassment of men and women on gender grounds and sexual harassment in the workplace*, carried out by the Gender & Sociology department in cooperation with the Centre for Public Opinion Research at the Institute of Sociology of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic. This project was a public tender of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic. Its realisation is closely linked to the fact that in 2004, the direction 2002/73/ES was implemented into the Czech legal order and definition of sexual harassment was introduced as a form of gender discrimination. As authors say, this project was the first sociological survey in the Czech Republic with the intention to provide a complex analysis of the extent of this problem.

In an effort to achieve a comprehensive analysis of this issue, authors concentrated on labour and workplace relationships, at all levels ranging from the individual to the institutional. The book is based on results of a representative survey among male and female employees in the Czech republic as well as in-depth interviews with victims of sexual harassment, structured interviews with male and female human resource managers, results of focus groups with men and women representing the confederation of trade unions (where these groups were organised separately for male and female trade union members).

The publication itself consists of introductory theoretical article, which defines the position of sexual harassment within the conceptual framework of equity theories and theoretical gender approaches to inequalities in the society. This is followed by four contributions that process the findings of specific research methods. The sixth article represents an analysis of past and present of legal regulation of gender and sexual harassment.

The first paper by Zuzana Uhde „*Roots of gender inequality: a critical approach*“ introduces feminist approaches to social inequalities and defines sexual harassment as manifestation of symbolical power of men over women on two levels – as domination of a superior man over an inferior woman and as a general supremacy of men over women in the society.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> It remains a question whether it is reasonable to stress the archetype of harassment as a superior male – inferior female scheme, if the authors' research suggests that a much more common form of sexual harassment is that which takes place between colleagues. (See for instance Table 3.2 *Initiators and victims of various forms of sexual harassment ...* on page 45)

If the publication is intended for wider public, as indicated by a short glossary of terms in its end, it could be argued whether this philosophically-theoretical introduction is sufficiently comprehensible for readers who lack the necessary background knowledge.

Marie Čermáková in her paper „*Job discrimination: past, present and future attributes of working relationships*“ looks at job discrimination in a more general way, based on realised representative survey. She deals with feelings of being overloaded, insufficient appreciation of one's work or experience people have with gossiping and defamation in the workplace. Somewhat surprising in this section is the fact that in some tables, absolute quantities are used instead of relative data (e.g. 2.2. and 2.3.).

Paper by Alena Křížková „*What is it not and where does it start? Sexual harassment in today's labour market*“ is also based on quantitative representative survey and starts off with distribution of answers to the question whether interviewees have encountered sexual harassment in their present or previous jobs. The answer „yes, personally“ was given by 13,2% of women and by 3,9% of men.<sup>2</sup> Further, Křížková analyses the occurrence of particular forms of sexual harassment and their assessment by men and women. Also, she analyses victims and those who initiate sexual harassment. Perhaps it is a pity that the question asked at the beginning of this paper is dealt with only indirectly and not enough space is dedicated to the answer.<sup>3</sup>

Although in the end of the book we can see the whole questionnaire as it was used in quantitative part of research<sup>4</sup>, cards used to help interviewees answer are missing and with respect to some questions it is thus impossible to know what alternatives of answers were offered.

Following two papers are rather longer and based on qualitative approaches. Contribution of Radka Dudová and Zuzana Uhde deals with the casuistics of sexual harassment and the employers' attitude toward this problem. In the first section, authors describe four stories of women – victims of sexual harassment. In these cases victims are being harassed by superior, colleague or a man from outside – specifically, client and shareholder of the company. In the second part,

<sup>2</sup> I think it could be argued whether the choice of answers to the questionnaire question *Have you ever encountered sexual harassment in your current....?* is correct. Can we consider an interviewee who replies „yes, personally“ a victim of sexual harassment? What if he/she only encountered such action when it actually concerned someone else? Although the ambivalence of this answer is clarified by the second alternative answer „yes, it concerned someone else“, I doubt whether these possible answers comply with the criteria that answers should be mutually eliminative of each other.

<sup>3</sup> The paper also contains small inaccuracies when presenting research results – e.g. in Graph 3.9 we read that it shows the proportion of answers „he/she is squeamish“ – however the questionnaire used also contains the possibility to answer „he/she is prudish“. What it is then which is showed by Graph 3.9 – only answers „he/she is squeamish“ or „he/she is squeamish“ and „he/she is prudish“ together?

<sup>4</sup> Albeit somewhat strangely graphically presented: some parts which (probably?) are not related to the given issue; however some questions left visible are not analysed within the text either.

Dudová and Uhde summarise the results of semi-structured interviewees with male and female representatives of personnel departments and use these findings to analyse the attitudes and approach of employers with regard to the issue of sexual harassment along with ways in which specific cases are solved. They use a threefold typology of organisations: new companies with international participation, smaller organisations of the familiar kind and organisationally old companies. They come to the conclusion, that the majority of those in charge of personnel consider sexual harassment to be a concept imported from abroad and see it as a contrast to the Czech environment where certain degree of sexually motivated behaviour is considered a standard. Thus, authors claim that the company attitude toward sexual harassment depends on the extent to which foreign influences are present in the entrepreneurial culture.

The penultimate paper by *Hana Maříková* focuses on trade unions' attitude toward the issue of sexual harassment. This paper more or less unwillingly reveals the silent conflict of researcher, who introduces a topic considered „imported from Brussels“ and interviewed persons uninterested in the issue who claim they only took part in the focus group because they had thought the talk would be about „relationships in the workplace“. It becomes obvious that trade union representatives perceive this issue as only marginally important (if at all) and many of their opinions actually ridicule the issue. In this respect, Hana Maříková says: „Low sensitivity and understanding of sexual harassment as *unimportant* or even *marginal phenomenon* is a consequence of certain structure of perceiving social reality, of acquired cultural schemes of its perception. ... Power mechanism where *Someone* (influential/powerful social groups) usurps the right to determine what must/may be above and what should/must be below prevent *Others* (less influential/powerful social groups) from describing and enforcing their perception of social reality (and their interests) and thus puts them in a pre-determined socially inferior position. Through this mechanism based on the principle of a strong subject and a powerless subject, certain decision-making procedures are proclaimed legitimate, including the decision what constitutes an issue and what does not, what is a problem and what is not. ...“ (p. 82) It remains a question whether sociologist should be the person who from a position of power introduces a certain topic and defines something as a problem which is not perceived as a problem by those he/she is researching.<sup>5</sup> I think that such approach turns the methods of understanding sociology upside down and turns sociologists to social activists. Instead of the aforementioned statement, I would expect maybe casting

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<sup>5</sup> This problem is not exclusive for sexual harassment research; it also repeatedly occurs when surveying other so-called „European issues“.

some doubt on the discussion on sexual harassment as rejected by trade union representatives, or an attempt to „tailor“ it to fit Czech conditions.

Final paper by *Barbara Havelková* looks at the evolution of legal regulation of sexual harassment, its transformation from European to Czech law and incorporation to the Czech Labour Code. It provides a legal definition of sexual harassment and explains what it means when the burden of proving lies with the defendant. It also deals with mechanisms used when the victims sue for compensation. The author states that in regard to sexual harassment, European Court of Justice so far has no relevant legal practice.

The reviewed publication represents an interesting contribution to sexual harassment research in Czech republic as well as in Slovakia, particularly as it is so far the only book based on relevant representative research. Thanks to use of qualitative as well as quantitative approaches, the book succeeds in providing a rather plastic description of current situation in terms of perceiving and solving the problem of sexual harassment. For Slovak readers, this is not only an interesting pioneer work in given area which has so far not been given attention in Slovakia, but also a proof that Czech decisive sphere is interested in scientific reflection of this issue.

Miloslav Bahna