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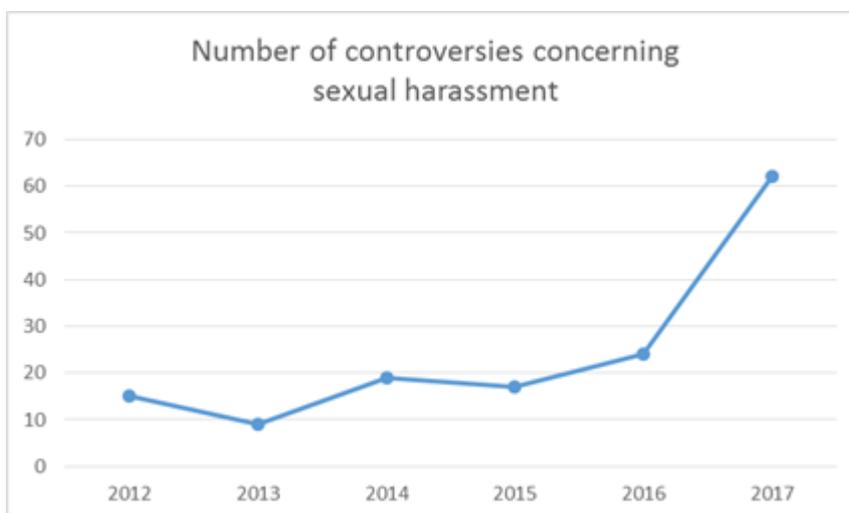
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## #metoo Sheds New Light on Corporate Responsibility to Prevent Sexual Harassment in the Workplace

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Published January 2018*

Following the recent months' massive number of personal accounts of sexual harassment published on social media under the hashtag #metoo, there has been increased media reports of the alleged failures by companies to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace. The '[me too](#)' movement, originally started as a grassroots movement to help young women who had survived sexual abuse, gained renewed traction in October 2017 following widespread allegations of sexual misconduct by a US film producer. Since then, in an effort to raise awareness of sexual harassment particularly in the media industry, the movement has inspired a large number of victims to speak out and companies in a range of sectors have been linked to sexual harassment controversies.

'The silence breakers' were named 2017 Person of the year by Time magazine to celebrate all the persons who have participated in the ongoing 'revolution of refusal'. In January 2018 some 300 Hollywood professionals had launched the 'Time's Up' initiative to fight systemic sexual harassment in Hollywood and in blue-collar workplaces across the US by, among other measures, setting up a legal defence fund of \$13m to help less privileged women and advocating for legislation against companies that tolerate sustained harassment. A large number of women attending the 2018 Golden Globes raised awareness of the initiative by wearing black to the award ceremony.



In a review of publicly available sources, ISS-Ethix notes that there has been a twofold increase in the number of news stories related to sexual harassment controversies involving companies in the S&P 500 index in 2017, compared with FY 2016 (see graph). Industry groups retail and media are the main drivers behind the increase.

The most recent media reporting has focused on the media industry. In November 2017 several companies in the US media industry faced allegations that prominent employees had engaged in sexual harassment. For example, an executive producer of several television shows on The CW Television Network, a joint venture between **Time Warner, Inc.** and **CBS Corp.**, was reportedly accused of sexual harassment and inappropriate behaviour. Similarly, **The Walt Disney Co.**'s head of animation was accused in media of sexual misconduct towards female employees over a number of years. In addition, a male news anchor on NBC News, a division of **ComCast Corp.**'s wholly-owned subsidiary **NBCUniversal Media LLC**, was alleged to have sexually harassed several women, including sexually assaulting a colleague in 2001, and a male booking executive was alleged to have engaged in inappropriate behavior with several women.

The Swedish media company **Bonnier AB** has also faced allegations that two presenters of its TV channel TV4 have for several years abused their positions of power within the company to subject colleagues to harassment, bullying and denigrating behaviour.

Earlier examples include the then-CEO of **Twenty-First Century Fox, Inc.**'s Fox News Channel being accused of sexual harassment by a female former news anchor in July 2016, and in April 2017 media reported on a series of allegations, commencing in 2002, of sexual harassment or other inappropriate behaviour by a male TV host on the channel. Examples from other sectors include the discount retailer **Dollar General Corp.**, which was accused of sexual harassment in the United States (US) in a lawsuit filed by the US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) in February 2017, as well as **Ford Motor Co.** which paid USD 10.125m in August 2017 to settle an EEOC investigation into racial and sexual harassment at two plants in Chicago.

Despite the increased media attention in recent months, ISS-Ethix notes that allegations of sexual harassment have featured in a range of sectors and countries for several years. For example, in 2015 American public affairs television series FRONTLINE produced an investigative documentary which reported on janitorial firm **ABM Industries, Inc.**'s alleged failure to prevent sexual violence. In 2016, the global union federation IndustriALL raised concerns of a 'pervasive culture of sexual harassment' in [India's garment manufacturing industry](#). Similar concerns have been raised concerning the textile, garment, shoe and leather sectors in [Indonesia](#) as well as [Cambodia](#). In 2015, stakeholders highlighted concerns about harassment in 'maquiladora' [assembly and processing plants in Juárez, Mexico](#).

### Normative framework

News on allegations of sexual harassment feeds into research by ISS-Ethix and is assessed against international business norms on labour rights, specifically [UN Global Compact](#) Principle 6, which states that *Businesses should uphold the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation*. Other relevant norms include the International Labour Organisation (ILO) core [Convention 111 concerning Discrimination in Employment and Occupation \(1958\)](#), and the [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women \(1979\)](#). The [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights \(1966\)](#) states that the rights enunciated in the Covenant should be exercised without discrimination of any kind as to sex.

The ILO has in recent years reviewed the issue of violence at work, and the possibility of setting an international labour standard will be discussed at the [International Labour Conference](#) in June 2018. Several women's rights groups and global trade unions such as the [International Federation of Journalists](#) and [IndustriALL](#), as well as the [International Trade Union Confederation](#) are campaigning for a new Convention specifically related to gender-based violence in the workplace. The Unions highlight that – although both men and women may experience violence and harassment in the workplace – women, as well those who do not identify with dominant gender stereotypes or roles, are often more vulnerable to abuse due to structural inequalities.

The ILO defines sexual harassment as *'a form of sexual violence that commonly occurs in the world of work, and it is frequently categorized in two ways: "quid pro quo" or "hostile working environment"'. "Quid pro quo" sexual harassment is when a worker is asked for a sexual favour, and submitting to or rejecting that request is used to make a decision about that worker's job. "Hostile working environment" harassment covers conduct that creates an intimidating, hostile or humiliating working environment.'*

The ILO has highlighted that 'cultural, structural and economic reasons underpin sexual violence' and linked the issue of violence at work to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) related to [decent work \(SDG 8\)](#), [gender equality \(SDG 5\)](#), [good health and well-being \(SDG 3\)](#) and the [reduction of inequality within and among countries \(SDG 10\)](#). The ILO has drawn attention to research showing that 'men have held the majority of management and decision-making positions, while women have been over-represented in low-paid jobs with little or no organized representation' thereby intertwining gender with power relations. The ILO also quotes academic studies showing that sexual violence is prevalent in low-paid factory work and supply chains, but that it is also pervasive in traditionally high-income, male-dominated occupations such as science, technology and engineering.

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