

The Scarring Effects of Workplace Sexual Harassment

Nisha Chikhale, Natalie Duncombe, and Birthe Larsen*

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Abstract

We provide new causal evidence on the labor market consequences of workplace sexual harassment using matched survey and administrative data from Denmark. Both women and men experience persistent earnings losses of around 6 percent, with losses doubling among those who change employers. These effects are not driven by non-employment or occupational downgrading but by moves to lower-paying firms. A substantial share of harassment comes from clients—particularly for women—highlighting the need for broader anti-harassment policies. Our findings reveal the long-term economic scars of harassment and gendered patterns in firm mobility, sorting, and productivity that persist beyond job transitions.

JEL codes: J16, J32, J81

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1 Introduction

Workplace sexual harassment is a widespread problem facing many workers. Often, the only way to escape workplace sexual harassment is to leave your job (Feldblum and Lipnic, 2016). Although sexual harassment in the workplace can affect all workers, the rate, and therefore the burden, of sexual harassment is much higher for women than men.¹ Despite its prevalence, little is known about the long-term economic consequences for victims—especially in terms of labor market outcomes like earnings and job mobility.

In this paper, we provide the first causal estimates of the long-term earnings consequences of workplace sexual harassment using linked administrative and survey data from Denmark. We document that both women and men suffer persistent earnings losses of around 6 percent following an incident, and these losses double among those who switch firms. We also provide new evidence on the sources of harassment: while coworkers are commonly cited, we find that clients—especially for women—are a significant source. These insights expand the scope of understanding about who perpetrates harassment and how its effects linger.

We begin our analysis using a dataset that links administrative and survey data from Denmark. The survey provides us with self-reported experiences of workplace sexual harassment that we match with workers’ labor market histories. This approach overcomes previous data constraints, allowing us to estimate the earnings consequences of sexual harassment in the workplace.

First, we provide a reduced-form evaluation of the earnings consequences of workplace sexual harassment. We use survey data provided by the Danish National Research Center for the Work Environment, which asks workers about the frequency and sources of sexual harassment in their workplace. One contribution of our work is to provide direct evidence on who perpetuates workplace sexual harassment. Consistent with previous research, coworkers are a significant source of sexual harassment at work. However, we also document a large proportion of incidences originating from clients, particularly as a source of harassment for

¹Our data contain a binary measure of gender, preventing us from identifying if an affected worker is gender non-conforming/non-binary or differentiating between cisgender and transgender workers. Workers in gender-minority groups are likely to face higher rates of harassment due to their marginalized gender. However, we cannot speak to this with existing data.

women.

We employ an event-study approach to estimate the consequences of workplace sexual harassment. We find that workplace sexual harassment is followed by earnings losses of around 6 percent for both men and women. This number doubles for workers who leave their firm, indicating that the earnings scars of workplace sexual harassment persist even when workers escape the reach of their harasser. Consistent with prior work, we see that men and women tend to move to firms with a larger share of workers who share their gender, and thus potentially face a lower risk of continued sexual harassment.

Work documenting the prevalence and consequences of workplace sexual harassment has a longer history in the fields of sociology, psychology, and medicine than economics (for reviews: [Welsh \(1999\)](#); [McDonald \(2012\)](#); [Fitzgerald and Cortina \(2018\)](#)). Overall, the largest body of empirical evidence focuses on recording the prevalence of workplace sexual harassment. Secondly, the literature has established a link between workplace sexual harassment and career interruptions. Only recently has administrative data been used to study the consequences of workplace sexual harassment for worker sorting. Other work considers how reports of workplace sexual harassment may affect the firm ([Abeysekera and Fernando, 2024](#)). We build on this empirical work and document the first direct evidence of the earnings consequences of workplace sexual harassment. We also document that clients are an important source of workplace sexual harassment and consider possible spillovers to other workers.

While more is known about the prevalence of workplace sexual harassment, gaps remain in our understanding of its labor market consequences. Previous research finds that sexual harassment from coworkers is more common when a worker belongs to a gender minority ([Gutek and Cohen \(1987\)](#); [Gutek et al. \(1990\)](#); [Gruber \(1998\)](#); [Jackson and Newman \(2004\)](#); [Kabat-Farr and Cortina \(2014\)](#); [Folke and Rickne \(2022\)](#)). Workplace sexual harassment also tends to occur more frequently in certain industries and occupations. However, much of this early research relies on cross-sectional survey data, which limits the ability to track workers over time and assess the long-term effects of harassment. The administrative panel data used in this paper allows for a more comprehensive study of the dynamic labor market consequences following sexual harassment in the workplace not only for victims, but for firms

as well.

Previous research has also established the significant impact of workplace sexual harassment on workers' labor market mobility and career disruptions ([Neumark and McLennan \(1995\)](#); [Feldblum and Lipnic \(2016\)](#)). Early studies attempt to measure mobility by examining intentions to quit through survey data ([Laband and Lentz \(1998\)](#); [Antecol and Cobb-Clark \(2004\)](#); [Willness et al. \(2007\)](#)). The strongest evidence in the U.S. context comes from a panel study of young women in St. Paul, Minnesota, which finds that workplace sexual harassment is associated with increased financial stress and job moves ([McLaughlin et al., 2017](#)). More recently, [Folke and Rickne \(2022\)](#) provides the first evidence on career interruptions using administrative data, showing that mobility rises following incidents of workplace sexual harassment. Looking more broadly to examine other forms of workplace violence, [Adams-Prassl et al. \(2024\)](#) found that victims of workplace violence experience declines in employment rates.

Our main empirical contribution is to offer the first estimates of the magnitude of earnings losses following workplace sexual harassment. Prior research has tried to establish whether there exists an effect of workplace harassment on wages and earnings, but has been limited by data constraints. For instance, [Hersch \(2011\)](#) attempts to calculate the cost of workplace sexual harassment from a legal perspective when seeking damages using limited data from reports to the U.S Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). While they do not observe earnings directly, [Folke and Rickne \(2022\)](#) find that workers move to more gender-segregated and lower-paying workplaces following workplace sexual harassment. They also performed a survey to elicit workers' willingness to pay to avoid workplace sexual harassment. Here they find that workers are willing to forgo 10 percent of their wages to avoid a workplace where they'll be exposed to workplace sexual harassment, which is consistent with the magnitude of earnings declines we observe from movers following harassment. Work by [Batut et al. \(2022\)](#) builds on these findings using administrative and survey data from France to document mobility outcomes following reports of workplace sexual harassment. Although they do not have information on earnings either, their results also provide evidence that workers who face exposure to workplace sexual harassment move to lower-paying firms. We offer novel direct evidence of the effect of workplace sexual harassment on earnings.

We know that the way in which survey questions about harassment are framed can significantly influence workers’ willingness to disclose their experiences. [Stockdale et al. \(1995\)](#) and [Ilies et al. \(2003\)](#) emphasize that the most effective approach is to focus specifically on behaviors that fall under the definition of workplace sexual harassment. Related work also explores the factors that influence workers’ decisions to report incidents to their employer. Unfortunately, reports of harassment are sometimes ignored or, in the worst cases, met with retaliation, (see [Bergman et al. \(2002\)](#); [Cortina and Magley \(2003\)](#)), which discourages employees from coming forward. Recent evidence suggests that employer policies impact reporting behavior, with some policies even backfiring ([Cheng and Hsiaw, 2022](#)). Similarly, [Dahl and Knepper \(2022\)](#) documents the importance of workers’ outside options in their decision regarding whether to report sexual harassment in the workplace.

Our work therefore contributes to a growing economic literature on gender-based violence in the workplace. While prior research has established links between harassment and job mobility, we are the first to document the earnings consequences directly using administrative data. We also explore mechanisms, showing that earnings losses are not driven by non-employment or occupational downgrading, but rather by transitions to lower-paying firms. Finally, we consider possible spillovers to coworkers and examine productivity effects.

In the remainder of this paper, [Section 2](#) discusses the data and sample selection, [Section 3](#) documents our empirical methods, and [Section 4](#) reports the results. And finally, [Section 5](#) concludes.

2 Data

In this section, we describe how we construct the novel dataset used in this paper that combines labor market information with instances of workplace sexual harassment. We also present descriptive statistics that summarize important features of the micro data.

2.1 Data Sources and Sample Selection

In order to identify workers who are victims of workplace sexual harassment, we use survey data from Denmark. The survey data come from the study ‘Working environment and health

in Denmark’. From 2012 until 2018, the National Research Center for the Working Environment has asked the same questions to different sets of employees in Denmark every two years.² The purpose of the survey was to analyze how the employees themselves assess their physical and mental working environment, as well as their health and ability to work. The survey asks respondents two questions that measure the frequency and sources of workplace sexual harassment.

We link this repeated cross-sectional data to employment histories and earnings from the Danish employer-employee-matched administrative data and firm level balance sheet data. We focus our sample on private sector workers from 2004-2021.³ This gives us individual labor market histories both before and after individuals respond to the workplace survey. For the key employment and earnings variables, we use the Integrated Database for Labor Market Research (IDA) register. We supplement this with additional registers to get information about education and other demographic variables (BEF, UDDA).

The main outcomes we consider are earnings and firm mobility. Earnings are the annual gross labor market income deflated to the 2015 price level.⁴ To capture the effects of employment flows on earnings, we include periods of zero earnings. We also track whether the worker remains at the firm they were in when they were surveyed. To ensure that survey responses match the worker’s current employer, we only consider workers who have been at their place of employment for at least one year.⁵

2.2 Descriptive Statistics

We first analyze the demographic characteristics of the survey respondents. The workplace environment survey question we leverage is “Have you been exposed to sexual harassment in the past 12 months?” where workers respond whether they were exposed daily, weekly, monthly, at least once, or never. Overall, 3 percent of the sample reported that they had

²The COVID-19 pandemic interrupted survey activity in 2020 and a new survey of workplace environments began collection biennially again in 2021. We have not yet collected these subsequent waves for inclusion in this study

³Since firm level information is not collected for the public sector, we focus on private sector workers.

⁴Earnings outcomes are in 2015 USD.

⁵We explore employment outcomes as well, but find limited effects. See Appendix [D](#)

Have you been exposed to sexual harassment?

	% Women	Age	Ann. Earn (USD)	Tenure	College	No. Obs
Yes	82	42.25	51,002	6.96	.36	2,932
No	53	46.89	61,393	8.65	.43	99,539
Total	54	46.76	61,096	8.61	.43	102,471

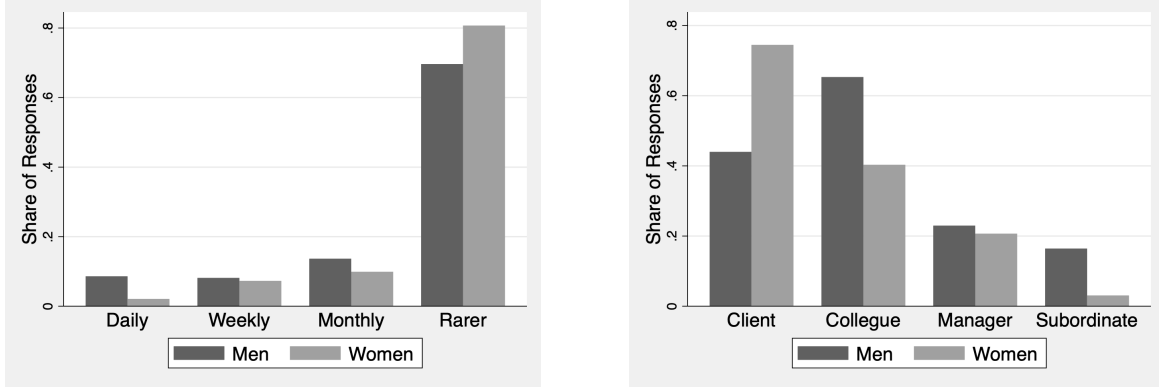
Table 1: Summary Statistics

Notes: This table shows summary statistics for workers for those exposed and those not exposed to sexual harassment for the fraction of women, age, annual earnings which are the annual gross labor market income deflated to the 2015 price level, tenure measured in years and college which is an indicator variable. Number of observations in each category are in the final column.

been exposed to sexual harassment in the past 12 months. For women, the rate was 4.5 percent, and for men, it was 1.2 percent. This prevalence is lower than other estimates for Denmark. An EU-wide survey on violence against women in the workplace estimated the 12-month incidence for women at 10 percent in Denmark. We attribute the discrepancy between our survey and other reports to differences in the subjective nature of the questions framing. The survey question we use relies on self-identification of harassment, which is known to skew self-reports downward relative to questions that ask about the behaviors that define sexual harassment itself without using those words ([Stockdale et al., 1995](#)).

First, Table 1 reports demographic summary statistics for workers who responded that they had faced any amount of exposure to workplace sexual harassment. The respondents who report workplace sexual harassment are predominantly women. And they tend to be younger, earn less, and have a lower rate of college attendance. We also document differences in reports of workplace sexual harassment by gender and age (See Appendix A). Over 10 percent of women under 25 in the sample report being exposed to workplace sexual harassment in the past year, while around 3 percent of men in this age group reported an exposure. In Appendix B, we report demographic summary statistics for workers who responded that they had faced exposure to workplace sexual harassment by the frequency of the exposure and source of harassment.

Next, we decompose the frequency of workplace sexual harassment for workers in the



(a) Frequency of sexual harassment

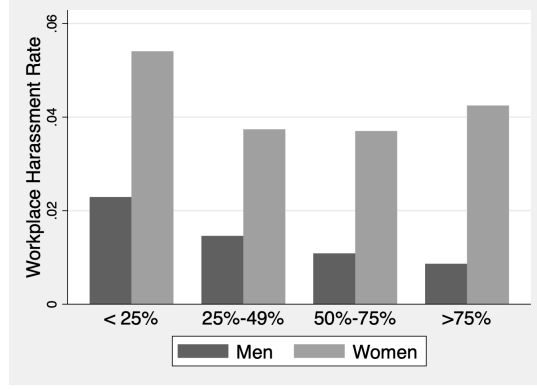
(b) Sources of sexual harassment

Figure 1: Frequency and Sources of workplace sexual harassment

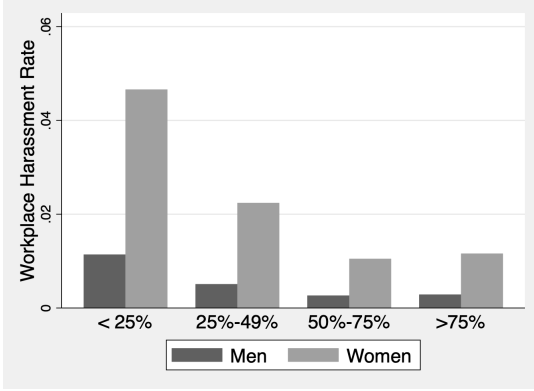
Notes: Both plots record the distribution of responses among male and female workers who report any degree of workplace sexual harassment. Panel (a) plots the reported frequency of workplace sexual harassment into daily, weekly, monthly or rarer and (b) plots the source of reported workplace sexual harassment, whether it is colleague, manager, subordinate or client.

survey who report any degree of exposure in Figure 1a. For most workers, sexual harassment is a rare event, although a significant number of respondents report repeated exposure to workplace sexual harassment. Again, there are slight differences by gender, with men who report exposure to workplace sexual harassment typically reporting a higher frequency of incidents

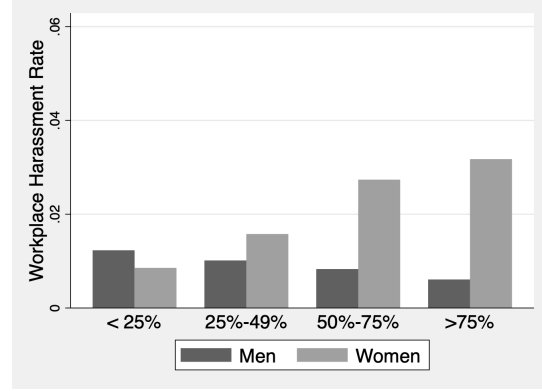
In addition, we can examine the sources of exposure to workplace sexual harassment in the data. The relevant survey question asks, “Who exposed you to sexual harassment?” In the survey, respondents who reported exposure to workplace sexual harassment had the option to indicate whether the source of the exposure was from colleagues, managers, subordinates, or clients/patients/etc. Respondents may report more than one source of sexual harassment. Figure 1b illustrates the sources of workplace sexual harassment by gender. For both men and women, the most common sources of harassment were colleagues and clients. For men who indicated exposure to workplace sexual harassment, 50 percent of respondents reported colleagues as the source of exposure, and 33 percent reported clients. For women, 27 percent reported colleagues as the source, and 64 percent reported clients. Men and women report a similar degree of exposure by managers, and men report a higher degree of exposure by



(a) All harassment



(b) Client harassment



(c) Coworker harassment

Figure 2: Sources of workplace harassment by firm male share and gender

Notes: Panel (a) plots the rates of reported workplace sexual harassment stemming from any source by gender depending on the firm's male employee share (on the first axis) being below 25 percent, 25 percent to 49 percent, 50 to 75 percent of above. Panel (b) plots the rates of reported workplace sexual harassment stemming from clients, patients, or students by gender depending on firm male shares. Panel (c) plots the rates of reported workplace sexual harassment by gender stemming from coworkers - either a colleague, manager, or subordinate depending on firm male shares.

subordinates.

Prior work has emphasized the relationship between firm or occupation composition and workplace sexual harassment (Folke and Rickne, 2022). Motivated by these results, we look at reports of sexual harassment by the gender composition of the firm. We calculate the share of men in each firm and drop firms with less than 5 employees for this analysis. Figure 2a plots the results for all reports of workplace sexual harassment. At first, it appears that we do not see the same trends documented in prior work that risk is higher for gender

minorities. While we do see this pattern for men, for women, we observe a U-shape in risk. We show why that is in the following figures. Figure 2b plots the results by gender and separately for instances due to clients and Figure 2c does the same for colleagues, managers, and subordinates. We see that for men and women, the incidence of reports of workplace sexual harassment from coworkers increases in the share of the opposite gender. However, we also document that when it comes to client-based harassment, the rate is higher for both men and women in workplaces with a higher female share. This client-based harassment therefore drives the bottom end of the U-shape in harassment for women.

Finally, we more closely examine differences in workplace sexual harassment across occupation categories. Table 2 reports harassment rates by gender and occupation group. We also include average pay by gender in these occupations. Women in agricultural and service occupations face the highest rate of harassment, with 9 percent of women reporting exposure. We use broad DISCO codes to characterize occupations.⁶ Service occupations tend to have high rates of harassment for both men and women and the lowest pay. However, women comprise nearly three-quarters of workers in service occupations. The sources of sexual harassment in the workplace also vary by occupation, with women sorting more heavily into occupations that are exposed to high rates of sexual harassment by clients than men, while other occupations see a greater gender divergence in workplace sexual harassment stemming from coworkers.

3 Identification and Estimation

In this section, we discuss the empirical approach in this paper to estimate the causal effects of workplace sexual harassment on labor market outcomes. To do this, we use a multiple-period difference-in-difference approach to analyze the outcomes of workers who report workplace sexual harassment. We considered different years of the survey to be the different periods of the treatment. We follow the approach of Callaway and Sant’Anna (2021) in constructing our estimator in which we compare the outcomes for workers who report harassment to those

⁶Six-digit DISCO codes are used for classifying and aggregating information about job functions in clearly defined groups, in relation to the tasks performed in the job or occupation.

Workplace Sexual Harassment by Occupation

Occupation	% Women	Ann. Earn (USD)	% Women Harassed	% Men Harassed	No. Harassed	No. Obs
Agriculture	9	64,024	9.30	1.20	539	5,722
Managers	32	105,264	2.20	0.70	4,532	43,976
Professionals	63	68,687	3.70	0.90	29,779	264,555
Technicians	58	64,180	2.40	0.80	12,412	134,706
Administrative	74	51,530	2.60	1.00	8,684	82,422
Service	72	44,132	9.10	2.10	12,389	124,445
Crafts	7	56,367	3.20	0.70	6,826	69,906
Assembly	21	54,044	3.60	1.00	4,925	50,882
Manual	43	44,309	2.60	1.50	5,811	62,143

Table 2: Harassment Rates and Summary Statistics by Occupation

Notes: This table presents the statistics for workers for those exposed in each occupation, where we use broad DISCO codes to characterize occupations. The first column is the fraction of women, the next is annual earnings which are the annual gross labor market income deflated to the 2015 price level, then we report the percentage of women harassed and men. The number of observations in each occupation are stated in the final column.

who never report workplace sexual harassment.

We are interested in key labor market outcomes of workers who experience sexual harassment on the job. We focus mainly on the log annual labor earnings and job mobility, which we define as an indicator equal to one if the worker is at a firm different from the one that they were at in the year they responded to the survey.

The staggered difference-in-difference estimation method we use relies on several assumptions (Callaway and Sant’Anna, 2021). The first assumption is the irreversibility of the treatment such that once a unit is treated, that treatment status is permanent. This implies that once a report of workplace sexual harassment occurs, the record of that event is permanent from the point of view of the worker. The second assumption is random sampling, which implies that each unit is randomly drawn from a large population of interest. The third assumption is limited treatment anticipation. For this to hold, we assume that individuals do not anticipate their experience of workplace sexual harassment prior to it occurring. And finally, we make the conditional parallel trends assumption based on the “Never treated” groups such that conditional on the large set of controls including demographics and employ-

ment characteristics, the treated worker’s labor outcomes would evolve in parallel to those for whom we do not observe an experience of workplace sexual harassment for (Callaway and Sant’Anna, 2021).^{7 8}

As in the procedure outlined in Callaway and Sant’Anna (2021), we start by estimating the group-time average treatment effect on the treated $ATT(g, t)$ for workers for the cohort of individuals first treated in period g at time t :

$$ATT(g, t) = \mathbb{E}[Y_t(g) - Y_t(0)|G_i = g], \quad (1)$$

where $Y_t(g)$ is the potential outcome under treatment in period t , $Y_t(0)$ is the potential outcome in the absence of treatment, and $G_i = g$ is a binary indicator equal to one if individual i is first treated in period g . This estimator is defined for periods $t \geq g$. We use the improved doubly-robust estimation procedure based on the inverse probability of tilting and weighted least squares from Sant’Anna and Zhao (2020) to estimate the $ATT(g, t)$. Given the differences we see in which demographic groups report selection into risk of workplace sexual harassment, we include a vector of covariates. The covariates we include are education, occupation, gender, age, and age squared. We also restrict the sample to individuals who have been employed at their firm for over a year to ensure that their responses correspond with their workplace at the time of the survey.

In order to aggregate these estimated effects over groups and time, we construct a simple weighted average of all $ATT(g, t)$ ’s, given as:

$$\theta = \sum_{g \in \mathcal{G}} \sum_{t=2}^{\tau} w(g, t) ATT(g, t), \quad (2)$$

where $\mathcal{G}$ is the set of groups and $w(g, t)$ is a weighting function. We use the simple weights from Callaway and Sant’Anna (2021), which create a weighted average of the $ATT(g, t)$ ’s, where the weights sum to one (avoiding any negative weight issues) and put more weight on larger units.

⁷Our never treated group is defined from the point of view of what we observe in the data. While this group of workers either is not surveyed or does not report sexual harassment in the survey, they may indeed experience sexual harassment.

⁸We examine the validity of the conditional parallel trends assumption in Appendix C.

4 Results

In this section, we examine whether workers who have experienced sexual harassment earn less, whether they move to other firms, and we finally investigate the mechanisms behind the results.

4.1 Earnings

Table 3 reports the estimated static aggregate ATT for earnings. The first row reports the ATT for earnings with all sources of workplace sexual harassment for women and men. Overall, women experience a 6.2 percent decline in earnings due to workplace sexual harassment, while men see a 5.9 percent decline. We also estimate the earnings results separately for exposure that comes from coworkers and exposure that comes from clients. The second row reports the estimated ATT for client-based harassment and row three reports the estimates for coworker-based harassment. The biggest gap in earnings effects between men and women comes from client-based harassment, with men’s earnings losses at almost twice the magnitude of women’s losses. Conversely, women face slightly greater earnings losses following coworker harassment than men.

Next, we examine the dynamics of earning losses following workplace sexual harassment. We construct the aggregate dynamic weighted average of the $ATT(g, t)$ ’s, which provides the average effect of participating in the “treatment” for the group of units that have been exposed to the treatment for exactly e periods. This analysis is similar to the standard two-way fixed effect regression in terms of outcomes of interest but avoids the issues with negative weighting that have been highlighted by Goodman-Bacon (2021). The dynamic aggregator gives us a sense of the dynamic impact of workplace sexual harassment and allows us to examine the conditional parallel trends assumption.

Figures 3a plots the result for men and 3b reports the results for women pooling all sources of workplace sexual harassment. We follow earnings outcomes for workers up to four years after they were surveyed. In terms of point estimates, men and women follow similar trends with earnings showing a steady decline after the reported workplace harassment. It is important to note that we do not see earnings recover in the years that follow harassment.

Individual Earnings Losses Following Sexual Harassment		
	(1)	(2)
	Women	Men
Coworkers & Clients	-0.0619*** [-0.0770,-0.0469]	-0.0589*** [-0.0899,-0.0278]
Clients	-0.0532*** [-0.0700,-0.0364]	-0.114* [-0.211,-0.0172]
Coworkers	-0.0699*** [-0.0993,-0.0406]	-0.0557** [-0.0914,-0.0200]
Mean	10.70	10.92
95% confidence intervals in brackets		
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$		

Table 3: Estimated earnings losses following workplace sexual harassment by source

Notes: This table reports individual earning losses following sexual harassment by coworkers and clients. Coefficient estimates are expressed as a percentage of earnings. Estimates are derived using a multiple-period difference-in-difference approach. 95 percent confidence intervals and p-values are obtained following Callaway and Sant’Anna (2021). Pre-period mean log earnings for men and women are presented in the last row.

It appears that these earnings losses are persistent and potentially growing with time. We also observe that the confidence intervals on the estimates for men are less precise than for women.

4.2 Mobility

In this subsection we investigate whether victims “escape” workplace sexual harassment after they report exposure by leaving their job. To measure job mobility, we record an indicator for every period that the worker is observed at an employer that differs from the one they were at in the survey year. We present the results for mobility in the main sample with all sources of workplace sexual harassment for both men and women in Figure 4. We observe that both men and women leave their firms at a higher rate after workplace sexual

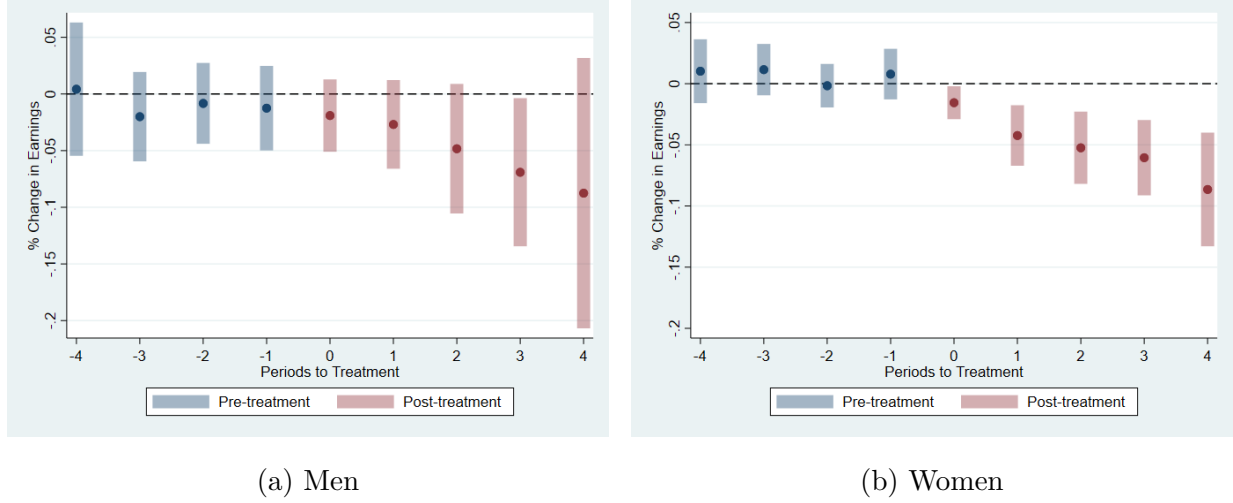


Figure 3: Dynamic ATT for earnings by gender

Notes: Panel (a) plots the estimates for the dynamic ATT aggregator for earnings for men (b) plots the estimates for the dynamic ATT aggregator for earnings for women. Both samples include all sources of workplace sexual harassment.

harassment. Women have an approximately 15 percent higher rate of firm mobility by the fourth year following harassment from a base rate of 0.475. Men are more likely to leave their firm following a report in the survey of sexual harassment, with approximately a 20 percent higher rate of mobility from a base rate of approximately 0.5. The steadily increasing rate of mobility over time may suggest that workers facing harassment are not always able to quickly escape harassment in their job.

4.3 Validity of Research Design

Our key identifying assumption is that potential outcomes evolve in parallel for workers absent the experience of workplace sexual harassment, controlling for various demographic characteristics. To test this, we extend the pre-period to show no evidence of pre-trends between control and treatment groups for our two main outcomes: log annual labor earnings and job mobility.

Indeed, we show that the parallel trends assumption holds even after extending the pre-period to seven years long in Figure 5. Moreover, Appendix C reports the results of the parallel trend tests of the static ATT for worker earnings. This is an additional test of our

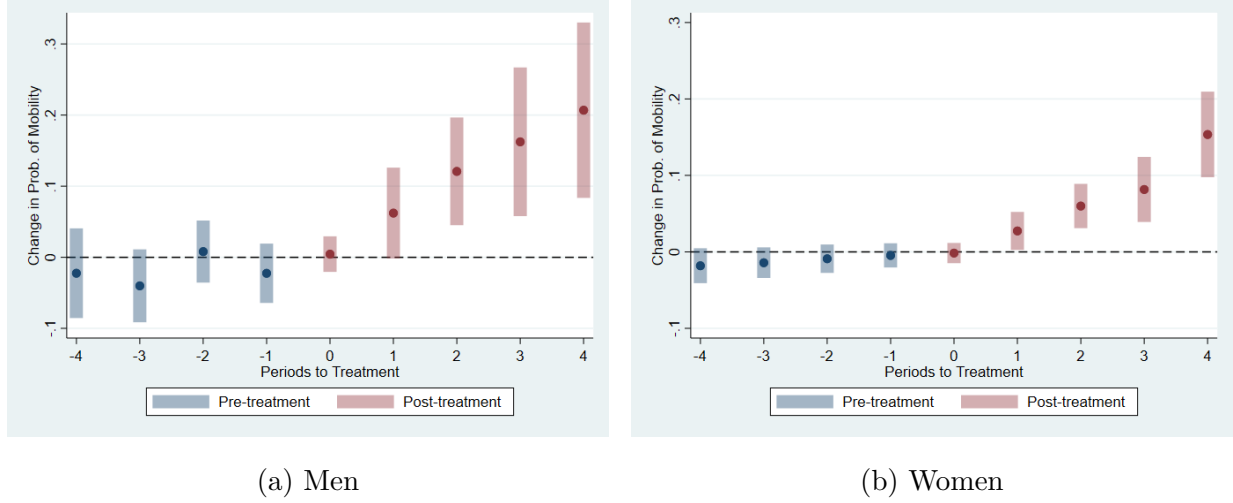


Figure 4: Dynamic ATT for mobility by gender

Notes: Panel (a) plots the estimates for the dynamic ATT aggregator for firm departures for men (b) plots the estimates for the dynamic ATT aggregator for firm departures for women. Both samples include all sources of workplace sexual harassment.

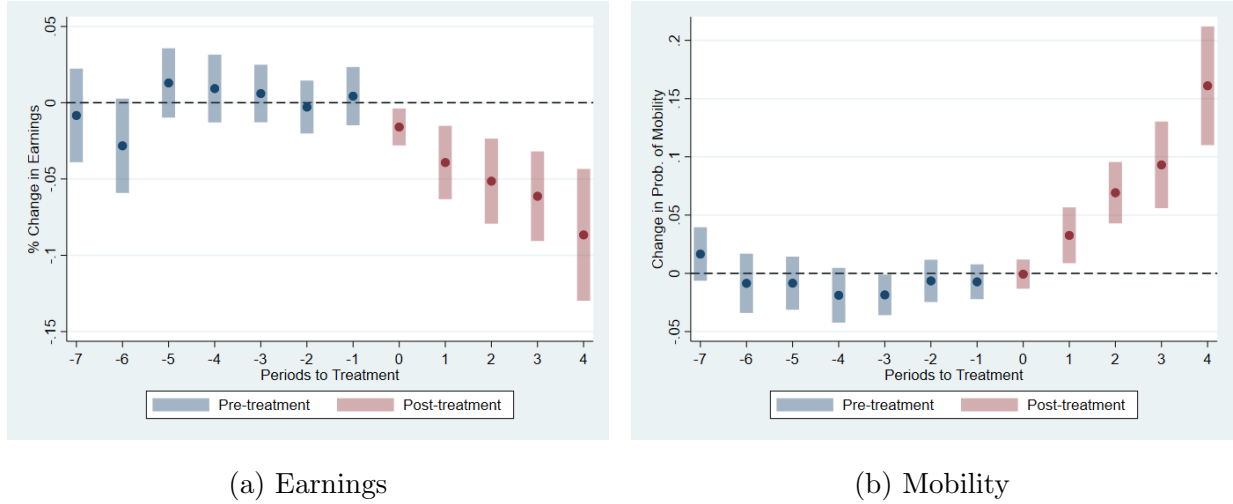


Figure 5: Dynamic ATT for earnings and mobility

Notes: Panel (a) plots the estimates for the dynamic ATT aggregator for earnings (b) plots the estimates for the dynamic ATT aggregator for firm departures. Both samples include men and women and all sources of workplace sexual harassment.

assumption of parallel trends in relation to the never-treated units.

For further robustness, we conduct a random inference-based placebo test which confirms that our earnings results are not driven by selection on-trend. The details and results of this

approach are included in Appendix [E](#).

4.4 Mechanisms

So far, we have established that sexual harassment causes earnings losses and greater rates of job mobility for both men and women who report workplace sexual harassment when surveyed. We will now examine the characteristics and consequences of these moves for labor market outcomes.

4.4.1 Movers vs. Stayers

First, we split the sample and estimate the specification from equation (1) on movers and stayers separately. We define movers as individuals who are employed at a different firm than the one reported in the survey three years after the survey. Table [4](#) reports the results of the simple static ATT. We see that earnings losses are concentrated among workers who leave their firms. Column (1) reports the results for women and column (2) reports the results for men. We see that average earnings losses are driven by the larger magnitude of losses for workers who move jobs. Again, the magnitude of losses remains similar by gender. Earnings losses for men who move firms are 13.1 percent while they are 12.1 percent for women who move. It is interesting to compare these results to those of [Folke and Rickne \(2022\)](#) who use a survey to elicit that workers would give up around 10 percent of their income to avoid sexual harassment, which is similar to the magnitude we observe for movers.

We then report the dynamic earnings losses for movers and stayers. Again, as in the static ATT, movers see losses of larger magnitude than stayers, with earnings diverging in the first year following the survey report of harassment. Stayers also experience earnings declines in the years following harassment, but they are not as large. For stayers, earnings declines become larger in the fourth year, which could reflect later mobility since we define movers as having a different employer up to three years after the survey. The magnitude of losses for movers is large and does not recover. Earnings losses are around 15 percent for movers three years following sexual harassment, which is similar in magnitude to estimates for workers who are displaced from their jobs due to layoffs. ⁹

⁹In general, Scandinavian workers experience displacement earnings losses around 10 percent five years

Individual Earnings Losses by Job Mobility		
	(1)	(2)
	Women	Men
Movers	-0.121*** [-0.154,-0.0874]	-0.131*** [-0.207,-0.0553]
Stayers	-0.0406*** [-0.0562,-0.0249]	-0.0332 [-0.0674,0.000977]

95% confidence intervals in brackets
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table 4: Estimated ATT for earnings for movers vs. stayers by gender.

Note: This table reports estimated annual earnings losses for those who stay in a firm and those who leave after the incidence of sexual harassment. Coefficient estimates are expressed as a percentage of earnings. Estimates are derived using a multiple-period difference-in-difference approach. 95 percent confidence intervals and p-values are obtained following Callaway and Sant'Anna (2021).

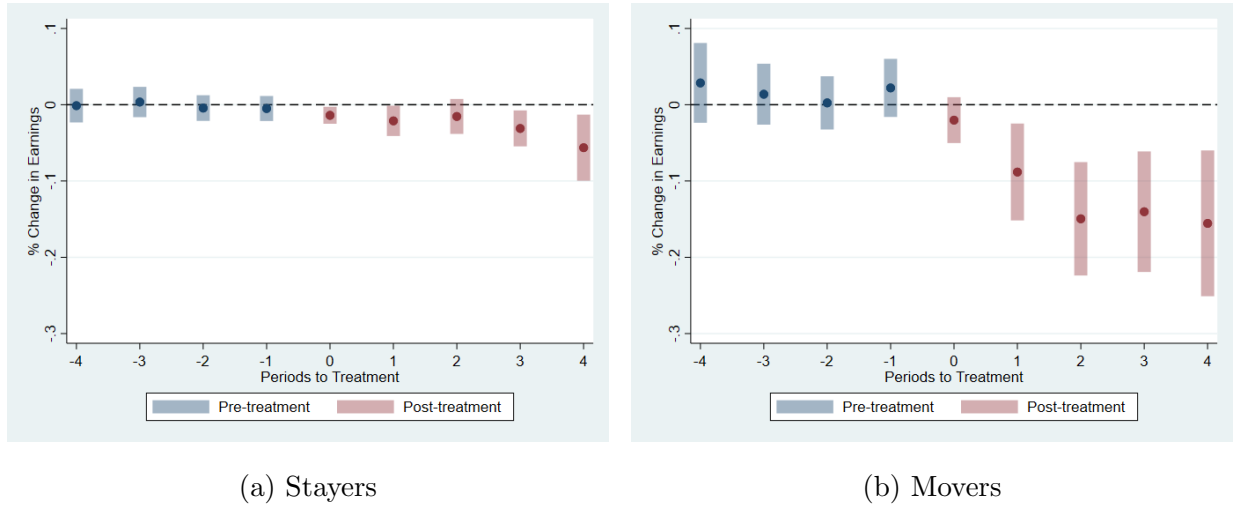


Figure 6: Dynamic Earnings ATT for stayers vs. movers

Notes: Panel (a) plots the estimates for the dynamic ATT aggregator for earnings for those who do not depart their firms (b) plots the estimates for the dynamic ATT aggregator for earnings for those who depart their firms. Both samples include men and women and all sources of workplace sexual harassment.

after job displacement, see (Bertheau et al., 2023).

4.4.2 Firm and occupation outcomes

Given that movers see larger earnings losses than stayers, we further analyze the characteristics of a worker’s firm that may drive these losses. First, we analyze the role of workplace sexual harassment in how workers sort into firms. Previous research suggests that women subject to workplace sexual harassment may transition to lower-productivity or lower-paying firms.

We consider the average firm wage, firm size, and the firm-level male share as outcomes. Table 5 reports the static ATT for each firm-level outcome by gender. Women end up at firms with approximately 4.1 percent lower average wages, 10 percent smaller firm size, and less than one percent lower male share. Men see a roughly similar pattern and move to firms with a 5.8 percent lower average wage and firm composition that is 1.3 percent more male. However, we fail to reject the null that men move to smaller firms as the estimates are less precise. While we do find evidence of increased gender segregation after harassment that corroborates prior work, it appears that moves to firms that are smaller and offer lower wages play a larger role in terms of magnitudes of what is driving the earnings declines following workplace sexual harassment than workers paying some type of amenity cost to move to a firm with a higher share of their own gender.

Given the significance of mobility, we also analyze occupational mobility outcomes. We define occupational mobility as an indicator equal to one when the worker is employed in an occupation different from the one they reported in the survey year. This classification is determined at the six-digit occupational code level. We find limited evidence of differential occupational mobility in the years after workplace sexual harassment, as illustrated in Figure 7. Men who experience sexual harassment at work have similar rates of occupational mobility than those who do not in the three years following (in panel (a)). It is not until four years after workplace sexual harassment where we observe a significant increase in occupational mobility among treated workers. This pattern is similar for women (in panel (b)). This finding suggests that losses in occupation-specific human capital are not a significant factor driving the earnings losses we document in Section 4.1.

Firm Characteristics						
	Avg. Firm Wage		Firm Size		Firm Male Share	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
Coworkers & Clients	-0.0409***	-0.0583*	-0.101**	-0.145	-0.0067**	0.0130*
	[-0.064,-0.017]	[-0.112,-0.005]	[-0.172,-0.029]	[-0.308,0.018]	[-0.010,-0.002]	[0.001,0.024]
Mean	10.69	10.82	6.51	5.33	0.36	0.63

95% confidence intervals in brackets

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table 5: Estimated ATT for firm characteristics

Note: This table reports estimated changes in firm characteristics, such as average firm wages, firm size, and firm male share. Coefficient estimates are expressed as a percentage of the respective outcome variable. Estimates are derived using a multiple-period difference-in-difference approach. Number of observations are rounded to the nearest thousand. 95 percent confidence intervals and p-values are obtained following Callaway and Sant'Anna (2021). Pre-period means of each outcome for men and women are presented in the last row.

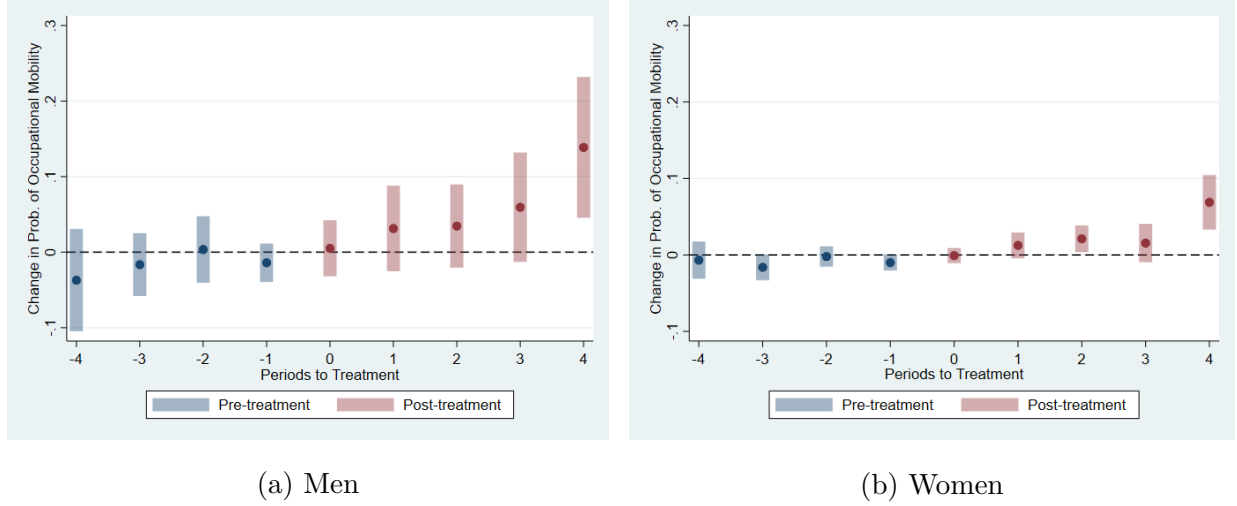


Figure 7: Dynamic ATT for occupational mobility by gender

Notes: Panel (a) plots the estimates for the dynamic ATT aggregator for occupational moves among men (b) plots the estimates for the dynamic ATT aggregator for occupational moves among women. Both samples include all sources of workplace sexual harassment.

4.4.3 Productivity losses

Prior work suggests that individuals who face workplace sexual harassment are less productive (Cici et al., 2021). If this is the case, we can estimate the impact of sexual harassment on

productivity by examining the impact of such a shock on an AKM residual (Abowd et al., 1999). Our large employer-employee matched data with employment histories and wages allows us to separately identify the determinants of wages since we are able to observe wages within and across firms both before and after job transitions. In particular, we estimate a classic AKM-style decomposition using a two-way fixed-effects regression on the largest connected set of workers i and firms j as follows.

$$\log(w_{i,t}) = \beta_1 \text{age}_{i,t} + \beta_2 \text{tenure}_{i,t} + \alpha_i + \psi_j + \varepsilon_{i,t}, \quad (3)$$

where t is year, age, and tenure are covariates, α_i is the individual fixed effect, ψ_j is the firm fixed effect, and $\varepsilon_{i,t}$ is the AKM residual.

The variation in wages is decomposed into an individual component, a firm component, and a residual component which captures the portion of wage variation not explained by individual or firm effects. We interpret the residual component as capturing the variation in wages due to heterogeneity in productivity. Figure 8 reports the results for men and women.

We see clear evidence that workplace sexual harassment lowers productivity for women in panel (b), while the impact on men’s productivity is insignificant (in panel (a)). We find that average productivity losses for women following sexual harassment at work are about 10 percent.¹⁰

4.4.4 Compensating Differentials

Next, we try to test whether these earnings declines represent compensating differentials. Often, sexual harassment is described as a negative workplace amenity. Under this framework, workers who face a high risk of workplace sexual harassment would be compensated through

¹⁰Our finding that women—but not men—experience a 10% decline in productivity is consistent with broader evidence that women face wage penalties in response to biased or hostile workplace conditions. Maloney and Neumark (2025) show that even modest levels of misogyny—measured via Google search data—are strongly associated with wider residual wage gaps, consistent with search-based discrimination models. Similar patterns appear in recent studies using causal or structural methods to quantify gender-based earnings gaps (Zhang and Hannig (2025); Fogel and Modenesi (2024); Jagannathan et al. (2024)).

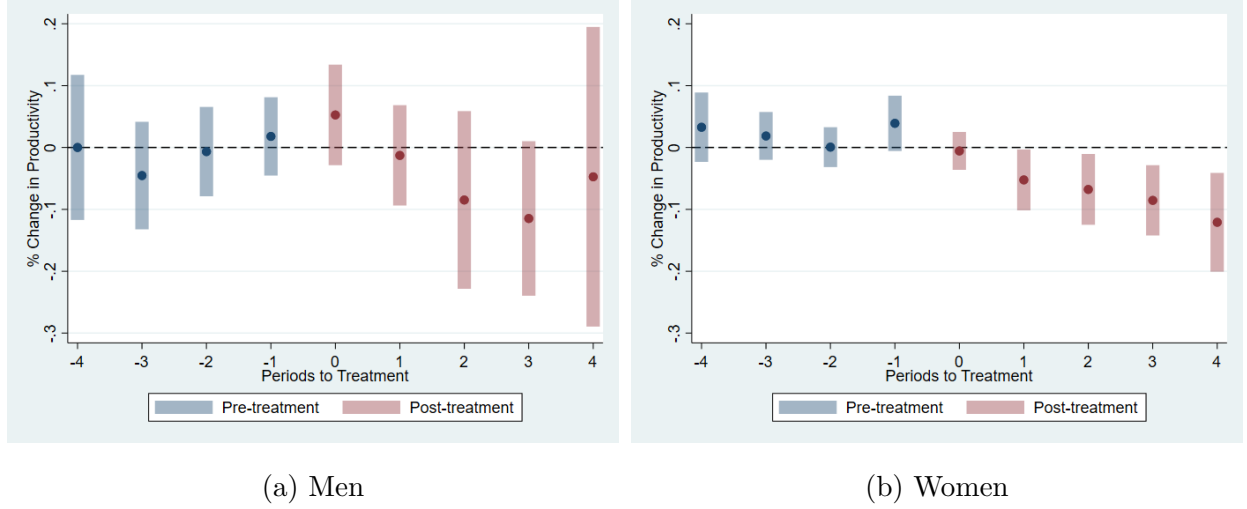


Figure 8: Dynamic ATT for productivity by gender

Notes: Panel (a) plots the estimates for the dynamic ATT aggregator for the AKM residual among men (b) plots the estimates for the dynamic ATT aggregator for the AKM residual among women. Both samples include all sources of workplace sexual harassment.

their wages. In a job search type model with amenities, earnings losses for a worker who leaves a match following harassment could be due to the loss of the compensating differential.

To test whether compensating differentials drive the earnings losses we observe in the data, we run our event study separately for those who report a high frequency of harassment (daily or weekly) and those with a low (monthly or rarely) frequency of harassment. We see that the magnitude of losses following the report of workplace harassment in the survey is similar for those who report low and high frequency exposure to workplace sexual harassment, though our results are more precise for instances of low frequency sexual harassment.¹¹ This suggests that the earnings decline we observe in the data is not being driven by a lost compensating differential in which case we would expect larger losses for those exposed to a high frequency of harassment at work. Overall, this may suggest that modeling workplace sexual harassment the same as other amenities that a worker and firm negotiate over may not be appropriate for all occupations.

¹¹The heterogeneous results shown here could also reflect difference in the severity of the harassment that we are not able to observe.

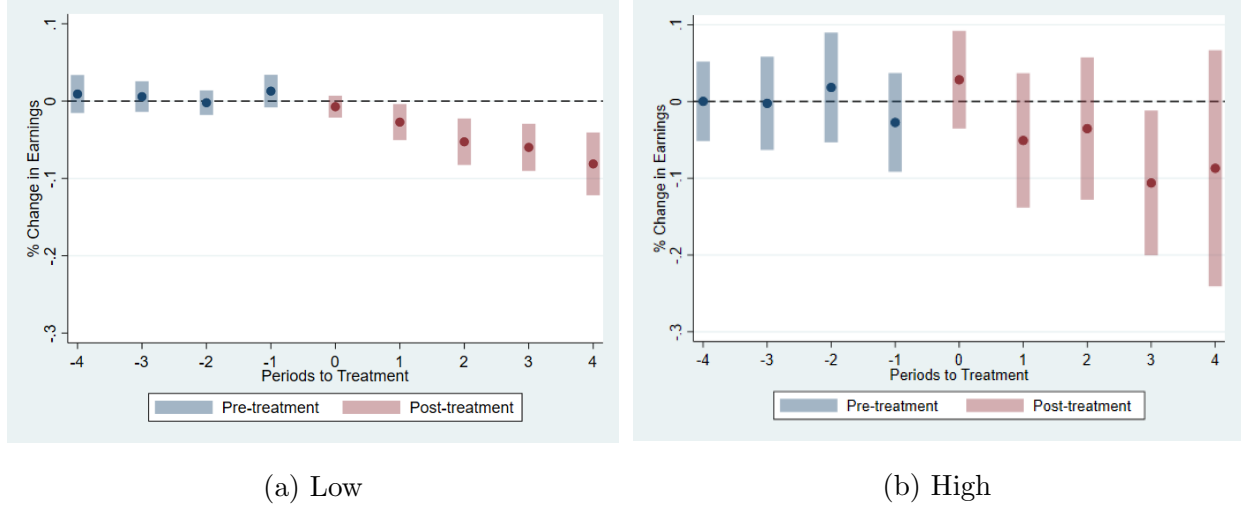


Figure 9: Dynamic ATT for earnings for low vs. high frequency sexual harassment

Notes: Panel (a) plots the estimates for the dynamic ATT aggregator for earnings among men and women who report monthly/rarer incidents of workplace sexual harassment (b) plots the estimates for the dynamic ATT aggregator for earnings among men and women who report daily/weekly incidents of workplace sexual harassment. Both samples include all sources of workplace sexual harassment.

4.5 Coworker Spillovers

To examine the spillovers of workplace sexual harassment on earnings for individuals who work at a firm that is exposed to sexual harassment, we conduct an analogous event study. We measure the effect of a workplace with sexual harassment on average firm earnings and the effect of a harassment event on non-harassed workers' average earnings.

Let $Y_{s,t}$ be the average log annual earnings at the firm level in year t for gender s . In Table 6 we estimate equation (2) for all employees at a firm and separately for those who we cannot identify experiences of sexual harassment i.e. the “non-harassed”.

Since we do not observe the universe of workers in our survey data, misclassification errors may be present in which firms have harassment incidents that are unobserved. Thus, we take these estimates as a lower bound on the earnings spillover of workplace sexual harassment. Column 1 and 2 of Table 6 report the earnings growth for women and men at a firm following a sexual harassment event, respectively. We find that both the overall firm and the spillover for those who have not experienced harassment is near zero. For all male coworkers in a firm and for the “non-harassed”, earnings grow by about one percent. We find no evidence of

	(1)	(2)
	Women	Men
Firm Spillover	0.0050 [-0.0018, 0.0118]	0.0011** [-0.0046, 0.0069]
Non-harassed Spillover	0.0051 [-0.0017, 0.0119]	0.0010** [-0.0047, 0.0068]
95% confidence intervals in brackets		
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$		

Table 6: Estimated avg. earnings growth at the firm following workplace sexual harassment by gender

Notes: This table reports estimated spillover effects on earnings of bystanders to workplace sexual harassment. Coefficient estimates are expressed as a percentage of the respective outcome variable. Estimates are derived using a multiple-period difference-in-difference approach. 95 percent confidence intervals and p-values are obtained following [Callaway and Sant’Anna \(2021\)](#).

changes in female coworkers’ subsequent earnings growth at firms that experience a sexual harassment incident relative to those that do not. This may be due to the fact that women are, in general, more likely to experience sexual harassment, and these types of events are therefore considered in alignment with the norm for women. Overall, we find little effect of workplace sexual harassment instances on coworker earnings spillovers.

5 Conclusion

The #metoo movement, which grew in prominence in 2017, put a greater spotlight on incidences of workplace sexual harassment. However, economic evidence has only just begun to document the extent of the labor market consequences of workplace sexual harassment.

In this paper, our main contribution is that we are the first to estimate the earnings consequences of these events. Using detailed survey and administrative data from Denmark, we can follow workers labor market histories after a report of exposure to workplace sexual harassment. These earnings losses are significant, and average 6 percent for both women and men in the four years following exposure. Looking at the dynamics of these losses, we

see no evidence that workers earnings recover, as losses are driven by workers switching to new jobs.

We are also able to provide direct evidence of who perpetuates workplace sexual harassment and analyze differences in the incidence and consequences of these sources by gender. Prior work has focused on the role of coworkers as a source of harassment, especially for workers in a gender minority group. We do find coworkers to be an important source of harassment, but we also find that clients are the source for significant proportion of incidences as well, and make up the majority of incidences for women. Our empirical results show that the earnings consequences of harassment are of a similar magnitude for coworker- and client-based harassment. The sources of workplace sexual harassment should be a key consideration when developing workplace or government policies to address harassment.

Our work is part of a growing literature highlighting the economic implications of workplace sexual harassment and other forms of gender-based violence. We add more evidence to this work on the gender inequality of who faces workplace sexual harassment and the labor market consequences they face. Our findings can also inspire future work examining gender differences in workplace sexual harassment and the role of policy in addressing these inequalities on a larger scale.

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A Heterogeneity of Workplace Sexual Harassment

Figure 10 plots the percent of workers who reported any exposure to workplace sexual harassment in the past year by age and gender. We bin workers by age to meet release criteria since some age-gender groups have a small number of reports.

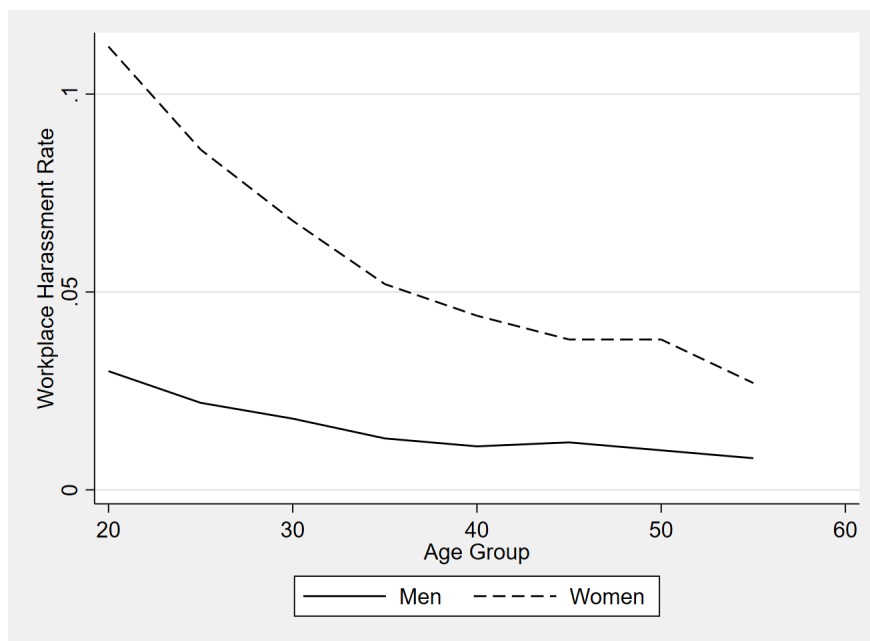


Figure 10: Incidence of harassment by age group and gender. Source: Author's calculations from AH data

B Descriptive Statistics Workplace Sexual Harassment

Table 7 displays the analysis sample’s reported frequency of workplace sexual harassment incidents by worker characteristics. Annual earnings are the annual gross labor market income deflated to the 2015 price level, tenure is measured in years and college is an indicator variable. Number of observations in each category are in the final column.

Table 7: Summary Statistics by Harassment Frequency

	% Women	Age	Ann.Earn (USD)	Tenure	College	Obs
Daily	0.53	41.80	52,597	6.46	0.21	91
Weekly	0.79	41.00	46,930	5.68	0.20	223
Monthly	0.77	38.77	49,492	6.07	0.28	310
At least once	0.84	42.86	51,536	7.21	0.39	2,308
Never	0.53	46.89	61,393	8.65	0.43	99,539
Total	0.54	46.76	61,096	8.61	0.43	102,471

Table 8 displays the reported source of workplace sexual harassment incidents by worker characteristics for victims in our analysis sample. Annual earnings are the annual gross labor market income deflated to the 2015 price level, tenure is measured in years and college is an indicator variable.

Table 8: Summary Statistics by Harassment Source

	% Women	Age	Ann.Earn (USD)	Tenure	College	Obs
Client, Patient, etc.	0.91	43.44	48,211	7.12	0.33	1,748
Colleague	0.68	40.63	54,490	6.91	0.38	736
Manager	0.79	39.81	53,457	6.17	0.45	349
Subordinate	0.41	41.80	71,554	7.36	0.39	82
Total	0.82	42.25	51,074	6.96	0.36	2,915

C Parallel Trends

The average coefficient from our parallel trends test of pre-trends for various firm and individual outcomes are reported in Table 9.

Pre-Trends Test for Parallel Trends	
	Average Pre-Trend Coefficient
Avg. Firm Log Wage	2.11e-70
Avg. Individual Log Wage	.0049525
Firm Male Share	.0628844

Table 9: Average pre-trends test on firm and worker characteristics

D Employment

Table 10 provides the estimated aggregate ATT for an annual employment indicator to examine whether workers who experience sexual harassment at work are choosing not to participate in the labor force. However, we do not find evidence that these workers move into non-employment following such events.

Employment Following Workplace Sexual Harassment		
	(1)	(2)
	Women	Men
Coworkers & Clients	-0.0014	-0.0002
	[-0.0041, 0.0013]	[-0.0008, 0.0003]
Clients	-0.0001	0.0001*
	[-0.0002, 0.0001]	[0.0000, 0.0001]
Coworkers	-0.0019	-0.0008
	[-0.0056, 0.0018]	[-0.0025, 0.0009]
95% confidence intervals in brackets		
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$		

Table 10: Estimated ATT for individual annual employment following workplace sexual harassment

E Robustness

For further robustness, we implement a random inference-based placebo test. In particular, we simulate artificial experiences of workplace sexual harassment by randomly assigning treatment indicators in the data while maintaining the same overall prevalence as observed in the actual data. This random assignment breaks any systematic relationship between treatment and potential confounders. Then we estimate aggregate average treatment effects on the treated (ATTs) using the placebo indicators. Under the null hypothesis of no effect, and given that the treatment is randomly assigned, we expect these placebo ATTs to be close to zero. Significant deviations from zero would suggest that our original estimates may reflect underlying correlations—such as individuals experiencing harassment also being more likely to face contemporaneous shocks to earnings—rather than causal effects of harassment on earnings. We repeat this procedure 500 times to obtain a distribution of placebo estimates. The results of this exercise in Figure ?? confirm that in our sample, the event study results are not driven by selection on-trend.

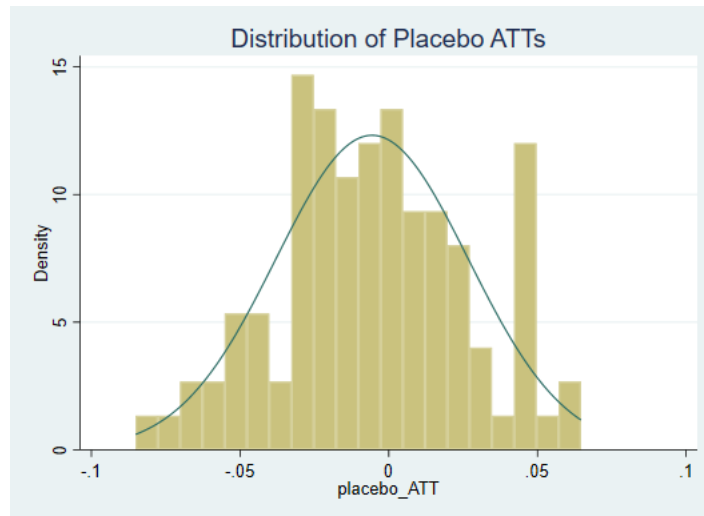


Figure 11: This figure displays the distribution of ATT estimates based on 500 placebo treatment assignments, where workplace sexual harassment indicators are randomly reassigned. The null distribution is centered around zero. This placebo test confirms that our main findings are not driven by selection on pre-treatment trends.