

Sexual Harassment in the Export Processing Zones of the Dominican Republic

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	3
I. JUSTIFICATION AND OBJECTIVES OF STUDY	5
II. INTRODUCTION	6
III. BACKGROUND ON THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC	6
A. Demographics	6
B. Export Processing Zones	7
C. Socio-Cultural Context	8
I. METHODOLOGY	10
II. ASSESSMENT RESULTS	11
A. Identity of the Aggressor	12
B. Examples of Harassment	12
C. Sanctions	14
D. Victims' Testimonies	14
I. CONCLUSIONS	19
A. Recommendations	20
BIBLIOGRAPHY	21

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The International Labor Rights Fund (ILRF) conducted an investigation with partners in the Dominican Republic to assess the extent of sexual harassment in the export processing industries producing goods for the US market. The study, which focused on three export processing zones (EPZ) in different regions of the country, reveals the following:

- Over 40 percent of the women surveyed had experienced sexual harassment in the workplace.
- 53 percent of the victims are young women whose ages range from 19 to 25.
- 43.7 percent of the sexual aggressors have supervisory positions within the factory.
- 68.2 percent of the victims have a male boss.
- Women who do not submit to the wishes of the sexual aggressors are fired, threatened with dismissal, demoted or have their pay arbitrarily reduced.
- 90 percent of the women workers are not aware of any institutions that provide support to victims of sexual harassment.
- Victims of the sexual abuse suffered from psychological instability, alienation, lowered self-esteem, feelings of helplessness, and humiliation.

The issue of sexual abuse of women workers worldwide has been shrouded in silence, and there have been very few credible studies to date of problems affecting working women in the developing world. ILRF, as part of its Rights for Working Women Campaign, has attempted to close this gap by conducting assessments in Africa, Latin America, Asia and the Caribbean. In the Dominican Republic, this is the first study to look specifically at the issue of workplace sexual harassment in export processing zones.

The research was conducted in coordination with a team of researchers headed by Fundación Laboral Dominicana (FLD), a grassroots labor rights NGO. The study involved 370 women workers, and gathered information through focus groups discussions, case studies and interviews. Interviews were also conducted with public and private institutions such as unions, NGOs, and health centers.

Factory workers in the EPZs work 56 to 80 hours per week and earn an average weekly salary of US\$25.00. The Dominican Republic's Work Code specifies that the workday cannot exceed 8 hours; nevertheless, due to the extremely high production quotas, workers end up working overtime without extra pay.

In addition to these problems in the factories, women workers also face sexual harassment. Most workers in the export processing zones are poor, young, unwed mothers between the ages of 19 and 25 years old. The experiences of many women are psychologically and physically devastating.

Dilena, for example, worked in the Santiago EPZ factory where she sewed pants. She was approached by her boss many times to have sex with him in exchange for more economic benefits. When she refused, she was threatened with dismissal and punished. When she attempted to form a labor union with her coworkers to stop further harassment at work, the workers were fired for violating company policies.

María, another worker, also became the victim of sexual harassment. When she refused to submit to her supervisors' sexual advances, he ran his car into her motorcycle and broke her leg. The supervisor was then transferred to another factory while María continued working at the same place without receiving any compensation for her losses.

In response to this horrific problem, the report makes the following recommendations:

- US trade rules should be changed so that they protect the rights of women workers.
- The International Labour Organization (ILO) should officially recognize workers' right to a violence-free workplace.
- Companies that profit from global trade should adopt codes of conduct that prohibit harassment in the workplace.
- The laws of the Dominican Republic need to be reformed and enforced to provide legal protections for women workers.
- There is a need for social programs that can raise awareness of working women's rights.

I. JUSTIFICATION AND OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

The International Labor Rights Fund (ILRF) is an advocacy organization dedicated to achieving just and humane treatment for workers worldwide. ILRF initiated this study in the Dominican Republic as part of its Rights for Working Women Campaign, which seeks to alleviate labor rights abuses against working women.

Sexual harassment is increasingly viewed as one of the most egregious forms of violence against women in the workplace, and is particularly a problem in the new global economy where the work force is comprised largely of young women with little formal education or previous work experience. Subcontracting and other forms of flexible work also make it very difficult for women to organize against such abuse. These young women may be doubly affected by an industrial hierarchy that reinforces culturally based discrimination.

Harassment can involve sexual advances or requests for sexual favors whereby submission to such conduct is made explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of employment; or whereby such conduct has the effect of substantially creating an intimidating or hostile working environment.¹ Indeed, in many countries, it may also extend to bodily searches or pregnancy testing.

Gathering data on the extent of the problem is extremely difficult. To date, most studies of workplace sexual harassment have taken place in rich, industrialized countries. There is virtually no data on the extent of the problem in the developing world. This is true for several reasons. It is difficult to elicit accurate data on harassment since many women, particularly in developing countries, are unfamiliar with the concept of harassment and lack the vocabulary to articulate the problem. Cultural norms that often blame the victim create an additional disincentive to speaking out, even to researchers under conditions of anonymity. Finally, a lack of resources for qualitative research on workers in general contributes to the problems of data collection in this area.

Currently, there are virtually no international instruments that deal with violence against women in the workplace. The United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) is, to date, the most comprehensive international instrument specifically prohibiting sexual harassment in Article 11 of General Recommendation 19.

The right to a workplace free from violence, however, is not defined as a “core” labor right by the International Labor Organization (ILO), the international body with foremost responsibility for defining workplace rights. Currently, the ILO has only a convention

¹Definition used by the Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women for the Commission on Human Rights. The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) further defines sexual harassment as “[a]ny repeated and unwanted verbal, physical and gestural sexual advance, sexually explicit derogatory statement, or sexually discriminatory remark made by someone in the workplace or trade union environment, which is offensive to the trade union member or worker involved, which causes the person to feel threatened, humiliated, patronized or harassed, or which interferes with the persons’ job performance and undermines job security, or creates a threatening or intimidating environment.”

prohibiting discrimination based on gender, but Convention 111 does not specifically prohibit sexual harassment. Nor do the Recommendations attached to this convention clarify that its prohibition of sex discrimination incorporates sexual harassment, although the ILO Committee of Experts has alluded to a prohibition of harassment by virtue of Convention 111.

The failure to recognize harassment as a core labor rights violation has widespread implications. For example, in recent years a number of multinational corporations have adopted voluntary codes of labor practice, governing their operations and their suppliers worldwide. These codes draw heavily on ILO-defined core labor rights, as do any existing “labor” or “social” clauses in various trade agreements. Further, failure by the ILO to recognize sexual harassment as a widespread labor rights violation has translated into a lack of attention to this critical issue at the level of national governments and multinational corporations.

The objective of this study is therefore to provide data on the extent and scope of sexual violence experienced by a representative sample of women workers in the Dominican Republic, which can serve as the basis for remedial action, and ultimately the development of an international standard prohibiting workplace harassment at the ILO. The study is part of a series of studies that are being conducted in the Caribbean, Africa and Southeast Asia to further a global campaign against workplace sexual violence.

II. INTRODUCTION

This report presents the most relevant findings of the research carried out by the Fundación Laboral Dominicana (FLD) as part of the ILRF’s Rights for Working Women Campaign. FLD was asked to investigate instances of sexual harassment in the Dominican Republic’s Export Processing Zones (EPZs).

The investigation was conducted from November 8, 2002 to February 8, 2003 and was coordinated by a team of researchers, led by Lourdes Pantaleón. The results clearly demonstrate the severity of the problem of sexual harassment in the workplace. This report also suggests strategies for confronting this problem and lists recommendations from public and private organizations that work with women workers in Export Processing Zones.

III. BACKGROUND ON THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

A. Demographics

This study was conducted in the Dominican Republic, a Caribbean country with a population of 8.7 million people. The Dominican Republic covers 48,442 square kilometers and shares the island of Santo Domingo with the Republic of Haiti.



The Dominican Republic is a representative democracy, with a government composed of three branches, the legislative, the executive and the judicial. The official language is Spanish, and predominant religion is Catholicism, though there are also numerous Protestant churches. The country's economy is based on tourism, manufacturing (EPZs), telecommunications, finance and other services, as well as agriculture.

B. Export Processing Zones

The Dominican Republic's small economy relies in great part on the export industry. The EPZs employ 14.2% of the country's work force, or approximately 186,000 workers. They generated approximately 3.26 billion dollars in 2002.

Many of the products from the EPZs are destined for the US market. In 2001, \$2.27 billion of the Dominican Republic's textile exports were sent to North America. In 2002, the United States imported 87.3% of the Dominican Republic's exports. US investors are also heavily involved in the EPZs. Nearly half of the EPZ companies in the Dominican Republic originated in the US, and 57.5% of the investment in the EPZs came from the US²

The creation of Export Processing Zones encouraged workers to migrate from the agricultural countryside to the industrial cities, and women played a lead role in this process. Today, 53% of these workers in the EPZs are women. Women, however, soon became the poorest and most abused workers in the factories. While women make up the majority of the workers in EPZs, they hold very few jobs with actual decision-making power.

² Dominican Republic National Free Zones Council Statistical Report 2001

Women work under conditions that violate their rights, working between 56 and 80 hours per week, and earning an average weekly salary of twenty-five dollars. Textile factories, which account for 57% of the factories in the EPZs, have a system of operations that assigns production quotas, but these quotas are unreachable in an eight hour work day³, which leads women to work overtime with no extra pay just to receive the base salary every week.

“...Pedrito spent the morning complaining about a headache and asking for permission to go to the hospital. The supervisor told him to go to the infirmary to get some acetaminophen, but the pain would not go away. That afternoon, Pedrito fainted from the pain. An ambulance came to take him away, but he died before arriving at the hospital...in the Zone, we are not human beings; he died and everything went on as if nothing had happened, even the music kept playing.”

-- **Altagracia, a worker in a Free Trade Zone in Santiago**

Women work in the assembly process with all kinds of restrictions, ranging from not being allowed to take a leave of absence to solve personal matters, to being unable to go to the bathroom at their own choosing. These restrictions are enforced year-round, in horrendous conditions, and they are most unbearable in the summertime.

F. Socio-Cultural Context

The socio-cultural reality for Dominican women and especially poor, working women is complex, particularly since there have been important cultural changes in the country in the past few years.

The Dominican government recognizes Catholicism as the official religion of the country and supports the infrastructure of the Catholic Church. Therefore priests play an important role in the power and leadership structures of most rural communities. Thus, Catholic morals are important in the national culture. Women are considered to be “of principles and values” if they fulfill their roles as assigned by the patriarchal overlap of government and Church structures.

These values are manifested in such ways as conservative dress, dedication to the care of the family (husband, children), regular church visits, not divorcing, and caring for the sick and elderly in the family and community. The traditional economic structures of the country, however, were undermined beginning in the late 1980s with the implementation of policies designed to generate foreign exchange by developing the sectors of services, free trade zones, tourism, and telecommunications. The changing economic scenario women into the workforce, and led to the migration of many women from the countryside to the city. These factors

³ Article 147 of the Dominican Republic’s Labor Code specifies that “...the work day cannot exceed 8 hours and a work week cannot exceed 40 hours.”

promoted cultural changes that generated crises in the conservative culture in terms of the socio-cultural role of women.

After women's incorporation into salaried jobs they have adopted new behavior, such as less conservative styles of dress and new ways of expressing themselves.⁴

Interestingly, despite the cultural taboos associated with teen pregnancy, pregnancy among adolescents is fairly common. Today 25% of Dominican women aged 14-24 are pregnant or have been pregnant⁵. 35% of Dominican homes are headed by women. Despite this reality, a young pregnant woman, if she is unmarried, experiences psychological trauma by being separated from her school peers, and many women simply drop out of school. Many of these women migrate from rural communities seeking to improve their lives and the lives of their families, leaving their children in their home communities. In the cities, the women, especially FTZ workers, live in marginalized neighborhoods, near industrial parks, in tiny rented rooms which barely hold a bed and a table where they put stoves to prepare food and bath water.

Rural women dedicate themselves to domestic or farm-related work and caring for the family. Spaces for participation and entertainment in rural areas are limited to community organizations, religious groups, and other community-based groups. Only the youngest women participate in entertainment events. Their authoritarian fathers or husbands don't let them go alone to public places where there are alcoholic beverages or parties. According to research by UNACAFEN, 2001, 93% of a surveyed group of rural women contribute to the production of coffee, cacao and other crops, but do not participate in the decisionmaking about how the money earned will be used. The male "heads of family" decide how the money will be used, even though it was earned by the whole family.⁴

It is important to note that adolescents in the rural zones have been assuming more liberal practices. More and more young women in these communities are participating in public activities, political campaigning, socio-cultural activities; and they have adopted the dress of young women in urban zones. The mountainous regions are still very conservative and the women continue to assume the traditional subordinate roles.

On the other hand, women working in the EPZs go out freely and frequently, especially the single women. A common expression of men in the Dominican Republic is that "men who have self-respect don't let their women work in the zone", referring to the idea that women who work in the EPZs are unfaithful or have many sexual partners. Working women themselves say they feel morally affected by this popular belief, and that they "pay the consequences for being sinners."

Women who do salaried work have been achieving certain levels of autonomy, but this change has also generated much domestic violence. Domestic crimes against women have

⁴ "If one behaves in the free zones as one was raised at home, the others rise above and take away your position." This is what one worker from the industrial FTZ in Santiago said, referring to the language used in the factories. This was said during group discussions during the research regarding sexual harassment, ILRF/FLD. 2002

⁵ Estadísticas del Fondo de Población de las Naciones Unidas.

4 Diagnóstico de la Unión de Asociaciones de Caficultores del Norte, Inc. UNACAFEN, 2001

increased in recent years. In 2001, 104 women died of domestic assaults, and 107 died in 2002. Official 2001 statistics reported 9,671 cases of violence and 2002 statistics reported 12,407. Sixty-five percent of the murders of Dominican women are committed by husbands, boyfriends, or ex-husbands against women between 16 and 35 years old according to the Secretaria de Estado de la Mujer.

D. Women Workers and Sexual Harassment

Problems of sexual harassment underline the larger social problem that women face as subordinates and victims of exploitation by men. While women in the Dominican Republic enjoy the “privilege” of having jobs in a country where the unemployment rate reaches 16.1%, it is also true that 87% of them have not graduated from high school. Lack of higher education eliminates their opportunities for being hired for jobs that provide them with higher wages, better conditions, and respect for their basic human rights.

From a legal point of view, women have the right to denounce the incidents of sexual harassment. Article 24-97 of the country’s Legal Code regarding intra-family⁶ violence, which is considered as the instrument of protection for women, says in paragraph 2 under the section “Other Sexual Aggressions” in the article 333-2 that “Sexual Harassment occurs each time an order, a threat, or an offer destined to obtain sexual favors, is committed by a person (man or woman) that abuses his/her authority conferred by his/her status. Such act is punishable with one year in prison or a US\$200 to \$400 fine.

IV. METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted using focus groups. The six groups of women were chosen at random, with an average of 16 participants per group. The women’s co-workers contributed to the investigation by providing data, information and examples of incidents of sexual harassment suffered by women workers in the EPZs.

The research was complemented by the completion of 258 interviews with women workers in three EPZs in different regions of the country. The women who were surveyed and interviewed were chosen at random and the interviews and surveys were conducted in the homes where the women reside.⁷ The 258 interviews were obtained by finding random samples of women according to the number of employees per factory and their geographical location in the most important regions of the country: North, South and East.

⁶ Enacted in January of 1997

⁷ The interviews with the women workers were initiated in factories. After evaluating the first 30 interviews, an error was noticed; none of them had been sexually harassed. This led us to interview another group of women, chosen at random, in their homes. Out of 27 women interviewed in their homes, 39.6% of them had reported being sexually harassed in the workplace. This led us to determine that the women workers are too afraid to speak truthfully about the issue of sexual harassment when interviewed in the workplace, because they feared being laid off.

Researchers also conducted 10 interviews with public and private institutions (NGOs, unions, health centers and public centers) chosen at random from a list of the 20 most important institutions in the country that deal with the rights of women workers.

All of the 370 women who participated in the research were guaranteed anonymity in order to respect their privacy and to prevent retaliation from their employers.

V. RESULTS

Out of every 100 women in the Export Processing Zones, 40.7 have been victims of sexual harassment in the workplace (See Table 8). The workers who are victims of sexual harassment are mostly young women who work diligently as sewing machine operators (See Table 9). These workers must survive on very low wages while having to pay an average of US\$73.00 a week for a basic basket of goods for their family. This situation favors the sexual aggressors, as they can use it to bribe and extort sexual favors from their subordinates (See Table 10).

Table 8

WOMEN WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN THE FREE ZONE FACTORIES	
Condition	Percentage
Have been harassed in the workplace	40.7%
Have not been harassed	59.3%
Total	100.0%

Table 9

POSITION THAT AGGRESSORS OCCUPY WITHIN THE COMPANY	
Position	Percentage
Boss (Engineers, administrators, etc.)	17.1%
Unit supervisor (immediate boss)	13.3%
Another supervisor	13.3%
Co-worker	46.7%
Others	9.5%
Total	99.9%

Table 10

AVERAGE AGE OF VICTIMS OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN THE FREE TRADE ZONES OF THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC	
Age	Percentage
Under 15	1%

Between 15 and 18	7%
Between 19 and 25	53%
Between 26 and 35	28%
Over 35	11%
Total	100%

Women workers who make accusations against perpetrators of sexual harassment told researchers that when the matter is investigated, they are themselves accused of wearing provocative dresses and using inappropriate language that incites the men to make the sexual advances.

“In order to work in a Export Processing Zone factory, one has to abandon their old way of life and be ready to put on a combat suit. There, you have to be ready and willing to face the worst, because if you don’t, you will not survive.”

--Woman worker from the San Pedro de Macoris Export Processing Zone

Identity of the Aggressor

Victims of sexual harassment say that the success of their complaint depends on the identity of the perpetrator. If the aggressor is one of the woman’s co-workers, he will likely be reprimanded, transferred, or fired. However, if the sexual aggressor is one of the woman’s supervisors, managers, or factory engineers, the woman herself risks being fired, or being moved to a position with more difficult tasks, where productivity will inevitably be lower and her earnings will be diminished (economically forcing her to resign). Women workers who accuse their supervisors of sexual harassment are also accused of inventing the story just to get promoted, or to hurt their supervisors.

Examples of Harassment

Within the group of women workers who experience sexual harassment, there is a subgroup that is most vulnerable: the youngest women who have most recently entered the workplace.

Young women workers who have just begun their work in the factory are more likely to respond to the pressures and bribes of their superiors inside the factory. The worker's inexperience, the lack of information and her inability to trust any coworker, male or female, are powerful tools used by the sexual aggressor.

There are also important aspects that allow the sexual aggressor to have "attractive" offers for a young woman worker. One is the fact that workers earn the minimum wage, about \$20 weekly, when they begin their employment. In addition, assembly line supervisors (68% of whom are men) are responsible for reporting each worker's productivity numbers and are also the ones who report a worker's excused or unexcused absences, tardiness, and conduct (See Table 6). Thus, the supervisors have leverage they can use to demand sexual favors from the women workers.

Table 6

GENDER OF THE BOSSES OF THE WOMEN SURVEYED	
Gender	Percentage
Male	68.2%
Female	31.8%
Total	100.0%

Most common offers made by supervisors to women workers in exchange for sexual favors:

- Report to Personnel that the worker has accomplished her production quota for the day when she has not.
- Place the worker in better positions where productivity quotas are easier to achieve.
- Raise her wages.
- Report to Personnel that worker has been more productive than she really is (leading to higher wages).

At the same time, however, supervisors often use blackmail and threats in exchange for sexual favors. Here are the most common form of these:

- Threats to fire the worker on false charges that the worker can not disprove.
- Change the worker's task in the middle of the assembly process so that she cannot achieve the desired productivity numbers.
- Arbitrarily take money out of her paychecks.

Many women workers who have been sexually harassed agree that "the pressures put upon us by the sexual aggressors are so strong that they leave us with two choices: either let yourself

be harassed or quit.”

Information provided by friends of the victims confirms that labor conditions do in fact improve for those who accept the harassment. They receive preferential treatment inside the factory, and are allowed to use work time to deal with personal matters without the risk of losing their jobs or losing money out of their paychecks. These women also have higher wages and only work eight hours per day.

On the other hand, there are women who do not accept being harassed and instead decide to confront their supervisors personally, make formal complaints, or, most commonly, quit.

Victims of sexual harassment in EPZs end up being discriminated against even by their own male and female co-workers. They are often accused of instigating the harassment in order to gain leverage for better benefits. Traditional social and cultural conceptions about the woman and the man prohibit women from discussing openly their experiences tolerating a supervisor’s harassment. The sexual, emotional and economic violence exerted over the woman and the lack of any alternative that would not jeopardize her family’s livelihood is the fine line between *yes* and *no*.

Sanctions

Provisions in article 96 of the Labor Code of the Dominican Republic state that “...in the workplace, sexual harassment is grounds for justified dismissal”.⁸ Despite this legislation, and the fact that 80% of women workers know that sexual harassment is a punishable offense under the Dominican Republic’s law with the possibility of incarceration for the aggressor, women workers still do not bring their complaints to the authorities. In those cases where the complaint is brought forward, the case is rarely a success.

In the offices of the Department of Labor, there is no information about accusations of sexual harassment or sanctions imposed in the Export Processing Zones. Researchers were similarly unable to obtain information from the Women’s Department, which is the government office that promotes and protects the rights of women. The Department either lacks information regarding sexual harassment cases, or is unwilling to release this information.

The private organizations that provide legal or emotional assistance to victims of violence, including women workers, are unaware of any cases of sanctions or prison sentences being imposed against sexual aggressors in the Export Processing Zones in the Dominican Republic. This allows us to confirm what women workers assert about sexual harassment in the workplace: that most often the only course of action is silence. “When we go complain, our accusations are unsuccessful. Even in the Department of Labor, they reach an agreement with the employers and we end up losing our jobs, such a harsh outcome in such a harsh life.” Lacking significant statistics, the issue of sexual harassment in the workplace is seldom discussed, even when

⁸ This article only refers to the cases of voluntary resignation by the worker with just cause. Sexual harassment is not specifically cited in the Worker’s Code.

discussions are centered around worker's rights.

The sexual violence is part of a larger pattern of rights violations that remain anonymous and unpunished, where regulations and international accords aim to draw foreign investment and the benefits of cheap labor into the sweatshops of poor countries around the world.

Victims' Testimonies

These are the stories of the women victims of sexual harassment in the EPZs of the Dominican Republic.

The majority of these women are young, unmarried mothers with no choice but to take a job in EPZs as there are very few job opportunities with good labor conditions for young women with little formal education. "In this job in the EPZ you see everything, from sexual harassment to exploitation to physical duress, but it is what it is and I have no other choice," said Julia, a factory worker from Bani.

-1- Irene

"My name is Irene and I am 25 years old and for the last 4 years I have worked in an assembly line in an EPZ. I have a husband and two children but I live alone. They live out in the countryside because the money isn't enough to pay for a home in the city.

I was harassed by the line supervisor where I worked attaching zippers to pants; he would ask me to go out with him every day, he would offer me money that would be enough to cover my weekly expenses if only I went out with him.

He would ask me this without anyone hearing about it. I would say no and escape his advances only because we were surrounded by people and he wouldn't want to make a scene. One day they asked me to come up to the Personnel's office. I was very scared because I thought they were going to fire me for whatever reason. But instead I found the same supervisor who had made the sexual advances towards me. He again said he would give me good money for going out with him and I finally said yes as I needed the money and could not afford to lose my job. I went out with him several times, he bought me clothes, gave me extra money often, but when I wanted to end it, he wouldn't. I was afraid my husband would find out, but he didn't care and kept chasing after me. Nobody in the factory ever knew what happened. There was nothing I could do or say to defend myself because I had once accepted his gifts and money. In the end, I had to leave my job."

"I would rather die working than hungry."

-2- Andrea

My name is Andrea and I am the mother of three children. I am 24 years old and live with a man who is not the father of my children. My children live with my mother in a neighborhood not too far from here. I see them during the weekends, because during the week I get home too

late from the factory and would not be able to see them on a daily basis, and besides, I wouldn't have enough money to buy bus tickets to see them every day.

I work in the EPZ to help my kids. If it weren't for them, I would not be working there because while the husband I have could support me, the father of my children doesn't give them anything. Also, one of my children is sick, so I have to buy him the medicine he takes daily and support my mom who cares for him.

I had the bad experience of being harassed by a supervisor of the factory where I have worked for the past two years. This man would make my life miserable and not let me be productive in my work because I would refuse his advances, his money, his offers to make me look more productive than I really was...

I would never work on Saturdays, because I worked every day from 7:00am to 8:00pm in order to achieve the daily production quotas, but he would force me to work on Saturdays; he would always invent something about how he needed greater productivity from me since they were nearing the deadline to finish and ship out the products. Then on those Saturdays when I did work, when there would be hardly any workers in the factory, he would try to convince me to go out with him.

After he realized he was not going to convince me, he started to take money out of my paycheck each week, and my complaints would go nowhere. He would tell me that to fix the situation, I knew what I had to do. He would also often relocate me to older and slower sewing machines where my productivity would drop.

I decided to ask the plant manager to relocate me to a different assembly line, but the old supervisor kept pressuring me with threats and he kept taking out money out of my paycheck. I had to wait almost a month to be relocated. I never told anyone about the incidents, neither in the factory or at home, as I was afraid I would be fired or my husband would not let me go back to work in that place."

-3- Dilena

My name is Dilena and I am 28 years old. Up until a few months ago, I worked in the Santiago EPZ in a factory that made pants. My line supervisor there would always make sexual innuendoes, asking me to go out with him after work. One day, after several weeks of insinuations, he came up to me and told me directly that he wanted to have sex with me in exchange for economic benefits; basically, he would tell the bosses I was making more pants each week than I really was and get more money that way. I never accepted his offer even though he threatened to fire me.

One day, I was called into the office. The supervisor had reported that I was not meeting my weekly quotas, that I would constantly arrive late to work and that I had been disrespectful to him. I was punished, but I couldn't say anything or leave my job on account of my 3 small children.

Then I rolled the dice: I asked to speak with the chief of Personnel and I told him I was being harassed by the supervisor. He knew I was ready to accuse him publicly and that I was prepared to lose my job. The chief of Personnel transferred me to a different assembly line.

The problems with the old supervisor did not go away. Then, my coworkers came up with the idea of forming a labor union because of these and other problems. I, along with my coworkers, was accused of violating company policies, and I was fired.

-4- Alicia

My name is Alicia and I am 22 years old. I am a single mother of two children and because of them felt the need to get a job at the EPZ in Bani. Within two days of working there, my supervisor started whispering in my ear while I worked the sowing machine. He would entice me with offers of more money or that I would get a promotion but said that I would have to go out with him to get these benefits. I refused his invitations but he would not let up. In the end, I wound up quitting.

Luckily after I left that factory I never saw him again and he never bothered me either. I was scared for my friend who did not have such luck. In a much similar situation, my friend María was harassed by her supervisor for a long period of time. She finally caved in just to make him stop with the requests. They agreed to meet at a location after work. He was there, but she did not show up. This made the supervisor very angry, so much so that when he was driving his car in the street, he saw her on her motorcycle and ran into her, breaking her leg and her motorcycle.

Maria complained to the company. It wasn't until after extensive research and further allegations by other women workers that the supervisor was fired. But Maria received no compensation for her losses, nor any emotional support of any sort and the case never went to the courts as she wanted. They just kept her in the factory and paid her the minimum wage during her recovery. She is now working at another factory.

-5- Yanet

I was at a party with my friends. Roberto, a friend of the family, told me that if I wanted to leave the life working in the field, I should talk to him. He said that if I was interested, to meet him the next day in the bus stop at 3:00 pm.

He told me he would get me a job. My family wasn't doing too well; I had nine brothers and sisters and we lived in this tiny plot of land that my dad worked on with my brothers. So I decided to go with Roberto.

While in Esperanza, Roberto took me to a room that could only fit a small bed and a table. We shared a bathroom with the other 22 rooms in the hostel; so that's when I gathered Roberto

had taken me to Esperanza not only to work but also to be his woman.

The next day, Roberto took me to the EPZ and asked me to say I did not have a husband or a boyfriend. That same day, they put me to work in a factory they call “La Escuelita” where they train the new workers. That’s where I met Andrés, a production supervisor. He told me that I was doing my job very well and that if I kept it up, I would move on to the actual factory and make US\$18 a week if I misbehaved and US\$26 if I did what he told me to do.

He sent me to the hospital to get tested for AIDS and to see if I was pregnant. If everything was ok, I would work there full time. So when the results of the medical exams came back negative, Andrés took me to work in the factory where he was a line supervisor. Throughout that entire week he would keep telling me that the weekend was almost here. That got me worried, so I told Roberto about it, to which he told me not to be silly and that I should obey that man for the good of everyone.

The weekend arrived and I was quite nervous come closing time. At 7:45 p.m., I finished my quota. On my way out, there was Andrés waiting for me. I was able to escape from him that day, telling him I was sick, but he would harass me constantly from then on, threatening to fire me if I did not go out with him. Finally, I conceded and went out with him as I did not want to lose my job. I did not get anything out of it other than fear and humiliation. I wound up leaving for another factory because Andrés would not let me end our relationship.

Roberto doesn’t know anything about what happened. I never told anyone about the matter, and didn’t know who to go to. I am still very sad about the incident, and I can’t forget that I did something I did not want to do. I live with a man whom I don’t love but whom I can’t separate myself from because my money alone isn’t enough to cover all of my expenses and I can only go see my family once a month.”

-6- Elizabeth

My name is Elizabeth and I am 23 years old. I am a single mother of a small boy. I started working at the EPZ when I was 18. In my first month working there, my luck ran out as a supervisor named Arturo whom everyone calls “blondie” started to proposition me. Only now have I been made aware that this is considered sexual harassment. Back then, I was a fool who didn’t know anything and thought that if I lost that job that I would never be able to get another one ever again, so I agreed to go out with Arturo.

After 3 months of going out with him, I started getting constant fevers and an intestinal infection. I went to the hospital and took an HIV test, thinking ‘this jerk gave me AIDS.’ What I surprise I got when I found out I was actually 6 weeks pregnant.

The next day, I went to the factory, found “Blondie” and told him: ‘I’m pregnant’, to which he angrily said ‘Shut up, damn it! They can hear us, let’s talk around noon time.’

I went to work in the assembly line and at around lunch time, “Blondie” came up and said: ‘I

have a solution to your problem. There is a doctor in Gurabito who will give you an abortion, you can't have this child!

I looked at him up and down and told him, 'Listen, I'll give birth to that child at any cost!' I kept working, and seeing "Blondie" every day but he wouldn't approach me and in the meantime, my belly grew larger and larger. The moment arrived and my child was born. A month after he was born, I went to the authorities and asked them to demand child support from "Blondie." He, of course, denied that the child was his and refused to pay up, until I took him to court and won the case.

"Blondie" did not give his last name to my child, but pays monthly child support bills. The company hired an attorney for "Blondie" and wanted to fire me as soon as my maternity leave was up. When I found out about this, I went to the manager's office and made a big fuss, threatening to make this matter public in the newspapers and on television. The manager was scared, and told me I could return to my job. I worked for one year in that factory. At Christmas time, I was paid my wages and bonuses and did not go back there the following January. Now I work at another factory where everyone knows about my story, so nobody dares mess with me."

VI. CONCLUDING REMARKS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Throughout this investigation, in which women workers collaborated by sharing their experiences individually and collectively, we learned the extent of the problem of sexual harassment faced by women workers in the EPZs in the Dominican Republic.

The data obtained does not leave any room for doubt. Over forty percent of women workers are sexually harassed, and 43.7% of the sexual aggressors have supervisory positions within the companies. Nearly seventy percent of the victims have a male boss and 53% of the victims are between the ages of 19 and 25. While the women surveyed say that 43.8% of the sanctions against sexual aggressors involve dismissal, when it comes to the legal process, there is no known case of someone being punished for sexually harassing a worker in an EPZ.

Article 333-2 in Law 24-97 on Family Violence proposes prison sentences of up to a year and fines ranging from U.S.\$ 200.00 to U.S.\$400.00 for those found guilty of sexual harassment. The article, however, also clarifies that sexual harassment in the workplace is a cause for dismissal for the woman worker as stated in Article 96 of the Labor Code. Nevertheless, there are no known cases in which sexual aggressors in the EPZs were sanctioned or fined.

There is no public or private institution of a political or judicial nature that deals with the matter of sexual harassment. Victims are thus left on their own to defend and protect themselves against such harassment.

The country also lacks an educational or informational plan to address the problem of sexual harassment. Private non-governmental organizations that defend women's rights do not have programs specifically geared towards this problem.

There is evidence of the need to work in both the political and judicial realms as well as the social and educational ones to generate actions aimed at encouraging and enabling the woman worker in this aspect. There also is a need to create a climate of encouragement so women feel more comfortable reporting sexual harassment cases in order to move the law towards the side of the victim and sanction those found guilty of harassing women in EPZs.

Finally, we must keep in mind that in the international arena, there are protocols, accords, conventions and conferences that deal with the issue of violence against women. In particular, the Inter-American Convention known as the “Belen Do Para Convention” which aims to prevent, sanction and eradicate violence against women was signed by the Dominican Republic and ratified by Congress. Such conventions and international accords create a favorable political and social environment to develop programs aimed at eradicating all forms of violence against women, and specifically sexual harassment, as women continue their fight towards greater gender equality.

Recommendations:

- Start educational campaigns aimed at informing women about their legal options, where to turn to in case they are victimized, where to seek help and where to post formal claims.
- Create an institution or modify an existing one to focus on the problem of violence against women and to provide victims of harassment with emotional and legal support.
- Increase political pressure to ensure that the sexual aggressors be punished to the full extent of the law.
- Train and sensitize the legal system about the matter.
- Encourage women to report cases of sexual harassment through social groups, unions, and organizations that defend the rights of women, because if they remain silent, the problem will remain unaddressed.
- Punish the guilty with exemplary prison sentences to deter future acts against women.
- Educate all sectors involved (business leaders, managers, doctors, supervisors, and male and female workers) about the legal implications of sexual harassment.

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