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## **SEXUAL HARASSMENT: TABOO TOPIC AT UNIVERSITIES – LEGAL FRAMEWORK IN NORTH MACEDONIA**

*According to the Istanbul Convention sexual harassment is a form of unwanted verbal, nonverbal, or physical behavior of a sexual nature with the aim or consequence of violating the dignity of a person, especially when an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating, or offensive environment is created. Because of the specificity of the academic environment, the intention is every member of the academic community to be aware that universities should prohibit sexual harassment and sexual violence and that such conduct violates both the law and university policies.*

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*The main subject of the paper is the danger of sexual harassment in an academic context. In doing so, the legal frame of sexual harassment in the Republic of North Macedonia is reviewed with special emphasis on its determination in an academic context. The aim of the paper is to give an overview of the legal framework in North Macedonia regarding sexual harassment, also to conclude whether and which Macedonian public and private universities mention sexual harassment in their legal documents, and to test the knowledge among students about this phenomenon (using a segment of the research "Sexual Harassment at universities in North Macedonia), because recognizing and knowing is the first step in the process of prevention.*

**Key words: sexual harassment, university, victim, Republic of North Macedonia, students**

## 1. Introductory remarks

Sexual harassment is one of the forms of gender-based violence. It is a world phenomenon and complex social problem that people in every society face. Such a phenomenon is not new at all and it can be found in history although maybe the term "sexual harassment" is relatively new, and the awareness for this type of behavior awoken at the end of the '70s of the last century. In 2017 the movement #Metoo raised awareness for sexual harassment as a global epidemic present in all life spheres (Stanojoska, Ilijevski & Shushak Lozanovska, 2022).

The efforts for defining sexual harassment in the theory have existed for more than thirty years, during which several different general definition approaches have emerged. Unfortunately, there is no single generally accepted definition in all contexts. The existing definitions can be categorized on the basis of a subjective-objective prism, through which two directions of a possible definition of sexual harassment are hypothetically distinguished. One is through definition with "objective" characteristics that are predetermined (Till, 1980), and the second is defined through the "subjective" inner feelings of the harassed person (Howald at all, 2018).

The first all-embracing concept of sexual harassment using the category of gender was proposed in 1980 (Till, 1980). He distinguished five possible forms of sexual harassment: gender harassment, sexual seduction, sexual bribery, sexual coercion, and sexual violence. These types of behavior were ordered by degree of severity in terms of impacts.

At its core, sexual harassment is unwanted and threatening, and often involves the exploitation of power differentials. It is a form of abusive behavior.

Sexual harassment is not about physical attraction or emotional need. It is about power or control and how that power is abused. Usually, such behavior is designed to humiliate and control someone. Whether a particular act or course of conduct constitutes sexual harassment depends on a review of all the circumstances, including the frequency, location, and severity of the conduct, i.e. whether the behavior is physically threatening or humiliating, as opposed to just an offensive statement, and whether it unreasonably interferes with the person's work environment, educational environment, etc.

The research conducted by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA, 2014) on violence against women has shown that sexual harassment remains a widespread and common experience for many women in the European Union. Depending on the type of incident recorded, it is estimated that 83 to 102 million women (45-55% of women) in 28 EU Member States have experienced at least one form of sexual harassment by the age of 15. It also becomes apparent that many women do not talk to anyone about their experiences of sexual harassment, and very few report the most serious incidents to their supervisors at work or to the authorities. Sexual harassment occurs in a variety of settings and uses a variety of means, including the Internet. The results of the FRA survey show that the sexual harassment of women involves a range of different perpetrators and involves the use of "new" technologies. The research shows that sexual harassment mostly affects younger women and that it is more often perceived and experienced by women with higher education and women from the highest professional groups.

Almost six out of ten of the world's countries lack adequate laws against sexual harassment in higher education and schools. When considering specific types of sexual harassment, the number of adult women not protected under the law increases. For sexual harassment in education, 1.5 billion women are not protected (55% of the population) (Tavares & Wodon, 2018:11).

The focus of exposure to sexual harassment in academia has traditionally been on student exposure, in particular in USA, where also most of the research into sexual harassment has been conducted. The prevalence of sexual assaults on students (primarily women) at universities in USA is well-documented. Data suggest 22% of college women have experienced dating violence and nearly 20% have experienced completed or attempted sexual assault since entering college. Sexual violence victimization is very common among college and university students in the USA. Research estimates that 20–25% of female undergraduates experience attempted or completed rape during their college careers (Bondestram & Lundqvist, 2020).

In a survey of sexual harassment at a Spanish public university on a sample of 1521 students, the results show that 15.9% of the students had experienced at least one episode of sexual blackmail behavior and 17.1% of the students had

experienced at least one episode of verbal sexual harassment (Ferrer-Pérez & Bosch-Fiol, 2020).

In a sample of university students in Italy, the frequency of harassment was 38.3% among men and 44.2% among women, with a minority of students exposed to harassment in 2/3 domains, with few gender differences. Harassment was related to mental distress for both women and men, although the symptoms were different in the two genders. Male students with harassment exposure more often perceived their health as „not good“ and reported symptoms of depression, whereas women reported panic symptoms, even after adjustment for social factors and previous sexual violence (Bastiani et al., 2019).

New types of exposure are established in studies, and they relate in particular to online sexual harassment, where prevalence is alarmingly high in studies that analyse this within the research field as a whole. Among college students, 43% report some experience receiving harassing messages. Across the entire sample, 34% of participants reported feeling anxious and 37% of participants reported feeling depressed as a result of an online interaction (Lindsay et al., 2015: 9).

In the research about sexual violence at universities in Serbia, conducted by the Victimology Society in Serbia from 271 student, 17% have responded that they have been victims to sexual violence. From them, around one third (31.4%) have been victimized in the year preceding the research, and 204 students have responded that have been victims to verbal sexual harassment during their studies. Most of them have been victims to non-verbal sexual harassment, then to physical sexual harassment, online sexual harassment, sextortion, and five students have answered that they have been raped or someone attempted to rape them (Nikolic – Ristanovic & Copic, 2022 :61).

The article analyses the Macedonian national legal framework about sexual harassment, gives an overview of the code of ethics or other ethics university documents at universities in North Macedonia. The third part is where we analyze the results of the research about sexual harassment which was conducted at Macedonian universities in 2021. At the end of the paper, we give certain recommendations based on the conclusions.

## **2. Legal framework for sexual harassment in the Republic of North Macedonia**

Due to the fragmented nature of the national legislation dealing with equality and non-discrimination, the provisions on sexual harassment in the Republic of North Macedonia can be found “scattered” in different laws.

**- Law on prevention and protection from discrimination**

The definition of sexual harassment is provided in Art.10, Paragraph 2 of the Law on Protection of Discrimination. According to this Law, harassment is an unwanted treatment of a person or group of people on discrimination grounds that has the purpose or effect of violating dignity or creating a threatening, hostile, humiliating, or intimidating environment, approach, or practice. Sexual harassment, on the other hand, is any form of unwanted verbal, non-verbal, or physical behavior of a sexual nature, which has the same purpose. (art. 10, Law on prevention and protection of discrimination of RNM)

According to the legal provisions every person who believes that has been discriminated against, including harassment, can submit a complaint to the Commission for Protection against discrimination, which acts according to its legal powers. The Law contains misdemeanor provisions for violating the provisions of the Law and provides for fines.

**- Law on Labor Relations**

Sexual harassment (which creates a "hostile working environment") has been regulated by the Law on Labor Relations. Article 9, act 4, defines *gender harassment* as any "verbal, nonverbal or physical behavior of a gendered nature that aims at or represents a violation of the dignity of the candidate for employment or the worker, and that causes fear or creates a hostile, humiliating or offensive behavior" (Law on Labor Relations of RNM). Regarding the definition of the gender harassment, it is worth mentioning that the use of the term "gender" instead of "sexual" harassment and "gender" behavior instead of "sexual" behavior (nature), although for some it may be lack of linguistic character, contributes to a misunderstanding of what types of behaviors this type of harassment implies. It is interesting to mention that despite the definition and regulation of this type of harassment as discrimination, the labor legislation also overlooks a guarantee for the prevention of this type of harassment. In addition to judicial protection in cases of discrimination, the law on labor relations also provides for misdemeanor sanctions for legal entities and the responsible person in the legal entity, in order to ensure that no worker is a victim of harassment and sexual harassment. Additional protection for victims in the proceedings is the fact that the burden of proof, that no discrimination or harassment occurred, falls on the defendant(s). (art. 11, Law on Labor Relations of RNM) fines.

**- Law on protection from harassment at the workplace**

The subject and the purpose of the Law on protection from harassment at the workplace is to define the obligations and responsibilities of employers and employees in relation to the prevention of psychological and sexual harass-

ment at the workplace. The terminology again remains the same as in the Law on Labor Relations, so this law also defines gender harassment as “any verbal, non-verbal or physical behavior of a gendered nature, which aims at or represents a violation of the dignity of the candidate for employment or the employee, and which causes a feeling of fear or creates discomfort, humiliation” (art. 5, Law on Protection against Mobbing at the Workplace of RNM). The law provides for the measures and procedures for the protection and prevention of harassment in the workplace and determines the place and time of possible psychological and sexual harassment.

***- Law on equal opportunities for women and men***

Sexual harassment is also prohibited according to Article 3 of the Law on Equal Opportunities for Men and Women, and according to Article 4 it is defined as “any form of the unwanted verbal, non-verbal or physical behavior of a sexual nature, the purpose or consequence of which is a violation of the dignity of a person, especially when an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive atmosphere is created” (Law on equal opportunities for women and men of RNM).

***Law for prevention and protection from violence against women and domestic violence***

As a law, which can be said to be in accordance with European standards and The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (the Istanbul Convention), the glossary itself, defines both sexual harassment and the realization of this behavior via the Internet. Sexual harassment, according to this law, means any verbal, non-verbal, or physical behavior of a sexual nature that has the purpose or consequence of violating the dignity of the person, especially when it creates a threatening, hostile, degrading, humiliating, or insulting environment. Sexual harassment via the Internet is any verbal, non-verbal, or other behavior of a sexual nature, which has as its purpose or consequence, a violation of dignity or the creation of a threatening, hostile, humiliating, or intimidating environment, approach, or practice, through electronic means of communication ( Art. 3, Law for preventing and protection from violence against women and domestic violence of RNM).

***- Child Protection Law***

The Child Protection Law does not explicitly define sexual harassment, however, it stipulates that all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children are prohibited, including harassment, child pornography, and child prostitution. Despite the mentioned forms, the Law does not provide special measures for prevention and protection. (art. 12 paragraph 2, CPL of RNM).

### ***Criminal Code***

One of the few forms of sexual harassment that are covered and criminalized by the Criminal Code is the crime of Satisfying sexual passions in front of another.

As part of chapter nineteen, more specifically from the group of crimes that violate sexual morality, the gratification of sexual passions in front of another is performed by the person who performs sexual activity in front of another in a public place or performs sexual activity in front of a child or who leads a child to him or before another to perform such an action. (art. 190, CC of RNM)

With the Amendments to the Criminal Code, a separate article 190-a is incriminated, which defines “sexual” as “gender harassment” and at the same time this crime is committed by “the one who, with a verbal or physical action, or by using electronic devices for communication, has a direct or indirect, real or symbolic meaning of stating, indecent offer, luring, expression of sexual passion or other action that clearly reminds of sexual intercourse or other sexual acts equated with it, will disturb a person who is subordinate to him or is in a relationship of dependence with him, another person at work or in a public place or a person who is vulnerable due to age, illness, disability, drug addiction, pregnancy or severe physical or mental disability, and thereby will injure his dignity, causing a feeling of discomfort, annoyance, humiliation or fear”. It is envisaged that the prosecution of the crime will be undertaken on a proposal, and the punishment with which the perpetrator is stopped is a fine or imprisonment for up to one year. (Art. 23, Law on amending and supplementing the CC of RNM). The more severe type of this crime will exist if the offender is a person is in position of power, and in this case the punishment is prison from six months to up to three years.

From the above we can agree that the Republic of North Macedonia has an extensive legal framework that defines and prohibits sexual harassment, defining it as a misdemeanor, as a crime, or as an act of violation of rights and obligations within a working relationship. In terms of the scope of the legal texts, it can be said that they are essential and more adapted to the definitions arising from the international legal framework. However, the existing legal regulations indicate that the mentioned laws were adopted or amended spontaneously, without a strategic approach to the problem and without knowledge of the entire legal system, hence they are characterized by the nontechnical problem arising from the fact that different laws use several different terms, whose mutual relations (sameness or difference) are not explicitly determined. Some of the laws operate with the term sexual harassment, and some with the term gender harassment, and in that context, no one has given an adequate explanation as to how and in what way the choice for one of the two offered terms was reached.

The term gender harassment as such is also used in the Amendments and Supplements to the Criminal Code, which has brought us to a situation where the Criminal Code itself is not in terminological correlation, for example with the Law on Prevention and Protection from Discrimination and the Law on Prevention and Protection from violence against women and domestic violence, but also with the Istanbul Convention itself, the signing of which initiated a large part of the proposed amendments to this systemic law.

The legal solutions in all analyzed legal texts is perhaps an additional topic for analysis because again the emphasis is placed on the will of the victim to decide to report and continue the process. Sexual harassment survivors struggle with a wide range of emotions that make coming forward difficult: fear of revictimization, distortion of allegations, and generally not being believed, and in such a way, these victims don't receive the necessary institutional support, which is only one aspect of the overall support that a person who has been victimized should receive. Serious commitments are needed to approach justice, first of all, strategic steps in the protection of victims, ex officio prosecution for these types of crimes, as well as strict sanctioning of perpetrators.

### **3. Code of ethics or other ethics documents at the Universities in Republic of North Macedonia**

Taking into account the specificity of the academic environment, there is a need for developing specific institutional mechanisms that will regulate the problem of sexual harassment at the faculties and the institutes. In that direction, of particular importance for the definition and the social regulation of sexual harassment in an academic context are the ethical codes of the universities, the regulations for the work of the faculties, as well as special regulations for protection against sexual harassment, which unfortunately do not exist in the annals of the legal acts of faculties in the Republic of North Macedonia.

**The Code of Ethics of the University "St. Cyril and Methodius" in Skopje**, adopted in May 2021, in article 14 paragraph 1 clearly foresees the prohibition of any form of harassment among the members of the university community. Additionally, paragraph 3 as unacceptable is categorized as *any sexual harassment*, defined as a form of harassment characterized by unacceptance or refusal from the other side, including repeated unwanted verbal or physical suggestions of a sexual nature to another person, physical assault, repeated unwanted telling of jokes and remarks with a sexual connotation, including references to gender and sexual orientation, ridicule and ridicule with a sexual connotation, exposure



of sexually offensive and disturbing material, and solicitation of sexual favors in exchange for certain action or inaction from a position of authority. This code of ethics also provides that casual communication, well-intentioned jokes, and criticism, as well as sexual and other intimate relationships between members of the academic community, based on consent and mutual respect, are considered an area of privacy and do not in themselves constitute a violation of the same.

Any member of the university community has the right to submit a report of harassment, committed by a member of the academic community, no later than 8 (eight) days from the day of learning about the committed violation, to the commissions for the implementation of the Code of Ethics, and in writing needs to explain the case with all the necessary data and evidence about the persons, time, place, and possible witnesses of the committed violation and signed by the applicant.

If the Ethics Commission determines that there is a violation, it makes a decision proposing to the Senate of the University to issue a written reprimand or a public reprimand. The written reprimand is delivered to the perpetrator of the violation, and the public reprimand is published at a session of the University Senate and in the University Gazette. These imposed measures do not exclude liability in accordance with other regulations.

In the **Code of Ethics for the employee at the University "Goce Delchev" in Shtip**, adopted in 2011, the term sexual harassment is not mentioned. Still, it states that the teaching and the associate staff, may not directly or indirectly exploit, abuse, bully, blackmail, or discriminate against students, nor treat them in an inappropriate manner or in any other way that insults their dignity.

On the other hand, with the Code of Ethics for the students of "Goce Delchev" University in Shtip, adopted in 2009, the right to protection against discrimination and harassment is guaranteed.

Harassment, according to this code, is considered any inappropriate behavior towards other individuals that hurts their special dignity, interferes with the performance of work tasks, or leads to a decrease in the quality of life of individuals. It is a behavior characterized by the absence of access from the other party, which creates or contributes to the creation of unpleasant and hostile working and educational conditions, which intimidates, insults, or humiliates individuals. Additionally, sexually suggestive proposals, solicitations, or favors are considered misconduct under this Code of Ethics, as is the threat of a sexual proposal, solicitation, or favor to any student.

At this University, the Rector's Office determines the responsibility and imposes measures for violation of ethical principles.

**The Code of Ethics at FON University**, adopted in 2011, declares any sexual harassment as morally unacceptable, defining it as multiple references to

sexually colored jokes to a certain person, commenting on gender orientation, insulting and mocking, sending sexually harassing materials, requesting sexual favors in exchange for a certain favor or obtaining a privileged position with a certain authority.

The Code stipulates that every member of the university community has the right to report harassment and the person who has reported the harassment must not be subjected to any pressure.

The Senate of the University appoints a Commission on Ethical Issues, which can issue a reprimand, public reprimand, and public condemnation to the person who violated the ethical rules regulated by this code, and the procedure is initiated by a proposal that can be submitted by any member of the academic and university community.

**The Code of Ethics at Business Academy Smilevski (BAS)**, determines that obscene words, insults, and verbal, mental, physical sexual, and/or electronic (cyber) harassment are not allowed in their academic community. In doing so, it defines sexual harassment any verbal, non-verbal, or physical behavior of a sexual nature, which aims at or constitutes a violation of the dignity of a member or members of BAS, and which causes a feeling of fear or creates discomfort, humiliation, etc.

In case of violation of the ethical values of this code, including sexual harassment, the Court of Honor established by the BAS Teachers' Council is put into operation. Members who have felt a violation of the prescribed ethical values can apply in writing to the Court of Honor. The report on the violation of ethical values in written form by mail, courier, or in person is submitted to the professional and administrative service, which will forward the report to the Court of Honor ex officio. The Court of Honor decides on each case individually.

**The University "Mother Teresa"** has defined sexual (gender) harassment in its Guidelines for Protection against Harassment at the Workplace and defines it as any verbal, non-verbal, or physical behavior of a gendered nature, which constitutes a violation of dignity, and which causes a feeling of fear or creates discomfort, humiliation.

The Guidelines explain in detail the procedure for reporting and acting upon a report of harassment, but the lack of its application is seen in the fact that it refers to permanent or temporary employees of the university, as well as job candidates, but does not refer to protection from disturbing the students studying in this university.

**The International University "Vision"**, similar to the previous one, with the Regulations on Protection against Harassment at the Workplace, defines gender harassment as any verbal, non-verbal, or physical behavior of a gendered nature, which aims at or represents a violation of the dignity of the candidate for

employment or of the employee, which causes a feeling of fear or creates discomfort, humiliation. The behavior, according to this regulation, is considered sexual harassment at the workplace, if it has not stopped after a written warning from the harassed person, that the behavior of the perpetrator of the harassment bothers him and that he will consider it harassment at the workplace. However, even here the protection remains reserved for employees and not for students.

The rest of the universities, unfortunately, have not regulated this issue in their acts or such acts are not publicly available, which is the same as if they didn't exist at all.

From the analysis of the available documents, in which some of the universities regulate the issue called sexual harassment, it is more than clear that these are more declarative protection provisions that are predominantly reserved for the employees of the universities, rather than for the students themselves. An additional problem is that in some of them there is no good reporting methodology that will motivate students to overcome the barrier and encourage them to report sexual harassment. And of course, again, the burden is placed back on the victim.

For those reasons, we consider this way of regulating this issue in an academic context as inadequate and practically inapplicable. Hence, it becomes clear that it is necessary for universities to recognize the importance of protecting students from sexual harassment and other sexist discrimination and to develop special Regulations in which they will elaborate the provisions of the ethical codes or precisely define the terms sexual or gender harassment, as well as measures to prevent and procedures to protect persons from sexual harassment. All this is with the ultimate goal of building and preserving academic freedom, equal opportunities, and respect for the integrity and human dignity of all participants in the higher education process.

#### **4. Research Methodology and Results**

The authors conducted empirical research in 2021 where the sample included 330 students from nine Universities in the Republic of North Macedonia. The data gathering was organized online by using the Qualtrics Platform between June and the beginning of September, and between the end of September and the end of December. The link for the survey was sent to potential respondents by e-mail. The questionnaire included 31 (thirty-one) question (open and semi-open questions) and was divided into five parts (demographic information, questions regarding recognizing of sexual harassment, questions about victimization, about their negative emotions, and questions about their reaction.

The sample included 330 respondents, which is why we have to conclude that it is not representative, the conclusions cannot be generalized, but it is an important step in research and analysis of sexual harassment in the academic environment.

The age of the sample is between 19 and 25 years of age, with 58.5% females and 18.5% males. The gender distribution of the sample is in accordance to the gender structures of universities in North Macedonia, where 54% of the students are females (State Statistical Office of North Macedonia, 2017).

Ethnically most of the sample is from Macedonian ethnic origin (65.5%), afterwards Albanian (5.8%), Turkish (2.7%), and other.

Regarding to the year of studies we had 16 (sixteen) respondents on graduate studies (Master and PhD), and 226 from undergraduate studies (3.6% - first year of studies, 30.3% - second year, 13.9% - third year, 17.9% - fourth, 2.2% - fifth, and 0.6% - sixth).

In the following section, we have included only the results of a few questions which are relevant to the legal framework of sexual harassment and its incrimination in the Criminal Code of North Macedonia.

**Table No. 1.** Which of the following actions can be specified as form of sexual harassment?

	<i>F</i>	%
Physical acts of sexual assault	170	51,5
Verbal harassment of a sexual nature (including jokes about sexual relations, sexual orientation or other sexual characteristics)	160	48,5
Offers for sexual services	158	47,9
Conditioning employment or other services with services of a sexual nature (whether implied or explicitly stated)	165	50,0
Unwanted touching or physical contact	189	57,3
Unwanted courtship	99	30,0
Unsolicited communication with explicit photos, emails or messages	170	51,5
Forced sexual intercourse	170	51,5
Sexual comments, stories and fantasies in the workplace, school or other inappropriate places	122	37,0
Showing private parts of the body	169	51,2

The question *Which of the following actions can be determined as a form of sexual harassment?* was a multiple-choice question. Most of the respondents (189 or 57.3%) consider that unwanted touching or physical contact is an act of sexual harassment. Afterwards, 170 respondents, or 51.5% of the total number, consider that physical acts of sexual assault are an action which can be determined as a form of sexual harassment, and the same number of respondents mention forced sexual relations with someone, as well as unwanted communication with explicit photos, emails or messages as such actions.

Conditioning employment or other services with services of a sexual nature (whether implicit or explicitly indicated) is an act of sexual harassment for 165 respondents, and for approximately the same number of respondents, 169 of them, showing intimate parts of the body is such an action.

Verbal harassment of a sexual nature (including jokes referring to sexual relations, sexual orientation, or other sexual characteristics) is recognized as an act by 160 respondents, and offers of sexual services are an act of sexual harassment for 158 respondents, or 47.9%.

The number of those who believe that acts of sexual harassment also include comments about sexual relations, stories, and fantasies at the workplace, school or other inappropriate places are slightly smaller. And only 99 respondents identify unwanted flirting as such.

These results show that students recognize certain forms of sexual harassment, and what in most cases is less recognized as sexual harassment are the sex comments, but what is the most interesting is that sexual harassment is mixed with other sexual offences.

**Table No. 2.** Do you think that the students know enough about sexual harassment and know how to recognize it?

	<i>F</i>	%
Yes, they know enough	45	13,6
They partially know	93	28,2
Don't know enough	55	16,7
Don't know at all	2	,6
I can't evaluate	18	5,5
No answer	117	35,5
Total	330	100,0

The analysis of the answers presented in Table no. 2 gives the impression that the students do not know enough about the phenomenon of sexual harassment

and do not know how to recognize it. Only 45 respondents are categorical that their knowledge is sufficient. In contrast, 93 respondents consider that they partially know, and 55 that they do not know enough. Two respondents think that they do not know at all, and part of the respondents, or 5.5% of them cannot evaluate.

**Table No. 3.** Why does sexual harassment happen?

	<i>F</i>	%
Myths and stereotypes about the sexes (genders)	71	21,5
Gender-dominated environments	88	26,7
A sense of dominance and power	172	52,1
Social norms	47	14,2
Misuse of the position	149	45,2
I don't know	11	3,3
Other	10	3,0

From the analysis of the answers to the question Why does sexual harassment happen? the dominant view is that the reason for it is the feeling of dominance and power, as well as the abuse of the position, which about 50% of the respondents agree with. Only 88 respondents believe that sexual harassment occurs in gender-dominated environments, 71 respondents believe that the problem lies in myths and stereotypes about genders, and 47 respondents attribute the problem to social norms. 3.3% of the respondents do not know why it happens, and some of the respondents additionally stated that the problem of sexual harassment also occurs due to psychological problems, complexes, etc.

Similar views are expressed in the works of Conrad and Taylor who argue that sexual harassment is an act of power, as well as in Catharine MacKinnon who concludes that men engage in offensive sexual behavior primarily as a way to realize or express their power, and not desire. (Merkin, 2012: 155)

## 5. Conclusion

Sexual harassment is an important, complex, and widespread social problem present at universities worldwide (Lindsay at all, 2015: 9; Tavares & Wodon, 2018:11; Bastiani at all, 2019; Bondestram & Lundqvist, 2020; Ferrer-Pérez & Bosch-Fiol, 2020). The problem of sexual harassment is located in

an androcentric environment as unfortunately universities still are, environment which is hierarchically structured. Although universities in North Macedonia are mentioning in statements that sexual harassment will not be tolerated the statement itself is not enough. We should show zero tolerance for sexual harassment. Building confidence and encouraging the students to report cases of sexual harassment is more than needed. Campaigns and education of students can raise awareness of sexual harassment issues and avoid any circumstances that lead to sexual harassment.

If the Macedonian universities want to prevent sexual harassment, they should come up with the best solution to stop and prevent this problem. In order to maintain the image of the universities and ensure the trust of the students:

- Each university should have its own strategy to prevent sexual harassment. The main goal should be to encourage dialogue and raise the level of awareness of the community on how to prevent sexual harassment;

- The universities should design and implement action protocols for dealing with sexual harassment that include preventive actions. This can be done by removing the taboo around the problem and providing support to those affected by it. Such measures are related to the atmosphere against violence at the universities, including calling on rectors, deans, directors of institutes, and heads of departments to act responsibly and take a direct stand against expressions and acts of sexual discrimination and harassment.

- There should be more financial support for researching the problem at universities, because at the moment there is a lack of scientific research of this problem. Universities should be bastions of freedom of speech, individual rights, and academic freedom;

- Better legal documents at universities - in the Republic of North Macedonia, there is no legal regulation covering sexual harassment at universities. Although some provisions are found in individual laws, it is not enough to cover the broad area of sexual harassment. The universities in the Republic of North Macedonia do not have a legal procedure for reporting sexual harassment. Some of the universities have partially provided it in the Codes of Ethics, and unfortunately, other universities have either not regulated it at all in their acts or such acts are not publicly available;

The segment of the research we have used has shown that students do not recognize all the forms of sexual harassment and they mix them with other sexual deviant and criminal acts. This situation should be alarming, and state and university authorities should work on information campaigns about the phenomenon, and the new crime incriminations.

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