

**The vulnerability of
female Polish migrant workers
to sexual harassment**



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Foreword

The origin of this study lies with the observations made by myself and my colleagues during our work as care providers with FairWork. We noticed that female clients had often experienced unwanted behaviour of a sexual nature. After a discussion with my colleagues, I reached the conclusion that little is known about the subject of sexual harassment in relation to migrant workers. For that reason, I decided to undertake this research.

This research was made possible thanks to the encouragement and the trust of my former coordinator, Hanka Mongard, and the director of FairWork, Sandra Claassen. I am particularly grateful to Dr Dorota Lepianka, researcher at the University of Utrecht, for the guidance and for spurring us on when we suffered setbacks. In addition, I would like to thank the following people for their help and support: Dorota Deren, Jessica de Klerk, Francien Winsemius, Karin Burgerhout, Pamela Lucas. I would also like to thank: Agnieszka Smialek, Kasia Lamens, Theo Tchang, Mischa Tchang and Ingrid Kooi. Finally, I want to thank the brave women who dared to tell their stories and have thereby provided insights into the sexual harassment of Polish women in the Dutch workplace.

Ewa Urywkow-Tchang

The women more likely to be sexually harassed and among the least likely to take action are migrant workers.

United Nations (1998: 4)

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Summary

Sexual harassment is a concept that has existed for a long time. In this study the term refers to any unwanted behaviour that hurts, denigrates, humiliates or belittles a person on the basis of his/her sex or gender. It mostly concerns women who find themselves in vulnerable socioeconomic positions and who have little sociocultural power at their disposal.

From the research, it appears that sexual harassment often occurs in the workplace or in work-related situations. It is also apparent that, due to their weak socioeconomic status, female migrant workers are especially susceptible to this form of abuse. Despite the growing relevance and recognition of the problem, the studies explicitly focusing on the sexual harassment of migrant workers are few, especially those concerning Europe.

This study contributes to the existing research into sexual harassment and its relation to migration by specifically highlighting the situation of female Polish workers in the Netherlands. A qualitative exploratory study was conducted based on interviews with seven female Polish migrant workers with a view to gaining more insight into the subjective perceptions and experiences of the female Polish migrant workers concerning sexual harassment in the work(-related) place.

The study sheds some light on the mechanisms that underlie the vulnerability of migrant women to sexual harassment. It also highlights the coping strategies of the victims and the role of sociocultural norms in the onset and perpetuation of sexual harassment.

Introduction

Background and context

In spite of its long existence (Thornton, 2002), sexual harassment has only recently received attention from the general and academic public. It was only in the mid-seventies, when the term 'sexual harassment' was coined, that sexual harassment was recognised as a social problem (McLaughlin et al., 2012; Timmerman and Bajema, 1999). Under the term 'sexual harassment', this study understands unwanted "behaviour that hurts, denigrates, humiliates or belittles on the basis of sex or gender" (Lopez et al., 2009: 5). There is considerable evidence that women are more vulnerable to sexual harassment than men (for example, Pina and Gannon, 2015; European Commission, 1998, 2011; O'Connell and Korabik, 2000; Gruber, 1997; Gutek, 1985). Consequently, this study places the focus on women as the victims of sexual harassment.

As is demonstrated by the various studies and reports, sexual harassment often occurs in the workplace or in work-related situations (for example, Haas and Timmerman, 2010; Icenogle, 2002; Thomas and Kitzinger, 1994). A report from 2010 concerning violence against women in countries within the European Union states, for example, that between 40% and 50% of women have experienced some form of sexual harassment in their workplace (European Commission, 2010: 14).

A number of studies and reports refer to migrant status as an important factor in making women particularly vulnerable to sexual harassment in the workplace (for example, FFSC, 2014; Human Rights Watch, 2012; Puri and Cleland, 2007; United Nations, 1998). However, it is worth noting that the subject of sexual harassment and the vulnerable position of Polish migrant women in the Netherlands receives almost no attention. Polish labour migration in the Netherlands is the most extensive of the total migration from the Central and Eastern European countries (Bureau of Discrimination Cases, 2012: 13)¹. The subject has been noted and acknowledged in policy documents as a potential problem (ibid.: 25; Scheele et al., 2014: 38). The report from the Bureau of Discrimination Cases reports, for example, that "at a certain employment agency the 'bosses' recruited only single Polish women who were then required to have sex with the 'bosses' in order to get or keep work" (ibid.: 25). This case, however, was never investigated further. Therefore, this study explores the subject further through qualitative research into the subjective perceptions, experiences and coping strategies of the Polish migrant women regarding sexual harassment in the workplace in the Netherlands.

Care providers

The specific relationship between sexual harassment and the vulnerable position of migrant workers has recently been a relevant focal point for the care providers at FairWork. During the discussions with the Polish victims of labour exploitation the FairWork care providers discovered that clients had regularly experienced various forms of unwanted behaviour of a sexual nature.

¹ In 2011 136,000 Polish migrants were registered in the Netherlands as residents or as employees (Bureau of Discrimination Cases, 2012: 13), meaning that they made up more than two-thirds of all (200,000) registered migrants from Central and Eastern European countries (ibid.: 13)

It is noticeable that the clients rarely speak about their negative experiences with this inappropriate behaviour as if it were a serious problem. Only a few of them consider it a big problem. In most cases the female clients describe the violation of their sexual integrity as an insignificant or an additional issue, one problem amid the many problems they have encountered in the workplace.

As a result, the care providers pick up on the signals of sexual harassment between the lines. It is therefore interesting to study this phenomenon more closely by conducting research in this area. To summarise, what are the experiences of female Polish migrant workers in relation to sexual harassment in the Dutch workplace?

Clients of FairWork come from all over the world. Some of the clients come from countries outside of the European Union. Others come from EU countries. The largest group (at the time that this research was conducted) of European clients comes from Poland. There are male as well as female clients.

Research objective and question

Research objective

The overall objective of this research was to gain more insights into the experiences of Polish migrant workers confronted with sexual harassment in the workplace.

There are two specific objectives here. The first objective is to use these insights to evaluate the role of sexual harassment in the course of the employment process of the female migrant workers. This assessment will enable FairWork to deal more effectively with sexual harassment as one of the signs of labour exploitation. Care providers who are well informed about the mechanisms of sexual harassment can use these specific signals to identify signs of exploitation of female migrant workers in the Netherlands.

The knowledge gained about the subject of sexual harassment can be used to design informative resources for care providers. These resources could include methodological guidelines for, among other things, the recognition of signs of sexual harassment, for conducting a conversation with clients about the subject of sexual harassment and for raising awareness of the subject of sexual harassment when fighting against unfair working relationships as encountered by migrants in the Netherlands.

The second objective was to raise awareness of the problem among employers, interest groups and policy makers. This awareness could give a boost to regulation regarding approaches to sexual harassment in the specific context of migrant workers and the vulnerable situation they find themselves in.

Research question

To gain more insight into the topic of sexual harassment in the context of migrant workers, the following research question was formulated:

What are the subjective perceptions and experiences of female Polish migrant workers concerning sexual harassment in the work(-related) place?

Bibliography overview

Identifying sexual harassment

Extensive research has been conducted into the typology of sexual harassment (for example, Fitzgerald, 1996; Gelfand et al., 1995; Gruber, 1992; Leskinen and Cortina, 2013; Timmerman and Bajema, 1999). Gruber (1992), for example, designed the Inventory of Sexual Harassment. This inventory distinguishes three types of behaviour which differ in degrees of gravity: verbal comments, verbal requests and non-verbal displays. According to Timmerman and Bajema (1999), sexual harassment can be considered in the following categories: verbal, non-verbal, physical and quid pro quo. The last category, 'quid pro quo', means: "a threat of an advantage (or a disadvantage) if the sexual advance is rejected (or accepted)" (European Commission, 1998: 151). This categorisation is in accordance with the classification of the European Commission (European Commission, 1998).

Other researchers (Fitzgerald, 1996; Gelfand et al., 1995) see sexual harassment as "a sexualised form of workplace relationships which can take two main forms" (Pina and Gannon, 2012: 210). The first is the aforementioned quid pro quo and the second is the hostile work environment. The second type of sexual harassment consists of two subtypes: gender-based (situations in which female employees are subjected to insulting, gender-related or sexist comments) and unwanted sexual attention (any form of unwanted sexual behaviour that is not necessarily connected to work-related consequences) (ibid.: 210).

Perception of sexual harassment

The general conclusion concerning the perception of sexual harassment is that women are less inclined than men to accept or tolerate any form of sexually-related behaviour in the workplace and that they "see gender harassment, unwanted sexual attention and sexual coercion as more serious" (McDonald, 2011: 8). For this reason they are more likely than men to label a certain advance as 'sexual harassment'.

Some studies indicate that there is a gap between what the respondents report about being the target of sexual harassment and how they define the behaviour themselves (for example, Fitzgerald et al., 1997). That is to say, many respondents are reluctant "to label or to be more sensitive to certain types of unwanted sexual behaviour" (Welsh, 1999: 173). One of the explanations for this gap is the traditional views regarding male-female roles (for example, Incenogle et al., 2002). Another explanation refers to individual differences such as sexuality, race and the status of the perpetrator within the structure of the organisation, which have an impact on self-labelling the experience of sexual harassment (Giuffre and Williams, 1994). Additionally, there is evidence supporting the influence of social class and type of work on the perception of sexual harassment (Incenogle et al., 2002). From the research it is also apparent that women in office jobs are more inclined than women in less educated jobs to label unwanted behaviour as sexual harassment (ibid.: 612). Finally, there are also many studies emphasising the role of the workplace culture in influencing the willingness and ability of employees to label sexual behaviour as sexual harassment (for example, Folgero and Fjeldstad, 1995; Timmerman and Bajema, 2000).

Sexual Harassment: The Reality of Dutch versus Polish Context

From surveys conducted in Poland as well as in the Netherlands about experiences of sexual harassment in the workplace, it transpires that there is a substantial difference between the two countries when it comes to the prevalence of the problem. A report from 2007 by the Polish Centre for Public Opinion reports that approximately 10% of working women reported having experienced unwanted sexual behaviour (CEBOS, 2007:9). The Dutch report by the National Survey of Working Conditions from the same year shows that only 2.9% of working women had experienced 'unwanted sexual attention' from a manager or colleague (van den Bossche et al., 2007: 63).

This difference is reflected in the definition of the legal procedures as well as in the actual application of the internal codes of conduct regarding the prevention and the fight against sexual harassment in the workplace. According to the EU report into the legislation surrounding sexual harassment, the determination of and execution of codes of conduct and regulations is more usual in the Netherlands than in Poland (European Commission, 2011). The Polish employment law, for example, contains neither specific complaint procedures for the victims of sexual harassment nor specific disciplinary sanctions against the perpetrators (ibid.: 223-226). Instead, the following is applicable: "The general provisions in the event of a breach of the principle of equal treatment in the workplace or in access to goods and services" (ibid.: 223). The Polish national collective employee agreements make no mention of procedures concerning the prevention of sexual harassment (ibid.: 228). According to the EU report, little is known in Poland regarding employers' actual application of procedures in cases of sexual harassment. The report only mentions cases of certain high schools or universities where "special anti-discrimination commissions were set up with the intention of collecting reports regarding sexual harassment" (ibid.: 229).

In contrast with the Polish employment law, the Dutch employment law contains the specific obligation to prevent sexual harassment (ibid.: 204). In spite of the fact that it is not mandatory in the Netherlands to set up a complaint commission, "in practice, many (major) employers have their own complaint procedures for victims of (sexual) harassment or other 'misbehaviour'" (ibid.: 204). Additionally, many collective employee agreements in the Netherlands contain provisions for the prevention of sexual harassment and for dealing with sexual harassment (ibid.: 209).

Furthermore, there is a considerable difference between Dutch and Polish society where the general perception of sexual harassment is concerned. The 2010 European survey shows that nine out of ten respondents view sexual violence as "very serious", while in Poland at least 20 per cent of the respondents view sexual violence as just "reasonably serious" (ibid.: 9). These results imply that the general awareness of sexual violence and the associated sexual harassment is higher in the Netherlands than in Poland.

Other important factors that influence the vulnerability to sexual harassment of Polish female migrant workers are sociocultural norms. As mentioned by Puri (2007) and Huen (2007), there are social norms specific to every culture² regarding sexuality, which can seriously impact the capacity of women to avoid unwanted sexual attention or to stand up for their own rights.

In the case of Poland, the social norms regarding sexuality are strongly reflected in the public discourse surrounding sexual harassment (Bratkowska, 2013; Fundacja Feminoteka and Gender Index, 2008). This shows that that sexual harassment is considered to be a private matter and that

² Culture – this term is defined as "the acquired behavioural repertory that is shared amongst people belonging to a certain group or society" (Wilterdink, N. en Heerikhuizen Van, B. eds. 2003: 400).

people are of the opinion that “if no one talks about it, it does not exist” (Borkowska, 2008: 34). The stereotypical perspective prevalent among Polish society regarding women and their sexuality reinforces the general attitude of ‘blaming the victim’ (Zielinska, 2011). According to these stereotypes, sexually abused women are ‘easy’ and ‘asking for it’ or, in the event that they undertake action against the perpetrator, ‘out for revenge’ (ibid.: 34). The discomfort and the inconvenience surrounding this subject are also reflected in an almost absolute indifference to and/or derision regarding the problem from the political as well as the religious establishment (Czerwinska, 2008; Szczuka, 2008). Finally, the Polish media also play an important role in shaping attitudes towards sexual harassment. The media in Poland have the tendency to portray victims in a negative light while excuses are made for the behaviour of the perpetrators (Zielinska, 2011: 219).

Unlike Poland, the Netherlands belongs to the EU countries where the general awareness of sexual harassment is reasonably high (European Commission, 2011: 9). This awareness was sparked in the mid-1970s in the Netherlands by women’s movements (Holmaat, 2011: 202). Sexual harassment is a recognised problem in the Netherlands which “is increasingly seen as part of a broader problem of intimidation, violence, discrimination, bullying and more generally as ‘unwanted behaviour’ which contributes to an undignified and unsafe environment” (ibid.: 202).

The contrast between the Dutch and the Polish, the actual as well as the perceived reality surrounding sexual harassment makes it particularly interesting to examine the situation of Polish female migrant workers in the Netherlands. So to what extent has the vulnerable position of Polish women in relation to sexual harassment been ignored, or even exacerbated, in a country that paradoxically enables the awareness of sexual harassment and the policies to prevent it and improve the position of victims? And, specifically, which mechanisms play a role in it?

Mechanisms of sexual harassment

Characteristics of the perpetrator

Specific characteristics of the perpetrator can increase the risk of sexual harassment in the workplace. Several studies have indicated that the perpetrator is generally a male employee (for example, European Commission, 2011; Haas and Timmerman, 2010; O’Connell and Korabik, 2000; Pina and Gannon, 2015). His age is between 30 and 50, he is usually married and has already been working for a long time in the workplace in question (European Commission, 1998: 25). Some studies name a number of specific personal features of the perpetrator, such as a lack of social conscience, naïve attitude towards heterosexual relationships, irresponsible, manipulative and exploitative behaviour (Begany and Milburn, 2002; Kosson et al., 1997; Pryor and Whalen, 1997).

The perpetrators can just as easily be ordinary colleagues as more senior colleagues (European Commission, 1998; McDonald, 2012: 8; O’Connell and Korabik, 2000). In spite of the fact that men in senior positions are more often linked to the more serious forms of sexual harassment, it is more often the case that colleagues in equal or lower positions are the ones who harass (O’Connell and Korabik, 2000: 301). It is argued that people in the more senior positions harass because they have the power to do this while colleagues and subordinates harass “to gain power or to minimise the difference in power” (ibid.: 302).

Characteristics of the victim

Specific personal and social features of the potential target of sexual harassment can also influence the onset and the continuation of the sexual harassment. The European Commission report indicates that younger (between 20 and 30 years old) single or divorced women are more at risk of being sexually harassed than are other women (European Commission, 1998: 26). According to this report, women with a low income and educational level and a temporary work status are especially vulnerable to sexual harassment (ibid.: 26).

Other studies have also shown that women in a vulnerable socioeconomic position and with little socioeconomic status and sociocultural power are more at risk of being confronted with sexual harassment (for example, McDonald, 2012; Haas and Timmerman, 2010; Huen, 2007; Puri and Cleland, 2007). One of the important contributing factors to the vulnerability of a potential victim is her migrant status. Many studies show that job insecurity makes a person particularly vulnerable to sexual harassment (Lopez et al., 2009; McDonald, 2012: 7; Puri and Cleland, 2007: 1363; Uggen and Blackstone, 2004: 64). Puri and Cleland have noted that “the migrants and the displaced are often exposed to increased risks of sexual coercion” (2007: 1366). The vulnerability of migrant workers to sexual harassment is therefore a serious and, in many countries, recognised problem.

Workplace culture

The research that clarifies the mechanisms of sexual harassment from the perspective of the organisation emphasises several important features of the workplace context (for example, Chamberlain et al., 2008; Lopez et al., 2009; Timmerman and Bajema, 2000; Welsh, 1999). One of those features is the workplace culture. Within this workplace culture the perceived tolerance of sexual harassment as well as the compliance with the policies concerning the prevention of and the handling of sexual harassment plays an important role (McDonald, 2012; Pina and Gannon, 2012). Timmerman and Bajema (2000), for example, note that there are two aspects of workplace culture which reduce the risk of sexual harassment in the workplace. These aspects are: a positive employee-oriented atmosphere and extensive rules and procedures (ibid.: 190). Other researchers confirm the argument about the positive impact of company policy on the prevention and reduction of sexual harassment (Chamberlain et al., 2008; Gornikowska-Zwolak, 2011; Lopez et al., 2009; O’Connell and Korabik, 2000; Szewiec, 2006).

In addition, certain features of the workplace such as work gender context³ and difference in employee power are also important in the shaping of the underlying power mechanisms of sexual harassment (McDonald, 2012: 7). Work gender context refers to the situations where “the gender ratio is very unevenly distributed either in the direction of men or women” (Welsh, 1999: 178). In those situations, the chance is greater that sexual harassment will take place because ‘femininity’ is more visible (ibid.: 178). Differential employee power refers to the level of subordination of the employees within the structure of the company. Since women are more likely than men to have a subordinate position at work, they also have less power in relation to potential perpetrators (Welsh, 1999, in Chamberlain et al., 2008: 266).

Power balance

Within the recent sociocultural theory regarding the subject, sexual harassment puts most emphasis on the question of power balance (for example, Berdahl, 2007a, b; McLaughlin et al., 2012; Pina and

³ Gender: in this study this term refers to social, cultural and psychological interpretations of a woman and a man. (<http://www.genderindeblender.be/woordenlijst.htm>)

Gannon, 2012; Uggen and Blackstone, 2004; Wilson and Thompson, 2001). The general argument is that the incidence of sexual harassment stems from the economical superiority of men over women (MacKinnon, 1979). Many studies show, however, that male power over women reaches further than economical aspects because even men in junior positions harass women (for example, Samuels, 2003; Quin, 2002).

A number of studies analyse the incidence of sexual harassment from the perspective of the power balance found at different levels of social structures and which are linked to the existing division of tasks between men and women (for example, Bredahl, 2007a, b; MacKinnon, 1979; Samuels, 2003; Quinn, 2002; Uggen and Blackstone, 2004; Wilson and Thompson, 2001). Wilson and Thompson (2001) profess, for example, that in order to understand sexual harassment in the workplace we must look at the unequal relationships between men and women within society. According to them, sexual harassment is not so much about sexual attraction but more about “men who exercise/have power over women” (ibid.: 61). In other words, sexual harassment is related to the lower status of women at work and their subordinate position in a society (ibid.: 61-2).

Sexual harassment is also related to the construction and (re)production of the male identity (Quin, 2002). This process occurs by way of the ‘game’ that men play for men to “keep in place the mechanism responsible for the (re)production of male and female identities, group boundaries and power balance” (ibid.: 393).

Coping strategies

The way in which female victims deal with sexual harassment in the workplace is related to the perception as well as to the actual experience of sexual harassment. That is to say, the perception of a victim of sexual harassment can influence the reaction of women to sexual harassment. On the other hand, the way in which a victim deals with sexual harassment can have an influence on the future sexual harassment experience of a (potential) victim.

From the literature regarding the female response to sexual harassment it would appear that between 5% and 30% of the female targets of sexual harassment submit a formal complaint (Fitzgerald et al., 1995; Wayte et al., 2002, in McDonald, 2012). For victims, it is more usual to “deal with the problem in isolation or with the support of friends or colleagues, or by tolerating the behaviour, by leaving the company or by offering resistance in some other ‘informal’ way” (ibid.: 9). There are several factors that can form a barrier to the reporting of the perpetrator: “fear of losing the job, especially for someone with precarious working conditions, fear of repercussions or revenge, not wanting to be seen as a victim, uncertainty or the fear of being seen as ‘oversensitive’, the belief that the perpetrator will not be punished, lack of knowledge regarding rights, and no access to external sources of support such as unions or professional assistance” (ibid.: 9).

The coping strategies are generally divided into individual approach and the approach in which a third party is involved (Hueting, 2006). The individual approach means that a woman who is harassed solves the problem herself (Hueting, 2006: 13-14). The involvement of a third party means that a woman who is harassed requests the help or support of someone else in solving the problem (Hueting, 2006: 13-14).

The literature outlines the four most accepted sorts of responses to sexual harassment: formal reports, informal complaints, social support and attempts at communication with the perpetrator (Bingham, 1991; Bingham and Scherer, 1993; Livingston, 1982, in Pina and Gannon, 2012). It seems

that the first two strategies are used the least often by victims (Pina and Gannon, 2012: 222). That is due to the structure of the organisation which all too often provides the victim with no possibility to improve her situation or to gain acknowledgement of her suffering. The third strategy, social support, is the most frequently used way of dealing with the problem of sexual harassment (ibid.: 222). In this case, women are more inclined to ask friends for support and help than they are their colleagues. The last strategy, attempts at communication with the perpetrator, can sometimes lead to an improvement in the victim's situation (ibid.: 222). The positive outcome of this strategy depends on the following factors: directness, assertiveness, the level of aggression of the confrontation and, most importantly, the status of the perpetrator within the organisation (Bingham and Scherer, 1993). It is evident that "the higher the perpetrator's status is, the smaller the chance that the victims will choose confrontation, probably for fear of work-related reprisals, alienation or retaliation" (Pina and Gannon, 2012: 223).

Research Sub questions

In order to answer the research question, four sub questions have been formulated on the basis of the literature overview:

- *Which types of sexual harassment do Polish women experience?*
- *How do Polish female migrant workers view sexual harassment (what is the role of sociocultural norms)?*
- *Which factors are the most conducive to the onset and the continuation of sexual harassment?*
- *How do Polish women deal with their experiences of sexual harassment (what are their coping strategies)?*

Methods and target group

This study uses qualitative methods to explore the subjective experiences and perceptions of female Polish migrant workers concerning sexual harassment in the workplace. Seven semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with female Polish migrant workers. This small number of respondents can be explained by three factors: time restriction of the research, exploratory nature of the study and the sensitivity of the subject.

The use of a semi-structured form allowed the interviews to take on a reasonably informal character without the use of a question list. Instead of strictly following the consecutive questions, the interviewer used a list of research subjects which served as a checklist. This technique gave the researcher the possibility to control the interview as well as allowing him to follow the natural course of the conversation.

The research focused on Polish migrants working in the Netherlands. The first and most important reason for this choice is the size of the Polish migrant population in the Netherlands. Polish migrants make up more than two-thirds of all registered migrants from Central and Eastern European countries (Bureau for Discrimination Cases, 2012: 13). The second reason is a practical one. By focusing on one nationality, it is easier to get an overview of the target group's situation and to ensure that the conclusions are simple and useful.

The choice of female respondents as a target group is justified by the fact that there is considerable evidence that women are especially vulnerable to sexual harassment (for example, European Commission, 1998, 2011; Haas and Timmerman, 2000; O'Connell and Korabik, 2000; Pina and Gannon, 2015). So in spite of the fact that men also experience sexual harassment in the workplace, women are certainly more at risk of being confronted by it.

As far as the selection of the respondents is concerned, the objective was to reach the greatest possible variety within the respondent group, with regard to the social features of the respondents such as age and educational level. The age of the respondents ranged from 23 to 37 years and their educational level ranged from elementary to university education. Apart from two respondents working in the automobile industry and electronics industry, the rest worked in the food industry and in the flower trade. All the women, except one who worked as a sales assistant, worked on the assembly line, sorting, processing or packing the products.

Since this study is not concerned with the reporting of the extent of the problem, a representative sample was not sought out. Instead, the respondents were recruited based on their willingness to discuss the problem.

The respondents were approached mostly through FairWork. The respondents were also recruited by putting calls out and distributing information about the research (in Polish shops, information points, community centres, social media, etc.) and through fieldwork. The researcher participated, for example, in several activities aimed at Polish migrants such as fitness and an integration day.

Results

The experiences of Polish women with sexual harassment must be placed in the context of their personal and work(-related) situation. For this reason, there follows a brief description of the general context of the work organisation, characteristics of the interviewed women, the perpetrators and personal and work-related circumstances.

Most Polish workers are dependent on a specific work organisation, which increases their vulnerability to sexual harassment.

60 to 70 per cent of Polish migrants are employed through commercial temporary employment agencies (Scheele et al., 2014: 23). These employment agencies recruit from Poland and they often offer potential migrant workers 'all-inclusive' packages which include many services, such as transport (from Poland to the Netherlands as well as in the Netherlands to the place of work), accommodation, insurance and jobs (ibid.: 23). This means that Polish migrants are very dependent on these work organisations and on the people in power within the system.

Furthermore, there are also other aspects, often related to the problem of dependency and abuse of power, which must be taken into consideration when it comes to the susceptibility of Polish women to sexual harassment. This is because Polish women recruited through a similar system are often alienated⁴ from Dutch society and have limited knowledge of their rights in the Netherlands (College for Human Rights, 2013: 5).

As for the personal situation of the respondents, almost all respondents (with the exception of one) came to the Netherlands through the mediation of an employment agency. The women were recruited by a number of branches of employment agencies in Poland which offered so-called 'all-inclusive' packages. For most of the respondents that meant that they came to the Netherlands together with other Polish workers in transport arranged by the employment agency. Most women said that when they first came to the Netherlands in that way, they were not exactly sure of their destination in the Netherlands.

Once in the Netherlands they were taken to (often temporary) accommodation. There they lived together with other predominantly Polish migrant workers. The respondents reported that they were often placed in (holiday) houses/bungalow complexes. There the respondents were assigned a room which they often had to share with another female colleague. Common areas, such as the bathroom and kitchen were shared by all residents. In each house/bungalow there were both men and women living. The respondents' accommodation was mostly located in fairly remote places, meaning that the inhabitants had little contact with the local population. The workers were transported to their workplace every day in a bus arranged by the employment agency.

All of the interviewed women had decided to come to the Netherlands because in Poland they had no prospect of a (well-enough paid) job. Most respondents (with the exception of one) reported that they had found themselves in a difficult socioeconomic situation which had led to them feeling that

⁴ 'Alienation from Dutch society' refers to both physical and mental conditions. Workers that rely on "all inclusive services" provided by an employment agency, are physically isolated from the Dutch society because they are often obliged to live at remote locations among Polish people only (Scheele et al. 2014: 40). The mental aspect of alienation refers to the inability to communicate with Dutch citizens or acquire enough information. This is often caused by a complete lack of or deficient command of the Dutch language (Arum van et al. 2010: 12).

they needed to go abroad to find work. As reasons for leaving they named various socioeconomic problems, such as debts, being a single parent, difficult family situation (for example, illness or alcohol problem of a family member).

Concerning the perpetrators, the respondents described men with a range of ages, descent and position. Most respondents were harassed by men who were older. Three respondents named as (one of) the perpetrators men who were roughly the same age as them. The descent of the perpetrator is often dependent on the situation in which the sexual harassment occurred. If sexual harassment occurred in the place where people are accommodated or during transport to the workplace, the perpetrators were always Polish men (2 respondents named several Polish men). In the workplace, the respondents named: Dutch men (4 respondents), Polish men (1 respondent), Dutch men of Turkish (1 respondent), Moroccan (2 respondents) and Iraqi (1 respondent) descent. Some of the perpetrators had a more senior position than a respondent (5 supervisors, 2 managers, 2 bosses). The men in the senior positions were not of Polish descent, except for one. Several perpetrators had a more or less similar position to the respondents. These men were mostly (except for one Dutchman) of Polish descent. Almost all men, however, found themselves in a better position where work conditions and work experience were concerned.

From verbal abuse to physical assault and aggression

From the interviews, it became evident that the Polish women had been confronted with a wide range of forms of sexual harassment at work or in work-related places. According to the descriptions made by the interviewed women, six types of unwanted behaviour occur, namely verbal, physical, non-verbal, quid pro quo, gender-based and a hostile work environment. In this study these six types are divided into two categories, namely individual and social.

Individual

- Verbal
- Physical
- Non-verbal
- Quid pro quo

Social

- Gender-based
- Hostile work environment

The inclusion in the 'individual' category of the verbal, physical, non-verbal and quid pro quo types coincides with the categorisation established by the European Commission and by other researchers in this area (for example, European Commission, 1998; Timmerman and Bajema, 1999). These four types refer to unwanted sexual behaviour that has an individual character since it usually occurs between two individuals. This means that a perpetrator displays unwanted sexual behaviour towards his target without other people being directly or indirectly involved.

While the first four types have a more individual character, the last two types (gender-based and the hostile work environment) refer to the social aspect of sexual harassment. This aspect is not explicitly mentioned in the literature and it is afforded little attention. From this research, it is evident,

however, that not only the perpetrator but also the work environment, such as colleagues and fellow residents, with their specific group culture and dynamic, are directly or indirectly involved in the sexual harassment of the victim.

As far as 'gender-based' harassment is concerned, this type refers "to a situation in which female employees are regularly subjected to offensive, gender-related or sexist comments" (Pina and Gannon, 2012: 210). In the literature concerning the topic of sexual harassment, this form is known under the name 'gender harassment' (Gelfland et al., 1995). This type often refers to the social character of sexual harassment since a group culture with gender-related values and norms plays a clear role. In this study, what is understood by 'gender-related values and norms' is the assigning of certain values to the women or men based on social, cultural and psychological interpretations of the roles of male and female. Furthermore, it means the creation of and behaviour according to the norms which stem from those assigned values.

The sixth type, 'hostile work environment', features in the literature as a collective term for all kinds of sexual harassment that do not belong in the 'quid pro quo' category (Pina and Gannon, 2012: 210; Icenogle et al., 2002: 602). In this research 'hostile work environment', however, refers to a work atmosphere which is unfriendly and threatening for a woman, in which not only and specifically the perpetrator but also others participate in a more indirect way in the sexual harassment of a woman.

Verbal

Within the first category three women reported the use of offensive language or having been sworn at. The swear words that men used against women referred mostly to the gender of the respondents. The women were called 'whore', 'slut' or 'bitch'. Ula⁵ (25), for example, received unpleasant comments from a Polish colleague after she was sexually harassed by her supervisor. This supervisor had made sexual gestures to her and the colleague had witnessed this and said to her, 'You like that, don't you, bitch?' Kasia (26) reported that she and her female colleagues were regularly called 'whore' and 'slut' by her Dutch (of Turkish, Moroccan and Iraqi descent) managers. During their stay in the employment agency's accommodation, Kamila (37) and her female colleagues were called 'whores' by their Polish colleagues who were also living there.

The other verbal forms of unwelcome sexual behaviour described by the Polish women comprised the swearing at or the making of insinuations to a woman in response to the rejection of the men's attempts at making advances. For example, one of the respondents, Ula (25), reported that when she pushed away a male colleague who was trying to touch her up, he said to her: "You give yourself to everyone!" (in the sense of 'you do it with everyone'). In the other situation she rejected the advances of another man and he told her to fuck off. Ula experienced these situations during her stay in company accommodation where she, like Kamila, lived together with other Polish colleagues.

Physical

Regarding the 'physical' category, all respondents mentioned various forms of unwanted physicality, such as: cuddling, hugging, attempts at kissing, a hand placed on the hand, shoulder, face or buttocks, pinching or grabbing their buttocks, or by pushing their whole body against them. An example of this was given by Iwona (35), who worked as the only female sales assistant in a male-dominated sector with mainly Dutch men:

⁵ In order to protect the privacy and safety of the respondents the names of respondents and of those persons of places named by the respondents have been changed.

While he (the boss) explained to me how the operational system worked, he bent over me and put his huge paws on my thigh. (Iwona,35)

Dorota (35), who unlike Iwona worked in a sector typically for female migrants (meat processing), spoke of how she was assaulted in an ambiguous way by a Dutch manager:

There were, for example, occasions when the corridor was blocked by pallets, so it was really narrow. When we needed to get through, he (the manager) would push me with my stomach against the wall. He really pushed. (Dorota, 35)

Two other respondents, Ula (25) and Kamila (37), who lived together with other Polish colleagues in the company's accommodation, spoke of the time that they found a man (a colleague) in their bed. Ula described the occasion when she woke up one morning next to her Polish colleague and housemate with her tights pulled to half way down her thigh:

He came to a party and at the end he said to me: "I'm coming over to yours". I said no. I am sure I locked the door before I went to bed. I had had a drink so I fell into a deep sleep. When I woke up, I saw him lying next to me. I started screaming at him... (Ula, 25)

Kamila (37) experienced a similar situation. She spoke of an evening when a drunken Polish housemate forced his way into her bed. After this event, she and her female roommate had to block the door of their room with a broom.

Some respondents also reported being confronted by physical aggression. This aggression occurred at the time that the woman made it clear that she did not want to be touched. Magda (23), for example, was on the receiving end of an aggressive reaction when she attempted to repel the sexual advances of her older Dutch colleague:

He came over to me and wanted to cuddle and kiss me, etc... Whenever I tried to push him away or something, he just kept forcing himself on me. (Magda, 23)

Non-verbal

Sexual gestures or actions belong to the third category of non-verbal forms of sexual harassment. Two respondents spoke about this type of unwanted behaviour. Kasia (26), for example, spoke of one Dutch supervisor of Iraqi descent who would "lick his lips" as she walked by. Another respondent, Ula (25), who worked with flowers on the assembly line, spoke about a very unpleasant situation in her workplace involving her Dutch manager:

Later the manager in this company began to do several different things to me. Not that he molested me or anything, but he made gestures to me, so strange. He came over to me and did this (the respondent imitates male masturbation). That is the way he did it, he didn't drop his trousers or anything... (Ula, 25)

Quid quo pro

In spite of the fact that in this type of sexual harassment is based on power relationships, only one respondent was directly threatened with this. This respondent worked for a distribution company where a lot of other Polish people were also working and where previously other Polish women had been harassed by a Dutch colleague. Here she speaks of how that colleague threatened her for rejecting his sexual advances:

He (a colleague) came over to me to cuddle me, etc. When I pushed him away, he said that if I continued to do that, he would go to Dirk (Dirk is our most senior manager), that he would talk to him, because he is his friend and that I would then be fired. (Magda, 23)

Another respondent, Kasia (26), was not personally confronted with this type of explicit threat, but her Dutch manager of Turkish descent told her and others that he had had a relationship with a girl and that that was how she had gotten a contract.

Gender-based

An obvious example of gender-based sexual harassment is making sexist remarks about and asking after the sex life and other private matters of a woman. These questions and comments refer to the stereotypical associations regarding being a woman, a woman's appearance and the role of the woman in society. Iwona (35), for example, who worked in a company where only men worked, was often confronted at work with this type of comments and questions. The following passage is an example of that:

For example, I sometimes dress differently, just because I feel like it and I've had enough of wearing sneakers and a big watch, then I wear big earrings, like today. But I don't do that often because I immediately get comments (from male colleagues) such as: "Well, aren't you looking beautiful! What happened? Have you been getting some? Who with?" (Iwona, 35)

Another example relates to a situation where the women were assigned a certain role clearly based on their gender. One respondent, Kamila (37), lived with a group of Polish colleagues in the accommodation arranged by the employment agency, shared with male colleagues. Specific group rules were adhered to according to which the women have a lower status than the men:

... and all the women had to clean the houses because a guy isn't supposed to do things like that. For them (male colleagues) that rule did not exist. I wasn't having it and I said to my friend: "You can do your share because I have also been working all day. Probably even harder than you". But it was made clear to him immediately that I was a 'bird' and that he ought to educate me, that he should teach me a lesson. (Kamila, 37)

These examples show specific behaviour of the men that place a clear emphasis on 'being a man' in contrast to 'being a woman'. This behaviour refers to the construction and the reproduction of the masculine identity (Quin, 2002). In this case, sexual harassment is not (only) based on sexual attraction but also on the construction of and guarding the limits of the male gender identity (ibid.: 399).

Hostile work environment

A few respondents described a hostile work environment which often encourages and exacerbates sexual harassment. Examples of this are: the spreading of gossip regarding a person's sexual morals, belittling or humiliating a woman. One respondent, Kamila (37), spoke, for example, about how while her Polish male colleagues were standing at the collection point waiting for the van to take them to work they were loudly gossiping about the women they lived and worked with. According to her: "They (the male colleagues) were saying, for example, that we (women) 'had sucked some guy at work's dick'". Another respondent, Kasia (26), spoke of how she felt belittled when her manager talked about her in a language that she didn't understand:

He (the supervisor) was talking to his friends... Well, I didn't understand what he was saying because it wasn't in Dutch, but in Arabic or something... I just felt that it wasn't something very

nice. It was so cruel to belittle me like that. He was making out that I was some kind of slut. (Kasia, 26)

In Ula's (26) case, who like Kamila (37) lived together with other Polish colleagues in the company's accommodation, other women even participated in the creation and maintaining of an atmosphere which was experienced by the respondent as threatening. She reported that after her male colleague had said to her, 'You like that, don't you, bitch?', a female colleague then turned around and sarcastically said: "Watch out or she'll go and tell her mummy". Even after her manager had been making obscene gestures towards her, she then had to deal with the unpleasant reactions of her colleagues. She spoke of sitting in the canteen during her break: "I could see everyone looking at me and all that giggling and whispering".

The Polish women interviewed had come into contact with different types of sexual harassment from verbal abuse to assault. That is remarkable given the small number of interviews. These findings expose the vulnerability of Polish female migrants and the importance of more research into this problem.

Subjective interpretation of sexual harassment

The subjective experience of the victim is essential in the determination of what sexual harassment is or is not (Ronner et al., 2007: 4). From the interviews it would also seem that the subjective experience of the victim is central to the determination of and the handling of unwanted sexual behaviour in the workplace or in work-related places. Three main subjects are decisive for how the Polish women interviewed set their borders and how they dealt with the sexual harassment, namely:

- Problems with definition;
- Personal interpretation of the borders;
- Questions of morality regarding women's behaviour.

Problems with definition

From the interviews, it would appear that most of the respondents had trouble defining what sexual harassment is or determining exactly when it occurs. The following statement would seem to suggest that the underlying reason for this is often the fear of trivialisation:

Well, it is very difficult to interpret whether you are being sexually harassed. On TV, you hear about near-rapes. In my case, I might get laughed at: 'You're exaggerating, you're 35 years old and if someone gives you a pat on the bum, there's no need to make such a big deal out of it!'. But how long can you put up with that for? (Dorota, 35)

Another feeling that goes along with the fear of trivialisation is uncertainty. Ola (25), who was confronted daily with the unwanted attentions of her Polish supervisor, wonders whether she might be oversensitive:

First I needed to calm myself down and then get everything straight in my head. I wondered if I might be exaggerating because I sometimes got the impression that the problem was with me, that I was perhaps just exaggerating. After a certain time, I reached the conclusion that there was nothing wrong with me, it was him. (Ola, 25)

It is worth noting that the respondents generally avoided branding what to them was unwanted behaviour as sexual harassment. Most didn't use this term at all and others explicitly denied that

certain behaviour was sexual harassment. Some called it an 'uncomfortable situation' (Iwona, 35), 'bad situation' (Ola, 26) or 'mobbing' (Ola, 25).

Personal interpretation of the borders

For most respondents, the physical form of unwanted sexual behaviour is a clear point in the determination of the borders of unacceptable behaviour. The following passage is an illustration of this:

The easiest way to determine when my border has been overstepped is when the intimacy of my body has been compromised. That is to say, I can cope with words but when someone tries to touch me or comes so close to me that I find it unpleasant, then the border of my intimacy has been overstepped. (Iwona, 35)

From this statement of Iwona's (35) it would seem that she can handle the verbal form of unwanted behaviour. This attitude, however, must be placed in the specific context of her male work environment. Iwona namely spoke of how difficult she found it in the beginning to cope with the verbal form of unwanted sexual behaviour and attention from her male colleagues as well as the customers. Over time she has, however, 'learnt a lot' and she has toughened up.

For Ula (25) there was only a clear border of unwanted sexual behaviour when she found a man in her bed:

Well, it is something... I don't know how I should say that. Well, the situation in Capelle was really bad for me (the respondent had found a male colleague in her bed). (Ula, 25)

It is interesting that she did not see the inappropriate sexual gestures as unwanted sexual behaviour, but as a part of the general hostile attitude of her colleagues towards her:

I knew that it wasn't completely normal. But I also knew that it was just going to happen, because they (all the colleagues she lived and worked with) just treated me in that way. (Ula, 26)

The personal interpretation of the borders also has consequences for the way in which the respondents react to and cope with unwanted sexual behaviour. One of the respondents, Ola (25), reports, for example, that for her a pat on her bum was the reason to no longer tolerate the unwanted behaviour of her colleague. Before this event she had had to tolerate a whole series of verbal insults. The violation of her physical integrity was the last straw that made her decide to take her complaint to the supervisor.

According to most of the interviewed women a clear 'no' is an important indicator in the determination of where unwanted sexual behaviour begins. This quotation is an example of this:

For me (sexual) harassment begins at the moment that I clearly say no and give off a signal that I don't appreciate it and consequently avoid contact. I think you can just sense it. (Kamila, 37)

Questions of morality regarding women's behaviour

From the many statements made by the respondents it is also apparent that the women struggle with their own opinions regarding the questions of morality surrounding a woman's behaviour. Some respondents doubt that they may be to blame for the eliciting of unwanted sexual behaviour by a colleague or manager. Magda (23), for example, wonders if she was partly to blame for the sexual harassment. She reached the conclusion that it couldn't be her fault because she "wasn't allowed to wear low cut tops or anything in that kind of style". Another respondent wondered if she hadn't been asking for it:

I questioned whether it was my fault because he tried to convince me and others that I was asking for it, because I wore make up at work. I didn't understand because there is no ban on hair and makeup at work. I didn't dress too provocatively at work. (Ola, 25)

The question of blame, therefore, often has an influence on how and when women react to unwanted sexual behaviour. This question of blame, as well as other things such as shame, privacy, sensitivity, lack of understanding and insufficient knowledge about the problem of sexual harassment, contribute to the development of many of the misconceptions and the taboo regarding the subject (Ronner et al., 2007: 4).

According to respondent Dorota (35), who worked in the meat processing sector mostly dominated by Polish migrants, there was absolutely no mention of the subject of sexual harassment at work. In spite of the fact that she and her Polish female colleagues were dealing with sexual harassment on a daily basis, they didn't discuss this openly:

I also think that women don't talk openly about it (sexual harassment). Some allow a guy to harass them for ten years or more. They don't do anything about it. I would have to do something about it. Someone may ask: 'Why did you wait so long?'. Well, I had my reasons. Full stop. (Dorota, 35)

The following statement from Kasia (26) is a good illustration of the prevailing ignorance and taboo surrounding the subject:

In my opinion, if one of the girls acts in such a way that she allows herself to be abused, then they (the girls) prefer not to talk about it. They are afraid that people will judge them. They are afraid that people are going to think that they wanted it as well. I have seen it myself where girls who had been harassed by boys, preferred to keep quiet. (Kasia, 26)

According to Ola (25), the subject of sexual harassment is a touchy subject because people can interpret it in different ways:

There are things that you just don't want to talk about. A woman who feels intimidated is certainly not going to tell everyone how she feels or how he (the perpetrator) is behaving towards her. People can interpret it (what they feel or experience) in the wrong way, because they don't know exactly or understand 100% how everything looks or proceeds. (Ola, 25)

So, the way that the women interpret the phenomenon of sexual harassment determines their initial reaction to it as well as the way they later deal with it. As is clear from the interviews, the initial reaction of the respondents to unwanted sexual behaviour goes paired with a sense of shame or blame. The questions surrounding female morality and the preconceptions about it also play a role in the way in which respondents deal with unwanted sexual behaviour. It also seems that the subject of sexual harassment is either difficult to discuss or cannot be discussed at all. That's why the respondents often feel uncertain about when they interpret certain behaviour as unwanted and what they can do about it.

Mechanisms of vulnerability

There are a number of factors that can be conducive to the onset as well as the perpetuation of sexual harassment (for example, McDonald, 2012; Lopez et al., 2009; Welsh, 1999). This research has exposed four important factors which make up the underlying mechanisms of sexual harassment:

- Specific work/living circumstances;
- Dependencies/hierarchies (within the work environment);
- Prevailing 'culture' within the work environment;
- Official policy of the company/employment agency.

Specific working/living circumstances

Most respondents were confronted with unwanted sexual behaviour during the execution of their work duties. According to three respondents, the perpetrator ensured that the victim was in a secluded place. The perpetrator was then easily able to force himself on her. Magda (23), for example, said that she was harassed by her male colleague when she had to go to the warehouse alone to scan products. It was then that her colleague tried to cuddle and to kiss her. This was confirmed by Kasia (25) who said that her supervisor lured her and her female colleagues to the warehouse in order to touch them up. Dorota (35) also mentioned that she was transferred by her supervisor to a workplace where no one could see her so that he could easily force himself on her.

Some respondents reported that they were also confronted with unwanted sexual behaviour outside of the workplace. It occurred, however, in work-related places, such as in the accommodation arranged by the employment agency or by the boss, or during transport to the workplace. In this case the perpetrators were always Polish colleagues with whom the respondents worked and shared accommodation. The respondents, who found themselves in this situation, said that they often experienced sexual harassment while others just looked on. Kamila (37) and Ula (26), for example, described how it was usual for their male housemates to pinch their bums or to make inappropriate sexual comments in the presence of others. That happened during everyday activities (for example, walking to the bathroom) as well as during parties. When the respondents tried to protest about this sort of behaviour, their reactions were trivialised or ridiculed by the male housemates.

Dependencies/hierarchies

The second group of factors refers to the dependency mechanisms which the respondents had to deal with. The possibility of losing their job played an important role, for example, in the perpetuation of sexual harassment. All respondents reported feeling dependent on their work one way or another. They feared for a loss of employment. The following statement from Magda (23) is an example of this:

... I didn't even know how to deal with it (sexual harassment) and what kind of decision I needed to make. Should I go to the manager with it or should I try to tolerate it and just get on with my work? I think that if you care a lot about your job, then you are not going to do anything about it. Of course, you're scared of losing your job. So, if you want that job, then you have to try to put up with it (sexual harassment) one way or another. (Magda, 23)

Additionally, the position of the respondents at work in relation to the perpetrator was weaker (lower in the work hierarchy, more recent appointment) and provided less security (no fixed hours and/or contract). Ola (25) states that the reason she hesitated before taking her complaint to the management was the perpetrator's stronger position at work:

Other people have also noticed that he (the colleague responsible for the unwanted sexual behaviour) felt very sure of himself and relaxed here. That is because he will get a fixed contract in July. So, he is sure that he can basically do as he pleases. Every day I was afraid of losing my job. It is also commonly known that he knows the place and people there because he has been working

there for a long time. He also has a better position. So, when I find myself in an unpleasant situation with him, I worry that every other manager will take his side rather than mine. I was a new employee and almost nobody knew me there. When it (unwanted sexual behaviour) began, I had only been working there for a month. (Ola, 25)

Dorota (35) also felt insecure because of her lower position in relation to the perpetrator and her weak position as employee:

I am his (the manager responsible for the unwanted sexual behaviour) subordinate, so it is possible that if I react aggressively, I will be fired. Yes, I felt concerned. It was a matter of a few pinches and pats here and there. He knew that I cared about my job, just like all the other Poles working there... Additionally, in the beginning I didn't have my phase four⁶ yet, so practically no protection. So there were things that kept me there and for which reason I couldn't talk about it (sexual harassment). (Dorota, 35)

These statements illustrate not only the pattern of dependence (in relation to keeping the job) but also a power mechanism. As the respondents described, the men felt that they would not be called to answer for the unwanted sexual behaviour. It is always related to their position within the company, which they consciously abuse in order to harass those women in a weaker position. This mechanism of the show of power and abuse of power is clearly visible in the following description of the perpetrators:

Well, I have the strong impression that they enjoyed special rights there. They were the boss' right hand men. They also had fixed contracts because they had been working in that company for eight to ten years, so since the company started. They had an unwritten agreement with the boss that gave them the right to control people. There was control in all areas. They often reported back to the boss about us, telling him what I or the other women did in our free time. They (the men responsible for the unwanted sexual behaviour) knew him (the boss) well and that's why they had more rights and were able to get away with more. (Kamila, 37)

The men described by Kamila (37) were Polish colleagues who mainly made a show of and abused their power in the accommodation (company homes). These specifically work-related living arrangements of Polish female migrants therefore made these women especially vulnerable to sexual harassment.

Another important aspect in the vulnerability of Polish migrant women is the lack of opportunity to find another job. The respondents confronted by sexual harassment often had a difficult personal and economic situation forcing them to endure the unpleasant situation (of unwanted sexual behaviour). Kamila (37), for example, spoke of how she had endured a lot and "had been through hell" because she had been forced to leave her country in order to escape poverty and to ensure a better future for her children. Magda (23) spoke of how she had had to put up with the persistent advances of her colleague over a long period of time because at that time she had little chance of finding another job. She feels happy in the Netherlands and doesn't want to go back to Poland, because if she goes back, "it's all over for her". For Dorota (35) the reason that she didn't initially

⁶ Phase 4 – the other name for this phase is "phase C". This phase means that someone working for a temporary employment agency has a right to a fixed contract if s/he has worked for longer than 4 years in phase B (3), or the 6th contract has expired. The following contract is a fixed phase C (4) contract. That is a contract of indeterminate duration. (<http://www.payforpeople.nl/payroll-wiki/wat-is-het-fasensysteem.html>)

react to the inappropriate behaviour of her supervisor was the sizeable debts that she had run up in Poland:

It started with him pinching me and touching me. It was very obvious, no chance of misinterpretation. But I couldn't do anything about it because I had taken out a loan of about 70,000 zloty in Poland. So of course, I was afraid that I would lose my job... (Dorota 35)

The statements made by the respondents show that the vulnerability of the women to sexual harassment is reinforced by their migrant status. The uncertainty regarding their ability to keep their jobs and migrant women's other socioeconomic problems make them very vulnerable to abuse (McDonald, 2012: 7; Puri and Cleland, 2007: 1363; Uggen and Blackstone, 2004: 64). The fact that migrant women are also away from their family surroundings contributes to their vulnerability (Puri and Cleland, 2007: 1366).

As respondents Kasia (26) and Dorota (35) say, insufficient or lacking knowledge of the Dutch society and language is often a reason to not undertake action when confronted with the problem of unwanted sexual behaviour. Their expat status makes them dependent on their work environment in the Netherlands. The women don't know what they should do or they are afraid of the consequences of any actions they might undertake:

Well, yes, people are afraid to do anything because they don't know the language and they're living in a foreign country. The Turks and others abuse the fact that people don't know their rights and don't know where to go when confronted with it (unwanted sexual behaviour). (Kasia, 26)

Dorota (35) compares the position of the Dutch women with that of the Polish migrant women to emphasise her dependent situation in the Netherlands. Dorota has never seen a Dutch woman harassed by a man at work. According to her, that is because the Dutch women have a stronger and more secure position in the Netherlands. They know their rights and enjoy the support of the family and the environment, in contrast to her and other Polish women.

Prevailing 'culture' within the work environment

From the interviews, it is evident that a lack of support in the environment makes up part of the prevailing culture within the work environment. 'Culture' here refers to the way in which management as well as colleagues react to and deal with the phenomenon of unwanted sexual behaviour. Shared values and norms relating to the interactions between men and women in the workplace play an important role here. According to Dorota (35), who was harassed by her Dutch supervisor, "people at work turned a blind eye to the sexual harassment" and then they spread gossip about her and her relationship with the supervisor. When asked how her Polish colleagues reacted to this, she replied:

It wasn't spoken about actually. It caused a bit of amusement... People really like to gossip here. If a woman is touched up by a man, according to them, she must be getting something in return, an extra day off, for example... A female friend of mine told me once what people were saying about me: that "I had an easier time of it here because he (the supervisor) was touching me up".(Dorota, 35)

Another respondent reported that at the time that she was confronted with unwanted sexual behaviour she received no support from the male or female Polish colleagues she worked and lived with:

The girls just laughed about it. Did others see it? Yes, and they laughed about it. They were laughing at me. I saw how they whispered and looked at me. Nobody did anything about it... I had a really hard time of it because I felt that they thought I was a slut and that's just how they treated me... I had no support. (Ula, 26)

Magda (23) stated that she had not been able to count on the support of her Polish coordinator or her Dutch supervisor:

Later when I told my coordinator the reason (sexual harassment) why I was leaving, he called the manager and told him that it was my fault because I had allowed it to happen. (Magda, 23)

Most respondents also described the threatening and misogynistic atmosphere within the workplace, which was conducive to the onset as well as the perpetuation of the sexual harassment. The following statement from Kamila about her Polish colleagues with whom she shared her accommodation is an illustration of this:

We were all in such an unpleasant environment. Women were treated badly. We were powerless. It was appalling... There was nothing you could do about this rudeness and discrimination. The men (colleagues and housemates) there were very self-assured. They worked in groups. They often made insulting comments about us (women). I had the feeling that I was constantly being threatened. I was too afraid to say anything or to defend myself in any other way. (Kamila, 37)

Official policy of a company or employment agency

The official policy of a company or an employment agency strongly determines the prevailing culture regarding sexual harassment within the work environment. As some researchers have remarked, the official policy of a company is an important factor in the prevention of and the fight against sexual harassment (Chamberlain et al., 2008; Gornikowska-Zwolak, 2011; Lopez et al., 2009; O'Connell and Korabik, 2000; Szewiec, 2006). All respondents reported never having heard of official regulations or a code of conduct for the prevention of and the dealing with unwanted sexual behaviour at work.

The respondents had experienced a number of other linked factors, such as the specific work or living conditions, dependencies/hierarchies, the 'culture' within the work environment and the policy of the company or employment agency. These factors have a considerable influence on allowing sexual harassment in the work(-related) place as well as the way in which the women deal with it. These factors also make up a part of the underlying mechanisms responsible for the vulnerability to sexual harassment of migrant women in the Netherlands.

Dealing with sexual harassment

In spite of their vulnerability and dependent status, most respondents find a way to cope with the unwanted sexual behaviour or they try to find one. According to the descriptions of the interviewed women, there are two categories of coping strategies, namely:

- Individual approach;
- Involvement of a third party.

Individual approach

From the interviews, it appears that within this approach two strategies can be distinguished: leaving the company or employment agency and manoeuvring between tolerating the unwanted sexual behaviour and fending it off.

One of the informal ways of coping with unwanted sexual behaviour is by leaving the company (McDonald, 2012: 9). This strategy was used by most of the respondents. Five of the seven women interviewed eventually left the company/department and/or the employment agency because they no longer knew how to cope with the sexual harassment (and often other problems as well). Leaving, however, was for none of the respondents a quickly or easily made decision. As mentioned earlier, the fear of being left without an income and the lack of alternatives to provide for their own livelihoods was reason enough for them to endure the sexual harassment over an extended period of time. This is why the respondents only made the decision to leave when the right moment came along. For Kamila (37) and Magda (23) it was when they found themselves in a serious relationship with a Dutch boyfriend. It was easier for them to give up their jobs because they had the chance to move in with their respective boyfriends. Kamila speaks of how she fled the employment agency and her workplace because she was afraid. Her boyfriend helped her to make that decision:

Well, I met a Dutch man. We had been having a relationship for three or four months and he was aware of my situation because I had told him all about it. I said: 'Listen, I can't handle it anymore'. He came over (to the accommodation arranged by the employment agency) regularly to check up on the situation, to see what was going on. And then he suggested that we move in together. You have save yourself one way or another, don't you? (Kamila, 37)

For Kasia (26) and Dorota (35) establishing a stronger position in the employment market offered them the opportunity to leave their jobs. For Ula (26), it was psychological exhaustion that drove her to eventually leave her work environment.

The other informal strategy for all respondents was the manoeuvring between tolerating the unwanted sexual behaviour and fending it off. However, each respondent executed this strategy in a different way. For three of the respondents a confrontation with the perpetrator was one way of (trying to) fend off the unwanted behaviour. Ola (25) reported, for example, that in the beginning she tolerated the unwanted advances of a colleague because she found the situation difficult to assess. From the moment that this colleague began touching her bum, however, she decided to talk to him about it. She told him several times that she saw him as a colleague and asked him to put a stop to this behaviour. Another respondent (Iwona, 35) tried to deal with the sexist comments from her colleagues and customers by giving a sharp and funny, yet still polite, response. In this way, she discouraged the men from asking inappropriate questions or making improper suggestions. A similar strategy was employed by Kamila (37). Two respondents (Kamila, 37, and Iwona, 35) reported using a very clear and direct way of showing where the boundaries were when a colleague started to display unwanted sexual behaviour. They just said that they didn't like certain behaviour and asked the colleague not to do it anymore. Other respondents (Kasia, 26, and Ula, 26) used bad language to express their anger to the perpetrator regarding the unwanted situation. Dorota (35), Kasia (26) and Iwona (35) employed a strategy of avoiding or ignoring the man responsible for the unwanted behaviour.

The strategy of manoeuvring between tolerating the unwanted sexual behaviour and fending it off was not always and not for all respondents effective, however. As described earlier, for most of them leaving the company or employment agency was the only way out.

Involvement of a third party

The respondents described three ways of coping with unwanted sexual behaviour in which a third party was involved: support from the social environment/network, informal complaints and formal complaints.

As stated by Pina and Gannon (ibid.: 222), for Polish respondents asking for support from the social environment/network is the most widely used strategy for dealing with sexual harassment. Sharing their suffering and irritation with family and/or friends was a way for most respondents to better cope with the sexual harassment. All respondents reported receiving understanding and emotional support from the moment they told someone from their circle of friends or family about their problems. For most of the respondents, however, contact with family and friends was limited because they were far away from their familiar surroundings. Additionally, most respondents found it difficult to talk about their problems with sexual harassment due to a feeling of shame and discomfort. Dorota (35), for example, said that for a long time she had not been able to talk to her mother and father about the sexual harassment she was suffering. In spite of the very close relationship with her father, she felt uncomfortable talking to him about this problem. And she had wanted to spare her mother from worrying. Ula (26) also mentioned that she hadn't wanted to bother her grandparents in Poland with her problems because "they had enough problems of their own". The other respondent, Magda (23), also said that she had not wanted her family in Poland to worry about her. Additionally, her contacts included female friends in Poland who led "a completely different life" there.

For those respondents with family or good friends in the Netherlands it was usually easier to share their misfortunes and to receive the support they needed. An example of this is the following statement by Ola (25) about the support that she received from her friend:

He encouraged me to fight. I suspect that if I had been alone, I would have ended up like that other girl (also sexually harassed by a male colleague) who quit. That (the support of her friend) really helped me. (Ola, 25)

After Magda (23) told her friend about her problems, she also received help from him and his family:

He (the friend) said that I had to leave (the employment agency) and that I had to go and live with him. I moved in with his parents straight away. Their help ensured that I could remain in the Netherlands. So, I didn't need to go back to Poland. (Magda, 23)

As far as receiving support or help from the work environment was concerned, most respondents reported that they had not been able to count on this. The reason most frequently given for this by the respondents was the lack of mutual trust among Polish colleagues. According to Kamila (37), for example, the Poles with whom she lived and worked were not to be trusted:

Well, sadly, the Poles are a tragedy. I am ashamed to say this, but... You want to be loyal to the Polish nation but you just can't trust them. I had so-called (female) friends. First, they said: 'Come and have a beer with us!' I said: 'Okay, why not' and the next day they called the employment agency and reported me for having an alcohol problem. People just grass each other up. So I couldn't talk to anyone about my problems there (within the work environment) because everything you say, they can twist your words and use them against you. They make you into a loser. (Kamila, 37)

Magda (23) also expressed her opinion of Poles in the Netherlands and described how her colleagues made her life more difficult instead of helping her:

You can't trust the Poles here, especially the Poles. When he (the man responsible for the unwanted sexual behaviour) began to suspect that I was in a relationship, he got angry with me about that. And there were girls (Polish colleagues) who went to him just to get him all worked up about me. (Magda, 23)

Ula (26) was also unable to count on the support and help of her Polish colleagues even though she really needed it:

It was like this: I had very little support, a lot of unpleasantness, inconceivable and strange situations to deal with. I would bet money that if I had talked to anyone about how unhappy I was, they (Polish colleagues) wouldn't have cared in the slightest. I now know for sure that they just used to laugh at me whenever they saw that I had problems (with sexual harassment). What I needed was someone that I could trust or someone who could support me or tell me what I was doing wrong. (Ula, 26)

Four respondents (Dorota, 35; Ula, 26; Magda, 23, and Ola, 25) said that sometimes their Polish colleagues were understanding and even attempted to help them. That was as far as it went, however, since these colleagues, according to the respondents, also felt powerless and afraid. The following passage is an illustration of this:

When I mentioned that I had made a complaint, a few people came to me and expressed their support. But I knew that beyond this I was not going to receive any real support. They (the colleagues) said: 'It's good that you've done that', 'Great that you weren't afraid', 'I knew that if someone was going to do it, that you would be the one, but you know how it is... I'm staying here for another year and then I'm going back to Poland to get married...'. That was kind of supportive, but not really. (Dorota, 35)

Two respondents reported the unwanted sexual behaviour to the senior management of the employment agency. In the case of Magda (23), she didn't mention it to her Polish coordinator until after she had given up her job. In response, she received the blame. According to the coordinator she was partly responsible for the sexual harassment because she 'ought to have been able to respond to it appropriately'. Magda (23) and Kamila (37) both tried to offer an explanation why they or other women had not reported the problem to their superiors. Magda (23) said, for example, that it wasn't worth it to take a complaint to the supervisor because:

In this company, there is a rule: 'The Poles are nothing more than numbers. If you don't like it here, then leave!' So, if I went to the supervisor with a complaint, then I would just have to leave because they could easily replace me. (Magda, 23).

Her statement was confirmed by Kamila (37). She said that if the coordinators from her previous employment agency felt that you were complaining too much, you were branded a problem case and they'd tell you: "Okay, then you can go back to Poland because you're not needed here".

Ola's (25) complaint, in contrast, was taken seriously by her two supervisors. Ola's supervisors spoke to the perpetrator and transferred Ola to another department. This constructive response from the supervisors needs to be considered in the context of Ola's work environment. In spite of the fact that she still felt insecure due to her temporary contract, she described the general work atmosphere as well as the relationships between lower and higher ranking employees as friendly. For this reason, she received understanding from her colleagues and superiors. Furthermore, she had plenty of friends within her work and living environments who supported her.

As far as formal strategies are concerned, only two respondents wrote an official letter to their employment agency complaining about unwanted sexual behaviour. Dorota (35), who sent the letter more than six months ago, is still waiting for a constructive response. The only response she has received so far is an e-mail which stated: "If you take this (sexual harassment) to the police, it will have negative consequences for the employment agency and the employees". In the case of Kamila (37), making an official complaint with the employment agency garnered positive results. The employment agency spoke to the perpetrator and he rectified his behaviour. It is worth noting, however, that Kamila is now working for a Dutch employment agency where she has mostly Dutch colleagues. She makes a comparison with the earlier situation working for an employment agency which only employed Poles:

Wow, what a difference! Here (in the current employment agency) they respond quickly. They do everything here in an official and effective way. One e-mail and the problem is solved. And there (at the former employment agency) nothing made the slightest impression on anyone. It was enough to make you paranoid. (Kamila, 37)

According to most respondents, there are three important reasons why the women confronted with sexual harassment are fearful and passive or reluctant when it comes to undertaking concrete action, namely:

- Lack of or insufficient knowledge of their rights (as migrants and as women);
- Insufficient knowledge of the Dutch society (for example, language, legal system, social system);
- Lack of or insufficient knowledge of (external) sources of support.

Dorota (35), for example, said that where legal matters were concerned, she had just been lucky that she had been helped by a Dutch neighbour. She was therefore lucky enough to receive the support that others had missed out on. Kasia (26), Magda (23) and Ola (25) said that they had not been able to find expert information regarding sexual harassment written in a language that they could understand anywhere. They didn't know where to go when they needed information about sexual harassment or concrete help or "an objective opinion" either (Ola, 25). Kamila (37) emphasised that in the case of Polish migrant women it is really important to raise general awareness of women's rights. She explained that Polish women she had worked with, as well as herself, had allowed themselves (in the past) to be dominated by men.

From the aforementioned strategies, it appears that the respondents usually employed the individual approach in their dealings with sexual harassment. It seems, however, that this approach is not effective (enough) for the eradication of unwanted sexual behaviour since the perpetrator is not required to accept any responsibility for his behaviour.

An approach where the involvement of a third party is required was used less frequently by the respondents. Within this approach most respondents rely on their family and friends. Physical distance and the taboo surrounding the subject of sexual harassment are restrictive factors here. The other two strategies within this approach, making a complaint to a superior and the lodging of an official complaint, were used less often by the respondents. Most reasons for this hesitation in reporting the perpetrator are in accordance with the findings of earlier studies (for example: Pina and Gannon, 2012; McDonald, 2012). The respondents gave the following reasons: fear of losing their jobs, the sense of shame and discomfort, no possibilities within the structure of the workplace for the improvement of their situation, insufficient knowledge regarding their rights, lack of or

insufficient knowledge regarding (external) sources of support and a lack of mutual trust among Polish colleagues.

Conclusions

This exploratory study has attempted to gain insights into the subjective experiences of Polish migrant women regarding sexual harassment in the workplace in the Netherlands. By asking four sub questions this subject has been explored and examined.

The results concerning the first sub question offer an invaluable insight, namely that Polish female migrant workers experience different types of sexual harassment in varying degrees. The respondents were confronted with the more familiar forms of sexual harassment as well as with lesser known or recognised forms. The following belong to the 'classic' forms of sexual harassment: physical assault, verbal abuse, non-verbal sexual actions or gestures, threats and/or inappropriate suggestions. Two less recognised forms of sexual harassment are 'gender-based' harassment and the indirect 'hostile work environment' form of harassment.

Responses to the second sub question offer noteworthy insights about the way in which Polish women themselves think about the subject of sexual harassment. The respondents often struggled with a sense of shame and guilt. These moral questions and the taboo surrounding the subject of sexual harassment highlight the sociocultural norms regarding female sexuality which prevail in Polish society. According to these norms, women are often quickly condemned if they are subjected to sexual harassment. Unwanted male behaviour, on the other hand, is often exonerated.

The third sub question asks about the factors most conducive to the onset and perpetuation of the sexual harassment of migrant women in the Netherlands. Here the results point to a number of factors intertwined with each other which provide the foundation for the onset as well as the perpetuation of sexual harassment. From this study, it seems that the following factors are important: specific work/living conditions (for example, in the accommodation arranged by the employment agency or the boss), sense of dependence on the job, the hierarchy within the work environment, the misogynistic 'culture' within the work environment and the lack of official policy for the prevention of and dealing with cases of sexual harassment.

The last sub question asks about the coping strategies of Polish women when dealing with sexual harassment. From the interviews, it is apparent that the Polish migrant women predominantly use a less effective individual approach in their dealings with sexual harassment. When using an approach where a third party is involved, most respondents use their family and friend networks as a way to cope with sexual harassment. Less often the respondents turn to a senior manager and even less frequently submit an official complaint. They described a number of prohibitive factors, such as the lack of or insufficient knowledge of their rights and of Dutch society or the fear of losing their jobs.

Discussion

This research has yielded two interesting points about the vulnerability of female Polish migrant workers to sexual harassment, namely:

- The sociocultural character of sexual harassment;
- The division between two mechanisms of sexual harassment: in the workplace and in the work-related environment.

Sociocultural character of sexual harassment

Regarding the first point, the sociocultural aspect presents itself in two of the forms of sexual harassment, namely 'gender-based' and 'a hostile work environment'. Both forms of sexual harassment demonstrate how the onset and perpetuation of sexual behaviour is influenced by people in the environment, prevailing values and norms concerning the interactions between men and women.

The sociocultural character of sexual harassment is also reflected in the perceptions of Polish women regarding sexual harassment. Remarkable here are the questions and prejudices surrounding female morality. The moral issues with which the respondents struggle and the taboo surrounding the subject of sexual harassment are indicative of the specific sociocultural norms present within Polish society. As previously mentioned, there exists in Poland a public discourse about sexual harassment which reflects the sociocultural norms female sexuality (Bartkowska, 2013; Fundacja Feminoteka and Gender Index, 2008). These norms imply a strong judgement of female behaviour and the justification of male behaviour (Zielinska, 2011: 219).

The sociocultural impact is also obvious from the descriptions of the prevailing misogynistic 'culture' within the work environment. The aspects of this culture, such as a threatening atmosphere and a lack of support or understanding from the work environment, reflect the perception of the tolerance of sexual harassment (McDonald, 2012; Pina and Gannon, 2012). In other words, these aspects illustrate how people within an organisation think about sexual harassment or how they approach the subject. From the interviews, it is apparent that within the work environment of the interviewed women there is a high level of acceptance of sexual harassment. **A question which could be asked here is: How is it that this acceptance is so high?**

The dependence and power mechanisms within their work environments, as described by the respondents, also reflect the sociocultural aspect of sexual harassment. According to the literature, these mechanisms represent the unequal relationships between men and women which exist in society (for example, Bredahl, 2007; Samuels, 2003; Quinn, 2002; Uggen and Blackstone, 2004; Wilson and Thompson, 2001). From this research, it would appear that the interviewed women often held subordinate positions in the company hierarchy, which made them more vulnerable to sexual harassment. **It would be interesting to examine the relationship between the weak socioeconomic position of Polish women and the specific sociocultural context of them as Polish migrant women in the Netherlands.**

Finally, the coping strategies of Polish women are strongly influenced by sociocultural factors. Women experience little support from the work environment where they often feel that they are not listened to and where they are treated with little respect by their managers and colleagues. The most

remarkable factor here is the lack of mutual trust among Polish colleagues. This element is interesting because it possibly implies a specifically Polish problem that negatively influences the coping strategies of Polish women.

This sociocultural character of sexual harassment is interesting because it offers more insight into the specific situation of Polish migrant women. It shows how Polish sociocultural values and norms have a specific effect on a new context of the Dutch reality of migrant workers. This reality is representative of the work organisation and the working and living conditions in the Netherlands which create room for specific group dynamic and behaviour. **For this reason, further research into the sociocultural character of sexual harassment could shed more light on the mechanisms of vulnerability to sexual harassment among migrant women.**

Division between two mechanisms of sexual harassment

The results of the research show that the women were harassed by two types of perpetrators. These perpetrators have their own specific territory. In the workplace, most respondents were sexually harassed by Dutch men or by Dutch men of foreign descent. In a work-related situation, such as the accommodation, the women were mostly harassed by Polish men. **It is interesting to examine the mechanisms of sexual harassment in those two specific situations. What are, for example, the differences and similarities in the power mechanisms within those two situations? In which ways do the sociocultural factors play a role in the onset and the perpetuation of sexual harassment, in the workplace as well as in work-related situations? What role does the sociocultural background of the perpetrator in the onset and perpetuation of sexual harassment?**

Suggestions for further research

This research should be seen as a pilot study in the area of the specific relationship between migration and sexual harassment in the Netherlands. Due to the exploratory nature of the study it was unrealistic to answer all questions regarding sexual harassment and to investigate all aspects of the problem. For this reason, there are many other points of discussion and suggestions for future research:

- **What is the extent of the problem (among the Polish as well as the other migrant groups in the Netherlands)?**
- **What are the differences in extent and forms of sexual harassment among the various migrant groups and the Dutch workers working in similar sectors?**
- **What are the male perceptions regarding sexual harassment (observers as well as the perpetrators themselves)?**
- **Which factors within a company/organisation play the largest role in the onset and perpetuation of sexual harassment?**
- **What are the specific differences between female migrant workers and female Dutch workers in relation to their vulnerability to sexual harassment?**
- **What do female migrants specifically need to cope more effectively with sexual harassment?**
- **What is the specific relationship between labour exploitation and sexual harassment? / How does sexual harassment form part of labour exploitation?**

Recommendations

These research results could form the basis for the design of a strategy for the prevention of sexual harassment among female migrant workers and for the provision of adequate help and guidance to the victims. In order to achieve this objective, a number of results are highlighted.

As far as the prevention of sexual harassment is concerned, the estimation of the risk factors of vulnerability to sexual harassment is of great importance. To this end the research results regarding the underlying mechanisms of sexual harassment are useful. These mechanisms highlight a number of factors which are conducive to the onset and perpetuation of sexual harassment. The respondents described the following relevant factors:

Specific work and living conditions:

- Accommodation or transport to the workplace as arranged by the employment agency or boss;
- Sharing accommodation with male colleagues;
- Little or no contacts outside of the (often Polish) work-related community;
- Carrying out work in a secluded work space (out of sight of other colleagues);
- Strong sense of dependence on the job;
- A weakened position within the company (short term position, no fixed hours and/or contract);
- The lack of alternatives when looking for another job;
- A difficult personal and economic situation (for example, debts, single parent of one or more children, financial responsibility for parents or other family members);
- Insufficient or lacking knowledge of Dutch society and language;
- Strong hierarchy within the work environment;
- Lower position in relation to male colleagues in the work hierarchy;
- Presence of men who feel untouchable and behave as such/who, compared to the average employee, can get away with more;
- A misogynistic 'culture' within the work environment;
- A hostile atmosphere (for example, the spreading of gossip about women, ridiculing the complaints of women, making insulting comments to or about women);
- Lack of support within the work environment;
- Lack of official policy regarding the prevention of and dealing with sexual harassment.

The following factors must be taken into consideration in order to be able to provide appropriate and targeted assistance:

- The role of the work environment in the onset and perpetuation of sexual harassment;
- Problems with definitions of what sexual harassment is or what it is not;
- Differences in personal interpretations of the limits of unacceptable behaviour;
- The role of sociocultural norms regarding female sexuality (a sense of shame and blame and the taboo surrounding the subject of sexual harassment);
- The lack of or insufficient knowledge of their rights (as migrants and as women);

- The lack of or insufficient knowledge of Dutch society (for example, language, legal matters, social system);
- The lack of or insufficient knowledge regarding possible (external) sources of support;
- The fear of losing their job;
- The absence of possibilities for the improvement of the victim’s situation within the structure of the workplace;
- The lack of mutual trust among the Polish workers.

Following on from the aforementioned factors, the following kinds of information are recommended as a basis for a targeted and effective assistance:

<i>Target group</i>	<i>Content</i>
Migrant women, Company managers, Care providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describing what sexual harassment means, and how it manifests itself. • How the work environment affects the emergence and persistence of sexual harassment
Migrant women, Care providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actions somebody can take when being subjected to sexual harassment. • Information about rights, the legal and social system, and (external) sources of support.
Company managers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What options exist within the framework of the working environment to prevent the occurrence of sexual harassment and to make the situation more palatable for the victim?
Care providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The role of socio-cultural norm about female sexuality; • How culture-specific behaviour affects whether sexual harassment persists and how it is dealt with.
Care providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessing the risk factors affecting sexual harassment.

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