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## Women Workers Safety at Workplace Case study of Sexual Harrasment in Google

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### Abstrak

Tulisan ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji keselamatan pekerja perempuan di tempat kerja khususnya industri yang didominasi laki-laki. Dengan menggunakan kasus pelecehan seksual di Google, tulisan ini menyimpulkan bahwa ada tiga faktor utama yang menyebabkan terjadinya pelecehan seksual, yaitu ketidaksetaraan gender, ketidakjelasan kebijakan, dan relasi kekuasaan. Makalah ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan pendekatan studi kasus dan mengandalkan data sekunder seperti jurnal, laporan perusahaan, berita dan artikel untuk membangun analisisnya. Berbagai sumber digunakan untuk memastikan validitas data. Kesimpulannya, sangat penting bagi perusahaan untuk menyusun kebijakan yang kuat dan jelas terkait pelecehan seksual di tempat kerja, ditambah dengan pelatihan bagi karyawannya dan memastikan tersedianya prosedur pengaduan yang sesuai.

Kata Kunci: *pelecehan seksual, tempat kerja, ketidaksetaraan gender, industri yang didominasi laki-laki, Google*

## Abstract

This paper aims to examine the women workers safety in a workplace especially male-dominated industry. Using sexual harassment case in Google, this paper concludes that there are three main factors that lead into sexual harassment such as gender inequality, unclear policy and power relation. This paper employs qualitative method with case study as an approach and relies on secondary data such as journals, company report, news and article to build its analysis. Multiple resources were employed to ensure the validity of data. As the conclusion, it is pivotal for the company to arrange strong and clear policy related of sexual harassment in a work place, compounded by training for its employees and ensure there are appropriate complaints procedures available.

*Keywords: sexual harassment, work place, gender inequality, male-dominated industry, Google*

## INTRODUCTION

At the end of October 2018, Google was shaken up by a media report highlighting the case of sexual harassment, involving Andy Rubin as the ex-executive Google and father of the Android. Rubin was accused for sexual misconduct to his subordinate. The investigation held by Google supported the accusation. What makes the employees of Google (hereafter: Googler) angry is because Google gave exit package for \$90 million for a perpetrator like Rubin. What Google did to Rubin is considered as unacceptable culture of the companies (Wakabayashi & Benner, 2018)

As a technology firm, Google is dominated by male workers. Even though Google states that gender equality is a part of the business, the gap between female and male workers is conducive on creating gender inequality. It can be seen from the less female leader in strategic position, and in this case, sexual harassment. There are sufficient evidences that mentioned about gender inequality especially in the male-dominated industry. These areas are characterized by strong cultures that associated with 'not welcome women'. Women have to deal with the limitation in order to "control goals, resources, and outcomes; organize and oversee their own work, enjoy the same pay and monetary rewards as their male colleagues; and demand respect at work and in work place interactions" (Alfrey & Twine, 2017). In male-dominated industry, female workers are vulnerable to be a victim of sexual harassment.

For example, (Dresden et al., 2018) examined how the female students in male-dominated majors within academia experience higher gender harassment compare to female in gender-equivalent major. This finding aligned with previous research held by (McLaughlin et al., 2012) that conclude how female workers are significantly to be a greater subjective harassment in male industries. (McLaughlin et al., 2012) offers "supervisory

authority, gender nonconformity, and workplace sex ratios" as the cause of sexual harassment on women.

To enrich the understanding about sexual harassment in male-dominated industry, this paper offers other variables such as gender inequality, unclear policy and abuse of power to explain sexual harassment towards women in Google as an example of technology industries.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Gender inequality in a work place

Documenting the reproduction of gender inequality in a work place is empirically challenging. Gendered cultures as well as occupational segregation especially in male-dominated sectors hinder woman participation (Wright, 2014). This is what it meant as 'glass ceiling' as the result of structural constraints that prevent women to achieve structural position because of gender discrimination (Alfrey & Twine, 2017). Gender inequality can be seen on various situations such as lower incomes, less female leader on strategic position, as well as sexual harassment. One of definitive role on occurrences of sexual harassment is gender ratio (McLaughlin et al., 2012; Pina & Gannon, 2012). As emphasized by Dresden et al., (2018), male-dominated sector contributes more on sexual harassment rather than gender-equivalent sector.

There are various forms of sexual harassment. According to (McDonald, 2012), sexual harassment consists of various behaviours such as personal insults, non-verbal gestures, to sexual and physical assault that often continued. Nowadays, when the technology becomes massive, sexual harassment can find its cyber form such as "the display of offensive and sexually explicit visual material on computers and mobile phones" (McDonald, 2012). (Hersch, 2015) noted that usually the victims of sexual harassment are "younger, hold lower-position jobs, work mostly with and be supervised by members of the opposite sex, and, for female victims, work in male-dominated occupations". The risk is also higher for vulnerable workers such as migrant and women in military.

### Policy in organization

Sexual harassment in a work place is not solely the result of individual behaviour, but also inappropriate culture. The organizations that tend to be tolerance to sexual harassment and strongly associated with job-gender context play significant impact, even the strongest predictor of sexual harassment (Pina & Gannon, 2012). Therefore, policies and prevention strategies have crucial role on addressing sexual harassment in a work (Pina & Gannon,

2012). When the policy is unclear, the victim will be reluctant to report the sexual harassment. Female workers will only report the sexual harassment if the organization environment is stable and safe for them; characterized by zero tolerance towards sexual harassment. Clear anti-harassment policy is substantial to protect the needs of workers as well as protecting the interest of organization such as lower productivity, worker dissatisfaction, and costly lawsuits (Pina & Gannon, 2012).

According to (Dessler, 2013), it is the obligation of top management to ensure the health and safety of the employees. Management should identify various risks involved in a job as well as unsafe conditions that might be happened during work. By considering hazard and risk situation, employer can prevent any accident happen in a work place. Sexual harassment can also be considered as risk in a work place. According to (Hersch, 2015), "sexual harassment is universally considered an extremely negative working condition, which suggest that a pay premium may arise for this type of working condition, similar to the premiums in jobs in which workers face a high risk of death or injury, risks that are also costly for firms to eliminate" (p. 6). The risk is become higher for female who works on male-dominated industries. Therefore, it is pivotal for the policy makers in the company to provide policy that accommodating employees' safety in order to create appropriate work environment.

Furthermore, the company and organization need to develop strong work place policies related to sexual harassment. Strong and clear policy is also need to be compounded by work place training and appropriate complaints procedures. The complaint procedures can also be compounded by counselling and other support for the victim. As mentioned before, workers who reported sexual harassment were vulnerable to the retaliation from the harasser. Strong and clear policy, training, and complaint procedures are considered as effective strategies to overcome the sexual harassment in a work place (Hersch, 2015).

According to (McDonald et al., 2015), there are six aspects that need to be considered on prevention policies making. First, the policy should be developed by clear understanding of the wrongdoing in organization. The second is visibility. It means, the policy related to sexual harassment should be widely known through the open and visible statement and emphasized on zero tolerance toward sexual harassment on public spaces. Third is the provision of complaints procedures through multiple communication channels. These multiple channels will encourage employees to be more confidence on reporting sexual harassment conduct. Fourth, organizational actions on prevention should rely on effective

high-level management. The fifth is related to clear and serious penalties for violation. The last, the policy should commit to the broader gender equality goals.

#### Power relation

According to (Wright, 2016), sexuality often utilized as a "control over woman". Particular power will significantly contribute to daily experience of women as minority in male-dominated work. Furthermore, organization characterized by "larger power differentials in the hierarchical structure and in male-dominated structures" is more conducive for sexual harassment (Hersch, 2015). Finding suggests that when the women posit of subordinated positions in organization, they will be more vulnerable to sexual harassment (McDonald, 2012). It is because person with higher position will have control towards the reward and punishment. The misuse of power to subordinate women especially in sexual harassment case can be happened because some of people with power will consider it as the extensions of the right toward the subordinate (Pina and Gannon, 2012).

However, there is a paradox theory that mentioned women with authority will also face the sexual harassment. This is because of women in higher position will challenge the superiority of men in the workplace. Women will also be the target of sexual harassment if "they challenge their subordinate position in gender system" (McLaughlin, Uggen and Blackstone, 2012, p. 626). Therefore, power is one of the central antecedents of sexual harassment (McLaughlin et al., 2012; Pina & Gannon, 2012)

#### The impact of sexual harassment in a work place

Sexual harassment affects both the victim and organization (C. Campbell et al., 2013). For the victim, sexual harassment will result on physical and mental health consequences, consists of anger, anxiety, humiliation, post-traumatic stress disorder and depression (McDonald, 2012; Pina & Gannon, 2012). Moreover, the victim will have lower job satisfaction and less commitment to the organizations. Some of them will quit the job or at least have higher absenteeism. As the result, victims may also have lower earnings because of these situations that not being handled appropriately (Hersch, 2015).

For the organization, the effect of sexual harassment on the victim will lead into increasing turn over and absenteeism. Work place productivity and job satisfaction is also become lower (Diekmann et al., 2013; McDonald, 2012; Pina & Gannon, 2012). Not only that. Organizations have to spend their time and effort to investigating the complaint, paying legal expenses, litigation and compensation for the victim (Hersch, 2015). Apart of

productivity and cost, organization also needs to deal with negative publicity and possibly face difficulty on hiring and retaining employees (Diekmann et al., 2013).

Even though the organization already realized about sexual harassment, handling this issue is still challenging. The case of sexual harassment in a work place remains pervasive and underreported. The victims tend to avoid formal report to the organization (McDonald, 2012). Legislation and organization incentives are not automatically solved the problem. Over and above, the sexual harassment consists of various behaviours and action. Therefore, sexual harassment is "difficult to defined, measure and monitor" (Hersch, 2015). Fortunately, there is one key factor to identify sexual harassment: consistency. According to Stockdale et al., (1995) as cited by (Pina & Gannon, 2012), "individuals would be more likely to characterize behaviour as sexual harassment if the event was seen as consistent in frequency and persistency, if similar behaviours were infrequent in the work environment, and if the incident involved unique behaviour towards the target/victim".

The other thing about sexual harassment is people will react differently to the identical action. It will depend on "organisational status, power, affect (fear, anger), self-esteem and assertion, victim-offender relationship, perceived efficacy and organisational tolerance of SH" (McDonald et al., 2015; Pina & Gannon, 2012). Other than that, according to (Diekmann et al., 2013), "victims typically do not take action against such harassment" because of various reason. Some of victims feel sexual harassment is a humiliation (C. Campbell et al., 2013). They feel ashamed, guilt and afraid in the same time; afraid to lose their job or retaliation from the perpetrator. It is compounded by the lack of knowledge about the rights as well as limited accessibility to external supports such as professional counsellor and workers union (McDonald, 2012). This condition will lead into more psychological distress as well as lower job satisfaction for the victim. As the victim become passive, the awareness on certain problem can be decreasing. The perpetrator does not think that their behaviour is unacceptable and the problem become persists (Diekmann et al., 2013). Therefore, sexual harassment that was being reported in a work place is actually an iceberg (McDonald, 2012).

From organization perspective, sexual harassment can be happened if the culture of the organization tolerates the unacceptable sexual behaviours. It is also related to the effectiveness of harassment remedies. However, according to (C. Campbell et al., 2013; McDonald, 2012), "it is not the organization sex-ratio of the work place that renders sexual harassment problematic, but rather organizational environments that are hierarchical, especially those where cultural norms are associated with sexual bravado and posturing and where the denigration of feminine behaviour is sanctioned".

## RESEARCH METHOD

This paper employ case study to examine sexual harassment in Google as male-dominated industry. There are several steps need to be done in doing case study such as selecting the case, collecting data, data analysis, interpreting data, and reporting the result (Crowe et al., 2011). This paper uses secondary data such as journal, company report, news, and article related to the case. The data was collected from multiple sources to ensure the validity of the data (triangulation) and result on similar conclusion. Data available were organized and analysed based on the key words. From the reviewing process, it can be concluded that there are three main variables that affect the sexual harassment, such as: gender inequality, unclear policy, and power relation.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

On November 01 2018, thousands of Googler around the world have involved in massive walk out as a protest to the company's policy related to sexual harassment case that involved Andy Rubin, a 'father of Android' as well as ex-executive of Google. The protest held from Google's office in Singapore, Tokyo, Europe and East Coast of the United States. This massive walkout is an expression from Google that the company's culture related to sexual harassment is unacceptable (A. F. Campbell, 2018).

The story began in October 2014 when Google gave a hero's farewell to Andy Rubin, an ex-executive as well as the creator of Android (Wakabayashi & Benner, 2018). At that time, the media reported Rubin's resignation because of his passion to start an incubator that focused on technology hardware. His start-ups will focus on developing a new technology related to hardware perspective (Gibbs, 2014). Little people know that Rubin's resignation is because of his case on sexual misconduct in 2013 towards his subordinate by insisted her to performed oral sex in a hotel room. From the report, Google made investigation and as a conclusion, the claim of the victim was credible. After the investigation, Rubin was notified and were asked to do resignation by Google's chief executive, Mr. Page (Wakabayashi & Benner, 2018).

Ideally, Google should fire Rubin without paying anything as compensation because of his accusation. However, Google gave him a \$90 million exit package and paid the instalments every month \$2 million for four years. According to the report made by (Wakabayashi & Benner, 2018), Rubin was not the first and the only one of Google executives that accused on sexual misconduct. For over the past decade, there is three of Google's executive that had been accused by sexual misconduct to subordinate. All of the cases were handled softly by Google through resignation that involved million dollars exit payment;

while there is no obligation for Google to do so. Each time the executives accused by sexual harassment, Google stayed silent with the case and tent to protect the men. Rubin case is only one of the examples how Google dealt with this situation. Even Google invested million dollars in the next Rubin's company (Wakabayashi & Benner, 2018).

On the walkout in November 01, the Google's employee demanded 'work place inequality'. Celie O'Neil-Hart as one of the protest organizers that working as YouTube marketing mentioned that "but there are so many stories that we've heard for so long, and it's time for action and change", as cited when the protest occurred in Google's Mountain View headquarters. According to the organizers, there are around 60% of Googler participated on the walkout action held in US, London, Zurich, Berlin and Singapore. Some of the protester also chanted "women's rights are worker's rights" (Lee & Dave, 2018).

As the organizers, seven of US Googler was also demand Alphabet Inc as Google parent's company to provide fair harassment investigations for the accusers, share the pay-equity data with the workers, and add employee representative to the boards. Google was also considered as sluggish in responding various structural issues, especially related to 'uncontrollable male executive power'. Google was considered as not serious enough in order to create 'equality and safety for underrepresented groups' (Lee & Dave, 2018). From information above, it can be concluded that gender inequality already happened in Google.

As one of the biggest search engines, Google have diverse employees background and culture. For a job seeker, Google is one of the most attractive and prominent company to work as it offers interesting and various benefits. On its company page, Google clearly states that they offer a lot of benefits such as excellent healthcare services, cafes and canteen that provide free nutritious meals and snacks, financial advisors and planning services (such as retirement saving plans), generous parental leave policies, death benefits, as well as extensive opportunities to support personal and professional development All of the benefits are available in order to ensure the welfare and well-being of the employees (Google, 2024). Despite of its benefits and facilities for the employees, Google have to maintain its gender inequality issues.

Gender inequality is common in technological industry. According to (Alfrey & Twine, 2017), technology industry is one of the industries that not so welcome for female workers (Alfrey & Twine, 2017) emphasize that "all organizations have inequality regimes; even organizations that have explicit egalitarian goals tend to develop inequality regimes over time". In technology firms, gender discrimination might be invisible and considered as a normal situation. For example, men will not realize that there is no woman on the teams.

Moreover “the equation of a particular male embodiment with technical competence is pervasive in technology firms” (p. 36).

### Gender ratio

The gender inequality issues are already emerged previously. On 2017, more than “60 current and former Google employees are considering bringing a class-action lawsuit alleging sexism and pay disparities against women” (Levin, 2017). According to the report, they have lower income compared to male workers that have same qualification and position. They also have to struggling with careers development at Google because of the corporate culture. This lawsuit was actually strengthened by the report from US Department of Labour (DoL) “which is arguing that Google systematically underpays women and recently convinced a judge to force the company to hand over portion of the company’s salary records”.

Google denied the accusation by saying that 60 people were a small number. Google also stated that their salary system is blind to gender. Employees will earn income based on their role and performance. Even though Google have claims that they have no gender inequality on payment, it has to be noted that sometimes sexual harassment can also lead into lower earnings. As reported by Wakabayashi and Benner (2018), previously Google already fired 48 employees for sexual harassment for over the last two years. (A. F. Campbell, 2018) also noted that around 94,000 Googler were frustrated with overall corporate culture such as “sexism, racism, unethical government contracts, and a general lack of transparency”. On this situation, it is important for Google to consider that the lower earnings for female workers are the result of corporate culture, not solely the lack of performance. Google has to realize that male-dominated work place is vulnerable towards the sexual harassment into female workers. It will also affect the performance of the employees. This awareness will help Google to develop better safety policy that sensitive and responsive towards the gender issues.

### Unclear Policy

In order to develop the right policy to overcome sexual harassment in a work place, policy makers should carefully examine various factors. Policy makers need to ensure does the sexual harassment is a reflection of individual behaviour or a part of organization environment and characteristic that which produce or conducive for certain behaviours. There is no universal procedure that can be implemented to develop sexual harassment policy. However, policy makers should pay attention on the size of the company, the number

of employees, location, and the nature of organization. Above all, the primary prevention strategies should emphasize on removing the causes of sexual harassment, preventing the development of the risk, as well as enhancing protective factors through policy and training

After the massive walk out, Google made several revisions regarding of its policy. As a Google CEO, (Pichai, 2018) sent email to all Googler about policy changing in order to create better working environment. Some of the key changes are related to how the company will process complaint about sexual harassment by make arbitration as an optional for the victim. Google will also be more transparent related to the investigation on sexual harassment case. (Pichai, 2018) also stated that Google will provide full support for the victims including extended counselling and career support.

The other important thing is the mandatory sexual harassment training. Study from (C. Campbell et al., 2013) result that sexual harassment workshops significantly increase the understanding about sexual harassment. They become more knowledgeable about definition of sexual harassment that prevents them to act unacceptable behaviour. The supervisors are also gained their ability to handle sexual harassment complaint. Through the training, workers will understand more about unwanted sexual behaviours. This understanding will lead into awareness to sexual harassment. Moreover, training will enforce certain norms as value and consensus in a work place. It strengthening by (McDonald et al., 2015) that stated "universal training has an effect on organizational cultures over and above the impact of individual training in that it leads to a greater recognition of sexual harassment".

In order to develop training, it is important to ensure the involvement of all sites across all hierarchical level. The effective training is beyond the relation between boss and subordinate, male and female, in order to gain better understanding toward harassment experiences coupled with effective complaint procedures (McLaughlin et al., 2012). The training should also raise the awareness and clarifying the misconceptions regarding of sexual harassment. Moreover, for the manager, sexual harassment training should include skill to manage emotions and build communication to ensure the managers overcome sexual harassment case appropriately.

#### Power relation

Sexual harassment is more related to aggression rather than seduction (Schweinle et al., 2009 in (McDonald, 2012). The harasser involved on sexual harassment action because they feel powerful toward the victim. Learn from the case of Rubin, the power relation between Rubin and the victim is clear. As Google executive, Rubin has more power towards

the victim as subordinate. Previous case involving Google's executive towards the sexual misconduct is also evidence that the abuse of power is real. Google as male-dominated industry create conducive environment that leads into sexual harassment even without realizing it. Therefore, proactive leadership is needed in order to "shifting the burden of identifying unprofessional behaviour from the (more vulnerable) target to the institution itself" (McDonald, 2012).

## CONCLUSION

From the case of Google, it can be concluded that sexual harassment occurred because of the gender ratio, unclear policy, and power relation. Therefore, it is pivotal to implement strong and clear policy, training about sexual harassment and providing complaint procedures.

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