

# Lethe and aletheia: a study on cases of sexual harassment towards public library staff in Spain

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## Abstract

The results of a study on cases of sexual harassment towards public library staff in Spain are presented, with three objectives: to determine through a survey the experiences of harassment according to its type and perpetrator, to assess whether there was institutional support, and to formulate proposals for the improvement and solution of this problem. The main results reveal the multiple situations of sexual harassment being committed mainly by users, but also by colleagues and superiors, that women suffered most from harassment, and that sufficient institutional support is not given for the prevention and/or correction of such cases. The bodies of public institutions responsible for the problem of harassment in the library field must present proposals to prevent and protect against harassment and thereby enable its prevention and eradication. Considering libraries also as places related to social, human, and cultural capital, it must be ensured that they are free from sexual harassment. Given that no previous works were identified on the subject analyzed, this can be considered the first study focusing on sexual harassment towards library personnel in Spain, thus providing a basis for future work on this topic.

## Keywords

Public libraries; Library staff; Sexual harassment; Legislation; Spain; Institutional support; Improvement proposals; Social capital; Human capital; Cultural capital.

## Acknowledgements

The first and most important thanks goes to the participants in the baseline survey of this study. Since these are experiences of sexual harassment, the value of their participation is even greater. The author of this study hopes that this work and the results achieved will contribute to improving and overcoming the problem analyzed. The second thanks goes to the authors **Barr-Walker et al.** (2021) for sharing their work under the creative commons license; their survey designed to analyze sexual harassment towards *University of California* library staff was used with an adaptation to the case of Spanish public library staff. Without these two contributions, this study would not have been possible. Finally, reviewers A and B are thanked for their corrections and proposals that improved this work.

## 1. Introduction, legislative framework, and theoretical framework

The term “*aletheia*” can be translated as disclosure, revelation, or truth (*Encyclopaedia Herder*, 2021), comprising the removal of *lethe*, the state of being or remaining hidden (Frank, 2012; Alvis, 2018). The truth is thus understood as disclosure. Following the ideas collected in the *Encyclopaedia Herder* (2021), Martin Heidegger argues in his work *The Essence of Truth* that its essence is freedom. This work is a study on cases of sexual harassment towards public library staff in Spain, all from the sense of disclosure of truth that may be affecting their freedom.

The legislative framework on sexual harassment in Spain includes *Organic law 3/2007, of March 22 for the effective equality of women and men* in Spain (*España*, 2020). According to Article 7 of this act, sexual harassment is considered to be any behavior of a sexual, verbal, or physical nature that has the purpose or effect of infringing the dignity of a person, in particular when creating an intimidating, degrading, or offensive environment. In the same article, sexual harassment is defined as any behavior carried out based on the sex of a person, with the purpose or effect of undermining their dignity and thereby creating an intimidating, degrading, or offensive environment. Article 14 sets out the general criteria for action by public authorities. Among these, two stand out:

- Collaboration and cooperation between public administrations in the application of the principle of equal treatment and opportunities.
- Adoption of the necessary measures for the eradication of gender-based violence, domestic violence, and all forms of sexual harassment or harassment based on sex.

Article 48 deals with specific measures to prevent sexual harassment and harassment based on sex at work, including the duty of companies to promote working conditions that prevent harassment, and the need to arbitrate procedures for prevention, dealing with complaints and claims. All of this is complemented by protocols for action against harassment in Article 62, based on which four principles are defined:

- A commitment to prevent and not tolerate harassment.
- Instruction to all personnel to respect the dignity of persons and equal treatment of men and women.
- Confidential investigation of complaints.
- Identification of the persons responsible for assisting those who report or make complaints.

Another previous Spanish law, but in turn relevant to this study, is *Organic law 1/2004, of December 28 on comprehensive protection measures against gender-based violence* (*España*, 2004). In the explanatory memorandum of this law, harassment in the workplace is related to the same concept of gender-based violence.

Finally, sexual harassment is classified as a crime and/or offense in Article 184 of the *Criminal Code* as amended by *Organic law 15/2003*, with prison terms of between 5 and 7 months or a fine equivalent to a salary of 6–10 months. It is mentioned that this will be the case if, within the scope of a continuous or habitual working, teaching, or service provision relation, behaviors occur that provoke an objective and seriously intimidating, hostile, or humiliating situation for the victim (*España*, 2003).

The importance, scope, and need for attention to sexual harassment is highlighted by the re-establishment of the *Ministry of Equality* by the *Government of Spain* in 2020 as a unit independent from other matters (*España*, 2020). In 2008, the *Government of Spain* set up the creation of this ministry (*España*, 2008), but it was abolished as a ministerial department in 2010 (*España*, 2010), and since 2012 laid under the *Undersecretariat of Health, Social Services, and Equality* within the *Ministry of Health, Social Services, and Equality* (*España*, 2012). One of the pillars of the current *Ministry of Equality* is to propose a global societal transformation both in the workplace and based on co-responsibility (*Ministry of Equality*, 2021). The current *Ministry of Equality* consists of governing bodies such as:

- a) *State Secretariat for Equality and against Gender-Based Violence*;
- b) *Delegation of the Government against Gender-Based Violence*;
- c) *Women’s Institute and for equal opportunities*, whose functions include:
  - Training on equality between women and men.
  - Study of the situation of Spanish women in the cultural field.
  - Receipt and channeling of administrative complaints made in specific cases of actual or legal discrimination on the grounds of sex.

Following the basic regulations of this institute, its functions regarding sexual harassment are complemented at international level by the instrument corresponding to the ratification of the agreement of the *Council of Europe* on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (*España*, 2014). Article 40 establishes that the parties shall adopt legislative or other necessary measures to ensure that all forms of unwanted behavior of a sexual nature (verbal, nonverbal, or physical), whose purpose or result is to violate the dignity of a person, in particular when such behavior creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating, or offensive environment, be punished with criminal or other legal sanctions.

“ No previous studies have been found on sexual harassment towards public library staff in Spain ”

Sexual harassment in the workplace has also been addressed from the point of view of theoretical and scientific studies. Authors such as Rocío Pérez Guardo discuss the methodological dilemmas and limitations of such study (Pérez-Guardo, 2012a; 2012b). Meanwhile, Rodríguez-Castro, Carrera-Fernández and Lameiras-Fernández (2019) present a snapshot of sexual harassment in Spain, including a thorough review of sexual harassment in academia and the workplace both in Spain and internationally. They highlight the lack of studies on sexual harassment in the workplace and the replication of studies on sexual harassment in academic environments in Spain in comparison with other countries.

The defining feature of the field of theoretical and scientific studies on sexual harassment and libraries in Spain is its absence. To define the theoretical framework for this study, various searches of the *Web of Science*, *Scopus*, and *Google Scholar* databases were defined accordingly based on a first aim of precision and secondly completeness, opting to combine the options given the few results retrieved. They were defined to retrieve documents whose title included sexual harassment and libraries (with the latter in any part of the document) in *Google Scholar*, and in the case of *Scopus* and *Web of Science*, to recover documents with sexual harassment in the title and libraries in the abstract or keywords.<sup>1</sup> These searches included any type of library (university, public, etc.). In total, combining the results of the searches in each database, 16 unique documents were identified, 12 of which were relevant to the topic searched. Among them, none of them addressed or dealt with sexual harassment in libraries of any kind in Spain, nor therefore sexual harassment towards their staff.

The main issue distinguished among the documents identified and obtained was sexual harassment suffered by library staff (Gasaway, 1991; Watstein, 1993a; 1993b; Ford, 2017; Lieu; Allard; Oliphant, 2019; Allard; Lieu; Oliphant, 2020), specifically for the case of public libraries in some documents (Houghton, 1999; Lieu, 2018). However, this topic is mainly analyzed for university libraries (Von-Stackelberg, 2018; Barr-Walker et al., 2019; Benjes-Small et al., 2019; Barr-Walker et al., 2021).

The results obtained by Will Manley in his 1992 survey on sex and libraries (Manley, 2010) can also be highlighted. As you can read in the screenshot of that author's website, this survey was finally not published by the *Wilson Library Bulletin*, and he was even fired. The responses to questions 6 and 7 of that survey revealed that 14% of the respondents had been sexually harassed by a library supervisor, and that 78% of the women surveyed and 7% of the men had felt sexually harassed by a library user.

To provide context regarding public libraries in Spain, according to the website of the Spanish public libraries, in 2018 (the last year with data available), there were 4,597 public libraries, of which 97.41% are locally administered (MCD, 2021a), viz. by institutions such as city councils. However, in Spain there is a *General Subdirectorate for Library Coordination*, which is part of the *General Directorate for Books and the Promotion of Reading of the Ministry of Culture and Sports*. This subdirectorate is responsible, among other tasks, for managing projects to promote the development of libraries (MCD, 2021b). Its functions include the development of programs and plans for the promotion and improvement of libraries, offering technical services, and advice on library matters. It consists of several areas, in particular library planning (which includes the coordination of training plans for library staff in Spain) and information and regulations (with sections for legal, economic, and administrative content).

To overcome the research gap found regarding sexual harassment towards public library staff in Spain, the following objectives are proposed for this study:

- To describe and assess harassment experiences in a sample of public librarians in Spain.
- To describe and assess the degree of institutional support perceived by staff in relation to such experiences.
- To present proposals from library staff to improve and address this issue.

## 2. Materials and methods

This study is based on the results of a Google Forms survey entitled "Study on sexual harassment towards public library staff in Spain," which was active between 20 March and 17 April 2021, designed based on that used by Barr-Walker et al. (2021) in their recent study on sexual harassment of *University of California* library staff. In that as well as the current study, harassment is defined as unwanted behaviors that can make one feel uncomfortable at work and that are sexual in nature and/or based on gender. The adapted survey can be used as Barr-Walker et al. (2021) allow sharing of their work and survey under the creative commons license with attribution (but not for commercial purposes in derivative works).

Delgado-López-Cózar (2004) elaborated a checklist of minimum information blocks that survey-based studies should include to guarantee validity and reliability. These blocks refer to information on the population, sample, methodology, and data treatment. Note that the purpose of this study is to present the situation regarding sexual harassment that public library staff in Spain may be suffering or have suffered. It is not intended to extract generalizations for the entire population under study through the analyzed sample. For this reason, neither the sampling error nor the confidence interval have been calculated, as these are not considered necessary for the purposes of this study.

Following the checklist of Delgado-López-Cózar (2004), the population of this study is the public library staff in Spain. The designed survey was shared with the library staff using email addresses available in the *Directory of Spanish Libraries* of the *Ministry of Culture and Sports* (MCD, 2021c), retrieved using the advanced search engine with filters of the type "public libraries" and "public". In the latter case, one can also select "specific groups of users (non-specialized)" and "other public", but this group does not include the national or central libraries of the autonomous communities, which have a specific filter

as in the case of specialized libraries and higher-education institutions. In addition, the second filter excludes public libraries for specific groups of users and others that are not integrated into the public library system.

The survey can be consulted in a pdf file uploaded to a project in the *Open Science Framework (OSF)* at <https://osf.io/2guk4>

The survey was sent by email to a total of 4,321 addresses. However, it is estimated that the *Directory of Spanish Libraries* of the *Ministry of Culture and Sports* is not completely up to date, as some delivery errors were received.

Regarding the sample, 87 responses to the survey were received. The survey included a total of 51 items classified into three large sections:

- Section 1: experiences of sexual harassment behaviors during work in the library (17 items)
- Section 2: support and assistance by institutions in matters of sexual harassment (31 items)
- Section 3: demographic information, optional general data, and additional comments (3 items)

The survey instructions stated that, because some questions might be difficult to answer or require negative or traumatic experiences to be recalled, responses could be omitted and the survey terminated at any time. Therefore, although the total number of responses received was 87, the number of responses to each item was variable.

The first paragraph of this section described the survey methodology. That used by **Barr-Walker et al.** (2021) was adapted without problems regarding delivery or data collection. Finally, regarding data processing, the survey instructions stated that it would be anonymous, preventing any link between the responses and the participants. The data were coded and processed using descriptive statistics in *Google Sheets*, which is fully integrated with the *Google Forms* platform that was used to prepare and distribute the survey.<sup>2</sup>

### 3. Results and discussion

#### 3.1. General characteristics of the sample

The total number of surveys received was 87. Catalonia, the Valencian Community, and Galicia stood out with the greatest participation in the study (Table 1). No survey results were received from the autonomous communities of Cantabria and Murcia, or the autonomous cities of Ceuta and Melilla. However, given that each of the survey items could be left blank to respect the privacy and choice of the participants, the three surveys in which the autonomous community or city field was not completed may correspond to these.

By gender, the greatest participation was by women with about 78% (Table 2). This result can be related to the fact that they may have suffered more experiences of sexual harassment than any other gender group, or at least, that they had more to say and transmit about it. Within the framework of this study, one could also consider that more women suffer harassment as they represent a greater fraction of the staff. The author of this study did not even consider this hypothesis, believing that sexual harassment does not have to do with the greater number of people of one gender or another, but rather with other factors. Furthermore, despite the positive correlation between the greater number of women on the workforce and the greater number of situations suffered, a causal relationship cannot be inferred from such a correlation.

The objectives are to describe and assess harassment experiences and the degree of institutional support, and to present proposals to address and improve this issue

Table 1. Total respondents by Spanish autonomous community or city

Autonomous community or city	Surveys collected	Percentage
Catalonia	23	26.44
Valencian Community	12	13.79
Galicia	10	11.49
Andalusia	8	9.20
Community of Madrid	6	6.90
Castille-La Mancha	4	4.60
Castille and Leon	4	4.60
Extremadura	4	4.60
Basque Country	4	4.60
Aragon	3	3.45
Canary Islands	2	2.30
Foral Community of Navarre	1	1.15
Balearic Islands	1	1.15
La Rioja	1	1.15
Principality of Asturias	1	1.15
Cantabria, Murcia, Ceuta, and Melilla	0	0.00
Left blank	3	3.45
Total	87	100.00

Table 2. Total respondents by gender

Option	Total	%
Female	68	78,16
Male	16	18.39
I prefer not to say	2	2.30
Left blank	1	1.15
Gender category or identity different/diverse from or not matching the above	0	0.00
Total	87	100.00

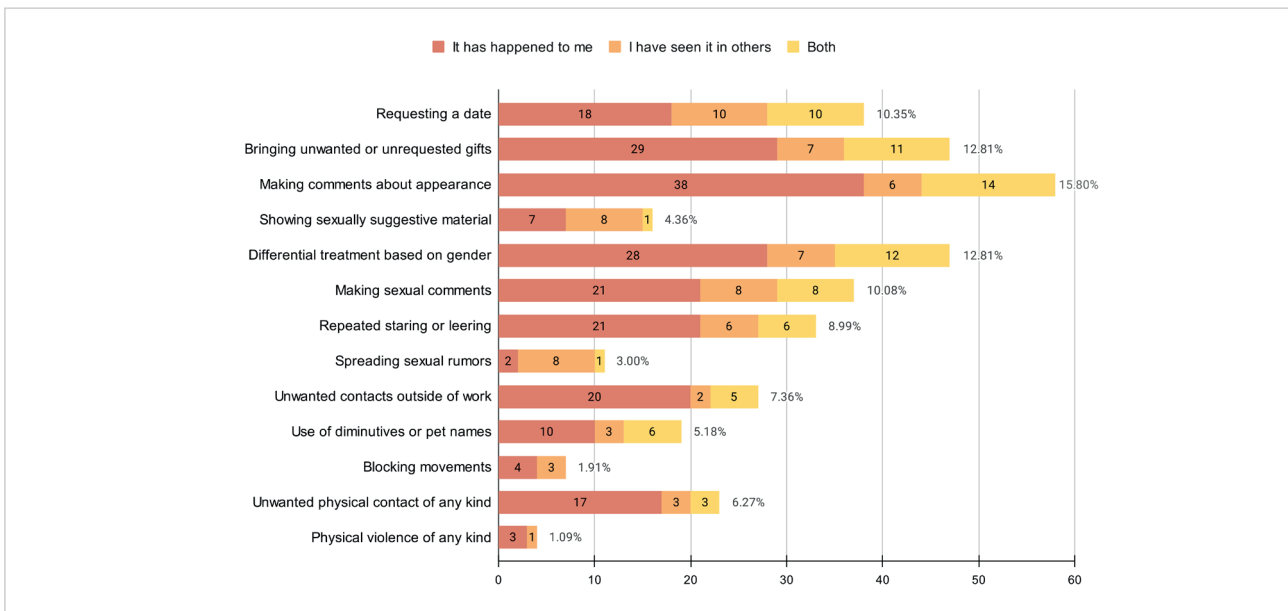
### 3.2. Experiences of sexual harassment

Graph 1 shows the experiences of sexual harassment according to the options “It has happened to me,” “I have seen it in other people,” and “Both.” All the items in this section of the study capture experiences by library staff. The most common cases of sexual harassment are:

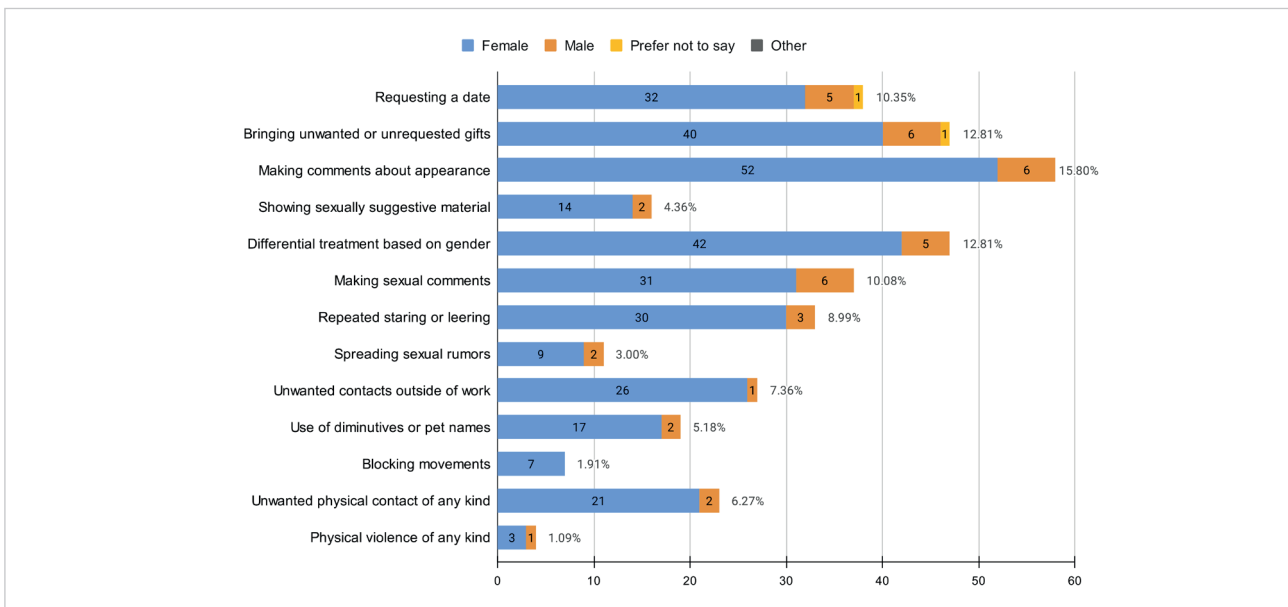
- Comments on appearance
- Unwanted gifts
- Different treatment based on gender
- Requesting dates
- Sexual comments

Also noteworthy are the cases of blocking movement (7 verified cases) and physical violence of any kind (4 cases). Meanwhile, in 15 responses, none of the possible options were indicated for any item. It can thus be interpreted that these respondents had not had experiences of sexual harassment nor seen them in others.

As can be seen from Graph 2, for all the items, women were the largest group to confirm their own experiences, having seen it in others, or both options. Summing the experiences for the above-mentioned options for all the items (367) by gender, 88.28% were registered by women, compared with 11.17% by men and 0.54% by those who preferred not to state their gender. This means that, although the library staff participants include men who have suffered sexual harassment or seen it in others, women are those who have suffered and seen it most.



Graph 1. Experiences of sexual harassment according to “It has happened to me,” “I have seen it in other people,” or “Both”



Graph 2. Sexual harassment experiences by gender

Based on the analysis above by gender, one could discuss the differences between having experienced or only seen acts of harassment. However, the data confirm that women reported the greatest sum of experiences that include “it has happened to me” (i.e., the sum of “it has happened to me” and “both”) for all the items (Table 3), except dissemination of sexual rumors (22.22% for women) and showing sexually suggestive material (exactly 50%). All this implies that women are the group of library staff most affected by experiences of sexual harassment.

367 experiences of sexual harassment were counted in the 87 responses to the survey, mainly towards women

Table 3. Percentage of women’s experiences of “it happened to me” and “both” with respect to the total experiences of each item, also including “seen in others”

Experience	Total experiences “it has happened to me” and “both” reported by women	% of experiences versus the total reported by women*
- Asking for a date	25	78.13
- Bringing unwanted or unrequested gifts	34	85.00
- Making comments on appearance	49	94.23
- Showing sexually suggestive material	7	50.00
- Treating differently because of gender	36	85.71
- Making sexual comments	27	87.10
- Repeated staring or leering	26	86.67
- Spreading sexual rumors	2	22.22
- Unwanted contacts outside of work	24	92.31
- Use of diminutives or pet names	15	88.24
- Blocking movements	4	57.14
- Unwanted physical contact of any kind	19	90.48
- Physical violence of any kind	2	66.67

\* For example, for “Asking for a date,” a total of 32 experiences were reported by women. Among those, 25 corresponded to the options “It happened to me” or “Both,” thus 78.13% of those reported were experienced by the participant.

In addition to the items mentioned above on experiences of sexual harassment, a blank text field was added to the survey to capture other behaviors not yet included, and a further item to include more details about the experiences suffered if so desired. The behaviors added by respondents in the “other” field, were

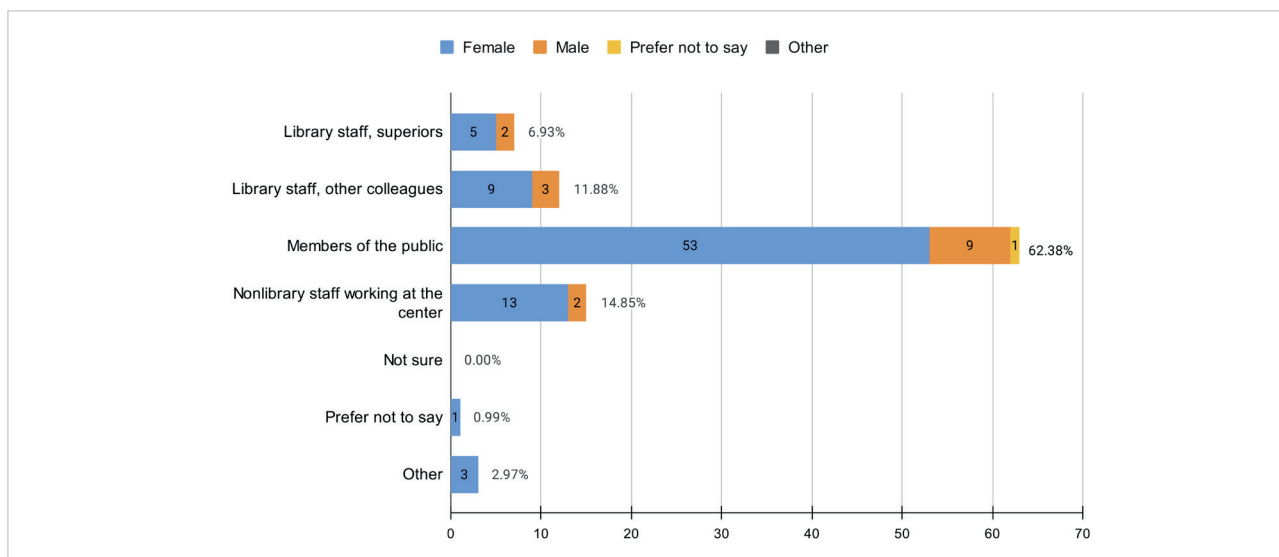
- Demeaning comments.
- Telephone harassment.
- Looking at specific parts of the body.
- Recording of visual material in the bathrooms.
- Experiences of harassment beyond the library space.

Two survey respondents indicated that they had neither endured nor suffered from or seen any of the behaviors included in the harassment experiences mentioned in the survey.

In the field enabling additional details, authorization was requested for sharing. A total of 19 people added more details, 17 of whom gave consent for sharing. Since these 17 comments are very revealing and their sharing has been authorized, as well as considering the annoyance to and effort of the people who made these comments, they can be read verbatim in an attachment to the project in OSF at <https://osf.io/42mkf>

It can be stated that, of the 17 comments added, 14 describe alarming situations of sexual harassment known to the library management, or a lack of support, attention, and action on the part of male and female councilors and a female mayor in one specific case. On the other hand, one comment cast doubt on the existence of sexual harassment, most likely confusing it with abuse, criticizing the present study for subverting reality, and considering the position of the current author to be ridiculous. However, the results of this study can surely be taken as evidence that sexual harassment towards public library staff exists or has existed. Finally, of the two remaining comments, one highlighted misinformation about what harassment is and how to act with people of the opposite sex and/or women, while the other described the feelings by a man that women considered him to be at their disposal or more receptive due to his public role, being pleasant, his physical appearance, or being single.

Harassment was perpetrated mainly by members of the public, but also by colleagues and library managers



Graph 3. Who has had experiences of sexual harassment by gender

The question regarding who knew about experiences of sexual harassment was addressed in another item (Graph 3). Most of the experiences were perpetrated by library users, but in 12 recorded cases the experiences were known by the rest of the library staff (colleagues), and 7 by senior staff.

In this case, and although Graph 3 shows the results disaggregated by gender, what is interesting about these findings is not so much the cases by gender (where again the female gender represents the largest number of cases), since the experiences of harassment are not limited to those in the “it happened to me” group, but may also include experiences lived by women and seen by men or lived by men and seen by women, or other gender options. What is important and alarming about the findings is that experiences of sexual harassment have been observed and perpetrated by colleagues, and even more worrying and shocking, that personnel from public libraries in Spain have observed experiences of sexual harassment by senior staff of these libraries.

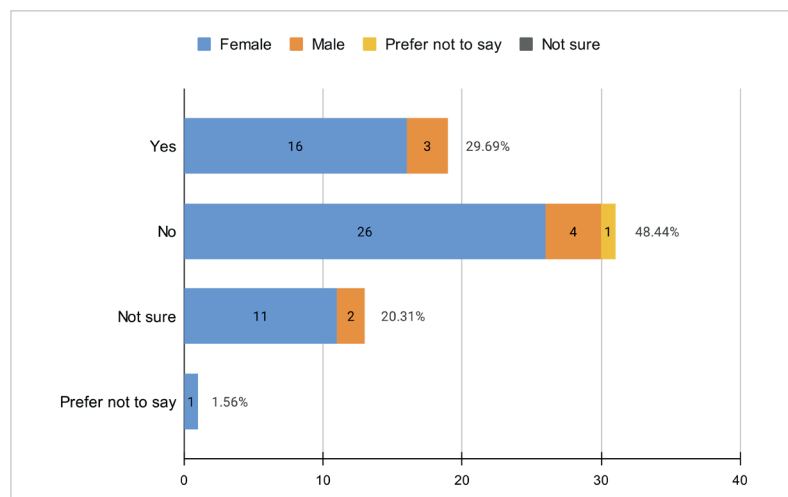
The previous results on experiences of sexual harassment, with women as the group suffering most experiences and being perpetrated mainly by users but also by colleagues and superior staff, coincide with findings of other studies cited in the introduction, the legislative framework, and the theoretical framework (Manley, 2010; Ford, 2017; Lieu, 2018; Lieu; Allard; Oliphant, 2019; Barr-Walker et al., 2019; Allard; Lieu; Oliphant, 2020; Barr-Walker et al., 2021). In Benjes-Small et al. (2019), the percentage of librarians who suffered harassment was lower than that of those who did not, but experiences perpetrated by their superior staff were also identified.

In the scientific literature on libraries, they are considered as institutions related and associated with greater social capital (Vårheim; Steinmo; Ide, 2008; Vårheim, 2009; Johnson, 2010; 2012), human capital (Häggström, 2004; Gilton, 2012; Balapanidou, 2015; Lo; Stark, 2020), and cultural capital (Goulding, 2008; Baker; Evans, 2011; Oliphant, 2014; Summers; Buchanan, 2018). This raises a question and a need for reflection regarding what was achieved by this study: What can be expected of a library whose head has perpetrated sexual harassment towards the staff, or members of the staff to other members?

This reflection is valuable because experiences of harassment can affect at least two dimensions of people:

- The personal dimension, as proved by this study.
- The professional dimension.

As an example of the latter, note that around 30% of the study participants believed that harassment experiences have affected them at work (Graph 4). Fewer than half believed that it did not affect them, with the remaining choosing the option of “not sure” or “prefer not to say.” Women were again the most affected group among those who believe that the experiences affected their work.



Graph 4. Did the experiences of sexual harassment affect your work?

Table 4. Correspondence between personal importance versus that attributed to the body that manages (city councils, etc.) or administers the library

Correspondence	Negative	% Negative	Equal to	% Equal to	Positive	% Positive
Between personal importance and that attributed to the body that administers the library	53	69.74	18	23.68	5	6.58
Between personal importance and that attributed to the management of the library	43	54.43	28	35.44	8	10.13

### 3.3. Degree of institutional support

Institutional support was analyzed using 30 items, which can be classified into four groups:

- Three of the items were designed to enable analysis of the correspondence between the degree of importance given by workers with respect to addressing experiences of sexual harassment, and that attributed to the managing body (city councils, etc.) or library managers and administrators (heads, directors, etc.).
- A second group of items was defined using questions where the answer “yes” denotes positive institutional support for experiences of harassment suffered by public library personnel.
- The third group consists of a set of questions where the answer “no” indicates positive institutional support.
- The final group includes questions about whether or not institutional support was perceived based on differences in characteristics attributed to gender and/or race.

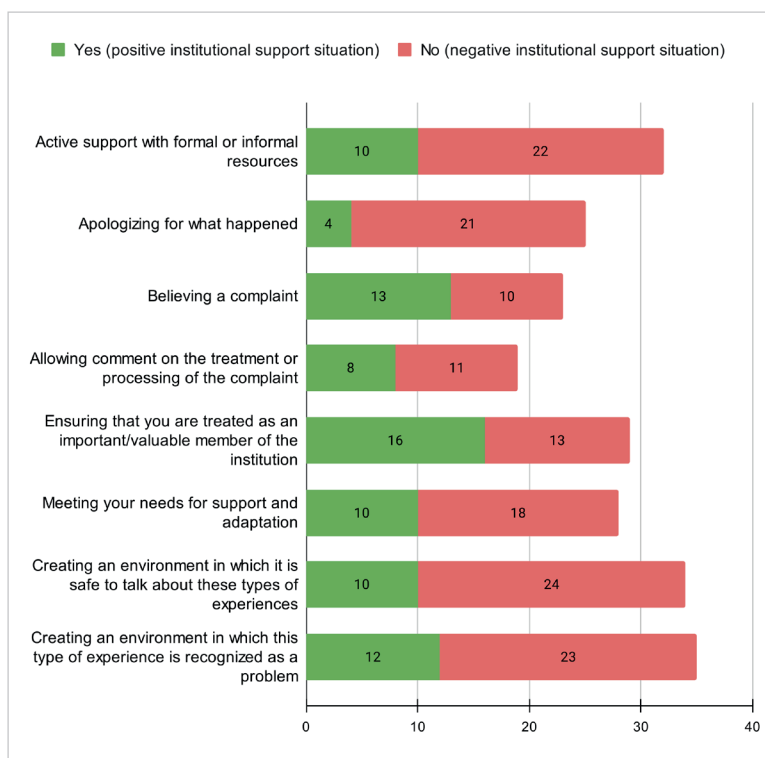
For the analysis of each item addressing the correspondence between the degree of importance given by people with respect to addressing experiences of sexual harassment and those attributed to the body administering the library and the people who run them, there were five possibilities: “very important”, “important”, “moderately important”, “slightly important”, and “not important,” being coded with numerical values from 5 to 1, respectively. For the correspondence analysis, the importance perceived by the body that manages the libraries was subtracted from that perceived by the study participant, and that perceived by the administration of the libraries from that perceived by the worker. This opens up three possible scenarios, i.e., that the correspondence was:

- Positive, with greater importance perceived by the local administration or library than by the library staff.
- Negative, with lesser importance perceived by the local administration or library than by the library staff.
- Equal, with coincident perceived importance.

For both analyses, the correspondence was negative in a higher percentage of cases, than positive or equal (Table 4). About 70% of librarians considered that the organization that manages their library gave less importance to the subject of sexual harassment than they did, while almost 55% believed that the administration of their library placed less importance on it than the participants. Only about 6% and 10% respectively perceived that the managing body and administration of the library gave greater importance than they felt personally. Overall, it can be said that the majority of people who responded to these items believed that the managing body and administration of their library gave less importance to sexual harassment than they do.

Regarding the perception of institutional support, experiences of lack of support were reported for each of the items considered in the study (Graphs 5, 6, and 7). It is worth highlighting the greater negative perception of support in issues such as (Graph 5):

- Creating an environment in which it is safe to talk about these types of experiences.
- This type of experience is recognized as a problem.
- Support via formal or informal resources.
- Apologizing about what happened.
- Allow opinions on the treatment or processing of the complaint.



Graph 5. Perception of institutional support where “yes” denotes a positive support situation. Note: “no answer” or “blank” answers have been omitted to facilitate the interpretation of the results.



- Satisfaction with support and adaptation needs.

Although the perception of institutional support was greater compared with other groups of issues (Graphs 6 and 7), situations of greater lack of support were detected for issues such as:

- The institution did not do enough to prevent this type of experience
- Denying the experience in any way
- Responding inappropriately to the experience when reported
- Making it difficult to report the experience

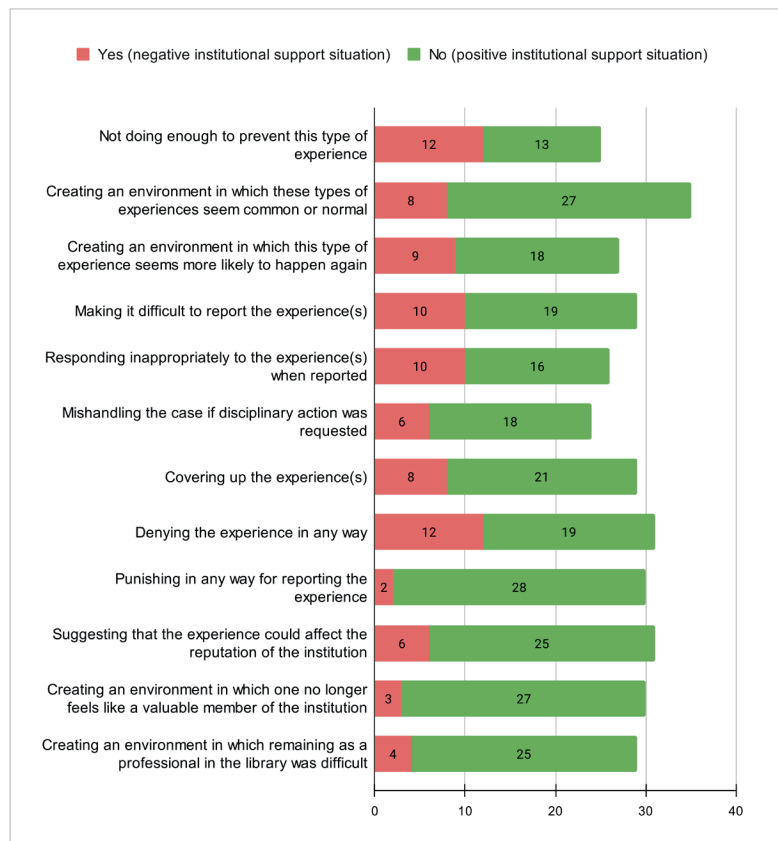
Negative cases of institutional support were also reported, including covering up the experience, suggesting that it could affect the reputation of the institution, and feeling as though you were punished for reporting it (Graph 6). Many of these aspects were also recognized in the work of **Barr-Walker et al.** (2021).

Regarding the perception of institutional support based on characteristics of diversity associated with gender and/or race, although only a single experience was identified for all the items among all the responses, it is no less important to verify (Graph 7).

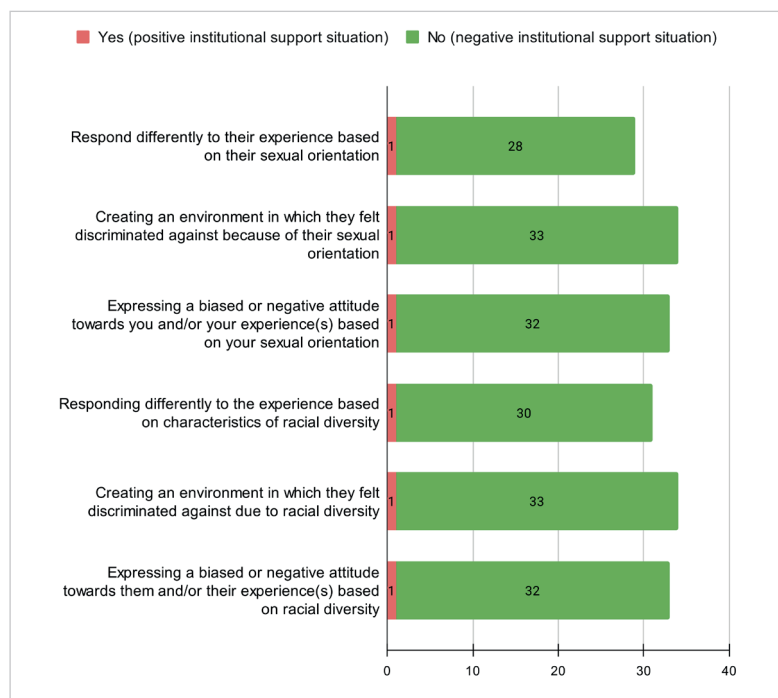
**Gasaway** (1991) already noted that the most important factor in preventing harassment by colleagues and superiors is a strong policy against harassment, consistently applied, along with a continuing education effort. **Watstein** (1993a; 1993b) discussed immediate and long-term preventive solutions at the individual, institutional, and associative levels. The results above question the existence, or at least the content, of the necessary protocols in public libraries in Spain in situations of harassment. Such protocols should serve to avoid a lack of support with formal resources from the institution, or to meet the needs of people who experience harassment, create an environment in which this subject can be discussed, and everything included in the items analyzed in this section.

### 3.4. Proposals for improving and addressing this issue

The author of this study started from the basis that one of the best and most effective and efficient ways to begin to overcome the problem of sexual harassment towards public library staff in Spain is to provide a voice and listen to people who have suffered such experiences. One of the items included in the study asked about the steps or actions that they would like to see implemented to deal with sexual harassment. The responses have been synthesized into a table without considering the number of times they were mentioned and giving equal importance to each (Table 5). A very interesting answer that is omitted is the question of why damaging a book usually carries specific penalties in almost any library, whereas harassing workers does not.



Graph 6. Perception of institutional support where the answer “no” denotes a positive support situation. Note: “no answer” or “blank” answers have been omitted to facilitate the interpretation of the results.



Graph 7. Perception of institutional support based on characteristics of diversity attributed to gender and/or race. Note: “no answer” or “blank” answers have been omitted to facilitate the interpretation of the results.

Table 5. Steps and actions to be taken by libraries

Family workshops	Learning and education
Legal actions and measures	Alert mechanisms (alarms, etc.)
Institutional support and backing for victims	Awareness campaigns
Without impunity, without consent	More actions, not only on designated days (November 25 and March 8)
Pass it on to library associations	Harassment protocols
Do not convey that it must be assumed as part of the day-to-day life of the profession	Support, empathy, and understanding for victims
Give it the necessary importance	Create environments for dialog, so that victims can share their experiences
Not to normalize it	Complaints
Information posters	Offer objective information
More security in libraries	Proper preparation to face it
Making cases visible; do not shut them up: raise their voice	Real and exemplary punishments; effective sanctions
Believe the victims: do not revictimize them	Protect and support staff
Expansion of the library collection on the subject	Egalitarian relationships
Respect	Not turning the page on the issue

#### 4. Conclusions and final comments

The results of a study on cases of sexual harassment towards public library staff in Spain are presented herein.

Regarding the first objective, it can be concluded that numerous experiences of sexual harassment have been identified, mainly towards women and mainly perpetrated by users, but also by colleagues and superiors in the library.

Regarding the second objective, the results obtained indicate a possible lack and a need for institutional support, at the level of both the local administration (city councils) and the library management and bodies, at least in many of the cases in the sample analyzed.

The achievement of the third objective allowed the identification of up to 28 measures offered by study participants, among which one can highlight education or family workshops, and a policy and action protocols in this regard, suggesting that they do not exist, are not known, or are not being made known.

The introduction described legislative support in addition to protocols for action in companies. The results of this study draw attention to this, since several participants proposed the development of protocols as measures to prevent, address, and overcome situations of sexual harassment. This leads one to consider three possibilities:

- That they exist but workers are not aware of them.
- That they exist, but that those responsible for libraries do not make efforts to ensure they are well known.
- That public libraries in Spain, at least where the study participants work, do not have such protocols.

What is clear is that the organizations or people involved in the management of libraries, at both the management and local authority level, must take into account the results of this study by developing protocols against harassment if they do not exist or proposing visibility campaigns if they already exist but are not known. The results of this work can be taken as a foundation for the elaboration of these protocols to be developed, or to improve their visibility in all public libraries in Spain, especially considering the items in Sect. 3.3 on the degree of institutional support, thus covering the expectations and needs of staff involved in harassment situations.

The final item in the survey invited the contribution of additional ideas or comments about the survey itself, the study, or any other aspect. The originality and value of the study, along with its limitations and possibilities for the future, can be understood in part based on the answers to this item. Among its limitations, this study is based on 87 survey responses. The results and conclusions must thus be understood as representing this sample or population group of public library staff in Spain. The study results have thus not been interpreted by generalizing them to the entire population. In this sense, more studies like the current one but covering a greater percentage of the analyzed population are needed to draw more general conclusions on the studied topic.

Other responses to the last item of the survey also deal with possible limitations of the study. For example, it is argued that the line between harassment and human relationships is blurred, and that the current study adopts an incorrect approach that could feed unjustified beliefs and the clash between genders, as well as making personal relationships difficult. However, the truth is that the primary intention of this study is to make possible cases of sexual harassment visible, and in fact it has been shown that do they exist and thanks to this study can be made

“ What can be expected of a library whose head has perpetrated sexual harassment towards the staff, or members of the staff to other members? ”

visible. Furthermore, although the concept of a clash of genders may not be the most appropriate, the results show a more negative situation for women than for any other group among the considered gender options.

Another response to the last item conveys the wish that the study not be used for politics or as a weapon to promote inequality. However, it is a fact based on the responses collected that an effective policy for the prevention and treatment of cases of sexual harassment towards public library staff in Spain is indeed lacking. In any case, it is only intended that the results of this study be used as a weapon to overcome inequality, not to promote it.

Finally, in terms of the limitations, several responses to the last item reflect a possible lack of situations of sexual harassment not covered in the survey but that have been experienced or suffered. Also, a proposal is added to carry out qualitative studies to fully analyze the institutional support in relation to the actions that institutions may or may not be undertaking.

The lack of specific academic studies on harassment in libraries is a fact that was raised and discussed in the introduction. Few works were identified in the bibliographic review in the introduction and the theoretical framework of the work from the searches designed and carried out using the *Web of Science*, *Scopus*, and *Google Scholar* databases. Therein lies the originality and value of this study: with an inevitable minimum margin of error, it can be accepted that this is the first work to be carried out in response to experiences of sexual harassment towards public library staff in Spain. Its value and importance are evident in the various comments added in response to the last item of the survey. Many people were grateful for the preparation of the study, stating that it is something necessary and a good initiative, and grateful for sending the survey and the attention to an issue that does not seem to exist. One person even reported that, in 25 years of work, this was the first time they had been asked about sexual harassment at their work in the library.

At the beginning of this study, the concepts of *lethe* and *aletheia* were used in reference to a hidden truth that it was intended to reveal and unhide to achieve greater freedom. The implications of this work for the future should be clear. In the first place, it is believed necessary to carry out more studies similar to this one, focusing on institutional support in a more qualitative sense, expanding the sample, or identifying models of good practice by all autonomous communities and provinces, or by specific libraries to overcome and avoid harassment experiences where these may take place.

Secondly, if Spain has a legal and legislative framework or resources, a *Ministry of Equality*, an *Institute for Women and Equal Opportunities*, and the *General Subdirectorate for Library Coordination* in the *Ministry of Culture and Sports*, with all the functions mentioned in the introduction, these bodies and institutions must now work to overcome situations of sexual harassment towards public library staff in Spain. A first step would be to analyze the existence of protocols against harassment, and if they exist, something that can be questioned based on the results of this study is their efficacy and effectiveness, which should be analyzed. This work provides proof that sexual harassment towards staff is occurring, and it could be the starting point for actions to be taken by the mentioned organizations and institutions.

Finally, if public libraries are places related to human, social, and cultural capital, they must be free from any situation of sexual harassment, especially regarding colleagues and superiors, but of course also with regard to the public and every possibility. This work also provides a starting point to begin to achieve the above aims.

“ The perception among participants is that they consider this issue to be more important than do the library management or responsible institutions ”

“ The proposed measures include training and education, family workshops, support for victims, and not normalizing harassment ”

## 5. Notes

1. In *Web of Science* the query used was: TI=(“sexual harassment” OR “sexual harassment”) AND TS=(librar\* OR biblioteca\*), in all the indexes of the *Web of Science Core Collection* and for all years.

In *Scopus*, the query was designed as follows: TITLE(“sexual harassment” OR “acoso sexual”) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY(librar\* OR biblioteca\*), for all years.

In *Google Scholar*, two queries were used from the advanced search option: allintitle: library OR libraries “sexual harassment”, which without including citations returned 14 effective results (22 appear on the first page of results, but advancing to the second they become 14); and the query: allintitle: biblioteca OR bibliotecas “acoso sexual”, which did not return even a result. The searches were launched on 8 April 2021.

2. To facilitate replication of the study, the data were added as attachments to the manuscript evaluation process for review. Due to privacy issues of the participants, they have not been made public. For any matter or query, you can write to the author of the study, thus guaranteeing the privacy of the study participants.

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