**Reviewer’s report**

**Title:** Workplace sexual harassment and depressive symptoms: a cross-sectional multilevel analysis comparing harassment from clients or customers to harassment from other employees amongst 7603 Danish employees from 1041 organizations

**Version:** 0  **Date:** 12 Jan 2017

**Reviewer:** Cris Sullivan

**Reviewer’s report:**

This is a large-scale examination of workplace sexual harassment and its impact on depression. The topic is extremely important and understudied.

The abstract could be clearer in conveying that the study examined sexual harassment committed by customers as well as by those within the organizational setting. As currently written, the first three sentences lead the reader to believe the study is about sexual harassment by customers. Then the next sentence mentions harassment by those within the organization but there is no link made that the study actually examined important differences between the two. Starting the abstract with the sentence currently on page 3 ("Sexual harassment conducted by clients or customers may differ from sexual harassment conducted by colleagues, supervisors or subordinates") would be more compelling and could garner more interest in the article.

The strength of the literature review is that it nicely explains how and where sexual harassment by customers might occur and why it may be handled differently than harassment committed within the workplace. A significant weakness of the review is that it is gender-neutral, as though sexual harassment occurs just as frequently against men and women (and by men and women), with equal ramifications. There is a large body of evidence that sexual harassment is a gendered phenomenon, with very different consequences for male vs female victims, and this needs to be addressed in the review as well as the analyses and results.

Analyzing data from two large datasets is another strength of the study, as it resulted in a very large sample size. A major weakness of the methodology, however, lies in how constructs were measured. Measuring sexual harassment with a single item (have you been sexually harassed?), and without providing a definition, is quite problematic and likely led to biased findings. This has been found in studies of sexual assault, where people (especially women) under-report if they are asked if they have been sexually assaulted, but more accurately report when asked about particular acts. Asking whether the sexual harassment was committed by a customer, in one question, and very directly, is even more problematic. As the authors themselves noted in the literature review, people are not likely to even identify particular behaviors by customers as being harassment. Yet the experience could still lead to depression or other symptomatology.

The measure of depression was adequate. It is not clear, however, why "psychosocial workplace initiatives" were measured, how they were expected to relate to sexual harassment or depression, nor why those particular 3 items were used. The authors did note that they thought these 3 items
might relate to depression but there was no evidence substantiating such a connection in the literature review, and I found this argument to be quite tenuous.

The authors categorized workers into five categories but did not provide adequate explanation of how these were determined (an example within each would be helpful). They also again neglected gender, even though it is likely that there were gender differences within the categories. At one point the authors noted that health care workers underreport abuse and harassment. It is not a coincidence that these health care workers are also predominantly women.

This is an extremely important topic and I was hoping to have a positive review of this manuscript. Unfortunately, the methodological flaws preclude the results from being trustworthy, and therefore the study does not advance our knowledge. The authors could rectify their lack of a gendered analysis of this problem, and the inability to establish causation might even be overlooked if other study aspects were especially compelling, but I'm not sure how they can overcome the fact that they measured their dependent variables so ineffectually.

**Are the methods appropriate and well described?**
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

No

**Does the work include the necessary controls?**
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

No

**Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?**
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

No

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I am able to assess the statistics

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