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What Are Norwegian Leaders Doing To Prevent Sexual Harassment In Their Organization?

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## ABSTRACT

Experiencing sexual harassment (SH) can affect the victim in both human and organizational terms. In Norway, leaders are obligated to prevent SH from taking place at their workplace. Despite this, the prevalence of SH at Norwegian workplaces is remarkably high and knowledge regarding what Norwegian leaders do to prevent SH in their organization is missing. Therefore, the aim of this study was to examine what Norwegian leaders are doing to prevent SH in their organization by interviewing leaders regarding how they define SH, their awareness to the presence of a SH- policy in their organization and how this policy is established and implemented. In addition, the question regarding responsibility for the SH- policy and prevention work was discussed in these interviews.

Through a thematic analysis of the semi- structured interviews with twelve Norwegian leaders presenting both the academia and big organizations, three primary categories emerged; clarity vs. “fuzziness”, certainty vs. uncertainty, and finally, proactive vs. reactive. The findings indicated that the leaders presented a clarity, however also “fuzziness” towards several important elements in regards to their prevention work for SH. Also, the leaders` certainty and uncertainty related to their SH- prevention work was presented. Finally, the leaders were perceived as both proactive and reactive in regards to actions conducted to prevent SH.

The study indicates that Norwegian leaders have limited knowledge regarding their organization`s definition of SH and ZT for SH and that they are aware the presence of their SH- policy, but are lacking knowledge when it comes to the policy`s establishment and implementation. Finally, the leaders see the responsibility for their SH- policy and the SH- prevention work as theirs, but had limited knowledge related to what this prevention work actually includes. In further research, a representative sample of Norwegian leaders should be asked what they do to prevent SH at their workplace. Such a study could have led to the drawing of strong conclusions regarding the question; what are Norwegian leaders doing to prevent SH in their organization?

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Today, the Norwegian legislation prohibits sexual harassment (SH) and the Norwegian Labor Inspection Authority clearly presents the consequences for leaders not taking SH at their workplace seriously (Lovdata, 2018; Arbeidstilsynet, 2018). Despite this, SH is a major concern in organizations (Offermann & Malamut, 2002; Popovich, 1988) and numbers from 2018 present how the prevalence of experienced SH at Norwegian workplaces is as high as 10% (SSB, 2018), positioning Norway above the EU average in regards to the proportion of employees experiencing workplace SH (Giaccone & Nunzio, 2015). It is known that many victims and witnesses of SH fear to report incidents, and the reported prevalence of workplace SH might therefore be invalid due to underreporting (Giaccone & Nunzio, 2015). In regards to consequences of SH, research has shown how experiencing SH can be severe both for human terms, such as depression, somatic complaints, and posttraumatic stress disorder (Lim & Cortina, 2005), and for the organization, such as job satisfaction, work- and job withdrawal, including turnover (Chan, Tang, & Chan, 1999; Fitzgerald, Drasgow, Hulin, Gelfand, & Magley, 1997; Lim & Cortina, 2005; Schneider, Swan, & Fitzgerald, 1997).

After the #MeToo campaign started during the Fall of 2017, several incidents of SH, also from Norwegian workplaces, have been given a lot of attention in the media. Examples of such incidents are the cases concerning the Norwegian politicians (Slettholm, 2019) and the Norwegian defense (Flydal, 2019). Although some organizations already have a SH- policy, only 19% of the Norwegian organizations participating in the study done by Bråten & Øistad (2017), reported having a SH- policy and routines for reporting, and 50% were not shure to whether their organization had such a policy or routines. We also know that several organizations seem to establish a SH- policy after incidents of SH have occurred as a reactive action to better cope with the consequences and possible future incidents of SH (Vardiman, Shepherd, & Jinkerson, 2014).

To show the organization's priority of preventing and eliminating SH at their workplace, several organizations state how they have a zero tolerance (ZT) towards SH and some also state this through a ZT- policy (Buhler, 1999; Konop, 2001). Although some research indicate how implementing and practicing a ZT- policy is the best preventing strategy to eliminate workplace SH (Anton, 2015; Gruber J. E., 1998; Magley & Shupe, 2005; Offermann & Malamut, 2002; Perry, Kulik, Bustamante, & Golom, 2010; Schultz, 2003; Williams, Fitzgerald, & Drasgow, 1999), ZT- policies might also be seen as problematic as ZT today has no clear academic definition or consensus. Due to this, both the society and practitioners present a more open definition. However, they omit what their ZT actually means and what it does in their work of reducing SH, leaving the employees on their own to create an understanding of the ZT (Stockdale, Bisom-Rapp, O'Connor, & Gutek, 2004).

It has been shown that the implementation process in regards to organizational policies, such as SH- policies, is important when aiming to prevent SH. If stages of the implementation process are skipped or rushed, the consequences will be shown in the level of success of the policy (Vardiman et al., 2014). First of all, for an optimal implementation process, the root of the problem needs to be addressed to have an understanding and motivation towards fixing the problem of SH at their workplace. Second, there will need to be an openness towards the SH- policy and SH in general (Vardiman et al., 2014).

A clear definition of what SH is and what behavior that will not be tolerated at the workplace should be presented (Lee-Cota & Story, 2018). Today, however, several definitions of SH are used in the world of practitioners such as social media, in academia and in legal settings (Fasting & Sundgot-Borgen, 2000; Lovdata, 2017; Stockdale & Bhattacharya, 2008; Pryor & Fitzgerald, 2003). By presenting a clear definition of SH and unacceptable behavior, the organization shows who they are and in which organizational culture they want to work (Lee- Cota & Story, 2018). From research, we know that in organizational cultures perceived as SH- tolerant, the victims of SH are more frightened to report the incident, are scared to not be taken seriously and do not believe that the perpetrator will receive a fair punishment

(Stockdale et al., 2004). This is also where the leader`s responsibility comes in. When presenting the SH- policy, the leader of the organization should stand in front stating their concern for the organizational and psychological consequences of SH and how such a culture under no surcomstances will be tollerated at their workplace (Vardiman et al., 2014; Lindenberg & Reese, 1996).

Finally, it seems to be of high importance that all employees, at all organizational levels, complete a form of policy training. The crucial part here is that the organization will repete such a SH- policy training with a structured plan. The theme of SH is not something an organization can bring up once, conduct one policy training and conclude that they have done what needs to be done to either eliminate the problem or prevent a possible future problem of SH at their workplace. SH- prevention work is not a check off box, it will need continual attention (Vardiman et al., 2014; Lindenberg & Reese, 1996).

Despite the high prevalence of experienced SH at Norwegian workplaces, the severe consequences of SH and the Norwegian legislation prohibiting SH, we are today left with a gap in research literature as there is no research presenting what Norwegian leaders are doing to prevent SH at their workplace. Due to the increased awareness and attention to the theme of SH the last couple of years, it is of interest to investigate whether Norwegian leaders are taking on the responsibility regarding SH that the Norwegian legislation is presenting, and also what actions the leaders do, due to this responsibility. To get an understanding of what Norwegian leaders are doing to prevent SH, we need to know more about the following; how leaders of Norwegian organizations define SH, the presence of a SH- policy and the establishment and implementation of such a policy and who or which part of the organization that is positioned as responsible for such policies and SH- prevention work.

Through a thematic analysis of the collected data, three primary categories emerged; (1) clarity vs. “fuzziness”, (2) certainty vs. uncertainty, and (3) proactive vs. reactive. The study revealed how there is an insecurity among the Norwegian leaders in regards to several important elements in the work of preventing SH, such as the definition of SH, what the organization`s ZT actually indicates, how they as leaders



know that their employees are aware the content of their SH- policy and their ZT. Also, the findings indicate how the leaders are secure to other SH- preventing elements, such as the presence of a SH- policy, the importance of promoting who they are as an organization and who in their organization that is positioned with the overall responsibility for this prevention work. Finally, the findings present how actions done in order to prevent SH from taking place in the interviewed Norwegian leaders` organizations, are both of proactive and reactive characteristics

Further structure of this thesis includes a theoretical background, a presentation of the methodological approach, a presentation of the results, a discussion linking my results to previous research, contribution to the literature, limitations and suggestions for future research, and finally a conclusion.

## 2.0 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

For many employees in organizations worldwide, a hostile work environment is a reality. Workplace harassment can be said to be a collective expression for different types of distinct hostile behaviors located at the workplace (Keashly & Jagatic, 2003). From the work of Einarsen (2000), we are presented to five types of workplace harassment; SH, scapegoating, work pressure, name calling and physical abuse, the latter four said to be as severe and frequent as SH. Despite the importance of identifying and preventing both bullying and harassment at work (Einarsen, 2000), this thesis will focus on one of the five types of workplace harassment, namely SH. Given the recent attention from the #Metoo movement, the apparent prevalence of SH at the workplace in Norway, and the expressed concern and involvement by some Norwegian leaders (Bråten & Øistad, 2017), SH will be the focus of this study.

SH is seen as a serious organizational and social problem (Salin, 2008; Brodsky, 1976). Due to this, many organizations establish a SH- policy and also promote their zero tolerance (ZT) towards SH and for some through a ZT- policy. Establishment of organizational policies, such as a SH- policy, have shown to be an effective way to both deal with and prevent organizational problems, such as lack of motivation, high

level of absence from work (Vardiman et al., 2014) and SH (Hertzog, Wright, & Beat, 2008; Pina & Gannon, 2012), as employees better understand what behavior that will not be accepted, how the routines regarding reporting of incidents work and also the possible consequences for the harasser (Vardiman et al., 2014; Lindenberg & Reese, 1996). However, these policies are effective and succeed when an implementation process, which includes several elements and steps is conducted without any steps being forgotten or rushed. Among these steps are a clear definition and description to what the problem that needs to be fixed is, policy training and a clear priority towards this prevention work from the leader. These critical steps will be presented in the section focusing on “*Establishment of organizational policies in general*”. Still, there is a lack of research when it comes to what Norwegian leaders do to reduce and prevent SH in their organization.

#### Defining sexual harassment

In the work of preventing SH from taking place at the workplace, defining such unwanted behavior is critical as this will present to the employees what type of behavior that will not be tolerated by this specific organization (Vardiman et al., 2014). Also, there will be no point in establishing strategies for preventing SH if the knowledge to what SH actually indicates is absent. The definition of SH is often presented in the organization's SH- policy or other organizational policies mentioning SH. Through an easily understandable definition and specific examples to what behavior the organization sees as SH, the employees will better understand the definition's content (Lee-Cota & Story, 2018). Despite this, as of today, there is no consensus when it comes to the use of a definition of SH. Therefore, SH can be defined from a research-, legal-, and personal/ psychological perspective. No literature was found in regards to what definition is preferred used. Therefore, all definitions will be presented as they will be relevant for the later discussion.

From a research literature perspective, SH has often been defined as “*unwanted sexual attention*” or “*unwanted sexual approaches*” (Fasting & Sundgot-Borgen, 2000, p. 5). From a legal perspective however, the definition of SH presents both an understanding of the roots of the actions the court will categorize as violation of the

law and the elements required to establish a claim of SH (Stockdale & Bhattacharya, 2008). By Norwegian legislation, the Norwegian Equality and Discrimination Act defines SH as “*any form of unwanted sexual attention that has the purpose or effect of being offensive, frightening, hostile, degrading, humiliating or troublesome*” (Lovdata, 2017).

Also, as the interpretation of unwanted and unwelcome attention is subjective, sexualized behavior can, through this subjective interpretation, be perceived differently as both harmful and unwelcome (Stockdale & Bhattacharya, 2008). This represents a personal definition of SH, meaning that an incident perceived as SH for one person might for others just be innocent flirting or joking. Therefore, SH can also be defined based on the victim's experience, belief and perception rather than a fixed description of what SH is (York, 1989; Offermann & Malamut, 2002). Finally, when defining SH in a workplace context, it is important to be aware the difference between SH and workplace SH. Workplace SH can be defined as an «*unwelcome sex- or gender- related behaviour that creates a hostile work environment or quid pro quo behaviours, where the unwelcome behaviour becomes a term or condition of employment or advancement*” (Pryor & Fitzgerald, 2003, p. 79). The difference between a *hostile work environment SH* and *quid pro quo SH* is that the former tells how the behavior is pervasive or sufficiently severe, but does not involve consequences for the individual's employment, while quid pro quo involves that the harassing conduct of acceptance will result in consequences for the individual's employment (Stockdale & Bhattacharya, 2008).

Summing up, it is important to be aware the different definitions of SH as they present a different focus towards the prevention work of SH. Although different perspectives presenting different definitions of SH do exist, there is a similarity concerning their focus to how the sexually harassing behavior is either unwanted or unwelcome. The organization's definition of SH does matter as it is a critical stage in the work of preventing SH and presents to the employees what behavior the organization will and will not tolerate (Vardiman et al., 2014). Lastly, for the organization to establish strategies to prevent SH from taking place at their workplace, the organization needs to construct a definition and understanding of what

SH actually indicates. Otherwise, how can they prevent something they do not understand?

The next section will present what the Norwegian law says in regards to SH and what will be expected as a minimum from all Norwegian organizations and leaders in the work of preventing SH from taking place at their workplace.

#### What does the law say about sexual harassment?

In contrast to a number of other countries not having laws concerning workplace harassment (Fusilier & Denny, 2014; Paludi, Nydegger, DeSouza, Nydegger, & Dicker, 2006; Ulusoy, Swigart, & Erdemir, 2011), Norway has had a prohibition of SH through both the Working Environment Act (§4-3) and the Gender Equality- and Discrimination Act (§13) ever since 2002. Together with a description of what SH means, the law also states that the organization`s and educational institution`s leaders and employers are to prevent both harassment and SH within their area of responsibility (Lovdata, 2018). If leaders or employers do not take an incident of SH seriously or do not follow the organization`s routines, the Norwegian Labor Inspection can be contacted with goal of such a situation never occurring again (Arbeidstilsynet, 2018). According to Arbeidstilsynet (2018), in cases of SH at the workplace, it is the employer who is positioned with the responsibility of following up the incident afterwards. Also, by the Norwegian Gender Equality Act (§25), the employer is required and responsible for preventing incidents of SH at the workplace by actions such as establishing policies or campaigns creating awareness (Arbeidstilsynet, 2018). As the establishment of a SH- policy is said to be the first step of preventing SH (Lee-Cota & Story, 2018; Couch & Frates, 1993), it is of interest to see how this legislation motivates the leaders to establish such a policy. The employers` responsibility in regards to preventing SH also includes taking victims and those reporting incidents of SH seriously and follow up all cases (Arbeidstilsynet, 2018).

In the work of preventing SH at the workplace, what the Norwegian law says about SH is important to take into consideration as it highlights what will and what will not be allowed for the organization and also what the organization and its employees at

different organizational levels are obligated to do. As of today, leaders of Norwegian organizations are obligated to prevent SH from taking place at their workplace and the establishment of SH- policies is highlighted as an alternative action in this prevention work (Arbeidstilsynet, 2018).

#### What are the antecedents of sexual harassment?

When establishing strategies to prevent SH from taking place at the workplace, it is critical to be aware of the possible antecedents to the SH. If the underlying reason for the SH is not identified, there is a great chance the developed SH- policy will not work as planned, namely to eliminate SH, as the policy's preventing actions are not established with the root to the problem as its foundation (Vardiman et al., 2014).

Despite the Norwegian law informing how the organization and its leaders have a responsibility in regards of preventing SH (Arbeidstilsynet, 2018), there are a number of antecedents for SH. According to Bell, Quick & Cychota (2003), the foundation for these antecedents can be called susceptibility to SH and is characterized by organizations presenting some precursors or risk factors, such as for example skewed gender ratios and a clear difference in power between female and male employees. During the susceptibility to SH, the employees might experience a low- level SH such as inappropriate touching or jokes about a hostile environment. Without preventive strategies or actions being implemented, this low- level of SH can escalate to rape, assault, or sexual coercion (Bell et al., 2003).

Both the severity and occurrence of SH are affected by the organizational context. A combination of social factors, such as leadership behavior or shared perceptions of organizational climate, and structural variables, such as job- gender context, can both interactively combine and affect the likelihood of harassment occurring at the workplace (Stockdale & Bhattacharya, 2008). In regards to the organizational context, both the organizational culture (Denison, 1996) and the social climate (Stockdale & Bhattacharya, 2008) are important elements.

### *Organizational culture and the social climate*

In regards to the incidence of SH, the organizational culture is an important variable due to its ability to strengthen the relationship between the employees as they establish a shared perception and understanding of the daily practices and collective local norms (Hofstede, Neuijen, Ohayv, & Sanders, 1990). Organizational culture can be defined as “*the deep structure of organizations, which is rooted in the values, beliefs, and assumptions held by organizational members*” (Denison, 1996, p. 624).

The social climate is an important aspect of the organizational culture and is, according to Timmerman & Bajema (2000), relevant in regards to the occurrence of SH in the workplace. Social climate can be defined as “*the shared meaning organizational members attach to the events, policies, practices, and procedures they experience and the behaviors they see being rewarded, supported, and expected*” (Ehrhart, Schneider, & Macey, 2013, p. 69). A positive social climate represents an employee-orientation rather than a focus only set to the work the employees do. According to Timmerman & Bajema (2000), organizations presenting such an employee-orientation, tend to be less tolerant for SH. Welsh (1993), highlights the importance of a positive social climate with the fact that employees treated with respect showed a lower number of reported SH incidents.

The work of Hulin, Fitzgerald, & Drasgow (1996) showed how the organizational climate is a critical forerunner in the occurrence of sexual harassing behavior, as the organizational climate presents the organization's tolerance for SH and is the element that in harassment cases will define the contingencies between behaviors of SH and its outcome(s). This implies that the organizational climate defines if harassment and associated behavior, such as reporting experiences of SH, either will be punished, ignored or rewarded. The organizational tolerance for harassment, meaning a specific dimension of organizational climate, will be formed by the employees' perception of those contingencies (Hulin et al., 1996).

Organizations representing a harassment tolerant climate are described as a critical trigger to the occurrence of SH as harassing individuals tend to sexually harass only when positioned in circumstances allowing them such behavior. This means that

those who are motivated to sexually harass their colleagues will be more able to do so in organizational contexts facilitating or permitting harassing behavior. Therefore, the organizational characteristics of the specific workplace is relevant when determining incidents of SH (Stockdale M. S., 1996).

Many victims of SH do not tell others at their workplace about their experiences (Brooks & Perot, 1991; DuBois, Knapp, Faley, & Kustis, 1998; Fitzgerald et al., 1995; Gutek B. A., 1985; Schneider et al., 1997; United States Merit Systems Protection Board, 1995). However, for those who do, organizations perceived as SH-tolerant, especially female employees will experience filing a SH complaint as risky, that he/she will not be taken seriously, and that the harassing perpetrator will not receive any serious consequences for his/her actions due to the SH-tolerant climate (Stockdale et al., 2004). Unfortunately, female employees perceiving their organization as SH-tolerant will often experience a higher level of harassment than their male colleagues (Fitzgerald et al., 1997). Also, Hulin et al., (1996) found that more female employees than male employees characterized their organization as SH-tolerant. This reporting was dominant in organizations with male supervisors or where the female employees were one of the first female employees in a specific job category (Hulin et al., 1996).

In addition, employees in organizational climates tolerant to harassment will often perceive strong contingencies between backlash or career disruption and complaints and weak contingencies between SH and sanctions. These perceptions are shown to often affect the reporting of harassing incidents (Brooks & Perot, 1991). An organization representing a SH-tolerant climate or cases of SH not taken seriously by the leader, most probably already has a SH-problem (Stockdale & Bhattacharya, 2008).

Previous research also presents how SH can be a result of the fact that women are not wanted in some workplaces and are therefore not respected as members of this organizational culture or particular work groups (O'Hare & O'Donohue, 1998; Reskin & Padavic, 1994). Through research, a link between occupational segregation at the workplace and SH has been found, often presented through female employees

being held back from opportunities by male supervisors (Stockdale & Bhattacharya, 2008). From Stockdale & Bhattacharya (2008) we know that female employees in work groups and occupations perceived as male-dominated, which in general have shown to have a higher level of SH (Fitzgerald et al., 1997), are disproportionately targeted for SH. When encountering men feeling threatened by the other individuals' (often female) emerging status and power, they often feel threatened in regards to their sense of privilege and power. In such situations, women are particularly vulnerable and at risk of becoming victims of SH (Berdahl, 2007; Stockdale & Bhattacharya, 2008).

In the work of understanding what causes SH, an indication toward who harass is critical as this also can give an indicator to why the SH is occurring in the organization (Vardiman et al., 2014). In regards to this, Stockdale & Bhattacharya (2008) found how specific beliefs and attitudes regarding gendered social structures are typical characteristics for a harasser and that it is much more likely to label behavior as SH when the harasser is positioned with more power than the victim (Gutek, Morasch, & Cohen, 1983; Kenig & Ryan, 1986; Lester, et al., 1986; Popovich, Licata, Nokovich, Martelli, & Zoloty, 1986). From Dall'Àra & Maass's (1999) research, we also know that men categorized with a hostile attitude towards women, often will target status-seeking women, for example those women with the ambition to break the glass ceiling. From Statistics Norway, numbers from 2016 present how 20% of the SH-victims were harassed by colleagues, while 6% were sexually harassed by someone higher in the organizational hierarchy, such as their leader (Statistics Norway, 2018).

Summing up, there are today several antecedents to SH (Bell et al., 2003) and it is therefore important to know and be aware of these antecedents to SH in the organization as this knowledge is critical in the work of creating and establishing strategies and actions to prevent SH (Vardiman et al., 2014). When working towards decreasing and preventing SH at workplace of Norwegian organizations, understanding what type of organizational culture and climate each of the organizations present will be important as it will inform us about where they stand in regards to the prevention work of SH and possible improvements in their strategies (Hulin et al., 1996). If the Norwegian organizations' climates are characterized as



SH- tolerant, SH is perceived by the employees as tolerated and the possibility of prevention work is therefore reduced (Stockdale M. S., 1996). Therefore, when eliminating and preventing SH in Norwegian organizations, we are in need of knowledge when it comes to the organizational culture, with the leader of the organization in front, and how these leaders understand their role and need to put their foot down and either strengthen or establish a culture where all employees understand that such unwanted behavior will not be accepted in their organization (Vardiman et al., 2014).

### Prevention of sexual harassment

In this section, theory concerning how to prevent SH at the workplace will be presented and the main focus will be on the four stages by Vardiman et al., (2014) since these are considered critical to follow when establishing and implementing an organizational policy. Also, theory regarding SH- policies, ZT for SH, and finally, the leaders` responsibility in regards to preventing SH at the workplace, will be presented.

### *Establishment of organizational policies in general*

The establishment and implementation of an organizational policy is not something that will just happen. To work appropriately effective in an environment with consistent change, a policy needs to be planned and well- thought- out. In such planning, it is highly recommended to start with the end in mind with focus towards all possible pitfalls associated with an implementation of a long- term plan. It has been shown how the majority of new policy development is motivated by an urgent need to understand a condition or situation that is dissatisfying and the establishment and implementation is therefore often rushed without taking into consideration the long term impact and consequences of a full implementation (Vardiman et al., 2014). Luckily, Vardiman et al., (2014) established four stages that is highly critical to follow when establish and implementing an organizational policy.

Stage one highlights the importance of clarifying and identifying the correct issue(s) that needs to be addressed. If the correct issue(s) or roots to the problem(s) are not identified, the use of the policy will not be successful as there is a possibility that the new developed policy will not reduce or eliminate the original problem. Stage one is also the stage where the policy development process will need to be decided (Vardiman et al., 2014).

At stage two of the process, the desired outcomes of the policy establishment should be expressed. Also, what to do and what not to do will be identified and the leadership should now show a high level of commitment to the developed policy (Vardiman et al., 2014).

Stage three includes communication of the policy to all levels of the organization. This is also the stage where all employees are to be both trained and instructed to become more aware of the organizational policy and its correct use and also better understand the policy's indication (Vardiman et al., 2014; Howard, 2008). According to Reese & Lindenberg (2004), training effectiveness can be seen as the strongest predictor in regards to policy satisfaction, underlining the importance of training regarding the content of the policy and is said to be needed when both communicating and applying the policy (Antecol & Cobb-Clark, 2003; Cochran, Frazier, & Olson, 1997; Franke, 2008; Vijayasiri, 2008; Williams et al., 1999).

Finally, at stage four, organizations need to prepare for both acceptance and resistance as a result of the new developed policy as employees either understand or do not understand the policy, its content and importance due to the policy not being written specifically enough. This again will affect the effectiveness of the implementation. Therefore, for the employees to support the new policy, the policy should be perceived as simple, clear, and developed through use of a participative method, meaning that those who actually are to use the policy have been invited to say their opinion and reflections during the establishment of the policy. Also, by calling the policy guidelines, the majority of the employees will perceive the policy as more flexible and not just a list of rules, making it easier for them to relate, understand and use the policy (Vardiman et al., 2014).

Summing up, the establishment of organizational policies are often, despite the recommendations to focus on the long-term effects, rushed to satisfy a current organizational problem (Vardiman et al., 2014). Furthermore, Vardiman et al., (2014) present four stages that all should be conducted if the goal is to establish a successful organizational policy. It is not known whether Norwegian leaders follow these stages in the process of establishing organizational policies, and specifically SH- policies. In the following section, the importance of an organizational policy for SH and how such a policy is critical in the work of preventing SH at the workplace will be discussed.

### *Sexual Harassment Policy*

As of today, there is no Norwegian law that obligates organizations to establish an organizational policy with a main focus of SH. However, leaders of Norwegian organizations are, as previously mentioned, obligated to prevent incidents of SH at their workplace and the establishment of a policy for SH, a SH- policy, is one such possible preventing action (Arbeidstilsynet, 2018). Although Norwegian leaders are not obligated to establish a SH- policy, establishing a comprehensive SH- policy is, according to Lee-Cota & Story (2018) and Couch & Frates (1993), the first step in preventing SH, and can be defined as *“a written document that typically indicates an organization’s prohibition against sexual harassment and the procedures for filing a complaint”* (Fusilier & Penrod, 2015, p. 53). Despite the fact that research literature recommend an establishment of a SH- policy in the prevention work of SH, only 19% of organizations in the Norwegian United Federation of Trade Unions (Norwegian: Fellesforbundet) and Norwegian Union of Municipal and General Employees (Norwegian: Fagforbundet) have a SH- policy and routines for reporting, 50% did not know if their organizations had such a policy or routines and only 9% of these organizations had a plan of actions with concrete goals regarding prevention of SH (Bråten & Øistad, 2017).

During the last couple of years, especially after the #MeToo campaign started Fall of 2017, a concern regarding reducing workplace SH has increased. Therefore, an establishment of an antiharassment organizational culture (Does, Gundemir, & Shih, 2018) through the use of a new, or re- establishment of an already established, SH-

policy has become more widespread (Gruber J. E., 1998; Schultz, 2003; Williams et al., 1999). However, although many organizations establish or re-establish policies and procedures informing how to deal with SH- incidents (Hertzog et al., 2008), several SH- policies have shown to be missing elements such as confidentiality protections and sanctions, negatively affecting the quality of the policy (Reese & Lindenberg, 2002, 2004).

The lack of critical elements can affect the number of SH- incidents being reported and that can be explained by the organizational procedures themselves (Riger, 1991). Therefore, it should be underlined that establishing a policy is not enough to prevent SH from the workplace, the quality of the SH- policy is also important (Haas, Timmerman, Höing, Zaagsma, & Vanwesenbeeck, 2010).

In addition to the importance of how to establish organizational policies in general, it is also of importance how organizations establish and implement their SH- policy. Lee-Cota & Story (2018) created seven keys representing how organizations who are either establishing or re- establishing their SH- policy can establish a strong and efficient SH- policy. These seven keys will be presented in this section.

First, a *strong statement* needs to be presented. This means that the top management needs to present their strong commitment and understanding to the importance of a SH- policy and convince the employees that SH under no circumstances will be tolerated at their workplace (Lindenberg & Reese, 1996). This statement can in turn make the employees understand that their workplace represents a culture where SH- claims will be taken seriously, that the harasser(s) will face consequences, something that can result in more SH- victims coming forward (Lee-Cota & Story, 2018).

Second, the policy should present an easily understandable *definition* of SH. This part of the policy should include a definition of SH and also present to the employees specific examples of such conduct presented in the definition (Lee-Cota & Story, 2018), and how the policy will be flexible so that a variety of situations will be accommodated (Couch & Frates, 1993). By presenting a definition of “what we see

as SH in our organization”, employees can be more aware and better understand what behavior will and will not be tolerated and will make them rethink and reflect on their own behavior (Vardiman et al., 2014).

As a third key, the policy should *outline reporting procedures*, meaning clear presentation of the reporting procedures (Lindenberg & Reese, 1996). Despite this, from the work of Lindenberg & Reese (1996), we know that employees in organizations with established SH- policies are often aware of the policy’s existence, however, are unsure about the routines for reporting incidents. For reporting of incidents to take place, understanding the reporting routines is crucial. Therefore, the organization should invite employees representing all organizational levels in the policy development so that they all have something to say (Vardiman et al., 2014) and will be aware of their rights and understand how to handle issues of SH. With a clear presentation and understanding of the reporting procedures, the chances of SH-claims being reported will increase, something that enable an effectively and quick resolution of complaints. Also, the reporting procedures should identify two or more trained and neutral individuals to investigate, positioned at different organizational levels, which the victims or observers of SH can report incidents to (Lindenberg & Reese, 1996). This is important as reporting to your supervisor will be difficult, and most likely not occur, if he/ she was the perpetrator (Lee-Cota & Story, 2018).

As a fourth key, the SH- policy should provide a *safe, confidential platform* providing the employees with an anti- relation assurance and a confidentiality statement to further encourage reporting (Lindenberg & Reese, 1996). Several employees are uncertain about or dissatisfied with some aspects of the SH- policy such as confidentiality, feedback, and fairness. Due to this, it is for many employees difficult to trust both the impact and effectiveness of their organization’s SH- policy (Lindenberg & Reese, 1993).

Fifth, an *explanation of the investigation process* should be outlined in the SH- policy, presenting to the employees how all complaints will be investigated both thoroughly and promptly, and how perpetrators will receive a range of sanctions. This part of the SH- policy should also present how the severity of the incident will be

important when determining the level of sanctions for the perpetrator (Lindenberg & Reese, 1996).

Sixth, it is important that the finalized SH- policy is distributed to all employees and that *policy training* for all employees is required (Lee-Cota & Story, 2018) as prevention- and training efforts has been found to help the establishment of a SH-intolerant climate (Stockdale et al., 2004). The policy training programs should be carried out by both the employees and the supervisor. Through policy training programs, the awareness of what unacceptable behavior involves will increase. Also, by supervisors conducting sensitivity training, the interaction with all parties involved in a SH- incident will be improved (Lindenberg & Reese, 1996). The employees should also receive a written acknowledgement informing that they have received, read, and understood the SH- policy and a copy of the policy should always be easily accessible (Lee-Cota & Story, 2018). However, conducting a policy training once will not be enough. Most organizations will hire new employees every year. Therefore, policy training will need continual attention (Vardiman et al., 2014; Lindenberg & Reese, 1996).

As the seventh and final key, the employees should receive a *policy survey* intent to measure the presence of SH at the workplace, where the results can increase the awareness of SH (Lindenberg & Reese, 1996). The survey should also include questions regarding the policy training so that data regarding the quality and possible changes to the policy training can be collected and taken into consideration (Vardiman et al., 2014).

Summing up, based on research, the establishment of organizational policies, such as SH- policies, perceived as easy to both understand and use for the employees, will be a critical phase in the work of decreasing and preventing SH (Lee-Cota & Story, 2018). By the SH- policies, the employees` awareness regarding what is/ is not tolerated when it comes to SH at their workplace, will increase (Vardiman et al., 2014). Also, through a clear SH- policy, the employees will be better prepared for what they should do when it comes to reporting routines if incidents of SH do happen. Understanding the reporting routines is critical as it can make it easier for

victims or witnesses of SH- cases to report the incident and by more cases being reported, the organization can easier map out the possible causes for SH at their workplace (Lindenberg & Reese, 1996). Based on this, in their SH- prevention work, Norwegian leaders should systematically establish and implement their SH- policy in order to create a successful action when preventing SH. However, per today we do not know whether Norwegian leaders are conducting such a systematic establishment and implementation.

### *Zero Tolerance for sexual harassment*

“Zero Tolerance” (ZT) is often represented in descriptions for SH- policies (Schimmoeller, 2012), and has become a popular term when describing what organizations do to wipe out discriminating or unwanted and illegal behavior at the workplace, such as SH. The research conducted tells us that, in regards to SH, ZT- policies appear to have the most potential in regards of reducing harassment (Anton, 2015; Gruber J. E., 1998; Magley & Shupe, 2005; Offermann & Malamut, 2002; Perry et al., 2010; Schultz, 2003; Williams et al., 1999). ZT has not yet either been consistently defined or implemented in research. However, despite the lack of definitions and specific guidelines, there is an increasing number of organizations informing how they have a ZT and some even develop ZT- policies for SH to be protected from liability (Buhler, 1999; Konop, 2001).

According to research literature, there is no clear academic definition today of what ZT indicates (Stockdale et al., 2004). This way, due to lack of a concrete and clear definition of ZT, employees in organizations presenting a ZT for SH are just informed how their organization promotes a ZT- policy, but are however left on their own to figure out what the ZT- policy indicates and involves and without taking into account the possible pitfalls of such a ZT- policy (Stockdale et al., 2004). Therefore, although there are no academic definition of ZT, the definitions presented by the organizations can be called popular definitions and are often divided into two general definition classes. On one side, we have the “absolutist” definitions of ZT, informing the employees how SH is strictly prohibited at their workplace and will in no form be tolerated and how the strongest possible penalty, often job termination, will be the consequence required for SH- behavior (Stockdale et al., 2004). On the other side, we

have the “symbolic” definitions of ZT, where the organization informs the employees about their serious concern for SH, however, they permit flexible penalties as the penalty will depend on the seriousness of the SH- incident (Stockdale et al., 2004). The symbolic approach is, however, criticized for sometimes being too flexible, making it too easy for employees to symbolically adopt a ZT language without looking into and addressing the root that is causing the harassment (Stockdale et al., 2004).

Compared to standard policies, ZT- policies are according to Gruber J. E. (1998) showing a higher number of SH- incidents being reported by victims and are therefore able to decrease the prevalence of SH. Also, formal ZT- policies for SH has shown to increase the likelihood of less severe types of SH- incidents being reported by employees and an increased likelihood for bystanders reporting more severe incidents of harassment compared to more standard policies (Jacobson & Eaton, 2018).

Although ZT seems to present what we hope it means; that no harassment will be tolerated and that all violations will be punished, all practitioners do not agree in regards to how ZT is only giving positive consequences for the organization. Research show how leaders often tend to support ZT as it promotes a strong statement in regards to organizational discipline, but does however take little discretion, something that can be criticized as it can be ineffective and lead to random punishments (Schimmoeller, 2012). Also, a ZT- policy can be perceived as having a low flexibility in the decision- making process as the leader is positioned in a kind of “boxed- in” situation. From this, the employees might resist using the policy. The more inflexible the policy is, the more consistent the outcomes and decisions will become. Also, a policy perceived as inflexible can result in questionable solutions presenting how “one size fits all”. However, by constantly updating and revising the policy, the challenge(s) can be addressed, but this again can lead to a robust and large policy that rarely will be read or used (Vardiman et al., 2014).



There are three potential consequences of promoting a ZT. First, there is the possibility that ZT can increase seatbacks for those passionate about gender equality. Second, ZT can damage an organization`s credibility when actions do not meet the ZT standards created by the society and the employees. And finally, ZT can lead the organizations to prioritize form rather than substance (Stockdale et al., 2004). Despite the fact that focusing on a ZT should lead to organizational climates being intolerant for SH, ZT may establish standards being too difficult to achieve, and will therefore undermine the efforts to positively influence the climate and change behavior. A lack of alignment of behavior of policy will form an organizational climate rather than procedures and rules. Therefore, if the leader is perceived as unfocused in regards of SH, the organizational climate will be perceived as SH- tolerant (Stockdale et al., 2004).

Summing up; ZT and ZT- policy is relevant when discussing how to prevent SH at the workplace as several organizations not only present a SH- policy, but also promote their ZT and some also a ZT- policy for SH. In regards to prevention work for SH, ZT- policies or organizations promoting having a ZT for SH can communicate to the employees that there is no tolerance for SH at their workplace. However, when presenting a ZT- policy or ZT for SH, it is critical for the organization to inform what their ZT actually indicates so that the employees can have a clear understanding of where the line is drawn. Unless, employees will need to make their own definition and understanding of what the organization`s ZT indicates, something that may lead to disappointments when, for example, a harasser does not have to face the consequences you thought ZT would lead to.

#### *The leader`s responsibility to reduce and prevent sexual harassment*

As previously mentioned, by the Norwegian law we know that leaders of Norwegian organizations are obligated to prevent SH from taking place at their workplace. One recommended preventing action is the establishment of a SH- policy (Lovdata, 2018). Also, when establishing a SH- policy, a strong statement from the leader will be critical, presenting a strong commitment, understanding and prioritization for the SH- prevention work (Lindenberg & Reese, 1996), as such a statement can make the

employees perceive the organization`s culture as harassment intolerant (Lee-Cota & Story, 2018).

Based on this, the organizational leader is positioned as a critical organizational feature as he/she can have an important effect in regards to the occurrence and prevention of SH (Offermann & Malamut, 2002; Hulin et al., 1996). This fact is relevant to mention in this thesis as the focus is also linked to who the organization has positioned as responsible for the SH- policy. Therefore, leaders need to know the employment law and organizational policies by hand and be able to use “common sense” when cases of SH- issues need to be handled (Vardiman et al., 2014).

Many leaders create an organizational climate where policies are said to exist and all leaders have a responsibility to actually implement these existing policies. When perceiving their leader to make a honest effort to stop harassment, Offermann & Malamut (2002) found that female employees would feel more free in regards to reporting incidents of SH, were more satisfied with the complaint process, had an increased job- satisfaction and would also show a greater commitment to their workplace than female employees perceiving their leader as harassment tolerant. Therefore, in organizational climates where the leaders do not show support for the organization`s policies and procedures in regards to harassment, the reporting of incidents has shown to decrease (Popovich, 1988).

Leaders are implored to actively monitor and correct conditions that is fostering a harassing environment as true commitment by leaders to take SH seriously can result in effectively handling of harassing conduct and also decrease the prevalence of negative job- related consequences (Stockdale & Bhattacharya, 2008; Offermann & Malamut, 2002).

According to Stockdale & Bhattacharya (2008), there are two important corrective steps managers can take in preventing SH at their workplace where the steps both can directly affect the prevalence of harassment and also eliminate other workplace barriers for female employees, such as their quest of breaking the glass ceiling. The first step presents how the leader should eliminate tokenism and work towards

establishing a balance between the differences of men and women in job contexts that, as of today, are male- dominant (Stockdale & Bhattacharya, 2008). The second step involves the investigation leaders should do in the workplace`s work- group climates and look for signs of SH- tolerance. Such signs can for example be victims reporting incidents not taken seriously or inappropriate punishment for the perpetrator (Hulin et al., 1996).

Leaders promoting a formalization of policies and practices, builds a harassment- free environment (Mueller, DeCoster, & Estes, 2001), something they, according to Offermann & Malamut (2002), as leaders have a responsibility to foster. Leaders are responsible to be aware of their attitude and how employees, as employees perceive them, often will emulate their leader. Therefore, a leader tolerating sexist treatment of employees will send signals to possible perpetrators that there is a tolerance for such behavior (Pryor, Giedd, & Williams, 1995). Leaders need to be aware their power to influence and possible resources to set the climate as they can enforce SH- policies, and at the same time choose to show a disinterest for SH by tolerating behavior that violates the policy (Stockdale et al., 2004).

The leader`s responsibility in regards to preventing SH at the workplace is critical. All leaders need to be aware how their organizational position and the responsibility this include as they have a great power of influence (Stockdale et al., 2004). Therefore, leaders will need to be aware of their behavior and promote their motivation to both reduce and prevent SH from taking place at their workplace. For the employees to understand that the organization is taking prevention work for SH seriously, leaders should highlight their support to the organization`s SH- policy, understand its content and establish or strengthen an anti-harassing organizational culture (Stockdale & Bhattacharya, 2008; Offermann & Malamut, 2002).

Summing up the theoretical background; research present the importance of promoting a clear definition of SH (Vardiman et al., 2014). Also, establishment and implementation of organizational policies concerning SH and the awareness and understanding of the leader`s responsibility in regards to SH- policies and SH- prevention work (Vardiman et al., 2014; Lee-Cota & Story, 2018) are critical

elements when aiming to prevent SH in organizations. However, these factors have not yet been investigated with a focus towards Norwegian leaders. Therefore, this thesis will investigate what Norwegian leaders are doing to prevent SH from taking place in their organization.

### Research questions

Today, we have little knowledge regarding what Norwegian leaders do to prevent SH at their workplace. Therefore, it is of interest to investigate how leaders of Norwegian organizations define SH and ZT for SH, how they implement policies for SH in their organization and who is positioned with the responsibility regarding such policies and the SH- prevention work. Base on this, the following research questions were developed:

1. How do Norwegian leaders define SH?
2. Do Norwegian organizations have a SH- policy and how is it both established and implemented?
3. Who is responsible for the prevention work for SH in Norwegian organizations?

## 3.0 METHOD

### The context

The context for this study was Norway and the data collection was conducted in Oslo. At the time of the data collection (February 2019) and also during the analysis, the amount of attention drawn to the subject of SH and the #MeToo campaign was still high. Although the #MeToo campaign started during the Fall of 2017, cases of big Norwegian organizations and their lack of guidelines or policies towards SH were still presented in February/March 2019. Examples of such cases are the Norwegian Armed Forces (Flydal, 2019) and the well-known, however now former, acting leader of The Norwegian Labor Party, Trond Giske (Slettholm, 2019). Therefore, during the data collection period, the awareness regarding SH in the society and therefore also among Norwegian organizations and leaders, was high. Due to the attention given to this problem, it is tempting to suggest that companies received an extra reminder to

either renew or establish some kind of policy for SH, something that will be reflected later in the discussion.

In regards to the sample, it was, both during and in the cold water of the #MeToo campaign, several leaders representing two different groups (leaders from academia and leaders from large organizations, (meaning over 100 employees) both public and private) that were particularly visible in the media, promoting their view of the stories presented by the press regarding SH. The two groups also informed about their experience with SH at the workplace and some also advocated their ZT for SH. Based on this, it was of interest to include these two different groups of leaders as the sample for this study.

#### The researcher

The researcher of this study is, at this time, a 24 years old female from Norway, Oslo. She is now in her last semester of her MSc Business education with a major in Leadership and Change. As a young women soon to be entering the adult work life, and maybe one day have a position as a leader, it is of interest to learn more about different types of organizational cultures and also how individual leaders respond to the questions related to SH. Also, based on a background as a sales representative next to the studies, the researcher have experienced unfortunate and uncomfortable incidents with customers. During that period, the researcher did not have the theoretical background related to leadership and prevention of SH, but had some strong personal opinions on how her subjective experiences should have been handled by her leaders. Overall, the researcher has a strong interest in the field of SH as it is a “touchy” area which is of high importance to create an openness and awareness about.

#### Sample selection and participants

The sampling was done to gain more insight into the leaders` definitions and organizational polices. Based on expressed experiences and concerns regarding SH at the workplace presented through the media and further “snowballing”, the selection of participants was conducted. Eleven male and female leaders/principals

representing both Norwegian private and public universities/colleges and 19 male and female leaders representing both Norwegian private and public organizations were through strategic selection and purposeful sampling (Kumar, Stern, & Anderson, 1993), contacted by email, and asked to participate in the study. The e-mail addresses were found through use of internet search and were used in order to get in contact with these potential respondents.

In the first email, the potential respondents were informed about the aims and methods in regards of data collection and that participating in the study of course would be voluntary and that all information would be presented anonymous and deleted when the thesis was submitted (1<sup>st</sup> of July 2019 the latest). Thus, by these emails, the 30 leaders/principals received an information sheet including the background and aims of the study and what would be expected by the informants. In order to reach as many leaders as possible and knowing that they have a busy schedule, two different formats for participation were offered. Therefore, in the email the potential respondent were asked if he/she was willing to participate in an individual phone- interview. If not, an electronic questionnaire could also be answered. The participants were informed that if they agreed to participate through an interview, an interview date would be scheduled. For those respondents who agreed to a questionnaire, an email was sent informing that the electronic link to the questionnaire would be sent during week seven (2019).

One week after the first email asking the potential participant for their participation was sent, the email was resent to those who still had not responded. From the 30 potential participants contacted, twelve of these agreed to participate in an interview, while 15 agreed to participate in the questionnaire. Among the three contacted potential participants who did not participate, two reported that they did not have time to participate, while one never answered the two emails. From the twelve interview participants, four represented the academia, while eight represented big organizations. From the 15 participants who conducted the questionnaire, four participants represented the academia, while eleven represented big organizations. The participants will further either be referred to as “leader from the academia” if the

participant represented the academia, and “leader” if the participant represented a big organization. A summary of the sample is presented bellow in Table 1.

*Table 1: Summary of the sample for both semi- structured interview and questionnaire*

Format of participation	Gender distribution	Academia vs. big organization
Interview: Total: 12	Female: 2 Male: 10	Academia: 4 Big organization: 8
Questionnaire: Total: 15	Female: 5 Male: 10	Academia: 4 Big organization: 11

### Data collection

The data was collected from the two types of source mentioned above; (1) semi-structured interviews and (2) questionnaires with structured questions. However, only the data collected from the semi- structured interviews was used in the analysis and discussion of this thesis. Therefore, information concerning both the structure and piloting of the questionnaires will not be presented. There were different participants participating in the two formats of data collection, however, they all represented the same population stated above. Overall, twelve semi- structured interviews were conducted. The interviews were conducted in Norwegian through use of an interview guide (see Appendix 1 for interview guide) and lasted between 15- 20 minutes. They were digitally recorded and then transcribed.

### *Semi- structured interview*

To collect in depth knowledge about the research questions, a semi- structured interview was performed (Kendall, 2008). The semi- structured interview included questions about the leader`s definitions of SH and ZT, the organization`s SH- policy and implementation process for such a policy, the leader`s understanding and experience in regards to challenges linked to the implementation of a SH- policy, and lastly, who they, as leaders, perceive as responsible for both preventing and dealing with SH- cases in their organization. Through the use of open questions, the participants had the opportunity to give their own personal definitions and inform

about how they as leaders handle the policies in their universities/ organization (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2008). Through the semi- structured interviews, I was able to ask the participants follow- up questions where it felt natural to dig a little deeper (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2008). By this, I was able to identify a new understanding of my topic and also use information from an interview to build on my questions from my interview guide for the next interview(s).

All interviews, except one, was conducted through the use of phone as this would facilitate access to the leaders` busy schedule. The only interview conducted in person, was conducted at the organization`s location in Oslo, where I met both the CEO and the HR- director. Before all interviews started, the participants were reminded about the information sheet where I informed how I intended to tape all interviews by use of a recorder. All participants agreed to a recording of their interview. Some participants, however, needed a second confirmation that the information would be anonymous and that parts used in the thesis from their interview had to be approved by them. All interviews were therefore taped, transcribed and lasted between 15 -20 minutes.

#### *Piloting the interview*

Prior to the data collection, I asked three leaders from organizations not included in the actual study to participate in a pilot study of the interview where the interview guide was tested and possible input was taken into account. By piloting the interview guide, I was able to optimize the interview guide and to practice my interview techniques before the main data collection period (February 2019) (Majid, Othman, Mohamad, Lim, & Yusof, 2017).

#### Data analysis

The thematic analysis approach, *template analysis*, was used to analyze the data obtained from the semi- structured interviews (King, 2004). The development of the initial template was conducted by an interpretative process, an examination of the transcript data, meaning the transcribed interviews, and the questions presented and answered during the interviews. Through a systematically spiraling with a goal of



reducing the data to a manageable level, consistently emerging categories were identified. Based on Radcliffe`s (2013) systematical approach, I first read through all interview transcripts as a whole to become familiar with the data that were to be analyzed. Then, I wrote down my first impressions before I read the interview transcripts one more time, carefully one by one. Second, I coded words, sentences, sections and phrases I perceived as relevant. These codes were based on my experience of something being surprising and of interest, similar to something I had read in previous research literature, and elements I found to be repetitive. I then went through all the codes, where some were merged and several were decided not to be used as I no longer found them as relevant. After this, I grouped the codes into three different primary categories which I later labeled (1) clarity vs. “fuzziness”, (2) certainty vs. uncertainty, and (3) proactive vs. reactive.

#### Ethical considerations and data security

Regarding the ethical considerations for the data collection for the project, an application was sent and registered to NSD (Norwegian Centre for Research Data) on the 30<sup>th</sup> of November 2018. On the 25<sup>th</sup> of January 2019, the application was approved. Also, to secure the collected data, the participants names were all anonymous and will be deleted the same date the thesis is delivered, meaning the 1<sup>st</sup> of July (the latest).

## 4.0 RESULTS

Overall, my analysis revealed how there is an insecurity among the Norwegian leaders in regards to several important elements in the work of preventing SH. These elements include the definition of SH, what the organization`s ZT actually indicates, how they as leaders know whether their employees are aware the content of their SH-policy and their ZT or not. Also, the findings indicate confidence among the leaders to other SH- preventing elements, such as the presence of a SH- policy, the importance of promoting who they are as an organization and who in their organization that is positioned with the overall responsibility for this prevention work. Finally, findings indicate that among the Norwegian leaders participating in

this study, there are both proactive and reactive characteristics when it comes to actions conducted in the work of preventing SH.

My analysis revealed three primary categories; (1) clarity vs. “fuzziness”, (2) certainty vs. uncertainty, and finally (3) proactive vs. reactive. The first category illustrates how the leaders presented a clarity, however also “fuzziness” towards several important elements in regards to their prevention work for SH. The second category depicts the leaders` certainty and uncertainty also, as the first category, in regards to their SH- prevention work. Lastly, the third category involves how the leaders can be perceived as both proactive and reactive in regards to their prevention work for SH. Through the analysis, subcategories were identified to all the three primary categories, presenting the main codes found during the data analysis. One can say the three primary categories are connected as they all give an indication towards the amount of awareness and control Norwegian leaders have towards their work for preventing SH from taking place in their organization. This way, the three primary categories can give answers to what Norwegian leaders are doing to prevent SH. In this section, these three primary categories and their associated subcategories are presented.

#### Clarity vs. “fuzziness”

When investigating what Norwegian leaders do to prevent SH at their workplace, the category concerning clarity vs. “fuzziness” emerged from the analysis of the collected data as it is of interest to look at the leaders` quality in regards to being clear and easily understandable. Therefore, clarity and “fuzziness” are indicators to the amount of control the leaders have in regards to their prevention work. The findings indicated three subcategories to the primary category; (1) definitions and descriptions of SH and ZT for SH, (2) main values and organizational culture, and (3) who is responsible for the SH- prevention work.

#### *Definition and description of SH and ZT for SH*

During the interviews, the leaders were presented to several questions including questions concerning their organization`s definition and description of SH. The findings indicated how most of the leaders lacked a clear knowledge towards their

organization's definition of SH, almost as what they presented was random. This is exemplified by the following examples by two male leaders where the first represents the academia;

*I am a bit insecure to if I have a clear definition, however, it is when one is exposed to unwanted attention that one experiences unwillingly (V)*

*I have actually not reflected that much around that. I do have a feeling of what it is and I do have some kind of meaning of what it is, but I would explain it as unwanted, meaning all behavior that is unwanted in that direction. But I cannot give you a definition to what you can do that is ok and what is not ok (H)*

The findings also indicate how the leaders' presentation of their organization's SH-definition, although "fuzzy", would comprise the definitions of SH from both a research-, and mostly a legal perspective. One leader, for example, presented a clarity to how their definition of SH was based on the Norwegian legislation. However, in an attempt to actually present their definition, this leader had difficulties finding the organization's definition of SH, although he conducted an online search while the interview was taking place. Therefore, this finding indicated that this leader had a clarity to the fact that his organization's definition was based on the legislation, but was however unclear and presented a "fuzziness" when it came to the content of the definition. A different example presenting this is illustrated by the following quote from the interview with a male leader from the academia;

*I will see where I...the concrete sound of it is...basically it is when there are actions experienced as harassing and it follows some objective facts, then it is qualified as sexual harassment here (S)*

During the interviews, and when listening to the recorded interviews, I also perceived how some of the leaders became defensive when asked how they would define SH. One such example is a leader who argued how he did not understand why I would need him to define SH, and informed me how I could find their definition myself by

an easy internet search. Aggressively, this male leader representing the academia explained how;

*I do not have a direct knowledge to that definition. However, you do know you can find this definition in writing?(W)*

Surprisingly, based on the findings, none of the interviewed leaders had a specific gender focus, meaning that they did not express any experiences to how one particular gender is sexually harassed more than the other. Despite several leaders' "fuzzy" definition of SH, many focused on the victim's story and experience in cases of SH and how this should be the foundation of the SH- definition. However, the findings also indicated how one of the leaders presented clarity when explaining how they had made a conscious choice to not define SH. He explained how this was done to not limit the opportunity to report, as it should be up to the individual to explain what SH is. This male leader also explained how;

*Because, you can define it very much in detail and then you are contributing to establishing a boundary that, for most people, is individual and we have therefore said how we rather will have the threshold as low as possible to pick things up. It is all about good and bad behavior. And then it will not be as important to define what that is (Z)*

Of particular interest was the response from one of the female leaders which was the only leader who presented the theme of power- differences as important when defining SH. Although this female leader did not present a clear definition of SH, she presented a clarity to the fact that she had a concern regarding how people might experience SH differently and how she does view harassment as serious. However, she regarded flirting as not being a problem. On the other hand, she also presented an unclarity and "fuzziness" when it comes to differing between SH and flirting and stated that she does not experience any SH in her organization, but rather that her employees are young, free and want to flirt with each other. The following example present this female leader's concern;

*If a man puts his hand on your thigh and tells you “today you look good”, I do not believe everyone will see that as sexual harassment. I do not see that as sexual harassment.... You know what? If you have not experienced that during your life, I will almost feel sorry for you. You know what I mean? If you are pushed hard up to the wall and he tries to kiss you- I would say I believe we all experience that during our life- it is not harassment, you should just take it as a compliment....I would just have thought of it as an unfortunate action as he simply finds you too cute (T)*

The lack of clarity was also presented when the leaders were asked how they would define their ZT for SH. Based on the recorded interviews, the findings indicated how several leaders hesitated to answer and responded with an insecurity in their answers. Some of these answers are illustrated below where the first quotation represents a male leader from the academia, the second by a male leader, and the third by a female leader;

*But it is, hmm as, as I, for me it is easy as it is a person who experiences that someone has crossed the line. Then it is...then it is that person who, who hmm, has been exposed to something that owns the experience (L)*

*Yes, we will, we will, for sure no one should, and we also add as well, therefore being exposed to, and then in some way it is the victim that defines hmm how one feel exposed or not, the addressee kind of (E)*

*Zero tolerance is zero tolerance so if there is a violation to what we see as harassment or sexual harassment it will not be acceptable and it will result in consequences (Z)*

#### *Main values and organizational culture*

When the leaders were asked what their organization`s main values were, I found a large variation in terms of their clarity and knowledge. While some leaders would list the organization`s main values right away, it was of interest how others presented “fuzziness” and a limited knowledge, such as the following male leader;

*It is hmm, it is, it is actually presented as...the three values we have, right now this is a bit unclear for me, I came straight from a meeting you see. Of course I should have known these by hand hmm let`s see. I wonder if they are written at... Yes it is \*\*\*\*, \*\*\*\*\* and there is one more that I cannot remember, but I think they are all presented on the organization`s... While you talk I will see if I manage to find them (A)*

When asked how a SH- policy is important for the organizational culture, clarity was perceived from several of the leaders informing how they meant the SH- policy could present to the employees what is and what is not accepted behavior at their workplace. Also, several of the participants presented a clarity in regards to how they focused on the importance of openness to the theme of SH. This is exemplified through the flowing quotes by a female leader, a male leader, and a male leader from the academia;

*We have a great awareness to it and I believe maybe one of the most important things is to have a culture where one can talk about it right away before things become big cases and that you there and then can say that “this is unacceptable behavior, I do not want this, now you need to pull yourself together”... The most important criteria of success is to have a culture of openness an having a low threshold to report and when something is brought up, you need to take it seriously and not sweep it under a blanket (J)*

*I do hope the threshold to bring up things you experience as not ok has been lowered. I also hope, as a result of this, that we can create an even safer and better work environment (Z)*

*You need to create a climate where it is easy to tell your story (W)*

It was also of interest how one male leader presented “fuzziness” towards the organization`s values, but showed clarity in his focused towards the importance of attitudes, perhaps more as rules for the organization rather than their main values, and how the organization, through the use of SH- polices, should promote these;

*Harassing is an attitude question, meaning you cannot train not to harass someone, but you need some attitudes towards it. Most people who do not harass, do this simply because they do not want to harass, right? So you will need an attitude presenting how this is not the way we interact (H)*

*Who is responsible for the SH- prevention work?*

Clarity and “fuzziness” were also found in the answers from the leaders in regards to the question concerning where the responsibility for the SH- prevention work is positioned in their organization. The findings indicated how there were three answers that appeared the most, all different in terms of clarity and “fuzziness”. First, the majority answered quite quickly, without hesitating and with a clarity to how they, themselves as leaders, had the overall responsibility. This is exemplified by quotations from a female leader, a male leader from the academia and a male leader;

*Being the top leader, it is part of my job... That is for sure. Then I, of course, have people working with these things, the HR- department is for sure central, but the overall responsibility is mine. That is the top manager`s (J)*

*That is me. I am the leader and is responsible for policies and what we live by. This will need to be a focus on management level so that the leader is aware and that it is the leader who has the ability to grasp in (L)*

*It is me up against the board of \*\*\*\*\* that have the overall responsibility for what is part of what we need to follow by the Norwegian laws, and this is Norwegian law. So that is totally natural (Z)*

Second, some leaders also answered how such responsibility was positioned in the HR- department, and that I would have to get in touch with them for more information. This finding indicates how these leaders present the responsibility as somehow clear, as they inform who is responsible, but also “fuzzy” as they just directed the responsibility to another department. This is illustrated by a male leader below;

*You could say it is the HR- department that has this responsibility. We all have a responsibility... So everyone have a responsibility in regards to respecting each other, but you could say the policy challenge is positioned at the HR- department which share the responsibility with the leader group (G)*

The third answer among the three most appearing answers, informed with a “fuzziness” how the responsibility of preventing SH at the workplace was placed on all parts of the organization. Exemplified with the following statement from a male leader from the academia;

*Technically, it lays in the arms of the director as business manager, but we do all at \*\*\*\*\* have a responsibility to conduct the action plan (S)*

#### Certainty vs. uncertainty

Certainty and uncertainty represent how one is neither sure or unsure, but rather quite sure and quite unsure. During the interviews and the data analysis, an experience of how the leaders presented how they were certain and uncertain rather than sure and unsure, emerged. This is of interest as it presents the level of awareness the leaders have in their prevention work for SH. The following two subcategories were found during the data analysis in regards to the primary category of certainty vs. uncertainty; (1) the knowledge towards the employees` awareness, and (2) presence of a SH- policy and ZT for SH.

#### *The knowledge towards the employees` awareness*

To get an understanding of how the leaders know to which degree their employees are aware of what the organizations` SH- policies means and indicates, the leaders were asked how they know that their employees know the content of the SH- policies. The findings indicate a high level of uncertainty about this subject. However, some leaders presented certainty to this knowledge as they informed how they measure the awareness among their employees through the amount of reports. Also, several leaders presented their certainty to their knowledge as they had a focus to continuously bringing up the concept of SH. This certainty is exemplified by the following statements from two male leaders from the academia;



*You need to check by asking. It is not a discussion we can have once and then we are done with it, because we hire new people all the time (L)*

*You will need to bring up such a theme all the time. You cannot just think that people will educate themselves through different webpages. You need to actively work with it (W)*

Several leaders expressed their certainty to the fact that their employees are aware the SH- policy`s content based on the fact that they see conducting policy surveys as highly important and how they use these to collect data regarding the employees` knowledge. One leader also expressed his certainty to his employees` awareness by promoting how his employees regularly need to complete an e-learning program. Some leaders also confirmed their certainty through their focus on appraisal. This is depicted through the following statement from a male leader;

*We have in some way said that we will do an appraisal annually and not every two years, that is too long between each time. This way, the one thing is that we kind of conduct anonymous surveys where we have a response rate at 90%, therefore almost everybody answers and it is representative and therefore kind of an answer to whether we have a challenge or not. And the other thing is that we have introduced a category that also is specified in the appraisal that is conducted annually for all our employees (E)*

Although almost all leaders presented how they were certain their employees were aware the content of their SH- policy, some of the answers illustrated an uncertainty in the expressed certainty since the leaders informed that they had control, however, they were not able to pinpoint to how or in which way they had this control. One such example is presented bellow and illustrates a male leader who referred to how their organizational handbook presents what behavior that can be seen as blameworthy and that they therefore;

*Have this under our skin...I believe I am quite sure about that as, for the first, we informed the working environment committees well and it was brought*

*down in the organization...So I am pretty safe to the fact that everyone is familiar with it (A)*

Certainty to control was also found in the statement below. However, also this male leader ignores to inform how he knows whether his employees are aware or informed and rather answers in a passive way how;

*No, I don't know, but I can be quite safe as we kind of have taken, been very aware to bring it up in different forums. I believe none of the leaders have doubts towards what we mean about this. We have several times brought this up. So I am pretty sure about that (M)*

Uncertainty, however, was highly presented in the leaders' answers to the same question regarding ZT, questioning how they know that their employees are aware where the line is drawn. Findings from this part of the interviews indicated that the participants were uncertain and had little knowledge about their employees' awareness to their ZT. One male leader from the academia presented his uncertainty by defending himself through informing about his amount of employees;

*With over 800 employees, it is almost impossible to know that everyone knows where the line is drawn in all cases...There are a lot of people working here and I cannot walk in and micromanage all individuals in every single situation. It is about trust and responsibility and then I need to make sure that the responsibility is conscious and that the trust is there and if it is broken a consequence needs to happen (L)*

Uncertainty in certainty was also found in a different leader's answer as he presented with a certainty what they do to inform their employees about their ZT and how he therefore is certain to the fact that his employees are aware of its content. However, uncertainty is also presented as this male leader from the academia only informs how he believed few of his employees would be insecure;

*The indications that I know this is that we have been working with this through the whole year and that it has been mediated externally and internally at \*\*\*\*\* that we have zero tolerance. So I believe there are few people that are insecure about this in this institution today (S)*

With certainty, one leader focused on the experience of the possible victim and presented how the employees themselves are responsible to know where the line is drawn. When explaining how this male leader is confident his employees are aware the content of their ZT he informed how;

*No, this is always, it is always hmm a challenge, right? It is something the employee needs to know to the extent the employee experience this as not ok or uncomfortable. So we have a focus to employee ship in regards to this. That is something we expect an employee hmm can know for themselves what is not ok (A)*

The findings presented how one male leader communicated uncertainty towards the knowledge regarding his employees` awareness as you should, according to him, have in mind how the “drawing of the line” can be perceived differently between different individuals;

*Where the line is drawn? Who tells or considers where the line is? That is very different. So if I feel that this is different for me, then that must be the line that counts in that situation. And then it can be something else for someone else, but it is up to the individual person it's about, that feels harassed, that actually needs to set the boundaries (Z)*

#### *Presence of a SH- policy and ZT for SH*

To gain information and an understanding regarding the leaders` organizations` prevention work for SH, the participants were asked if their organization had a policy for SH. As the attention around SH was increased from the Fall of 2017, due to #MeToo, it was also of interest whether their SH- policy was formal or emerged and also the timing of either the policy`s establishment or re- establishment.

A high level of certainty was found in regards to the leaders knowledge towards the presence of either a policy or guidelines related to SH in their organization. Also, certainty was found in some leaders` awareness to when and why their SH- policy was either established or re- established. Certainty was also presented by other leaders, such as a male leader informing how one could find their SH- policy in the organization`s handbook, and to the information regarding how this policy was established several years ago, and that the policy was re- established due to #MeToo. Uncertainty, however, was presented as there was a lack of knowledge among some other leaders to whether this policy was either established or re- established despite knowledge to the presence of a SH- policy. This is illustrated bellow by a male leader from the academia;

*That I do not remember, but I do know that they were updated, but exactly when that happened is the responsibility of the organization director (V)*

When confronted with the fact that several leaders have presented their ZT for SH in the media, and questioned how the situation regarding this theme is in their organization, certainty was found through how the majority of the leaders quickly responded that they also had such a ZT, exemplified by the following male leader from the academia;

*Yes. I cannot say there are any reason for leaders to say they do not have a zero tolerance. If a leader says they do not have zero tolerance, I would like to see such a leader. But then it is the question regarding how you practice zero tolerance. That is much more difficult (L)*

A certainty to the presence of a ZT could also be illustrated by the following example, presenting a male leader from the academia`s concern to organizations who do not having such a ZT for SH;

*There cannot be any leader in the work life that tolerates harassment, so I therefore take it for granted to have a zero tolerance for sexual harassment (W)*

### Proactive vs. reactive

When investigating what Norwegian leaders do to prevent SH at their workplace, it is of interest to study how proactive they are, meaning actions done to eliminate SH before it has a chance to occur, and also reactive, meaning possible responses to cases of SH after these cases have happened. The findings indicate how this third and last primary category has the following three subcategories; (1) the leader`s behavior, (2) increased awareness among the employees, and lastly, (3) when and why the SH-policy was either established or re- established and why.

#### *The leader`s behavior*

The findings indicate that some of the leaders were proactive in regards to SH as they answered how the leaders` attitude towards the SH- policy and what behavior they accept and not accept is critical to promote. These leaders also highlighted the importance of these attitudes and behaviors being communicated by the leader to the employees. This proactive approach is illustrated by the following examples from a male leader from the academia, and two female leaders;

*It is also quite clear that the leaders need to be clear and stand up so that all employees know that this is undesirable (W)*

*The tone from the top in regards to what is acceptable and not acceptable is highly important. To show how you take this seriously and direct a focus to it (J)*

*It is highly important that we somehow are ambassadors. Because if not, we will never get them to come to us if something were to happen (T)*

#### *An increased awareness among the employees*

The findings indicate how most of the leaders work to increase their employees` awareness in regards to the importance of SH, their SH- policy and how to prevent SH from happening at their workplace. Therefore, the findings indicate how this work illustrates mostly proactive work, as most of the presented measures seem to have been conducted before possible incidents of SH.

More specifically, the findings related to how some of the leaders educate their employees, are in my opinion regarded as a proactive approach, for the employees to better understand what is seen as SH in their organization. The following situations exemplifies this by two male leaders and one female leader;

*We have a HSE (health, safety, environment)- handbook and there we have examples of blameworthy conditions and we have listed what you can report about and what will be seen as blameworthy... We have informed through “Workplace” where we have a platform all employees have access to. We have informed by email to leaders, plus, when new employees come, they go through, among other things, our guidelines and ethical guidelines, and you do this annually so that this is an annual recurring reminder to employees (A)*

*That is the art when you are to reach out with a message to everyone. We have done this though establishing an e- learning course that is mandatory for all. Therefore, everyone needs to, somehow, go through these courses and answer some questions and need to pass a test at the end, proving that they have understood what has been announced. And this is something we introduced also last year related to the awareness so that everyone have completed this course (E)*

*The most important thing is to really train and comply these. Dilemma training for unwanted behavior that both can be sexual harassment, but it can also be different types of behavior. So to comply and train and raise awareness to the whole culture and not at least have a value platform at the bottom, a clear culture to what is acceptable and not acceptable so that people dare to report (J)*

Several of the leaders also presented how they in a proactive matter, focus on the importance of having clear and easily usable routines for reporting of incidents of SH. A female leader illustrated this by informing the following;

*You are clear to what guidelines you have. That is both understood, rooted, and that there is a consensus. The most important thing is that you have a consensus to what the guidelines mean and that it is followed. If it is just presented as a boring guideline that you do not agree upon, it will be difficult to get people to follow it (T)*

Furthermore, one finding of particular interest illustrates how one male leader highlighted the fact that their organization does have a lot of young employees. Due to this, they include their employees when establishing their policies. This proactive action is further presented bellow;

*We do not have that many employees who like to sit down and read. And I believe the youth, maybe especially the youth, really like rules when they are invited to make the rules, they tend to really like rules (H)*

Proactive work was also found in the leaders` promotion of employee surveys as the findings indicated how a few of the leaders informed how they use employee surveys to get a better understanding related to their experience regarding the effect of their prevention work through use of a SH- policy. This is exemplified by a male leader`s statement;

*By using this employee surveys, we will kind of have a result showing if we somehow have had an effect or not. So we kind of measure the effect of what we do (E)*

#### *Establishment or re- establishment of the SH- policy*

As previous presented, due to the attention around SH after #MeToo started, it was of interest to investigate if the SH- policies were either established or re- established as a reactive action to this. The findings indicate that most of the leaders were aware to how their organization`s SH- policy was either established or re- established due to the #MeToo campaign or cases of SH in their organization. This is exemplified in the following statements from one male leader representing the academia and one male leader;

*It was established in January 2018...It was because we at that time had received quite strong alerts regarding sexual harassment. It was therefore necessary to establish a culture- building action plan (S)*

*We re- established our routines for reporting in 2018 and the reason for this was actually due to #MeToo as we saw that it appeared at several places, and we thought that although we have not had any cases the last couple of years in regards to that, we also through that there is a big chance it happens here (A)*

## 5.0 DISCUSSION

In this part of the thesis, the results will be discussed in light of the theory with the aim to answer the presented research questions and generate new insight. The discussion is presented with the same structured as the results. Although the three primary categories are connected as they all give information regarding the awareness and control Norwegian leaders have towards their work aimed to prevent SH at their workplace, they will be discussed as separate themes.

This study explored what Norwegian leaders do to prevent SH from taking place at their workplace. Three overarching categories emerged from the data analysis; clarity vs. “fuzziness”, certainty vs. uncertainty, and proactive vs. reactive. The findings indicate that the leaders have a clarity to who in their organization that is positioned with the responsibility for both the SH- policy and the SH- prevention work, but “fuzziness” in regards to their main values and definition of both SH and their ZT for SH is also an important finding. Findings also showed how certainty was presented to the fact that the leaders` employees are aware the content of their SH- policy and ZT for SH. Uncertainty however, was depicted through the leaders` lack of knowledge regarding how they know that their employees are aware. Finally, the findings revealed that the leaders are conducting both proactive and reactive actions to prevent SH.



### Clarity vs. “fuzziness”

#### *Definitions and descriptions of SH and ZT for SH*

Questioning how the leaders define SH was an important part of my study since a clear definition can be considered as an indicator for the leaders` awareness towards both the work they are doing to prevent SH as leaders and as an organization and what the organization promotes that they stand for. Clarity was found concerning the focus directed to the victim when defining SH, but “fuzziness” was also expressed through the lack of knowledge for the definition or description of SH. Therefore, I found how the leaders had some clarity and knowledge towards the concept of SH, however a “fuzziness” in the understanding to what their organization is stating in terms of SH. This finding is in itself in contrast to one of the important recommendations regarding preventing SH at the workplace. Lee-Costa & Story (2018) underline the importance of having an easily understandable definition of SH as a critical element in the organization`s SH- policy and how the definition should include examples to what behavior the organization characterizes as SH. Other scientist such as Vardiman et al., (2014) also emphasizes the importance of a clear definition, presenting to the employees “what we see as SH in our organization”, and that this again can lead to an increased awareness and understanding towards the behavior and prevention of SH regarding what will and will not be tolerated, possibly making reversal employees reflect upon and rethink their own behavior.

Also, it was found how one leader, in hope of lowering the threshold for reporting, had chosen not to establish a definition of SH as such a definition should only be based on the experience of the victim. However, in light of Lee-Cota & Story`s (2018) research, we know that without a definition to what the organization characterize as SH, it might be difficult for the victim to know whether he/she has actually been exposed to SH, and such a situation might lead to the victim not reporting the incident. Therefore, this example illustrates the importance of having a clear definition and example to what SH indicates in organizations (Lee-Cota & Story 2018).

During the interviews, it was also of interest to ask the leaders (who reported having a ZT) how they defined or described their ZT. However, to this question the leaders hesitated to answer, something that might be explained by the fact that there is no clear academic definition of ZT (Stockdale et al., 2004). I found “fuzziness” to the leaders` definition of ZT as none were able to present what their organization indicated with ZT. This “fuzziness” is considered a critical disadvantage concerning the prevention of SH. As we know from Stockdale et al., (2004), this lack of knowledge might result in the employees being aware the presence of a ZT for SH or even a ZT- policy in their organization but are however left on their own to figure out what this ZT means and indicates.

Based on the “fuzziness” regarding the definition of both SH and their ZT for SH, it is tempting to ask the following question; how will these leaders` employees know or understand the importance of both SH and ZT for SH and its content when their leader does not? Based on these findings and evidence- based knowledge, it should be emphasized that it seems important that all leaders are really aware the concept of SH and have an understanding to what their organization is statin in terms of SH.

#### *Main values and organizational culture*

Insecurity and “fuzziness” were found when questioning the leaders what their organization`s main values were. As a promoter towards what the organization stands for, the leader should know these main values by hand. These findings are not in line with what is considered important when you are to make sure your employees understand that the organization is fronting a harassment intolerant organizational culture. As stated by Lee- Cota & Story (2018), the organization should present “who we are and what do we stand for” for example through presenting their main values.

Based on this, I would argue that although the leaders in the present study knew that their organization had values, such knowledge is not enough in terms of convincing both their employees and the researcher to how they are able to promote an organizational culture and values that are important in the prevention of SH in their organization.

I also found that a clear statement from the leader regarding SH was common. This was a positive finding since it is well known that the first critical key in the establishment of a SH- policy is to make a strong statement, preferably from the leader, informing the employees how SH under no circumstances will be tolerated at their workplace and also present a great motivation for the SH- policy and SH- prevention work (Lindenberg & Reese, 1996).

Another identified clarity was the finding related to the leaders' great focus towards promoting an organizational culture with openness towards SH. The clarity to such a focus presents the same focus that was found by leaders in the study done by Bråten & Øistad (2017), and might build on the theory presenting how victims of SH working in an organizational culture perceived as SH- tolerant, will experience the filing of a SH- complaint as risky and will therefore rather not tell others about their experiences (Brooks & Perot, 1991; DuBois et al., 1998; Fitzgerald et al., 1995; Gutek B. A., 1985; Schneider et al., 1997; United States Merit Systems Protection Board, 1995). This reported openness towards SH in the leaders' organizations is a very positive finding and might lead to a lowered threshold for communicating or reporting of incidents.

I will highlight one particularly interesting finding, actually positioned under the subcategory regarding defining SH, however, I found it to be more related to the promotion of main values and organizational culture. One of the participating leaders who, in my opinion, had a high tolerance for SH, as she claimed that it is totally fine to be pushed up against the wall, as it just indicates how someone thinks you are a bit cute, gives an unclear and "fuzzy" signal to her employees. I would argue that the attitude and behavior described by her as innocent flirting, would by most people be experienced as SH and that she therefore is promoting a SH- tolerant culture. The fact that she, as a female leader, is promoting a culture that in my opinion would be perceived as SH- tolerant, is in itself of interest as cultures experienced as SH- tolerant in most cases are managed by male leaders (Hulin et al., 1996). However, as a result of this SH- tolerant culture, employees with harassing characteristics might perceive this female leader as tolerant to SH and will therefore not see their harassing behavior as a problem (Stockdale M. S., 1996). Also, from Stockdale et al., (2004),

we know that such a harassing tolerant culture will decrease the possibility of victims from this organization to report incidents. Therefore, it is definitely questionable whether this leader can play a role in the prevention of SH in her organization. In this case, I would advise this leader to follow the recommendations based on the work of Pryor et al., (1995), to be more aware in regards to the attitude she is communicating and thereby also tolerates and rethink what she describes as SH and what behavior she will not tolerate.

*Who is responsible for the SH- prevention work*

According to the Norwegian law (Lovdata, 2018), it is the leader`s responsibility to prevent SH from their workplace. Based on this and the fact that we know that it is considered very important that leaders express a true willingness and motivation to prevent SH in their organization (Stockdale & Bhattacharya, 2008; Offermann & Malamut, 2002) it was of interest in this study to investigate how the leaders responded when asked who in their organization that is positioned with the responsibility for the SH- prevention work.

I found clarity in the leaders` quick response to how they, as the leader, were positioned with this responsibility. This clarity is of interest since many of the leaders previously during the interviews had hesitated and shown low confidence and “fuzziness” when asked questions related to their actual prevention work (such as their definition of SH and main values). However, as the leader is an important organizational future as he/she can affect the occurrence and prevention of SH (Offermann & Malamut, 2002; Hulin et al., 1996), it is of importance that these leaders understand how and why they should be positioned with such a responsibility and that this cannot be pushed further down in the organization. This, however, was something one of the leaders in a way did when he reported that the responsibility for the prevention work was positioned in the HR- department and asked me to contact them for more information.

Based on these findings and the above listed knowledge, it is important to emphasize to all leaders that their clarity and understanding to their responsibility regarding the prevention of SH is important and that this is likely to lead to employees feeling more

free in regards to reporting incidents of SH (Popovich, 1988), be more satisfied with the routines for reporting, have an increased job- satisfaction and communicate a greater commitment to their workplace (Offermann & Malamut, 2002).

### Certainty vs. uncertainty

#### *The knowledge towards the employees` awareness*

The findings indicated that when the leaders were asked about their knowledge regarding the employees` awareness about the SH- policy`s content, the leaders presented use of policy survey, information meetings and an employee handbook. Despite the use of policy survey, if no measurement of the prevention work is conducted, it is tempting to question whether these leaders actually can conclude that the prevention work is effective.

Based on findings in previous research stating the importance of the leader`s priority and stated motivation for the SH- prevention work (Vardiman et al., 2014), it was especially interesting when some of the leaders argued with certainty that the SH- policy is something that the employees need to familiarize themselves with, and thereby indicating that the leader is not responsible to whether the employees are aware of or understand the content of the policy. This certainty is notable since it is well known that employees who are not educated regarding the content and background of their organization`s SH- policy, are left to figure this out by themselves, something that possibly could result in a misunderstanding of the policy`s content and function (Stockdale et al., 2004).

Uncertainty was identified when the leaders almost answered with excuses when confronted with the same question concerning their knowledge to the employees` awareness in regards to the organization`s ZT and where the line is drawn. From previous research, we know that organizations promoting a ZT but however leave out a definition or description to what this ZT indicates, the employees are left with the responsibility of creating their own understanding of what ZT indicates (Stockdale et al., 2004). Therefore, although the leaders excused themselves from not knowing whether their employees were aware the content and indications, this uncertainty and not being able to inform their employees where the line is drawn can lead to several

confused and frustrated employees that might not experience the outcome(s) they would think such a ZT would lead to.

Based on these findings and what is known from the literature, it is tempting to recommend that all leaders need to make sure they know the definition of SH and ZT and that they also do assess, in one way or another, whether the employees actually know the definition.

#### *Presence of a SH- policy and ZT for SH*

As establishing a SH- policy effectively can both deal with and prevent organizational problems, such as SH (Hertzog et al., 2008; Pina & Gannon, 2012) and the fact that previous research has found how absence of a SH- policy is linked to a higher rate of experienced SH than the reported rate (Peirce, Rosen, & Hiller, 1997), it was of interest to investigate whether the leaders in this study had such a policy. The fact that almost all the leaders in my study reported having a SH- policy is in contrast to the findings reported by Bråten & Øistad (2017). In their study, both a questionnaire and interviews were conducted. In the questionnaire part of the study only 19% of the 17 568 participating members of the Norwegian United Federation of Trade Unions and Norwegian Union of Municipal and General Employees reported having a SH- policy. These contrasting findings might be explained by the different methodology used in these two studies and how Bråten & Øistad`s (2017) sample was representatives from Norwegian organizations, while the sample of the present study was leaders (indicating how leaders often have a greater knowledge to the presence of an organizational policy than their employees if such information is not communicated well enough). In their study, Bråten & Øistad (2017) had a really large sample, compared to mine, and through use of a questionnaire it might have been easier for their respondents to know such information regarding the organization`s SH- policy as they could look it up while answering the questionnaire.

The fact that uncertainty was found in regards to the leader`s knowledge concerning when their SH- policy either had been established or re- established is worrying since the leader`s understanding and commitment to the SH- policy is considered as an important part of the prevention of SH (Lindenberg & Reese, 1996). However,

certainty was also identified as knowledge existed regarding re- establishment of the SH- policy due to #MeToo and an awareness to the fact that few or none reports does not mean incidents are not taking place. This confirms the work of Vardiman et al., (2014) regarding how several organizations establish a SH- policy to be better prepared for future possible cases of SH.

Certainty was found through the leaders` confirmation to how they had a ZT for SH, something that is in line with previous research reporting an increasing number of organizations which, despite the lack of academic definition(s) and guidelines, report having a ZT for SH (Buhler, 1999; Konop, 2001). What I found interesting regarding the leaders ZT for SH, was how some leaders were critical to the fact that anyone would say they do not have such a ZT. I find it easy to agree with these leaders stating that it should not be possible today not to have or promote a ZT for SH. On the other hand, before being critical to leaders not promoting their ZT for SH, I would recommend these leaders to establish a concrete description of ZT as their promotion of a ZT without any description is, as I see it, almost the same as not having a ZT for SH.

#### Proactive vs. reactive

##### *The leader`s behavior*

The findings related to the leaders` proactive actions towards SH is in line with previous research (Lindenberg & Reese, 1996) reporting how leaders should make a strong statement regarding the importance of the SH- policy. This is also important since the leader`s promotion and statement being communicated by them as leaders can increase the employees` perception and experience of how their leader prioritize the SH- prevention work (Lee-Cota & Story, 2018).

##### *Increased awareness among the employees*

Although the leaders presented several proactive actions to increase their employees` awareness regarding SH, it is also possible that some of these classified as proactive actions could be considered reactive actions. However, my interpretation of the interviews was that these actions were proactive as the leaders presented them as actions conducted before cases of SH had occurred.

I found the leaders proactive in regards to increasing their employees` awareness through their focus of policy training. The leaders` awareness towards policy training is important and confirms previous research which found how prevention- and training efforts can help in the work of establishing a SH- intolerant climate (Stockdale et al., 2004). Some leaders argued that policy training was required by all new employees as a proactive action. This is in accordance with the recommendation by Lee-Cota & Story (2018). However, none of the leaders presented the frequency of such policy training. It is therefore tempting to argue that such policy training should be conducted more than once, since research has found how policy training, being part of the SH- prevention work, needs continual attention (Vardiman et al., 2014; Lindenberg & Reese, 1996). Otherwise, I believe the training might be experienced by employees more as a check off box rather than a proactive, conscious action by the leader to prevent SH.

In contrast to previous research (Lindenberg & Reese, 1996), having both clear and easy routines for reporting SH was found essential by the leaders in this study. Such proactive actions might strengthen the employees` awareness to how these routines work. By this, the leaders might challenge previous research presenting how employees in organizations with an established SH- policy often are aware the existence of this policy but are however unsure about the routines for reporting incidents (Lindenberg & Reese, 1996). During the interviews I was only informed about how the leaders see their routines for reporting as important. I did not get information regarding how they had strengthened these routines, for example due to incidents that had happened in their organization, meaning that it was a potential reactive action. However, research indicate that having routines for reporting and the knowledge about your employees` awareness to the usage of these routines, is a proactive action as it is one of the critical stages in preventing SH (Lindenberg & Reese, 1996). Based on these findings and the litterature, it is suggested that all leaders not only make sure they have clear and easy routines for reporting, but that they ensure themselves that the employees really are aware and understand the routines and how to report.



One proactive action I found to be of particular interest was the leader who had experienced the importance of including his young employees in the establishment of the rules and routines for reporting. This proactive action is in line with the conclusion by Vardiman et al., (2014), that including those who actually are to use the policy should be invited in the establishing phase of the policy in order to increase the likelihood for both support and usage by the employees. Therefore, by including his employees in the establishment of their rules and routines, it will be easier for the employees to both understand and use these and it can therefore be seen as a proactive action.

The use of employee surveys were also presented as a proactive action by the leaders. This action is in line with the recommendations from Lindenberg & Reese (1996) who state that a policy survey can measure the presence of SH and further use this information to increase the awareness of SH, something also the leaders in the present study highlighted as important. Therefore, as I perceive it, the use of these policy surveys can be both proactive and reactive as they map out their employees' understanding of their SH- policy. This information can further lead to modifications making this policy, for example, more understandable and work as a proactive action possibly resulting in a greater understanding to what behavior that will not be tolerated and from there avoid incidents of SH. Also, through a policy survey, the leaders might be informed about how incidents of SH have either occurred or perhaps the occurrence of SH have gone from one number to another and can therefore also work as a reactive approach.

#### *Establishment and re- establishment of the SH-policy*

I identified both proactive and reactive actions concerning the establishment or re-establishment of the leaders' SH- policy as the leaders informed how either the establishment or re- establishment was motivated by #MeToo or cases of SH that had occurred in their organization. I argue that establishing or re- establishing the organization's SH- policy due to #MeToo and an understanding to the fact that although none incidents are filed, it might have or possibly can happen also to them, can both categorize as proactive actions to prevent SH. This confirms previous research informing how establishing or re- establishing the organization's SH- policy

has become more widespread, due to campaigns, such as #MeToo (Gruber J. E., 1998; Schultz, 2003; Williams et al., 1999) to promote their antiharassment organizational culture (Does et al., 2018). On the other hand, either establishing or re-establishing the organization's SH- policy after incidents of SH will be characterized as a reactive action. This way, in which some of the leaders presented how they had conducted such a reactive action confirms the work of Vardiman et al. (2014), presenting how several organizations seem to establish a SH- policy after incidents have occurred as a reactive action to better cope with the consequences and possible future incidents of SH.

I would argue that however the situation, meaning whether an incident of SH has or has not occurred in an organization, a reactive action to prevent SH is as important as a proactive action, perhaps even more important. A reactive action indicates that an incident of SH has taken place and that the organization is taking action to prevent this from happening again. However, the motivation for the organization should not be to solve this problem of SH as efficiently as possible, but also have in mind the long- term effects this actions might have.

## 6.0 CONTRIBUTIONS, LIMITATION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

### Contributions to the literature

A number of scientific papers have been published focusing on SH at the workplace. There is, however, a gap in knowledge when it comes to the question about what Norwegian leaders are doing to prevent SH in their organization. However, the results from this research can contribute to the literature concerning SH- prevention work done by leaders, with a specific focus towards Norwegian leaders. Results from the present study tell us that some of the Norwegian leaders are certain to the presence of a SH- policy and a ZT for SH in their organizations, but they are unclear and present a “fuzziness” in regards to how their organizations define SH and ZT for SH, something that can lead to their employees creating their own understanding of these two elements. The conducted research also contribute to the literature as it reveals how most of the Norwegian leaders in the study are aware and clear to their responsibility

related to the SH- policy and the SH- prevention work and how they work in a proactive manner to increase their employees` knowledge regarding this. However, “fuzziness” was presented regarding the organizations` main values and clarity in regards to their knowledge concerning their employees` awareness.

### Limitations

There are some limitations in the current study. First, all interviews, with an exception of one, were conducted through the use of phone. Although interviews by phone made the process of data collection more efficient, physical interviews might have established a stronger connection of trust between the participant and the interviewer (me), that further possibly could have resulted in more interesting and sensitive data being both shared and collected (Rogers, 1976).

Also, as I perceived that only a few of the participants were a bit uncommentable, perhaps due to the sensitive subject of SH, two out of all the participants were not asked when they established or re- established their SH- policy. If all participants had been asked this question, the findings could have been more comprehensive. However, all the others answered in the same direction and as the number of participants in itself is not representative, asking a few more of the participants would not allow me to generalize the results from this study.

### Future research

In future research, a representative sample of Norwegian leaders should be asked what they do to prevent SH at their workplace. Such a study could have led to strong conclusions regarding the question; what are Norwegian leaders doing to prevent SH in their organization, could be drawn. In addition, it would have been of interest to investigate what the Norwegian employees experience that their leaders are actually doing to prevent SH from their workplace. Having such information could lead to a better understanding of the bigger picture informing us whether the work that is reported as preventive work really is conducted and if it is experienced by the employees as preventive.

## 7.0 CONCLUSION

The findings indicate a lack of knowledge among the Norwegian leaders concerning their definition of both SH and their organization`s ZT for SH. Although the leaders presented knowledge in regards to the presence of a SH- policy in their organization, several steps of the policy`s establishment and implementation were unclear. The leaders presented a clarity to how the responsibility was theirs and that several proactive and reactive actions are conducted to increase awareness regarding SH among their employees. Despite the clarity to where the responsibility regarding the SH- policy and the SH- prevention work is positioned, the leaders presented “fuzziness” to what this responsibility indicates and includes.

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## 9.0 APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Interview guide

1. How do the leaders of Norwegian organizations define SH and ZT?
  - Hvordan vil du definere seksuell trakassering?
  - Har du et eksempel på en situasjon som i din organisasjon vil bli tolket som seksuell trakassering?
  - Flere ledere har den senere tid gått ut i mediene og sagt de har en nulltoleranse for seksuell trakassering på arbeidsplassen. Hvordan er dette i din organisasjon?
  
2. How do Norwegian organizations use policies in cases of harassment?
  - Hvilke verdier vil du si XXX har?
  - Hvor viktig vil du si policier er for XXX?
  - Når vi er inne på policier, har XXX noe policy mot seksuell trakassering?

2a) How are the policies implemented?

  - **Om de har SH- policy:**
    - Kan du si litt om hvordan implementeringsprosessen av en slik policy er bygget opp?
    - Er det noen utfordringer ved implementering av policien?
  - **Om de ikke har SH- policy:**
    - Om du tenker deg at dere i fremtiden skal etablere en SH-policy, hvordan tenker du implementeringen ville gått for seg?
  - How do the leaders of Norwegian organizations know that the policy(s) have been successful?
  - **Om de har SH- policy:**
    - Har du som leder merket noen endring i organisasjonen etter implementering av SH- policien (eks. flere tilfeller av SH rapportert)?
    - Hvordan vet du at dine ansatte er bevisst den SH- policien som dere har?
      - **Om de har nulltoleranse:** Hvordan opplever du at dine ansatte forstår deres definisjon av nulltoleranse?
  
3. Who is positioned as responsible for the SH- policies in Norwegian organizations?
  - Hvem i din organisasjon har ansvaret for SH- policien?
  - Ser du noen spesielle utfordringer av personlig, organisatorisk eller politisk karakter ved å ha dette ansvaret?

Tusen takk for din deltakelse. Ønsker deg en fortsatt flott dag!