

Sexual harassment has no place at workplace

Sexual harassment at work stories abound everyday. Separating fact from fiction can be a challenge for all involved. Sexual harassment education is the key to understanding how to stop it. Inappropriate behavior of a sexual nature can be extremely uncomfortable for the person being harassed.

Prevention is the best tool to eliminate sexual harassment at workplace. Employers are encouraged to take steps necessary to prevent sexual harassment from occurring. They should clearly communicate to employees that sexual harassment will not be tolerated. They can do so by providing sexual harassment prevention training to their employees and by establishing an effective complaint /or grievance process and taking immediate and appropriate action when an employee complains according to the Protection Against Harassment of Women at Workplace Act 2010.

Partial list of types of sexual harassment:

- Unwanted sexual advances.
- Offering employment benefits in exchange for sexual favors.
- Actual or threatened retaliation.
- Leering; making sexual gestures.
- displaying sexually suggestive objects, pictures, cartoons, or posters.
- Making or using derogatory comments, epithets, slurs, or jokes.
- Sexual comments about an individual's body.
- sexually degrading words.
- suggestive or obscene letters, notes, or invitations.
- unwanted emails text messages etc.
- impeding or blocking movements.

- Unwanted or sexually suggestive touching.
- Telling lewd or sexual jokes.
- Sexual posters, pictures, cartoons, emails, pc screen savers.
- Talking about sexual encounters.
- Staring in a sexually suggestive way.
- Tampering with or destroying the work product of the one being harassed.

Possible Physiological & Psychological Reactions

Being sexually harassed can devastate your psychological health, physical well-being and vocational development.

Physiological Reactions (Partial)

- Headaches.
- Lethargy.
- Gastrointestinal distress.
- Dermatological reactions.
- Weight fluctuations.
- Sleep Disturbances, nightmares.
- Phobias, panic reactions.
- Sexual problems.

Psychological Reactions

- Depression, anxiety, shock, denial.
- Anger, fear, frustration, irritability.
- Insecurity.
- Embarrassment.
- Feelings of betrayal
- Confusion.
- Feelings of being powerless
- Shame.
- Self-consciousness.
- low self-esteem.
- Guilt, self-blame.
- Isolation.

Harassment situations

Sexual harassments can occur in a variety of circumstances. Often, but not always, the harasser is in a position of power or authority over the victim (due to differences in age, or social, political, educational or employment relationships). Forms of harassment relationships include:

- The harasser can be anyone, such as a client, a co-worker, a parent or legal guardian, a teacher or professor, a student, a friend, or a stranger.
- The victim does not have to be the person directly harassed but can be anyone who finds the behavior offensive and is affected by it.
- Adverse effects on the target are common.
- The victim and harasser can be any gender.
- The harasser does not have to be of the opposite sex.
- The harasser may be completely unaware that his or her behavior is offensive or constitutes sexual harassment or may be completely unaware that his or her actions could be unlawful.
- Misunderstanding: It can result from a situation where one thinks he/she is making themselves clear, but is not understood the way they intended. The misunderstanding can either be reasonable or unreasonable. An example of unreasonable is when a man holds a certain stereotypical view of a woman such that he did not understand the woman's explicit message to stop.

Common effects on the victims

Common professional, academic, financial, and social effects of sexual harassment:

- Decreased work or educational performance; increased absenteeism.
- Loss of job or career, loss of income.
- Having to drop courses, change academic plans, or leave academics (loss of tuition).
- Having one's personal life offered up for public scrutiny the victim becomes the "accused," and his or her dress, lifestyle, and private life will often come under attack.
- Being objectified and humiliated by scrutiny and gossip.
- Becoming publicly sexualized (i.e. groups of people "evaluate" the victim to establish if he or she is "worth" the sexual attention or the risk to the harasser's career).
- Defamation of character and reputation.
- Loss of trust in environments similar to where the harassment occurred.
- Loss of trust in the types of people that occupy similar positions as the harasser or his or her colleagues.
- Extreme stress upon relationships with significant others, sometimes resulting in divorce; extreme stress on peer relationships, or relationships with colleagues.
- Weakening of support network, or being ostracized from professional or academic circles (friends, colleagues, or family may distance themselves from the victim, or shun him or her altogether).
- Having to relocate to another city, another job, or another school.
- Loss of references/recommendations.

Effects of sexual harassment on organizations

- Decreased productivity and increased team conflict.
- Decrease in success.
- Decreased job satisfaction.
- Loss of staff and expertise from resignations to avoid harassment or resignations/firings of alleged harassers; loss of students who leave academics to avoid harassment.
- Decreased productivity and/or increased absenteeism by staff or students experiencing harassment.
- Increased health care costs and sick pay costs because of the health consequences of harassment.
- The knowledge that harassment is permitted can undermine ethical standards and discipline in the organization in general, as staff and/or students lose respect for, and trust in, their seniors who indulge in, or turn a blind eye to, sexual harassment.
- If the problem is ignored, a company's or school's image can suffer.
- Legal costs if the problem is ignored and complainants take the issue to court.

Financial Assistance:



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What Can You Do If You Are Harassed?

There is no one way to respond to harassment. Every situation is different and only you can evaluate the problem and decide on the best response.

Friends, affirmative action officers, human resource professionals, lawyer and women's groups can offer information, advice and support, but only you can decide what is right for you while the advises will help you understand your choices, their benefits and risks as well as the strengths and weaknesses of your case. The only thing you can be absolutely certain of is that ignoring the situation will not cause it to go away. Above all, **DO NOT BLAME YOURSELF FOR THE HARASSMENT**. It is not your fault. Place the blame where it belongs--on the harasser. Self-blame can cause depression and will not help you or the situation.

The Following Strategies Can Be Effective:

- Say **NO** to the harasser! Be direct.
- Write a letter to the harasser. Describe the incident and how it made you feel. State that you would like the harassment to stop. Send the letter by certified mail. Keep a copy. Or you choose to tell him verbally in presence of a trusted person. (Keep in view your circumstances & make informed choices)
- Keep a record of what happened and when. Include dates, times, places, names of persons involved and witnesses, and who said what to whom.
- Tell someone; don't keep it to yourself. By being quiet about the harassment, you don't help stop it. Chances are extremely good that you aren't the only victim of your harasser. Speaking up can be helpful in finding support and in protecting others from being victims.
- Finding out who is responsible for dealing with harassment on your organization and whether you can talk in confidence to that person. All workplaces in Pakistan are bound to establish an inquiry committee under protection against harassment of women at workplace act 2010.
- Find out what the procedure is at your workplace or collage/university. Know your rights & obligation for your employers stated in protection against harassment of women at workplace act 2010.it is the organization's responsibility to provide you with advice, help and support, but such meetings at the workplace can provide an important record if legal action is ever advisable.
- If you are a union member, speak to your union representative. Unions are generally very committed to eliminating sexual harassment in the workplace.
- If you are experiencing severe psychological distress, you may want to consult a psychologist or other mental health professional who understands the problems caused by sexual harassment.
- Seek all possible remedies ensured in the protection against harassment of women at workplace act 2010.
- If there is no inquiry committee established at your workplace, you can write an application to the district court as all workplaces are bound to show compliance to the protection against harassment of women at workplace act 2010 and formation of such committee is mandatory.
- You have the option to file a complaint either to an inquiry committee or the ombudsman.
- If the Ombudsman is not appointed you can reach district court for legal remedies.