



**VIOLENCE
AGAINST
WOMEN
AT WORK...
LET'S TALK
ABOUT IT!**

The mental health
impacts of violence
and harassment
against women at work



pro mente | **austria**



ΕΤΑΙΡΙΑ ΚΟΙΝΩΝΙΚΗΣ ΨΥΧΙΑΤΡΙΚΗΣ
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A resource guide for female employees on recognising and tackling violence and harassment in the workplace and a useful resource for employers on good practices to prevent violence and harassment against women at work.

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The information contained in this booklet does not necessarily reflect the position or opinion of the European Commission.



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Mental Health Europe (MHE) is a European level NGO and network committed to the promotion of positive mental health and well-being, the prevention of mental disorders, the improvement of care, advocacy for social inclusion and the protection of the human rights of people with mental health problems and their families and carers.

MHE is recognised under Belgian law as an international not-for-profit organisation. The membership of MHE is composed of NGOs, individuals, professionals, volunteers and others, including people with mental health problems, who are active in the mental health field at local, national, regional or European level and who share and who support MHE's vision. MHE represents the common interest of these organisations and individuals and lobbies and advocate for it at the European level.

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We would like to take this opportunity to thank our project partners and all the women that took part in this project for their dedication, enthusiasm in achieving our objectives. We look forward to future collaboration on joint projects and activities that will address the issues around gender inequity and mental health in Europe.

*Mary Van Dievel – Director
Mental Health Europe*

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MHE'S policy recommendations

A sample of European good practices and helpful resources (English version only)

For each country there will be good practices and resources.



Women make up more than half the world's people but only a fifth of the world's decision-makers. Women are under-represented in formal politics, and often have little voice in making decisions within important political spaces such as the household and the workplace. Their lack of access to education and resources puts them at a severe disadvantage in the economic sphere. Everyday women around the world face discrimination, poverty, violence and abuse. This is especially true for women who are already marginalised: disabled, indigenous, those living with HIV, informal workers, migrant women.

The Guardian newspaper

** Introduction

MHE has long-standing experience in the field of women and mental health.

In order to prepare the concept for this project, MHE advisors on Women and Mental Health met several times to discuss the Daphne Programme and Call for Proposals in order to develop a proposal that would contribute to the protection of women against all forms of violence at work, and to promote mental health and well-being. Some of the project partners were involved in these preparations and shared their experiences of working with women with mental health problems who have experiences of violence.

The organisations were chosen from 8 different European countries representing different realities and a varying degree of reported violence against women:

- 3 organisations from countries with higher than average rates of violence and harassment against women at work (Lithuania, Romania, Slovenia);
- 2 organisations from countries with medium rates of violence and harassment against women at work (Austria, Greece);
- 3 organisations from countries with lower than average rates of violence and harassment against women at work (Cyprus, Latvia, Spain).

This booklet is targeted at women employees, employee's representatives and employers; it aims to provide guidance on recognising and tackling psychosocial risks in the workplace.

It will describe in a coherent way the definitions of these particular psychosocial risks and why this hidden problem must be tackled.

It will outline how to identify sexual harassment, where to go for help and how to get protected against psychological damage. Furthermore it will outline the measures an employer should take to ensure all staff are educated about bullying, harassment and violence... also to ensure staff are aware of the consequences of violence in the workplace (physical or/and psychological) and information on how to develop good anti harassment policies.

For women affected by this we have provided a comprehensive list of resources to help them if they are a victim of these behaviours in the workplace.

It is estimated that one in three women worldwide will suffer some form of gender-based violence during the course of her lifetime. Despite efforts from the international community and the commitment by the vast majority of states to combat discrimination against women, notably by means of the ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), women still remain victims of violence and discrimination in all regions of the world.

Violence against women takes various forms including but not exclusively, domestic violence, rape and the trafficking in women and girls for forced prostitution.

Violence against women is multifaceted and linked to unequal gender norms and socio-economic power structures both in the public and private spheres. It serves to reinforce and perpetuate gender inequity. Thus, violence against women is a key issue in addressing gender inequality and discrimination against women as well as in effectively addressing key development issues such as health and poverty.

Thanks to the persistent lobbying by women's and human rights organisations across the globe Violence against Women (VAW) was put on the human rights agenda.

The promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment is clearly a vital part of the UN mandate. Improving gender equality strengthens respect for human rights, reduces poverty and stimulates economic growth and health, and proves to be essential for achieving the Millennium Development Goals. December this year (2009) we will see the 30th Anniversary of the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women, CEDAW, an event that will prompt us all to take stock of what has been accomplished, and of the great deal of work on gender equality that remains to be done.

Statement by Mr Johan Rutgersson, Second Secretary, Permanent Mission of Sweden to the United Nations, on behalf of the European Union "Advancement of Women" (item 14 [a] 28 July 2009, Geneva)



Violence against women at work... Let's talk about it!

In recent years, national working conditions surveys have shown that **an increasing incidence of work-related health problems develop as a result of psychological rather than physical causes**¹. Psychological violence can include different forms of violence such as sexual harassment, bullying or mobbing.

Many studies show that women are at particular risk of violence at the work place. In fact, a research paper of the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions² found that in the surveyed 31 European countries, including the EU-27 Member States, **women employees are significantly more exposed to work place bullying than their male colleagues**. The difference is even greater in the case of sexual harassment where more than three times as many female as male employees report having experienced sexual harassment in the previous 12 months. The reasons for this are various. In the first place, women are represented in many of the "high-risk" occupations, such as teaching, social work, nursing and other health-care work, work in banks, shops, hotels, restaurants and factories. The continued segregation of women in low-paid and low status jobs (while men predominate in better-paid, higher status jobs and supervisory positions) also contributes to the problem. Finally, various work-related factors can be associated with incidents of violence and harassment. These include difficult working conditions (work overload, high work pace, etc.), various aspects of the work context (cutbacks, lack of employer support, etc.) and some elements related to the work organisation (forms of management that encourage competition between employees, etc.)³.

¹ European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2007. *Women and Violence at Work*. <http://www.eurfund.europa.eu/pubdocs/2007/110/en/1/ef07110en/pdf>

² *Ibid.*

³ Canadian Women's Health Network. 2007. *A Call to Action: Women's Health at Work & Violence in the Workplace*. <http://www.cwhn.ca/resources/workplace/violence.html>

Hidden problem

In today's increasingly global and competitive labour market, factors associated with violence in the workplace are becoming more and more common. National surveys have found that between **40 and 90 per cent of the women questioned have suffered some form of violence and harassment during the course of their working lives**⁴. However, violence and harassment are problematic concepts. According to the World Health Organization, data collection efforts that measure the scope and magnitude of the situation of violence and harassment against women are hampered by a number of factors, including a) the influence of social and cultural norms in determining what constitutes violence, impeding universal consensus on a definition of violence against women; and, b) changes in reported rates of abuse according to the definition of violence used, the way questions are asked, the type of target population, and the setting of the interview (privacy, familiarity of environment, etc)⁵. Violence and harassment are therefore usually understood as "**hidden phenomena**"⁶, which make them difficult to be aware of. As a result, many serious incidences of violence and harassment may not be reported or recognised.

At **individual level**, the suffering and humiliation resulting from violence and harassment usually lead to a lack of motivation, loss of confidence and reduced self-esteem, depression and anger, anxiety and irritability of the concerned women.

Violence and harassment at work has immediate effects on the concerned women, but it also affects employers and their enterprises as well as the community as a whole.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ World Health Organization. 2000. *Violence Against Women*. <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs239/en/index.html>

⁶ European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions. 2007. *Violence, Bullying and Harassment in the Workplace*. <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/ewco/reports/TN0406TR01/TN0406TR01.pdf>

In the same way as with stress, these symptoms are likely to develop into physical illness, mental disorders, tobacco, and alcohol/drug abuse. They may culminate in occupational accidents, invalidity and even suicide.

At **workplace**, violence causes immediate and often long-term disruption to interpersonal relationships, the organisation of work and the overall working environment. Employers bear the direct cost of lost work and improved security measures. They are also likely to bear the indirect costs of reduced efficiency and productivity, the deterioration of product quality, loss in company image and a reduction in the number of clients.

At **community level**, the costs of violence encompass health care, including mental health care, and long-term rehabilitation costs for the reintegration of women victims, unemployment and retraining costs for those women who lose their jobs as a result of such violence, and disability and invalidity costs where the working capacities of the women victims are impaired by violence at work⁷.

Women in the workplace

In many countries women make up a growing proportion of the workforce. However, a very substantial amount of female workers are employed in precarious jobs, often with little job-security, low pay and unfavourable working conditions and remuneration. This is not limited to the industrialised world, for many female workers in developing and industrialising countries the work-experience is an unpleasant one, with mistreatment and sexual harassment a commonplace reality often nurtured by cultural and religious beliefs. Whilst a growing number of women are taking on managerial jobs, they are still faced with problems connected to exclusionary or undermining behaviour from men who may consider them a threat. Sexual harassment is frequently used as a tool of control generally but not exclusively by men to “keep women in their place.”

⁷ *International Labour Organization. Introduction to Violence at Work. 1996-2008.*
<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/protection/safework/violence/intro.htm#wmnrisk>

*Unwanted conduct of a sexual nature, or conduct based on sex,
affecting the dignity of women at work.*

Rubenstein, 1988



Extent of sexual harassment, bullying and mobbing

Despite the interest in sexual harassment in recent years, few rigorous empirical studies have been undertaken. Where such studies⁸ are reported they are very often based on self-selected samples. Generally speaking, there appears to be a scarcity of empirical studies of sexual harassment which also extends to the area of racial harassment. It seems that women are reluctant to report sexual harassment thus empowering the perpetrator and keeping the target silent and submissive. This cycle of abuse and silence appears to be the rationale behind the lack of empirical evidence.

In a US study⁹ of 447 female private sector employees and 300 female university employees 40.9% and 15% respectively considered their experience within the last 24 months as sexual harassment. However, a much higher number reported exposure to individual sexually harassing behaviour, many on a repetitive basis.

Studies undertaken in the UK suggest that between 16% and 75% of women at work have experienced sexual harassment at work with even higher numbers for the student population¹⁰.

A large-scale German survey undertaken by the Federal Institute of Occupational Health and Safety concluded that more than nine out of ten women had experienced sexual harassment at work during their working lives.

In a study of female employees in Bulgaria, 10% reported that they received questions of a sexual nature during their job-interviews. A total of 15% had also received unwelcome contact from either co-workers or supervisors. As a result of denying further advances 33% had suffered negative consequences¹¹.

⁸ Einarsen, S. (1996) *Bullying and Harassment at Work: Epidemiological and Psychological Aspects*. PhD thesis, Department of Psychological Science, University of Bergen.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Hoel, H. & Cooper, C.L. (2000a) *Destructive Conflict and Bullying at Work*. November 2000, Unpublished Report, UMIST, UK.

¹¹ Gutek, B.A. & Koss, M.P. (1993) *Changed women and changed organisations: Consequences of and coping with sexual harassment*. *Journal of Vocational Behaviour*, 28-48

Employees below 33 years of age were most at risk. In the 18-25 age groups nearly 50% had received comments of a sexual nature.

Mobbing and subjecting an employee to psychological harassment includes actions of continuous negative remarks or criticism, isolation, spreading gossip or ridiculing the person concerned¹².

Mobbing occurs in environments conducive to its development. Like viruses it needs the right conditions to thrive. This usually involves workplaces with poor management lacking in conflict resolution skills and lacking in awareness about mobbing and its consequences. Worse still are workplaces where management knowingly utilizes mobbing tactics as a means to eliminate staff in spite of the, sometimes fatal, devastation it causes. This phenomenon prevails particularly in a financial crisis, where the employer bullies an employee out of a job rather than provide redundancy.

Bullying at the work place constitutes offensive behaviour through vindictive, cruel, malicious or humiliating attempts to undermine an individual or groups of employees. Such persistently negative attacks on their personal and professional performance are typically unpredictable, irrational and unfair.

The bullies will systematically discredit their target to erode any support the target may seek out later. Bullies slander their target's reputation to anyone who will listen: co-workers, management, union representatives, human resources, etc.

A mobbing is this larger involvement of the group in the bullying. Management and unions withdraw support and eventually participate in attacking the target with as much enthusiasm as the (original) bully. Co-workers are afraid for themselves and either look the other way or actively participate. The group is set against the individual.

¹² International Labour Organization. *Introduction to Violence at Work. 1996-2008.*
<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/protection/safework/violence/intro.htm#wmnrisk>

Violence

Verbal abuse – swearing, cursing, insulting, or using language that is condescending. Threatening behaviour – this includes pounding furniture or walls, shaking fists, throwing objects, or destroying property.

Physical attacks – including pushing, shoving, hitting, kicking.

Workplace violence doesn't necessarily need to occur at the workplace itself. It can happen at any business-related functions that occur off-site, such as conferences, social events, and trade shows, or away from work altogether, such as in the case of threatening phone calls.

There are many elements of a workplace – such as its processes and interaction styles – that can place employees at greater risk of workplace violence. Such elements may include:

- Working directly with the public;
- Performing inspections or enforcement duties;
- Handling or transporting money, prescription medications, or valuables;
- Providing services, advice, education, or health care;
- Working directly with volatile or unstable people;
- Working where alcohol is sold or served;
- Working directly with communities;
- Working alone or in very small groups, or in isolated areas;
- Working overnight hours;
- Working through times of organisational or political change or instability.

Whilst accidents and assaults injure and kill people quickly and spectacularly, bullying and consequent prolonged negative stress injure and kill people slowly and secretively. The outcome, though, is the same¹³.

Mental health effects of bullying and harassment

Exposure to workplace bullying and or sexual harassment has been found to be associated with the following:

- Anxiety;
- Depression;
- Aggression;
- Insomnia;
- Melancholy and apathy;
- Cognitive effects such as concentration problems;
- Insecurity and lack of initiative;
- Reduction in job-satisfaction and commitment to the organisation;
- Unsafe behaviour and increased propensity for accidents;
- Poor lifestyle habits e.g. increased smoking and alcohol consumption;
- Poor diet;
- Poor concentration and diminishing self-confidence;
- Personal withdrawal, often leading to social isolation;
- Negative effect on home and private life;
- Intolerable strain on relationships.

Post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

Frequently, mobbing spelled the end of women's career, marriage, health, and livelihood. In cases of the most severe incidents of bullying, victims have frequently been diagnosed with PTSD. In a Norwegian study which compared victims of severe bullying with individuals who had been involved in traumatic disasters¹⁴, a large proportion of the bullying victims were found to suffer from symptoms of PTSD at a higher level than those involved in disasters. According to the writers of that report, the extreme levels of stress experienced by many of the bullying victims could be explained by a breakdown of their previous assumptions about the world and about themselves. As with bullying, sexual harassment has recently been linked to PTSD¹⁵.

¹⁴ Einarsen, S. (1996) *Bullying and Harassment at Work: Epidemiological and Psychological Aspects*. PhD thesis, Department of Psychological Science, University of Bergen.

¹⁵ Hoel, H. & Cooper, C.L. (2000a) *Destructive Conflict and Bullying at Work*. November 2000, Unpublished Report, UMIST, UK.

There are claims that a considerable number of suicides may have their roots in workplace bullying. No firm evidence exists for such claims, and, furthermore, people very rarely commit suicide for a single reason. The fact that up to 40%¹⁶ of bullied targets in a large scale-Norwegian survey stated that they had at times contemplated suicide, illustrates the severity of the effects bullying may have on those involved.

For those individuals who may decide to leave as a result of their ordeal or who are forced out of the organisation or dismissed, they may be unable, or in some instances unwilling to find a new job¹⁷. A number of the most severely affected targets will never return to work after lengthy spells of absenteeism. In some cases their return is prevented by their state of health. In other cases the increasing severity of their conflicts brings them into sharp opposition to their organisation, which in some cases decides to terminate their employment¹⁸. Lengthy periods of legal wrangling and litigation appear to be a growing tendency in bullying cases. In a substantial number of cases, targets of bullying who have had their contracts terminated as a result of the conflict, have ultimately found themselves unemployable. In any case, violence against women in the workplace is likely to have long-term detrimental effects on their mental health leading to possible long term unemployment and ultimately poverty and social exclusion. This outcome has extremely serious consequences not only on the woman, but on society as a whole and therefore primary prevention should be the focus.

Six cases heard together by the courts of appeal in the United Kingdom emphasized that liability for psychiatric injury caused by stress at work is in general no different in principle from liability for physical injury.

¹⁶ Einarsen, S. (1996) *Bullying and Harassment at Work: Epidemiological and Psychological Aspects*. PhD the-sis, Department of Psychological Science, University of Bergen.

¹⁷ Gutek, B.A. & Koss, M.P. (1993) *Changed women and changed organisations: Consequences of and coping with sexual harassment*. *Journal of Vocational Behaviour*, 42, 28-48.

¹⁸ Leymann, H. (1990) *Mobbing and psychological terror at workplaces*. *Violence and Victims*, 5, 119-125.

** A reference guide for women



"I can't understand how women can say they are not feminist, after everything that women – feminists – in the past have made possible for us and our way of living today."

Axelle Red, JUMP, 23 April 2009

Combating attitudes

It will be a long winding road in the struggle to combat unspoken patriarchal attitudes. Too often women scowl at the thought of being seen as feminists, but it was because of actions of feminist activists that women have their freedoms today. Nevertheless, inequality is prevalent in all areas of society and women are still under represented in the top jobs, the pay gap is pervasive, and the opportunities for women in the ever increasing mobile workplace are limited as women are still the main carers. Equal voting rights have not transmuted into equal power. In the workplace, women remain clustered in the lowest-paid occupations and continue to be subject to discrimination.

The multiple roles that women fulfil in society situate them at greater risk of experiencing mental problems than others in the community. Women bear the burden of responsibility associated with being wives, mothers and carers of others with no financial compensation for their work. More and more, women are becoming a vital part of the labour force and in one-quarter to one-third of households they are the prime source of income (WHO, 1995). In addition to the many pressures placed on women, they must contend with significant gender discrimination and the associated factors of poverty, hunger, malnutrition and overwork.

This reflects societal gender roles and is compounded by a lack of opportunities in both training and education, contributing to lower incomes in work and higher levels of poverty in retirement amongst women.

There should be an emphasis on training women for secure employment, encouraging men by making provisions, to share the responsibility of child care by ensuring the availability of child care facilities, being given the opportunity to work flexible hours/work from home. Allowing men and women to reconcile work and family life equally is a positive step towards equality. This can be achieved by education in schools and communities with the emphasis on citizenship and social conscience, with the particular emphasis on social education courses with the aim of preparing boys and girls for the roles of carers and supporters of families/disabled and sick people and make both genders aware of inequalities during early years education.

Do you recognise sexual harassment?

Most women themselves fail to recognise sexual harassment and treat it as trivial and routine. Such has been the internal coping mechanism. Ignoring offensive behaviour or denying its existence is the most common way women deal with sexual harassment.

In the book '**Back Off! How to confront and stop sexual harassment and harassers**' Martha Langelan¹⁹ recommends taking the following steps:

Ask yourself the following:

- Do I consent to the behaviour?
- Does the behaviour make me uncomfortable?
- Does the behaviour violate my dignity as an individual?
- Does it violate my right to work in dignity in a safe working environment?

Dealing with the harasser upfront²⁰:

- Do the unexpected: Name the behaviour. Whatever he's just done, say it, and be specific.
- Hold the harasser accountable for his actions. Don't make excuses for him; don't pretend it didn't really happen. Take charge of the encounter and let people know what he did.

REMEMBER – Privacy protects harassers but visibility undermines them

- Make honest, direct statements.
- Be serious, direct, and blunt.
- Demand that the harassment stop.
- Make it clear that all women have the right to be free from sexual harassment.
- Stick to your own agenda. Don't respond to the harasser's excuses or diversionary tactics.

¹⁹ Langerland, M. (1993), "Back Off! How to confront and stop sexual harassment and harassers", *Social Science*, 380 p.

²⁰ Neeta Raymond *Combat Law, Volume2, Issue3*
<http://www.indiatogether.org/combatlaw/vol2/issue3/harass.htm>

- His behaviour is the issue. Say what you have to say, and repeat it if he persists.
- Reinforce your statements with strong, self-respecting body language: eye contact, head up, shoulders back, a strong, serious stance.
- Respond at the appropriate level. Use a combined verbal and physical response to physical harassment.

OTHER IMPORTANT MEASURES

→ Keep Documents

Documenting the harassment is important for use as evidence in a case or complaint. You should: Photograph or keep copies of any offensive material at the workplace. Keep a journal with detailed information on instances of sexual harassment. Note the dates, conversation, frequency of offensive encounters, etc. Obtain copies of your work records (including performance evaluations) and keep these copies at home.

Other documents that you should have: A company policy and procedure manual is very important to have. The company's documented policies on harassment, discrimination, performance appraisals, termination, affirmative action plans can be very important to show their stated policies versus their actions. Company newspapers, annual reports, pictures of its top executives, posters, company credo, and company surveys are important to show the environment and its hostility towards women.

Take all letters of commendation, awards, thank you's and anything at all that will corroborate your positive job performance. Pay special attention to documents that your superiors have provided commending you and your work.

→ Set your own boundaries

Say "NO" emphatically and clearly when you are asked to go to places, to do things, and respond to questions, or engage in situations that make you uncomfortable. Do not worry about offending the other person or hurting his or her ego. Take care of yourself first.

→ **Create a Witness to the behaviour**

Inform a trusted colleague and try to ensure that s/he is an eye or ear witness to any situation where you are being sexually harassed. This will be useful later if you chose to file a formal complaint. Send a copy of sexual harassment policy/ rules to the harasser. If your workplace already has an anti sexual harassment policy or the conduct rules of your institution prohibit sexual harassment, send a copy of the institution policy/conduct rules to the harasser with the appropriate sections underlined.

→ **Get a medical check-up**

If you have been raped or physically assaulted, go for a medical check-up. Obtain a medical report. This is important, should you decide to pursue a legal case.

In a study of members of UK's largest trade union, 26.4% of those who had previously been bullied said that they left their job due to bullying²¹.



²¹ UNISON, 1997.

Make a START to stop violence against women at work

S for SPEAK OUT, SPEAK UP: Speaking about sexual harassment is an effective tool in combating it. While speaking about it, the problem becomes visible, it is acknowledged that it exists, and this in turn leads one to take effective measures against it. Speaking about sexual harassment also gives an opportunity to clarify by this about it. It helps in changing attitudes of people towards this issue.

T for TELL SOMEONE: Being quiet or brave about sexual harassment lets it continue. Talk to other co-workers; you may not be the only one harassed by this person. Do not blame yourself and do not delay.

A for AWARENESS situations and people who may harm you and trust your own instincts about possible danger: Don't ignore other's warnings about particular people or social settings. Acknowledge their concern for you and for themselves.

R for REPORT sexual harassment to the appropriate person in the organisation and RECORD events: Explore the different avenues available to you and file a formal complaint if necessary. If your organisation does not have a policy, ensure that your employer formulates an anti-sexual harassment policy and carries out all the connected tasks. Keep track of what happens in a journal or diary and keep any letters or notes or other documents you receive. Write down the dates, times, places, and an account of what happened. Write down the names of any witnesses.

As with the strategies to cope with sexual harassment the same applies to bullying and mobbing. To reiterate the strategies follow these guidelines published by the Andrea Adams Trust²².

T FOR TALK to a union: If you are a member of a labour union, talk to your union representative.

1. Find out if your employer has a policy and procedures on harassment and bullying and obtain a copy.
2. Stand calm and firm and do not allow you to be a target.
3. Do not become isolated. Seek immediate support and advice.
4. Keep a record of all incidents which cause you distress or are undermining – log dates and write down your feelings after each such occurrence together with your own response.
5. Try to get witnesses to bullying incidents by avoiding situations where you are alone with the bully.
6. Do not take action alone. Make an appointment with your company harassment advisor and seek their guidance and support.
7. Talk to colleagues and see if they are experiencing the same treatment as you.
8. Follow the company grievance procedures with the help and support of your Harassment Advisor, Personnel or Union officers.
9. Keep your complaint as objective as possible so that you can't be accused of filing the complaint out of malice or ambition.
10. Make an appointment with your doctor and tell them what is happening to you at work. Follow medical instructions and get signed off if necessary.
11. If counselling is available at work make an early appointment to talk through your experience.
12. Talk to friends and family for emotional support.

Occupational groups that tend to be at higher risk of workplace violence than others:

- Teachers;
- Health care workers;
- Social services workers;
- Municipal housing inspectors;
- Retail employees;
- Public works employees.

**As with Sexual Harassment, Bullying and Mobbing...
take immediate action!**

START to take action now!!!

- **Speak up speak out;**
- **Tell someone;**
- **Awareness of your situation;**
- **Report to the appropriate person and record events;**
- **Talk to your union.**

“Anything done by a person in the course his employment shall be treated as done by his employer as well as by him whether or not it was done with the employer’s knowledge or approval.”²³



** A reference guide for employers

What should the employer do?

The employer should first and foremost, acknowledge that it is their legal responsibility to provide safe working environment for women free from all forms of violence and discrimination and that they can be held liable for this.

The employer should know that violence can have a devastating effect upon the health, confidence, morale and performance of those affected by it. The anxiety and stress produced by all forms of harassment commonly leads to those subjected to it taking time off work due to sickness, being less efficient at work, or leaving their job to seek work elsewhere.

The employer should understand the reasons why women remain silent about sexual harassment. An absence of complaints about harassment does not necessarily mean an absence of harassment. It may mean that the recipients of harassment (especially sexual) think that there is no point in complaining because:

- Nothing will be done about it;
- It will be trivialised;
- The complainant will be subjected to ridicule;
- They fear reprisals.

The employer should acknowledge the consequences of ignoring violence and harassment against women in the workplace:

- Costly investigation and litigation;
- Negative exposure and publicity;
- Increased absenteeism;
- Lowered employee morale;
- Reduced productivity;
- Decreased efficiency;
- Higher employee turnover.

The best way to prevent all forms of harassment is to adopt a comprehensive harassment policy. The aim is to ensure that harassment does not occur and, where it does occur, to ensure that adequate procedures are readily available to deal with the problem and prevent its recurrence.

Sexual harassment policy

What should be included in an anti-harassment policy?

A basic policy should contain the following elements:

- An express commitment to eradicate and prevent sexual harassment and express prohibition of sexual harassment;
- A definition of sexual harassment;
- An explanation of penalties (including termination) the employer will impose for substantiated sexual harassment conduct;
- A detailed outline of the grievance procedure employees should use;
- A declaration that anyone found guilty of harassment after investigation will be subject to immediate and appropriate disciplinary action;
- A declaration regarding harassment of or by third parties like clients, customers etc.;
- Additional resource or contact persons available for support and consultation;
- An express commitment to keep all sexual harassment complaints and procedures confidential;
- Provisions for training of employees at all levels;
- An anti retaliation policy providing protection against retaliation to complainants, witnesses, complaints;
- Policies and procedures should be adopted after consultation or negotiation with employee representatives.

How to communicate about your company's policy

Issue a strong policy from the top authority against sexual harassment taking a “zero tolerance” approach. Make sure it gets out to all your employees either through the employee handbook or intranet. Have the employees sign it to acknowledge that they received and read the policy. The policy can also be posted in the workplace. If you have employees whose primary language is not English, have your sexual harassment policy translated or communicate to them in their primary language. Discuss the policy with all new employees and ensure that third-party such as suppliers and customers are aware of your sexual harassment policy. Review the policy with your employees and retrain them on a regular basis.

Enforce Policy

Take complaints of sexual harassment seriously and investigate all sexual harassment charges quickly and thoroughly and professionally. Maintain accurate records of the investigation and the findings and make sure employees who bring charges do not face retaliation. Ensure confidentiality and time bound response to complaints. Take immediate action when sexual harassment is discovered or suspected and discipline appropriately any employee found to have engaged in sexual harassment.

Give recourse with a Complaints procedure providing different routes that employees can take to file complaints; i.e., contacting the responsible authority for sexual harassment, a supervisor, calling a hotline, complaining through email, etc. Organisations need to focus on the plight of the average individual. A policy is useless unless people use it, and most research indicates that a small fraction of employees never say or do anything about harassing behaviour.

Training

Educate them about the issue and promote a healthy discussion of the policy... Discussion and challenging debates are crucial in combating deep rooted patriarchal attitudes.

Harassment Awareness Training

The setting up of a complaints committee and an anti-sexual harassment policy lays a strong foundation for a sexual harassment free workplace. However, effective training programmes are essential to sensitise/train all their staff members, men and women, to recognise sexual harassment, deal with it when it occurs and prevent it. The training programme is the best way to ensure proper understanding and implementation of your policy.

Sexual harassment training for all employees should address perceptions and understanding of sexual harassment, impact of sexual harassment on individuals and workplace, understanding the policy and complaints mechanism. The training for Complaints Committee should address, in addition to these, the procedures of investigation, skills necessary for enquiries, documenting the procedures.

Take these measures to protect you and the workforce... It's the way forward!





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A resource guide for female employees on recognising and tackling violence and harassment in the workplace and a useful resource for employers on good practices to prevent violence and harassment against women at work.

