

Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace and How it Can be Prevented

Sexual harassment pollutes the working environment and can have a devastating effect upon the health, confidence, morale and performance of those affected by it; thereby, resulting in decreased productivity. Sexual harassment at workplaces needs to be prevented because it results in nothing beneficial. Majority of those affected are women and as a result is a barrier to their proper integration into the labor market, companies and their community involvement, at large.

According to the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), “Sexual harassment is a form of sex discrimination that violates Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Title VII applies to employers with 15 or more employees, including state and local governments. It also applies to employment agencies and to labor organizations, as well as to the federal government. Powell also defines sexual harassment as “the directing of unwelcome sexual attention by one member of an organization towards another, and workplace romance, the sharing of welcome sexual attention by two members of an organization.”

According to the, “Sexual Harassment Support article”, though the number of formal complaints has decreased in the last decade, a majority of those complaints have been by women. The proportion of women who report having experienced sexually harassing behavior at work has range from 40% to 68% in various studies; whereas, the proportion of men who have been sexually harassed at work is not as high as that of women but worthy of note. For instance, 19% of males have experience sexual harassment behavior as reported by the U.S. government employees during the previous two years. According to the National Council for Research on Women, women in the

United States are nine times more likely than men to quit their jobs, five times more likely to transfer, and three times more likely to lose jobs because of harassment.

Sexual harassment has negative effects on the women. It is basically an obstacle to proper integration of women into the labor market because men/employers stereotypes women as the weaker sex and as less powerful, thereby leaving little room for integration into the labor market. When the labor market is defined based on power and dominance, it puts women in the low ratio as compared to men. The implication here is that women are bound to be more sexually harassed than the majority/dominant group (males), as a result of position ranking and employment offers. Employment is, or at least should be, based on one's qualification for the job in question and not based on race, gender, etc. When, however, an employer makes a job offer contingent upon offering sexual favors, or offers a job in ways that suggest sexual undertones, an uncomfortable work environment is bound to result. In the case where the potential employee is offered the job, there is no way the employee won't wonder if the job was offered for something in return. Eventually, such thoughts will definitely affect the employee's work morale and ultimately, work performance.

Also, sexual harassment can leave a stigma on the woman for life as in the case of Monica Lewinsky, Anita Hill, Clarence Thomas, Lorena Bobbit and Paula Jones. This can affect the work life of these women, health-wise. Health issues such as stress, hypertension, anxiety, depression, and suicidal thoughts or attempts, to mention but a few, are not uncommon. Other issues that could develop as a result include fear and guilt; having one's personal life offered up for public scrutiny; being objectified and humiliated by scrutiny and gossip; relationship issues between colleagues involved and

vice versa; becoming publicly sexualized; defamation of character and reputation; as well as a loss of trust in environments similar to where the harassment occurred.

A hostile, offensive or intimidating work environment can affect those involved in many ways thereby resulting in their inability to perform assigned duties, lack of good communication skills, and where the harasser is the boss, lack of respect may be the case. Sooner or later, with enough evidence, a lawsuit is bound to follow. In extreme cases, an employee could lose their job and this may force some to take the law into their own hands in extreme cases. In the event of a lawsuit, it could cost the employer millions in settlements and lawyer expenses. Lawsuits might even rob such employers of quality talent as those looking for jobs might decide not to apply for work at such places, loss of good employees, time and money spent on training of new employees, and may even lead to the closing of companies/bankruptcy.

The financial effects of sexual harassment are potentially severe, especially when the employer does not have adequate policies and complaint procedures in place.

Financial harms to victims of sexual harassment include loss of wages because of taking sick leave or leave without pay from work or as a result of the termination or transfer of employment. For example, the U.S. Government estimated that federal employees lost \$4.4 million in wages from 1992-1994 because of sexual harassment.

According to the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), an employer is held responsible for acts of sexual harassment by its employees when it knew or should have known of the conduct, unless it can show that it took immediate and appropriate corrective measures. An office environment where sexual harassment is not properly addressed will typically lead to low morale and increased turnover.

Workplace romance (sexual harassment) affects the community too as it receives extensive media coverage, especially when a public figure is involved as with former President Bill Clinton and the white house intern Monica Lewinsky thereby leaving room for absenteeism, reduced job satisfaction and productivity, premature ill health and retirement, higher rates of staff turnover and insurance costs, legal defense and liability for sexual harassment claims. These effects may lead to possible strain on the welfare system and possible crime rates like rape, fraud, stealing, etc.

With a majority of the cases of sexual harassment being reported by women, how can it be stopped? As they say, prevention is better than cure. The EEOC pretty much says so. For instance, employers can “nip this in the bud” by proactively providing on-boarding training to new employees during their initial orientation, especially as it pertains to women in the work force, so they know up front that sexual harassment isn’t tolerated. For example, videos of real life sexual harassment stories by various women could be played during such training so that the women, most importantly those new to the workforce, are aware of the various forms that sexual harassment could take. Employers must create cultures that reject sexual harassment by issuing strong policies against it, educating employees about the issue, and establishing formal grievance procedures to deal with allegations of sexual harassments. Employees should also be made known to the “chain of command” in the event of possible sexual harassment. Dress codes should be enforced and open door policies to discuss possible sexual harassment issues. Finally, a training program for managers should detail the reasons for the policy, the variety of forms of sexual harassment, and proper responses to allegations

of sexual harassments. Managers should be made aware that sexual harassment could cost them their careers.

As long as people have to go to work, there will always be interaction between individuals. Having said this, if people respect the limits of their interactions with fellow workers, there is no reason why everyone, “can’t just get along” for the benefit of their employer. Although sexual harassment may never be completely eliminated in the workplace, all parties- women, companies and the community at large would benefit when its occurrence is minimized.

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