

Sexual harassment is a cancerous disease that eats at the heart of most organisations

Author: Newturn Wikirefu . June 2020

There is no credible denial that sexual harassment is rampant in organisations and employees especially women are the most endangered species at the mercy of organisational sexual terrorists. To add insult to injury such sexual monsters are bosses who are masquerading as helpers yet there are wolves dressed in the sheep's clothes. According to McGolgan (2004), sexual harassment is whereby any form of unwanted verbal, non-verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature occurs, with the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person, in particular when creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.

Such verbal or physical acts with a sexual nature include among other things:

- Joking or teasing with a sexual nature
- The continuous invitation to dinner or date despite rejection
- The intentional dissemination of hearsay with a sexual nature
- Enquiring for or sharing a sexual experience
- Spreading and displaying a nude or image with apparent sexual intercourse

It is important to note that workplace covers any place under the direct or indirect control of the employer that an employee needs to be present or go to carry out work. It includes office and other locations where the job responsibilities are undertaken such as offices of clients, destinations of business trips, venues of business lunch/dinner, business branches and also the appropriate extension of the workplace, such as excursion, social activities, staff gathering after work that are organized by the company.

Ways in which sexual harassment manifests itself at the workplace?

There are different ways in which sexual harassment manifests itself at the workplace and these include among other forms:

Verbal Sexual Harassment

This occurs when two male co-workers are constantly teasing with dirty jokes when women are within hearing distance and such jokes range from mildly crude to downright vulgar.

Physical Sexual Harassment

This happens when a male co-worker at times gives a female counterpart a pat on the shoulder as a way

of saying she has done a good job. Later on, the action becomes more physical and extends to resing his hand on hers, putting his arms around her shoulder and occasionally brushing against her accidentally and such an action is tantamount to physical harassment.

Visual Sexual Harassment

It occurs when a male superior co-worker has scantily clad women in suggestive poses prominently posted in his office. Such pictures are not only indecent but obscene and there constitute visual sexual harassment.

Psychological Sexual Harassment

A male co-worker or superior has shown an interest in a female co-worker but she is not keen on accepting his dates and have openly and made it very clear that she is not interested but he insists, showing her with signs of his affection by leaving flowers on her table, dropping hints and finding ways to be alone with her, even making hidden threats and this amounts to psychological harassment.

What are the implications of sexual harassment in the workplace?

- It decreases productivity and increases team conflict.
- Decreases success and meeting of financial goals
- Decreases job satisfaction
- Sexual Harassment undermines ethical standards and discipline in the organization which will lead to disrespect and trust among employees and their seniors.
- The image of the organization will suffer financially and reputation-wise when complainants take the issue to court.
- Increases loss and absenteeism of staff members

Myths Surrounding Sexual Harassment

There is a lot of myth that is woven around sexual harassment in the workplace. The perpetrators of sexual harassment spread malicious and outrageous myths regarding sexual harassment.

Myth 1. Sexual Harassment is rare.

The sexual terrorists in the workplace adamantly argue that sexual harassment is rare and yet sexual harassment is rampant in the workplace.

Myth 2. The seriousness of sexual harassment has been exaggerated and most of the so-called harassment is merely trivial and harmless flirtation.

However, the truth of the matter is that sexual harassment is devastating and traumatic.

Myth 3. If the harasser does not do it intentionally, then it does not constitute sexual harassment

However, contrary to that assertion as long as it is against the will of the victim and makes the person feel offended, humiliated or intimidated the victim has the reason to believe that her/his rejection or resistance will lead to negative consequences.

Myth 4. Victims of Sexual Harassment are all females

However, it is important to note that males can also be subjected to sexual harassment by their female superiors or co-workers.

Myth 5. It you ignore sexual harassment it will go away

It is important to note that contrary to such a claim sexual harassment will never die a natural death.

Myth 6. Sexual Harassment only happens between people of opposite genders

Such an assertion must be dismissed with the greatest contempt it deserves for sexual harassment knows no gender boundaries.

What can be done in the workplace to address the issue of sexual harassment?

1. Develop A Sexual Harassment Policy

Any progressive organisation needs to have a sexual harassment policy that lays down the procedures for decisively dealing with unwarranted sexual harassment at the workplace.

1. Say No Clearly and Firmly

If you are a victim of sexual harassment you should stand your ground and say no to such actions clearly and loudly without any fear or favour to stop the perpetrator from keeping bothering you.

1. Be reasonable About What Others will say

If you are a victim of sexual harassment guard against killer phrases like among others:

“Nothing happened”

“It was a joke”

“There was no big deal”

1. Give yourself credit

If you are a victim of sexual harassment come out in the open and report your case as you are protected by the law.

Against this background, there is an organisational need to embark on a sexual harassment crusade to conscientize workers about sexual harassment, its causes, effects and the measures that can be taken to address such a psychological evil once and for all. Over and above that the organisational sexual terrorists must be subjected to the full wrath of the law otherwise your organisation will be a safe haven for sexual terrorists.

Sources:

ILO: General observation on Convention No. 111: Discrimination (Employment and Occupation), 1958, Report of the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations, Report III (Part 1A), International Labour Conference, 91st Session, Geneva

HASPELS, Nelien et al, Action against Sexual Harassment at Work in Asia and the Pacific, Chinese edition translated by Tang Can et al, Hunan University Press, 2003.

Newturn Wikirefu is the Talent Acquisition Manager at Industrial Psychology Consultants (Pvt) Ltd a management and human resources consulting firm.

Phone +263 4 481946-48/481950/2900276/2900966 or cell number +0784 597343 or email: newturn@ipccconsultants.com or visit our website at www.ipccconsultants.com

<https://thehumancapitalhub.com/articles/Sexual-Harassment-Is-A-Cancerous-Disease-That-Eats-At-The-Heart-Of-Most-Organisations>