

Sexual Harassment: Better Training and Protection in the Workplace

Despite the many advances women have made toward equality in the workplace, approximately 1 in 4 women experience sexual harassment at their place of work and a staggering 40% of these women don't report it because of fear of retaliation. Women need more protection in their workplaces so they can safely and effectively perform their duties.

Sexual harassment is characterized as any harassment in the workplace involving unwanted sexual advances or obscene remarks. Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 makes discrimination based on sex illegal. Although the Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 provides some protection for women against sexual discrimination and harassment, it does not go far enough. Women are reporting sexual harassment at increasingly higher rates every year. Sexual harassment claims have risen 29% in recent years, and retaliation for filing those claims has increased by 28%.

Although women are protected by existing laws, the Supreme Court has significantly weakened these protections by ruling employers are only liable for sexual harassment claims if the harasser has the ability to fire the victim, otherwise the employer is held blameless and cannot be sued by the victim. Employers must be held accountable for their employees' acts of indiscretion. It is the responsibility of the employer to ensure a safe and productive workplace - not the burden of the employee.

In addition to making work environments unsafe and less productive, sexual harassment has effects that permeate life beyond the workplace. 95% of women who are sexually harassed endure some debilitating stress reaction such as anxiety, depression, lowered self-esteem, and headaches. Sexual harassment doesn't just affect women's ability to work, it also affects their mental and physical health.

Prevention is the key to stopping workplace harassment. All employees should be trained about what constitutes sexual harassment and what to do if they are victims of sexual harassment or witness sexual harassment occurring in their workplace. Managers and supervisors should be trained yearly on the signs of sexual harassment, prevention, and proper remediation procedures. Managers and supervisors should also be trained on how to create a safe work environment that discourages sexual harassment. Companies should have stringent anti-harassment policies in place that clearly outline the grievance process and consequences for those who sexually harass their coworkers.

In addition to training, we need to strengthen the laws surrounding sexual harassment. Those who come forward with claims of sexual harassment should be fully insulated from retaliation by their employers, giving victims the confidence to report the harassment without fear of reprisal.

Brothers and sisters, now is the time to protect women and allow them to work in an environment free from the threat of sexual harassment. We should appeal to the Supreme Court to overturn its decision and hold employers accountable for all sexual harassment claims. Let's pressure businesses to enact and enforce comprehensive sexual harassment prevention and remediation programs. It is in our power to end sexual harassment in the workplace.