Sexual Harassment in Workplaces

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Abstract

Sexual harassment is currently one of the major issues experienced by workers in workplaces (Gutek, 2012). This paper aims to give a clear understanding of various aspects of sexual harassment as a problem, its definition, its characteristics, and how workers can deal with it (Hersch, 2015). However, companies and organizations are encouraged to come up with laws prohibiting sexual harassment, making employees aware of how they can file a sexual harassment claim, and lastly, making employees aware of sexual harassment.

Introduction

The US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) defines sexual harassment at the workplace as unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature or sexual advances that affect the way an employee performs his work or end up creating an offensive, hostile, and intimidating working environment (Ishak, 2012). It ranges from a simple sexual joke to physical touching or posting offensive materials. Sexual harassment in workplaces has become common, yet it has a substantial adverse effect on organizations, the person harassed, employees, and the individual who is the harasser. Sometimes, sexual harassment in workplaces is not all about sex; the harasser usually tries to demonstrate power. Whenever an individual decides to use sexual behavior to control you, whether physical or behavioral, that can be referred to as sexual harassment.

In this paper, we will examine the definition of sexual harassment, its effects on the organization and employees, and how management can prevent it in their workplaces.

Types Of Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment in workplaces is of two types: hostile work environment and quid pro quo. Quid pro quo sexual harassment occurs when an individual in higher authority, maybe a supervisor, puts it as a demand that subordinates must learn to put up with sexual harassment for them to get or remain in their work positions. However, this might also be the condition for employees to be promoted or have a pay rise. A single instance of harassment is enough to sustain a quid pro quo claim, while a pattern of such incidents is what comes to be referred to as a hostile work environment.

When an employee is exposed to a hostile work environment, he should seek legal action if he feels that the conduct was unwelcome, based on sex, and sufficient to create an offensive or abusive working environment (Heather McLaughlin, 2012). Management can be held responsible for quid pro quo harassment because it mainly involves supervisors and managerial employees. The negative impact of losing a job and the benefits that come with it puts employees at a crossroads on whether to tolerate sexual harassment. This type of bullying typically creates an intimidating working environment for the employee. There are very many stressful issues that employees deal with in their workplaces. So, management needs to ensure that they protect their employees from any form of sexual harassment. The stress of trying to get work done on time and trying to deal with each personality and attitude should not be compounded by sexual harassment.

Causes Of Sexual Harassment In Workplaces

There are many reasons that lead to sexual harassment in workplaces. One of the primary reasons is cultural values. Cultural values have a way of defining men and women. Women are considered inferior to men. Therefore, women have no self-confidence because of the perspective society has on them. Men, on the other hand, are brought up to feel superior to women. This makes them view women as toys they can play with, and they usually take this notion into workplaces. Such views give men the freedom to harass women in workplaces, making them sexually vulnerable. Women are more susceptible to sexual harassment because they are usually given jobs in insecure positions, while they also lack power (Kumar, 2015). Instead of fighting the vice, they typically prefer to reassign their job positions. Some women, because they are usually not aware of whom to approach, usually keep quiet and suffer in silence. Sometimes, sexual harassment is seen as a power game where men in top positions ask for sexual favors from their subordinates to give them some promotions. This is probably the most common form of sexual harassment. In some instances, men feel stressed after giving their best to the organization; they barely get any recognition, whereas a woman demonstrates some little effort to be recognized. Such men may resort to sexual harassment. Women can also be to blame for sexual harassment (Heather McLaughlin, 2012). Some of them think that every real woman must look sexy. They view sexuality as the only basis of power for a woman. Such views attract sexual harassment from men in workplaces. One of the reasons that sexual harassment is a hidden issue in any organization is that many companies want to safeguard their image.

Effects Of Sexual Harassment In Workplaces

It affects the emotional well-being of an individual

Sexual harassment can affect the mental and emotional welfare of an individual. It affects the self-esteem of an individual and how he relates to others. Sexual harassment causes stress and anxiety to the affected people.

Physical Health

There is a close relationship between physical health and mental health. When a victim of sexual harassment undergoes mental and emotional issues, this leads to illnesses such as high blood pressure, weakened immune system, loss of appetite, headaches, sleep disturbances, and weight fluctuations (Ishak, 2012).

Financial challenges

Due to health problems, the affected person may start having economic challenges. Because of sexual harassment, an individual may lose or resign from his job, leading to a loss of wages. Others become exposed to a broader negative effect on their careers; for example, some may lose their job references.

Global consequences

Sexual harassment dramatically affects the productivity of a firm because it demotivates the people who get sexually harassed. It diverts the minds of the affected persons from their work, therefore affecting productivity. Reduction in productivity greatly affects a firm; therefore, the firm experiences slow growth (Heather McLaughlin, 2012; Gutek, 2012). Sometimes, management should inquire about the private lives of their employees to protect them from sexual harassment. This issue also causes an organization to have negative publicity and exposure. It encourages absence and reduces employees' morale, efficiency, and productivity. Therefore, this is an issue that organizations must work hard to solve.

Strategies To Help And Stop Sexual Harassment

Victims of sexual harassment have always tried to end it. Some of their efforts have proved fruitful, while others have proved futile (Hersch, 2015). When it proves impossible for a victim to end sexual harassment, he should check the policies that the company has laid down to address the issue (Kumar, 2015). Such an individual is encouraged to document everything.

Personally inform the harasser that his actions are offensive

This appears to be the most difficult thing for a victim of sexual harassment to do, but it is the most effective move in addressing sexual harassment. Sometimes, even the harasser is not usually aware that his actions are offensive. Sometimes, to him, it may look like just a mere joke. If the victim is unable to face the harasser, he should write a letter or an email telling him to stop the behavior. An

individual can also choose to inform the supervisor of the issue.

Human resource and supervisors

If the harasser refuses to stop the harassment even after the victim informs him that his actions are inappropriate, one should take the complaints to the next level (Gutek, 2012). The victim should make sure that he/she follows the legal procedures that have been laid down by the company. If the victim does not get a good response, he/she should continue up to the next chain of command.

Write it down

It is imperative to follow a company's procedure to solve the issue. This is because if the victim does not follow the company's procedure, it is very likely for him to lose in court. So, the victim must first settle the complaint with the company. The next thing an individual should do is document it and put some files away from the workplace. Employer retaliation is illegal.

Employers are always encouraged to listen to all the employees who file complaints in an organization. Sometimes retaliation occurs, and this is the reason why an individual is encouraged to have a copy of his file (Ishak, 2012).

Have a local attorney evaluate the harassment claim

If all the above does not bring a solution to the affected person, she should look for an attorney to help assess her suit so that she can file her case in a court of law.

Resources Managers Can Use To Prevent Sexual Harassment

Managers can use various resources to stop sexual harassment at the workplace. Since this issue is considered the most violating and intimidating form of violence, many countries came up with laws to help detect this problem. These laws protect every individual from sexual harassment, ranging from women and employers to employees. The court also assists in addressing and preventing sexual harassment in workplaces by giving guidelines to employees.

It is critical for managers to be aware of their responsibilities. One of their principal duties is to provide a secure and safe working environment for their subordinates. It must be free from any form of harassment and discrimination. Managers also need to know why women are always silent concerning sexual harassment because the absence of any complaints does not mean the absence of sexual harassment.

Finally, managers need to come up with an anti-sexual harassment policy. Every member of the organization needs to be made aware of this policy so that it will be sufficient enough to establish zero tolerance for sexual harassment (Akhtar, 2013). They also need to develop a proper complaint channel for everyone who might be a victim of sexual harassment.

Conclusion

In conclusion, sexual harassment is a very negative issue in organizational culture. An anti-sexual harassment policy needs to be established to prevent this issue and provide a safe and secure working environment (Kumar, 2015). Managers need to use policies, laws, and complaint procedures against sexual harassment. It should be highly avoided or prevented to ensure the continued growth of an organization. It should be noted that sexual harassment can occur in both white-collar and blue-collar jobs. Although workplace relationships are allowed in some companies, couples are always encouraged to maintain professionalism in the workplace (Akhtar, 2013).

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