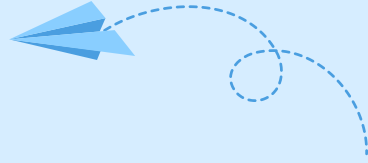




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Hostile Work Environment

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| ABSTRACT

This paper explores hostile work environment and its consequences for the victim and the organization. One of the causes of hostile work environment is quid pro quo, where a person in a position of influence asks for sexual favors before making employment decisions concerning an individual. The second cause is verbal abuse and discrimination. Title VII of the Civil Rights Act addresses the issues of workplace discrimination. This research study involved conducting interviews in three restaurants in Memphis District headquarters. The three respondents cited sexual harassment as the primary cause of hostile work environment. In all three cases, the harasser was either a supervisor or a manager.

Sexual harassment threatened to adversely affect their work environment. The institutions involved in the harassment neither had a clear policy nor offered training on workplace harassment. The organizations could incur massive financial losses if they did not address this violation. The paper concludes that managers have the highest responsibility to prevent actions that create hostile work environments.

Keywords: hostile workplace environment, sexual harassment, verbal abuse, discrimination, quid pro quo.

Hostile Work Environment



INTRODUCTION

A work environment becomes hostile when an employee is harassed or subjected to any form of unwelcome visual, verbal or physical action that is pervasive to the point of adversely affecting working conditions. One of the conditions that can lead to creating a hostile work environment is sexual harassment. It is presented by a coworker or a manager who, for an extended period, makes sexually explicit jokes that distract a person from concentrating on the job. The second situation is when a boss verbally refers to your religion, age or gender and continues the behavior even after a request to stop. From the historical perspective, hostile work environment is derived from the sexual harassment theory of discrimination. Harassment in the workplace has caused a heated discussion in the legal front in the past decade. The number of legal actions by individuals and organizations against the perpetrators of the violation has also escalated. The paper asserts that the management should adopt anti-harassment policies and provide training for the employees and managers to prevent the creation of a hostile work environment.

TYPES OF WORKPLACE HARASSMENT

Workplace harassment may be manifested in sexual harassment, verbal abuse or discrimination. The most common form of sexual harassment is

quid pro quo that mostly affects women. Quid pro quo is a Latin term that means “this for that.” It is a form of sexual harassment. It occurs when rejection or submission of sex is used as a determinant for employment decisions (Berman, West, & Van Wart, 2016). In this condition, an individual in a position of influence threatens to withdraw or alter job benefits such as promotion, employment, salary increases, work assignments, and shifts in case of the rejection of sexual favors (Lockhart, 2016). It also occurs when a person with control over the employment status of a subordinate seeks sexual favors as a condition to offer job-related benefits of the position.

Another type of harassment is verbal abuse and discrimination. It refers to an unwelcome behavior from any person in the workplace (Berman et al., 2016). It includes verbal abuse and discriminatory utterances that cause emotional duress and result in significant interference with the comfort or work performance of an employee. This type of hostile actions create an offensive or intimidating work environment and affect both genders in equal measure. The behavior causes a hostile environment if it creates a negative impact on the person who tries to stop the act, such as demotion and termination.

LAWS AGAINST WORKPLACE HARASSMENT

The laws explored in this section refer to sexual harassment. Most importantly, harassment against a co-worker, subordinate, potential employee or supervisor in a sexual manner is considered illegal.

Harassment includes unpleasant remarks such as pestering based on an individual's sex. Sexual harassment is only illegal if it exceeds to the point of creating issues at the workplace or leading to adverse employment decisions such as demotion (Lehman, n.d.). In the federal law, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 contains provisions on sexual harassment in the workplace (Lehman, n.d.). The EEOC guideline addresses both hostile environment and quid pro quo. According to this legal provision, sexual harassment, verbal abuse, and discrimination are illegal conducts. The law protects the victim from the harasser or retaliation against people who present the grievances.

PERSONAL RESEARCH IN LOCAL DISTRICT OFFICES

In an attempt to ascertain what causes a hostile environment, interviews in three departments of the Memphis District were conducted. All respondents, who were females, cited sexual harassment as their main concern. All three persons interviewed were presented with the same set of questions. The first inquiry was about the individual who committed the harassment stated, the time when it occurred, what exactly the alleged harasser did, whether it was still ongoing, and how it affected them. The second question was whether they had told anybody about these incidences. The last question was to inquire whether the organization had anti-harassment policies.

As a result, two of the three respondents claimed that the supervisors perpetrated most of the harassment — they requested to meet them

after work and threatened to remove them from the overtime register if they denied. The respondents asserted that it happened every week, a day before their day off. The two respondents remarked that they often had to stay at home on their last day of duty every week to avoid supervisor's requests. The third interviewee claimed that the manager could reach to touch her bosom when he called her in his office. None of the three respondents reported these incidents to anybody out of the fear of losing their jobs. Moreover, they have neither seen anti-harassment policies nor received relevant training. However, they said they would be happy to have the issue resolved.

The interviews demonstrated that the most common cause of hostile workplace is sexual harassment. It has devastating effects on the organizations and individual employees. The employees interviewed stated that the harasser was either a supervisor or a manager. It indicates that workplace harassment is perpetrated by a person who holds a position of power. According to the victims, harassment occurred weekly, thus amounting to an uncomfortable work environment. The cost of the issue for the organization consists of the losses from absenteeism as the female workers began to stay at home when they predicted the occurrence of harassment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Employers should know that prevention is the best strategy to handle harassment in the workplace. Harassment should be expeditiously addressed to prevent the situation from spinning out of control. The

employer has the greatest part to play in preventing harassment. If the company does not take actions to preclude harassment, it will eventually become liable for the violation. Employers can avoid the issue by adopting the following steps.

Adopting Clear Policies Against Harassment

Employers should ensure that the employee handbook has a policy prohibiting harassment in the workplace. The policy should clearly define what constitutes harassment. It should distinctly state that the organization does not tolerate such behavior. The policy should also assert that anyone found engaging in the violation will be severely disciplined or terminated. The handbook should outline the procedure for filing complaints of harassment and provide assurance that all allegations will be investigated. The employers should guarantee that individuals presenting the complaints about harassment will not face retaliation.

Training Employees and Supervisors

Every year, companies should organize training sessions for employees, supervisors, and managers. Such seminars should educate all staff about the actions that lead to harassment. They should inform the employees that they have the right to work in an environment free of workplace harassment and to review the complaint procedure. A separate training for managers should be conducted to educate them on the ways of handling complaints.



CONSEQUENCES OF HARASSMENT

For the Organization

Harassment can result in heavy losses for an organization. One of the consequences is the reduction in productivity due to the decline of morale and motivation. An employee who is paranoid that the perpetrator may repeat attempts of discrimination, sexual harassment, and verbal abuse may not work effectively. The productivity of the witnesses of harassment in the workplace may also reduce because of the demotivation that may result from the realization of the unethical practice (Toker, 2016). Harassment creates an unpleasant work environment for witnesses because they feel powerless and helpless, which kills their morale. If a company is associated with unresolved cases of harassment, its image may be damaged and will repel customers and potential employees.

Harassment leads to bad decisions in organizations. A recruiter with the culture of quid pro quo sexual harassment may employ a person on the basis of his or her physical appearance rather than competence. The recruiter may also extend benefits such as expensive business trips where traveling and hotel cost are incurred for personal rather than business reasons. The individuals in a position of influence may also advance underserved loans and overdrafts to gain sexual favors from their targets.

Furthermore, harassment causes increased absenteeism. Cases of harassment result in adverse psychological impacts that can lead to illnesses (Greenwald, 2016). People fearing such instances may choose to stay at home because the workplace is unsafe. The time spent in resolving

problems caused by sexual harassment may better be used for productive activities.

Moreover, harassment can cause legal costs for companies. Employers must ensure that employees are protected from violence. An employee who is aware of incidences of harassment but fails to take measures attracts legal action against the organization. Employers who have not established clear channels of complaints may be held liable for this violation.

Consequences for Individuals

Harassment can also cause high personal costs. About 90% of the people in the U.S. facing harassment in the workplace suffer from depression, anxiety, sleep disorders, nausea, sexual dysfunction, and low self-esteem (Toker, 2016). For example, sexual harassment victims lose an estimated \$4.4 million in wages annually due to unpaid leave (Toker, 2016). Sexual harassment, as well as verbal abuse, inhibits career development. People facing sexual harassment stand the risk of losing a job or opportunity for promotion if they reject sexual advances of the person in authority. Harassment creates an uncomfortable environment and exerts indirect pressure on people to leave their jobs. It may create traumatization that has adverse emotional consequences for the targeted employee.



| CONCLUSION

Harassment, be it sexual, discriminatory or verbal abuse, creates a hostile environment. Actions that create a hostile environment cause heavy legal ramifications for the organizations. The right of employees to work in an atmosphere free of discrimination is firmly protected by Title VII of the Civil Rights Act. Employers have the responsibility to educate their employees about this fundamental right and ensure it is protected. When the violation cannot be avoided by the employers, aggrieved individuals can seek intervention of the EEOC. Companies can avoid legal costs and increase productivity by preventing harassment in the workplace.

