

Harassment and abuse



Principle:

Policies are in place and implemented to prevent and remediate harassment and abuse, including sexual harassment and abuse.



Key message:

Abuse and harassment can take many forms, and can be hidden.

Definitions of abuse

“...any action that intentionally harms or injures another person.”¹

“Treat with cruelty or violence, especially regularly or repeatedly.”²

What is abuse and harassment?

- Harassment and abuse includes verbal, non-verbal, visual and physical elements.
- It can include creating negative work environments through bullying and intimidation, physical violence, sexual harassment, and other behaviours that harm an individual or group.
- Harassment and abuse can harm individuals in many ways - both physically and psychologically.
- In some cases this can lead to loss of dignity and confidence, depression, anxiety, stress, reduced productivity, injuries and suicide and other forms of death.
- In many parts of the world, laws exist to protect workers from many forms of abuse, such as sexual harassment and violent assault.

What is expected at sites?

- Policy covering harassment and abuse, which outlines what harassment and abuse is. This should be regularly reviewed and updated.
- Training on the harassment and abuse policy provided to all workers.
- Standard operating procedures on investigating incidents and providing access to remedy - this should protect workers' anonymity and dignity.
- Documentation of complaints involving harassment and abuse.
- An effective monitoring mechanism to identify occurrence and

Facts

- 64% of respondents in a 2011 global survey said that they had been bullied at work³
- One in three women will be victims of gender based violence in their life, including at work⁴
- Sexual harassment is not just physical – it can include a wide range of verbal, non-verbal and visual behaviour



Incidence of workplace harassment may not always be obvious

Sexual harassment

What is sexual harassment?

- unwanted
- improper or offensive
- of a sexual nature
- can affect terms of employment
- can be verbal, non-verbal, physical, or visual

Continued...

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re-occurrence of harassment and abuse.

Indicators of abuse and harassment?

- Observing incidence of harassment and abuse can be challenging, but indicators can include:
 - offensive, intimidating or sexual language, sounds, gestures or other forms of communication
 - unwanted sexual contact or advances
 - displaying offensive images, including pornographic or otherwise indecent images
 - hitting, punching, or other forms of assault
 - offensive jokes
 - shouting, shaming or unfairly criticising individuals
 - providing excessive or inappropriate work
 - coercion and bribery
 - ignoring or isolating individuals

Responses to abuse and harassment?

- Any complaint of harassment or abuse should be treated seriously - it can be a serious issue for workers health and well-being.
- Before action is taken, the incident or incidents should be investigated carefully but sensitively - this means protecting workers anonymity and dignity.
- If there is evidence of harassment and abuse, action must be taken to address it.
- The action taken depends on the severity of the incidence, for example:
 - In cases of sexual or other severe forms of harassment, perpetrators should be dismissed, and local authorities should be informed if any laws were broken.
 - In other situations, it may be sufficient to talk with the worker who has shown abusive or harassing behaviour, warning them of future penalties.

Workplace bullying

- In many countries workplace bullying alone is not illegal.
- However, bullying at work is not acceptable and victims should be aware of their right to access grievance procedures and remedy.
- Bullying can become illegal harassment or discrimination when it relates to:
 - sex, gender and sexual orientation
 - disability
 - age
 - race
 - religion and belief
 - pregnancy and maternity
 - other discriminatory factors
- It may become assault if there is physical violence or verbal threat and intimidation.
- In these cases, it may be necessary to inform local authorities.



A work environment free from bullying, harassment and abuse is often more productive

Additional information and resources

- [Ethical recruitment factsheet](#)
- [Respect for diversity factsheet](#)
- [Access to remedy factsheet](#)
- [Sample - sexual harassment policy](#)
- [Sample - non-discrimination policy](#)
- [Sample - SOP on abuse remediation](#)
- [Sample - grievance procedure](#)
- [Sample - grievance record](#)

1. The Free Dictionary, 2015. Abuse. www.medical-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com

2. Oxford Dictionaries, 2015. Abuse. www.oxforddictionaries.com

3. International HR Forum, 2011. Workplace Bullying: A Global Issue. www.internationalhrforum.com

4. World Health Organization, 2013. Global and regional estimates of violence against women: prevalence and health effects of intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence. <http://apps.who.int>