

5 Key Types of Workplace Harassment and Ways to Stop it.

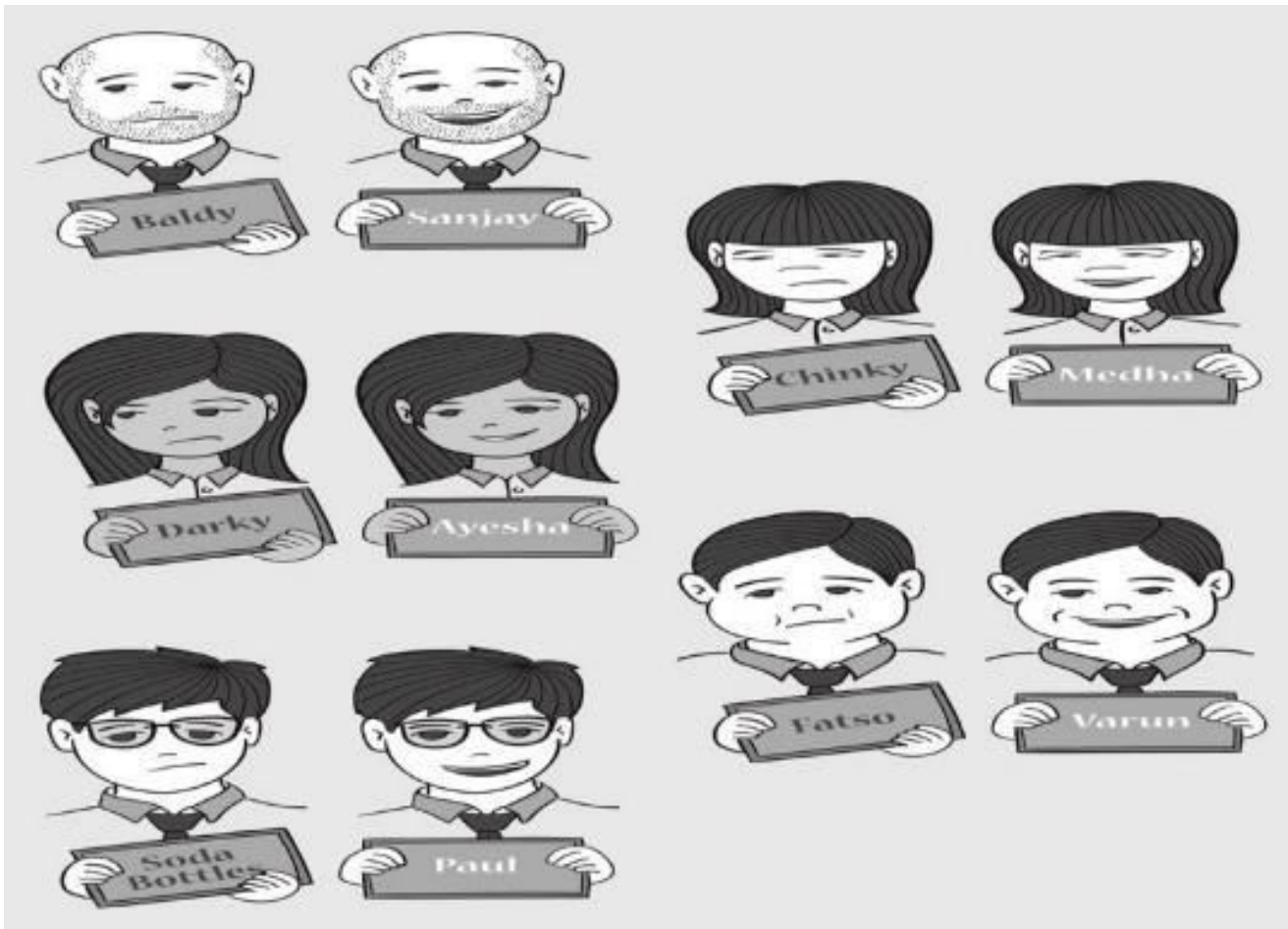
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- You are so fat, why don't you skip your breakfast?
- Anila is pretty, she will do a good job in handling clients
- You are 41, when do you plan to get married?
- Jo is gay, it will be odd to invite his partner to the family day.
- Not Sure if Maya will comeback after her maternity, let us defer her promotion to the next cycle.
- Your presentation is as sexy as you are.
- I just don't want to hire women in my team, they take too many leaves.

Aren't the above common comments that we over hear at work? Filled with stereotypes and bias, they are hurting and are classified as workplace harassment.



Harassment on the basis of the following prohibited grounds of discrimination: race, colour, religion, national origin, ancestry, place of origin, age, physical disability, mental disability, marital status, sexual orientation.

Because our unconscious bias has caused us to assume that someone who speaks slowly is unintelligent, we assume the speaker is unintelligent. Everything they say or do for the rest of the conversation, is clouded by our judgement

5 Different forms of Harassment



Discriminations:

The more common and recognizable forms of discriminatory harassment are on the basis of Race, Skin Colour, Religion, Gender, Disability, Sexual Orientation, Age based Harassment. Any preferential or detrimental treatment can be reported and calls for Disciplinary action based on the gravity of the incident.
E.g.: Preference to a fair skin person; male over a female;

Power-Play:

This is a common form of harassment based on the differences of the Superior and the Subordinate. A manager could be giving all important tasks to the most talented person as it will be executed to perfection. This may over a period of time may cause over load and stress to the best performer in the team and the others will be demotivated as they don't get good opportunities to work. Alternatively, a subordinate also gives special gifts to the manager, hoping for some favors at work in terms of Work scheduling/promotions/performance ratings/travel opportunities/project allocations etc.

It is essential for the Manager to be fair to all the team members and not have any relationships with subordinates.

Bullying:

It is a personal form of harassment of passing hurting comments based on one's appearance and looks. Bullying in its most basic form is not illegal but can be damaging nevertheless.

Personal harassment includes:

- Inappropriate comments
 - Offensive jokes
 - Personal humiliation
 - Critical remarks
 - Ostracizing behaviours / Blackmails
 - Intimidation tactics / frightening tactics
 - Or any other behaviour that creates an intimidating and offensive work environment for the victim
- Cyberbullying and online harassment are a serious concern for employers.
- Share humiliating things about the victim on Social media or WhatsApp
 - Spreading rumours, lies or gossip about the victim on social media
 - Send harassing instant messages or text messages directly to the victim
 - Uploading, downloading and distributing of pictures without their permission
 - Virtual stalking

The above are considered as a punishable Offense under the Information Technology Act of our country and calls for fine and jail term.

Retaliation:

The following are considered acts of retaliation if they happen because you reported or supported a charge of sexual harassment

- Isolation or exclusion from any normal work activity
- creating a hostile work environment

Retaliation harassment occurs when a person harasses someone else to get revenge and to prevent the victim from behaving in such a way again.

Retaliation harassment could be a subtle form in terms of excluding a colleague from team outings. Or can be grave as to fire a junior employee for having filed a complaint against a senior person.

Sexual Harassment:

Workplace Sexual Harassment is a **behaviour** defined as **unwelcome** and **sexual in nature, a subjective experience, IMPACT** is what matters not intent, often occurs in a matrix of **POWER**, whether **directly or by implication**.

Any behaviour that is

- Unwelcome
- Sexual in nature (Physical, verbal, non-verbal)
- Has an Impact on the victim whether or not the Harasser intended to harass

Sexual Harassment against women is punishable as per the Prevention of Sexual Harassment Act, 2013. In the wake of the #metoo movements a lot of victims have come forward to report these incidents and this the most prevalent form of harassment at most workplaces. Organisations take this seriously and Act on this immediately.

Where to Report Workplace Harassment?

Document and capture the incident specifics, along with any evidence, time of incident, witness present and report it to the specific authorities as per your organisation.

- The disciplinary Action policy of your organisation should clearly list the forms of harassment that can be report and the consequences or penalties for different forms of harassment. For grave instances Whistle Blower or grievance redressal can also be approached
- For any sexual harassment related complaints, report to
 - The Prevention of Sexual Harassment (PoSH) Internal Committee
 - **SHe-Box www.shebox.nic.in** Online Complaint Management System, This Sexual Harassment electronic Box (SHe-Box) is an effort of Government of India to provide a single window access to every woman, irrespective of her work status
- When in Doubts always approach your manager and HR to seek clarification on the next steps

What do you do, if you are a Victim?

- **3S tips for a Victim:**
 - **Speak up:** Make it clear to the harasser that you consider the behaviour as harassment
 - **Say No:** Say a firm 'NO' and tell the person to stop contacting you
 - **Stop:** Stop answering the person's calls, emails, and other messages
- Delete or mark the number as spam in your phone and social media accounts
- Inform your friends and family what's going on
- Don't publicize your location and daily habits
- Keep records and evidences
- Talk to the HR, Internal Complaints Committee or Harassment cell at your institution or workplace

What do you do, if you are a Witness?

Many a times, witness keep quiet for the fear of the impact on their job status and don't want to get in the bad books of their managers. Most witness prefer to ignore the incidents that they have witnessed. But witness do play a key role in getting justice to the Victims. If you are a witness to a harassment incident:

- First step is to get the victim out of the situation
- Encourage the victim to report the incident

- Document and report the incident to respective HR or the committee
- Do not spread rumours or gossip of what you have seen, confidentiality is crucial

What do you do, if you are a Harasser?

How do you know if you or your behaviour is harassing someone or not, intentionally or unintentionally? Follow the **4-check challenge** and stop if you think you may be harassing someone.

- Watch for the body language, are colleagues uncomfortable or take a step back when you are around?
- Will you exhibit the same behaviour or language even if your family was present?
- Will you like it if the same behaviour was done to you or to your loved one?
- Would you like it to be reported to the media under #metoo now or 20 years later?

What do you do, if you are a Manager?

Managers and supervisors have an additional responsibility in maintain the organisations Culture. They are the first and single point of contact for the employees. Hence managers need to:

- **Set an Example** - Do not participate in any inappropriate behaviour **Zero Tolerance Policy** to any behaviour that is harassing in nature
- **Do not ignore** a case of Harassment
- **Act** on any complaint of Harassment **immediately** - as per the guidelines laid out and regardless of your personal opinion
- **Treat everyone** you manage **fairly**
- Encourage your members to speak up
- Do not cross **personal boundaries**
- **Do not retaliate**

What to do, if you are the HR?

HR plays a very crucial role; it is important that they are seated among the employees to understand the pulse of the employees. They need to

- Implement, update and review the company policies time and again.
- Train the employees
- Look out for preventive measures
- Create more awareness among employees on a frequent basis
- Ensure employees are trained well during the induction
- Ensure the complaint process and the complaint committee is robust
- HR team should also be trained and empowered to handle such situation

Workplace harassment often impacts the productivity of the team, hurts the morale of the employees and impacts the work environment. It is best to prevent and arrest at the earliest stage.

Author notes: if you have faced any form of workplace harassment or if you found this article helpful, or need more inputs, then please do share your thoughts with Viji Hari – viji@kelphr.com.

About the author



A Professional Speaker, an active blogger and columnist on various online HR forums. Viji is actively involved champion in creating awareness about Diversity and Inclusion, PoSH at work place and setting up prevention and redressal committees in the corporate world. With 19 years of industry experience in MNC's in India & USA, she has Co-Founded KelpHR in 2013 and authored the book BCC:Behind Closed Cubicles. Viji helps in enabling safer workplaces across India. She aim's to impact not just a brand but also the enhance productivity, work culture, the values of the organisation. She has been associated with 100+ organisations across India in creating Diverse, safe and Harassment free workplace.

The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 is a legislative act in India that seeks to protect women from sexual harassment at their place of work. It was passed by the Lok Sabha on 3 September 2012. It was passed by the Rajya Sabha on 26 February 2013. <http://bit.ly/219bBtR>