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Two in three women sexually harassed at work

Two in three women and one in three men have been subject to one or more forms of sexual harassment at work, according to a survey of nearly 10,000 people by the peak body for working people.

The ACTU survey received responses from 9607 people – 68% of whom are women – across all sectors of the economy from education and public services to mining, finance and hospitality.

Nearly two thirds – 64 percent – of women who responded to the survey said they'd experienced sexual harassment at a current or former workplace, along with 35 percent of men.

The most commonly form of harassment was crude or offensive behaviour, reported by 69 percent of respondents, with 48 percent experiencing unwanted sexual attention, 35 percent inappropriate touching and 18 percent explicit texts, emails or messages on social media. Eight percent of respondents had experienced sexual coercion.

While 58.8 percent of those who'd experienced harassment told someone about their experience, only 26.7 percent chose to make a formal complaint.

The number one reason people declined to pursue a formal complaint was that they feared negative repercussions (cited by 55 percent of people who'd experienced harassment). Close behind was a lack of faith in the complaints process (cited by 50 percent of respondents).

Two thirds – 66 percent – of people said they'd witnessed sexual harassment at work, with 23.6 percent of those saying that the harassment they'd witnessed was frequent, and 41.7 percent saying it was occasional.

Quotes attributable to ACTU President Michele O'Neil:

“Everyone should go to work free from the fear of harassment and unwanted sexual attention.

“For many people – mainly women – today in Australia this is not the reality. Our workplace laws have failed women who are experiencing harassment at work.

“The results show that while nearly two thirds of women and one third of men have experienced harassment, very few believe that our current rules will deliver them justice.

“We need to change the rules. Sexual harassment is a workplace issue and people who experience it should be able to take it up through the workplace umpire.

“We need access to fair, effective and efficient complaints mechanisms that support people who've been harassed, not punish them.”

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