



AMC DCSPER News Item



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News Date: 02/07/96 11:49 AM

Keywords: EMPLOYMENT LAW

Sexual Harassment--Still a Workplace Problem

For the third time the Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB) has studied sexual harassment in the Federal workplace. Their most recent study concluded that although a great deal of attention to the issue has raised employee consciousness of the definition and scope of the issue, 44% of women and 19% of men responding to the survey indicated that they had experienced some form of "unwanted sexual attention" in the workplace within the last two years.

Key facts and conclusions reached by the MSPB include:

-The 1994 survey results are similar to the prior study in 1987 in which 42% of women and 14% of men reported experiencing sexual harassment.

-Formal complaints are rare: Only 6% of those harassed took formal action, primarily because they believed that the incident was not serious enough to do so.

-Training has been widespread: 87% of supervisors and 77% of non-supervisors.

-Agency Policy: All Federal agencies have policies prohibiting sexual harassment and 92% of the work force are aware of their agency policy.

-Definition of sexual harassment is more widely understood: Since the original 1980 MSPB study, the number of men who categorized uninvited sexual teasing, jokes, remarks or questions by coworkers as sexual harassment rose from 42% in 1980 to 64% in 1994.

-Responding to sexual harassment: The most common reaction is to do nothing (44%). Asking or telling a person to stop is the most often action taken by those who choose to do something (88%); and, this is reported as the most successful approach to use--of those who took such an action 60% report that it made things better.

-Penalties are viewed as inconsistent or inappropriate: A substantial number of survey participants feel that the discipline imposed is too light, and that there is a double standard, with higher-level management treated less severely than lower-graded employees.

-Emphasizing sexual harassment: Has not resulted in making the workplace uncomfortable for employees--only 18% of men and 6% of women feel increased discomfort.

-Coworkers are more likely than supervisors to be the source of sexual harassment: 79% of men and 77% of women claim sexual harassment by a coworker. This contrasts to 14% of men and 28% of women who claim harassment by a supervisor.

The MSPB makes several critical recommendations based on their findings. Among the more important:

-Agencies should publicize agency policies, penalties imposed against violators, and encourage assertive action by those who are victims. Although most Federal employees report knowledge of agency prohibitions, far less is known about what happens to those who commit sexual harassment. Penalties should be "public enough" to serve as examples and perhaps as a deterrent to potential harassers.

-Managers and supervisors should be firm and consistent in penalizing proved harassers. The seriousness of the offense should be the key criteria when deciding what to do. A more severe penalty can be given to supervisors who commit harassment for they have a dual obligation: not to commit harassment and to "create and maintain" a workplace free from sexual harassment.

-Agencies should "diagnose the extent and seriousness" of sexual harassment in their organizations to determine the best approaches and solutions to undertake. Resources are precious. They should be expended wisely only after the organization defines the best methods of utilizing resources to combat specific problems.

-Agency training should be tailored to address specific agency workplace problems arising from sexual harassment case experience. Since sexual harassment by coworkers is the predominant experience across government, training should highlight this problem.

Within AMC, sexual harassment is treated through a team approach with representatives of EEO, legal and civilian personnel working together to ensure that the AMC policy prohibiting sexual harassment is communicated to the workforce and strictly complied with by all under a "zero tolerance" standard.

The AMC Office of Equal Opportunity has created a Program Manager for the Prevention of Sexual Harassment (PM POSH) to lead this effort, with similar positions

established at AMC subordinate locations. This team is committed to the proposition that freedom from sexual harassment, and other forms of discrimination, is a fundamental right of each employee.

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