

## **Third of workers experience sexually inappropriate behaviour from colleagues but many are too scared to report it, research shows**

Almost a third of people have experienced sexually inappropriate behaviour at work, but only half felt confident enough to report it, new research shows.

Groping, stroking, inappropriate comments and threats that it would harm their career if they did not return sexual advances were among the unwanted attention received, mostly from senior colleagues.

Victims described feeling violated, intimidated, ashamed, degraded and scared, but many chose to stay silent rather than report it for fear they would be treated negatively as a result.

The research, commissioned by [The Barrister Group](#), reveals the true extent of the toxic cultures that still exist in many workplaces, an issue highlighted by a number of recent celebrity scandals.

The study of over 2,000 UK workers, evenly split by gender, found that 29% had been a victim of sexually inappropriate behaviour from a colleague. Almost one in three women (31%) were affected, compared to one in four men (26%) and 69% said the perpetrator was someone more senior.

Almost half (48%) did not report the matter and of those who did, many said they felt awkward, isolated, were accused of overreacting and, in 12% of cases, forced to find another job.

The main reasons for staying silent included fears that they wouldn't be believed or taken seriously, and even that they would be blamed.

Dr Anna Loutfi, an employment barrister and part of The Barrister Group, said: "For many of us, the #MeToo movement felt like a watershed moment which started a wider conversation about what is and isn't acceptable behaviour, not just for women and not just at work.

"The fact that sexual harassment is still so prevalent in the workplace is hugely disappointing.

"Recent celebrity scandals may have heightened public awareness of what constitutes inappropriate behaviour, but the reality seems to be that far too many people are still putting up with it for fear that they will be seen as the problem rather than the perpetrator.

“That is fundamentally wrong and must be addressed.”

Worryingly, although most people claimed they knew what constituted inappropriate behaviour, a third didn't think touching someone's breasts, slapping their bum or making sexual comments about their appearance was wrong. Women were quicker to call this out than men.

Further, a third (34%) of workers believed their bosses were complicit and happy to look the other way anyway, while a quarter (23%) described their workplace culture as sexist or misogynistic. Less than two-thirds (61%) said their employer had a policy in place to deal with sexually inappropriate behaviour.

Dr Loutfi added: “It is surprising that so many people still don't recognise that certain behaviours are wrong, and, for the avoidance of doubt, employers should have clear policies in place.

“There is obviously a distinction between what is unlawful and what is inappropriate, but both are unacceptable in the workplace.

“Employers have a legal duty of care and employees have a right to expect that they will not be made to feel uncomfortable, intimidated or violated in the course of their work.

“There needs to be a culture of openness and transparency, where employees feel empowered to report inappropriate behaviour and are confident that when they do they will be supported and the necessary action will be taken.”

ENDS

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