



focus: sexual harassment

What the law says

You might be surprised to learn that one out of every three women has been sexually harassed at work at some point in her life, according to a recent survey.

Yet sexual harassment is illegal. Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits sexual harassment or unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical harassment of a sexual nature.

How to spot it

There are two types of sexual harassment that can lead to lawsuits.

Quid pro quo harassment is the more overt form, and it refers to situations when an individual in power demands sexual favors or acts in return for something such as a promotion or a

promise not to punish or terminate a victim.

A hostile work environment is the more common form of sexual harassment. It occurs when someone is made to feel uncomfortable due to frequent exposure to offensive sexual jokes or conversations, pornographic images, or repeated unwelcome sexual advances.

Important: The victim and the harasser can be either a man or a woman, and the victim and the harasser can be the same gender.

What to do about it

Keep in mind that you can't always wait for the victim to tell you about the harassment. One study found that 71% of women who were sexually harassed failed to report the

unwelcome behavior.

So keep an eye out for anything that could be considered offensive based on gender. Obviously, pornographic images or videos have to be removed from the workplace. Otherwise, they could help prove a job site was sexually hostile.

If a worker tells you that he or she is being sexually harassed, you need to investigate the allegations according to your employer's sexual harassment policy. Chances are you'll want to get your HR manager involved in the investigation.

Also, let the victim know that he or she has to tell the harasser that the behavior is unwelcome. In some situations, the harasser isn't even aware that what he or she is doing is offensive.
