Sexual harassment in workplaces make women unproductive, say experts

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Women experts have decried the prevalence of sexual harassment of girls and young women in the workplace, arguing that it makes them unproductive and prevents them from contributing to the development of their country.  
  
The women revealed this in a webinar with the topic, “Safeguarding the world of work from violence and harassment,” which was organised by an advocacy group called Pataki Legacy Foundation.  
  
A Human Resource and Administrative Manager at Chrono Studeos, Folashade Oguntoyinbo, said a world free from harassment and violence is the only way to attain gender equality and safe working conditions.  
  
Folashade explained that psychological and behavioral consequences, including uneasiness, depression, and anxiety, are common among victims of sexual harassment.  
  
She said the government, civil societies, and organisations should play crucial roles in promoting anti-harassment campaigns and enacting laws that protect workers, especially women and girls who are most vulnerable.  
  
She also appealed to organisations to empower workers through training to know their rights, as well as conduct research on gender-based violence at work.  
  
She stated: “Sexual violence and harassment affect productivity, the victim’s finances, and even the reputation of the company. Everyone loses when a workplace is contaminated with prejudice and harassment. Employees suffer from absenteeism, low morale, gossip, antagonism, tension, and anxiety as a result of the hatred caused by harassment.  
  
“Sexual harassment not only harms one’s health, but it also harms one’s finances. Sexual harassment can harm a victim’s work performance. Some people retreat from the job and detach from coworkers due to fear and low confidence.  
  
“The failure of any organisation to appropriately prevent and respond to sexual harassment can lead to costly lawsuits. A high-profile case can harm a company’s brand and lead to lost sales.”  
  
A legal practitioner, Baraatu Dangana emphasised that young girls and women can report harassment anonymously and keep their personal information confidential.  
  
She advised employees to address any complaints with their employers internally instead of making derogatory comments about them on social media.  
  
She also urged the women to reach out to professional bodies for help if their organization fails to take any action in response to reported cases.  
  
Dangana said: “If you experience sexual harassment at work, the company, by law, should take any reports seriously. Make notes about what happened and when. If you have evidence and even if the harassment was online or in an email, you can save it.  
  
“After reporting and your employer or management is not taking your complaint seriously, or if you need further support, there are several avenues available to you. We have the Nigeria Bar Association (NBA), legal aid councils, and organisational bodies that are ready to help you.  
  
“It’s imperative that organisations take sexual harassment seriously. Everyone has the right to feel safe at work, and learning how to spot and address such abuse is one step we can all take to ensure this is the case.  
  
“Women should learn how to make anonymous reporting of sexual harassment possible. Anonymous reporting channels can further empower victims who fear social or professional consequences.  
  
“Organisations can also key into anonymous surveys so that staff can report if they’ve experienced or witnessed sexual harassment. Breaking the silence around sexual harassment requires building trust in the reporting mechanism. Employers must assure confidentiality, protection against retaliation, and swift action upon receiving complaints.  
  
“Employees and employers should respect one another. As an employee, you should never go on social media to abuse your employer.”  
  
The convener, Oluwaseyi Ibuoye reaffirmed that the foundation regards sexual harassment as a corrupt practice, and emphasised that to end the harassment, victims must be aware of their rights and take legal action.  
  
According to Oluwaseyi, the foundation will keep pushing for women’s rights by helping them achieve financial stability and spreading knowledge of the recently ratified International Labour Organization Convention 190 (C190), which calls for the abolition of harassment and violence against women in workplaces.