How widespread sexual harassment in the workplace is, and whether this has increased or decreased over time

In my role as a welfare officer, I meet people across the generations. Frequently the discussion of former workplaces comes up, either recent history or decades into the past. Therefore, I have formed a good anecdotal opinion based upon testimony from clients.

The conclusion I reached is that sexual harassment has become more covert than previously which makes it feel like the victim is being gas lighted. In the distant past, sexual harassment was blatant, easily identified, and easily witnessed by others – bottom pinching, groping whilst at a work station in full view of others. Today, it often takes the form of suggestive remarks, discreet unwanted touching often under tables, and the effect leaves a person feeling anxious, not wanting to be making a fuss over what is easily carried off as “misunderstanding”. I have spoken to people who give testimony about feeling unsure about reporting, feeling uneasy about challenging it, and often choosing to leave rather face scrutiny and have to relive awful events.

Who experiences sexual harassment in the workplace, who perpetrates it and what the impact is on difference groups

This will not be in keeping with current thinking, but it seems to be an issue for men as much as women. Men describe a culture where a female making suggestive remarks or groping them has to be taken as “good fortune” and to complain implies that they are homosexual. This tends to be equal work colleagues causing this.

Women tend to have the problem more covertly, and usually from someone in a superior position to them, which adds a power dimension to the problem.

Actions that the Government and employers should be taking to change workplace culture to prevent sexual harassment, give people more confidence to report sexual harassment, and make this issue a higher priority for employers

An independent support line, or advocacy service would be a good first step. Victims often fear being ridiculed, belittled or seen as trouble making for raising the issue. To have a confidential, independent service to talk with and be supported by would be a good way to help victims minimize shame and stand up for themselves.

How workers can be better protected from sexual harassment by clients, customers and other third parties

A clear message must be made that the work place is not a date place. This may sound extreme but the primary objective of a work place is work. No-one is paid primarily to be sexually available.

The effectiveness of tribunals and other legal means of redress and what can be done to improve those processes

Not qualified to answer

The advantages and disadvantages of using non-disclosure agreements in sexual harassment cases, including how inappropriate use of such agreements might be tackled
Non-disclosure agreements leave the abuser free to carry their actions. Whilst a distressed victim might sign one as part of a payoff package, or might sign in ignorance of what they might later find themselves asked to do in a workplace.

There should be very strict rules on non-disclosure, and any form of bullying should be expressly removed from such a clause.

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