

Managing psychosocial hazards in the workplace: spotlight on harassment

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Work-related stress often caused by psychosocial risks is estimated to affect around **one third** of all Australians. **One in five** Aussies experience a mental health condition in any year and **one in two** of us will experience a mental health condition in our lifetime.

You don't need to be an expert on mental health, but as an employer, people manager or leader you do need to manage psychosocial risks in the same way you manage workplace health and safety (WHS) risks, in a reasonably practicable manner.

Harassment

One of the most common psychosocial hazards is harassment. Harassment towards another person in relation to age, disability, race, sex, relationship status, family responsibilities, sexual orientation, gender identity, or intersex status can also be considered discriminatory.

- Harassment may be perpetrated by a person's employer, a co-worker or group of that person's co-workers.
- Harassment is not always obvious, repeated or continuous, and may be a one-off incident.
- Examples of workplace harassment may include telling insulting jokes about particular racial

groups, making derogatory comments or taunts about someone's disability, sharing inappropriate images, videos, emails, text messages, social media messages, letters or notes about an individual or group of workers' personal characteristics.

- Examples of workplace sexual harassment may include asking intrusive questions about a person's body, staring, leering or unwelcome touching (e.g. deliberately brushing up against a person or touching them in a sexual way), sexual or suggestive comments, jokes or innuendo, sharing sexually inappropriate images or videos or uninvited sexual propositions.

As a person conducting a business or undertaking (PCUB) positive duties under work health and safety laws require you to do all that you reasonably can to prevent workplace and sexual harassment.

Table 1 provide some tips on the process steps that you can follow and the actions you can implement to do the best you reasonably can to prevent harassment and sexual harassment in your workplace.

It is important to note that if someone finds a particular behaviour offensive, humiliating or intimidating, and it relates to their sex, race, age or any of the listed attributes, then it is considered harassment.

Sexual harassment is any unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature that is done to either offend, humiliate, or intimidate another person, or where it is reasonable to expect the person might feel that way when exposed to certain behaviours.

These can include uninvited physical intimacy or propositions, remarks with sexual innuendo and jokes of a sexual nature.

Table 1: Steps to help you prevent harassment in your workplace

Source: Safe Work Australia



Identifying how, where and when harassment including sexual harassment might happen

Assessing the likelihood that a worker may experience harassment or sexual harassment and how it may affect them

Implementing the most effective control measures to prevent harassment from happening

Working out how you will address harassment – especially sexual harassment – it is does happen in your workplace

Checking that your control measures are working and whether there is anything more than you can do

Talk to your workers
Create a safe physical and online work environment

Create a positive and respectful workplace culture
Implement clear workplace policies
Lead by example

Provide information and training on preventing harassment and sexual harassment

Address unwanted or offensive behaviour early
Quickly respond to reports of harassment

Encourage workers to report any harassment
Implement safe work systems and procedures

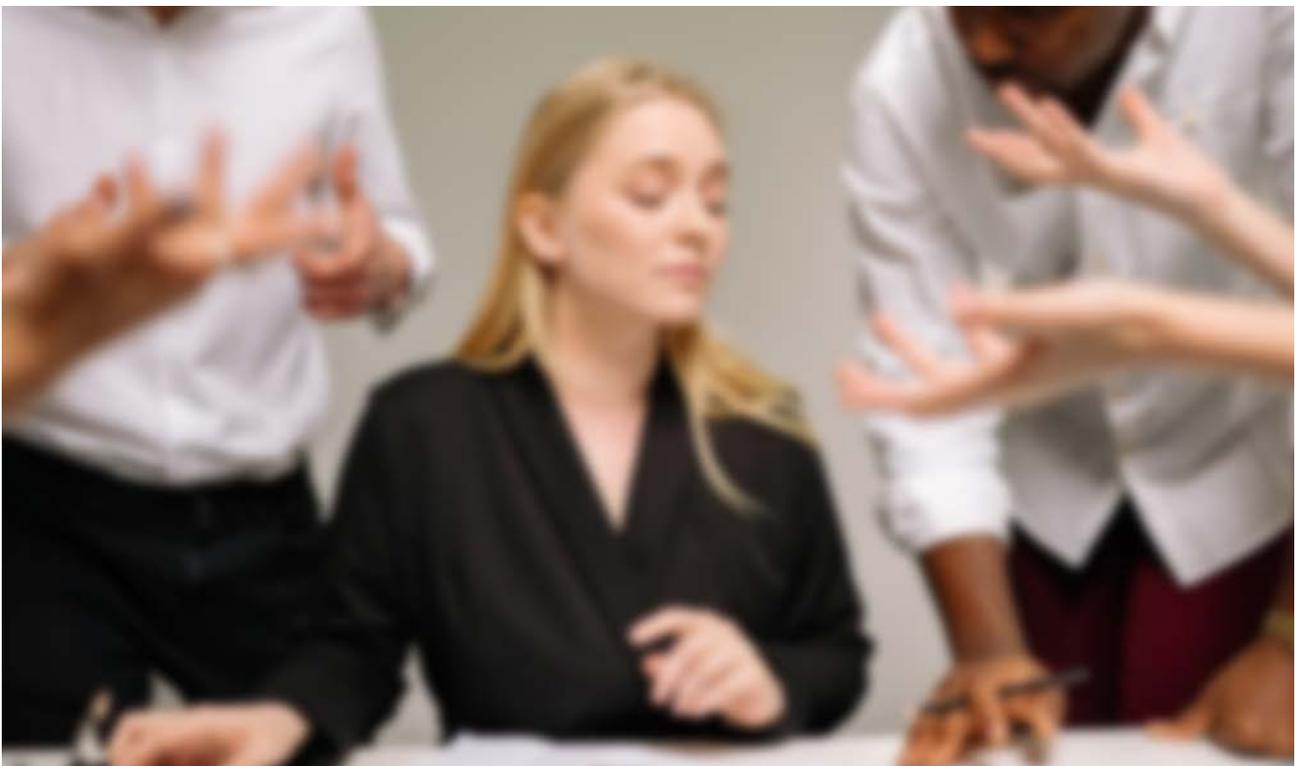


Photo credit: Yan Krukau, pexels.com

What other tools are available to help you to manage the risks of psychosocial hazards in your business?

Safe Work Australia has a range of resources available on its website, including guides for both employers and workers. Visit bit.ly/Safe-Work-Harassment

Workplace Health & Safety Queensland has developed a useful psychosocial risk assessment tool which takes you through the four steps in the process to help you identify and manage risks. This template can be used by any business in Australia. Visit bit.ly/WS-QLD-RiskAssess to download the tool.

Work Safe Victoria has a range of useful tools available through its website including a WorkWell Toolkit which provides practical step by step ideas, tips and suggestions to help employers of different sizes prevent mental injury and create a safe and mentally

healthy workplace. Visit bit.ly/WS-Vic-WorkWell to access the tool kit.

Another facet of handling managing psychosocial risks in the workplace is ensuring that you have a clear and fair grievances and complaints process in place.

SafeWork SA have produced a very useful template for a Grievance and complaint resolution procedure that can be adapted for any business to follow. Visit bit.ly/WS-SA-Complaints to download the template.

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