

Gender-Based Violence & Harassment: Creating Safer Workplaces and Communities

This issue of Migration Matters defines types of gender-based violence and harassment, outlines how it affects newcomer and racialized women, and provides further resources for creating safer environments and supporting survivors.

Gender-based violence

Gender-based violence (GBV) is violence that is committed against someone based on their gender identity or gender expression.¹ At its very foundation, gender-based violence is about power and control. This can take many forms. The [power and control wheel](#) is often used to illustrate some of the ways that power and control can be exerted in relationships.

Definitions

Harassment can be of a sexual nature or not, can occur in any setting, and can be perpetrated by a stranger, co-worker, neighbour, or even a friend. However, because of the environment, **workplace harassment** comes with unique barriers, as well as unique legal protections.

Sexual harassment may look like unwanted sexual attention, coercion, or hostility (e.g. misogynistic jokes).

Sexual assault is any unwanted sexual contact, including groping or coercion into sexual contact by use of force or abuse of power or authority.

Social context

Women were more likely than men to report experiencing workplace harassment in the past year. People with disabilities and members of a visible minority were more likely to experience harassment than other groups.² Some of the women most vulnerable to workplace sexual harassment are those in lower-paying, less secure, and/or non-traditional jobs, as well as racialized and immigrant women.³ Newcomer women are more likely to have jobs that put them at risk, such as working in residential settings as caregivers. Many of the sexual harassment cases that were heard in BC and Ontario Human Rights Tribunals between 2000-2018 also pleaded discrimination based on race, ethnicity, place of origin and related grounds alongside the sexual harassment.⁴ This indicates that we need an intersectional approach in our understanding of vulnerability.

Intersectionality describes how aspects of a person's identity (such as gender, race, ability, sexual orientation, etc) intersect to form a unique experience. The term was originally developed in 1989 by Kimberlé Crenshaw⁵ to describe how Black women face discrimination based on both their race and gender and that these should not be treated as separate instances.



Original Power and Control Wheel developed by:
Domestic Abuse Intervention Project
202 East Superior Street Duluth, MN 55802

The wheel has been adapted for contexts including [immigrant women](#) and [the workplace](#).

Gender-based violence can take many forms, including sexual assault, intimate partner violence and harassment.

References

- [Status of Women Canada. \(2018\). About Gender-Based Violence](#)
- [Statistics Canada. \(2018\). Harassment in Canadian workplaces.](#)
- [Women's Legal Education and Action Fund \(LEAF\). \(2013\). Submission to the Standing Committee on the Status of Women Study of Sexual Harassment in the Federal Workplace](#)
- [Hastie, B. \(2019\). Workplace Sexual Harassment: Assessing the Effectiveness of Human Rights Law in Canada. UBC](#)
- [Crenshaw, K. \(1989\). Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics. University of Chicago Legal Forum.](#)

To learn more about intersectionality, see AMSSA's [Migration Matters info sheet](#).

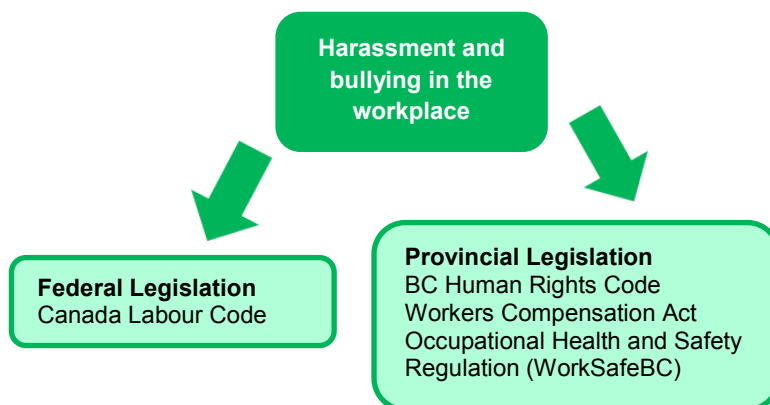
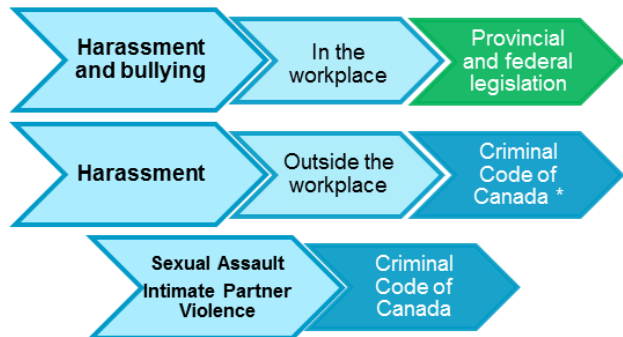
Impacts

Gender-based violence can impact a survivor in physical, emotional, psychological, spiritual, social, and financial ways. In terms of the workplace, even when violence occurs outside the workplace, the effects can often seep into it. Workplace harassment and violence is a risk factor for poor workplace psychological health.⁶ Sexual harassment in the workplace impacts the way that women navigate their work environments.⁷ Sexual harassment in the workplace can cause absenteeism (and thus potentially loss of income), as well as undermine a person's sense of dignity and competency in the workplace.⁸ Women who experienced workplace harassment were more likely to report stress, poor mental and physical health, and were less hopeful for the future than those who had not experienced harassment.⁹

Disclosing and reporting: barriers

While employees have legal protection, many do not disclose or report when something happens to them. **Disclosing** means telling someone what happened, while **reporting** includes a formal complaint (e.g. with HR or the police). As with any other gender-based violence, reasons for not disclosing may include: power differentials, fear of repercussions, and/or feelings of shame.^{10,11} The vast majority of workplace harassment cases are against a supervisor, manager, or person of authority.¹² Many people may choose to not report a case of harassment because doing so may threaten their job and livelihood. Furthermore, in any reporting process or investigation, the survivor is often re-victimized by being asked to recount their experiences in detail and to prove there was no consent.¹³ Newcomer women are particularly vulnerable. Different cultural norms around gender-based violence may mean that some newcomers may not necessarily know they should report something.¹⁴ Even if they do, they may fear repercussions around immigration status and/or loss of income. For some, their immigration status or the status of their partner and/or family may be linked to their job.¹⁵ As newcomers, they may not have as many supports or options and they may also have a language barrier, making it harder to report harassment.

Legal Protections for reporting



*Actions that constitute workplace harassment (e.g. lewd comments) do not meet the criteria of criminal harassment. Stalking would be an example of criminal harassment.

Resources for addressing harassment

- * [Creating Safer Workplaces and Communities - Ending Violence Association \(EVA\) BC](#)
- * [Resource Toolkit - WorkSafeBC](#)
- * [Is it Harassment? A Tool to Guide Employees - Government of Canada](#)
- * [Resources for Addressing Sexual Assault and Harassment in Class - Teaching Tolerance](#)
- * [VictimLinkBC—Government of BC](#)
- * [Transgender Sexual Violence Survivors: A Self Help Guide to Healing and Understanding - Forge Forward](#)
- * [Resources – Ending Violence Association \(EVA\) BC](#)
- * [Legal Services Society—Legal Aid BC](#)

References

- ⁶ ESDC. (2016). *Psychological Health in the Workplace*
- ⁷ Angus Reid. (2018). #MeToo: Moment or movement?
- ⁸ VAW Learning Network. (n.d). *Spaces where sexual harassment occurs and its potential impacts*. Western University
- ⁹ Statistics Canada. (2018). *Harassment in Canadian workplaces*.
- ¹⁰ Brownridge, D. A., & Halli, S. S. (2002). *Double jeopardy? Violence against immigrant women in Canada*. *Violence and Victims*, 17(4), 455-471
- ¹¹ ESDC. (2017). *Harassment and sexual violence in the workplace*
- ^{12,13} Hastie, B. (2019). *Workplace Sexual Harassment: Assessing the Effectiveness of Human Rights Law in Canada*. UBC
- ¹⁴ WHO. (2009). *Changing cultural and social norms that support violence*
- ¹⁵ EVA BC. (2019). *Gender-Based Violence, Harassment, and Bullying: Workplace Policy Guidelines for Response and Prevention*