

- Sexual harassment is a workplace problem that threatens the physical and psychological well-being of thousands of Canadian workers, mostly women, every day. It also touches the lives of many others whose sisters, mothers, wives, daughters, and friends become victims.
- Studies show that three of every four working women have been sexually harassed. More than a third of Canadian working women have suffered sexual harassment at work, and a quarter of them were fired as a result. Of those not fired, nearly half quit their jobs because of the harassment.
- Sexual harassment can devastate the working lives of women. Many are forced to quit their jobs, losing seniority, and sometimes end up with jobs at the bottom of the pay scale. This contributes to the continuing wage gap between men and women.
- UFCW Canada is committed to stopping sexual harassment wherever it occurs, and to increasing awareness of its nature and extent. Sexual harassment isn't just a personal threat. It is economic blackmail. And it is against the law.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT

UFCW Canada can, and will, help.

UFCW Canada does not tolerate sexual harassment or any other type of unjust, demeaning discrimination. Our union has a long history of standing against discrimination wherever it occurs – on the job, or in society at large.

Many UFCW Canada collective agreements contain specific provisions that require employers to guarantee workers the right to work in an environment free from harassment. They also spell out the punishment for offenders and ensure that the employer will take action to correct the situation. UFCW Canada also works with employers to help them achieve realistic policies and procedures to fight sexual harassment.

UFCW Canada stands by members and helps protect them from sexual harassment. Special training is provided by the UFCW Canadian Council for full-time staff representatives to help them identify cases of harassment, and the steps to take when it is encountered.

UFCW Canada also keeps members informed by distributing literature, and by putting sexual harassment on the agenda at union functions, including workshops, leadership training, and joint labour-management conferences and seminars.

To find out more about sexual harassment and your rights on the job, contact your UFCW Canada full-time staff representative, or contact



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SEXUAL HARASSMENT

It's wrong.

It's against the law.

It's not your fault.

We can help.



Sexual harassment is any unwanted sexual attention.

Sometimes sexual harassment is directed at a particular individual. It can take the form of suggestive comments, pressure for sexual contact, or demands for sex in return for a job or other benefit. It can involve unwanted sexual touching, or even rape (both are sexual assault).

But sexual harassment also exists when sexual jokes, sexist remarks, or the display of suggestive images or objects – including swimsuit calendars or pin-ups – create a hostile or intimidating environment.

Often, the harasser is someone in a position of authority, but harassment also occurs between co-workers or between peers. And, while anyone can be a victim of sexual harassment, it is a simple fact that the vast majority of victims are women, while virtually all harassers are men.



Sexual harassment has serious consequences.

Many victims of sexual harassment feel degraded and humiliated. Some feel confused. Until they realize that it is the harasser who is responsible for the problem, instead of themselves, they often question their own feelings and reactions.

Anger and anxiety can turn into physical problems, such as nausea, headaches, and fatigue. Particularly in persistent cases, the very real physical effects of harassment can lead to serious problems in the victim's personal life or job performance. Loss of self-confidence, health problems, poor references, and a disrupted work record can have a long-term economic impact, such as having to leave one's job, and not being able to find another. It is economic blackmail.



Speak up and fight back!

- Don't ignore the problem. It won't go away by itself.
- Raise the issue of harassment in your workplace or wherever you encounter it.
- Give a copy of this fact sheet to someone who could benefit from reading it.
- Support victims of harassment. Don't gossip – livelihoods, and more, are at stake.
- Keep your full-time UFCW Canada staff representative informed of conditions in your workplace.



If you are harassed:

- Remember that it is not your fault. The harasser is responsible for his own behaviour.
- The harassment isn't likely to stop if you ignore it. It may actually get worse.
- Tell the harasser to stop – in person, or in writing. Take someone with you as a witness and for support.
- Keep a record describing each incident, including dates, times, and exact quotes whenever possible. If you write to the harasser to tell him to stop, keep a copy, and consider using registered mail.
- Talk with co-workers. Don't spread rumours, but others may be victims of the same harasser. Lodging a complaint or grievance as a group often makes it easier to stop the harasser.
- Inform your full-time UFCW Canada staff representative of the problem as quickly as possible. They are trained to be able to determine the most appropriate action to take, including filing a grievance, a lawsuit, or even criminal charges. When necessary, they will also be able to advise you on your rights to employment insurance benefits, and, in certain cases, workers' compensation claims.



Sexual harassment is not a game or a joke.

Sexual harassment is not "flirting", or good-natured teasing. In fact, it isn't about sex at all. It is an abuse of power – the social and economic power men hold over women. When men use their power to treat women sexually in a non-sexual context, they interfere with women's right to work, to learn, to walk on the street without fear, and to be treated as equal and respected participants in public life.



Sexual harassment is against the law.

Canadian law prohibits sexual harassment. Federal, provincial, and territorial human rights commissions are responsible for investigating and resolving harassment complaints. Employers have been held accountable for sexual harassment in the workplace. As a result, most unions, companies, universities, professional bodies, and other institutions have adopted their own policies against sexual harassment.

The reality of the matter, however, is that only half of women surveyed believe that a complaint would be taken seriously in their workplace. Often, women who report harassment are not believed, or are even blamed for the problem. As well, the harasser may look for ways to retaliate. And, as some high-profile cases have shown, legal action by the victim can be not only slow, stressful, and expensive, but also very costly on a personal level.