

How Workplace Harassment Impacts Physical and Mental Health

Physical Symptoms

Individuals subjected to workplace harassment and/or discrimination can develop physical symptoms such as stomach problems, headaches and other stress-related ailments. These health problems can crop up even if a person isn't directly subjected to harassment or discrimination. These types of misconduct can be detrimental to a person's health if it occurs as a matter of course in the workplace.

In some cases, the body may become so overwhelmed from the experience(s) that the individual develops muscle aches, headaches, or even chronic physical health problems such as high blood pressure and problems with blood sugar. Researchers at the University of Pittsburgh found that women who had experienced harassment or assault were about twice as likely to have elevated blood pressure and insomnia.

More specifically, the part of our brain that processes emotions, including stress, is located right next to the brain stem, which deals with involuntary functions such as heart rate and breathing. That's why when we are increasingly stressed, it impacts cardiovascular functioning, autoimmune diseases, metabolic function, and other issues.

Psychological symptoms

Stressful experiences are particularly deleterious to mental health when they are chronic, negative and unpredictable, a threat to one's identity, or signify a failure to achieve a desired goal. Sexual harassment, in particular, is associated with increased risk of anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder, as well as diminished self-esteem, self-confidence, and psychological well-being.



The feelings of shame or guilt that a person may experience when subjected to sexual harassment at work can greatly impact their self-esteem and sense of self-worth as a professional. They may question their achievements or think that this type of behavior is just "normal" in the field. Personal care like diet, exercise and sleep can also become a challenge.

Other Effects

The impact and consequences of harassment vary from person to person and can be influenced by the duration and severity of the offensive behavior

Additional responses to harassment may include:

- Anger
- Powerlessness
- Isolation
- Fear of going to work
- Inability to concentrate on work
- Increased absenteeism and sick leave

You are not alone

If you have experienced sexual misconduct, or know someone who has, **please be assured there are people who care about what you've endured.** You're not alone in what happened to you, or in how you feel, no matter what form your experience took. It is important for you to know that the feelings, reactions, and questions you may be experiencing are similar to those of other people who have been subjected to similar misconduct through no fault of their own.

