



Sexual

Harassment

at

Work

***A leaflet for
Usdaw members***

Usdaw

*Union of Shop, Distributive
and Allied Workers*

www.usdaw.org.uk

Sexual Harassment at Work

Sexual harassment is an important issue for Usdaw. It is overwhelmingly a problem experienced by women. However, harassment can be directed by women to men. Young men and gay men can be particularly vulnerable. But generally it is women, of all ages, who can be faced with harassment from fellow employees, from a boss or from members of the public.

What is Sexual Harassment?

- There is no one single definition of sexual harassment.
- Sexual harassment is behaviour which is **imposed** on another person because of her sex. It is unwanted, unreciprocated and offensive. An essential characteristic of sexual harassment is that it undermines the woman's dignity at work, or creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for her. It can take many forms including: physical contact of any sort; suggestive remarks or so called 'jokes'; sexual propositions; unwanted comments on dress or appearance; verbal abuse of a sexual nature; leering; and displaying pornographic pictures or pin-ups.
- The common feature of all this conduct is that it is unwanted by the person on the receiving end. Whether or not the harasser intended to be objectionable is not the point. If the behaviour is unwelcome and the attention is not wanted by the other person, it is harassment.

Sexual Harassment is a Trade Union Issue

Sexual harassment creates an atmosphere and environment in the workplace which is not acceptable. Usdaw believes that everyone has a right to work in a situation which is safe and supportive, free of fear of harassment or discrimination.

- Sexual harassment can seriously damage your health. Sexual harassment can make a worker feel threatened, humiliated, patronised. It is demeaning and distressing and can affect a person's mental and physical well-being. It is therefore an important health and safety issue.
- Sexual harassment is a widespread and serious form of sex discrimination. It threatens and undermines the individual concerned. It can even mean being moved to another job or to a different location, to loss of promotion and worse still, to job loss.
- Black women can be particularly vulnerable – the dividing line between racial and sexual harassment is often blurred.
- Gay men and lesbians can also face harassment and offensive behaviour.
- Black workers, gay men and lesbians may feel particularly vulnerable and reluctant to complain about sexual harassment. This makes it even more important to spread the union's message that sexual harassment will not be tolerated.
- Usdaw is totally committed to opposing all forms of discrimination and to ensuring the rights of all women and men to fair and decent treatment.
- Sexual harassment, therefore, can affect every aspect of a person's life especially by threatening the person's confidence and sense of well-being. Usdaw also recognises that the harassment itself can occur beyond the workplace. It may take place on the way home from work or during social activities in the wider community. Usdaw believes that the most effective way to prevent this is by tackling the issue directly, at source, in the workplace.

Taking Action Against Sexual Harassment – Employers' Responsibilities

Employers are required to take action to prevent sexual harassment occurring. They have a duty to ensure that employees are aware that such behaviour is not acceptable. Employers are responsible for their own actions and those of their employees, so if an incident of sexual harassment does occur, it is up to the employer to take steps to deal with the incident and prevent any reoccurrence.

Tackling Sexual Harassment Directly

If you are being sexually harassed, there are a number of things you can do. It is not your fault, you have a right not to be harassed.

- Do not try to deal with this on your own; tell your union representative, confide in family and friends – get as much confidence and support as you can. You can always contact a woman union official to discuss any matter in strict confidence. *(See back page for names, addresses and telephone numbers.)*
- Tell the harasser that this behaviour is unwelcome and ask him to stop. Very often an early word prevents the matter escalating. Do it in writing if you do not wish to talk to him, or go with your union representative. It is important to accompany your representative even if you do not say anything. This prevents the harasser claiming that since you did not complain personally, he did not believe you objected to his behaviour. Keep a note of what happened and a copy of any letter that you send him. This can be important evidence.
- If he does not stop, keep a diary of what happens, noting incidents, witnesses, if any, dates and times. Let your union representative have copies.

Taking Action as a Union Member

Everyone can take action to help stop sexual harassment happening in the workplace.

- Be aware of the issue. Sexual harassment is not a joke. It is a very real problem which can have serious consequences for all concerned.
- Make sure your own behaviour does not cause offence or misunderstanding.
- Take a stand against sexist language and behaviour and pornography and support workmates who are experiencing sexual harassment.

Union Action

Usdaw is here to work with you to make sure that there is no place for sexual harassment in your workplace. Prevention is better than taking action after the event. Usdaw's priority is to establish an environment which is free from sexual harassment. Action can be taken in a variety of ways including:

- Running workshops and get-togethers for union members and representatives to raise awareness of this issue, and to give confidence to people who may wish to bring this matter out into the open.
- Drawing up policy statements with employers and negotiating workplace procedures which can deal with any incidents fairly, quickly and confidentially.
- It is important to ensure that sexual harassment is seen and dealt with as a disciplinary matter by employers. Equally, as Usdaw's Rule Book makes clear, action will be taken by the union against any member who sexually harasses another person during the course of union business or activity.

Remember ...

**You are not alone in tackling this matter.
The union is here to work with you.**

Contacts

Listed below are the contact names and addresses of union officials who co-ordinate the union's equality work in your area.

South Wales and Western Division

Tracey Macgregor
Usdaw, 1 Bank Road
Kingswood
Bristol BS15 8XL
Tel: 0117 961 6061
e-mail: bristol@usdaw.org.uk

Linda Riggs
Usdaw, First Floor
Belgrave House
73 Mutley Plain
Plymouth PL4 6JJ
Tel: 01752 665951
e-mail: plymouth@usdaw.org.uk

Eastern Division

Megan Wigley
Usdaw
The Anderson Centre
6 Olding Road
Bury St Edmunds
Suffolk IP33 3TA
Tel: 01284 775700
e-mail:
burystedmunds@usdaw.org.uk

Midlands Division

Alex Fraser
Usdaw, 3c Market Place
Kegworth
Derby DE74 2EE
Tel: 01509 686900
e-mail: kegworth@usdaw.org.uk

North Eastern Division

Jayne Shotton
Usdaw, 198 Portland Road
Shieldfield
Newcastle upon Tyne
NE2 1DJ
Tel: 0191 232 0531
e-mail: newcastle@usdaw.org.uk

Scottish Division

Alison McCullough
Usdaw
1 Queens Lane North
Aberdeen AB15 4DF
Tel: 01224 652820
e-mail: aberdeen@usdaw.org.uk

Southern Division

Sam Odusina
Usdaw, Meldrum House
89-91 Middleton Road
Morden
Surrey SM4 6RF
Tel: 020 8687 5950
e-mail: morden@usdaw.org.uk

North West Division

Jane Hunter
Usdaw, 5 Ibis Court
Centre Park
Warrington WA1 1RL
Tel: 01925 578050
e-mail:
warrington@usdaw.org.uk

Or contact:

Women and Equalities Officer
Usdaw, 188 Wilmslow Road, Manchester M14 6LJ
Tel: 0161 224 2804

Usdaw

*Union of Shop, Distributive
and Allied Workers*

www.usdaw.org.uk

Published by Usdaw, 188 Wilmslow Road, Manchester M14 6LJ