



Monday 1 April 2019

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SEXUAL HARASSMENT AT WORK RIFE DUE TO “BROKEN LAWS”

Kingsford Legal Centre, Redfern Legal Centre, Women's Legal Service NSW and the National Association of Community Legal Centres have today released a comprehensive report **#MeToo: Legal Responses to Sexual Harassment at Work**.

The report details the endemic nature of sexual harassment in workplaces across Australia, and suggests key reforms to reduce sexual harassment, increase reporting, and radically change workplace culture.

“From bakeries to banking firms, from supermarkets to law firms, sexual harassment in Australian workplaces is rife and remains under-reported. The law is broken and fails to protect workers from sexual harassment,” Kingsford Legal Centre Law Reform Solicitor Maria Nawaz said.

The report makes over 45 recommendations to build a culture where women can access and enjoy their right to work, in safe workplaces that are free from sexual harassment.

Recent data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics indicates 1 in 2 women and 1 in 4 men experience sexual harassment during their lifetime, but barriers to reporting sexual harassment in workplaces remain, with fewer than 1 in 5 people proceeding to make a formal complaint following sexual harassment at work.

Ms Nawaz explained that sexual harassment disproportionately affects women, and is a form of gender inequality which prevents many people from participating fully in the workforce.

“We know that sexual harassment in Australian workplaces is at endemic levels, and the current legal framework is woefully inadequate. We need immediate and systemic law and cultural reform to reduce sexual harassment, and increase access to justice for people who do experience sexual harassment in their workplaces,” Ms Nawaz said.

Sharmilla Bargon, employment law solicitor at Redfern Legal Centre said reports of sexual harassment at work are skyrocketing.

“We regularly advise clients who have been sexually harassed, and are then fired or bullied when they report it. The conduct is often shocking. It is totally unacceptable: no one should have to put up with this at work. We also know that international students, women with disability, LGBTQ+ people, Indigenous women, young people and women of colour are more likely to experience sexual harassment,” Ms Bargon said.

“Our laws should reflect our values as a society, and at the moment workplace laws do not clearly protect workers against sexual harassment. We currently have to use ‘workarounds’ to take swift legal action for our client. We want employers to be under a duty to take steps to stop sexual harassment in the workplace, and if they do nothing, they should be subject to penalties.”

Assistant Principal Solicitor at Women’s Legal Service NSW Pip Davis said the community is ready for change in this area.

“Sexual harassment is a form of violence against women. We know the extent of the problem, the impact on women and broader society and what needs to be done. Governments at the state and federal level, and individual workplaces must act to implement these recommendations to ensure everyone feels safe at work, free from sexual harassment,” Ms Davis said.

The **#MeToo: Legal Responses to Sexual Harassment at Work** report has now been submitted to the Australian Human Rights Commission’s National Inquiry into Sexual Harassment in Australian Workplaces. You can read the full report [here](#).

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We can also provide former clients for interview on request.

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Kingsford Legal Centre acknowledges the Gadigal and Bidjigal Clans, the traditional custodians of the Sydney Coast. We pay respect to those Elders, past and present and thank them for allowing us to work and study on their lands.