

Briefing 5 – Workplace initiatives: the role of managers and supervisors

1. Introduction

Summary of key points

- Managers and supervisors have responsibilities in preventing sexual harassment.
- Tools to support managers and supervisors, including training and human resources policies, can help to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace.
- Targeted training programmes can help managers and supervisors to reduce the incidence of sexual harassment, for example, by reducing production pressures.

The briefing provides guidance for training and awareness-raising of managers and supervisors, with a particular focus on practical initiatives for low/non-unionized workplaces. This includes measures to create a working environment that respects and empowers workers, builds human resources' skills, and promotes social dialogue to enable workers to participate in the development of workplace policies.

2. Managers and supervisors: their role in preventing violence and sexual harassment

Managers and supervisors have a responsibility to ensure that workplaces are free from sexual harassment. However, many supervisors have received little training on the issue. Managers and buyers do not always recognize the challenges and difficulties facing supervisors.

Verbal abuse, including shouting and name calling, often highly sexualized, is common in factories and farms. Supervisors, particularly those whose pay depends upon worker productivity, sometimes may mistakenly believe that using verbal abuse as a motivational punishment can spur worker productivity. For these supervisors, skills-training can equip them with positive motivational techniques that can replace verbal abuse; this in turn has the potential to increase worker productivity.

3. Training for managers and supervisors

The benefits of training for managers and supervisors

When managers and supervisors are aware of the damaging consequences of sexual harassment and have the tools to prevent it, there is a 'win-win' situation for the employer and workers. Training can help managers and supervisors improve efficiency, productivity, performance and retention of workers. Research by Better Work (Brown et al. 2014, Better Work 2015) found that factory profitability decreases as verbal abuse increases. In addition to decreasing productivity, verbal abuse raises production costs by forcing factories to pay more to attract and retain workers.



A growing number of lead companies and brands, multi-stakeholder initiatives and suppliers provide training for managers and supervisors to raise awareness about sexual harassment, deal with complaints and create a positive working environment. Training is one of the most important tools that can change workplace culture and reduce violence and sexual harassment, benefitting brands, employers and workers. Fair Wear Foundation, the Ethical Training Initiative, the Ethical Tea Partnership and Better Work, among others, have found that many supervisors are inadequately trained to manage people, as well as lack the skills to handle sensitive issues like harassment.

Three case studies, below, together with Case study 4.3, illustrate different training programmes for managers, supervisors and workers, with the aim of addressing sexual harassment and violence in global production workplaces.

- ➔ **Case Study 5.1 Ethical Trading initiative: Equal Treatment training for managers, supervisors and workers**
- ➔ **Case Study 5.2 Ethical Tea Partnership training to tackle discrimination and harassment in Kenya**
- ➔ **Case Study 5.3 Challenging sexual harassment in the textile sector through international support (Better Work)**

Training can change managers' and supervisors' perception of sexual harassment, as illustrated by the quote in the box below.

"I always thought that when women spoke about being sexually harassed, they meant they were raped. But now I understand that sexual harassment can take place in many different forms." (Manager attending Better Work training in Jordan)

Issues to cover in awareness raising and training for managers and supervisors:

- Knowledge about compliance with international standards and national law.
- Company statement to make clear that sexual harassment and verbal abuse will not be tolerated.
- Understanding of how to prevent verbal abuse, violence and sexual harassment, and how to change workplace culture and behaviour.
- Awareness of the impact of unequal gender and power roles in the workplace and how to prevent discrimination.
- Understanding of workers' rights, decent work and freedom of association.
- Relevance of buyers codes of conduct and implications for continuing orders.
- Managing workloads, work pressures and long working hours.
- Managing the impact of unrealistic production targets.
- Business benefits derived from eliminating sexual harassment.
- The roles of supervisors and managers in improving communications and a culture of respect in the workplace.
- Benefits of having more female supervisors.

A Manual on Improving the Working Conditions in the Cut Flower Industry produced by the global union IUF makes a number of suggestions for training in a sector where women predominate in low-level precarious jobs. The following measures are recommended in training to address sexual harassment in flower farms:

- Companies should adopt a declaration that sexual harassment is strictly prohibited. They should further define the meaning of sexual harassment.
- A clear procedure for reporting sexual harassment cases should be put into place and a contact person designated.
- Establish women's committees and clearly define their roles.
- All workers should have an employment contract, thus giving job security and making them less vulnerable to sexual harassment.
- The employment contract should clearly spell out penalties for sexual harassment, and these should include dismissing the perpetrator.

- A clear and transparent system for recruitment, promotion, payment of salaries etc. must be put into place.
- The trade union and management should put in place an intensive awareness campaign against sexual harassment together with training programmes for workers to encourage openness on the subject.
- Establish a counselling and support programme for victims.

“Before the training, I did not know that using bad words or talking to girls in the wrong way is considered sexual harassment. I also understand now how to prevent it or stop it, such as reporting it to HR.” (Worker attending Better Work training in Jordan)

Training methodologies

Mixed training methodologies are most effective, comprising group discussions, presentations, role-plays, games, stories, and case studies. This can help develop the participants’ understanding, particularly when dealing with difficult and sensitive issues such as violence and sexual harassment. Participatory activities, including role-plays, can be important in drawing out personal experiences of violence and sexual harassment and can help develop problem-solving techniques. Training is best tailored to the needs of the audience – senior managers may not want to play games but may be prompted into a good discussion by seeing a shocking video illustrating the type of physical violence that is common in factories.

The following link is a graphic example that can be used for this purpose: <http://www.mirror.co.uk/tv/tv-news/video-watch-shocking-moment-child-3118925>

After showing the videos to the management, trainers can raise questions such as:

- How realistic is this video clip?
- Have you ever seen or heard similar cases of bullying or scolding, or use of sexually explicit language?
- How does this type of behaviour affect business?
- Do you consider it as harassment? Why?

With greater awareness of the negative impact of sexual harassment in the workplace, it will be easier for managers and supervisors to establish workplace policies and practical initiatives to ensure that there is a working environment free from harassment and violence.

Learning from Fair Wear Foundation training programmes for managers and supervisors

- The learning from the FWF training programme for managers and supervisors shows the importance of raising the awareness of the harmful effects of sexual harassment and violence.
- Although training may enhance supervisors’ knowledge, it will not immediately change their behaviour. Supervisors commonly considered ‘stress’, ‘pressure from the top management’ and ‘production pressures’ as reasons for their abuse.
- Many supervisors felt that they needed to be abusive to show that they had ‘power over production workers’, who are mainly women. They were used to seeing women abused and were not motivated enough to stop violence when it happens.
- Some supervisors felt powerless themselves, because of the culture in the factory. Some said they could not change anything unless the society or the factory organization changed.
- Supervisors learned from complaints and understood that they needed to change.

The case studies that follow look in greater detail at how employers, managers and supervisors can:

- Provide information and training for workers, so that they understand what sexual harassment is, and that all workers have a right to a workplace free from sexual harassment.
- Implement human resources policies and practices, including the adoption of a clear sexual harassment policy that defines sexual harassment, makes it clear that sexual harassment will not be tolerated, and that perpetrators will be disciplined or dismissed.
- Support establishment of a workplace sexual harassment committee.
- Ensure that there is a confidential procedure for making complaints about sexual harassment.
- Monitor the incidence of sexual harassment.