

In the previous edition we looked at the benefits of making workplaces equal and diverse by creating a work environment that has different insights, perspectives and experiences, all combining to offer a wider range of ideas and skills.

So 'job done' right? No, not exactly. By law all organisations (and all staff within them) have to then treat each other with respect and dignity. So do they?? Well, most do. But according to **Acas**, Bullying & Harassment in the workplace is on the rise



So what is Harassment?

As defined by the Equality Act 2010 it is:

Harassment is "unwanted conduct related to a relevant protected characteristic, which has the purpose or effect of violating an individual's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for that individual".

Harassment can be a one-off incident for example, if a colleague makes a racist comment, or it can be a series of incidents or bullying which takes place over time. It can happen at work, but also outside work at work-related trips or social events, such as staff parties or team days. It isn't just face-to-face either, as anyone who uses social media knows, online 'chat' can be just as toxic.

Examples of harassment include:

- Spreading malicious rumours
- Unjustified criticism aimed at undermining you
- Racist or homophobic comments, or jokes pranks
- Unjustified threats about your job
- Physical violence
- Humiliating behaviour
- Unwelcome sexual advances or comments.

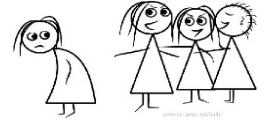


It doesn't have to be linked directly to an obvious protected characteristic either: personal appearance, personality and body shape can also be used to harass and demean, as well as by association with someone from a protected group.

Have you ever been subjected to, or witnessed someone else being exposed to, this type behaviour?

When 'banter' isn't banter

Harassment is not always easy to define. A joke is a joke isn't it? Well not if it offends, or is at the expense of someone else.

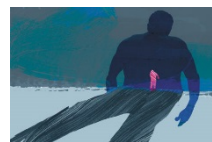


Donald Trump recently dismissed comments he had made about women as, '**locker room banter**'. Not only did this upset women, but also offend athletes and sports players who did not want to be associated with his derogatory comments - demonstrating nicely you can't control who is offended, or how people feel. But things do change....Old TV sitcoms were full of racist, homophobic and misogynistic comments that, at the time, were 'normal'. Now we are much more aware of the effect it has and is no longer acceptable.



Why does it matter?

Often people are genuinely unaware of the affect their comments have or language and 'joking' is perceived as 'normal', but.....



Bullying and harassment can make someone feel anxious and humiliated. Stress, loss of self-confidence and self-esteem caused by harassment or bullying can lead to job insecurity, illness, absence from work, and even resignation. Not good for business at all.

Not only does it have a negative effect on the employee, but if serious enough, can result in legal action, damages and loss of reputation. Employers have a 'duty of care' to protect ALL employees, to act 'fairly' and follow policies and procedures if a complaint is made.

What would you do if you witnessed this type of behaviour towards a work colleague?

What might stop you from reporting it?

If you do feel you are being subjected to bullying or harassment let your assessor, manager, or work colleague know or you can seek advice elsewhere such as:

Citizens Advice Bureau
<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk>

Acas helpline (0300 123 11 00)
<http://www.acas.org.uk>