

Sexual Harassment While Working from Home

What It Looks Like and Responding to It

In the previous lesson, we saw the different types of sexual harassment that can ensue at the workplace.

In this lesson, we will explore sexual harassment that you can be subjected to while working from home and what you can do when faced with such harassment.

Let us start by looking at an incident of such harassment...

Example 1

Raveena hastily joined a scheduled virtual meeting with her manager, Atul. As soon as the meeting started, she was shocked to see Atul sitting in a state of undress.

Atul (with a smile, oblivious of the fact that Raveena was mortified): "Good evening Raveena, what are your updates for today?"

Raveena (embarrassed, looking away from the screen): "Umm... Err... can we have this meeting tomorrow?"

Atul (surprised look): "Oh, why? Is everything ok?"

Raveena (exasperated): "I'm not feeling well... I need to logout right away."

Raveena quickly exits the meeting.

Example 2

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It's 11 pm. Natasha is preparing for bed when she receives a call on her cellphone, which says "Viren - Boss".

Viren (words slurring): Natasha, we've got to do an urgent call right now. Log into the virtual meeting link that I have shared with you.

Natasha: You mean, now? It's 11pm.

Viren: Yes, now, It's really important.

Natasha (hesitantly): O... kay...?

Natasha logs in to the call

Viren: "Turn on your camera, Natasha."

Natasha: "Err... a video call?... at this time?... can't we continue on audio ...?"

Viren (laughing): "What the F%\$& is your problem? Do as I say, or I'll F%\$& your appraisals. Now, be a good girl and turn on your camera. You are my darling, after all."

Natasha switches on her camera and realises that Viren is visibly intoxicated.

Natasha: "Yes, Viren. What is it?"

Viren: "Nothing much, just wanted to see you."

Natasha: Viren, we'll talk tomorrow

She logs off from the call

Why These Actions Constitute Sexual Harassment

In the first example, Atul appearing in a state of undress while on a job-related call with Raveena falls under that purview of ***Non-Verbal sexual harassment***.

In the second example, Natasha's manager, Viren, subjected her to two types of harassment:

- a. ***Verbal sexual harassment***, when he berated her for refusing to turn on her camera. He also threatened her to comply with his demand to get on a call by insinuating that failure to do so could affect her appraisals.

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- b. *Non-verbal sexual harassment* by coming on to a business call in an intoxicated state.

What Atul and Viren did not realise is that according to law, different elements of their conversation and behaviour towards colleagues amount to sexual harassment at the workplace, which - if reported - could lead to strict disciplinary action – including termination of employment and other legal processes.

Now, you may wonder - “*I thought work-from-home means safety from harassment. Isn't it?*” We'll find the answer to this question in the next lesson.

Before proceeding to the next lesson, though, please take the accompanying quiz.

Happy Quizzing!