



Sexual Harassment Myths and Realities

Below are some examples of commonly held beliefs and misconceptions about sexual harassment. The two examples set out what possible responses could be to some common myths about sexual harassment. Ideally, the group reports will provide rich insights about these misconceptions. Because sexual harassment is so rife in our workplaces and organisations, it should not come as a surprise if some participants believe that there is some truth in these myths. As the facilitator, you should be ready to step in and provide information in instances where there is lack clarity and understanding about these myths and their implications. It is important to have a readily prepared response to every myth that you use for this exercise.

Myth	Reality
<p>If it was sexual harassment, they would have reported it. Not reporting it means it did not happen.</p>	<p>Sexual harassment is humiliating and denigrating on the victim. In the context of an unequal power relationship, fears of victimisation, a hostile work environment, losing a job deter many victims from reporting sexual harassment. Job security also features prominently as reasons for not reporting sexual harassment. Further, the fear of not being believed and the secondary trauma caused by this can serve as a deterrent against reporting.</p>
<p>It is not sexual harassment if the victim has consented.</p>	<p>At a superficial level, this statement appears to hold some truth. However, we can only conclude this in the absence of deeply interrogating the meaning of consent. Certainly, consent cannot occur in a context where the victim feels that a “no” would result in loss of employment, being denied meaningful and fulfilling work marginalisation within the organisation/movement.</p> <p>There are many reasons why women may submit to sexual advances. Experience might have also taught her that resisting “only makes life more difficult”. The victim might have suffered sexual harassment so many times that they become fatigued by fending it off. It is important to understand that submission is NOT consent.</p>

	<p>This does not mean that women do not have agency. What it means is that agency is exercised within the confines of a deeply sexist and patriarchal society defined by unequal relations between men and women.</p>
<p>Sexual harassment happens only between senior and junior staff/ members of an organisation.</p>	
<p>Sexual harassment is just innocent flirtation with no harmful consequences. Its seriousness is exaggerated.</p>	

Being found not-guilty means the sexual harassment or sexual assault did not take place.

When someone says no to sex and sexual advances, you should keep asking until they say yes.

Respected men/leaders cannot sexually harass or assault people.

Most charges of sexual harassment are false.

Heterosexual people do not harass homosexual people.

The perpetrator has to have sexual intentions towards their target for the behaviour to count as sexual harassment.

