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Sexual Harassment: A Serious Matter

In light of recent events the National Council of Women of New Zealand (NCWNZ) has reiterated the severity of sexual harassment and the negative impact that the prevalence of this human rights violation has on both the individual and the organisation involved.

“Sexual harassment in the workplace is a serious and pervasive human rights violation and should be taken very seriously,” says NCWNZ National President Elizabeth Bang.

There is still a lack of clarity on what constitutes sexual harassment and many victims of sexual harassment are reluctant to report their experiences. This may be due to a fear of retaliation from employers, shame, lack of belief in the complaint mechanism or fear of being blamed for the incident.

Employers must ensure that there is no place for sexual harassment in their workplace and protect their employees with an effective sexual harassment prevention programme; this should include adequate policies and complaint procedures.

The Government should encourage measures to prevent sexual harassment and demonstrate that it is taking "appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women by any person, organization or enterprise" as is required under the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

NCWNZ is concerned at the lack of systematic data collection on violence against women, including sexual harassment in the workplace.

In an informal survey of an NGO's membership nearly 41% of respondents reported bullying of some kind; one third of these women had since left their place of employment, despite the often significant financial or personal loss involved.

These figures are concerning, when you take into account the cost to the economy as well as to the individuals and companies involved.

Further Information:

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"Women Influencing Policy"