State of Workplace Harassment Report

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Executive summary

In the last few years, the workplace has undergone a considerable transformation. Increased employee mobility, expanded remote work opportunities, and Gen Z workers entering the workforce have impacted how employees experience workplace harassment as well. Beyond its negative effects on the workplace environment which can result in legal liability, harassment can hurt an employer's profitability — it's estimated that misconduct costs U.S. businesses $20 billion in rehiring costs alone.

A complex web of factors contributes to employee experiences of harassment, and how employees perceive, respond to or report them. To uncover employee opinions about how they and their employers are prioritizing harassment prevention, Traliant worked with the independent market research firm, Researchscape to survey over 2,000 U.S.-based employed adults (18+) at companies with 100 to 1000+ employees in hospitality, healthcare, retail, industrial/manufacturing, and office settings.

In the last five years nearly half (46%) of respondents reported they had witnessed workplace harassment happen to another employee at either their current workplace or a prior employer.

Nearly one in four (24%) of those surveyed said that in the last five years they had been the target of harassment in their workplace.

This presents an alarming picture for employers who want to create safe work environments and establish settings where employees can bring their best selves to work. This survey looks to uncover the other realities of how employees are navigating today's workplace and seeks to identify areas where employers need to address critical gaps.

For purposes of the survey, respondents were instructed that workplace harassment is defined as unwelcome and offensive conduct related to a protected characteristic such as religion, sex, race, and disability.
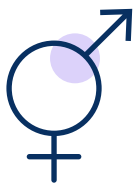
Key findings

Among employees surveyed, **Gen Z reported the highest instance** of witnessing harassment with **52% saying they had seen a coworker being harassed.**

Of the employees reporting that they had witnessed harassment, **just over half (52%) said they decided to intervene,** while nearly **one in five (18%) said no one intervened.**

Defining the generations

Gen Z (1997 and later)

Millennial (1981 - 1996)

Gen X (1965 - 1980)

Baby Boomer (1946 - 1964)

When employees feel a lack of protection from harassment, the top three reasons cited are: **concerns about retaliation (67%), lack of harassment prevention procedures and training (57%),** and **fear of bullying and threats (50%).** This varied by gender — **women were much more concerned (56%) over the potential for bullying and threats** as a result of any reporting **compared to men** who cited this concern **(43%).**

Women also reported experiencing higher rates of dissatisfaction for reporting outcomes compared to men: **32% of women** reported that they were **either not very, or not at all, satisfied with the outcome** of how their employer handled the report **compared to 20% of men.**

Almost **half (49%) of respondents would not report harassment** if there were **not anonymous reporting channels** or due to **fears of retaliation, worries of reputational harm,** or **lack of awareness on internal processes.**

Employees that have not received any training from their employers **reported higher rates of feeling not very protected (20%)** or **not at all protected (42%)** from harassment at the workplace.

Workplace harassment remains a consistent issue for employees across industries. And while most employees are confident in their employer's ability to prevent and respond to harassment, there are variations across generations and demographic groups that need to be addressed.

Those differences require organizations to ensure their harassment training, and their internal processes, are in step with the modern workplace. Training and policies should cover the new ways in which harassment can arise, such as through social media. How the employer will respond to potential harassment should be clearly set out in policies and employees should be able to see that problems, once reported, are effectively and appropriately addressed.

How protected do you feel at your workplace?

Extremely protected	39%
Very protected	36%
Somewhat protected	19%
Not very protected	5%
Not at all protected	1%
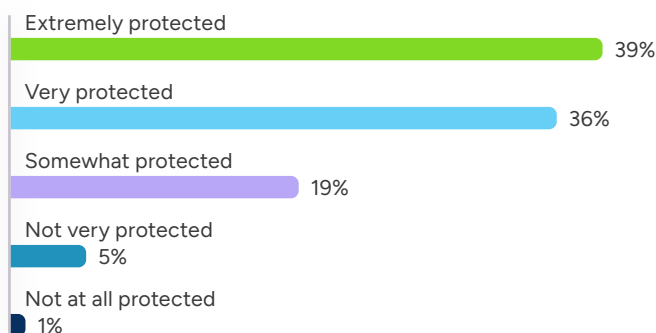
"In today's workplace, employers have a responsibility to create environments where everyone feels safe, respected, and valued. That starts with taking meaningful steps to prevent workplace harassment and establishing resources that foster a respectful and productive workplace."

- Michael Johnson, Chief Strategy Officer at Traliant
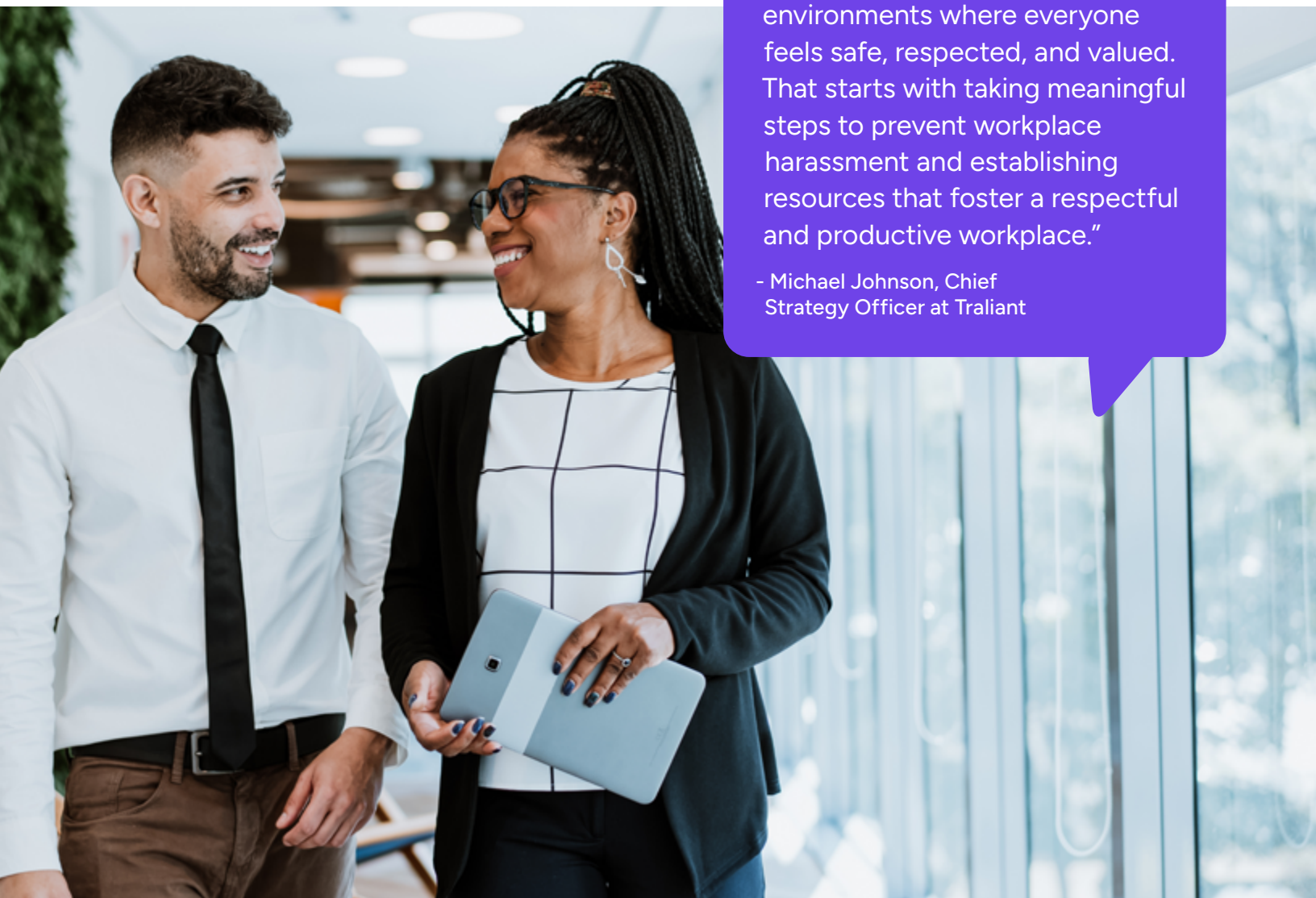
The state of harassment in the workplace

Harassment in the workplace is a very real prospect for workers, regardless of industry. In the last five years, almost half (46%) of survey respondents said they had witnessed an instance of workplace harassment, and nearly one in four (24%) have been the target themselves. For purposes of the survey, respondents were instructed that workplace harassment is defined as unwelcome and offensive conduct related to a protected characteristic such as religion, sex, race, and disability.

Looking at the data for exposure to workplace harassment, there are some interesting demographic variances. For Gen Z, 52% said they had witnessed harassment, while just one-third of Baby Boomers (33%) said the same. That gap between older and younger generations potentially signals a shift in what types of conduct employees think of as harassment.

## In the last five years, have you witnessed workplace harassment happening to another employee?

- Yes   46%
- No   54%
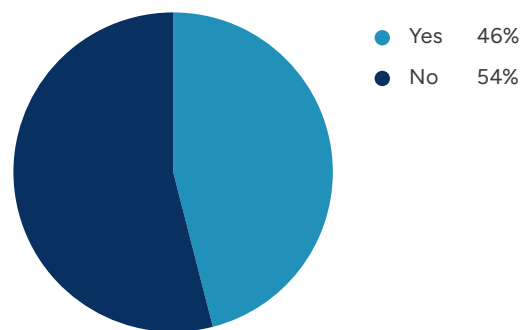
In the last five years, have you been the target of workplace harassment?

- Yes   24%
- No   76%
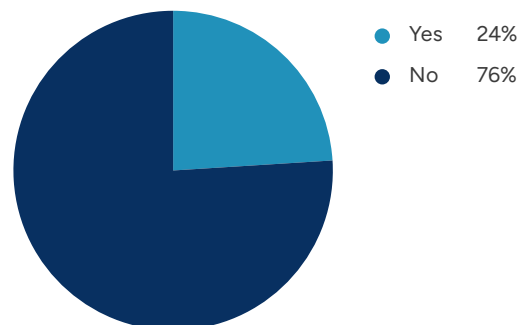
Of those who witnessed harassment, about half (52%) said they intervened themselves, while 30% said someone else did, and nearly one in five (18%) said no one did anything.

This signals the power of the bystander effect — a social phenomenon where individuals are less likely to intervene in a situation when other people are present. This is thought to result from a diffusion of responsibility — the idea that if more people are around, each person feels less responsible for taking action.

Did you or someone else intervene in the situation to de-escalate or resolve?

● Yes, I intervened	52%
● Yes, another employee intervened	30%
● No, no one intervened	18%
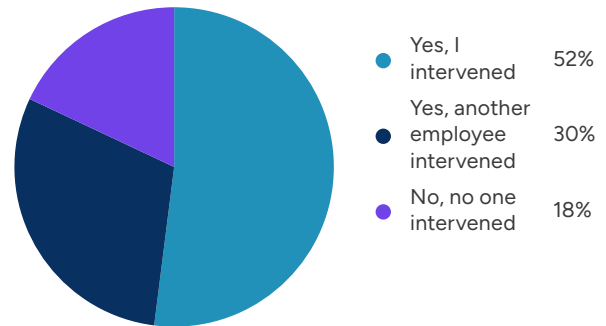
Defining the terms

The bystander effect is a social psychological phenomenon where individuals are less likely to offer help to a victim or intervene when other people are present.

Industry spotlight: Office workers

Almost a quarter (24%) said that they **witnessed harassing conduct where no one intervened.**
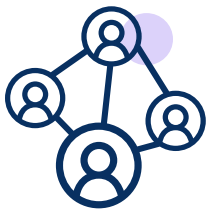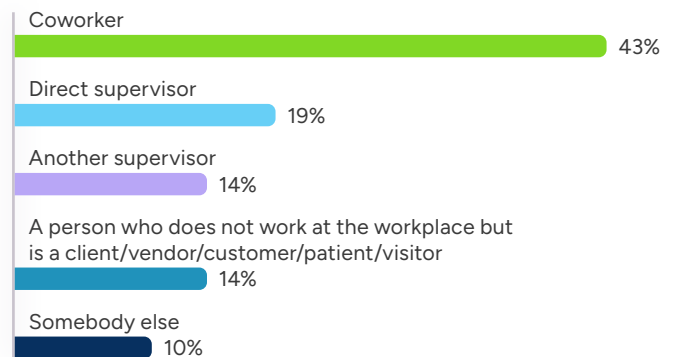
Additionally, office workers were **more likely to report** that the person engaging in harassing conduct **was a supervisor.** Because the conduct was coming from a supervisor, **bystanders may have been reticent to step in.**

When it comes to the harassment itself, 43% of respondents said that it was a coworker who engaged in harassing conduct. While mostly consistent across generations, the outlier was Gen Z who identified harassment as coming from someone outside of an organization (clients, visitors, patients) at a higher rate than other generations at 21% compared to the average of 14%.

How would you classify the person who engaged in harassing conduct?

Coworker
43%

Direct supervisor
19%

Another supervisor
14%

A person who does not work at the workplace but is a client/vendor/customer/patient/visitor
14%

Somebody else
10%

33% of respondents reported that the person who engaged in harassing conduct was either a direct or indirect supervisor, signaling the influence of power dynamics within the workplace and an increased level of vulnerability for those in non-management or less senior roles.

Reporting workplace harassment

Employee reporting of harassment is critical. An employer can only address harassment, stop it from escalating and prevent recurrence if it is on notice of the problem.

Among survey respondents, most harassment that they reported witnessing or experiencing in the last five years was reported. Respondents who said they had reported harassing conduct used different channels: 40% went to HR, 36% went to their direct managers, and another 8% reported to another manager. Eleven percent said they did not report to the organization but did tell a colleague and 7% said they did neither.

What causes employees to not report instances of harassment? To start, inadequate reporting mechanisms or unclear procedures can hinder reports because employees don't know where, how and to whom they can or should report. Organizations must establish multiple, easily accessible reporting channels and make sure employees know about them. Allowing employees to report anonymously can make it easier for employees to come forward.

Did you report the harassment? To whom?

Yes, I reported it to HR — 40%

Yes, I reported it to my manager — 34%

Yes, I reported it to another manager — 8%

No, but I told another colleague — 11%

No, I did not report it — 7%

Establishing a confidential reporting system and an anti-retaliation policy is vital to comply with the law and promotes a culture of trust that encourages individuals to report incidents without fear.

Where survey respondents did report harassment, nearly one-third (28%) said they were either not very satisfied or not satisfied at all by their employer's response.

Looking closer at satisfaction with respect to reporting outcomes, women respondents were more likely to be dissatisfied, with 32% saying they were either not very, or not at all, satisfied with the outcome compared to 20% of men.

Across generations, Gen X employees were most likely to be dissatisfied with an outcome, with 27% saying they were not at all satisfied with the result of their reporting. This compares to 14% of Millennials and just 11% of Gen Z.

Satisfaction with employer response was correlated with income. Those making more than $100,000 reported the highest rate of satisfaction with the employer response with 64% being either extremely or very satisfied.

If you've reported an incident of harassment, how satisfied were you with your employer's handling of the report?

Extremely satisfied — 25%
Very satisfied — 28%
Somewhat satisfied — 19%
Not very satisfied — 10%
Not at all satisfied — 18%
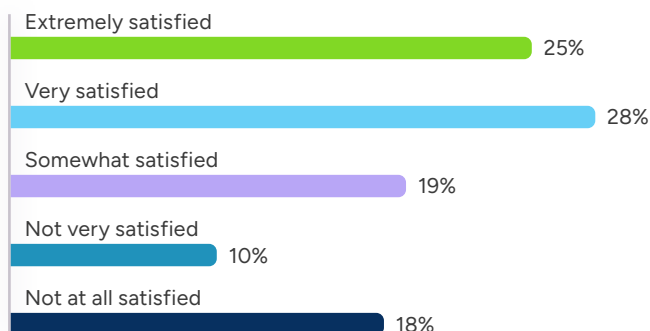
Employers should focus on addressing employee dissatisfaction with employer response to reports. Leaving employees dissatisfied with reporting outcomes may reduce the likelihood they come forward next time they see or experience potentially harassing conduct. It may also lower their confidence rates in their employer's ability to meet their needs when it comes to harassment prevention.
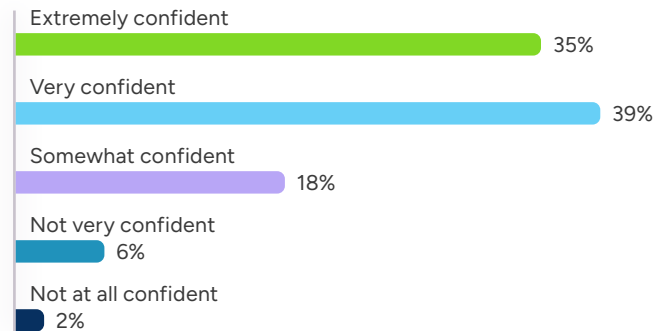
Training and prevention policies

Overall, workers are fairly confident in their employer's commitment to preventing harassment. Ninety-two percent of respondents were at least somewhat confident that their employer's approach to harassment prevention met their own needs.
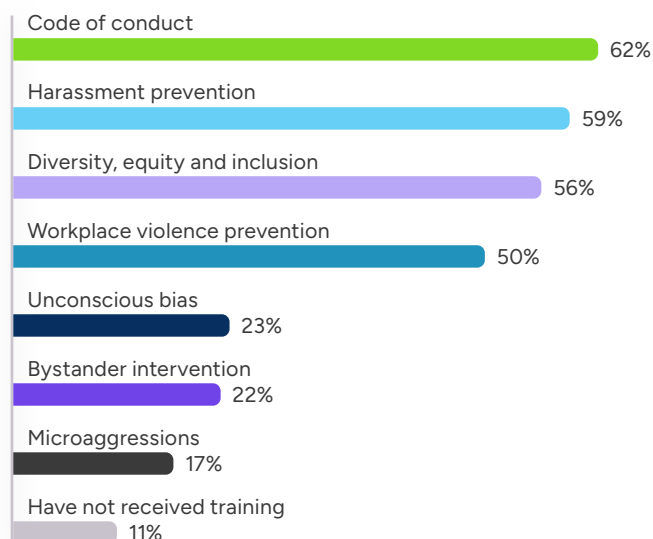
A key part of fostering that confidence is delivering regular training for employees to understand what constitutes harassment, what doesn't and what they can and should do if they learn about or experience harassing conduct. Employers may be surprised to learn that employees may not fully understand what constitutes harassment and be unaware of subtle or indirect forms of misconduct.

Employees at all levels need to be educated about the physical, verbal and visual types of harassment and how to respond to harassers as managers, targets or bystanders.

How confident are you that your employer's overall approach to harassment prevention meets your needs?

Extremely confident	35%
Very confident	39%
Somewhat confident	18%
Not very confident	6%
Not at all confident	2%

Insufficient or infrequent training on harassment leaves employees uninformed. All employees, regardless of where they are located, should receive ongoing, comprehensive harassment training — not just those in states that legally require it.

Within the past year, what training have you received from your employer?

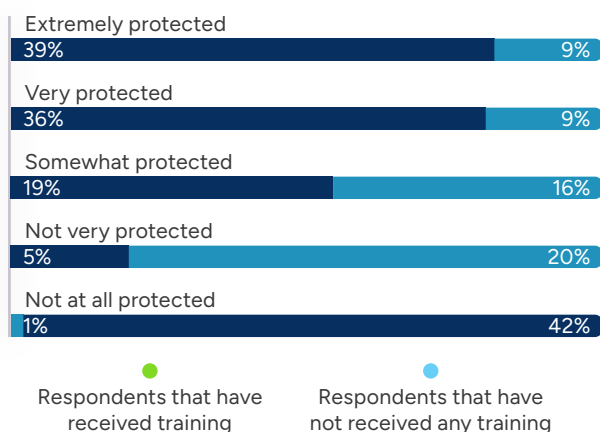|	
Code of conduct	62%
Harassment prevention	59%
Diversity, equity and inclusion	56%
Workplace violence prevention	50%
Unconscious bias	23%
Bystander intervention	22%
Microaggressions	17%
Have not received training	11%

Industry spotlight: Hospitality and retail

Workers in **hotels, restaurants** and **bars** along with **retail employees, were more likely** to report **receiving no training** (16% for hospitality and 15% for retail). On average across work settings, **11% of workers** said they **received no training** — a startling finding for industries that **have high exposure to third-parties** of their organizations.

Harassment prevention training educates learners on how to recognize, de-escalate, and prevent all forms of workplace harassment, while taking into account the unique training needs required by different industries. This helps build the skills they need to navigate challenging situations and feel protected.

The data shows how these skills can translate into confidence. Employees that have not received any training from their employers reported higher rates of feeling not very protected (20%) or not at all protected (42%) from harassment at the workplace.

How protected from harassment do you feel at your workplace?

Extremely protected
39% | 9%

Very protected
36% | 9%

Somewhat protected
19% | 16%

Not very protected
5% | 20%

Not at all protected
1% | 42%

● Respondents that have received training
● Respondents that have not received any training

Did you find the training relevant for your industry?

● Yes   91%
● No   9%
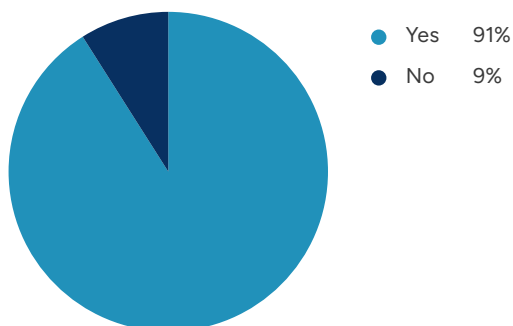
With training, it's helpful for learners to see industry-specific scenarios that apply to their own workplace settings so they can easily apply the skills they are learning to their everyday roles. This is an area where employers are excelling — when employees were asked whether the training they received felt relevant for their industry, 91% of respondents said "Yes".
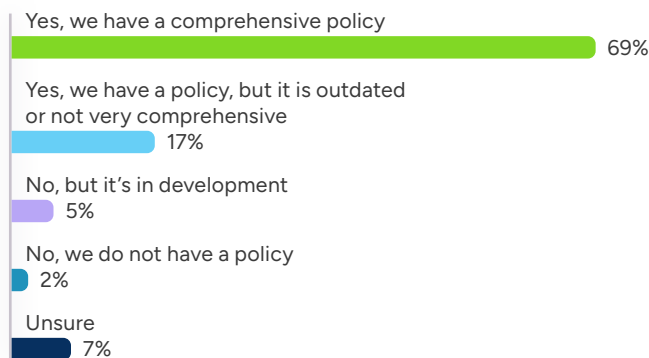
Additionally, organizations often face challenges in addressing global legal frameworks related to harassment. Harassment prevention training requirements vary by state. The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) encourages employers to provide regular, comprehensive training. Entirely separate from state or local laws requiring training and EEOC recommendations, employers who fail to provide training to all employees, regularly, risk losing important litigation advantages that can greatly reduce or even eliminate employer liability if a claim is successful.

There has also been more momentum surrounding new laws, regulations, and guidance related to harassment prevention to protect businesses and ensure employee safety. In 2024, the EEOC released Promising Practices for Preventing Harassment in the Construction Industry, highlighting their anti-harassment guidelines for the construction industry, which historically has had higher rates of harassment due to the unique structure of construction jobs and worksite culture.

All of these factors make it important for employers to have clearly defined workplace harassment prevention policies in place to help address and respond to workplace harassment wherever it should manifest. Comprehensive and up-to-date policies clarify the boundaries of acceptable conduct, helping to avoid costly employee harassment complaints, reducing legal risk, protecting the organization's reputation and its ability to recruit and retain the best talent.

And while most employees (69%) said their organization did have a comprehensive workplace harassment policy in place, 17% said the policy was outdated and 14% said there was no policy at all or they were unsure if one was in place.

Does your organization have a written workplace harassment prevention policy?

Yes, we have a comprehensive policy
69%

Yes, we have a policy, but it is outdated or not very comprehensive
17%

No, but it's in development
5%

No, we do not have a policy
2%

Unsure
7%

Why is this concerning? Not having a written workplace harassment prevention policy or having one that is outdated opens organizations to unnecessary risk and also perpetuates cultures of misconduct by leaving employees in the dark when it comes to knowing how to recognize and respond to situations that can lead to harassment.

By fostering a company-wide dedication to preventing harassment, employers reduce liability risks while also cultivating a safer workplace that enhances employee well-being and productivity.
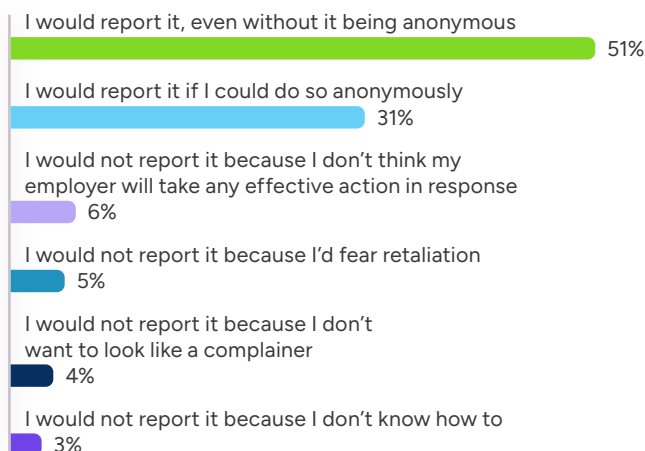
The role of workplace environments

In combination with training, it's vital that employers promote a "speak-up" culture among employees to encourage them to call out and report harassment as it arises. And while 78% of respondents said their employer was either extremely or very supportive of creating this kind of culture, the following data shows employees may feel they aren't able to report harassment.

- When asked whether they would report an instance of workplace harassment they or a coworker experienced, only half (51%) said they would report it regardless of whether they could do so anonymously or not.

- Thirty-one percent said they would report it, but only if they could do so anonymously.

If there was a scenario at your current employer where you were a victim of harassment or witnessed your coworker experience an instance of harassment, how likely is it that you would report the issue to a manager or HR?

I would report it, even without it being anonymous
51%

I would report it if I could do so anonymously
31%

I would not report it because I don't think my employer will take any effective action in response
6%

I would not report it because I'd fear retaliation
5%

I would not report it because I don't want to look like a complainer
4%

I would not report it because I don't know how to
3%

49% of respondents would not report harassment if there were not anonymous reporting channels or due to fears of retaliation, worries of reputational harm, or lack of awareness on internal processes.

Comparatively, Baby Boomers were the generation most likely to report an instance regardless of anonymity (63%) while Gen Z proved more hesitant (44%).

Of those who felt not protected to report instances of workplace harassment, the top three reasons cited were worries of retaliation (67%), a lack of harassment prevention procedures and training (57%), and fears of bullying and threats (50%). Women, in particular, were much more concerned (56%) over the potential for bullying and threats as a result of any reporting compared to men who cited this concern (43%).

It's also important to understand how workers view their time with employers and the overarching culture that exists within these workplaces. Most employees (96%) said they feel at least somewhat engaged at their workplace, with 35% saying they felt extremely engaged and 43% saying they were very engaged.

How engaged do you currently feel at your workplace?

Extremely engaged	35%
Very engaged	43%
Somewhat engaged	18%
Not very engaged	3%
Not at all engaged	1%
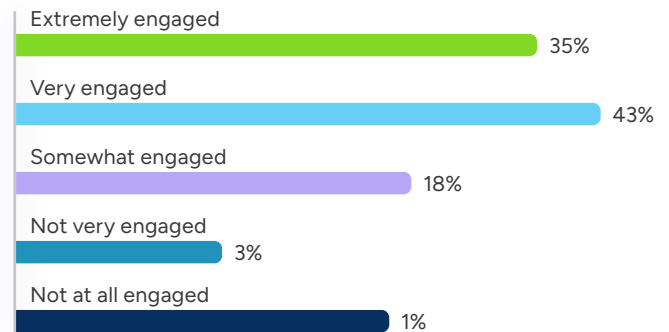
Industry spotlight: Healthcare and manufacturing

Workers in **healthcare** settings reported the **highest levels of retaliation fear — 73% of respondents** working in healthcare said this was a **factor contributing to them not feeling protected.**

Manufacturing showed the inverse with the **lowest fears of retaliation (57%);** however, the **top factor contributing** to manufacturing workers **not feeling protected** was **lack of harassment prevention procedures and training (62%).**
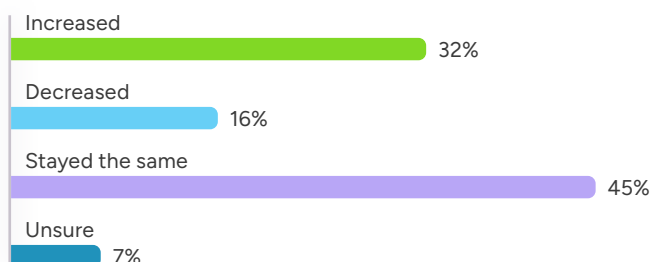
Although engagement is high, sentiment has largely stayed still. Over the last five years, 45% of respondents said their feeling of belonging at work had stayed the same and 16% said they felt it had decreased during that time.

However, when employees are the direct target of workplace harassment, this can have a dramatic effect on confidence in their employers, which can erode engagement and overall happiness at work. For respondents that reported "Yes" to being the target of workplace harassment in the last five years, only 55% reported that they feel extremely or very protected from harassment at their workplace now compared to 82% of respondents that have not been the target. Additionally, 28% of those that have been the target of workplace harassment said their sense of belonging in the workplace has decreased in the last five years, compared to only 12% from respondents who have not been the target reporting the same feelings.

Remote and hybrid work have also introduced new options for employers to offer employees — 51% of remote employees said they feel extremely protected from harassment at the workplace compared to 38% of fully in-person workers reporting the same. This is good news for those organizations that follow a remote or hybrid model — but indicates an area of concern for fully-in person work environments.

How has your sense of belonging in the workplace changed, if at all, in the last five years?
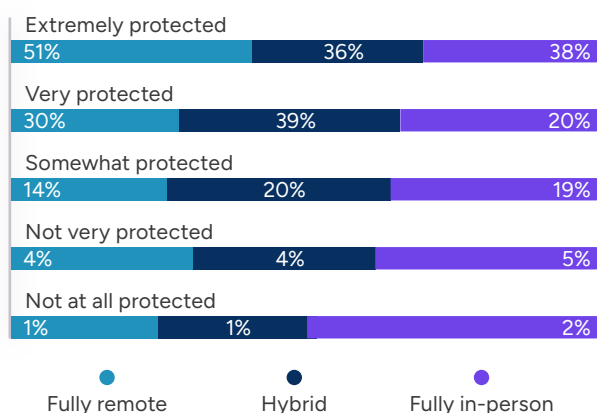
Increased
32%

Decreased
16%

Stayed the same
45%

Unsure
7%

How has your sense of belonging in the workplace changed, if at all, in the last five years?

Increased
34% | 32%

Decreased
28% | 12%

Stayed the same
27% | 51%

Unsure
11% | 5%
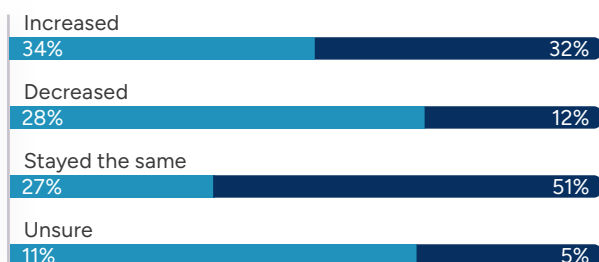
● Respondents that have been the target of workplace harassment

● Respondents that have not been the target of workplace harassment

How protected from harassment do you feel at your workplace?

Extremely protected
51% | 36% | 38%

Very protected
30% | 39% | 20%

Somewhat protected
14% | 20% | 19%

Not very protected
4% | 4% | 5%

Not at all protected
1% | 1% | 2%

● Fully remote   ● Hybrid   ● Fully in-person

Conclusion

Workplace harassment is a very real concern for employees today. Nearly half have at least witnessed harassing conduct in the last five years and nearly a quarter have been the target of the conduct themselves.

With that, it's crucial for employers to understand how those experiences are perceived across broad sets of employees, spanning differences between men and women, generational differences, industries, and differences in levels of household income.

Key findings:

- **A gap exists between generations when it comes to exposure to workplace harassment.**
  Over half (52%) of Gen Z reported that they had witnessed harassment in the workplace in the last five years, compared to just 33% of Baby Boomers. As this generation continues to enter the workforce in larger numbers, employers need to make sure they're providing employees with the training and resources they need to define and identify harassment as well as how to report it.

- **While confident in their employer's approach to preventing harassment, employees show mixed responses to reporting cases in the workplace.**
  Just 51% of respondents said they would report an incident of harassment if they used their name (not anonymous), while 49% said they would not report an incident unless they could do so anonymously or because they lack of confidence in their employer to take action, fear retaliation and being viewed as a complainer, or just don't know how to.

- **When it comes to employer responses to workplace harassment incidents, gaps remain, especially among female employees.**
  Most employers do a good job of responding to incidents, leaving employees feeling satisfied with the outcome. However, female respondents reported experiencing higher rates of dissatisfaction for reporting outcomes compared to their counterparts: 32% of women reported that they were either not very, or not at all, satisfied with the outcome of how their employer handled the report compared to 20% of men.

- **Experiencing workplace harassment can have long-term effects on an employee's sense of belonging and feelings of safety.**
  For respondents that have been the target of workplace harassment in the last five years, only 55% reported that they feel extremely or very protected from harassment at their workplace now and 28% said their sense of belonging in the workplace has decreased in the last five years.

For employers, effective workplace harassment prevention requires that they fully understand the nuances of their workforce, how employees view particular instances of harassment, who are the ones most likely to experience or report it, and how the ultimate outcome of that reporting plays out. With this knowledge, employers can make more informed, strategic decisions to provide the resources employees need to create safer workplaces with zero-tolerance for workplace harassment.

Steps to help build safer, harassment-free workplaces

Improve awareness

Employees may not always recognize what qualifies as harassment, especially when it comes to more subtle or indirect forms of misconduct. Continuous education and training help to increase awareness among both employees and managers about the various forms of harassment—physical, verbal, and visual—and provides guidance on how to respond as targets or bystanders. By exploring nuanced scenarios that address "gray areas," employees gain a clearer understanding of what behavior is considered acceptable and what is not.

Implement effective reporting mechanisms

Poorly designed or unclear reporting systems can discourage employees from reporting incidents. Organizations should implement accessible, clearly communicated reporting channels and offer various options, including anonymous reporting, to ensure employees feel comfortable and supported when coming forward.

Prevent retaliation

Employees may be afraid of retaliation if they report harassment, which can prevent them from speaking up. Implementing a confidential reporting system along with a clear anti-retaliation policy safeguards employees from retribution and fosters a culture of trust, encouraging individuals to report incidents without fear.

Train all employees, regardless of location

Lack of adequate or regular harassment training results in employees being uninformed. To address this, all employees — regardless of location — should undergo continuous, comprehensive harassment training, not just those in states with related legal requirements.

Address industry and global environments

Organizations often struggle with addressing industry-specific scenarios and navigating global legal frameworks related to harassment. To make training more relevant and impactful, it's important to customize policies and training programs to reflect the unique dynamics of the workplace and local legal requirements. Employees may be afraid of retaliation if they report harassment, which can prevent them from speaking up. Implementing a confidential reporting system along with a clear anti-retaliation policy safeguards employees from retribution and fosters a culture of trust, encouraging individuals to report incidents without fear.

Methodology

The independent market research firm Researchscape conducted this survey. The survey reached over 2,000 U.S.-based employed adults (18+) at companies with 100 to 1000+ employees in industries including hospitality, healthcare, retail, industrial/manufacturing, and office settings, to understand employee opinions about how they and their employers are prioritizing harassment prevention.

About Traliant

Traliant, a leader in compliance training, is on a mission to help make workplaces better, for everyone. Committed to a customer promise of "compliance you can trust, training you will love," Traliant delivers continuously compliant online courses, backed by an unparalleled in-house legal team, with engaging, story-based training designed to create truly enjoyable learning experiences.

Traliant supports over 14,000 organizations worldwide with a library of curated essential courses to broaden employee perspectives, achieve compliance and elevate workplace culture, including **preventing sexual harassment**, **DEI**, **code of conduct**, and many more.

Backed by PSG, a leading growth equity firm, Traliant holds a coveted position on Inc.'s 5000 fastest-growing private companies in America for four consecutive years, along with numerous awards for its products and workplace culture. For more information, **visit our website** and **follow us on LinkedIn.**