

THE Accent

Prince Edward Island Union of Public Sector Employees

Stop Workplace Harassment!

It's clear that changes are taking place in Prince Edward Island and throughout the nation about the need to prioritize the establishment of psychologically safe and secure workplaces. UPSE's **Labour Relations Officers** work with members on a regular basis who are experiencing bullying and harassment in the workplace. In 2019, after receiving numerous reports of violent incidents from members in the healthcare sector, UPSE surveyed LPNs, RCWs, PCWs and HSWs. The findings showed that **97%** witnessed or experienced a violent incident, assault, or threatening behavior in the workplace, and **96%** of those stated that the incidents involved swearing, threats, name-calling, and yelling. **76%** of the respondents indicated that the incidents included bullying, manipulation, and intimidation, and **45%** identified sexual harassment, including stalking and unwanted contact.

Other unions have also drawn attention to the toxic workplace issue, most recently the UPEI FA, in response to the Rubin Thomlinson report, asserted the need for "wide-ranging action and accountability" in regard to findings stemming from allegations of workplace misconduct at UPEI involving the former President, Dr. Alaa Abd-El-Aziz. The Premier addressed the report's findings as well, saying he wants to see the university's "action plan and timeline for change, and would be appointing an independent auditor to make sure report recommendations are met."

UPSE is committed to working with the membership, and the employers, to ensure that work is done to create healthy and safe workplaces for our members, and for all Islanders. The goal is to create an environment where everyone is free from bullying, harassment, intimidation, or acts of violence while on the job. Toward this end, UPSE will be conducting a **survey that is open to all UPSE members** in the near-future, to gain important feedback about both physical and psychological safety in the workplace. **Stay tuned for more information soon about how to participate in the survey!**

What is Workplace Harassment?

Harassment means any single or repeated occurrence of inappropriate conduct, comment, display, action or gesture or bullying that has a harmful effect on the worker's psychological or physical health or safety.

E.g., conduct that is based on any personal characteristic such as, but not limited to:

- race, creed, religion, colour
- sex, sexual orientation, gender identity
- marital status, family status, pregnancy
- disability, physical size or weight
- age, nationality, ancestry or place of origin

Inappropriate sexual conduct includes, but is not limited to:

- sexual solicitation or advances
- sexually suggestive remarks
- jokes or gestures
- circulating or sharing inappropriate images
- unwanted physical contact

If you are experiencing any of the following at work, contact your Labour Relations Officer at UPSE for help: 902-892-5335 or 1-800-897-8773.

Behaviours or comments that might constitute workplace harassment include, but are not limited to:

- sexually suggestive remarks or advances;
- verbal aggression or insults, calling someone derogatory names;
- threatening a person or repeated occurrences of threats;
- unwanted gestures or insults, inappropriate jokes, circulating inappropriate images;
- spreading gossip or rumors; • using electronic communication to send threatening or intimidating messages;
- vandalizing personal belongings; • making personal attacks based on someone's private life / personal traits;
- isolating the worker

Note: Intent alone does not determine whether the behaviour is harassment. A person cannot excuse their behaviour by saying they did not intend it to be humiliating or intimidating ([Guide to Workplace Harassment Regulations](#)).

What is Reasonable Action?

All reports of workplace harassment should be taken seriously. However, not every unpleasant interaction, or workplace conflict is considered workplace harassment.

Expressing differences of opinion, offering constructive feedback, guidance or advice about work related behaviour, if undertaken in an appropriate manner, is not considered workplace harassment but may turn into harassment if steps are not taken to resolve the conflict.

Workplace harassment should not be confused with exercising managerial authority. Managers and supervisors have a broad range of responsibilities and are permitted to take reasonable action relating to the management of workers.

When done reasonably and fairly, the following actions should not be considered workplace harassment:

- with good reason, changing work assignments and job duties;
- scheduling and workloads;
- inspecting the workplace;
- implementing health and safety measures;
- delivering work instructions;
- assessing and evaluating work performance;
- disciplinary actions; and/or any other reasonable and lawful exercise of a management function

Note: all employers must clearly define harassment in a workplace harassment policy to ensure workers recognize unacceptable behaviours.

Employers must make a copy of the policy readily available to workers and ensure all employees are trained and follow terms established in the workplace harassment policy ([Guide to Workplace Harassment Regulations](#)).

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UPSE is proud to represent over 5000 members in the public and private sectors.