

Sexual harassment in Korean workplaces still underreported



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Choi Jeong-yoon

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(Getty Image)

in 10 victims do not report incidents, citing fear, mistrust or discomfort 7

Despite growing awareness around workplace harassment, a majority of South Korean employees still choose to remain silent after experiencing sexual harassment at work, according to a government survey released Monday

The Ministry of Gender Equality and Family found that 75.2 percent of employees who experienced sexual harassment did not report it, marking an 8.5 percentage-point increase from the last survey in 2021. Among those who did report, nearly a quarter said no appropriate action was taken

The triennial survey, which polled over 19,000 employees from public institutions and private companies, revealed that 4.3 percent of workers experienced some form of sexual harassment over the past three years, slightly down from 4.8 percent in 2021. However, public institutions saw a rise in reported cases, from 7.4 percent to 11.1 percent, likely due to the return to in-person work after the pandemic

The most common types of harassment included sexual comments about physical appearance, lewd jokes or explicit talk, and being pressured to sit next to someone or pour drinks at work gatherings.

While offices and workplace dinners remained the most common settings for harassment, the proportion of cases occurring online through group chats and social media rose to 7.8 percent, a 3.1 percentage-point increase.

Half of the alleged perpetrators were supervisors or senior employees, and 80.4 percent were male.

Among victims who chose not to report the incidents, reasons included believing the situation was not serious (52.7 percent), fear of awkwardness with the perpetrator (33.3 percent), and lack of trust in the organization to respond properly (27.4 percent).

For those who did report the incidents, only 27.4 percent received counseling or were guided through procedures, while 17.5 percent saw a formal investigation initiated, and 16.2 percent reported separation or work reassignment of the offender.

Secondary victimization, such as malicious rumors, was experienced by 12.3 percent of victims, down from 2021, but still a concern. Alarming, over 40 percent of bystanders took no action after witnessing harassment or retaliation.

Despite the challenges, the survey also found improvements in workplace systems. About 80.8 percent of respondents said their workplace has sexual harassment prevention guidelines, up 12.1 percentage points. The proportion of employees who trust their company to handle cases fairly rose to 88.7 percent, a 15.5 percentage-point increase.

Still, those responsible for managing harassment reports cited work overload and lack of expertise as major challenges, as many juggle multiple roles without dedicated training or resources.

Jong Yong-soo, head of the women's rights promotion department at the ministry, said the government "will actively support building workplace cultures where harassment prevention and response systems function effectively."

jychoi@heraldcorp.com

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