

Sexual Harassment Training Does Not Invite Lawsuits, Claims College Study

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Sexual harassment training does not invite lawsuits, according to a study by Caren M. Goldberg, a management professor at American University's Kogod School of Business.

"Some organizations have avoided implementing sexual harassment training programs for fear that providing it might increase lawsuits from otherwise unaware victims," Goldberg said. "But if an employer is sued, proof that sexual harassment training was offered may be one the best defenses. This study indicates that the presumed downside is much ado about nothing."

The study was published in the journal *Psychology of Women Quarterly*.

Two hundred and thirty-four white-collar professionals from a variety of industries, all graduate-school students, participated in the study. The subjects filled out a questionnaire on which they were asked to predict how they would respond to a variety of situations involving sexually-harassing behavior. They could choose from the following answers: verbal confrontation, filing a formal report, seeking legal counsel or quitting.

After the questionnaire, roughly half of the subjects received sexual harassment training, while the remaining subjects did not. Approximately three months later, both groups completed follow up questionnaires that had the same questions as the initial questionnaire. In the end, the training group and non-training group did not differ in their intent to seek legal counsel.

"The findings will hopefully provide some reassurance to employers who are undecided about offering harassment training," said Goldberg, whose areas of expertise include sexual harassment and diversity issues in the workplace.

In 2005, California became the first state to require organizations with 50 or more employees to provide mandatory sexual harassment training for supervisors. It is believed that other states will follow suit.

Source: American University's Kogod School of Business kogod.american.edu

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