

MEDIA RELEASE

Thursday 3 March 2022



Workplace sexual harassment complaints increased by 43% in 2021

Shocking new statistics from employment rights community legal centre JobWatch show calls for legal assistance for experiences of workplace sexual harassment and assault increased by 43 per cent in 2021. In the leadup to International Women's Day, JobWatch is calling for a reaffirmed commitment to women's safety in the workplace.

Calls to JobWatch's free and confidential Telephone Information Service relating to workplace sexual harassment and assault increased by **43 per cent** in 2021 compared to 2020, or **83 per cent** compared to 2016. Of these calls:

- 4 in 5 calls (80 per cent) were from women
- 2 in 5 calls (39 per cent) were from women under the age of 34
- 1 in 5 calls (21 per cent) were from women born outside of Australia

Zana Bytheway, Executive Director of JobWatch and Associate Member of the Respect@Work Council, says that this dramatic increase in calls is of no surprise to her.

"For years, we've been seeing a steady increase in the number of women reporting experiences of sexual harassment and assault in the workplace. The dramatic increase in 2021 was the result of years of grassroots activism around victim-survivor storytelling, helped by the public discourse on the topic as highlighted by Grace Tame's advocacy, and Brittany Higgins' decision to share her experience. When you see other stories being told, you inevitably feel braver about speaking up yourself," she says.

"This International Women's Day, we must reaffirm our commitment to women's safety in the workplace," says Ms Bytheway. "We must fully implement all recommendations of the Respect@Work Report, and increase and sustain long-term funding for specialist legal, crisis response and support services."

Susan* was one of hundreds of women who called JobWatch in 2021 seeking legal assistance relating to workplace sexual harassment. She reported experiencing sexual harassment and assault by a colleague ten years ago, but despite reporting the incidents to the manager, the alleged perpetrator had remained at his job. After he finally left the business and after seeing the increased public discourse about the issue, Susan finally reached out for support.

Her case isn't unusual, with many of JobWatch's callers only reaching out for support months or even years after their experiences as they were fearful about the repercussions of speaking up, including the possibility of losing employment. JobWatch stresses that while there are legal avenues for victim-survivors to pursue, many do have time limits on making a claim so the sooner an individual seeks legal assistance, the better.

All workers are encouraged to call JobWatch's Telephone Information Service on 1800 331 617 (regional Victoria, QLD, TAS) or 03 9662 1933 (Melbourne metro) if they have experienced workplace sexual harassment and assault or have other concerns about their rights at work.

JobWatch has recently been named as one of the recipients of new four-year National Legal Assistance Partnership (NLAP) funding to address frontline sexual harassment and discrimination in workplaces. This funding will allow JobWatch to significantly expand their already extensive Telephone Information Service and legal representation service to deliver a dedicated frontline response for Victorians experiencing sexual harassment and assault in their workplace.

Available for interview

- Zana Bytheway, Executive Director, JobWatch

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About JobWatch

JobWatch is an independent, not-for-profit employment rights community legal centre. We operate out of Victoria and provide assistance to Victorian, Queensland and Tasmanian workers about their rights at work. Some of our functions include:

- A free and confidential Telephone Information Service for Victorian, Queensland and Tasmanian workers.
- Community legal education, including training, seminars and the production of a variety of publications on employment law and workers' rights.
- Representation and assistance for disadvantaged workers through a legal casework practice.
- Campaign and law reform activity with a view to promoting workplace justice and equity for all workers.

For more information: www.jobwatch.org.au
