

Attachment 2: Press release



THE UNIVERSITY OF
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ANROWS
AUSTRALIA'S NATIONAL RESEARCH
ORGANISATION FOR WOMEN'S SAFETY
to Reduce Violence against Women & their Children

AR/ Australian
Retailers
Association

MEDIA RELEASE

Sexual harassment rife in retail work

Whole of industry action necessary to protect young women

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Sexual harassment is pervasive and persistent in retail work, with young women most at risk, as revealed in a new report by researchers from the Australian Centre for Gender Equality and Inclusion @ Work published by Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS).

Up to half of women and one in four men working in retail have experienced sexual harassment (AHRC 2022) including physical contact, sexually suggestive comments and jokes, intrusive questions about their private life or appearance, and staring or leering.

The report, [*“Just another day in retail”: Understanding and addressing workplace sexual harassment in the Australian retail industry*](#), found young women under the age of 25 are highly targeted and often subjected to multiple forms of sexual harassment.

Professor Rae Cooper, director of the [Australian Centre for Gender Equality and Inclusion @ Work](#), said employers have a legal duty to prevent harm to workers from sexual harassment.

“These are not isolated incidents, this is happening every day across this large industry, and young people – especially young women – are copping the brunt of it.

“The retail industry is a key national employer of young people, and these workplaces have a duty of care to protect their inexperienced workers who are often working their first job. Sexual harassment doesn't just come from customers – peers and managers are often perpetrators. It is pervasive.”

The researchers drew upon four existing surveys, conducted 15 interviews with experienced industry insiders and held 12 focus groups with 56 retail workers and managers. Their findings show comprehensive change is needed to make retail workplaces safe for staff.

Many staff report feeling unsure about how to report sexual harassment, and those who do are often dissatisfied with the process.

Retailers must improve in areas including workplace reporting mechanisms, data collection in relation to incidents, training of staff and managers, and communicating outcomes to staff.

Tessa Boyd-Caine, CEO of ANROWS said: “Sexual harassment in retail is common, normalised, and harmful. This is part of the broader social environment that enables violence against women and children and as such, sexual harassment needs to be understood clearly and taken seriously.

“There will be no one-size-fits-all solution to tackle this widespread problem, but as it stands, employers lack the necessary tools to action their responsibilities to keep their staff safe and free from sexual harassment. Enhanced reporting processes are imperative to ensure victim-survivors feel safe and empowered to come forward.”

Gerard Dwyer, National Secretary of the SDA said: “Sexual harassment is never acceptable – not at home, not at play, not at work. Victims can use their company's formal complaints process, speak to their union, the SDA, document it themselves, or speak to a government body such as the Fair Work Ombudsman.

“There is significant variation in employer policies and the quantity, frequency, and types of sexual harassment training provided. Solving this requires an industry-based approach with union engagement.”

Paul Zahra, CEO of the Australian Retailers Association said: “Sexual harassment in the workplace is a significant, ongoing concern for retailers. We thank victims and survivors who shared their stories.

“We acknowledge the independent research teams for providing a safe space to have an open dialogue. Now it’s up to the retail sector to take this report, build on it, and create an environment where our staff don’t have to come to work in fear of sexual harassment and violence.

“This report provides a strong foundation for ways we can better combat sexual harassment in the workplace. This will include strategies informed by data, tailoring education for employees, and upskilling and empowering supervisors and managers to respond to sexual harassment in the workplace.”

Information about workplace sexual harassment and how to make a complaint is available on the [Fair Work Ombudsman’s website](#).

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Declaration

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