



**TECHNOLOGY
FOR
IMPACT**

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WHITE PAPER

DATA DRIVEN INSIGHTS ON HARASSMENT AND PSYCHOLOGICAL RISK IN SOUTH AFRICA

Insights created by the Resilient Workplace Institute



TOXICITY / HARASSMENT QUANTIFIED

This paper provides a summary of the outcome of anonymous harassment risk assessments in 40+ South African Companies

SEGMENTED HARASSMENT VIEW

Different segments in the workforce experience different types and levels of harassment. A harassment risk assessment enables a risk based approach to allocate resources purposefully to priority areas.

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Executive Summary

In addition to the requirement to comply with legal obligations, including ILO Convention 190, there are compelling business reasons for companies to manage and prevent harassment in the workplace. It is clear that not all segments of the workforce are concerned about the same types or levels of harassment. Objective 10.3.1 of the Sustainable Development Goals sets an objective to reduce harassment. High performance depends on both the environment and the people, and the presence of harassment adversely impacts both.

What is Harassment?

Harassment is unwanted conduct that impairs dignity and creates a hostile environment for one or more employees in the workplace.

ILO Convention 190, the first international treaty to recognize the right of everyone to a world of work free from violence and harassment, establishes a global standard for eliminating all forms of workplace harassment. It calls on member states and employers to take proactive steps, including identifying hazards and assessing risks related to harassment. This paper aligns with the principles of Convention 190 by providing quantified, consolidated insights from anonymous data collected through Harassment Risk Assessments conducted across 41+ companies in South Africa.



Executive Hesitation

Executives often hesitate to conduct harassment risk assessments due to fears of being implicated. Harassment can occur at any organizational level. Perpetrators could be direct reports, peers, senior staff, or external parties like contractors and customers. Data indicates that, on average, harassment is more prevalent at lower levels and does not overwhelmingly implicate executives. However, certain senior management segments feel extremely harassed. Executives have a duty to manage and prevent harassment.

Harassment Risk in SA

On average, employees experience a high or extreme harassment risk in the workplace at a rate of 1.82, concentrated in a third of the workforce. The risk level and profile vary significantly between companies, departments, and business units. This clearly indicates that management style, practices, and company culture directly impact the level of harassment experienced in the workplace.

Why should management care about harassment?

High levels of harassment in the workplace adversely affect the profitability and sustainability of a business.

Productivity Research (2) has proven that 'ostracism, incivility, harassment, and bullying have direct significant negative effects on job productivity.' Preventing harassment in the workplace contributes directly to an improved bottom line and business sustainability.

Employee Wellness Job burnout is an outcome of a toxic work environment (2) with dimensions such as ostracism, narcissism, cynicism, aggressiveness, bullying, harassment, abusive supervision, interpersonal conflict, and mistreatment, causing various wellness-related problems.

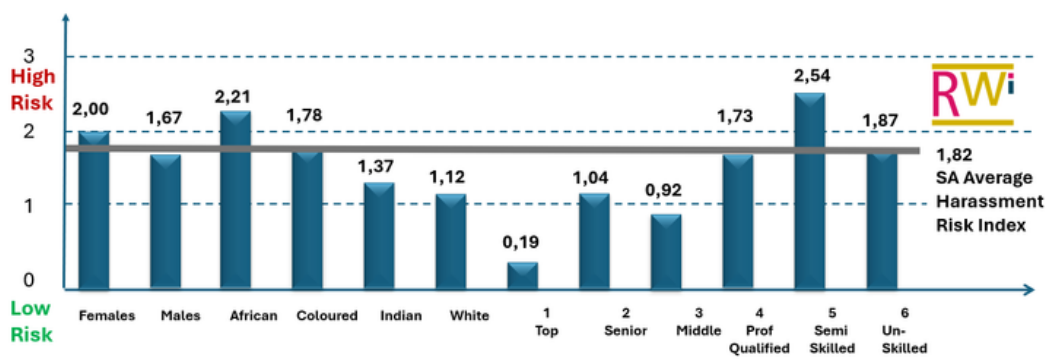
Innovation According to the KPMG 2020 benchmarking report, politics and turf wars are the top issues that undermine an innovative culture.

Retaining Talent Culture Amp found that top talent leaves a company not primarily due to salary, but because of their manager, leaders, or lack of promotion opportunities.

Risk Profile in South Africa

On average, employees in South Africa report experiencing 1.5 extreme or high risks per participant. African, Indian, female, and junior staff participants reported experiencing a higher-than-average risk. This was noted regardless of the company's workforce composition in terms of racial distribution. Although females generally reported higher risks, in some companies, males reported higher risk levels than females. The type of harassment concerns on the following page provide further insights.

Harassment Risk Index South Africa 2025



(2) Anjum, A., Ming, X., Siddiqi, A.F., Rasool, S.F., 2018. An Empirical Study Analyzing Job Productivity in Toxic Workplace Environments. Int. J. Environ. Res. Public. Health 15, 1035. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph15051035>

Harassment Insights

Companies that conduct harassment risk assessments are able to follow a risk-based approach to address the distribution of harassment risk types by segment. This leads to better results and more effective allocation of resources in response to employees' top concerns.

Although the average harassment reported per participant is valuable for establishing a risk index for South Africa, the two- and three-dimensional data points clearly show hot spots within the SA workforce and companies that need better support. The insights to the right demonstrate the different segments that reported a high and different variation of risk compared to the average reported across the total participants.

By gaining an understanding of these concerns companies are able to follow a risk based approach to spend their resources effectively to remove these barriers in the workplace effectively and efficiently.

Harassment Ranking

Sarcasm is rated as the top concern in South African workplaces, followed by discrimination and humiliation. Despite the macro environment presenting high levels of gender-based violence and bribery, sexual harassment and bribery in the workplace are reported as present but are considered less significant concerns. Due to policies, procedures, internal training, and serious consequences, it appears that employees choose to limit the latter conduct at work.

Segmented Risk Insight

Senior Management Females

23% higher

Female senior managers (all races) experienced a high level of harassment, with 1.85 extreme/high risks per participant. Ostracism, Humiliation, and Sarcasm are the main types of harassment reported.

Semi-Skilled Males

43% higher

Semi-skilled males experienced a high level of harassment, with 2.14 extreme/high risks per participant. Discrimination, Sarcasm, and Ostracism are the main types of harassment reported.

Senior Managers Female African

186% higher

African Female senior managers experienced a high level of harassment, with 4.29 extreme/high risks per participant. Ostracism, Humiliation, and general feeling of being harassed are the main types of harassment reported.

Senior Managers Male African

26% higher

African Male senior managers experienced a high level of harassment, with 1.89 extreme/high risks per participant. Ostracism, Humiliation, and Racism are the main types of harassment reported.

Senior Managers Female Indian

167% higher

Indian Female senior managers experienced a high level of harassment, with 4 extreme/high risks per participant. Emotional Abuse, Ostracism, and Personal Criticism are the main types of harassment reported.

Skilled Technical Coloured

39% higher

Skilled Technical Coloured experienced a high level of harassment, with 2 extreme/high risks per participant. Discrimination, Sarcasm, and Emotional Abuse are the main types of harassment reported.

Harassment Ranking Index (from high to low)

Harassment

Sarcasm
Discrimination
Humiliation
Employee Awareness
Constant Personal Criticism
Emotional Abuse
Ostracism
Pressuring Employee to Resign
Knowledge and Understanding of Procedures
Abusive Language
Threats
Racism
Personal Circumstances
Marginalisation
Violence
Bribery
Sexual Harassment (Unwanted Touching)
Sexual Harassment (Unwanted Material)