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<https://www.wsj.com/articles/younger-workers-report-seeing-more-discrimination-11572793201>

## MANAGEMENT & CAREERS

# Younger Workers Report Seeing More Discrimination

Different generations experience sexism, racism and ageism at varying levels in office, new poll shows



Younger employees might perceive workplace harassment where more experienced employees see business as usual. PHOTO: ISTOCK

By *Kathryn Dill*

Nov. 3, 2019 10:00 am ET

American workers under the age of 35 are more likely to see and experience discrimination at the office, according to a new poll, indicating how different generations can view the same behavior.

Three out of every five workers have either witnessed or been a target of some form of discrimination at work, based on their age, race, sexual orientation or gender identity, according to a survey from Glassdoor and the Harris Poll of 1,100 U.S. employees across age groups. But people between the ages of 18 and 34 were far more likely than other age cohorts to report having witnessed or being subject to each type of discrimination.

The current wave of young workers has come of age during a time of increased awareness about harassment and diversity issues, said Carina Cortez, Glassdoor's chief people officer. As a

result, they may be more likely than their older cohorts to spot and call out harassment and



On Call With WSJ Tune in for live Journal analysis of the 2020 election one year out.



Half of younger workers surveyed reported witnessing or experiencing racism, compared with 33% of workers over the age of 55, according to the report.

More than half—52%—of younger employees said they have seen or been subject to gender discrimination, compared with 30% of workers over 55.

People in their 20s and early 30s reported more ageism, which can have a different meaning to different people, Ms. Cortez said. The survey showed 52% of younger workers have experienced or witnessed age-related discrimination, compared with 39% of workers over 55. The perception could stem from people under 35 getting lumped together in office conversations and stereotyped as “those millennials,” Ms. Cortez said.

Anjali Misra, 30, is a grant writer who has worked for nonprofits and in higher education. She said that when she meets people in person for the first time after speaking with them by phone, she is often treated differently.

“I’m short and I look young and I’m a woman of color, and I think that the ageism really crops up there,” she said. “I’m not taken as seriously.”

Ms. Misra said she and other young colleagues have often felt powerless about voicing concerns when there was no formal human-resources department, or where it was unclear who a junior employee could trust in a challenging situation.

“My colleagues would tell me about something that happened, in confidence. And when I would ask ‘How can I help?’, 90% of the time they’d say, ‘I really just wanted to tell someone. I really don’t see this going anywhere or me getting any sort of resolution,’” she said.

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As several generations converge in the workforce and attitudes about appropriate office conduct change, younger workers might perceive problems where more experienced employees see business as usual, said Johnny C. Taylor Jr., chief executive of the Society for Human Resource Management.

Increased awareness of harassment after several high-profile workplace cases in the past couple of years may be driving a measurable rise in complaints to corporate HR departments,

In a recent survey of more than 1,000 human-resource managers conducted by the organization, 37% said they had seen an increase in sexual-harassment and discrimination complaints over the past two years compared with the prior two-year period.

In the rush to add employee training on discrimination and harassment, companies may have failed to fully educate their workers on what type of behavior meets the formal criteria for a harassment complaint, Mr. Taylor cautioned.

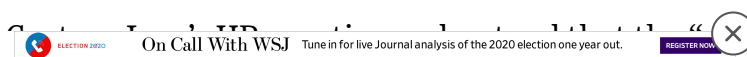
“That’s what a lot of the current training programs don’t do,” he said. “They don’t spend the time saying, ‘Let me tell you what qualifies and what doesn’t qualify.’”

A young woman asked on a date by the CEO, for example, might be surprised to learn that his behavior doesn’t qualify as harassment—despite it being a bad idea—unless she believed her job would be jeopardized by saying no or if he asked repeatedly, Mr. Taylor said. Though the executive’s behavior could violate a company policy, it wouldn’t meet the criteria for harassment on its own, he added.

The increase in complaints to HR could reflect heightened awareness of inappropriate behavior, but it doesn’t necessarily indicate an actual rise in workplace harassment, Mr. Taylor said. Of more than 7,600 sexual-harassment charges filed with the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission in fiscal year 2018, 56.4% were dismissed after investigations didn’t find enough supporting evidence.

The agency also estimates that 75% of all types of workplace-harassment complaints are never reported. Jana Morrin, CEO and co-founder of Speakfully, a documentation and reporting platform for workplace mistreatment, said companies need to initiate conversations around reporting harassment and hold them continuously. When avenues for reporting are unclear, workers may wait or choose not to report at all.

“The scariest part is to submit something, and nothing happens,” Ms. Morrin said. “The younger generation is more willing to leave the organization if that happens than any other generation.”



it is in their interest to adapt to a more vocal workforce.

Among older workers, Ms. Romansky said, “There’s a tolerance for mistakes. There’s a notion that ‘You didn’t know, you said this thing, please stop doing that,’ and people can move on.”

Many younger workers, meanwhile, feel it isn’t their responsibility to explain why something was inappropriate. “They’re expecting things to change,” she said.

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