

**BAKERS
FOOD
AND ALLIED
WORKERS
UNION**



FOODWORKER

SPRING 2019



**A GOOD WORKING
ENVIRONMENT DOESN'T
TOLERATE ANY
HARASSMENT OR
DISCRIMINATION**

***HELP US PUT AN END TO SEXUAL
HARASSMENT IN THE WORKPLACE***

CAMPAIGNING AGAINST SEXUAL HARASSMENT

IN JANUARY 2019 BFAWU launched a public campaign against sexual harassment with support from Women Against Rape (WAR).

We had our first regional meeting with union reps at Region 5 in January and are invited to speak in other BFAWU regions. The feedback was very positive.

A 2016 TUC survey (*Still just a bit of banter?* 2016 research by TUC and Everyday Sexism Project) found **over half of women in the UK had suffered sexual harassment at work.**

We suspect that figure is even higher in the fast food and hospitality industries, as many victims can't afford to talk about it or report it for fear of losing their jobs, their accommodation, their children or even be deported.

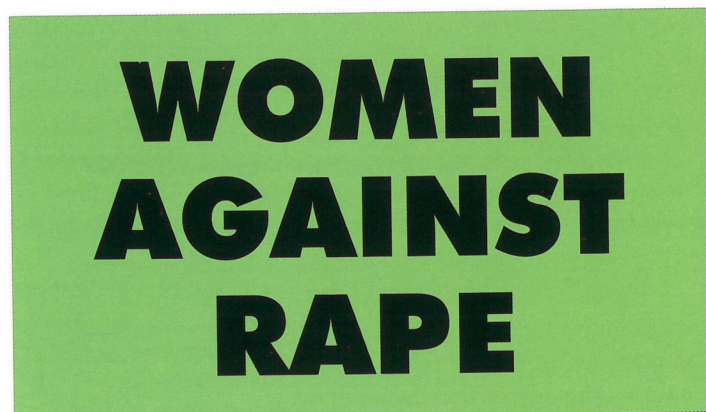
Anyone on low pay, zero hours contracts, with insecure immigration status, kids to feed, is especially vulnerable to abuse of all kinds. Most victims are women, but also men can suffer sexual violence, mostly from other men.

Austerity makes women even more vulnerable

Austerity cuts to welfare and social housing have made women even more vulnerable as we can no longer rely on benefits to survive.

These cuts have cut off women's escape routes, including access to legal aid, legal advice, helplines and refuges. Women and children are now more often trapped in violent relationships.

Those of us who are homeless may have to depend on someone who offers a place to stay, who may then feel entitled to a sexual payment.



That's why WAR campaigns for welfare benefits and social housing – they are crucial to our power to refuse both precarious employment and unwanted sexual contact. Without them we are at the mercy of violent and exploitative employers and individuals.

Benefit cuts have hit women hardest, particularly single mothers. Women have shouldered 86% of the austerity cuts and of families hit by the benefit cap (which limits the total benefit paid to a family), 85% are single mothers. The UN rapporteur on extreme poverty recently said: *"If you got a group of misogynists in a room and said how can we make this system work for men and not for women they would not have come up with too many ideas that are not already in place."*

Universal Credit

According to Iain Duncan Smith (at the Tory Party Conference 2010), Universal Credit was designed to *'strengthen the family unit'* – that is, men's power and control over women and children, especially given that UC is paid to the head of the household, *usually the man*. Austerity policies have pushed people into low waged precarious jobs, as well as expelling low income people from wealthier areas. Many fast food workers are teenagers and immigrants and may not know their rights.

What is 'sexual harassment'?

The law against sexual harassment is defined in the **Equality Act 2010**. It basically says that sexual harassment is *any unwanted sexual behaviour*. Verbal comments, unwanted touching – any behaviour that makes you feel intimidated or uncomfortable.

A pattern of harassment can have a cumulative effect, much more serious and undermining than each separate incident. It is horrible to be trapped with an abusive man, or group of men. Women are expected to play along, or get accused of having 'no sense of humour'. **Sexual assault is a crime.** Even rape, a violent intimate crime, can happen at work. It is particularly traumatic compared to other things that cause injury at work. It's frightening if done by customers or colleagues, but worse if it's your manager or a more senior employer, as they have more power.

Most people are scared to object or report it. It can be stressful to even speak about it and if you are disbelieved, you may lose your job, home, kids, marriage and health. Men in positions of authority can further punish you by giving you the worst jobs or most unsocial hours.

Sexual abuse can also be racist or discriminatory in other ways. We work on such cases with other groups based at the Crossroads Women's Centre in London: All African Women's Group, Black Women's Rape Action Project, WinVisible (women with disabilities) and others on the basis of collective self-help.

BAKERS FOOD AND ALLIED WORKERS UNION **BFAWU** STRENGTH IN UNITY

Sexual Harassment in the Workplace...

A GOOD WORKING ENVIRONMENT DOESN'T TOLERATE ANY HARASSMENT OR DISCRIMINATION

Sexual harassment is NOT normal behaviour

...IT'S JUST NOT RIGHT!

HARASSMENT IN THE WORKPLACE

People who witness harassment can intervene and challenge it. This can be very helpful – it's important for men to know that their colleagues don't approve and won't tolerate sexism. If someone is mentally unwell, it may be best not to risk escalating the violence at the time but raise it later.

How does BFAWU getting involved help matters?

The Bakers Union campaign can make a big difference, both by supporting members and through *public campaigning*. The images on these pages were produced by BFAWU to assist the campaign.

- Workers must be able to report to union reps in confidence, and they may prefer to disclose such experiences to a woman.
- Official acknowledgement of the crime is a key step towards healing. The best guarantee that the abuse will stop is to win justice against the abuser, including compensation to help rebuild a shattered life. The Union may seek help from a lawyer who is accountable, and determined to win.
- The union can also seek ways to publicise victories anonymously, so that people see justice can be won – an encouragement to all.

We hope this sexual harassment campaign will give workers more confidence to speak out, reassure them that it isn't their fault, they aren't the only one – like in the #MeToo movement – and that they have a right to expect justice and can count on the support of the union to win it. The campaign can help victims find their own voices and begin to make sexual violence visible in all future protests and strikes.

To expect to be supported by your union vs sexual violence is your *right* as a worker – it's not separate from all the other reasons people join unions. Increasing our collective power against sexual abuse increases our collective power against *all* abuse, discrimination and exploitation.

Let's build a strong movement together to tell all abusers that they'll not get away with it anymore!

Lisa Longstaff
Women Against Rape

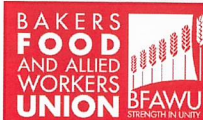
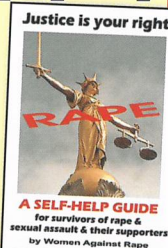


Read more about BAFWU and WAR's campaign and campaigns against sexual violence at work in the USA fast food industry at:

www.bfawu.org/bfawu_announces_launch_of_sexual_harassment_campaign_and_supported_by_our_sisters_from_women_against_rape

Be in touch with WAR, join our email list at: war@womenagainstrape.net.

More about this and WAR's other campaigns at www.againstrape.net where you can find our guide, *Justice is Your Right*.



Sexual Harassment in the Workplace...

FRIENDS DON'T LET FRIENDS BLAME VICTIMS



...IT'S JUST NOT RIGHT!



Sexual Harassment in the Workplace...

... BUT WHAT CAN I DO?



If you're being sexually harassed at work:

- **tell your manager** – write a letter or email and keep a copy
- **talk to your HR team or Trade Union** – they'll be able to give you advice and support
- **collect evidence** – keep a diary recording all of the times you've been harassed and what happened
- **tell the police** if you think you're the victim of a crime – for example, if you've been physically attacked

...IT'S JUST NOT RIGHT!

#METOO IN THE FAST FOOD AND HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY

WOMEN AGAINST RAPE

SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN THE hospitality industry is much more common than we all think. We don't exactly know how common because most people don't tell anyone. Abusers count on the victim being afraid to report it, scared that she may lose her job if she is not believed or even if she is.

But things are changing. Decades of campaigning by organisations like ours, individual women and other survivors who fought back, and the advent of social media have enabled global movements like #MeToo. This has encouraged workers in the hospitality industry to come forward.

In the United States, in September 2018, hundreds of McDonald's women workers in the US launched a 10-day strike across many states. Organizing with the Fight for \$15 campaign, which is demanding a living wage for all workers, they demanded that McDonald's stop sexual harassment in its workplaces.

There is an ongoing legal battle in the US: the multinational company denies liability for the sexual harassment that has been reported, instead blaming each incident on the local franchise manager who may have to pay damages. McDonald's local branches have been sued several times, and the US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission was appealed to again in May when 10 women filed sexual harassment complaints.

In the UK too some workers have come forward. We have heard about different types of sexual abuse: sexual comments and propositions, men exposing themselves, groping/sexual assault, even rape.

But it is hard to speak out if you don't know your rights and you don't know if your union is going to back you or you don't have a union.

The Bakers' Union has come to Women Against Rape because it wants to ensure that workers can report any abuse, win justice and stop any further violence. We are very glad about that and want to support in every way we can.

Sexual abuse comes from customers, or from colleagues. But it is nastier and more worrying when it is someone abusing their position of authority, such as a manager who assumes he is entitled to impose his will on staff, without your consent.

To get away with it, an abuser may also accuse you of being complicit in some way (like you were seen acting flirty or you had sex with him in the past) – they often turn on the charm in public and only behave badly in private when no one is watching. They may say you are emotional or hysterical.

Most victims of sexual abuse are women and girls, but we also know of men who are abused by other men. You may think you are the only one, but most likely other colleagues have faced the same at the hands of other men, and the man who is violating you has also violated others.

It is a basic human right to be safe at work, and if that is violated, you should get protection, justice and compensation and know that no-one's not going to do the same to another colleague.

A couple of examples

- A woman, newly employed as a school teaching assistant, experienced a pattern of suggestive comments and intimate touching from a senior male teacher. She hadn't joined the union yet and was denied help. She tried to avoid him but the constant threat made her very anxious. Her employer brushed it off as nobody had witnessed it. We helped her find out her rights online. She wrote to the employer and was then informed of disciplinary proceedings against her harasser. She suffered anxiously for several weeks only to be told that it wasn't an official process just an "informal investigation." She was finally offered a written apology.
- We heard from the Bakers Union about a particular McDonald's manager who sexually abused women staff. When they reported him higher up, he was moved to another branch. But the women in the new branch were warned about him by his earlier victims and they collectively complained and got him sacked. **That's solidarity among women workers, a form of collective self-defence!**

Cases have been fought by the Bakers Union, and with help from a lawyer, some won compensation. But they were forced to sign a confidentiality agreement – not to speak about it, or publicise it. This means the company keeps it hushed up, and if no other action is taken the man remains free to do the same to another vulnerable worker. But they won important official acknowledgement of their suffering and got financial help towards rebuilding their life.

Reporting – weigh up your options

Whether to report violence to the police and/or the employer is always a delicate decision. You may want to contact the Bakers Union to talk this through. They are committed to providing support and helping to build a movement to tackle sexual violence, as they are doing against workplace injuries with their McBurned Campaign.

Some things you need to consider might include: *what evidence is there to back up your story – did anyone witness anything? Do you have any injuries? Did you take photos of them? Were they recorded with a GP or a hospital? Do you have a clear memory of what happened, or was it hampered by drink or drugs?* **You are not to blame for what happened to you, and your report should be believed and investigated thoroughly and impartially.**

If you go to the police, they should investigate, and if it goes to court it could result in the perpetrator being convicted. But that would only be likely if there was strong evidence to support what you say and prove you did not consent.

It is you who should make the decision on whether to report or not as you are on the spot and in the best position to weigh it all up. But you are stronger when you are not alone; so get information about your rights and get support from others.

If you have suffered anything like this, or witnessed it happening, get in touch, *we want to hear from you.*

You don't have to put up with it! Let's build a strong movement to end sexual violence everywhere.

Let employers and their friends in high places know that they will not get away with it any more!

Contact Women Against Rape:
war@womenagainstrape.net