

How to Screen for and Respond to Sexual Violence in the Workplace

CASE STORY #1

Patricia M. was 21 years old when she first came to the United States from Mexico about six years ago. Like most immigrant farmworkers in the US, Patricia did not have a work visa, but she was able to get work. About four years ago, she got a job harvesting almonds. The foreman would pick workers up and then drop them off at the end of the day at a local gas station. She said he repeatedly offered her food and drink, which “bothered [her] a lot,” because she felt he was not offering these things innocently. He insinuated that he could help her, saying, “Listen to me, I’m the foreman, and you’ll have a job.”

On the third day, he dropped off all the workers at the gas station except her. He told the rest of the workers he was going to pick up the water cooler, but instead, he took Patricia to a remote field.

“From there, he didn’t say anything, he just stared at me. I was wearing a hat and a bandanna [that covered my face], and he said, ‘What do you have there? An animal?’ And I knew he wanted to do something to me.”

Adapted from “Cultivating Fear – The vulnerability of Immigrant Farmworkers in the US to Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment,” Human Rights Watch Report, May 2012.

CASE STORY #2

Maria and her husband are from Guatemala. They both worked for a plant nursery in Southern Florida. They had two small children. Maria and her husband worked in different areas of the nursery and very rarely saw each other during the work day. Both worked long hours. Maria’s brother, Miguel, also worked at the nursery. He worked in the packing area. Miguel had a wife and three small children.

Maria’s supervisor continually propositioned her for sex and told her she had a nice body. He would make vulgar comments about her body and sexual encounters. Maria was embarrassed. He would stand very close to her and would say he loved her warmth. He would walk beside her and brush his body against hers. One day he told her he was not wearing any underwear. He would sometimes make comments that he imagined she and her husband needed the

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work because they had two children to feed. He would also make comments about how they would probably have to let her brother go because they did not have enough work for everyone. He also carried a large knife underneath his pants strapped to his leg. Maria did not report this behavior by her supervisor. She did not tell anyone.

CASE STORY #3

Susana worked as a housekeeper for a family in the city. She cleaned the house and cared for their two small daughters. She also did some of the gardening in the yard when she had the time. Susana is from Honduras. She traveled to the US because she and her husband were unable to find work in their country and she had two small children. One of her daughters had a medical condition which required regular medical care. Susana decided to travel to the US to work in order to make enough money to pay for a procedure her child needed. Her husband traveled with her, however, he was detained when crossing the border and returned to Honduras.

Susana stayed with a friend from Honduras, whom she knew from childhood. Her friend told her she could stay with them temporarily until she found a job and a place to live. Susana found a job almost immediately as a housekeeper. The family offered her a room and she would stay there the six days that she worked and then she would only have to stay with her friend one day per week.

Susana's boss Adriana would leave for work early in the morning and return in the early evening. Susana would take the children to school and do her housekeeping work throughout the day. Adriana's husband Steve, worked from home most of the time. One day, Adriana's husband called her upstairs. He could not find a tie. He was naked. Susana walked into the room and walked out but he insisted she enter the bedroom to look for the tie. She looked for the tie and ran out. He did not leave the bedroom. Another time she thought he was in his office on the first floor and she went into their bedroom to make the beds and clean the bathroom, she found him sitting on the bed completely naked and touching his genitals. She felt very uncomfortable and ran out. He called her back in and told her his wife would be very upset and would probably fire her if the house was a mess when she returned from work. Steve did this many times in the following weeks and months. One day she walked past his home office on the first floor and she looked in, she saw a video of herself in her bedroom. She did not know when it was taken. Susana did not know what to do.