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IBA Aims To Fight Bullying, Harassment In Law Firms

By **Aebra Coe**

Law360 (November 24, 2020, 3:22 PM EST) -- The International Bar Association is working with partners to make two new training modules available to legal workplaces to address bullying and sexual harassment, topics that were highlighted in a recent report showing widespread problems in the profession, according to a Tuesday presentation.

At a webinar put on as part of the IBA's Virtually Together conference, IBA senior legal adviser Kieran Pender, author of a 2018 report on bullying and sexual harassment in the legal industry, revealed that his team has collaborated with Australia's College of Law to develop an online training module that will be made available free of charge to the public in the coming weeks.

Additionally, his team has collaborated with virtual reality training company Osiris Labs to come up with a virtual reality-based program addressing harassment and bullying in legal workplaces that will be made available to members of the IBA.

In **his 2018 report**, Pender found that of nearly 5,000 legal industry respondents from across the globe, 43% report that they have been bullied while at work, including one in two women and one in three men. Meanwhile, 25% of all respondents said they had been sexually harassed at work, with that number landing at approximately 33% among women who took the survey.

Niru Palanivel, a legal content designer at the College of Law who is working on the online training program alongside the IBA, said that the module is aimed at guiding workplaces to make changes in the legal profession and humanizing the issue of bullying and harassment.

The program is interactive and contains GIFs, videos, illustrations, graphics, and quizzes, and it can be completed individually or in a group setting, Palanivel said. Additionally, it is not a one-off activity to tick off a box. Instead, she said, it allows for continuity and accountability through ongoing action plans that can be implemented by individuals or as part of a workplace-wide movement.

"As individuals and workplaces in the legal profession we have the ability and responsibility to drive change," Palanivel said.

Osiris Labs CEO James Oury said his training program is aimed at driving engagement through the use of virtual reality, in part by putting people in one another's shoes to foster empathy.

The program was developed using data provided by the IBA. The association provided thousands of instances of sexual harassment and bullying to Osiris, which then analyzed them using machine learning and extracted data that Oury said can speak to sentiment, themes, and particular use cases that are more common in the industry.

While training is important, another speaker on the IBA's webinar Tuesday, employment law expert Claire Murray, said that legal workplaces must keep in mind that training programs are not a magic bullet.

"Sometimes partners don't make a connection between videos in training and their own behaviors," Murray said. "Sometimes you have to directly say, here are all of the negative consequences [for inappropriate or abusive behavior]. If all else fails, people get that."

--Editing by Alyssa Miller.

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