

# Exploring the lived experience of optometrists and dispensing opticians facing harassment, bullying, abuse or discrimination at work

To read the full report please visit the GOC website: <https://optical.org/>

The General Optical Council (GOC) commissioned Explain Market Research, an independent research provider, to undertake qualitative research with two specific objectives:

- 1 To explore the lived experiences of optometrists and dispensing opticians who had experienced harassment, bullying, abuse or discrimination at work, and the impact of this on them and their patients
- 2 To identify ways that the GOC, and wider sector, can better support registrants facing these negative behaviours at work

## The workplace culture

Participants **identified a loss of job satisfaction** over recent years, discussing a changing workplace culture in which their negative experiences took place. They listed three factors that underpinned this change in culture:



**Increase in workload**



**Commercial pressures**



**Interprofessional dynamics**

## Examples of mistreatment

- Experiences with **physical, verbal or cyber bullying**
- **Discrimination** based on gender, religion, race or sexuality
- **Harassment at work**, typically in the form of sexual harassment
- Experience of **abuse at work**, typically in the form of abusive comments and aggressive behaviours from patients

Participants had often **experienced multiple forms** of this behaviour

## Impact on registrants

- **Mental health impacts** (e.g. experiencing stress, anxiety and/or depression)
- **Physical symptoms** (such as dizziness, migraines)
- **Personal life impacts** (such as a change in their self-confidence/self-esteem)
- **Reduced engagement in their work** and/or career progression

## Barriers to reporting

The reporting of mistreatment was not straightforward, and several key barriers were identified by participants. These include:

- **Lack of certainty** about the **right person to disclose** mistreatment to
- Concern about **adverse impacts of reporting**
- Concern about **reporting with no evidence**
- **Lack of belief** that reporting would engender change

The research highlighted that **experiences of reporting mistreatment were highly variable**

## What registrants think should be done

**Create a defined 'roadmap'** outlining actions for mistreatment and designating a lead responder



Establish **effective and knowledgeable peer support networks** for registrants

**Provide career-long education** to empower recognition and action against mistreatment



**Promote a cross-sector culture that upholds zero tolerance** for staff mistreatment

## The role of the GOC

### Bring leadership



Provide **leadership in industry-wide communication** of behaviour expectations, and the consequences for breaches of the GOC's standard practice

### Clarify its role



Registrants wanted **the GOC to clarify its role** in fostering healthy workplace cultures and acting against harassment, bullying, abuse, or discrimination