Sexual Harassment of Women:
Climate, Culture, and Consequences in Academic Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine

http://nationalacademies.org/SexualHarassment

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Background

Sponsors

Study Statement of Task

The Committee will undertake a study of the influence of sexual harassment in academia on the career advancement of women in the scientific, technical, and medical workforce, which will include the following:

- Review of the research on the extent to which women in the fields of science, engineering, and medicine are victimized by sexual harassment on college and university campuses, in research labs and field sites, at hospitals/medical centers, and in other academic environments;

- Examination of existing information on the extent to which sexual harassment in academia negatively impacts the recruitment, retention, and advancement of women pursuing scientific, engineering, technical, and medical careers, with comparative evidence drawn from other sectors such as the military, government, and the private sector;

- Identification and analysis of policies, strategies, and practices that have been the most successful in preventing and addressing sexual harassment in these settings.

Study Committee Members

Co-Chair: **Paula Johnson**[1], Wellesley College
Co-Chair: **Sheila Widnall**[2], Massachusetts Institute of Technology

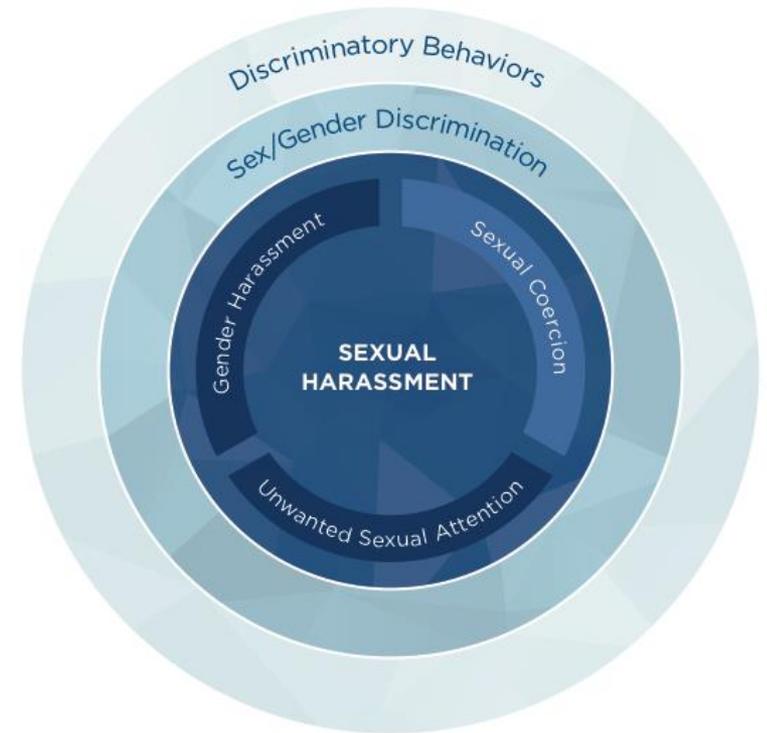|		
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Findings and Recommendations In Detail

Findings: Types of Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment is a form of discrimination that consists of three types of harassing behavior:

1. sexual coercion

2. unwanted sexual attention

3. gender harassment

SEXUAL COERCION

using professional threats or rewards to get sexual favors

UNWANTED SEXUAL ATTENTION

sexual assault

rape

unwanted groping or stroking

PUBLIC CONSCIOUSNESS

GENDER HARASSMENT

relentless pressure for sex or dates

nude images posted at work

unwanted sexual discussions

sexually humiliating acts

sexual insults, gender slurs, and vulgar name calling
e.g. "whore," "pu**y," "slut," "bitch"

offensive sexual teasing or remarks about bodies

sexist insults
e.g. women don't belong in science

sabotage of women's equipment

obscene gestures

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Findings: Types of Sexual Harassment

Gender harassment that is severe or occurs frequently over a period of time can result in the same level of negative professional and psychological outcomes as isolated instances of sexual coercion.

Sexually harassing behavior can be either direct (targeted at an individual) or ambient (a general level of sexual harassment in an environment) and is harmful in both cases.

Recommendation on Gender Harassment

Recommendation: Leaders in academic institutions and research and training sites must pay increased attention to and enact policies that cover gender harassment as a means of addressing the most common form of sexual harassment and of preventing other types of sexually harassing behavior.
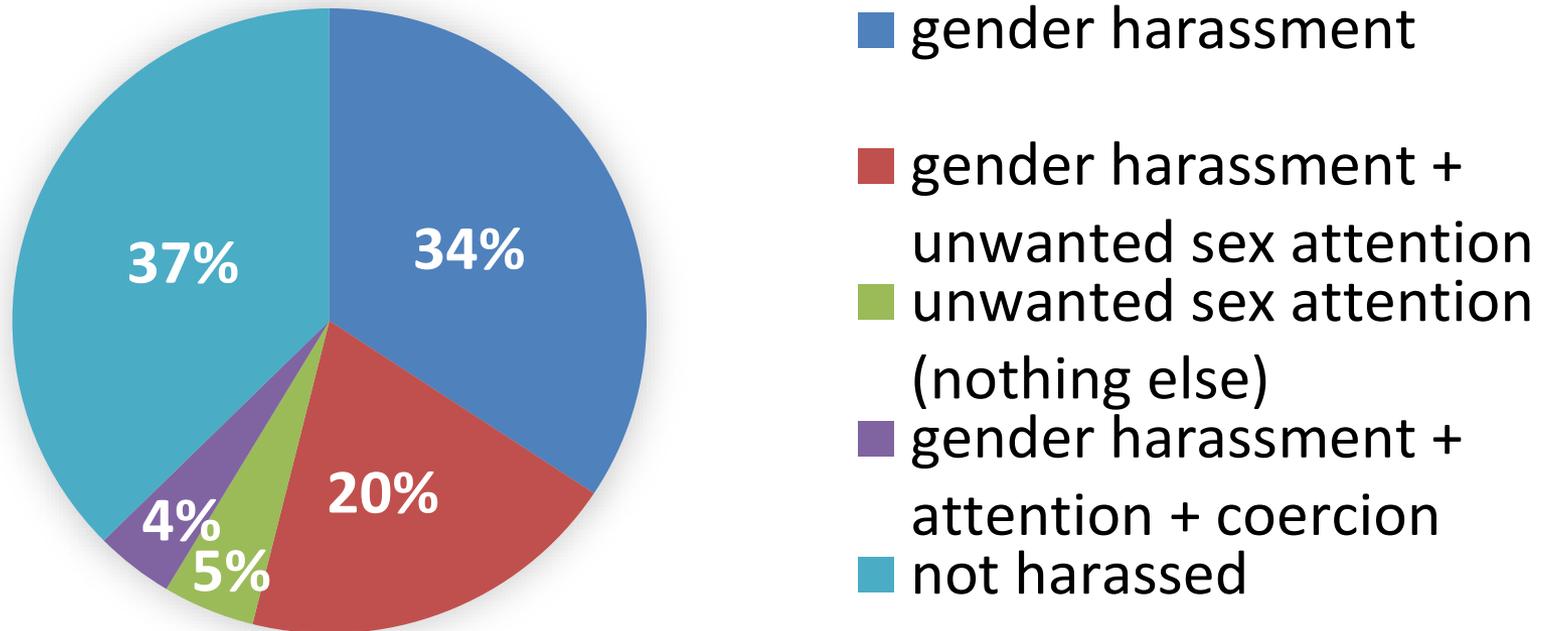
Finding: Prevalence of Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment is common in academic science, engineering, and medicine.
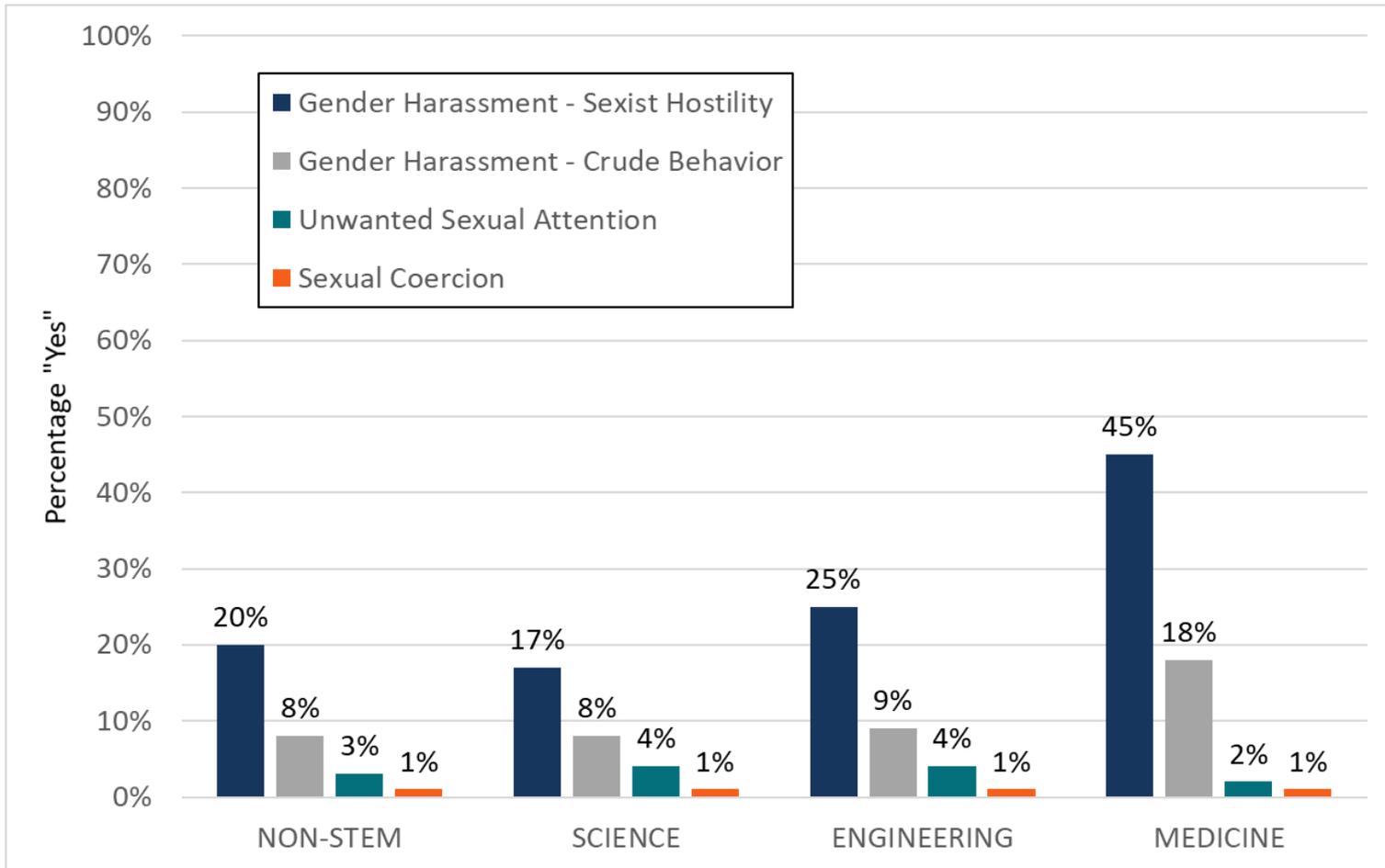
- Best available analysis to date shows that 50 percent of women faculty and staff in academia experience sexual harassment.

- Student surveys at a couple universities shows that between 20-50 percent of students in science, engineering, and medicine experience sexual harassment from faculty or staff.

Finding: Sexual harassment is common

Example – Percent of women faculty/staff harassed by coworkers or supervisors at a large public university:

- gender harassment
- gender harassment + unwanted sex attention
- unwanted sex attention (nothing else)
- gender harassment + attention + coercion
- not harassed

(Pie chart values: 34%, 20%, 5%, 4%, 37%)

Finding: Sexual harassment is common (cont.)

Findings: Race, Sexuality, and Gender Identity

Women of color experience more harassment (sexual, racial/ethnic, or combination of the two) than white women, white men, and men of color do. Women of color often experience sexual harassment that includes racial harassment.

Sexual- and gender-minority people experience more sexual harassment than heterosexual women do.

Findings: Impact on Targets and Bystanders

Sexual harassment undermines women's professional and educational attainment and mental and physical health.

Sexual harassment has adverse effects that affect not only the targets of harassment but also bystanders, co-workers, workgroups, and entire organizations.

Findings: Impact on the Research Enterprise

The cumulative effect of sexual harassment is significant damage to research integrity and a costly loss of talent in academic sciences, engineering, and medicine.

Research Integrity

Finding: Parts of the federal government and several professional societies are beginning to focus more broadly on policies about research integrity and on codes of ethics rather than on the narrow definition of research misconduct.

Recommendation: Academic institutions should consider sexual harassment equally important as research misconduct in terms of its effect on the integrity of research.

Findings: Legal System

Judicial interpretation of Title IX and Title VII has incentivized organizations to create policies, procedures, and training on sexual harassment that focus on symbolic compliance with current law and avoiding liability, and not on preventing sexual harassment.

The legal system alone is not an adequate mechanism for reducing or preventing sexual harassment.

Findings: Reporting

Title IX, Title VII, and case law reflect the inaccurate assumption that a target of sexual harassment will promptly report the harassment without worrying about retaliation.

The least common response for women is to formally report the sexually harassing experience. For many, this is due to an accurate perception that they may experience retaliation or other negative outcomes associated with their personal and professional lives.

Recommendation: Move Beyond Legal Compliance

Recommendation: Move beyond legal compliance to address culture and climate. Academic institutions, research and training sites, and federal agencies should move beyond interventions or policies that represent basic legal compliance and that rely solely on formal reports made by targets.

Findings: Predictors of Sexual Harassment

Characteristics most associated with higher rates:

- male-dominated

- organizational climate that communicates tolerance of sexual harassment

  - Perceived risk to victims for reporting harassment,

  - Lack of sanctions against offenders, and

  - The perception that one's complaints will not be taken seriously.

Organizational climate is, by far, the greatest predictor of the occurrence of sexual harassment

Recommendations Video:
https://youtu.be/juJu2mg5y5M

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Key Recommendations

1. Create diverse, inclusive, and respectful environments

- **Hiring and Promotion**: Take explicit steps to achieve greater gender and racial equity in hiring and promotions, and improve the representation of women at every level.

- **Civility-Promotion**: Combine anti-harassment efforts with programs to promote civility.

- **Interrupt and Intervene in Inappropriate Behavior**: Utilize training approaches that develop skills among participants to interrupt and intervene when inappropriate behavior occurs, such as bystander intervention.

- **Training that Aims to Change Behavior**: Training should focus on changing behavior, not on changing beliefs.

Key Recommendations

2. Diffuse the hierarchical and dependent relationship between trainees and faculty

- **Mentoring Networks:** Adopt mentoring networks or committee-based advising that allows for a diversity of potential pathways for advice, funding, support, and informal reporting of harassment.

- **Independent Research Funding:** Develop ways research funding can be provided to the trainee rather than just the principal investigator.

Key Recommendations

3. Provide support for targets

- **Access to Support Services:** Provide means for the target of harassment to access support services (social services, health care, legal, career/professional) without filing a formal report.

- **Informal Reporting:** Provide alternative and less formal means of recording/documenting information about the experience and reporting the experience.

- **Prevent Retaliation:** Develop approaches to prevent the target from experiencing or fearing retaliation in academic settings.

Key Recommendations

4. Improve transparency and accountability

- **Clear Policies:** Develop and share clear, accessible, and consistent policies on sexual harassment and standards of behavior. Make clear that people will be held accountable for violating the policies.

- **Transparency about Handling Reports**: Be as transparent as possible about how the institution is handling reports of sexual harassment.

- **Assess Climate**: Utilize climate surveys to further investigate and address systemic sexual harassment.

Key Recommendations

5. Strive for strong and diverse leadership

- **Make it an Explicit Goal:** make the reduction and prevention of sexual harassment an explicit goal of your leadership tenure.

- **Develop Leadership Skills:** Support and facilitate leaders at every level in developing skills in leadership, conflict resolution, mediation, negotiation, and de-escalation, and ensure a clear understanding of policies and procedures for handling sexual harassment issues that is not just about protecting institutional liability.

Key Recommendations

6. Make the entire academic community responsible for reducing and preventing sexual harassment

- All members of our nation's college campuses, as well as members of research and training sites should assume responsibility for promoting civil and respectful education, training, and work environments, and stepping up and confronting those whose behaviors and actions create sexually harassing environments.

Developments Since Release of the Report

- Visibility
  - #ScienceToo
  - News Articles, blogs, and op-eds
  - Campus events and professional society meetings
- Policy
  - NSF and NIH announcements
  - Combatting Sexual Harassment in Science Act of 2018 or H.R. 7031
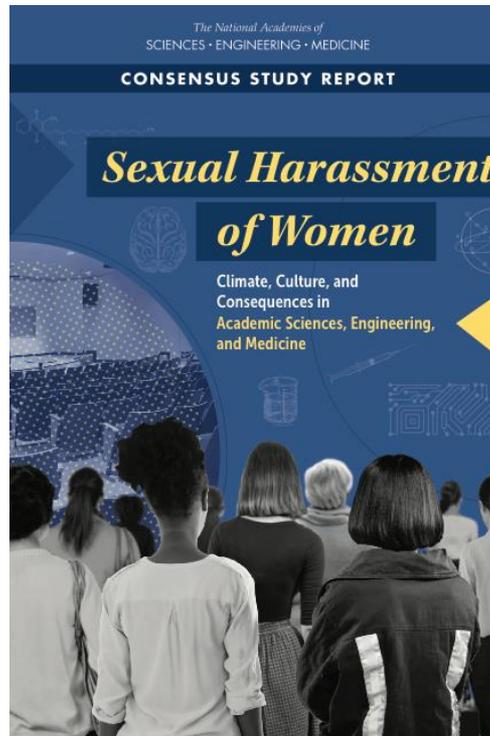- Changes on campus…

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Action Collaborative on Preventing Sexual Harassment in Higher Education

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