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SEXUAL HARASSMENT OF WOMEN

Climate, Culture, and Consequences in Academic Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine

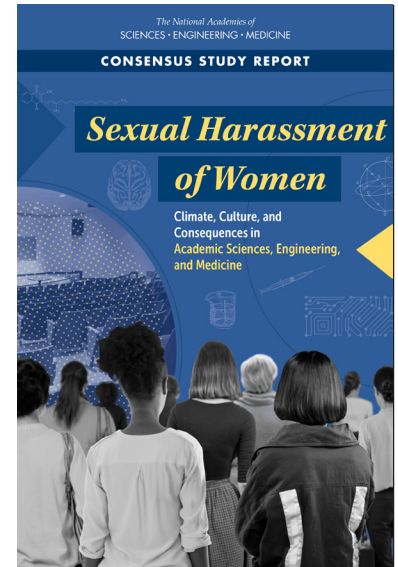
OVERVIEW

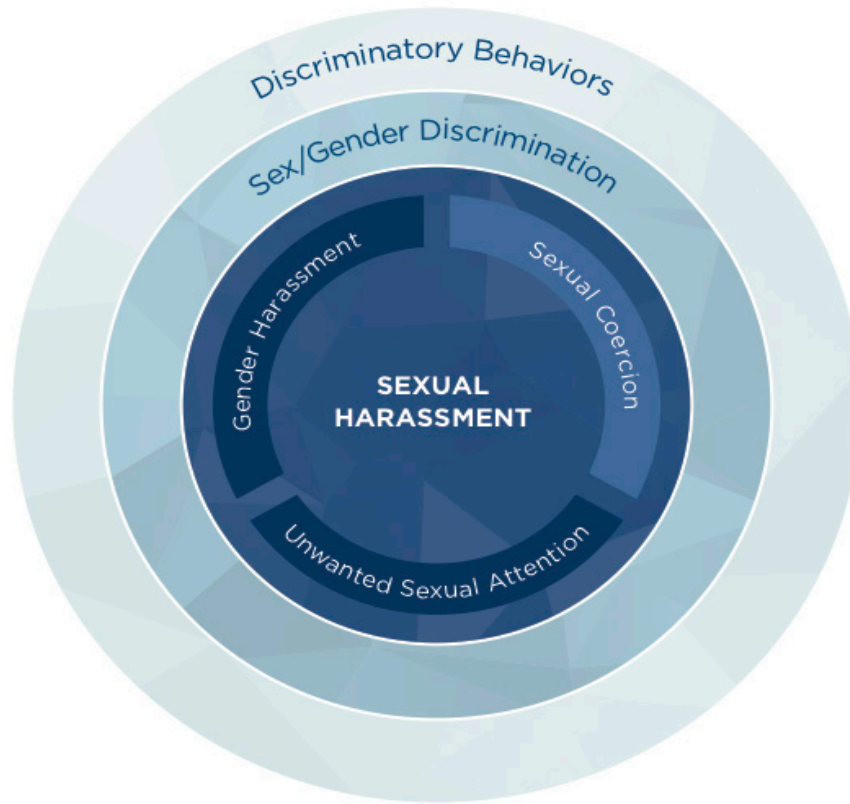
System-wide changes to the culture and climate in higher education are needed to prevent and effectively respond to sexual harassment. There is no evidence that current policies, procedures, and approaches—which often focus on symbolic compliance with the law and on avoiding liability—have resulted in a significant reduction in sexual harassment. Colleges and universities and federal agencies should move beyond basic legal compliance to adopt holistic, evidence-based policies and practices to address and prevent all forms of sexual harassment and to promote a culture of civility and respect. The cumulative result of sexual harassment in academic sciences, engineering, and medicine is significant damage to research integrity and a costly loss of talent in these fields. Institutions should thus consider sexual harassment equally important as research misconduct in terms of its effect on the integrity of research. These key findings are explored in the National Academies report, *Sexual Harassment of Women: Climate, Culture, and Consequences in Academic Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine*.

PREVENTING SEXUAL HARASSMENT OF WOMEN IN ACADEMIC SCIENCES, ENGINEERING, AND MEDICINE

Addressing and preventing sexual harassment requires attending to all three forms of sexual harassment: 1) **gender harassment** (sexist hostility and crude behavior), (2) **unwanted sexual attention** (unwelcome verbal or physical sexual advances), and (3) **sexual coercion** (when favorable professional or educational treatment is conditioned on sexual activity). Gender harassment is by far the most common form of sexual harassment, and when severe or frequent, it can result in the same level of negative outcomes as one instance of sexual coercion. 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.

Attending to an organization's climate is crucial to preventing and addressing harassment because organizational climate is the greatest predictor of sexual harassment. Organizations with tolerant, or even perceived tolerant, climates show higher rates of sexual harassment than those seen as intolerant. Unfortunately, academic institutions are often perceived as tolerant, and based on the best available studies to date, more than 50 percent of women faculty and staff report having been harassed. Student surveys of university systems show disturbingly similar high rates, with 20–50 percent of women





Legal Classifications:

- Quid pro quo sexual harassment
- Hostile environment harassment

FIGURE 2-1 The relationship between discriminatory behaviors, sex/gender discrimination, sexual harassment, gender harassment, quid pro quo sexual harassment, and hostile environment harassment. While sexual coercion is by definition quid pro quo sexual harassment, sometimes unwanted sexual attention can be considered quid pro quo sexual harassment if tolerating such behavior becomes a term or condition of employment (Fitzgerald, Gelfand, and Drasgow 1995).

students experiencing sexually harassing behavior perpetrated by faculty/staff, and women students in academic medicine experience more frequent sexual harassment than those in science and engineering.

The persistent sexual harassment in academic sciences, engineering, and medicine, and its adverse impacts on women's careers, is jeopardizing more rapid and sustained progress in closing the gender gap in these fields. Across all industry sectors, occupations, races, ethnicities, and social classes, sexual harassment undermines women's professional and educational attainment and their mental and physical health. For women faculty in science, engineering, and medicine, the professional outcomes from being sexually harassed include stepping down from leadership opportunities to avoid the perpetrator, leaving their institution, and leaving their field altogether. Additionally, when sexual harassment occurs in research environments it can undermine core values of research integrity. The cumulative effect of sexual harassment is significant damage to research integrity and a costly loss of talent in academic sciences, engineering, and medicine.

Four factors increase the likelihood that women in academic sciences, engineering, and medicine will be targeted with sexual harassment: male-dominated work settings; hierarchies that concentrate power in individuals and make students, junior faculty, and others dependent on them for funding, research direction, mentorship, and career advancement; symbolic legal compliance policies and procedures that are ineffective at preventing harassment; and uninformed leadership at all levels lacking the tools, intention, and/or focus needed to undertake the key actions necessary to reduce and prevent sexual harassment.

The challenges and opportunities are significant. Preventing sexual harassment against women is critical to avoiding further loss of talent in academic sciences, engineering, and medicine, and thus to advancing the nation's economic and social well-being and its overall public health. Making the necessary changes to prevent harassment will require diverse and visionary leadership at all levels as well as the support and participation of every member of the academic and research communities.

However, when academic institutions demonstrate the will to do so, the research shows what will work to prevent sexual harassment, and thus we can protect the next generation of women entering science, engineering, and medicine.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO BRING ABOUT NECESSARY CHANGE

Seven recommendations focus on what academic institutions need to do to address and prevent all forms of sexual harassment.

RECOMMENDATION: Address the most common form of sexual harassment: gender harassment.

Institutional leaders should pay increased attention to and enact policies that cover gender harassment. Because it is the most common form of sexual harassment, it usually accompanies other forms of harassment, and thus addressing it will have a large impact on preventing the other types of harassment as well.

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. Sexual harassment needs to be addressed as a significant culture and climate issue. The following five recommendations offer specific ways to progress toward this goal.

RECOMMENDATION: Create diverse, inclusive, and respectful environments.

Academic institutions should work to create a diverse, inclusive, and respectful environment where these values are aligned with and embedded into the systems, structures, policies, and procedures of the institution. Their leaders should prioritize taking actions that will result in greater gender and racial equity in hiring and promotions, thus improving the representation of women at every level. They should also foster greater cooperation, respectful work behavior, and professionalism at the faculty, staff, and student/trainee levels, and should evaluate faculty and staff on these criteria in hiring and promotion. Institutions should combine anti-harassment and civility-promotion programs. They should ensure that training on preventing and addressing sexual harassment is tailored for specific populations, provides skills needed by all members of the academic community, teaches how to interrupt and intervene when harassment occurs, and focuses on changing behavior, not on changing beliefs. Critically, institutions must evaluate training programs for efficacy and to determine what aspects most effectively change climate, and reduce and prevent harassment.

RECOMMENDATION: Improve transparency and accountability.

Academic institutions should develop and readily share clear, accessible, and consistent policies on sexual harassment and standards of behavior. They should include a range of clearly stated, appropriate, and escalating disciplinary consequences for perpetrators found to have violated policy and/or law. Such consequences should be punitive, not something often considered a benefit, such as a reduction in teaching load or time away from campus service responsibilities. Policies should also include an investigative and decision making process that is fair to all involved and that is undertaken and completed in a timely manner.

Academic institutions should strive for greater transparency in how they are handling reports of sexual harassment while balancing a need for confidentiality. They should issue annual reports that provide information on (1) how many and what type of policy violations have been reported (both informally and formally), (2) how many reports are currently under investigation, and (3) how many have been adjudicated, along with general descriptions of any disciplinary actions taken.

Academic institutions should be accountable for their organizational climate, and utilize climate surveys to further investigate and address systemic sexual harassment, particularly when surveys indicate specific schools or facilities have high rates of harassment or chronically fail to reduce rates of sexual harassment.

Academic institutions should consider sexual harassment equally important as research misconduct in terms of its effect on the integrity of research, and thus should increase collaboration among offices that oversee the integrity of research (i.e., those that cover ethics, research misconduct, diversity, and harassment issues) and centralize resources, information, and expertise.

RECOMMENDATION: Diffuse the hierarchical and dependent relationship between trainees and faculty.

Academic institutions should identify and enact mechanisms to diffuse concentrated power and dependencies in relationships between trainees and faculty/advisors, such as using mentoring networks and committee-based advising, and providing independent funding.

RECOMMENDATION: Provide support for the target.

Academic institutions should convey that reporting sexual harassment is an honorable and courageous action and provide (1) access to support services (social services, health care, legal, career/professional) regardless of if a formal report is filed, (2) alternative and less formal ways to record information about an incident, and (3) approaches that prevent the target from experiencing or fearing retaliation.

RECOMMENDATION: Strive for strong and diverse leadership.

Strong and diverse leadership is essential to creating and maintaining a culture and climate that prevents harassment. It is crucial that all levels of leadership, from principal investigator and lab director to university president, are held responsible for creating the needed changes described above. Institutional leaders at all levels should make publicly known that the goal of reducing and preventing sexual harassment is one of their highest priorities, and they should engage students, faculty, and staff in efforts to achieve that goal during their tenure. And because leaders without effective tools cannot implement the kind of institutional change required to address a problem as widespread and longstanding as sexual harassment in the academy, institutions should support their leaders at every level by providing skill-development training customized to each level of leadership.

COMMITTEE ON IMPACTS OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN ACADEMIA

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For More Information . . . This Consensus Study Report Highlights was prepared by the Committee on Women in Science, Engineering, and Medicine based on the Report *Sexual Harassment of Women: Climate, Culture, and Consequences in Academic Science, Engineering, and Medicine* (2018). The study was sponsored by the National Science Foundation, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, the National Institutes of Health, the National Institute of Standards and Technology, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the Burroughs Wellcome Fund, the Henry Luce Foundation, and the Howard Hughes Medical Institute. Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of any organization or agency that provided support for the project. Copies of the Report are available from the National Academies Press, (800) 624-6242; <http://www.nap.edu> or at www.nationalacademies.org/sexualharassment.

Committee on Women in Science, Engineering, and Medicine Policy and Global Affairs

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