

Learning Network

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SEXUAL & GENDER-BASED HARASSMENT

Sexual and gender-based harassment are forms of gender-based violence which violate important human rights.

Incidents of sexual harassment occur **every day** in **every space**.

We hear about it on [campuses around the country](#), [in the Canadian Armed Forces](#), [at sporting events](#), [in cyberspace](#), and many places close to home.

It is engaged in by [politicians](#), [professors](#), [radio hosts](#), [dentistry students](#), [justices of the peace](#), and many other people we know or associate with respectability.

It can be difficult to understand because it seems so paradoxical:

- It is based on sex but it is **not** about sexual desire or unrequited attraction.
- It is a **violation** of human rights and other federal and provincial legislation; yet, it is **widespread**.
- It is **harmful** to those being harassed; yet, bystanders often interpret sexual harassment as “**normal**” behavior.
- The **costs** of harassment are high, yet coworkers, schoolmates, and so-called “friends” **often** engage in harassing behavior.

So, what is sexual and gender-based harassment and how do we stop it?

Sexual harassment is a type of discrimination based on sex involving unwanted comments or behaviour that intimidate, offend, or humiliate another person. Examples include:

- Asking for sex in exchange for a benefit (e.g. a promotion or a passing grade)
- Unwanted touching
- Calling people sex-specific derogatory names

Gender-based harassment is a form of sexual harassment involving behaviour that reinforces heteronormative gender roles¹. Examples include:

- Making gender-related comments about a person’s appearance or mannerisms
- Bullying someone using gender-related comments or conduct
- Treating a person badly because they don’t fit stereotypic gender roles

Globally, 70 to 99% of women experience street harassment at some point during their lives.²

SPACES WHERE SEXUAL HARASSMENT OCCURS AND ITS POTENTIAL IMPACTS

Patterns of sexual harassment often reflect cultural norms connected with *spaces*. *Spaces* associated with sexual harassment include...

Street Harassment: This form of sexual harassment occurs in public places.

- Sexually objectifies
- Makes public spaces feel less comfortable and safe
- Reinforces vulnerability to assault and attack in public spaces

Workplace Sexual Harassment:

- Undermines a person's sense of dignity
- Undermines a person's sense of competence at work
- Compromises earning potential (absenteeism, distraction, loss of promotion)
- Creates a toxic environment

Sexual Harassment in Educational Settings:

- Undermines skills and a person's ability to learn
- Disrupts education
- Compromises a person's ability to reach his or her full potential
- Can result in absenteeism, poor grades and discontinuation of one's studies

Sexual harassment can negatively impact every domain of a survivor's life.

Sexual Harassment – What is a myth and what is reality?

Myths	Realities
<p>Sexual harassment is no big deal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is an invention of feminists • Women exaggerate the impacts • It's not like she was raped 	<p>It is a violation of human rights.</p> <p>It is a violation of various federal, provincial/territorial and/or municipal legislations.</p> <p>Sexual harassment is a widespread problem.</p>
<p>It is a "deviant" or rare event</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Men who harass must be perverse, ugly, sexually frustrated – not regular guys • It only happens to women in male-dominated fields 	<p>Anyone can be sexually harassed; however, subordinated groups (e.g. women, LGBTQ people, people with disabilities) are targeted more often.</p> <p>Street harassment can be sexist, racist, transphobic, homophobic, ableist, sizeist and/or classist.</p>
<p>It is "normal" behaviour between sexes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It's innocent flirtation/sexual attraction • Women are being hyper-sensitive 	<p>It is not part of courtship; nor about unrequited love or romantic attraction.</p> <p>It is often used to express power over another person.</p> <p>It is discrimination.</p>
<p>He didn't mean to do it</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He was having fun/drinking and got carried away • He's a good guy/my friend/co-worker 	<p>Sexual harassment is intentional behaviour.</p> <p>Often, it <u>re-asserts gender, race, age or class hierarchies within environments</u> (school, work, street) in harmful ways.</p>
<p>Stopping/reporting sexual harassment is easy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women file reports lightly • Women easily gain the upper hand by reporting • She can verbally protest • She can avoid harm if she wants to 	<p>There are many <u>barriers</u> to reporting that silence women or lead them to minimize, ignore or "put up" with harassment.</p> <p>Sometimes reporting creates additional problems for victims: e.g. s/he may be ostracized by co-workers, not believed, or pay for being a "whistle-blower".</p>
<p>"Reactions" to sexual harassment are the real problem</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Results in political correctness • Ruins "normal relationships" • Stops people from having fun 	<p>Sexual harassment causes negative consequences (e.g. poor health, loss of earning potential).</p> <p>Its repercussions should never be blamed on the person being harassed.</p>
<p>She asked for it</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • She chose to work in a male environment • She wears sexy clothes 	<p>Everyone has the right to learn, work and be in settings free from discrimination.</p>

BARRIERS TO REPORTING SEXUAL HARASSMENT

A survivor's ability to report what happened is impacted by: victim-blaming, experiences of social marginalization and prior sexual violence, complexities of identity (e.g. citizenship, race/ethnicity, age), the normalization of sexual harassment, a lack of effective responses, retaliation from the harasser and others, and social misconceptions that minimize the impact of harassment and excuse perpetrators for their actions.

Repercussions to Disclosure

"Everyone will find out."

Perpetrator Known to Victim

"...But we work together."

Myths and Misconception

"It's just innocent flirtation."

Experiences Minimized/Ignored

"It's not a big deal – they do it to everyone."

Bystanders who recognize sexual or gender-based harassment has occurred but choose to ignore it are complicit in silencing the survivor.

RESOURCES

[Hollaback!](#)

An online network of groups across the globe that uses the internet to connect activists and those who resist street harassment. It publicly displays street harassment stories, news, photos and videos.

[#WhoWillYouHelp](#)

A Public Service announcement by the government of Ontario launched by Premier Kathleen Wynne on March 6, 2015 depicts scenes of sexual violence or harassment in the workplace, a bar, at school, and at a party with the message "when you see something, do something."

[Draw the Line](#)

'Draw The Line' is an interactive campaign that aims to engage Ontarians in a dialogue about sexual violence. The campaign challenges common myths about sexual violence and harassment and equips bystanders with information on how to intervene safely and effectively.

[Climb the Hill](#)

A video produced by the Ontario Federation of Labor regarding sexual harassment in the workplace. Women with lived experience share their stories of harassment in the workplace, the impact on them and their responses. Strategies to reduce sexual harassment in the workplace are offered.

RESEARCH

Street Harassment: Current and Promising Avenues for Researchers and Activists.

Laura Logan (2015). *Sociology Compass*, 9/3, 196-211.

This paper offers a concise overview of street harassment terms and definitions. It offers examples of initiatives from around the world to address this global social problem. Research on this topic has been limited, and this paper identifies areas for further research including investigating street harassment with an intersectional lens and evaluating the impact of various education and response initiatives.

Sexual Harassment Mythology: Definition, Conceptualization, and Measurement.

Kimberly A. Lonsway & Lilia M. Cortina & Vicki J. Magley (2008). *Sex Roles*, 58, 599-615.

[The Illinois Sexual Harassment Myth Acceptance Scale](#) is a 20 item scale which examines attitudes and beliefs that are generally false but are widely and persistently held. These myths serve to deny and justify male sexual harassment of women. This scale has since been adapted for Spanish and German cultures. The scale may be used to assess impact of myth acceptance on gender or to inform bystander intervention approaches.

SEXUAL & GENDER-BASED HARASSMENT IS NOT INEVITABLE: KNOW WHAT YOU CAN DO!

3 Ways to Strengthen Prevention & Response to Sexual Harassment

1. Recognize and address the role of your workplace/school/neighbourhood culture
 - Confront jokes or banter about women, LGBTQ individuals, and others.
 - Foster an environment that recognizes women and other marginalized groups as equals.
2. Pledge to be a better bystander and help others to be better bystanders.
Learn how to safely intervene when you witness harassment:
 - Check in. Ask the person who is being harassed if they are okay.
 - If it is safe to do so, tell the harasser to stop. Say their actions are not okay.
 - Divert the harasser (e.g. ask for the time).
 - If your friends are harassing someone, tell them it is unacceptable.
3. Evaluate the effectiveness of your workplace/school/ other policy on sexual harassment.
 - Make the policy visible so people know where to find it.
 - Ensure that the policy and its processes are easy to understand.
 - Review the policy every 1-2 years with diverse people from your community (e.g. women, LGBTQ folks, women of color, survivors of violence).

THINGS YOU CAN DO IF YOU ARE BEING SEXUALLY HARASSED⁴:

- Trust your instincts
- Know your rights and the law
- Know and seek out support
- Where it is safe to do so, tell the harasser that you want their behavior to stop.
- Take care of yourself

THINGS YOU CAN DO THAT SUPPORT YOU IN MAKING A REPORT⁵:

Keep a written record of events, including:

- What happened and who said/did it
- When and where it happened
- Witnesses to the incident
- Your response at the time – your reactions/feelings as well as attempts to tell the harasser to stop can be important if you decide to bring forth a claim

Consider taking one or more of the following options on page 7.

ACTIONS YOU CAN TAKE IF YOU ARE BEING SEXUALLY HARASSED

Internal Policies

- Organizations are legally required to prevent and rectify sexual and gender-based harassment.
- File a complaint in writing and ask for a written response.

Collective Agreements

- Many collective agreements include terms of the Ontario Human Rights Code (HRC).
- Contact your union for help as you may be able to file a grievance on alleged breaches of the HRC.

Occupational Health & Safety Act (OHSA)

- The OHSA recognizes any form of workplace harassment.
- Contact the Ontario Ministry of Labour for more information on recourse under the OHSA.

Other Administrative Bodies

- Administrative bodies (e.g. the Landlord and Tenant Board) have a responsibility to apply the HRC.
- You can file a claim with any administrative body authorized to consider questions of law.

Criminal Charges

- In some cases, sexual harassment is a crime (e.g. stalking, sexual assault, threats of sexual assault).
- Contact your local police if you believe you are experiencing criminal harassment.

Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario

- Human rights applications can be filed within 1 year of the last incident of harassment.
- Contact the Human Rights Legal Support Centre for assistance in filing an application.

[Ontario Ministry of Labour](http://www.ontario.ca/ministry/labour): 1-800-531-5551

[Human Rights Legal Support Centre](http://www.hrtco.org/): 1-866-625-5179

UPCOMING LEARNING NETWORK WEBINAR

Drawing the Line on Workplace Sexual Harassment

September 24, 2015 | 10:00am - 11:00am EST

In this webinar, sexual violence survivor advocates Julie Lalonde and Nicole Pietsch will discuss several topics including:

1. Seeing beyond the individual incident or harasser
2. Taking leadership
3. Drawing The Line on Sexual Harassment

Nicole Pietsch, B.A., Coordinator, Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres

Julie Lalonde, M.A., Project Manager Draw-the-line.ca Campaign

Register here: vawlearningnetwork.ca/drawing-line-workplace-sexual-harassment-webinar

NEW LEARNING NETWORK RESOURCES

[Learning Network Brief 26: Barriers to Reporting Sexual Harassment](#)

This Brief discusses some of the barriers that make reporting sexual harassment difficult and for some, lead to more complex consequences.

[Learning Network Brief 27: Sexual Harassment and Public Space](#)

This Brief explores how patterns of sexual harassment often reflect the cultural norms connected with the spaces or environments (school, work, public spaces) in which it occurs. The analysis provides examples of how sexual harassment can work to define or re-assert gender, race, age or class hierarchies within spaces in harmful ways.

[Sexual Harassment Network Area](#)

Visit our new network area where we've posted over 30 resources/research papers.

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PLEASE EVALUATE US!

Let us know what you think. Your input is important to us. Please complete this brief survey on your thoughts of this newsletter: fluidsurveys.com/surveys/crevawc/sexual-harassmentnewsletter-issue-13/

FOOTNOTES

¹Government of Ontario. 2015. It's Never Okay: An Action Plan to Stop Sexual Violence and Harassment. Toronto: Queen's Printer for Ontario.

²Hollaback: You Have the Power to End Street Harassment. Research. www.ihollaback.org/research/

³Myths adapted from Lonsway, Cortina & Magley (2008). Sexual harassment mythology: Definition, conceptualization, and measurement. *Sex Roles*, 58, 599-615.

⁴See www.ihollaback.org for more information on ending street harassment.

⁵Adapted from: Ontario Human Rights Commission (2013). Policy on preventing sexual and gender-based harassment. Toronto: Queen's Printer for Ontario.

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Centre for Research & Education on Violence against Women & Children

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