



Sexual Harassment of Girls and Young Women

Sexual harassment, a form of sex discrimination, includes unwelcome sexually determined behavior such as physical contact and advances, sexually colored remarks, showing pornography and sexual demand whether by words or actions.

Statistical Information

- 56% of American high school girls in grades 7-12 studied by the AAUW in *Crossing the Line*, experienced sexual harassment (in person or online).
 - 26% of girls as opposed to 13% of boys in the study were sent unwelcome sexual jokes, comments, or pictures.
 - It's just part of school life/It's no big deal (44%); I thought it was funny (39%); I was being stupid (34%) were the answers to why students harassed others.
 - In the AAUW study 59% of girls and 44% of boys didn't do anything after being sexually harassed.
- A Wellesley College study suggests that the harassment of girls is becoming more violent and occurring at a younger age.
- Often sexual harassment is mislabeled as bullying, which is not yet fully defined.

Good Practices to Prevent Sexual Harassment

- In India, Children's Parliaments make ending harassment a goal and priority for school and community leaders. The parliaments, which include children up to 18 years old, and are small sized, ensure that almost every child gets attention and participates. They take charge and keep an alert eye on the violation of rights. Students often go to the police for help. Students have improved in their education and are getting better results.
- Coalition for Gender Equity in Schools (CGES) collaborates with youth, educators, parents, activists and policy makers to raise awareness about the impact of sexual harassment in New York City schools and works towards achieving gender equality in the education of New York City youth.
- In the United States, violations of federal civil rights laws related to sexual harassment, require elimination of the hostile environment and take precedence over anti-bullying laws and prevention efforts

What Actions Should be Taken to Stop Sexual Harassment?

United Nations

- UNICEF urges changing policies and legislation at the local levels; and promotes the right to education of all children, especially girls' rights to primary and secondary education.
- Include workplace harassment as defined by *The Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women* (CEDAW), General Recommendation 1992. It finds that sexual harassment is discriminatory when the individual has grounds to believe that her objection would disadvantage her in connection with her employment.
- The SRSR on Violence against children urges nations to develop safe, sensitive and accessible counseling, complaint and reporting mechanisms on violence against children
- Financially support organizations and groups which actively assist and rehabilitate women and children who have experienced sexual harassment

Schools and Communities

- Girls should know what constitutes harassment, interrupt any harassment they observe, and tell a trusted adult.
- Prevention programs should address empowerment strategies, social pressure and the media rather than "manage" girls' adolescence. Girls need to understand the difference between "consent" and "coercion" and avoid female passivity.
- Work with trained school officials to develop an enforceable sexual harassment policy.
- Encourage programs that include raising the consciousness of boys and men to school and street sexual harassment and how they may escalate into domestic violence .
- Encourage participation in boys' and men's educational groups such as Tostan and the White Ribbon which focus on respectful behavior towards girls and women, warning how harassment may escalate into domestic violence.

NGOs and individuals

- Write, protest, and make presentations to raise awareness of sexual harassment in the educational, business and cyberspace communities.
- Perform "safe audits" which examine different forms of sexual harassment; identify safe areas in schools and in communities, review results and create an action plan. Create reporting centers and hot lines which include Web-based, girl friendly procedures.
- Approach men and boys as allies in combating sexual harassment.

UN Resource Documents

- *The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women.*
- Expert Group Meeting for the 57th meeting of *The Commission on the Status of Women, Paragraph # 142*

