

# FACTSHEET: SEXUAL HARASSMENT



## DEFINITION

Sexual harassment is an “unwanted and unwelcome sexual behaviour that interferes with your life. Sexual harassment is not behaviour that you like or want and can include for example unwanted kissing, touching, flirting and stalking.”<sup>47</sup> It can take the form of unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favours, or other verbal or physical harassment of a sexual nature. Sexual harassment can be verbal (remarks about figure/look, sexual jokes or advances), non-verbal (staring and whistling), physical (from unsolicited physical contact to assault/rape) and digital (sexting, on-line sexual advances and comments).

Sexual harassment can occur between peers and between people that know each other. In some societies, unwelcome sexual advances may be so normalized that sexually harassing peers may not even be recognized as abusive and so even when someone speaks out, they are reprimanded or ignored.

Sexual harassment can also be perpetrated by strangers in public spaces such as on transportation systems, in parks and on the streets. Sexual harassment can be perpetrated by people in positions of authority which increases the vulnerability of the person experiencing such harassment. It can take place in the workplace as well as in schools, often by teachers to students.

Children and young people can also experience broader sexist, transphobic or homophobic harassment and bullying for not conforming to rigid gender stereotypes, norms and expectations. Children and young people may be policed by their peers and sometimes by adults to fit into rigid gender expectations and are often punished for not playing their part - for example a boy can be bullied for wishing to play with girls in the playground. This can be traumatic for children and creates a pressure to fit in and at the same time it prevents them from being the person they want to be.

## FACTS

- Between 40 and 50 per cent of women in European Union countries experience unwanted sexual advances, physical contact or other forms of sexual harassment at work.<sup>48</sup>
- In the United States, 83 percent of girls aged 12 to 16 have experienced some form of sexual harassment in public schools.<sup>49</sup>
- In Malawi, 50 per cent of schoolgirls surveyed reported being touched in a sexual way by their teachers or classmates and without their consent.<sup>50</sup>
- Small surveys in Asia-Pacific countries indicate that 30 to 40 per cent of women workers reported some form of harassment (verbal, physical or sexual).<sup>51</sup>



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Sexual harassment has become normalized as its public performance is tolerated, even expected, and allowed to flourish. A school culture has been created that gives, in effect, permission to proceed, potentially turning schools into practice fields and training grounds for dating/domestic violence and other forms of interpersonal gender violence<sup>52</sup>

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Nan Stein, senior research scientist,  
Wellesley Centre for Women (WCW)

# **[ Sexual harassment is when: ]**



**[ The legal system also takes into account repetitiveness in sexual harassment situations. ]**

# [ Sexual harassment is when: ]

Pay attention to the **CAPITALIZED** words in the first column. **Draw a line** to the appropriate example or definition in the other column to match them up.

1. <b>UNWANTED</b> (sexually oriented)	<b>A)</b> Victims of sexual harassment may: - avoid settings where harassment has occurred - quit school or an activity because of sexual harassment - experience health problems because of sexual harassment
2. <b>COMMENTS</b>	<b>B)</b> Damage or weaken someone, especially gradually or insidiously
3. <b>ACTIONS</b>	<b>C)</b> A moral or legal entitlement to have or obtain something
4. (and/or) <b>ENVIRONMENT</b>	<b>D)</b> Putting your hand on someone's butt Unwanted sexual touching
5. (that) <b>UNDERMINE</b>	<b>E)</b> The state or quality of being worthy of honour or respect
6. (a person's) <b>RIGHTS</b>	<b>F)</b> The quality of being honest and having strong moral principles
7. <b>DIGNITY</b>	<b>G)</b> "You look so much hotter with make-up" or "I'd love to get you alone"
8. (and/or) <b>INTEGRITY</b>	<b>H)</b> Unwelcome, unsolicited
9. <b>CAUSING ADVERSE, HARMFUL CONSEQUENCES</b>	<b>I)</b> -Display of sexual images in public -Sexual harassment in the workplace -Sexism or Homophobia

The hockey team locker room has become a **HARASSING ENVIRONMENT** for Jack. The team coach and the recreation centre are responsible for the locker room. Just as people in charge of equipment used by the public should be held accountable if the equipment is defective, those in positions of responsibility must also be held accountable to intervene when someone using a public facility is being harassed. In other words, a harassing environment must not be tolerated and those in charge of this setting have a duty to intervene in order to keep it free of sexual harassment.

In a **HARASSING ENVIRONMENT, THE BEHAVIOUR OF WITNESSES** is equally important and can greatly help or hinder the person being harassed. When witnesses laugh or remain silent when someone is being sexually harassed they make things worse for the victim. The victim may then believe that everyone is laughing at him/ her and that everyone condones the situation. Furthermore, when witnesses laugh or do nothing, it encourages the harasser to continue the behaviour and provides tacit agreement with the situation. A simple, well-timed intervention from a witness is sometimes all that is needed to make harassing behaviour stop!

**WHAT COULD WITNESSES DO?** Witnesses should look for a variety of solutions! Members of the team who were in the locker room or the coach witnessing the situation could intervene. Even a simple remark to the team can have a substantial impact. Witnesses could also make the effort to be a **TRUE FRIEND** to the harassers and explain to them that when a “bad joke” becomes sexual harassment it isn’t funny any more and that serious consequences could result.

The decision to **LODGE A FORMAL COMPLAINT** can be a difficult one to make since this is a serious course of action that could lead to fairly unpleasant consequences. Nonetheless, such a solution is sometimes deemed an important and necessary measure in order to retain one’s self-esteem, to stop being afraid or to finally put an end to harassing behaviour.

# PASSAJ

Handout #3



## [ Confronting Sexual Harassment ]



Sexual harassment is present in virtually every aspect of society. It is also a form of sexual abuse. At some point in the future there is a strong likelihood that you'll be faced with sexual harassment, whether it's in your place of work or study or in a leisure setting. Moreover, we are all vulnerable to sexual harassment which occurs in situations where one person's unwelcome, sexually-oriented actions or comments undermine another person's dignity and integrity.



The following is a list of some of the possible, harmful consequences of sexual harassment:

### FOR THOSE WHO ARE SEXUALLY HARASSED:

- lower self-esteem
- avoidance behaviours such as changing work hours and travel plans, and keeping away from certain places. These adaptations may have negative consequences for people's careers and quality of life.
- choosing to quit work, school or sports activities
- lower productivity, a drop in school marks, absenteeism
- anxiety, anger, sadness, depression, decreased pleasure in life

### FOR WORK OR STUDY ENVIRONMENTS:

- the reality of complaints and legal actions
- decreased employee productivity; decreased scholastic performance
- loss of employees and clients
- an atmosphere of distrust
- difficulty with recruiting new students or employees
- acquiring a bad reputation

### FOR THE HARASSER:

Who may briefly feel as though he/she has won, but who risks losing a great deal in the immediate future.

- dealing with stress related to complaints of harassment
- growing unease on the part of colleagues
- disciplinary actions such as suspension from work or loss of promotions
- reduced access to management positions or professional development opportunities.

BY ESTABLISHING RELATIONSHIPS THAT ARE TRULY  
BASED ON EQUALITY, EVERYONE WINS.

### HARASSMENT IS WHEN I:

- persist in touching someone in a sexual way even when I'm rejected
- make frequent, inappropriate sexual comments
- blackmail or make promises to someone in exchange for sexual favours.



A harassing environment is one where an unhealthy, demeaning atmosphere is allowed to develop, for example when:

- degrading, sexual messages are publicly displayed.
- despite being aware of what is happening, those in charge tolerate the infringement of personal privacy by staff members in places such as washrooms.
- people are obliged to participate in initiation practices that are sexual in nature.

Those in charge of school or work environments may be required to compensate for personal damages as a result of legal actions when they allow such unhealthy climates to develop. Furthermore, people who are involved in such situations may also have to face disciplinary measures.

Authors: Francine Lavoie, Marie-Christine Pacaud, Marjolaine Roy and Catherine Lebossé