

what is sexual harassment?



Sexual harassment is a form of sexual violence. People who are subjected to sexual harassment may experience a range of emotional, financial, and psychological harms. Creating environments free of sexual harassment is critical as we work to eliminate sexual violence in all its forms.

WHAT IS SEXUAL HARASSMENT?

Sexual harassment is **any unwelcome** sexual advance, request for sexual relations, or other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature.¹ Sexual harassment can include obscene language or demeaning comments; lewd gestures; unwanted touching; and unwanted sexually explicit images.

Sexual harassment can occur anywhere—at work or on the street, in public or private—and can happen to anyone, regardless of age, race, ethnicity, gender or gender identity, religion, ability, sexual orientation, or social status. Harmful social norms, such as people holding incorrect beliefs that women are inferior to men, contribute to the occurrence of sexual harassment.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN THE U.S.

In a recent national survey, 81 percent of women and 43 percent of men reported experiencing some form of sexual harassment or assault in their lifetime.² More than 3 in 4 women and 1 in 3 men reported experiencing verbal sexual harassment, while 1 in 2 women and 1 in 6 men experienced unwanted touching of a sexual nature.³

▶ sexual harassment:

any unwelcome sexual advance, request for sexual relations, or other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature

*2 in 5 men &
4 in 5 women*

*experience some form
of sexual harassment
in their lifetime.*

SNAPSHOT: INTERSECTIONS OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN THE WORKPLACE

People with multiple intersecting marginalized identities, such as gender and gender identity, race, ability, class, sexual orientation, and citizenship status, face higher rates of sexual harassment in the workplace. An analysis of U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission data found that Black women report significantly higher levels of sexual harassment in the workplace than white women.⁴ In 2016, Black women were nearly four times more likely to report workplace sexual harassment than white women.⁵

Workers in low-wage jobs—an industry in which women of color and immigrant women represent a majority—have the highest reported incidents of sexual harassment.⁶ In particular, workers who are undocumented or have a temporary work visa face higher risk of harassment.⁷ Immigrant workers are less likely to report sexual harassment for fear of jeopardizing their immigration status or because legal resources are not accessible in the language they speak.⁸

New Jersey and federal law prohibit both workplace sexual harassment and retaliation for reporting.



STATEWIDE HOTLINE

800 - 601 - 7200

OPTIONS FOR REPORTING SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Sexual Harassment at Work

U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission
[eeoc.gov/employees/charge.cfm](https://www.eeoc.gov/employees/charge.cfm)

Sexual Harassment in Schools

U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights
[ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/complaintintro.html](https://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/complaintintro.html)

Sexual Harassment in N.J. Housing, Employment, or Place of Public Accommodation

New Jersey Division on Civil Rights
[nj.gov/oag/dcr/filing.html](https://www.nj.gov/oag/dcr/filing.html)

HOW TO PREVENT SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Sexual harassment is 100 percent preventable—and everyone has a role to play in that prevention. Preventing sexual harassment involves breaking down harmful social norms and promoting respect, empathy, and equity.

Start promoting positive social norms in your day-to-day life with these steps:

- Calling in inappropriate behavior
- Believing and supporting survivors of sexual harassment
- Challenging gender stereotypes and supporting gender equity

REFERENCES

¹ Employment discrimination. (2007). Retrieved from <https://www.nj.gov/oag/dcr/employ.html>

² The Facts Behind the #MeToo Movement: A National Study on Sexual Harassment and Assault. (2018). Retrieved from <http://www.stopstreetharassment.org/our-work/nationalstudy/2018-national-sexual-abuse-report/>

³ Ibid

⁴ Cassion, D. & Besen-Cassion, Y. (2019). Race, threat and workplace sexual harassment: The dynamics of harassment in the United States, 1997-2016. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 26. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12394>

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Durana, A., Lenhart, A., Miller, R., Schulte, B., & Weingarten, E. (2018). Sexual harassment: A severe and pervasive problem. Retrieved from <https://www.newamerica.org/better-life-lab/reports/sexual-harassment-severe-and-pervasive-problem>

⁷ Shaw, E., Hegewisch, A., & Hess, C. (2018). Sexual harassment and assault at work: Understanding the costs. Retrieved from <https://iwpr.org/publications/sexual-harassment-work-cost/>

⁸ Ibid

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The New Jersey Coalition Against Sexual Assault (NJCASA) is the statewide organization representing 21 county-based rape crisis centers and Rutgers University's Office for Violence Prevention and Victim Assistance. NJCASA elevates the voice of survivors and service providers through advocacy, training, and support for efforts to create safer communities for all people.

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