Sexual Harassment in Academia: The NASEM Report and Recommendations

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Study Statement of Task

The Committee will undertake a study of the influence of sexual harassment in academia on the career advancement of women in the scientific, technical, and medical workforce, which will include the following:

- Review of the research on the extent to which women in the fields of science, engineering, and medicine are victimized by sexual harassment on college and university campuses, in research labs and field sites, at hospitals/medical centers, and in other academic environments;

- Examination of existing information on the extent to which sexual harassment in academia negatively impacts the recruitment, retention, and advancement of women pursuing scientific, engineering, technical, and medical careers, with comparative evidence drawn from other sectors such as the military, government, and the private sector;

- Identification and analysis of policies, strategies, and practices that have been the most successful in preventing and addressing sexual harassment in these settings.
# Study Committee Members

Co-Chair: **Paula Johnson**\(^1\), Wellesley College  
Co-Chair: **Sheila Widnall**\(^2\), Massachusetts Institute of Technology

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Overview

• Key findings
• Recommendations
• Responses to the report
Key findings
Summary

• Current climate permits extensive sexual harassment
• That climate undermines research integrity, reduces talent pool, and harms targets
• Legal compliance has not reduced harassment
• Changing climate and culture can reduce, deter, and address harassment
Basis

- Surveys
- Experiments
- Interviews, case studies, and qualitative analysis
- Cases, doctrines, and sociolegal methods

Nearly *four decades* of research on sexual harassment
SEXUAL COERCION

UNWANTED SEXUAL ATTENTION

sexual assault
rape
unwanted groping or stroking

PUBLIC CONSCIOUSNESS

relentless pressure for sex or dates
unwanted sexual discussions

GENDER HARASSMENT

nude images posted at work
sexually humiliating acts
sexual insults, gender slurs, and vulgar name calling e.g. "whore," "pu" "v," "slut," "bitch"
offensive sexual teasing or remarks about bodies
sexist insults e.g. women don't belong in science
sabotage of women's equipment
obscene gestures
Prevalence

- Sexual harassment remains common
- Women of color experience more sexual harassment than white women, white men, or men of color
- Sexual- and gender-minority people experience more sexual harassment than heterosexual women
Impact

- Undermines women’s professional and educational success
- Degrades the physical and mental health of targets
- Affects bystanders, co-workers, and organizations negatively
Organizational climate

Sexual harassment is most likely to take place in workplaces that are:

• Male-dominated in number, leaders, and culture

• Tolerant of sexual harassment
  o Reporting is perceived as risky
  o Reports not taken seriously
  o Offenders escape sanction

*Perceived tolerance for sexual harassment is, by far, the greatest predictor of its occurrence.*
Recommendations
Gender harassment

- 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.
Compliance

• 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.
Institutions

- Create diverse, inclusive, and respectful environments
- Diffuse the hierarchical and dependent relationship between trainees and faculty
- Provide support for targets
- Improve transparency and accountability
- Strive for strong and diverse leadership
- Make the entire academic community responsible for reducing and preventing sexual harassment
Professional societies

- Professional societies should accelerate their efforts to be viewed as organizations that are helping to create culture changes that reduce or prevent the occurrence of sexual harassment.

- Academic institutions and federal agencies should consider sexual harassment equally important as research misconduct in terms of its effect on the integrity of research.
Policy makers

Consider new and additional legislation with the following goals:

• Better protecting sexual harassment claimants from retaliation.
• Prohibiting confidentiality in settlement agreements that currently enable harassers to move to another institution and conceal past adjudications.
• Banning mandatory arbitration clauses for discrimination claims.
• Allowing lawsuits to be filed against alleged harassers directly (instead of or in addition to their academic employers).
Policy makers (cont.)

- Requiring institutions receiving federal funds to publicly disclose results from campus climate surveys and/or the number of sexual harassment reports made to campuses.
- Requesting that the National Science Foundation and the National Institutes of Health devote research funds to doing a follow-up analysis on the topic of sexual harassment in science, engineering, and medicine in 3 to 5 years to determine 1) whether research has shown that the prevalence of sexual harassment has decreased; 2) whether progress has been made on implementing these recommendations; and 3) where to focus future efforts.
Federal agencies

• Increase support for research and evaluation of the effectiveness of policies, procedures, and training on sexual harassment.

• Attend to sexual harassment with at least the same level of attention and resources devoted to research misconduct. They should increase collaboration among offices that oversee the integrity of research (i.e., those that cover ethics, research misconduct, diversity, and harassment issues); centralize resources, information, and expertise; provide more resources for handling complaints and working with targets; and implement sanctions on researchers found guilty of sexual harassment.
Federal agencies (cont.)

- Require institutions to report to federal agencies when individuals on grants have been found to have violated sexual harassment policies or have been put on administrative leave related to sexual harassment, as the National Science Foundation has proposed doing. Agencies should also hold accountable the perpetrator and the institution by using a range of disciplinary actions that limit the negative effects on other grant personnel who were either the target of the harassing behavior or innocent bystanders.

- Reward and incentivize colleges and universities for implementing policies, programs, and strategies that research shows are most likely to and are succeeding in reducing and preventing sexual harassment.
Responses to the report
Visibility

- Restoring women to science history
- Publications and lectures
- New incentives, apps, and studies
- Campus events
Accountability

- Proposed federal legislation
- Revised policies
- Announcements and studies

#ScienceToo
Interventions for Preventing Sexual Harassment

Create Diverse, Inclusive, and Respectful Environments

Hiring and Promotion: Take explicit steps to achieve greater gender and racial equity in hiring and promotion, and improve the representation of women at all levels of the university.

The University of Michigan Committee on Strategies and Tactics for Recruiting to Improve Diversity and Excellence (STRIDE) offers faculty recruitment workshops for faculty members with an important role in faculty recruitment.

Civility Promotion: Combine anti-harassment efforts with programs to promote civility.

The well-being of all faculty, staff, and students in the workplace is a priority of the University of Michigan. The University offers a variety of programs and resources to promote a healthy and respectful workplace environment.

Improving Transparency and Accountability

Clear Policies: Develop and share clear, accessible, and consistent policies on sexual harassment and standards of behavior. Make clear that people will be held accountable for violating the policies.

Include a range of clear disciplinary actions that correspond with the severity of the harassment.

Engage the academic community in policy and practice reviews. Some institutions have created student advisory boards and forums for students to meet with the Title IX Steering Committee.

Transparency about Handling Reports.

Be as transparent as possible about how the institution is handling reports of sexual harassment.

The University publishes a biannual report of complaints of sexual misconduct and an annual campus safety report to inform the campus community.

Assess Climate: Utilize climate surveys to further investigate and address systemic sexual harassment.

The results of climate surveys should be shared publicly to demonstrate to the campus community that the institution takes the issue seriously. The Administration and Researcher Campus Climate Collaborative (ARCC) survey has been used by more than 250 higher education institutions.

Research Integrity: Consider sexual harassment equally important as research misconduct in terms of its effect on the integrity of research.

The U.S. Geological Survey and the Department of the Interior have broad scientific integrity policies that apply to employees, appointees, volunteers, consultants, and contractors. Some scientific societies such as the American Geophysical Union have developed new ethics policies that explicitly call out sexual harassment and discrimination.

Diffuse the Hierarchical and Dependent Relationship Between Trainees and Faculty

Mentoring Networks: Adopt mentoring networks or community-based training that allows for a diversity of potential pathways for advice, funding, support, and informal reporting of harassment.

Independent Research Funding: Develop ways to allocate funding that can be provided to the trainee rather than just the principal investigator.

Provide Support for the Target

Access to Support Services: Provide means for the target of harassment to access support services (social services, health care, legal, career professional).

Informal Reporting: Provide alternative and less formal means of reporting information about the experience and reporting the experience.

Provide anonymous, confidential reporting systems. Callers is an online system that allows targets to control the disclosure of information, access supportive services, and share information on alleged perpetrators.

Provide confidential reporting channels outside of the faculty or workplace hierarchy, such as an emb拜or.

Explore the use of restorative justice processes. The Campus PRISM (Promoting restorative Initiatives for Sexual Misconduct) Project calls for accountability through collaboration and prevention through education.

Prevent Retaliation: Develop approaches to prevent the target from experiencing or fearing retaliation in academic settings.

Be prepared to take action to ensure the target of the harassment is able to continue his/her academic work. This could include using mutual no contact orders between the accused and accuser, changing class schedules, changing the locks at the housing facility of workplace, restricting building access for the accused, and reassigning advisors, mentors, and supervisors.

Strive for Strong and Diverse Leadership

Make it an Explicit Goal: College and university presidents, provosts, deans, department chairs, and program directors must make the reduction and prevention of sexual harassment an explicit goal of their tenure.

Develop Leadership Skills: Support and facilitate leaders at every level (university, school, college, department, lab) in developing skills in leadership, conflict resolution, mediation, negotiation, and de-escalation, and ensure a clear understanding of policies and procedures for handling sexual harassment issues.

Move Beyond Legal Liability: Leadership training programs should include training on how to recognize and handle sexual harassment proactively and how to take explicit steps to create a culture and climate to reduce and prevent sexual harassment—and not just protect the institution against liability.

The National Academy of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine

Report recommendations video

https://youtu.be/juJu2mg5y5M

http://nationalacademies.org/SexualHarassment
#ScienceToo
Consensus Study Report

Sexual Harassment of Women
Climate, Culture, and Consequences in Academic Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine

The National Academies of SCIENCES • ENGINEERING • MEDICINE

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