

## APA Official Actions

### Position Statement on Sexual Harassment

Approved by the Board of Trustees, 2021

Approved by the Assembly, 2021

Approved by the Board of Trustees, 2016

Approved by the Assembly, 2016

“Policy documents are approved by the APA Assembly and Board of Trustees. . . These are . . . position statements that define APA official policy on specific subjects. . .” – *APA Operations Manual*

#### Issue:

Sexual harassment is a form of discrimination that ranges from verbal and non-verbal behavior to physical assault, which is a criminal offense. Behaviors that constitute sexual harassment include unwanted sexual attention, requests for sexual favors, jokes referring to sexual acts, sexual orientation and/or gender identity and expression, and conditions of employment or advancement that are dependent on sexual favors, either explicitly or implicitly.

Sexual harassment may affect all individuals. According to available data, 77 percent of women and 34 percent of men surveyed had experienced verbal sexual harassment, 51 percent of women and 17 percent of men had been sexually touched without their permission, and about 38 percent of women had experienced harassment at their workplace<sup>1</sup>. Furthermore, a majority of all LGBTQ+ persons have experienced slurs (57%), insensitive or offensive comments (53%) about their sexual orientation or gender identity and been sexually harassed (51%)<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, individuals from minority populations may experience “intersectional harassment,” which encompasses multiple forms of mistreatment due to the victim’s multiple identities, including having the highest levels of harassment and discrimination in the workplace<sup>3</sup>.

Sexual harassment has been associated with poor physical and mental health, leading to long-lasting physical and psychological illness, decreased performance and productivity, low morale, and increased job turnover<sup>4</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2018/02/21/587671849/a-new-survey-finds-eighty-percent-of-women-have-experienced-sexual-harassment>

<sup>2</sup> <https://cdn1.sph.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/94/2017/11/NPR-RWJF-HSPH-Discrimination-LGBTQ-Final-Report.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://everfi.com/blog/workplace-training/intersectional-discrimination-sexual-harassment-workplace/#:~:text=Intersectional%20harassment%20is%20defined%20as,marginalized%20racial%20and%20gender%20identity.>

<sup>4</sup> Jenner, S., Djeremester, P., Prügl, J., Kurmeyer, C., & Oertelt-Prigione, S. (2019). Prevalence of sexual harassment in academic medicine. *JAMA internal medicine*, 179(1), 108-111.

Sexual harassment has been reported in various settings, including in academic and hospital medicine. The medical school hierarchy contributes to prevalence of harassment in academic medicine, with medical students being most vulnerable<sup>5</sup>. More efforts are needed to improve training and reporting to promote a healthier, more productive learning and work environment and minimize long-lasting impact and physician burnout.

**APA Position:**

**The APA opposes and condemns all forms of sexual harassment and supports measures to:**

- 1. encourage and promote reporting of sexual harassment;**
- 2. improve recognition and decrease incidence of sexual harassment through training and education, and;**
- 3. facilitate-treatment for victims who have been sexually harassed.**

**Authors:** Ludmila De Faria, MD, Balkozar Adam, MD, Jacqueline Hobbs, MD and Maureen Sayres van Niel, MD, on behalf of the Committee on Women’s Mental Health, Council on Children, Adolescents and Their Families and the Women’s Caucus

---

<sup>5</sup> Hsiao, C. J., Akhavan, N. N., Singh Ospina, N., Yagnik, K. J., Neilan, P., Hahn, P., & Zaidi, Z. (2021). Sexual Harassment Experiences across the Academic Medicine Hierarchy. *Cureus*, 13(2), e13508. <https://doi.org/10.7759/cureus.13508>