

# TWU Counseling Center

## Sexual Harassment: The Facts

### The Legal Definition

According to the United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission:

"Harassment on the basis of sex is a violation of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act and Title IX of the Education Amendment. Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitute sexual harassment when:

- Submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of an individual's employment;
- Submission to or rejection of such conduct by an individual is used as the basis for employment decisions affecting such individual; or
- Such conduct has the purpose or effect of substantially interfering with an individual's work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile or offensive work environment."

### Types of Sexual Harassment

**Gender Harassment:** Generalized sexist statements and behavior that convey insulting or degrading attitudes about women. Examples include insulting remarks, offensive graffiti, obscene jokes or humor about sex or women in general.

**Seductive Behavior:** Unwanted, inappropriate and offensive sexual advances. Examples include repeated unwanted sexual invitations, insistent requests for dinner, drinks or dates, persistent letters, phone calls and other invitations.

**Sexual Bribery:** Solicitation of sexual activity or other sex-linked behavior by promise of reward; the proposition may be either overt or subtle.

**Sexual Coercion:** Coercion of sexual activity or other sex-linked behavior by threat of punishment; examples include negative performance evaluations, withholding of promotions, threat of termination.

**Sexual Imposition:** Gross sexual imposition (such as forceful touching, feeling, grabbing) or sexual assault.

Of these five types of behavior, gender harassment is by far the most common, followed by seductive behavior. The "classic" forms of sexual harassment (bribery and coercion) are in fact relatively uncommon, while other forms of sexual imposition happen more frequently than most people think. Recent court decisions have also found that certain types of offensive visual displays in the workplace, such as pornography, can be considered sexual harassment.

The defining characteristic of sexual harassment is that it is unwanted. It's important to clearly let an offender know that certain actions are unwelcome.

## **Effects of Sexual Harassment**

Being sexually harassed can devastate your psychological health, physical well-being and vocational development. Women who have been harassed often change their jobs, career goals, job assignments, educational programs or academic majors. In addition, women have reported psychological and physical reaction to being harassed that are similar to reactions to other forms of stress. They include:

### **Psychological Reactions**

- Depression, anxiety, shock, denial
- Anger, fear, frustration, irritability
- Insecurity, embarrassment, feelings of betrayal
- Confusion, feelings of being powerless
- Shame, self-consciousness, low self-esteem
- Guilt, self-blame, isolation

### **Physiological Reactions**

- Headaches
- Lethargy
- Gastrointestinal distress
- Dermatological reactions
- Weight fluctuations
- Sleep disturbances, nightmares
- Phobias, panic reactions
- Sexual problems

### **Career-Related Effects**

- Decreased job satisfaction
- Unfavorable performance evaluations
- Loss of job or promotion
- Drop in academic or work performance due to stress
- Absenteeism
- Withdrawal from work or school
- Change in career goals

## What Can You Do If You Are Sexually Harassed?

There is no one way to respond to harassment. Every situation is different and only you can evaluate the problem and decide on the best response.

Friends, affirmative action officers, human resource professionals and women's groups can offer information, advice and support, but only you can decide what is right for you. The only thing you can be absolutely certain of is that ignoring the situation will not cause it to go away.

Above all, **DO NOT BLAME YOURSELF FOR THE HARASSMENT.** It is not your fault. Place the blame where it belongs--on the harasser. Self-blame can cause depression and will not help you or the situation.

Many Women Have Found These Strategies Effective:

- Say **NO** to the harasser! Be direct. "Stop (fill in the blank) right now, and never do it again to me or to anyone else."
- Write a letter to the harasser. Describe the incident and how it made you feel. State that you want the harassment to stop. Send the letter by certified mail. Keep a copy.
- Keep a record of what happened and when. Include dates, times, places, names of persons involved and witnesses, and who said what to whom.
- Tell someone; don't keep it to yourself. By being quiet about the harassment, you don't help stop it. Chances are extremely good that you aren't the only victim of your harasser. Speaking up can be helpful in finding support and in protecting others from being victims.
- Find out who is responsible for dealing with harassment in your organization and whether you can talk in confidence to that person. Almost all organizations have sexual harassment policies, procedures and individuals or counselors who administer them. At TWU, call Human Resources at 940-898-3555, if you are a TWU employee or the VP of Student Life at 940-898-3615, if you are a student.
- If you are a union member, speak to your union representative. Unions are generally very committed to eliminating sexual harassment in the workplace.
- If you are experiencing severe psychological distress, you may want to consult a psychologist or other mental health professional who understands the problems caused by sexual harassment. TWU's Counseling Center is available to help you deal with the stress caused by sexual harassment and evaluate your options. Call 940-898-3801 for an appointment.

Adapted from: The American Psychological Association

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**TWU  
Counseling  
Center  
Locations:**

*Denton  
West Jones Hall  
940-898-3801*

*Dallas-  
Parkland  
FPH 120  
214-689-6655*

*Dallas-  
Presbyterian  
DPB 16  
214-706-2416*

*Houston  
Suite 2250  
713-794-2059*