

Sexual Harassment and the Gender Wage Gap

MARCH 2021

Despite being prohibited by Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, workplace sexual harassment remains pervasive and pernicious. Sexual harassment is one of many manifestations of power imbalances in the workplace. It affects women and men across industries and occupations. And, it can have greater consequences for women who face other forms of discrimination and harassment, such as women of color, LGBTQ women and women with disabilities.¹

While sexual harassment is increasingly being recognized in the national dialogue, it is nothing new – and over time it has negatively impacted women’s workplace opportunities and career decisions, resulting in significant and often overlooked financial consequences. Preventing and effectively addressing workplace sexual harassment is one way to help close the gender wage gap and promote women’s financial security.

Sexual harassment can impede a woman’s job performance, workplace advancement and earnings.

- One in three women say they have been the victim of sexual harassment in the workplace.² Women who experience sexual harassment at work often avoid reporting it for fear of retaliation, termination or inaction.³ Among women who do report sexual harassment to their employers, nearly half report being dissatisfied with the response.⁴
- Many women who experience sexual harassment at work report increased anxiety and depression, which is associated with lower productivity and poorer performance at work.⁵ Some report experiencing a decline in job involvement and satisfaction, as well as increases in absenteeism, turnover, early retirement and a range of negative health outcomes.⁶
- Women in workplaces that do not address sexual harassment may feel less empowered to negotiate salaries and raises, depressing their long-term earnings and advancement.

Sexual harassment can affect women’s career choices directly and indirectly, reinforcing occupational segregation and perpetuating the wage gap.

- A recent study found that women who say they’ve experienced sexual harassment at work are 6.5 times as likely to change jobs as women who have not – often to a job of lower quality or with lower pay.⁷
- Hostile work environments often discourage women from entering, or push women out of, certain industries, increasing occupational gender segregation.⁸
- Sexual harassment exists in every industry and occupation, but there are industries where it is especially prevalent.⁹ Women in male-dominated industries that have historically excluded women, like manufacturing and construction, report more incidences of sexual harassment.¹⁰
- Many women take pay cuts and make sacrifices that harm their careers to escape sexual harassment.¹¹ Women who have been sexually harassed at work report significant disruption and financial stress, comparable to the financial stress of individuals who have experienced other major negative events such as serious injury, assault or incarceration.¹²

For women of color, the consequences of workplace sexual harassment can be even more devastating.

- Women of color often face intersecting forms of discrimination and harassment. Many avoid disclosing workplace sexual harassment because of the heightened risk of retaliation, doubt, victim-blaming and other harmful, prejudiced responses.¹³ This indicates that women of color may be less likely to have their experiences of sexual harassment addressed or their rights enforced.
- The financial consequences of reporting harassment and facing retaliation, or leaving a job due to harassment, can be even more severe for many women of color because they face the greatest wage gaps. On average, white, non-Hispanic women are typically paid 79 cents, Black women 63 cents, Native American women 60 cents, Latinas 55 cents, and Asian American and Pacific Islander women are paid as little as 52 cents, as Burmese women are, and just 85 cents overall for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men.¹⁴

While sexual harassment is increasingly being recognized in the national dialogue, it is nothing new – and over time it has negatively impacted women’s workplace opportunities and career decisions, resulting in significant and often overlooked financial consequences. Preventing and effectively addressing workplace sexual harassment is one way to help close the gender wage gap and promote women’s financial security.

Learn more about the gender wage gap at NationalPartnership.org/Gap

- ¹ National Women’s Law Center. (2018, August). *Out of the Shadows: An Analysis of Sexual Harassment Charges Filed by Working Women*. Retrieved 22 March 2021, from <https://nwlc.org/resources/out-of-the-shadows-an-analysis-of-sexual-harassment-charges-filed-by-working-women/>; Kearl, H. (2018, February). *The Facts Behind the #MeToo Movement: A National Study on Sexual Harassment and Assault*. Stop Street Harassment, GfK, Raliance and University of California San Diego Center on Gender Equity and Health Publication. Retrieved 22 March 2021, from <http://www.stopstreetharassment.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Full-Report-2018-National-Study-on-Sexual-Harassment-and-Assault.pdf>
- ² Marist Institute for Public Opinion. (2017, November). *More than One in Three Women Report Sexual Harassment In the Workplace*. Retrieved 22 March 2021, from <http://maristpoll.marist.edu/1122-more-than-one-in-three-women-report-sexual-harassment-in-the-workplace/>; Morning Consult/Vox Media. (2018, March). *National Tracking Poll*. Retrieved 22 March 2021, from https://morningconsult.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/180313_crosstabs_VOX_ALL-WOMEN-1.pdf
- ³ Cain Miller, C. (2017, April). It’s Not Just Fox: Why Women Don’t Report Sexual Harassment. *The New York Times*. Retrieved 22 March 2021, from <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/10/upshot/its-not-just-fox-why-women-dont-report-sexual-harassment.html>; Morning Consult/Vox Media. (2018, March). *National Tracking Poll*. Retrieved 19 March 2020, from https://morningconsult.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/180313_crosstabs_VOX_ALL-WOMEN-1.pdf
- ⁴ Ibid. (Morning Consult/Vox Media, 2018)
- ⁵ Merkin, R., & Kamal Shah, M. (2014, May). The impact of sexual harassment on job satisfaction, turnover intentions, and absenteeism: findings from Pakistan compared to the United States. *SpringerPlus*, 3(215). doi:10.1186/2193-1801-3-215; Young, J. (2016, December 1). *What Are the Costs of Workplace Sexual Harassment?*. EVERFI Blog. Retrieved 22 March 2021 from <https://everfi.com/insights/blog/the-effects-of-sexual-harassment-in-the-workplace/>
- ⁶ Ibid.; Thurston, R. C., Chang, Y., & Matthews, K. A. (2019, January). Association of Sexual Harassment and Sexual Assault With Midlife Women’s Mental and Physical Health. *JAMA Internal Medicine*, 179(1): 48-53. doi:10.1001/jamainternmed.2018.4886
- ⁷ McLaughlin, H., Uggen, C., & Blackstone, A. (2017, June). The Economic and Career Effects of Sexual Harassment on Working Women. *Gender & Society*, 31(3), pp 333-358. doi:10.1177/0891243217704631
- ⁸ Durana, A., Lenhart, A., Miller, R., Schulte, B., & Weingarten, E. (2018, September). *Sexual Harassment: A Severe and Pervasive Problem*. Retrieved 22 March 2021 from New America website: <https://www.newamerica.org/better-life-lab/reports/sexual-harassment-severe-and-pervasive-problem/>
- ⁹ Ibid; Thuy Vo, L. (2017, December 5). We Got Government Data On 20 Years Of Workplace Sexual Harassment Claims. These Charts Break It Down. *Buzzfeed News*. Retrieved 22 March 2021, from <https://www.buzzfeed.com/lamvo/eoc-sexual-harassment-data>
- ¹⁰ Frye, J. (2017, November). *Not Just the Rich and Famous: The Pervasiveness of Sexual Harassment Across Industries Affects All Workers*. Retrieved 22 March 2021 from Center for American Progress website: <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/women/news/2017/11/20/443139/not-just-rich-famous/>; Parker, K. (2018, March). *Women in majority-male workplaces report higher rates of gender discrimination*. Retrieved 22 March 2021 from Pew Research Center website: <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/03/07/women-in-majority-male-workplaces-report-higher-rates-of-gender-discrimination/>; see also note 7.
- ¹¹ See note 7; McLaughlin, H., Uggen, C., & Blackstone, A. (2017, June). The Economic and Career Effects of Sexual Harassment on Working Women. *Gender & Society*, 31(3), 333-358. doi:10.1177/0891243217704631
- ¹² Ibid, p. 342.
- ¹³ See note 1; see also Haines Whack, E. (2017, November 18). Why few women of color in wave of accusers? ‘Stakes higher’. *Associated Press*. Retrieved 22 March 2021, from <https://apnews.com/34a278ca43e24c5587c911ead5fac67c>
- ¹⁴ U.S. Census Bureau. (2020). *Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic (ASEC) Supplement: Table PINC-05: Work Experience in 2019 – People 15 Years Old and Over by Total Money Earnings in 2019, Age, Race, Hispanic Origin, Sex, and Disability Status*. Retrieved 22 March 2021, from <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/income-poverty/cps-pinc/pinc-05.html>; U.S. Census Bureau. (2020). *American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates 2019. Tables B20017C and B20017H: Median Earnings in the Past 12 Months (in 2019 Inflation-Adjusted Dollars) by Sex by Work Experience in the Past 12 Months for the Population 16 Years and Over with Earnings in the Past 12 Months*. Retrieved 22 March 2021, from <https://data.census.gov/>. Note: Unpublished calculations based on the median annual pay for women and men who worked full time, year-round in 2019. The Current Population Survey does not provide disaggregated data for Native American women’s earnings. This calculation is based on a comparison of the median earnings of white, non-Hispanic men working full time, year-round with that of Native American women working full time, year-round as reported in the American Community Survey. The median annual pay of a Native American women in this source was \$36,577 and the median annual pay of white, non-Hispanic men was \$61,233. Bleiweis, R. (2021, March). *The Economic Status of Asian American and Pacific Islander Women*. Center for American Progress Publication. Retrieved 22 March 2021, from <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/women/reports/2021/03/04/496703/economic-status-asian-american-pacific-islander-women/>