

Both boys and girls negatively affected by sexual harassment

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A new study in *Psychology of Women Quarterly* explored the outcomes of sexual harassment on both boys and girls. While girls were harassed more frequently, boys were indirectly yet negatively affected through a school climate that tolerates the harassment of girls.

The study, led by Alayne J. Ormerod, PhD, of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, examined the relationship among peer-to-peer sexual harassment, school climate, adult-to-student harassment, and outcomes for the students. Approximately 300 girls and 250 boys were surveyed from seven public high schools in the Midwest.

Girls had more frequent, upsetting experiences of peer harassment. Girls also reported more frequent and distressing harassment from school personnel than boys. Male students reported fewer, less upsetting experiences of harassment. Consequently, they had fewer stress-related consequences directly associated with harassment.

However, the damaging effects of harassment extended beyond those who were directly harmed by it. For girls and boys, a school climate associated with experiences of sexual harassment was related to feeling unsafe while at school, withdrawal from school, and feelings of lowered self-esteem.

For boys, a negative climate, that is, a climate tolerating the harassment of girls, was the major variable associated with negative psychological, health and educational outcomes. Given that boys are harassed less

frequently and rate their experiences as less upsetting, these findings suggest that boys may suffer negative consequences regardless of whether they are the targets of harassment.

“We hope these findings inform teachers, administrators, and policy makers for high schools when they develop policy and procedures related to sexual harassment,” the authors conclude. “When students believe that teachers and administrators do not actively intervene in harassing behavior toward girls, it has negative consequences for all students: both boys and girls, and targets and non-targets.”

Source: Wiley

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