

**SUMMARY RESPONSE TO THE SURVEYS OF  
SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN THE UCSD GRADUATE/ MEDICAL  
AND  
UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT POPULATIONS**

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## INTRODUCTION

In 1992 the Chancellor's Advisory Committee on the Status of Women (CSW) commissioned a study of the prevalence of sexual harassment at UCSD. The study protocol involved a staggered survey of several sub-populations at UCSD, beginning with graduate/medical students and following with undergraduates, faculty and staff. The following summary includes information on the results of the graduate and undergraduate student surveys conducted in Spring, 1992 and 1993 as they relate to the literature on this subject. Both studies were aimed at determining the prevalence of unwelcome sexual behaviors and sexual harassment among graduate/medical students and undergraduates.

The graduate/medical student study was conducted under the auspices of the CSW Subcommittee on Sexual Harassment and the Office of Graduate Studies and Research. The instrument was developed by the CSW Subcommittee on Sexual Harassment. Data collection and analysis were conducted by Teri Greenfield and Darlene Morell in the Office of Student Research and Information. The survey was distributed in May, 1992 to the campus mailboxes of all registered graduate and medical students. The overall response rates were 18% male and 31% female.

The undergraduate study was conducted by the Office of Student Research and Information, in consultation with the CSW and the Vice Chancellors of Student Affairs and Academic Affairs. Questionnaires were mailed to 1280 randomly selected undergraduates at the beginning of spring quarter 1993. The number of returned questionnaires required to ensure, within a 95% confidence interval, that the response of the sampled population would be representative of the total population was determined to be 384. A total of 563 questionnaires were returned for an overall response rate of 44%. The response rate for males was 33% compared to 54% for females. Copies of those studies can be obtained from the Office of Student Research and Information.

The establishment of the Office of Sexual Harassment Prevention and Policy (SHPP) is an important step in furthering the implementation of needed prevention and policy efforts. SHPP reports directly to the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs and is responsible for policy analysis, administration of campus complaint resolution procedures, and campus prevention and education programs.

This report is divided into two parts: Part A - Survey Findings and Part B - Strategies for Dealing with Sexual Harassment. It is our intention that the reader will use the information to expand awareness and understanding of sexual harassment.

## PART A - SURVEY FINDINGS

### DEFINING SEXUAL HARASSMENT

#### FINDINGS

##### GRADUATE

Seventy percent of female survey respondents and thirty-two percent of male respondents report at least one experience of an unwanted sexual behavior while attending UCSD. Taking the most conservative assumption that none of the non-respondents had ever experienced unwanted sexual behavior while attending UCSD would imply that overall, 22% of women graduate/medical students experienced unwanted sexual behavior. The comparable figure for men is 6%.

Fifteen percent of female survey respondents and two percent of male survey respondents report they have been sexually harassed while attending UCSD.

##### UNDERGRADUATE

Fifty-two percent of respondents experience some type of unwelcome sexual behavior while attending UCSD.

Eight percent of all undergraduates at UCSD report being sexually harassed.

*The frequency of sexual harassment is commonly addressed in the literature; however reported frequencies may vary depending on the definition given by the researcher.... When examining the incidence of sexual harassment in universities a pattern emerges -- it exists as a common occurrence in our universities (Rubin and Borgers 1992).*

The surveys assessed incidence rates of both "unwanted sexual behaviors" and sexual harassment. In designing the questionnaire, a distinction was made between the experience of "unwanted sexual behaviors" and that of sexual harassment. The official definition adopted by the university was provided in the questionnaire, and only those students whose experiences fit the definition were instructed to complete items concerning sexual harassment. The importance of this distinction for the CSW was evidenced by the extreme differences reported for the two actions. Unwanted sexual behavior was not labeled as sexual harassment unless it involved pressure for dates or sexual activity, sexual touching, or sexual relations.

Although legal guidelines defining sexual harassment have been available since the 1980's, there is debate, controversy, misinformation and mythology about the subject of sexual harassment on American campuses today. According to attorneys William Petrocelli and Barbara Kate Repa in their book, Sexual Harassment on the Job, sexual harassment is legally defined as any unwelcome sexual advance or conduct that creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive work environment. Simply put, sexual harassment is any offensive conduct related to an employee's or student's gender that a reasonable woman or man should not have to endure.

In the UCSD survey a distinction was made between the experience of "unwanted sexual behaviors" and that of sexual harassment. More respondents reported experiences of unwanted sexual behavior than those reporting sexual harassment as defined in UCSD policy. This distinction reflects one of the most persistent and troubling problems in the sexual harassment literature as described in the research of Louise Fitzgerald, that being the lack of a widely agreed upon definition of the concept. She writes in "Sexual Harassment: The Definition and Measurement of a Construct,"

*Separate from this problem, but related to it, is the lack of a generally agreed upon operational definition, one that can be used in research and theory building in this area. Although many studies have been conducted, each has tended to develop its own methodology, a practice yielding conflicting estimates of incidence rates and behaviors. This not only leads to a disarray in the literature, but also the unfortunate "real world" effect of diminishing the credibility of such reports.*

Based on her research with the measurement of sexual harassment, Fitzgerald offers the following definition that we find helpful:

*Sexual harassment consists of the sexualization of an instrumental relationship through the introduction or imposition of sexist or sexual remarks, requests or requirements, in the context of a formal power differential. Harassment can also occur where no such formal power differential exists, if the behavior is unwanted by, or offensive to, the woman. Instances of harassment can be classified into the following general categories: gender harassment, seductive behavior, solicitation of sexual activity by promise of reward or threat of punishment, and sexual imposition or assault.*

## SETTINGS WHERE HARASSMENT OCCURRED

### FINDINGS

#### GRADUATE

Unwanted sexual behaviors occurred primarily in connection with a university related social setting, a job or teaching assistantship/research assistantship, or in a regular classroom setting.

One third of females who report being sexually harassed indicated they were harassed by faculty.

#### UNDERGRADUATE

Unwelcome behaviors occur primarily in connection with non-university sponsored social settings, at another person's residence hall/apartment, at home (on campus) or at an off-campus job.

Most incidents of sexual harassment occur at an on-campus residence or in the classroom and involve a series of incidents rather than a single event.

Explanations for sexual harassment range from insensitive expressions of attraction to an expression of the psychological need to dominate or the abuse of organizational power. It is often described as bad taste, inappropriate courting behavior, lack of social skills, or a traditional element of male bonding. Three theoretical explanatory categories exist in the literature: (1) the socio-cultural model, (2) the natural or biological model, and (3) the organizational model (Tangri, Burt and Johnson 1992).

The academic environment reflects many of the characteristics noted in the literature where sexual harassment is more likely to occur. Some of these supporting characteristics are: the highly structured and stratified organizational structure, requirements for "after hours" and weekend work, and an emphasis (in medical schools) on long hours and overnight team assignments. The educational instruction for graduate students at Scripps Institute of Oceanography may include months of study on a ship where crew and scientific staff are with each other day and night. Additionally, many of these characteristics enlist efforts that are demanding and emotionally taxing, resulting in a breakdown of social barriers that would otherwise preclude unwelcome sexual overtones.

When an analysis of power is applied in explanations of sexual harassment, it is often argued that in order to maintain male dominance within a discipline or occupation, sexual harassment will be used to intimidate or discourage women, manage on-going male-female interactions and precipitate the removal of women from the field. Thus, sexual harassment often accomplishes informally what laws against sex discrimination theoretically prohibit: gender-based requirements for acceptance within a discipline or for a job.

Peer harassment is the term used to describe sexual harassment by colleagues. Peer harassment includes gender harassment, seductive behavior, sexual bribery, and sexual coercion. Peer harassment creates an environment that makes education less equal for women and men. Once again, women make up the majority of complainants.

Research from the Project on the Status and Education of Women indicates that the most serious forms of peer-harassment involve groups of men. When men outnumber women, as in fraternity houses, stadiums, and parties, peer/group harassment is especially likely to occur. Examples include:

"scoping," which involves rating women's attractiveness on a scale from one to ten;

yelling, whistling, and shouting obscenities at women who walk by fraternities, gyms, and other campus sites;

fraternity pledges who approach young women and attempt to bite their breast, a practice called "sharking";

creating disturbances outside of places where women meet or congregate;

displays of sexist posters and pictures in residence halls and dorms.

## IMPACT AND EFFECTS OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT

### FINDINGS

#### GRADUATE

Unwanted sexual behaviors experienced by females who report being sexually harassed are, in general more numerous and serious than those experienced by female respondents as a whole.

Sexual harassment resulted in an "intimidating, hostile or offensive environment" for 87% of female respondents. The most common emotional reaction was anger and disgust (89%).

#### UNDERGRADUATE

Sexual harassment results in an "intimidating, hostile or offensive environment" for 51% of harassed females. The most common physical/emotional reaction is anger /disgust (79%).

Stress related problems, retaliation for reporting sexual harassment, missed educational opportunities, lost time and effort, self-censoring and silencing, disillusionment and disappointment are high prices indeed to pay for someone else's illegal behavior. This is not the only cost. Tong (1984) has identified a "sexual harassment syndrome" that generally describes the emotional and physical symptoms suffered by victims of sexual harassment. On the basis of her analysis and this survey data, the following consequences of harassment are common experiences felt by student victims:

- general depression, as manifested by changes in eating and sleeping patterns, and vague complaints of aches and pains that prevent the student from attending class or completing work;
- undefined dissatisfaction with college, major, or particular course;
- sense of powerlessness, helplessness, and vulnerability;
- loss of academic self confidence and decline in academic performance;
- feelings of isolation from other students;
- changes in attitudes or behaviors regarding sexual relationships;
- irritability with friends and family members;
- fear and anxiety;
- inability to concentrate;
- alcohol and drug dependency.

Previous research has not yet systematically investigated the conditions under which victims will experience any of these consequences, however, the debilitating effects of these symptoms are enormous.

The most profound consequences of sexual harassment often occur where women students are pioneers in previously all-male fields--medicine, oceanography, physics, chemistry, mathematics, biology, etc.. A woman entering a discipline that has been traditionally closed to her group has a difficult enough time adjusting to a new situation and proving her worth to skeptical "old timers" in the field. If sexual harassment is added to the situation, it often increases the pressure where the environment is no longer endurable (Petrocelli and Repa 1992).

Among graduate and undergraduate students, behavioral, emotional and physical impacts may take different forms based on the power relationship between the student and the harasser. For example, for the graduate student at the dissertation stage, a professor with expertise in the chosen disciplinary specialty who is an advisor and dissertation committee member, has the ability both formally and informally to virtually ruin the student's many years of study. This can include access to grants and fellowships, teaching assistantships, recommendations for academic positions and even the dissertation itself. Harassment at this level can force the graduate student to forfeit work, research, or even a career.

## COPING STRATEGIES

### FINDINGS

#### GRADUATE

Almost half of the sexually harassed females (49%) indicate that harassment occurred during the 1991/92 year.

Actions taken to end harassment include: (a) avoidance strategies; (b) discussing the situation with friends and relatives; (c) telling a UCSD member; (d) confronting the harasser; and (e) seeking counseling.

#### UNDERGRADUATE

Common actions taken after experiencing sexual harassment include: avoiding the person (79%), seeking advice from friends/relatives (51%) and telling the person to stop (51%).

*A discrepancy seems to exist between what students believe they would do and what they actually do when confronted with a sexually harassing situation....Most subjects stated that they would report such incidents; however, not one actual victim made an official complaint. Reasons cited in their study included fear of retaliation, fear of not being believed, fear of being accused of provocation, and lack of knowledge regarding how to go about filing a report (Rubin and Borgers 1992).*

A number of feelings often combine to keep people silent about sexual harassment: guilt, shame, embarrassment, fear of being labeled a troublemaker, too sensitive, bossy or humorless. Upbringing, culture or experience may make the subject too painful or laden with other taboos for some women to come forward. Additionally, many students keep silent because they distrust the procedures for handling their harassment complaints.

## PART B - STRATEGIES FOR DEALING WITH SEXUAL HARASSMENT

### STOPPING HARASSMENT

If you feel that you or "people like you" are the target of unwelcome jokes and discussions, there are clear ways to show your disapproval.

- Don't laugh.
- Leave the room.
- Firmly but politely tell the harasser that you don't appreciate the remark. You might say, "I'm sorry but rape is not at all funny to me."
- Ask the harasser for the date and time and to please repeat the joke while you write it down.
- Hand the harasser a UCSD information sheet on sexual harassment or place a copy in his/her mailbox. Handouts on sexual harassment are available from the Office of Sexual Harassment Prevention and Policy (SHPP), Old Bookstore, 534-8297 or 8298.
- If the behavior is repeated or pervasive, a consultation with the SHPP may be your next step.

Take a hard and honest look at the behavior that is making you uncomfortable, angry and frustrated. Discuss your situation with a fair-minded friend or relative asking for a candid evaluation of your perceptions. If the behavior in question is not threatening, sort out what might be harassment from what might be department politics and life frustrations. Make a special effort to educate yourself about recognizing and fighting harassment. Meet with other similarly situated women and men to discuss the common harassment problems and ways to deal with them. Ask the SHPP to provide a training in the department.

### CONFRONTING THE HARASSER

When confronted directly, harassment is especially likely to end if it is at a fairly low level: off-color jokes, tacky cartoons, etc. Saying no in a tangible way does more than assert your determination to stop the behavior. It is also a crucial first step if you later decide to take more formal action, whether through the university complaint procedure or through the legal system. When confronting the harasser make your point with concise, direct sentences. If the thought of speaking to the harasser makes you nervous, rehearse and/or bring a friend to accompany you. You can also write a letter to the harasser. The letter should consist of a factual account of what happened, a description of how the conduct in question made you feel, and a statement of what you want to see happen next. We also recommend these important guidelines:

- Have the letter delivered by registered or certified mail.
- Do not send copies of the letter to the press or administrators.
- Keep at least one copy of the letter for your records.
- Don't discuss the letter with the harasser if you do not want to.

It is impossible to offer foolproof advice on how to respond to every situation involving serious sexual harassment. However, we do recommend you get help from the UCSD Office of Sexual Harassment Prevention and Policy at 534-8297 or 8298, a UCSD Information Advisor, or a state or federal agency. Here are some practical suggestions:

- Collect evidence.
- Keep a detailed journal.
- Talk with friends, family or a counselor.
- Enlist help from departmental peers.
- Organize a group.
- Get a copy of your records.
- File the complaint within a timely manner.
- Have an advocate accompany you through all phases of the complaint process.

The purpose of any university-recommended corrective action to resolve a complaint will be to remedy the injury, if any, to the complainant and to prevent further harassment through disciplinary action. Recommended action may include: written or verbal reprimand of the harasser; suspension, dismissal, or transfer of the harasser; a change of grade or other academic record for a student who has been the victim of harassment.

## INSTITUTIONAL STRATEGIES

The Chancellor's Advisory Committee on the Status of Women has made recommendations based on this survey that the new Office of Sexual Harassment Prevention and Policy is implementing. Educational efforts, including this first paper, campus information sheets, and training for TAs, faculty, staff and students are now occurring weekly across campus. Initial programs are being introduced to better communicate the definition of what constitutes sexual harassment. Meetings with women interns, residents and oceanography graduate students were conducted this summer, thus taking the initiative in designing prevention efforts for distinct campus populations.

A series of departmental meetings with faculty is underway to introduce the resources of the new office and emphasize the nature and extent of harassment; the trauma experienced by individuals who are harassed; the damage done to their careers; and legal definitions and legal responsibilities. Additional educational programs conducted in the fall of 1993 include a presentation of UCSF Medical School findings on sexual harassment, a 5 week training for campus investigators, information advisors and complaint resolution officers, and a published set of guidelines for complaint resolution.

To date, the new program has provided approximately 68 prevention and education programs for over 1000 people on the general campus, the Medical School, and Scripps Institute of Oceanography. Yet education, however successful, is not sufficient in itself to prevent sexual harassment or offer remedies when it occurs. It is critical that a distinct means of hearing and resolving complaints of sexual harassment be available and separate from the regular departmental and administrative hierarchies. The 1992 PPM200-10 provides such a process by offering a separate complaint resolution panel to review formal complaints of sexual harassment.

## NOTES

1. Petrocelli, W. and Repa, K. (1992). *Sexual Harassment On The Job: What It Is And How To Stop It*. Berkeley, CA, Nolo Press.
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9. Petrocelli, W. and Repa, K. (1992). *Sexual Harassment On The Job: What It Is And How To Stop It*. Berkeley, CA, Nolo Press.

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**Report of the Subcommittee on Women in Science (CWIS)  
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