

A Soteria Solutions Whitepaper

Strategies for Reducing Sexual Harassment in the Workplace

Building a Sustainably Safe and Respectful Culture

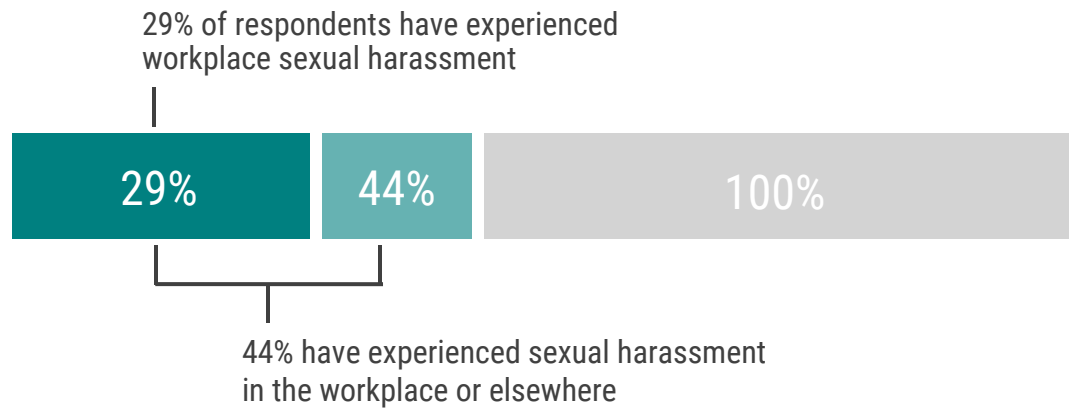


Soteria Solutions™
Activating Bystanders, Igniting Change.

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Sexual Harassment in the Workplace



- Pew Research Center, April 2018, "Sexual Harassment at Work in the Era of #MeToo"

As the #metoo movement and societal pressures encourage employees to report sexual harassment and assault, companies are coming to grips with the extent and consequences of workplace sexual harassment.

With good intentions, organizations often respond with quick solutions, adopting programs that may be easy to implement, but which do not solve the problem.

This paper outlines a more strategic approach. One that builds on more than a decade of research and which has been shown to help change an organization's culture and reduce sexual harassment.

The Challenge: Most Prevention Training Doesn't Work

71% of organizations offer annual sexual harassment prevention training.

- Association for Talent Development, November 2017 survey of 955 organizational HR, learning, and training professionals, conducted prior to the #metoo movement launch.

If sexual harassment prevention training is so prevalent, why isn't it working?

The most common form of training looks at sexual harassment prevention as a problem of perpetrators and victims. It explores what harassment looks like and asks individuals not to harass others.

The goal of this type of training is to minimize liability and risk in the wake of [Supreme Court rulings](#) which established that companies must train employees on anti-harassment policies in order to avoid legal liability for harassment. In some cases state laws require this training.

The problem with this approach is that those who harass typically don't see themselves in the role of harasser, as conveyed in this type of training, so the message is lost on them. [1]

These are 'check-the-box' solutions, which are not based on research, and which unfortunately reinforce stereotypes and often unintentionally blame victims.

Instead, companies should be seeking to build an environment where employees want to work, where individuals feel they can be safe from harassment.

“ Sexual harassment in the workplace isn't going to stop by just showing a video on the matter and having employees sign off on a policy. A culture free of misconduct must be built. ”

Jane Stapleton, President, Soteria Solutions
and Executive Director of Practice, Prevention Innovations Research Center at UNH

[1] The Effects of Identity Threat Reactions to Sexual Harassment Training on Training Outcomes, Rawski, Academy of management Proceedings, Vol. 2017, Issue 1, Jan 20171

What Does Work: Bystander Intervention

Bystander program participants, who reported few opportunities to help as bystanders at pre-test, reported they engaged in more behaviors to help strangers one year later.

- Encouraging Responses in Sexual and Relationship Violence Prevention: What Program Effects Remain 1 Year Later? [2]

The breakthrough in both reducing workplace sexual harassment and in building safe, respectful workplace cultures has been bystander intervention. It engages everyone within an organization to step in when harassment is occurring, by giving them the knowledge and skills to do so safely and effectively.

“ Bystander intervention is not about putting on your cape and saving the day. It's about having a conversation with a friend about the way they talk about women. ”

Robert Eckstein, Lead Trainer, Soteria Solutions
New York Times, Dec. 2017,
"Sexual Harassment Training Doesn't Work. But Some Things Do."

Jane Stapleton, president of Soteria Solutions, and executive director of practice at the University of New Hampshire Prevention Innovations Research Center, explains how bystander intervention impacts prevention this way, "Prevention is about teaching people how to stop behaviors before they happen. You can't just tell people here's the policy and expect that that's going to stop them from either sexually harassing someone, or that's going to help them intervene to help someone else. You really need to teach them skills. Prevention is knowledge plus action. We're looking to change behavior."

[2] Moynihan, M.M., Banyard, V.L., Cares, A.C., Potter, S.J., Williams, L.M., Stapleton, J.G. Encouraging Responses in Sexual and Relationship Violence Prevention: What Program Effects Remain 1 Year Later? (2015) Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 30 (1), pp. 110-132.

The goal is more than prevention.
It's creating a culture that doesn't
support sexual harassment.

That goal starts at the top with
leadership.



A Framework for Reducing Sexual Harassment in the Workplace



A framework for creating organizational cultural change that supports respect and safety, and does not tolerate sexual harassment and assault, can be thought of as a pie with three equal slices.

Resources and Support

One-third of the pie is “resources and supports for victims.” Organizations need clear policies that define sexual harassment and provide clear instructions for what employees should do if they are a victim of sexual harassment or assault or witness a colleague being harassed.

Organizations must offer trauma-informed resources and supports, both within the organization and the community, for employees who disclose an incident of sexual harassment or assault. Employees must know where and how they can report these incidents and understand that the organization has a fair and confidential process for disclosure that will not place them in jeopardy of losing their position. Employees must be trained on how to support a colleague who discloses and understand that they have a responsibility to assist. These employees also need to know they will not face retribution for helping a colleague.

Due Process

Another third of the pie is due process for the accused. All employees must know that their organization has a zero-tolerance policy for sexual harassment and assault, that starts at the top. The consequences of these behaviors must be clearly identified and enforced equitably for all employees regardless of their organizational rank.

As part of this enforcement, organizations must have protocols and procedures for reviewing and investigating sexual harassment complaints. These can include, for example, anonymous tip lines and including such behavior in performance evaluations. Those accused need to be treated fairly and provided with clear guidance on the investigation.

Comprehensive Prevention Strategies

Historically, most of the attention has been paid to the first two slices of the pie. However, the last slice of the pie, comprehensive organizational prevention, has the potential to have the most lasting and impactful effect on supporting a safe and respectful workplace. Organizational leaders must acknowledge that creating this type of environment requires a comprehensive strategy that engages all employees. Every employee needs to understand the organization's sexual harassment policies and reporting structures, how to recognize sexual harassment and support someone who has been harassed, as well as how to safely intervene to stop harmful behavior.

Additionally, **leaders and employees need to learn skills to create a safe and respectful work environment**. This can include learning how to compliment another person without belittling or sexualizing/objectifying them, creating opportunities where employees with less status or power can contribute to organizational policies and practices, and building a sense of community. Everyone needs to take responsibility for supporting a safe and respectful workplace culture.

Policies should be shared during employee orientation, and regularly reiterated through evidence-based prevention strategies, including interactive in-person trainings, social marketing campaigns and conversations about creating safe and respectful workplace environments.

These prevention efforts must provide employees with the knowledge they need to identify sexual harassment in the workplace and to effectively respond. **Evidence-based bystander intervention training can help employees learn and practice ways to directly and subtly intervene when they observe harassment**. Further, effective bystander training teaches participants how they can support victims after the harassment or the assault.

A common theme in so many victim disclosures and reports is self-blame. A colleague who witnesses this behavior could say to the victim, "I can't believe this just happened, it is not your fault, let's go and speak with human resources." Research on victim disclosure and response illustrates that this type of empathic response has positive implications for how victims move forward.

This type of thoughtful, comprehensive and strategic prevention will help organizations ensure that the resources they enlist will deliver important cultural change.

Effective sexual harassment prevention training is research-informed, customized to meet the needs of your organization, and improvements are sustainable over time.



Choosing Prevention Training That Works

Questions to Consider When Choosing Training:

- 1** Was the program developed by experts? Did the developers use research to inform their training? Are the strategies evidence-based?
- 2** Are the expected outcomes and objectives of the program clear?
- 3** Does the program engage all community members, and provide them with practical skills to enable them to intervene before, during, and after an incident?
- 4** Is the program customizable to meet the specific needs of your organization? For example, if your staff travel frequently or socialize after hours, does it address those scenarios? If you have a large, hourly service staff, does it address their situations? Can the language of the training be adapted to your organization's culture?
- 5** How does input from employees inform the training? Is feedback from employees used to ensure the content is transferable?
- 6** Is the program sustainable over time? Does it help your workplace build the capacity and knowledge to carry the program forward, without becoming dependent on the vendor for future training?
- 7** Has care been taken to ensure that the training scenarios are not "victim-blaming"? e.g. that they do not focus on what the victim could have done to avoid the situation?
- 8** Is the program trauma-informed and survivor-centered? One in four women and one in eight men will be victimized by unwanted sexual contact or sexual assault in their lifetime. The likelihood is that you'll have attendees in training who have experienced harassment or even assault; if your program is trauma-informed and survivor-centered, this training can be a positive experience for these individuals.

Conclusion

Workplace sexual harassment is pervasive, but new strategies coupled with proven, research-informed prevention programs can help build environments where harassment is not accepted.

Early prevention products really only address a legal liability issue and take a perpetrator/victim approach to the problem. But asking people not to harass others is not an effective strategy for reducing workplace sexual harassment.

A better approach, one which is informed by research, is to provide all staff with the knowledge and tools to become active bystanders who are able to **step in and intervene safely when harassment is taking place**. This community of responsibility approach is most effective when resources and support are available to victims and due process for anyone accused is clearly identified and equitably enforced.

Bystander intervention training, adapted to meet the needs of your organization, in tandem with resources for victims and due process for those accused, can transform your workplace into a safe and respectful environment in which sexual harassment prevention becomes everyone's job.

“ This is not just a problem for those who are harassed. It has implications for our professional communities, and we all come out ahead if people intervene to stop it. ”

Sharyn Potter, VP of Research, Soteria Solutions
from the American Sociological Association training video
"Bystander Intervention Strategies"

Research Supports the Effectiveness of Bringing in the Bystander®

Rather than focusing on the roles of perpetrators and victims, the highly-interactive, researched and evaluated Bringing in the Bystander In-Person Prevention Program uses a **community of responsibility approach**. It teaches bystanders how to safely intervene in instances where an incident may be occurring or where there may be risk. The program, which was developed and evaluated by leading researchers and program practitioners, is customizable to reflect the locations, colloquialisms and culture of your organization.

What the research says:

Bringing in the Bystander increases bystander intervention

Moynihan et al. 2015 found that program participants, who reported low opportunity to help as bystanders at pretest, reported they engaged in more behaviors to help strangers 1 year later. This suggests engaging with prevention messages through scenarios and hands-on skill building in the program helped participants recognize bystander opportunities.

Program participants show increased helping behaviors up to a year after program participation

Moynihan et al. 2015 found although results showed a pattern of helping declines over the course of a year, those who participated in Bringing in the Bystander were helping more than control group participants a year later.

Bringing in the Bystander may be more effective than traditional prevention models

Results from Peterson et al. 2016 showed Bringing in the Bystander was more effective at changing attitudes, beliefs, efficacy, intentions, and self-reported behaviors compared with a traditional awareness education program that focuses on men as potential perpetrators and women as potential victims.

Bringing in the Bystander is adaptable to a variety of organizations

Cares et al. 2015 found that overall, Bringing in the Bystander with minimal modifications worked in across organizations, and many of the initial changes in attitudes lasted as long as one year after the program.

Bringing in the Bystander is particularly effective with boosters, such as the Know Your Power Campaign

When coupled with sexual assault prevention messaging such as in the Know Your Power Campaign, Banyard et al. 2017 found that Bringing in the Bystander participants showed increased intent to help strangers and friends, and viewed acting as an active bystander as more legitimate.

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Soteria Solutions™
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Soteria Solutions provides new approaches to prevent sexual and interpersonal violence and harassment. We work with you to activate bystanders at all levels, to create lasting change and build a safe, respectful, and sustainable culture in your organization or school.

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