

Office for Civil Rights (OCR)

IMPACT OF TRAUMA

Sexual harassment and sexual violence against girls and women is a real and serious problem in education at all levels. Sexual harassment and sexual violence can affect any student, regardless of race or age. Sexual harassment and violence can threaten a student's physical or emotional well-being, influence how well a student does in school, and make it difficult for a student to achieve his or her career goals. Victims of sexual harassment and violence are more likely to suffer academically and from depression and post-traumatic stress disorder; to abuse alcohol and drugs; and to contemplate suicide http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/SV_factsheet_2011-a.pdf.

Lack of education on and ineffective methods of combating sexual harassment and violence may create unsafe learning environments for women and girls, in particular. Additional statistics on women and girls in the education system, information about the impact of trauma, and sources for further information can be found in the first Federal Partners Report on Women and Trauma <http://nicic.gov/Library/025082>.

How a Trauma-Informed Approach Can Make a Difference

The Office for Civil Rights (OCR) is responsible for enforcing Title IX of the Education Amendments Act of 1972, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex, including sexual harassment and sexual violence, in all public and private educational institutions receiving federal funds. The law protects both male and female students from sexual harassment and sexual violence by school employees, other students, and third parties. OCR helps schools combat sexual harassment and sexual violence in a variety of ways: (1) OCR investigates and resolves complaints and compliance reviews alleging that schools receiving federal funds have failed to protect students from sexual harassment and sexual violence; (2) OCR issues policy guidance to inform schools of their obligation to provide an environment free from sexual harassment and sexual violence; and (3) OCR field offices offer schools technical assistance to encourage them to improve their anti-harassment policies and procedures and to assist students and their parents to work with schools to enhance the schools' anti-harassment capability.



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION (ED)

Major Accomplishments 2010-2013

In October 2010, OCR issued a first-of-its-kind policy guidance on harassment and bullying. The guidance explains that when bullying or other harassment based on sex or gender (as well as other bases) creates a hostile environment that is serious enough to limit or interfere with a student's ability to benefit from the services, activities, or opportunities offered by the school, the harassment violates Title IX. If an institution knows or has reason to know about student-on-student sexual harassment, Title IX requires that the school take immediate and effective action to eliminate the harassment, to prevent its recurrence, and, when appropriate, to address its effects on the harassed student and the school community.

In April 2011, OCR issued policy guidance on schools and colleges' Title IX obligations relating to sexual violence. The guidance advises institutions on how they can prevent sexual violence from occurring and ensure it gets identified and reported when it does occur. The guidance explains institutions' responsibility to resolve complaints of sexual violence promptly and equitably. It includes examples of the types of remedies institutions can implement for the victim and the entire school community and also describes proactive measures schools and colleges can take to prevent sexual violence. Since the guidance's release, dozens of colleges and universities have made changes to their policies and procedures consistent with the guidance, and institutions continue to work together to develop better practices for dealing with sexual violence.

OCR's complaint investigations and compliance reviews on sexual harassment and sexual violence have led to robust remedies such as implementing procedures by which schools address sexual violence as a Title IX civil rights

issue, rather than leaving this matter to be handled by the criminal justice system; providing interim protection and services for victims of sexual harassment and sexual violence; systematizing cooperation between school officials and local law enforcement authorities to ensure Title IX investigations are completed promptly; conducting climate surveys; establishing advisory committees comprising students, faculty, and community members to monitor the school climate and advise the school's administration; conducting peer-to-peer sexual harassment training; and publicizing school policies so that students know where and with whom to file reports and what to expect from the process.

New Directions and Collaborations

OCR is committed to ensuring that all students feel safe at school so that they have the opportunity to fully benefit from the school's education programs and activities. OCR will continue to vigorously enforce Title IX to ensure that schools are meeting their obligations to respond to sexual harassment and sexual violence. OCR continues its collaboration with the Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division and Office on Violence Against Women on sexual harassment and sexual violence issues and will work with other federal agencies on these issues as needed.

Additional Resources

Update contact: phyllis.scattergood@ed.gov

Office for Civil Rights website www.ed.gov/ocr

Dear Colleague letter on harassment and bullying
<http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-201010.pdf>

Dear Colleague letter on sexual violence
<http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-201104.pdf>