

# #GIRLSTOO

## SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND VIOLENCE FACT SHEET

### WHAT IT IS AND HOW IT AFFECTS GIRLS



Inspiring all girls to be strong, smart, and bold

**Sexual harassment and violence is an epidemic** and it starts at a young age. Sexual harassment, which is defined as unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature or offensive remarks about a person's sex, can have long lasting implications on a young person at a critical point in their development. Many adults don't realize the pervasiveness of sexual harassment and sexual violence among young people and these staggering numbers don't take into account the reality that many young people don't choose to report it, for a variety of reasons. Existing research shows:

- 1 in 4 young women experiences sexual assault before the age of 18.<sup>1</sup>
- Of women who reported having experienced sexual harassment or assault, 57% reported that they first experienced sexual harassment or assault before the age of 18.<sup>2</sup>
- Over half (55%) of girls ages 10 through 19 say they hear boys making sexual comments or jokes about girls at least several times a week.<sup>3</sup>
- In a 2017 survey of girls across the United States ages 14-18, one in three (31%) reported being a survivor of sexual assault or other violence and more than one in five girls (21%) reported they had been kissed or touched without their consent.<sup>4</sup>
- Nearly half (48%) of 7th-12th grade students reported experiencing sexual harassment in the previous school year.<sup>5</sup>
- More than two in three (68%) girls and over half (55%) of boys report being sexually harassed at some point in high school.<sup>6</sup>
- Three in four girls ages 14 to 19 feel unsafe as a girl at least once in a while.<sup>3</sup>

**Sexual violence and harassment have lasting effects.** Beyond the immediate emotional and physical pain of being violated, girls who experience sexual harassment and violence also have a higher risk of headaches, stomach aches, sleeplessness, depression, anxiety, eating disorders, chronic pain, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).<sup>4</sup> Sexual assault can also impact a young person's academic success; without support, students may withdraw from classes or activities and lose access to critical educational opportunities.

- Survivors of sexual violence are at risk for experiencing depression, PTSD, self-harm, eating disorders, sleep disorders, substance use, and suicide.<sup>7</sup>
- According to a national survey of girls ages 14-18, among girls who have experienced sexual violence:
  - 86% have felt down, depressed, or hopeless (compared to 66% of girls overall);
  - 68% reported having difficulty concentrating in school (compared to 46% of girls overall); and
  - 30% reported they had been absent from school because they felt they would be unsafe at or on their way to school (compared to 14% of girls overall).<sup>4</sup>

**Youth who are most marginalized by society experience sexual harassment and violence at disproportionate rates.** Youth of color, youth with disabilities, LGBTQ+ youth, and low-income youth disproportionately experience sexual harassment and/or violence. Often these experiences are compounded by the fact that these students often go to schools with the fewest resources to address the lasting effects of this trauma.

- Three out of five (60%) LGBTQIA+ students report having been sexually harassed at school.<sup>8</sup>
- 38% of LGBTQIA+ girls report having been kissed or touched without their consent (compared to 21% of girls overall).<sup>4</sup>
- Girls growing up in low-income communities are at greater risk for experiencing sexual violence.<sup>9</sup>

**As a society, we perpetuate attitudes and behaviors that both cause and normalize violence.** Deeply entrenched gender stereotypes about how boys and girls behave aren't just old-fashioned - they are a root cause of sexual harassment and violence. In fact, recent studies find that:

- Men who have internalized and agree with rigid gender stereotypes are more likely to have perpetrated bullying and sexual harassment than their peers who do not have as rigid stereotypes.<sup>10</sup>
- 85% of girls ages 14 to 19 perceive a link between boys sexually harassing and assaulting girls and boys' "desire for power and control over girls".<sup>3</sup>
- One in three (33%) boys feels pressure to dominate or be in charge of others. Boys who feel this pressure are more likely to report that they spend time around other boys who make frequent sexual comments or jokes about girls.<sup>3</sup>
- One in three boys (32%) ages 14 to 19 feels pressure to "join in when other boys talk about girls in a sexual way".<sup>3</sup>
- Youth who receive comprehensive sex education with a focus on healthy relationships are less likely to perpetrate intimate partner violence and sexual harassment.<sup>11</sup>

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