

**Girls Inc. is committed to advancing the rights and opportunities of girls and young women**, with a particular focus on the needs of girls from low-income communities and girls who face multiple, intersectional challenges. Informed by the voices of girls themselves, we advocate to break through the barriers girls face and to reform systems that impede their success.

## SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Sexual violence remains a pervasive and alarming issue. In a 2016 survey of the Girls Inc. network, including girls, almost 70% of respondents identified “bullying, harassment, and sexual violence” as a top issue facing girls today. Unwelcome conduct that is severe or pervasive and based on sex, gender identity, race, disability, or other protected categories is discriminatory harassment. Schools that fail to properly address cases of severe or pervasive harassment, including sexual assault, may violate federal civil rights laws.

## SEXUAL ABUSE AND ASSAULT

Girls are especially at risk for sexual abuse and assault. According to a 2017 survey, 31% of girls aged 14-18 reported experiencing sexual assault or other violence and more than 1 in 5 girls were kissed or touched without their consent.<sup>1</sup> Girls of color and those who identify as LGBTQ+ are disproportionately affected. For example, 38% of LGBTQ+ girls are kissed or touched without their consent - nearly double the rate for non-LGBTQ+ girls.<sup>2</sup> In addition, while 6% of girls overall report being forced to have sex, rates are higher for Native American girls (11%) and Black girls (9%).<sup>3</sup> For girls growing up in poverty, the risks are increased.<sup>4</sup> Living in a low-income household more than doubles the rate of violent victimization compared to high-income households.<sup>5</sup>

## DATING VIOLENCE

A 2015 survey found that 11.7% of female high school students reported being physically abused (purposely being hit, slammed into something, or injured with an object or weapon) by a dating partner.<sup>6</sup> The same survey found that 15.6% of high school girls had experienced sexual dating violence.<sup>7</sup> Survivors of dating violence often blame themselves, lose trust in others, and become convinced that they do not deserve to be treated with respect. Many survivors internalize these behaviors and come to think of them as normal.

### DID YOU KNOW?

The federal civil rights law called Title IX prohibits all forms of sex-based harassment, including sexual assault, in schools that receive federal funding. Title IX requires that schools take action to address sexual harassment and assault. Schools must provide information and support to survivors so they can continue their education, and conduct prompt, thorough, and impartial investigations.



## WHY IT MATTERS

- Sexual violence and harassment have lasting effects. Beyond immediate emotional and physical pain, girls in abusive situations have a higher risk of headaches, stomach aches, sleeplessness, depression, anxiety, eating disorders, chronic pain, and post-traumatic stress disorder.<sup>8</sup> The trauma resulting from sexual violence also puts survivors at a higher risk for substance abuse.
- Sexual assault endangers a student's academic success. In some cases, particularly if they do not receive support, students may withdraw from classes or activities, losing access to critical educational opportunities.
- Survivors often feel doubly victimized by widespread reluctance to believe accounts of rape, long delays in processing rape kits, and selective prosecution.

## WHAT WE CAN DO

- Urge the Department of Education to maintain guidance on schools' legal obligations under Title IX, continue strong enforcement of the law, and continue to make public the list of schools under investigation.
- Advocate for Congress to continue funding programs that address violence against women.
- Advocate for funding for comprehensive, medically-accurate, age-appropriate, culturally sensitive, and LGBTQ+-inclusive sexuality education programs so young people can make informed, responsible, and healthy decisions throughout their lives.
- Require K-12 schools to teach students about healthy relationships, including about "consent".
- Educate students about their Title IX rights, which protect a student's right to an education free from harassment and sexual violence.
- Raise public awareness regarding harassment and violence and fight to change cultural attitudes on sexual violence and victim-blaming.

## END NOTES

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3. Ibid, see 1.
4. Popkin, S. J., Bogle, M., Zweig, J. M., Saxena, P., Breslav, L., & Michie, M. (2015). *Let Girls Be Girls: How Coercive Sexual Environments Affect Girls Who Live in Disadvantaged Communities and What We Can Do About It*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute. Retrieved from <http://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/72466/2000490-Let-Girls-Be-Girls.pdf>.
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6. Kann, Laura, et al. (2016). *Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance. United States - 2015. Surveillance Summaries*. MMWR, 65(6). Retrieved from [https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/65/ss/ss6506a1.htm#T20\\_up](https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/65/ss/ss6506a1.htm#T20_up).
7. Ibid, see 6.
8. Ibid, see 1.

