

Taking on Sexual Harassment in STEM

ACTION

Senators and Representatives should cosponsor the Combating Sexual Harassment in STEM Act.

Background

A 2018 National Academies report titled “Sexual Harassment of Women” shows that sexual harassment across all fields of science has been an ongoing and deeply troubling issue that demands a more substantial response.

Sexual harassment experiences typically fall into one of three categories:

- sexist gender harassment, which includes experiences that are primarily discriminatory based on one’s gender
- sexual gender harassment, which encompasses sexually explicit behavior without sexual advance
- unwanted sexual attention

A recent survey of undergraduate women in physics found that nearly 75% of respondents experienced at least one type of sexual harassment.

2018 Study: Undergraduate Women in Physics

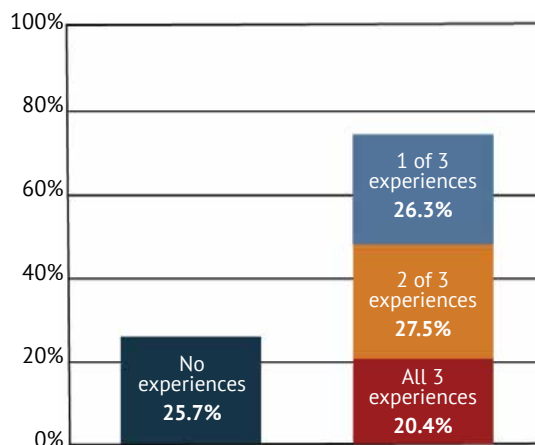


Figure adapted from Aycock et al. “Sexual harassment reported by undergraduate female physicists,” *Phys. Rev. Phys. Educ. Res.* **15**, 010121 (2019).

Impact on US Scientific Enterprise: The Loss of Talented Scientists

Women faculty in science, engineering, and medicine who experience sexual harassment report three common professional outcomes:

- Stepping down from leadership positions to avoid the perpetrator
- Leaving their institution
- Leaving their field altogether

From the National Academies report:

“...Gender discrimination itself harms women and the broader meritocracy of science.”

The Combating Sexual Harassment in STEM Act Will Help Address the Problem

The bill will:

- Establish an Interagency Working Group to coordinate efforts to reduce sexual harassment involving grant personnel
- Direct the NSF to award grants to institutions researching sexual harassment in the sciences with the goal of prevention and reduction
- Require updates to the Academies report “On Being A Scientist: A Guide to Responsible Conduct in Research”

“Sexual harassment is driving some of our brightest minds away from careers in research at a time when we need them most.

If we are to tackle the scientific and technological challenges ahead of us, we must do more to ensure women are free to conduct their research without being degraded, harassed, or abused because of their gender.”

—US Rep. Eddie Bernice Johnson

Chairwoman of the House Committee on Science, Space and Technology