

# SEXUAL VIOLENCE & THE WORKPLACE

## Research Brief

*Sexual violence can interrupt a person's employment and affect their economic security. The purpose of this research brief is to highlight the relationship between sexual violence and the workplace, and examine gaps in existing research. This research brief will allow advocates to connect the research on sexual violence and the workplace to their work with the clients they serve. The seven articles reviewed here discuss the prevalence and characteristics of workplace violence and the profound negative effects of sexual violence on employment.*

**Ellis, E. M., Atkeson, B. M., & Calhoun, K. S. (1981). An assessment of long-term reaction to rape. *The Journal of Abnormal Psychology, 90*, 263-266. doi:10.1037//0021-843X.90.3.263**

**Aims:** This study was to examine the long-term reactions to rape on intra- and interpersonal relationships.

**Methods:** In Georgia, a study was conducted with 27 sexual assault survivors from the Atlanta metropolitan area who were raped at least one year prior to the study. A group of 26 women who did not identify as sexual assault survivors were used as a control group. Participants were given surveys to complete and were interviewed by the researchers. Survivor participants also participated in an additional interview.

### Key Results

- Almost 50% of sexual assault survivors lost or were forced to quit

their jobs in the year following the rape due to the severity of their reactions to the rape.

- Survivors of sexual assault were significantly more depressed than the women in the control group. Forty-five percent of survivors were either severely depressed or moderately depressed, as compared with 23% of control group participants. Nineteen percent of survivors were severely depressed, as compared with 8% of control group participants. Rapes by strangers involved more trauma and violence than rapes by acquaintances or dates. Survivors of stranger rape reported more difficulties and being more fearful.

**Summary:** While this sample might not be representative of all rape survivors, this study illustrates the effects of rape on emotions and sexual relationships. Compared with women who have not been raped, women who have experienced rape



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report more depression, fatigue, and interpersonal problems. Women who have suffered sudden and violent rapes are more likely to experience more severe depression and might avoid dating.

**Application:** Although conducted in 1981, the study results are still relevant to the relationship between sexual violence and the workplace. This is one of the few studies that emphasize the severity and duration of emotional and social problems related to employment that might result from rape. While taking into consideration the relatively small sample size, advocates can use this information to work with employers in preventing sexual violence at the workplace as well as advocating for policies to help survivors recovering from the effects of rape.

**Future Research Needs:** Future research should be conducted with a more recent representative sample of sexual assault survivors on the long-term effects they have experienced and particularly how those effects relate to employment.

**MacMillan, R. (2000). Adolescent victimization and income deficits in adulthood: Rethinking the costs of criminal violence from a life-course perspective. *Criminology*, 38, 553-588. doi:10.1111/j.1745-9125.2000.tb00899.x**

**Aims:** Most research looks at the short-term costs of violent victimization; this study analyzes the long-term costs and socioeconomic consequences of victimization. Using a life-course model, the researcher links three types of violent victimizations: sexual assault, weapon attack, and physical assault in adolescence to

financial loss in later life. Victimization in adolescence will affect educational and occupational attainment, and this will directly influence income later in life.

**Methods:** Using the *National Youth Survey* (a longitudinal survey of a random sample of American adolescents that measured violent victimizations) and the *1993 Canadian General Social Survey* (a cross-sectional survey of a random sample of the Canadian population), the researcher tested a life-course model. The life-course model is a theoretical model that looks at the cost of victimization across the lifespan to estimate the long-term costs of victimization.

### Key Results

- Income loss from violent victimization is age-graded or, in other words, the cost of victimization varies by age. Violent victimization is most costly to an individual's socioeconomic status when it occurs in adolescence.
- Between 48% and 69% of the effects of adolescent victimization on personal income is due to diminished educational attainment and occupational status.
- Survivors of sexual assault earn about \$6,000 less per year than people who have not been sexually assaulted. The expected lifetime income loss for adolescent sexual-assault survivors is \$241,600.

**Summary:** Violent crime is considerably more costly when looking at the long-term economic impact. Educational enhancement strategies and programs for victims of crime, as well as crime prevention in schools, are important for young people's long-term economic future.

**Application:** Advocates can use this research in prevention and intervention strategies by



working with schools and other community systems to assist teen survivors in reaching their educational and occupational goals, as well as in helping to develop violence prevention programs and curricula and strategies.

**Future Research Needs:** Additional research on the costs of childhood sexual abuse would enrich the body of research on the long-term costs of sexual violence.

**Rock, L. M., Lipari, R. N., Cook, P. J., & Hale, A. D. (2011). 2010 Workplace and Gender Relations Survey of Active Duty Members: Overview report on sexual assault (DMDC Report No. 2010-025). Retrieved from the Service Women's Action Network: [http://servicewomen.org/SAPRO%20Reports/DMDC\\_2010\\_WGRA\\_Overview\\_Report\\_of\\_Sexual\\_Assault.pdf](http://servicewomen.org/SAPRO%20Reports/DMDC_2010_WGRA_Overview_Report_of_Sexual_Assault.pdf)**

**Aims:** To measure sexual-assault experiences of active-duty members and evaluate the effectiveness of sexual assault response and

prevention programs within the Department of Defense (DOD).

**Methods:** *The workplace and gender relations survey of active duty members (WGRA 2010) was completed by 26,505 respondents. This survey was modeled after prior workplace surveys: 2006 workplace and gender relations survey of active duty members and the 2008 Workplace and Gender Relations Survey of Reserve Component Members. The researchers looked at sexual contact within the last year; this includes – rape, nonconsensual sodomy (anal or oral sex), and indecent assault (unwanted, inappropriate sexual contact or fondling.)*

#### Key Results

- In 2010, 4.4% of women and .9% of men indicated experiencing unwanted sexual contact. The incident rates for women and men were lower in 2010 than in 2006.
- In the past 12 months, of the 4.4% of women who experienced unwanted sexual contact:
  - 26% indicated that they experienced completed unwanted sexual intercourse, anal or oral sex
  - 70% indicated that the unwanted sexual contact occurred at a military installation
  - 41% indicated that the incident occurred during the workday
  - 59% reported that their work performance decreased
  - 71% chose not to report the incident to the DOD
- In the past 12 months, of the .9% of men who experienced unwanted sexual contact:
  - 20% indicated that they experienced completed unwanted sexual intercourse, anal or oral sex

- 63% indicated that the unwanted sexual contact occurred at a military installation
- 59% indicated that the incident occurred during the workday
- 35% reported that their work performance decreased
- 85% chose not to report the incident to the DOD

**Summary:** The results of this most recent survey indicate that the DOD has made progress in reducing sexual assaults, improving care and support to survivors, and educating service members on services available to them. A majority of service members are willing to be active bystanders and intervene to prevent a sexual assault. This survey also shows that barriers to reporting sexual violence in the military seem to persist.

**Application:** Advocates can use this information to understand the prevalence of sexual violence in the military and to build partnerships with the military Sexual Assault Response Coordinator (SARC). Local programs also can use this information to provide outreach to current and former service members and their families.

**Future Research Needs:** Future research could further examine the effectiveness of the reporting process and the experiences of survivors in reporting sexual violence. Further research also could examine why individuals choose not to report to the DOD.

**The Restaurant Opportunities Center United, Family Values @ Work, HERvotes Coalition, Institute for Women’s Policy Research, MOMSRISING, National Coalition On Black Civic Participation’s Black Women’s Roundtable...9 to 5, National Association**

**of Working Women. (2012). *Tipped over the edge: Gender inequity in the restaurant industry.* Available from the Institute for Women’s Policy Research: <http://www.iwpr.org/publications/pubs/tipped-over-the-edge-gender-equity-in-the-restaurant-industry-1?searchterm=tipped+over>**

**Aims:** The restaurant industry is one of the nation’s largest employment sectors, with women comprising the majority of the workforce. This study’s goal was to explore the challenges women face in the restaurant industry – occupational segregation, discrimination, lack of career mobility, sexual harassment, lack of benefits, and lack of schedule control. The report provides policy recommendations for policymakers, employers, and consumers.

**Methods:** This report analyzed data from three government sources: the *Current Population Survey*, *American Community Survey*, and the *Occupational Employment Statistics*; and data from focus groups, interviews, and a survey of 4,300 restaurant workers.

### Key Results

- More than one in 10 restaurant workers reported that they or a coworker have experienced sexual harassment.
- Focus group participants indicated that sexual harassment was an “accepted ... part of the culture” and workers had to accept this.
- Managers were often the perpetrators of the sexual harassment workers experienced.
- There is a lack of sexual-harassment training, many sexual harassment complaints are not addressed, and policies on sexual harassment are either nonexistent or not enforced.

**Summary:** This research shows that women



in the restaurant industry do not have access to living wages and benefits, and that they face hostile working conditions on a daily basis. Public policy measures should be considered to reconcile these problems and advance women's status in the restaurant industry. Specific recommendations include raising the federal minimum wage, establishing a national standard for requiring employers to provide earned sick leave, and passing legislation that requires sexual violence-prevention policies and practices.

**Application:** This report highlights the problems and challenges many women experience while working in the restaurant industry. This report also identifies possible policy solutions at local, state, and national levels to improve the working conditions of all workers, which would be espe-

cially beneficial to survivors of sexual violence.

**Future Research Needs:** Future research should look at other service industries and how workers navigate working and dealing with sexual violence experiences. Additional research also could look at sexual violence perpetrated by clients or customers against workers, and could identify effective policies and procedures to prevent such violence.

**Tjaden, P., & Thoennes, N. (2001). Coworker violence and gender: Findings from the National Violence Against Women Survey. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine, 20, 85-89* doi:10.1016/S0749-3797(00)00279-8**

**Aims:** This study addressed employee-on-employee violence at a national level. Data from the *National Violence Against Women (NAVW) Survey* was analyzed to assess the prevalence and characteristics of coworker violence among women and men. Findings were then compared with violence perpetrated by people other than coworkers.

**Methods:** The *NVAW Survey* was a telephone interview study conducted between November 1995 and May 1996. A nationally representative sample of 8,000 men and 8,000 women, 18 years old and older, were selected using random digit dialing. The survey asked each respondent a set of behavior-specific questions about their experiences of violence, including violence by coworkers. The researchers used the data from this study to analyze how men and women experience coworker violence. In this study, coworker violence is understood as being committed by a current or former coworker inside or outside of the workplace; this violence is described as rape, physical assault, stalking, threatening to physically harm or kill.

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## Key Results

- Lifetime coworker victimization experiences ranged from 1.1% of women and 2.3% of men.
- Approximately 27% of women and 4% of men were raped by a coworker.
- Men and women were both more likely to be victimized by an intimate partner, stranger, or other acquaintance/family member than to be victimized by a coworker.
- Women were less likely to be physically assaulted than men, but more likely to be raped or stalked by a coworker.
- Women were significantly more likely than men to lose time from work because of the victimization they experienced (approximately 26% and 8%, respectively).

**Summary:** Annually, about 100,700 women and 93,000 men are victimized by a current or former coworker. This article illustrates the differences in coworker violence between men and women, as well as the difference between the response to victimization, with women more likely to report the abuse to law enforcement and take more time off work because of the violence. Female victims of coworker violence could suffer more serious consequences than male victims of coworker violence. Women were more likely to report that they lost time from work and also were more likely to contact law enforcement for intervention.

**Application:** This research can help service providers and employers understand the prevalence of coworker violence and identify prevention strategies based on the type of violence women and men experience.

**Future Research Needs:** More research is needed to examine how victims cope with the

violence they experience at work, and if men and women have different coping skills. Additionally, research about the circumstances that lead to coworker violence is needed to create the most effective prevention and intervention strategies. More research also is needed on the experiences of other types of sexual violence, other than rape, that occur in the workplace.

**Tjaden, P., & Thoennes, N. (2006). *Extent, nature, and consequence of rape victimization: Findings from the National Violence Against Women Survey (NCJ 210346)*. Retrieved from the National Criminal Justice Reference Service: <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/210346.pdf>**

**Aims:** This study looked at rape victimization at a national level. Data from the *National Violence Against Women (NVAW) Survey* was analyzed to assess the prevalence and characteristics of rape and attempted rape among women and men.

**Methods:** *The National Violence Against Women (NVAW) Survey* was conducted between 1995 and 1996 as a nationally representative telephone survey of 8,000 adult men and 8,000 adult women. The men and women were asked about their experiences with violence, including rape. This survey included five behaviorally specific screening questions to measure both attempted rape and completed rape.

## Key results

- Almost 20% of adult female rape victims and almost 10% of adult male victims of rape reported that they lost time from work due to their victimization.
- Lifetime rape victimization accounted for 17.7 million women and 2.8 million men.



- About 32% of female rape victims and about 16% of male rape victims were injured as a result of their most recent rape experience.
- 22.4% of women ages 18-29 were raped in their lifetime, and 3.5% of men aged 18-29 were raped in their lifetime.

**Summary:** This article illustrates the prevalence and characteristics of rape victimization of men and women in the United States. This study indicates that rape occurs at an early age and that most survivors knew their rapist. It also confirms that there are mental health and productivity losses associated with rape.

**Application:** Advocates can use this data to inform employers about the prevalence of rape and the likelihood of rape survivors suffering injuries as a result of their victimization. This data, as well as the data regarding time lost from work due to their victimization, indicates how rape and sexual violence impact survivors' employment and why employers should be concerned about this issue.

**Future Research Needs:** Future research needs to examine in more detail the effect of rape and other forms of sexual violence on employment. Longitudinal research also should include how past sexual violence victimization impacts future earnings, productivity, and overall economic security of survivors.

**Waugh, I. M. (2010). Examining the sexual harassment experiences of Mexican immigrant farmworking women. *Violence Against Women, 16*, 237-261, doi:10.1177/1077801209360857**

**Aims:** The goal of this study was to examine the sexual harassment experiences of Mexican immigrant women working on farms in California.

**Methods:** One hundred and fifty female farmworkers, employed on fields in California's Central Valley, completed questionnaires about their experiences of sexual harassment while working in the fields. The questionnaires, which were developed by the researchers, contained questions regarding sexual harassment experiences, characteristics of work setting and perpetrator, and demographic information. To protect the women, most surveys were conducted at local flea markets so that they would be able to talk with the researchers away from the job site. These women identified as Mexican or of Mexican descent. Questionnaires were available in English and in Spanish, and the materials were presented orally in English and Spanish.

#### **Key Results**

- The survey found that women farmworkers are at risk for sexual harassment because of working conditions, which are exploited by people who commit sexual violence against them. These conditions include:

- Working alongside men in remote areas
  - Being separated from other coworkers
  - Doing work that requires them to assume physical positions, such as bending and reaching
  - Being concealed by bushes and vines
- Of the respondents who reported sexual harassment:
- 22% told no one of the harassment
  - 97% also reported experiencing gendered harassment
  - 53% reported experiencing unwanted sexual attention
  - 24% described experiencing sexual coercion or on-the-job blackmail
  - Women would wear heavy clothing and facial scarves to protect themselves from working conditions and sexual harassment

**Summary:** The respondents used a variety of methods to counter the sexual harassment they experienced while working, and many women decided to stay in their jobs and confront the harasser. Sexual harassment affected the women and their families' livelihoods, as many perpetrators had control over work and wages.

**Application:** This study explores the intersections of class, race, and gender on sexual violence in the workplace. Advocates can use this information to better serve the immigrants in their communities and to address the workplace sexual violence many immigrant and other marginalized workers experience.

**Future Research Needs:** More research needs

to be conducted to investigate how immigrant women navigate intimate relationships while managing the sexual violence they experience at the workplace, since many families work together on farms. Future research also should examine the sexual violence experiences of other communities of immigrant women in other parts of the country.

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## Conclusion

The research reviewed in this brief provides insight into the dynamics of sexual violence in the workplace, demonstrating profound negative impacts of sexual violence on employment and on society as a whole. The reviewed studies suggest that the prevention of sexual violence is cost-effective. Existing research also indicates that women are more likely than men to report being sexually victimized by co-workers, and that female victims of coworker violence might suffer more serious consequences than their male counterparts. Although the contributions of the existing studies are invaluable, more research is needed to study the response and coping mechanisms of female and male victims of workplace sexual violence – and impacts of sexual victimization on employment, income, and public benefits – in order to create more effective prevention and intervention programs.

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This research brief is part of a ***Sexual Violence & the Workplace Information Packet***. Contact the National Sexual Violence Resource Center for more information: 877-739-3895 or <http://www.nsvrc.org>.

