

ASA NEWS

Release Date: March 22, 2004
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Males and Adolescents Are Increasingly Victims of Sexual Harassment

WASHINGTON, DC—The new sexual harassment is not just for women any more. Research by Christopher Uggen, University of Minnesota, published this week in the *American Sociological Review* describes workplace conditions for men and women who might be vulnerable to sexual harassment.

Based on small-scale surveys and intensive interviews with 700 men and women, Uggen and his co-author Amy Blackstone, a professor at the University of Maine, examined the current state of sexual harassment. They found that more than ever, sexual harassment victims include men and adolescents as well as women.

“All women are at some risk of sexual harassment, but males are also likely to be targeted if they seem vulnerable and appear to reject the male stereotype,” reports Uggen. “If a man refuses to go along with sexual joking, wears an earring to the workplace, or is financially vulnerable, he could be targeted. We even found a correlation between a man’s likelihood of being harassed and the amount of housework they reported doing—an activity typically attributed to women.”

In the past, sexual harassment has been studied as something men do to women. The Uggen and Blackstone study took a new approach. They developed measures and questions that allowed them to measure same-sex harassment, male victims, as well as male-to-female harassment.

What they discovered is that aggressors tend to be men who are flaunting their heterosexual masculinity over all forms of femininity. Victims were not just women but also men who had challenged the stereotypical male ideals.

A surprising development, according to Uggen, centers on adolescents and their workplace experience. Despite the very corporate and adult image of harassment portrayed in movies such as the 1994 film *Disclosure*, the study found that adolescents do experience sexual harassment but it’s grossly underreported and misunderstood. They found that one of every three women and one of every seven men that took part in their study reported they were sexually harassed by their mid-twenties. Yet, those men and women had never told anyone about their experience prior to the study.

“We gave young adults and adolescents surveys questioning them about sexual harassment and we asked them if they’d ever experienced it in the workplace,” Uggen said. “In the survey, several of them reported that they had experienced harassment. When we followed up with one-on-one interviews, it was remarkable to hear that so many more did not realize certain behaviors such as consistent and unwanted flirting or inappropriate jokes could be considered harassment. To these adolescents—and to many men we interviewed—it was something they shrugged off.”

Uggen encourages adolescents to report these occurrences and identify it early. "When these adolescents remain quiet, they risk experiencing greater levels of harassment as they enter adulthood," Uggen said.

Uggen and Blackstone's findings from "Sexual Harassment as a Gendered Expression of Power" are available in the current issue of *American Sociological Review* at www.asanet.org/journals/asr. The *American Sociological Review*, the flagship journal of the American Sociological Association, publishes original works of interest to the discipline in general, new theoretical developments, results of qualitative or quantitative research that advance our understanding of fundamental social processes, and important methodological innovations.

The American Sociological Association, founded in 1905, is a non-profit membership association dedicated to serving sociologists in their work, advancing sociology as a science and profession, and promoting the contributions and use of sociology to society.

Christopher Uggen is Associate Professor of Sociology, Life Course Center affiliate, and McKnight Presidential Fellow at the University of Minnesota (www.soc.umn.edu/~uggen). He studies the sociology of crime, law, and deviance, and his current projects involve studies of felon voting rights, sexual harassment, and the work, family and civic life of former criminal offenders. Amy Blackstone is Assistant Professor of Sociology at the University of Maine. Her research interests include sociology of gender, social movements, and activism and other forms of civic participation.

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Members of the media interested in a copy of Uggen's article should contact Johanna Ebner in the American Sociological Association Public Information Office (202-383-9005 x332, pubinfo@asanet.org).