

# KEY FINDINGS

FROM “NATIONAL PREVALENCE OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE  
BY A WORKPLACE-RELATED PERPETRATOR”

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# KEY FINDINGS

## FROM “NATIONAL PREVALENCE OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE BY A WORKPLACE-RELATED PERPETRATOR”

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### RESEARCH TRANSLATION BY NSVRC

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**A** new analysis on workplace sexual violence has been published, providing a new window into workplace-related sexual violence. This analysis provides information into specific types of sexual violence people have experienced by a workplace-related perpetrator and offers a closer look at the perpetrators of these behaviors.

*National Prevalence of Sexual Violence by a Workplace-Related Perpetrator* (Basile et al., 2019) was developed with research from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) using data collected through the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS). NISVS is recognized as one of the largest and most comprehensive sources of ongoing national data collected on sexual violence. The data analyzed in this study were collected during the initial 2010 collection and included 2011 and 2012 data as well.

This analysis provides information on:

- prevalence data for workplace-related sexual violence within five classifications: rape (e.g. unwanted forced, attempted, and alcohol/

drug-facilitated penetration); made to sexually penetrate (completed, attempted, and alcohol/drug-facilitated); sexual coercion (e.g. pressured sex); unwanted sexual contact (e.g. groping); and noncontact unwanted sexual experiences (e.g. unwanted sexual remarks)

- perpetrator sub type: proportion of male and female perpetrators<sup>1</sup> further classified as either:
  - authority figures (defined as a boss, supervisor, or superior in command) or
  - non-authority figures (included coworker, customer, or client)
- impacts to male and female victims<sup>1</sup> based on the type of perpetrator involved

<sup>1</sup>NISVS did not ask for gender identities for victims or perpetrators other than male and female.



## KEY FINDINGS

Overall, an estimated seven million women or 5.6% of women in the U.S. reported experiencing some type of workplace-related sexual violence during their lifetime. Almost three million men (approximately one in 40) reported some form of sexual violence by a workplace-related perpetrator in their lifetimes.

The most commonly reported (by an estimated 4.2 million women or 3.5%) type of sexual violence for women was unwanted sexual contact by authority figures (1.4%) and non-authority figures (2.3%). Noncontact unwanted sexual experiences were reported by 2.4% of women.

For men, however, the most common type of workplace sexual violence was noncontact unwanted sexual experiences (1.5 million men or 1.3%), the majority of those perpetrated by a non-authority figure. That was followed closely by unwanted sexual contact (1.4 million or 1.2%).

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CLOSE TO ONE MILLION WOMEN (940,000 OR 0.8%) REPORTED BEING RAPED, AND ALMOST AS MANY (909,000) REPORTED SEXUAL COERCION.

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The authors noted the following similarity with other findings across general sexual violence types: Most female victims of workplace-related sexual violence reported only male perpetrators (96.2%), while male victims were split between only male perpetrators (40.7%) and only female perpetrators (53.6%). Of the total victims, very few reported both male and female perpetrators.

## IMPACTS

Five impacts were examined among victims of workplace-related sexual violence. Fear was the most commonly reported impact by both male (14.3%) and female (29.8%) victims.

**Concern for one's own safety** (22.6%) and **PTSD symptoms** such as nightmares (22.6%) were evenly reported by female victims.

**Missing at least one day of work/school** was reported by 6.8% of female victims, and **injury** was reported by 3.6% of female victims.

**Concern for safety** was reported by 10.8% of male victims of workplace-related sexual violence, and **PTSD symptoms** were reported by 9.8% of male victims. The remaining two, **injury and missing work or school**, were not reported at a level that was statistically significant.

## DISCUSSION

The authors note that while the most commonly reported forms of sexual violence experienced by both men and women were non-penetrative forms, penetrative forms were reported as well. Because of this, providing information-only sexual harassment trainings that focus on verbal harassment or hostile work environment may not be enough to address all forms of sexual violence that are taking place in the workplace-related context.

Like other research on workplace violence and harassment, this study affirms that effective prevention approaches include:

- commitment to prevention from top management

- consistent and regular mandatory training
- promoting a culture of harassment-free work environment to prospective and new hires as an organizational value

Two additional recommendations within the public health framework include:

1. Address the foundational causes of workplace-related sexual violence. Noting that “much of this aggression falls along social status and power” (p. 5), the study asserts that effective prevention requires an examination of gender inequality not only in a workplace setting, but within the broader population.
2. Additionally gender differences should be noted. The impacts of workplace-related sexual violence (beyond the individual costs) to the organizational costs of lost productivity and turnover may well be contributing to the existing gender wage gap.



## LIMITATIONS

Several limitations of the study were noted, including an inability to identify the particular relationships that make up the “authority” and “non-authority” perpetrator categories. Expanding the broad categories of “authority” and “non-authority” into more discrete categories and providing additional behavioral contexts such as tactics used by each may be useful to executing targeted prevention strategies. For example, male respondents identified female non-authority figures as the largest category of perpetrators (57.0%). Are these female coworkers, customers, or clients? Knowing the specific roles that different workplace-related perpetrators hold can provide insight for potential prevention strategies.

In addition to gaining an understanding of the fuller context of the victim-perpetrator relationship, having more discrete data available about who is victimized would inform prevention strategies. For example, knowing the race and ethnicity of victims, not limiting gender identity to a binary choice, and other salient information about who is being victimized can lead to more targeted prevention approaches.

Another limitation of note was the focus on only five impacts – fear, concern for one’s own safety, PTSD symptoms, missing at least one day of work/school, and injury. It is likely that other impacts such as getting fired from a job or feeling forced to look for a new job may directly affect a woman’s earning and ability to care for herself and/or family, and could also contribute to the wage disparity experienced by women.

## PATHS FORWARD

Consistent with recommendations offered here as well as the expanding research base on workplace sexual violence and harassment, workplaces must begin to promote and strengthen practices that support a safe environment that works for all employees.



Recommendations presented are also echoed in similar reports on workplace violence, including the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) report, *Select Task Force on the Study of Harassment in the Workplace* (Feldman & Lipnic, 2016). These include:

- putting in place strong leadership and accountability mechanisms
- consistent and regular mandatory training
- promoting a culture of respect and inclusion
- training programs that focus on the spectrum of acceptable as well as unacceptable behavior, not just the standards where behavior becomes legally actionable

**Comprehensive Approaches:** As with all analyses of sexual violence, there is no one “perpetrator type” but instead many types of people who perpetrate. As our understanding of sexual violence continually evolves, so does our understanding of who perpetrates and the dynamics of the behaviors. This offers opportunities for innovative and targeted prevention strategies.

CDC has created the *STOP SV* technical package as a guide for those working to prevent sexual violence (Basile et al., 2016). Several strategies and approaches are highlighted in the package – promoting healthy norms and teaching skills are two areas where many workplaces currently focus their prevention efforts.

In order to have greater impact, it is important for workplaces to implement strategies that work at the workplace or community level. Providing opportunities to empower women and girls, creating protective environments, and establishing and consistently applying effective policies are all examples of community-level prevention approaches. Proactive, top-down approaches where leaders and managers are on board and invested in change are key – not just to check off a list, but to create safe, healthy, and productive workplace environments.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

NSVRC's key findings of the Select Task Force on the Study of Harassment in the Workplace report from EEOC: <https://www.nsvrc.org/key-findings-select-task-force-study-harassment-workplace>

For additional resources and information, see NSVRC's online collection on *Ending Sexual Assault and Harassment in the Workplace*: <https://www.nsvrc.org/ending-sexual-assault-and-harassment-workplace>

Learn more and read other reports from NISVS: <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/datasources/nisvs/index.html>

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