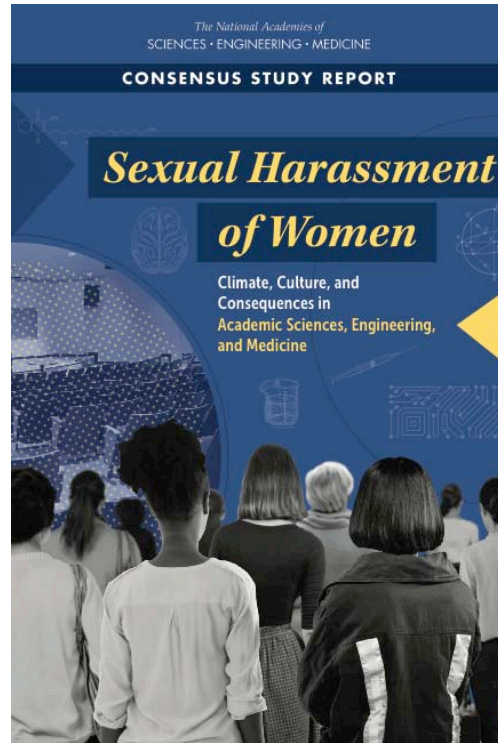


# Sexual Harassment of Women: Climate, Culture, and Consequences in Academic Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine



<http://nationalacademies.org/SexualHarassment>  
**#ScienceToo**

# Sponsors



# Committee on Women in Science, Engineering, and Medicine

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<sup>1</sup> NAS Member

<sup>2</sup> NAE Member

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# Study Statement of Task

The Committee will undertake a study of the influence of sexual harassment in academia on the career advancement of women in the scientific, technical, and medical workforce, which will include the following:

- Review of the research on the extent to which women in the fields of science, engineering, and medicine are victimized by sexual harassment on college and university campuses, in research labs and field sites, at hospitals/medical centers, and in other academic environments;
- Examination of existing information on the extent to which sexual harassment in academia negatively impacts the recruitment, retention, and advancement of women pursuing scientific, engineering, technical, and medical careers, with comparative evidence drawn from other sectors such as the military, government, and the private sector;
- Identification and analysis of policies, strategies, and practices that have been the most successful in preventing and addressing sexual harassment in these settings.

# Study Committee Members

Co-Chair: **Paula Johnson**<sup>1</sup>, Wellesley College

Co-Chair: **Sheila Widnall**<sup>2</sup>, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

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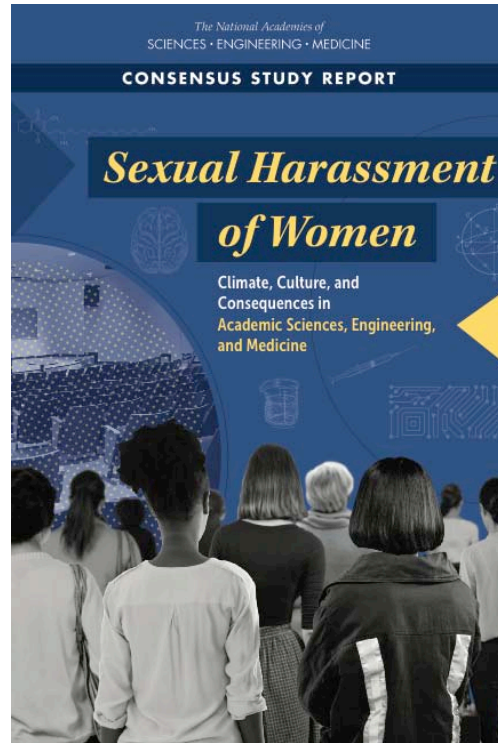
John B. Pryor

Billy M. Williams

<sup>1</sup> NAM Member

<sup>2</sup> NAE Member

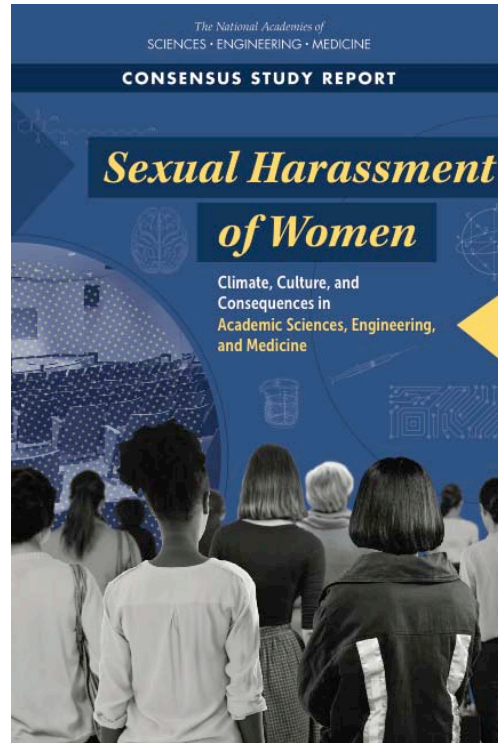
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Sheila E. Widnall  
Committee Co-chair

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Lilia Cortina

Committee Member

# Findings

Sexual harassment is a form of discrimination that consists of three types of harassing behavior:

1. sexual coercion,
2. unwanted sexual attention, and
3. gender harassment.

Gender harassment that is severe or occurs frequently over a period of time can result in the same level of negative professional and psychological outcomes as isolated instances of sexual coercion.

# Recommendation

**Recommendation:** Leaders in academic institutions and research and training sites must pay increased attention to and enact policies that cover gender harassment as a means of addressing the most common form of sexual harassment and of preventing other types of sexually harassing behavior.

# Finding

Sexual harassment is common in academic science, engineering, and medicine.

- Best available analysis to date shows that 50 percent of women faculty and staff in academia experience sexual harassment.
- Student surveys at a couple university systems shows that between 20-50 percent of students in science, engineering, and medicine experience sexual harassment from faculty or staff.

# Findings

Sexual harassment undermines women's professional and educational attainment and mental and physical health.

The cumulative effect of sexual harassment is significant damage to research integrity and a costly loss of talent in academic sciences, engineering, and medicine.

# Findings

The two characteristics most associated with higher rates of sexual harassment are (a) male-dominated gender ratios and leadership and (b) an organizational climate that communicates tolerance of sexual harassment

Organizational climate is, by far, the greatest predictor of the occurrence of sexual harassment, and ameliorating it can prevent people from sexually harassing others.



Billy M. Williams

Committee Member



# Finding and Recommendation

The legal system alone is not an adequate mechanism for reducing or preventing sexual harassment.

**Recommendation:** Move beyond legal compliance to address culture and climate. Academic institutions, research and training sites, and federal agencies should move beyond interventions or policies that represent basic legal compliance and that rely solely on formal reports made by targets.

# Findings

Parts of the federal government and several professional societies are beginning to focus more broadly on policies about research integrity and on codes of ethics rather than on the narrow definition of research misconduct.

Professional societies have the potential to be powerful drivers of change.

# Recommendations

**Recommendation:** Professional societies should accelerate their efforts to be viewed as organizations that are helping to create culture changes that reduce or prevent the occurrence of sexual harassment.

Paula A. Johnson  
Committee Co-chair

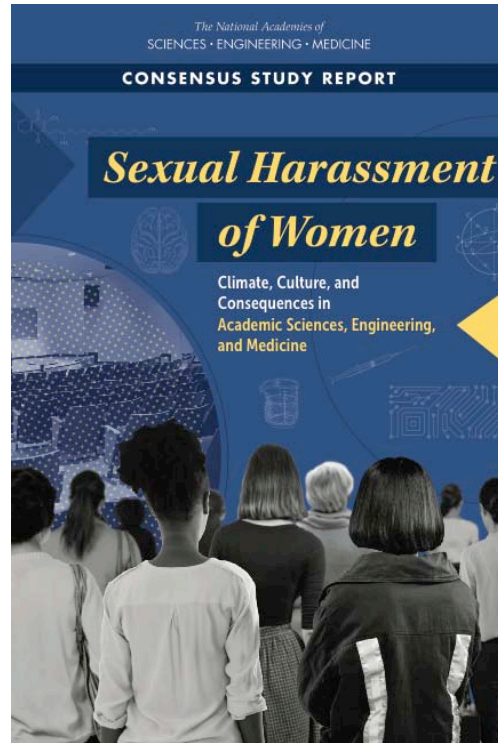
# Finding

A system-wide change to the culture and climate in higher education is required to prevent and effectively address all three forms of sexual harassment

# Recommendations for Institutions

- Create diverse, inclusive, and respectful environments
- Diffuse the hierarchical and dependent relationship between trainees and faculty
- Provide support for targets
- Improve transparency and accountability
- Strive for strong and diverse leadership
- Make the entire academic community responsible for reducing and preventing sexual harassment

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