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Youth at work: Adolescent Employment and Sexual Harassment

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### Abstract

**OBJECTIVE:** An examination of the frequency and impact of workplace sexual harassment on work, health, and school outcomes on high school girls is presented in two parts. The first compares the frequency of harassment in this sample (52%) to published research on adult women that used the same measure of sexual harassment. The second part compares outcomes for girls who experienced harassment versus those who did not.

**METHODS:** Students in a small, suburban high school for girls completed a paper and pencil survey during class. A modified version of the Sexual Experiences Questionnaire (SEQ; Fitzgerald et al., 1988) was used to identify sexually harassed working teenagers. Work attitudes, assessments of physical health and mental health, and school-related outcomes were measured using standardized scales. Data were analyzed using difference of proportions tests, t-tests, and regression.

**RESULTS:** The percentage of harassed girls was significantly higher than the figures reported in most studies of working women. Girls who were sexually harassed were less satisfied with their jobs and supervisors, had higher levels of academic withdrawal, and were more apt to miss school than their non-harassed peers.

**CONCLUSIONS:** Sexual harassment significantly impacts employed high school girls' connections to work and school. It not only taints their attitudes toward work but it also threatens to undermine their commitment to school. Educators, practitioners and community leaders should be aware of the negative impact this work experience may have on adolescents and explore these issues carefully with students who are employed outside of school.

**PRACTICE IMPLICATIONS:** Teenage students, stressed by sexual harassment experienced at work may find their career development or career potential impeded or threatened due to school

absence and poor academic performance. In addition, the physical safety of working students may be at risk, creating a need for teenagers to receive training to deal with sexual assault and other types of workplace violence. Educators, practitioners, and community leaders should be aware of the negative impact this work experience may have on adolescents and their overall school experience and explore the issue of sexual harassment carefully with students who are employed outside of school.

In 2005, the United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) filed fifteen employment discrimination lawsuits involving teenage workers and sexual harassment. Two of these suits were against different franchises of the national fast-food chain, McDonald's, and reflect the growing number of sexual harassment litigation suits filed by adolescent workers (WJLA, 2004). Prior to 2002, litigation filed against employers by adolescents was uncommon. By 2002, sexual harassment complaints filed by teenagers comprised approximately 2% (268) of more than 14,000 suits filed nationwide, and by 2004, teenage workers' charges quadrupled to 8%, and these rates have continued to rise (Drobac, 2007).

Perpetrator behaviors in all of the lawsuits covered a wide gamut from verbal harassment to sexual assault. The EEOC website (<http://youth.eeoc.gov/cases.htm/>) gives brief descriptions of recent sexual harassment suits and also provides information for teenage workers. Two recent lawsuits filed by teenage girls against Burger King (EEOC lawsuit [No. 4:03CV107 HEA]) and McDonald's (EEOC v. GLC, Inc., 2005) described the girls' experiences of repeated groping, vulgar sexual comments, and demands for sex by male supervisors. In another lawsuit (EEOC v. Pand Enterprises, Inc., 2005), young men were subjected to same-sex sexual harassment by a

male supervisor that included requests for sex, crude sexual remarks, and unwanted touching. The above complaints are similar to those filed by adults in earlier lawsuits, which included claims of sexual assault and intimidation (*Meritor Savings Bank v. Vinson*, 1986; *Robinson v. Jacksonville Shipyards*, 1991; *Harris v. Forklift System, Inc.*, 1993; *Oncale v. Sundowner Offshore Services*, 1998). These adult and juvenile lawsuits highlight the potential serious threat to teenagers' safety in the workplace where a majority of students spend between five to twenty hours a week (National Academies, 1998). While previous research has described the types of jobs that adolescents hold, the number of hours they work, and their wages (Bachman & Schulenberg, 1993; Mortimer, 2005), the pervasiveness and impact of sexual harassment has received only minimal attention (Fineran, 2002). It is quite apparent that research has not kept pace with rising legal and social concerns over this issue.

### *Adolescent Employment*

Currently 80 to 90% of adolescents work at some point during high school and most of them are employed in retail sales, restaurants, grocery stores and health care (Mortimer, 2005). Like adults, working adolescents are protected from discrimination by Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. Title VII provides the main framework prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sex, including sexual harassment. EEOC guidelines define sexual harassment as "unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature that constitutes harassment when 1) submission to the conduct is either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of employment, 2) submission to or rejection of such conduct is used as the basis for employment decisions, or 3) the conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working environment" (C.F.R. 1604:11).

*Sexual Harassment and Employed Adolescents*

While numerous studies of adult sexual harassment have been conducted over the past twenty years, few have explored the problem among adolescents who work part time while attending school. Only three studies documenting adolescent workplace sexual harassment have been conducted during this same time span (Fineran, 2002; Stein, 1981; Strauss & Espeland, 1992). Strauss and Espeland (1992) found that 30% of 250 female vocational students surveyed from four Minnesota school districts had been sexually harassed at work, while a recent study conducted by Fineran (2002) found that 35% of the 332 students who worked part-time reported experiencing sexual harassment ( 63% girls, 37% boys). None of these studies examined the impact of harassment on health problems or academic performance.

*Sexual Harassment and Employed Women*

Three generalizations can be drawn from the research literature on sexual harassment over the last twenty-five years. First, the percentages of women who reported being sexually harassed varies considerably among the studies. Some reviews of the literature (Gruber, 1990; Fitzgerald & Shullman, 1993; United States Merit Systems Protection Board [USMSPB], 1995) estimate that fifty percent of working women have experienced sexual harassment on the job. Recent studies, however, have found estimates that are considerably lower (Richman et al., 1999; Cortina & Wasti, 2005). Part of the reason for these variations is that researchers have often used quite different measures of sexual harassment. Compounding this problem is the use of different time frames—i.e., the retrospective time period respondents are asked to use to determine if an offensive behavior (e.g., pressure for a sexual relationship) had occurred. The problem of measurement has been addressed to some extent by the emergence of the Sexual Experiences Questionnaire (SEQ) as the instrument of choice among a growing number of researchers (Shupe

et al., 2002). A second generalization is that sexual or sexist comments occur more frequently but have less psychological or work-related impact than intrusive forms (e.g., sexual touching, bribery, or assaults) that have significant detrimental health and work-related outcomes. For example, the USMSPB (1995) survey of women federal employees found that sexual remarks (39%) and sexual looks and gestures (29%) were the most common and least severe forms of harassment while pressures for sexual favors (7%) and sexual assault (4%) occurred less frequently but were ranked high in severity.

The final generalization is the consistency of correlates or predictors of victimization across research studies. Some categories of women have high rates of victimization regardless of occupation, geographic region, or nationality (Gruber, Smith & Kauppinen, 1995). In this regard, demographic and workplace characteristics are important predictors of both frequency and severity of harassment. With particular relevance to our study, research on adults over the last twenty-five years has provided compelling evidence that young and unmarried women and those with low status or low seniority at their jobs experience more harassment than others (Fitzgerald & Ormerod, 1991; Gutek, 1985; Gruber, 1998; USMSPB, 1995).

### *Sexual Harassment and Mental Health*

A growing number of studies have documented the negative effects of workplace sexual harassment on adult mental health. Victims of harassment experience a wide variety of symptoms that include: decreased self esteem (Gruber & Bjorn, 1982) and confidence (Benson & Thompson, 1982); anger, social isolation, helplessness, anxiety, depression, tension and nervousness, (Cohran, Frazier & Olson, 1997; Gutek & Koss, 1993; Schneider et al., 1997). In addition, a number of studies have substantiated the link between post traumatic stress disorder and depression and sexual harassment (Dansky & Kilpatrick, 1997; Gutek & Koss, 1993;

Schneider, Swan, & Fitzgerald, 1997). Somatic complaints related to sexual harassment victimization include: gastrointestinal disturbances, sleep disturbance, weight gain or loss of appetite and substance abuse (Dan, Pinsoff, & Riggs, 1995; Richman et al., 1999). Other reported negative effects associated with work include decreased job satisfaction (Gruber, 1992; Schneider, Swan, & Fitzgerald, 1997), and job loss (Coles, 1986). Schneider, Swan, and Fitzgerald (1997) found significant relationships between sexual harassment and both work and job withdrawal.

While the effects of sexual harassment on mental health have been documented for adults who have experienced sexual harassment in the workplace, little attention has been given to employed adolescents. Research on sexual harassment among teenagers has focused primarily on experiences that occur in schools (American Association of University Women [AAUW], 1993, 2001; Hand & Sanchez, 2000). The AAUW and Permanent Commission on the Status of Women [PCSW] (1995) reported that students who experienced sexual harassment no longer enjoyed their usual activities, had nightmares, felt sad, nervous and isolated from friends and family, and experienced changes in eating and sleeping habits. Students also reported school performance difficulties including: absenteeism, decreased quality of schoolwork, skipping or dropping classes, lower grades, loss of friends, tardiness, and truancy.

This preliminary study will explore workplace sexual harassment from the viewpoint of female students who work while attending high school and will compare working students who have experienced sexual harassment with working students who have not. Previous research on adults and teenagers suggests that there will be significant relationships between experiences of sexual harassment at work, academic and work performance, and mental and physical health.

### *Hypotheses*



Do adolescents experience the same frequency and the same types of sexual harassment on their jobs as adults? Given the fact that adolescents are single, non-married, and have low seniority or status at their workplaces, prior research would predict that teenagers will experience higher levels of sexual harassment than adult women. In order to determine whether sexual harassment victimization differs between teenage girls and adult women, the experiences of this sample of working girls will be compared to samples of adult women employees found in published research that used the same measure of sexual harassment (SEQ), although time period measurement differs between studies. Do working teenagers suffer the same negative outcomes to their health and well being from workplace sexual harassment as adults? Prior research suggests that teenagers may experience fewer adverse outcomes (e.g., depression, health problems, etc.) because work is typically not a central aspect of their social lives. Given the primacy of peer relationships in high school as well as the high levels of school sexual harassment, it seems likely that workplace harassment will not have a large impact on the psychological and physical well being of teenagers. It does seem likely that teenagers will react to the immediate context of the workplace and experience lower satisfaction with their jobs, coworkers, and supervisors as a result of harassment. Some of the effects of these negative experiences may carry over to how they experience their school life. Specifically, a negative work experience may adversely affect students' satisfaction with school and their overall learning experience.

### Method

#### *Sample*

Two hundred sixty (260) students in a small, predominantly white, suburban, New England private high school for girls completed a paper and pencil survey during health classes

held during the spring term. Parental consent forms were sent home with the students. The parents were informed that the purpose of the study was to investigate adolescents' experiences of harassing behaviors during their time at work and that knowledge from the study would advance our understanding of the work environment and the effects of these types of behaviors on adolescent mental and physical health and academic success. The university Institutional Review Board approved the study and participation in the survey was voluntary and followed Institutional Review Board procedures for parental consent and student assent. Students who received parental consent were given an assent form along with the survey during class. Due to student interest and school support, the overall response rate was high (90 %). Each grade level was represented (66 freshmen (85 % response rate), 65 sophomores (96 % response rate), 64 juniors (89 % response rate), and 65 seniors (93 % response rate). The demographic characteristics of the sample population were quite similar to the student body at the school. For example, non-whites were 4 % of the high school population. Our sample consisted of 5%. Students were asked about frequency of victimization at work, emotional reactions to sexual harassment, the relationship between themselves and the perpetrator (supervisor, co-worker and other persons at work), and the perpetrator's gender. In addition, students answered questions about their school life, their health and well being and coping skills.

### *Measures*

#### *Sexual Harassment*

Twenty-nine items in the Sexual Experiences Questionnaire (Fitzgerald et al., 1988; Fitzgerald, Gelfand, & Drasgow, 1995) were used for our adolescent population ( $\alpha = .86$ ). The SEQ has been used in a number of occupational and educational contexts; and it has been translated and used extensively cross-culturally (Shupe et al., 2002). Fitzgerald and her

colleagues report high reliability (alpha) for the SEQ (.81-.92) across a variety of samples (Schneider, Swan, & Fitzgerald, 1997). The SEQ items cluster into three subscales, which have also demonstrated high reliability: Gender harassment, unwanted sexual attention, and sexual coercion (Gelfand, Fitzgerald, & Drasgow, 1995). *Gender harassment* refers to behaviors that convey sexist and degrading attitudes toward women. Crude sexual remarks, stereotypic comments about women's competence or abilities, or obscene gestures are examples. *Unwanted sexual attention* includes offensive touching, stroking or fondling, asking personal questions of a sexual nature, or repeated requests for dates or sex. *Sexual coercion* includes sexual bribery (offering a reward or threatening punishment as a means of obtaining sexual favors) and sexual assault.

#### *School-Related Variables*

A scale comprised of six items developed by Bowen and Richman (1995) was used to measure general *School Satisfaction* (I enjoy going to this school, I like the classes I am taking, etc. (alpha = .74, range=6-12)). Thirteen items developed by Hanisch and Hulin (1991) to measure reactions to work stress were modified in order to capture school-related stress. A factor analysis of the items resulted in two factors that were subsequently converted to scales: *School Avoidance*--e.g., Made excuses to miss school or class, Went to school late—with a 0-24 range, and *Academic Withdrawal*--e.g., Did not work to the best of my ability, Spent time day-dreaming or doodling in class—with a range of 0-12. Alpha coefficients for these scales were .76, and .81, respectively. Students' *Grades* were determined through self report ("What is your overall grade average this year?").

#### *Health and Well-Being*

Physical Health and Mental Health were based on items derived from Bowen and Richman's School Success Profile (1995). The former scale (range=5-15), comprised of five items, inquired whether students had experienced one or more problems (e.g., trouble sleeping, headache, etc.) in the last seven days. The latter five-item scale (range=0-10) asked students how often in the last week they felt successful, lonely, sad, or confident, felt like crying or were pleased with themselves. *Self Esteem* (range=4-12) was created by combining four items (e.g., I feel positive about myself, I have a number of good qualities) developed by Bowen and Richman (1995). Alpha coefficients for the above three scales are .83, .86, and .87, respectively. *Post-traumatic Stress* (Trauma Symptoms) developed by Dyregrov and Yule (1995) was created by combining eight survey items (range=0-32). Students were asked to evaluate the impact of a sexual harassment experience they identified as the most upsetting to them. Students rated their most upsetting incident on a four point Likert scale using the following questions: I thought about it when I didn't mean to; I tried to remove it from my memory; I had waves of strong feelings about it; I stayed away from reminders of it; I tried not to talk about it; Pictures of it popped into my mind; Other things kept making me think of it; I tried not to think about it (alpha = .91).

#### *Work-Related Outcomes*

Several scales developed by Bowen and Richman (1995) were modified to tap work stress and work relationships. *Work Stress* was a scale based on eight items (range=8-24 where students were asked to describe what their job was like (e.g., hectic, tense, relaxed, hassled) most of the time. Nine items inquiring what their manager/supervisor was like most of the time (e.g., hard to please, tactful, interferes with my work) were scaled to measure *Supervisor Satisfaction* (range=9-27). *Coworker Satisfaction* (range=0-12) measured relations with coworkers and was

tapped by six items that were summed (I trust those in my workplace, I am able to confide in my coworkers). Alpha coefficients for the above three scales are .73, .85, and .77, respectively.

Reactions to job stress were assessed by items developed by Hanisch and Hulin (1991). Four items were summed to create *Job Withdrawal*--e.g., tried to find another job, thought about leaving my job (alpha=.89, range=0-12).

### *Control Variables*

Adolescents who work may not see their employment as a significant source of self identity since school activities, peers, and familial relationships compete for their attention. In response to the questionnaire item, "How important is this job to your identity?" only 22 % of the girls believed that their job was important to their identity while more than twice that number (54%) said that it had little or no relevance. For this reason, Job Identity was used as a control variable in the regression analyses. Also, since students' academic performance is correlated significantly with other school outcomes--absenteeism, satisfaction with school, attitudes towards teachers (Bowen & Richman, 1995)-- it seemed important to use Grades as a control variable as well.

### *Data Analysis*

The analysis consists of two parts. First, the percentage of teenage girls with jobs in the formal economy ("wage earners") who experienced sexual harassment were compared to figures for adult women workers found in published research. Since no adults were included in this sample, direct comparisons of harassment rates between teenagers and adults could not be made. However, there are studies of adult women that used the SEQ and thereby provide a basis for a rough comparison. Such a comparison is important because it attempts to answer an important question: Do teenage girls experience lower or higher rates of harassment than adult women?

The second part of the analysis employs difference of means tests (t-tests) and regression analysis to determine differences in outcomes between sexually harassed and non-harassed employed teenagers. *Higher scores reflect poorer outcomes* (e.g., lower grades, self esteem and job identity, poorer health, less satisfaction) for all variables. Because a fairly large number of statistical comparisons were conducted, significance levels were adjusted using Bonferroni's correction (Uitenbrock, 1997).

## Results

### *Sexual Harassment Experiences*

When asked whether or not they worked outside of school, over half of the students (58%) said that they did. All of the working teenagers indicated that they were employed part-time. Most of the girls who worked were under age eighteen (72%) and were employed mostly in two broad categories of the formal wage economy--restaurant service jobs (44%) and retail sales (36%). About two-thirds described their workplace as having as many if not more women than men. More than 52% of the girls reported that they had experienced some form of sexual harassment during the past year at their jobs. An analysis of their "most upsetting" harassment experience revealed that more than half (56%) of the perpetrators were coworkers, while supervisors and vendors/customers accounted equally for the remainder. A large majority of the perpetrators were older than the girls, with nearly half (46%) described as older than 30.

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Table 1 about here  
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Table 1 compares the rate of sexual harassment of teenage girls in this study to nine samples of employed women which used the Sexual Experiences Questionnaire to collect

information on their experiences. The results indicate that girls had significantly higher harassment percentages in six comparisons and a significantly lower percentage in one. Federal court employees had the same percentage as the girls. Both groups in Cortina and Wasti (2005)—factory workers and university professionals—had significantly lower levels of harassment, as did attorneys in another study by Cortina (Cortina & Lim, 2005). All three groups in Richman et al. (1999)—service and maintenance workers, clerical staff, and employed college students—likewise had much lower harassment rates than the sample of working teenagers. Both utility workers and university faculty and staff had higher levels of harassment than the teenage sample, though only the latter was significant.

The comparisons also reveal that the girls experienced significantly higher levels of both gender harassment (GH) and unwanted sexual attention (USA). Forty-seven percent of the teenage workers experienced GH, and 38% reported USA. The comparable figures for adults were significantly lower. Though differences between working girls and working women in sexual coercion are not statistically reliable because of the small number of teenage girls who reported such experiences, the figures are provocative nonetheless. Working teenage girls experienced as much if not more sexual coercion than the women in Richman's (Richman et al., 1999) study. For example, employed college students—the group probably most similar to the working teenagers in terms of age—experienced considerably less.

### *The Impact of Sexual Harassment*

The analyses of impact focused on three types of outcomes—health, work-related, and school-related—and their relationship to sexual harassment. In this study two types of analysis were conducted. First, t-tests were performed on each of eleven outcomes. Then, regression analysis was conducted for the outcomes, using Job Identity and Grades as control variables. The

hierarchical analysis in this regard involved first entering Grades, then Job Identity and, finally, sexual harassment for each outcome.

#### *Sexual Harassment and Health Outcomes*

Results in Table 2 suggest that workplace sexual harassment does not significantly impact teenage girls' health and well-being. Both the physical and mental health scores of sexually harassed girls are fairly similar to those of their non-harassed peers. Also, harassed girls had levels of self esteem and post-traumatic stress that were comparable to their non-harassed peers.

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Table 2 about here  
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#### *Sexual Harassment and Work-Related Outcomes*

Girls who had been sexually harassed at work were different in several ways from their non-harassed peers. A perusal of t-tests that were statistically significant reveals that harassed girls experienced greater work stress and lower satisfaction with their coworkers and supervisors. They were also more apt to think about leaving their jobs. With the exception of coworker satisfaction, the impact of these variables was also found in the regression analyses: job withdrawal, work stress, and supervisor satisfaction were significant.

#### *Sexual Harassment and School-Related Outcomes*

Do adolescents' work experiences impact their attitudes toward school? Specifically, do teenagers who were sexually harassed on their jobs feel less satisfied with and connected to school than their non-harassed counterparts? The data suggest that there is a modest connection between workplace harassment and school life. In particular, regression analyses show that



sexually harassed teenagers had significantly higher levels of school avoidance and academic withdrawal than other employed teenagers. Other school-related aspects (satisfaction with school or school work, or thoughts of leaving school) were not significantly related to workplace sexual harassment.

### Discussion

In this preliminary study, a little more than half of the teenagers experienced some form of sexual harassment at their place of employment. These findings showed that when compared to research on adult women, teenage girls not only experienced more harassment but also that it occurred in a shorter time period. Only Richman's (1999) study provided the basis for comparing the three sub-types of sexual harassment, but the results are compelling. The girls in this study reported experiencing significantly higher levels of gender harassment (47%) than women in all three of Richman's samples (29%, 27%, and 29%, respectively). Similarly, the percentages of those who experienced unwanted sexual attention among the three occupational groups studied by Richman (15%, 14%, and 10%) were significantly lower than the figure for teens (38%). Though a statistical analysis on sexual coercion could not be calculated because of the small number of girls in this category (5%), the figures are nonetheless disturbing. The percentages for sexual coercion in Richman's three samples--5% of service workers, 3% of clerical workers, and 1% of college student workers—are comparable to these findings (5%). This study and Richman's used a one-year (last 12 months) time frame. In contrast, Schneider and her colleagues (1997) and Cortina and Wasti (2005) used "last 24 months", and Linn and Cortina (2005) used "5 years" as time frames.

These findings may seem somewhat predictable given that teenagers are young, single, and have low job status. All three factors are cited in the research literature as strong and

consistent predictors of sexual harassment victimization. It is surprising, however, that the teenagers experienced significantly higher levels of harassment than adults given that they all described their jobs as part-time. It is especially troubling that the girls experienced levels of sexual coercion that were comparable to those of fully-employed adult women.

The results of our analyses with regard to outcomes suggest that sexual harassment's impact on attitudes and behavior centers around work—i.e., the site of these experiences—and has a smaller relationship to other contexts (school) or overall functioning (health). The closest parallels between sexual harassment and adverse outcomes for women and the results for the teenagers is for work behavior and attitudes. Girls who were sexually harassed experienced more work stress and less satisfaction with their supervisors as well as a greater desire to leave their jobs than other employed peers. Similar relationships are found among women in the military (Fitzgerald, Drasgow, & Magley, 1999), university faculty and staff (Schneider, Swan, & Fitzgerald, 1997) and private sector employees (Fitzgerald et al., 1997). So, the girls in this study experienced a fairly high level of harassment given the limited number of hours they worked and it appears that they experienced some of the negative job-related outcomes that adult women do.

Apart from job-related outcomes, the study results contrast with a considerable research literature cited earlier that finds that workplace sexual harassment is a source of low self esteem, psychological distress, and health problems for adult women (Fitzgerald et al., 1997; Schneider, Swan, & Fitzgerald, 1997). Also, while research has found that sexual harassment at school has detrimental effects on the psychological and physical health of girls (e.g., AAUW, 2001) the results of this study indicate that the overall mental health and health risks of workplace sexual harassment for teenagers are fairly small. This outcome may also reflect the fact that there were

few girls in the sexual coercion category which is usually perceived as a more severe behavior. It may be that girls' health and well-being is protected to some degree from the potentially adverse effects of sexual harassment by academic success, or that access to resources for this fairly advantaged population may also minimize the link to negative outcomes. Also, given the previously cited literature on health outcomes and sexual harassment at school, it is likely that experiences at school—relationships with peers and teachers, engagement in school activities—have greater saliency for girls' well-being than their jobs, especially when most girls feel little attachment to them. Besides low job identity expressed by most girls, a majority stated that the job was not important financially (64%) and they did not pay their own expenses (62%). Even among the girls who said that their job was financially important or that they paid their own expenses, sexual harassment was not related to any of the health outcomes (analysis not shown).

The girls, however, were not entirely immune from the adverse outcomes from sexual harassment beyond their jobs. There were significant relationships between girls' experiences with sexual harassment and school avoidance and academic withdrawal. Teenagers who were harassed at work did not find school as exciting or engaging as other classmates. In this regard, educators should be concerned about the potential impact of a spillover of workplace harassment experiences because students who are avoiding school, daydreaming in class, and receiving lower grades may find their full career potential threatened or at the very least impeded.

### *Practice Implications*

The lessons that adolescent employment might promote, such as responsibility, punctuality, and skill development (Moskowitz, 2000), may be negated in two ways by the experience of sexual harassment during employment in high school.. First, student interest in school and education in general may be negatively impacted and second, the level of academic

performance that leads to scholarships and rewards for certain career paths may be inhibited. Girls especially may suffer from negative early employment experiences, particularly if they are socialized to expect that this type of behavior is tolerated by others around them. Female students already experience sexual harassment from peers on a frequent basis at school and experiencing sexual harassment from coworkers and adult supervisors at work may normalize these behaviors even more. Low expectations for work may block girls' future career goals and income expectations particularly when jobs are already compromised by sex discrimination.

In addition, although findings from this study suggest that overall health risks of workplace sexual harassment for teenagers are low, this may not accurately reflect health risks involving physical safety. The USMSPB (1995) estimates that over a two year period approximately 12,000 female federal workers were sexually assaulted (rape or attempted rape) by supervisors or coworkers. The fact that girls, working part time jobs, experienced sexual coercion at rates equal to adult females who work full time flags this as an area for concern.

School administrators may want to include training on discrimination in the work environment or create opportunities for school personnel to question and explore an adolescent's negative work experience and the possible impact on academic performance. Also, integrating sexual harassment information with teen work safety issues is a positive way to help teenagers protect themselves. In order to fully inform teenagers of their rights as workers, the EEOC has begun an education campaign that covers these issues. A website (<http://youth.eeoc.gov>) devoted to teenage workplace issues can be accessed through the EEOC main webpage and gives advice to teenagers for handling workplace problems. School newspapers, bulletin boards and websites are other ways to distribute this critical information. Dissemination of information about teenage worker's rights should occur in courses required for graduation to ensure that all students are

accessed and informed. Businesses may need to conduct more training regarding sexual harassment and safety at work particularly if they employ adolescents on a regular basis.

### *Limitations*

This sample was drawn from a single school with a predominately White, suburban population and addressed only girls' experiences. Since girls and women of color have been found by some researchers (Buchanan, 2005; Martin, 1994) to experience higher levels of harassment at work and at school, it is possible that figures in this study underreport the amount and type of harassment that working teenagers experience. Also, low-income students may have a greater need for the money they earn and, similar to economically vulnerable adult women, consequently are forced to endure more sexual harassment. The relatively small size of our sample limited our ability to perform analyses on subcategories of employed teenagers (e.g., compare the experiences of girls in different age brackets, or by race. Because this sample did not include adult women comparisons had to be inferred between teenagers and adults by using figures from existing published research studies that used different time frames for collecting information on sexual harassment. Also, this cross-sectional study did not allow for exploration of processes that lead to work or school avoidance nor does it allow for monitoring of the health and school-related effects of on-going harassment.

### *Future Research*

Further research on adolescents' work experience should focus on the relationship sexual harassment has with academic performance and career development. Longitudinal studies may be helpful in examining long-term work-related outcomes or career decisions students make in relation to experiencing sexual harassment on initial jobs during high school. There is still little information regarding how sexual harassment experienced during a first job affects the social

and emotional development of both boys and girls. Studies that include teenage boys as victims are also needed. Additionally, risk factors affecting teenage worker safety need to be investigated so that teenage workers are more protected (Fitzgerald,1993; Runyon et al., 2005). Some states have adopted work rules that prohibit teenage workers from working alone, particularly during night hours, due to recent assaults, robberies and murders that have occurred (Lewis, 2006; Runyon et al., 2005).

### Conclusion

Teenagers' work experiences and the possibility of sexual harassment on the job should be an important issue acknowledged by educators, practitioners, parents, and community business leaders who employ adolescents. Although student psychological well-being was not shown to be adversely affected in this preliminary study, other areas for concern have been raised (i.e., effects on school performance, academic outcomes, stress from work, and physical safety). In addition, concerns for girls' physical safety at work may require more scrutiny since comparisons with studies of adult women show that girls experienced higher rates of sexual harassment than the adult women. Since the majority of U.S teenagers now work while attending high school, it would appear critical that both male and female teenagers receive training to deal with sexual assault, sexual harassment, and other types of workplace violence and that school performance of working adolescents be closely monitored.

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Table 1

*Percentage of Girls and Women Experiencing Sexual Harassment (rounded)*

	(n=)	Overall	GH <sup>a</sup>	USA	SC	Difference of Proportions ( $\chi^2$ ) <sup>b</sup>		
						Overall	GH	USA
Teens	(106)	52%	47	38	5			
Adult Women								
<i>Cortina &amp; Wasti (2005)</i>								
Factory workers (food manufacturing plant)	(447)	36				9.07 **		
University faculty & staff	(240)	37				6.63 **		
<i>Lim &amp; Cortina (2005)</i>								
Federal court employees <sup>c</sup>	(883)	52				0.98		
Attorneys	(1,425)	27				29.85 **		
<i>Richman et al. (1999)</i>								
Service & maintenance workers	(105)	27	29	15	5	14.06 **	7.75 **	14.70 **
Clerical staff	(427)	31	27	14	3	16.41 **	16.27 **	33.54 **
Employed college students	(428)	31	29	10	1	15.13 **	12.81 **	52.54 **
<i>Schneider et al. (1997)</i>								
Public utility workers	(447)	67				8.37 **		
University faculty & staff	(300)	63				4.03 *		

<sup>a</sup> GH= Gender Harassment, USA=Unwanted Sexual Attention, SC=Sexual Coercion. <sup>b</sup> Comparisons are drawn between the working teens and adults in four studies in terms of overall harassment (1<sup>st</sup> column), Gender Harassment (2<sup>nd</sup> column), and Unwanted Sexual Attention (3<sup>rd</sup> column). Difference of proportions tests could not be calculated for Sexual Coercion because of the low number of teens in this category. <sup>c</sup> The majority of employees were secretaries and administrative support staff. \* p<.05 \*\* p<.01

Table 2

*Outcomes for Harassed and Non-Harassed Wage-Earning Girls (N=106)*

Outcomes <sup>d</sup>	Sexually Harassed? <sup>a</sup>				Regression <sup>b</sup>									Total R <sup>2</sup>	F <sup>c</sup>
	No		Yes		Step 1			Step 2			Step 3				
	M	SD	M	SD	$\beta$	SE	R <sup>2</sup>	$\beta$	SE	$\Delta R^{2\ e}$	$\beta$	SE	$\Delta R^{2\ f}$		
<u>Health</u>															
Self Esteem	6.4	2.2	6.5	2.3	.23	.19	.050*	.12	.20	.013	.04	.46	.005	.068	2.28
Trauma Symptoms	19.9	7.9	20.8	8.2	.13	.24	.018	.06	.24	.003	.10	.73	.002	.024	1.62
Physical Health	8.2	2.3	8.8	2.3	.36	.21	.129**	.05	.22	.003	.04	.41	.001	.133	4.56**
Mental Health	6.6	1.4	6.9	1.5	.23	.12	.051*	.07	.13	.006	.05	.27	.005	.062	2.07
<u>Work Outcomes</u>															
Job Withdrawal	2.1	1.8	4.1	3.1**	.26	.28	.068**	.22	.38	.047*	.22	.44	.070**	.189	7.08**
Work Stress	11.7	4.6	14.6	5.9**	.13	.46	.016	.14	.49	.016	.23*	.79	.057*	.088	2.88*
Supervisor Satis	11.9	3.5	14.7	4.9**	.12	.39	.014	.22	.39	.052*	.24	.66	.083**	.149	5.13**
Coworker Satis	4.1	3.2	6.6	3.8*	.11	.42	.012	.12	.38	.013	.19	.71	.039*	.063	2.04

School Outcomes

School Avoidance	6.9	4.3	9.1	4.8*	.44	.16	.195**	.04	.43	.002	20*	.36	.037*	.234	9.39**
Aca Withdrawal	5.0	2.4	6.5	3.3*	.43	.13	.182**	.05	.27	.003	.14	.30	.013*	.198	7.39**
School Satis	9.1	1.6	9.5	1.6	.47	.15	.216**	.04	.26	.002	.04	.27	.005	.223	8.57**

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<sup>a</sup> Tests of significance are based on t-tests. <sup>b</sup> Hierarchical regressions were performed for each outcome with grades entered first, followed by job identity, and then sexual harassment. <sup>c</sup> F values are for equations with grades, job identity, and sexual harassment and each outcome. <sup>d</sup> Higher scores reflect poorer outcomes (e.g., low self esteem, poor health, more work stress, or less satisfaction with supervisors or school), lower grades, and less job identity. <sup>e</sup> Incremental R<sup>2</sup> value when job identity is entered into the equation with grades. <sup>f</sup> Incremental R<sup>2</sup> value when sexual harassment is entered into the equation with grades and job identity. \*  $p < .010$  (.05 with Bonferroni's correction). \*\*  $p < .008$  (.01 with Bonferroni's correction).



