

“Everyone Is Doing It”: When Did Teenage Peer Sexual Harassment Become “Normal”?



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Introduction

A disturbing trend involves the ambivalence of students towards actions and behaviors of sexual harassment that they consider “normal”.

Purpose

Explore perceptions among teens concerning acceptance of peer-peer sexually implicit actions and behaviors.

Overview of the Issue

- Approximately 75% of students state they have experienced sexual harassment within a school environment
- Theories suggest why sexual harassment relates to different developmental and societal influences including cultural, structural, biological, development, and abuse of power
- Victims of sexual harassment often feel embarrassed, labeled, or afraid if they speak up
- Prevention programs and recommendations are crucial to create a safe environment

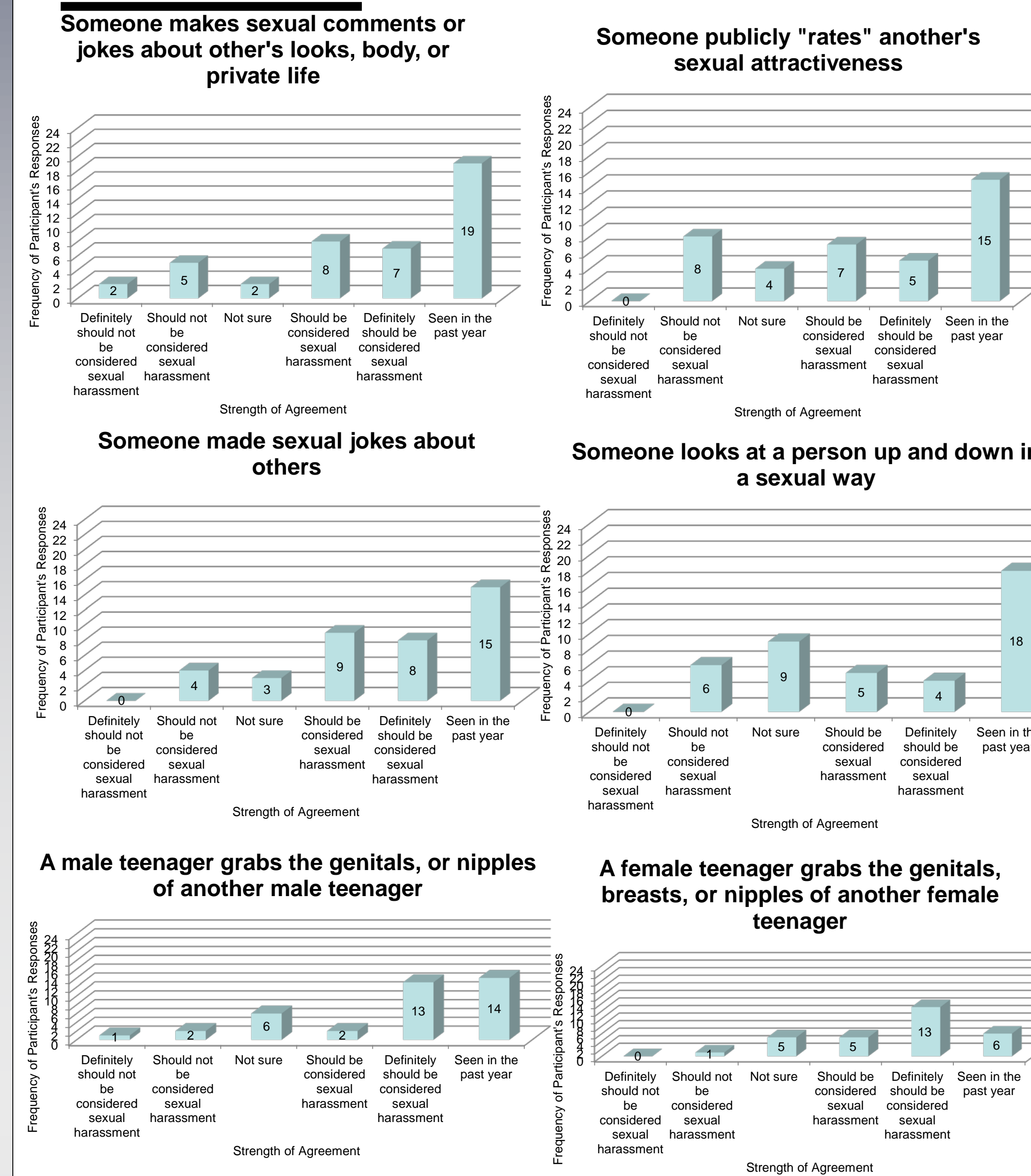
Objectives

- Identify the prevalence and incidence of sexual harassment occurring in schools
- Define sexual harassment and peer to peer sexually implicit actions and behaviors among teens
- List attitudes and behaviors concerning peer to peer sexual implicit actions or behavior among teens
- Suggest interventions for prevention and suggest policy changes for schools to address the issue of peer to peer sexual harassment

Procedures

- IRB approval.
- Target Group- high school students attending local public high schools.
- Focus Groups

Results



Main Findings

- *When asked what is sexual harassment, several students said they barely knew and no one ever clearly defines it for them*
- *All students said their understanding of sexual harassment is not sufficient*
- Students said they have discussed sexual harassment in class between 7th-10th grade
- Many students said their sexual education was taught by an instructor from an outside program

Findings cont.

- Students said they want better programs on sexual education, prevention tips, and a better understanding of sexual harassment

Conclusions

Students need to be better informed about the legal definition of sexual harassment and specific behaviors included in the definition.

Recommendations

- Training courses in junior high and high schools
- Creating educational components about the value of human rights
- Conducting the study asking questions with more cultural wording
- Separating out the focus groups by gender
- Recruiting from junior high through college to see trends and changes

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