



# RISE UP

## INTERNS, THEIR WORKPLACE RIGHTS, AND THE TOOLS TO END SEXUAL HARASSMENT

**W**ith the rise of the #MeToo and #TimesUp movements, now more than ever, individuals are empowering each other to defend their right to live free of sexual violence and harassment—and the world is paying attention. In recent months, stronger policies have been adopted for the protection of employees, clearer channels created for individuals to report harassment, and stricter repercussions demanded for the perpetrators of these acts. Every year, 150 million people intern in the United States: young people whom the Co-chairs of the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) Task Force on Sexual Harassment explain may be less aware of laws and more susceptible to harassment.<sup>1</sup> Yet, little research has been devoted to the impact of sexual harassment on interns, and few resources exist specifically for them.

This document shares new research, offers guidance and resources for those who have experienced or witnessed sexual harassment, and provides opportunities for individuals and organizations to build safe, inclusive, and vibrant workplaces.

According to a 2018 survey conducted of former interns funded by the B.A. Rudolph Foundation: the majority of former interns (82 percent) had been aware of their colleagues experiencing sexual harassment—and half had experienced sexual harassment themselves. This harassment had negative impacts, not just on those who directly experienced the harassment, but also on those who witnessed it. And, while the data show it is all too common to experience or observe harassment, it is much less the norm to know what to do if it happens to you: only a small minority of former interns (18 percent) report they were “completely aware of the anti-sexual harassment policies and the procedures for addressing complaints” at the time of their internship.

### WHO WE ARE

Established in 2011, the B.A. Rudolph Foundation champions the educational and professional development of women for whom a small amount of support makes a significant difference. It envisions a society in which all women, especially women from traditionally underrepresented communities, have equal access to the profession of their choice. The B.A. Rudolph Foundation is committed to the principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

### WHO IS THIS REPORT FOR?

#### **Interns, especially those who identify as women**

so that they understand their workplace rights and know where to go and what to do if they witness or experience sexual harassment.

#### **Organizations that host interns and Allies**

so that they build safe, inclusive, and vibrant workplaces, where all individuals can contribute fully.

## WHAT IS SEXUAL HARASSMENT?

"Sexual harassment is unwelcome behavior that happens to you because of your sex; but for your sex, you would not have been targeted."<sup>3</sup>

A wide range of behavior can be biased, problematic, and unacceptable in the workplace—without being defined as sexual harassment in legal terms. Legally, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) defines sexual harassment in the workplace as:

"unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitute sexual harassment when this conduct explicitly or implicitly affects an individual's employment... [and] interferes with an individual's work performance, or creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work environment."<sup>4</sup>

Generally, there are two broad types of sexual harassment:<sup>5</sup>

1. **Quid pro quo** sexual harassment occurs when an employment decision — like a promotion, an assignment, or even keeping your job — is based on your submission to a request for sexual favors. The conduct can either explicitly or implicitly impact an individual's employment situation.
2. **Hostile work environment** occurs when the behavior makes the work environment intimidating, hostile, or offensive, and interferes with an employee's work performance.

### WHAT ACTIVITIES ARE CONSIDERED SEXUAL HARASSMENT?<sup>6</sup>

This list is not exhaustive, but these are common forms of sexual harassment:

- Making conditions of employment dependent on sexual favors
- Physical acts of sexual assault
- Requests for sexual favors
- Verbal harassment of a sexual nature
- Unwanted touching or physical contact
- Unwelcome sexual advances

## IN HER WORDS

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*"My friend made the decision to never return to the office where she interned. She wasn't the only intern to make that decision either. She may have lost an amazing opportunity to grow professionally because of someone who was supposed to be guiding and supporting her."*  
- 2018 Survey Respondent

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*"It was extremely difficult. The right policies were not in place to protect her."* - 2018 Survey Respondent

### INTERSECTIONALITY, THE DEFINITION OF HARASSMENT AND THIS REPORT'S LIMITATIONS:

Anyone can experience sexual harassment, and the information in this document can be useful to all, though it has limitations. We acknowledge the intersectionality of identities. The United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) considers that harassment can be based on race, color, national origin, religion, age, disability, and sex—the latter of which includes actions against an employee due to sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, genetic information, and pregnancy.<sup>2</sup> Each of these types of harassment, separately and in combination, causes harm. The focus of this document is on sexual harassment against individuals who identify as women, and specifically unpaid female interns, in keeping with the mission of the B.A. Rudolph Foundation to champion the educational and professional development of women. This document does not offer a disaggregated analysis by race, color, ethnicity, national origin, religion, age, disability, sexual orientation, nor gender identity—though these topics and other nuances of identity and intersectionality, deserve further study.

## WHAT ARE THE CONSEQUENCES OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT?

"Workplace harassment affects all workers, and its true cost includes decreased productivity, increased turnover, and reputational harm. All of this is a drag on performance—and the bottom-line."<sup>7</sup>

Sexual harassment in the workplace affects individuals who experience harassment, those who witness it, and also the organization in which the harassment occurs.

**Individuals experiencing harassment**, as well as those witnessing it happening to others, may suffer negative psychological and professional effects. Sexual harassment has been linked to diagnoses such as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder, and can serve to exacerbate existing symptoms or trigger entirely new conditions.<sup>8</sup> Individuals may also stop contributing their voices and ideas to the organizations they represent, or they might leave their positions altogether, inhibiting their professional growth and advancement.

**For organizations**, the consequences of harassment are both financial and reputational. In 2015, the EEOC collected \$164.5 million in payouts for workers filing workplace harassment charges.<sup>9</sup> In addition to these payouts, companies also lose talent when they feel unsafe, unprotected, or unheard.<sup>10</sup> Organizations and even entire industries known for pervasive or permissible harassment suffer reputational harm, and may struggle to attract and retain employees.<sup>11</sup>

In our 2018 survey of former interns, we found that the impact of this harassment—on those who experienced it as well as those who witnessed it—made interns **"feel unsafe and alone in the workplace,"** it **"affected their openness to give opinions,"** made it **"harder to concentrate on working and getting the job done,"** and resulted in **"difficulty completing tasks."**<sup>34</sup> Individuals experiencing harassment, as well as those witnessing it happening to others, may suffer psychological and professional effects including restricting how much they contribute their ideas or leaving the workforce all together.

## HOW COMMON IS SEXUAL HARASSMENT?

Sexual harassment is the most common form of workplace gender-based discrimination.<sup>12</sup>

Statistics on the number of women experiencing sexual harassment vary widely. Various surveys and studies find a quarter, a third, half, or as many as 85 percent of women have been sexually harassed in the workplace over the course of their careers.<sup>13</sup> Some of this discrepancy is likely related to different definitions of sexual harassment; another major challenge in calculating the scope of the problem is that individuals may be reluctant to report incidents. A 2015 survey found that 71 percent of women who were sexually harassed in the workplace did not report the experience.<sup>14</sup> It's not hard to understand why—of employees who reported harassment, three-quarters faced retaliation of some kind, in spite of legal protections for those reporting these crimes.<sup>15</sup>

While there has been limited study on the frequency of sexual harassment on interns, research indicates that “the bigger the power differential in an employment relationship, the greater the risk of sexual harassment.”<sup>16</sup> Interns are especially vulnerable given the temporary nature of their employment, the entry level positions they hold, and their limited time in the workforce.

In our 2018 survey of former interns, we found that more than **4 in 5 former interns (82 percent) who identify as female report they have been aware of their colleagues experiencing sexual harassment**<sup>35</sup>—most commonly against female colleagues in their mid 20s. Half of former interns had experienced sexual harassment themselves.

Nearly 750,000 female interns annually<sup>36</sup> so, based on the Foundation’s findings, an estimated 615,000 women entering the workforce this summer may witness sexual harassment as they launch their careers and more than 400,000 will experience it themselves.

## WHAT WORKPLACE RIGHTS DO INTERNS HAVE?

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*“As I have gotten older, I am more apt to call out inappropriate behavior directed toward me or others, especially when others are younger and not as comfortable with speaking out for fear of backlash.”*  
- 2018 Survey Respondent

Young employed women (under 35) are 12 percentage points more likely to say they have experienced sexual harassment at work than women 35-44.<sup>17</sup>

Interns, often younger and less professionally experienced than others in the workplace, have little situational power in the office. They may not have the same rights as others in the workplace if they are unpaid, and they may also be less likely to be aware of the rights they do have and to defend them—especially those who are new to navigating workplace dynamics and fear how speaking up could impact their career advancement.

Interns, especially those who are unpaid, may not have the same rights as others in the workplace. They may not be covered by protections of federal laws, such as Title VII which prohibits sex discrimination in the workplace, or Title IX which covers sex discrimination in education. State policies may also leave interns out.

- **Federal Civil Rights Law:** EEOC interprets the law as an “employee” to those who are paid, which means that in many states unpaid interns can not access protections under Title VII, including against sexual harassment.<sup>18</sup> If interns are paid, they are protected by Civil Rights law in the same way as employees.
- **State law:** Harassment laws differ by state in severity and specificity, and in whether employment laws apply to unpaid interns. While some states, including California, Connecticut, Maryland, and Oregon, as well as the District of Columbia, have passed legislation specifically addressing this loophole, in other states unpaid interns are not covered under standard employment laws, which makes them prime targets for harassment.

- **Non-Disclosure Agreements (NDAs):** In some work environments, particularly in government, interns may be asked to sign NDAs to protect the offices in which they serve. While these NDAs do not prohibit anyone from reporting sexual harassment, young interns who lack experience with these and similar documents may be led to believe that signing an NDA means they are not allowed to disclose anything. The language of these documents is often unclear about what they can and cannot report.

In our 2018 survey of former interns, we found that interns may not know their workplace rights. Less than one in five (18 percent) interns report they were “completely aware of the anti-sexual harassment policies and the procedures for addressing complaints.”

## WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I WITNESS OR EXPERIENCE SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN THE WORKPLACE?

When harassment does occur, individuals must decide whether to report the incident, whether or not a formal reporting structure has been established by the organization and shared with the individuals who work there. The pressure to foster and maintain relationships with employers exists for all employees, but may be greater for interns who feel the need to protect themselves at the launch of their careers.<sup>19</sup> We encourage interns to:

- **Be clear** with the harasser that the behavior is unacceptable and inappropriate.
- **Document** by keeping a record of events, things that were said, possible witnesses, and dates. When possible, take photographs of things that make you uncomfortable.<sup>20</sup>
- **Identify the point of contact** in your office for sexual harassment complaints and request guidance from them on how to move forward. You can **talk with a superior** in the office whom you trust<sup>21</sup> and also **consult your employee handbook** for company-specific sexual harassment policy and complaint procedures.<sup>22</sup>
- **Find support** in a therapist, friend, family member, or co-worker with whom you feel safe and comfortable. You can also call the National Sexual Assault Hotline at 800.656.HOPE or [chat online](#).
- **Use existing resources** from the American Association of University Women, the National Women's Law Center, the Powershift Project at the Freedom Forum Institute, RAINN, the Women's Bar Association, and the Women in Government Relations which have information on how to respond to sexual harassment in the workplace.
- **Utilize university resources**, especially the Title IX Coordinator. Schools and universities are required to protect their students from discrimination, including sexual harassment, that occurs during or interferes with educational programs, including internships.<sup>23</sup> By law, schools must act to end harassment they are aware of.<sup>24</sup>
- **Meet with the EEOC** to discuss the situation, find more resources, and discuss next steps. [Find an EEOC office](#).

### SEXUAL VIOLENCE IS A FORM OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT

If you have experienced sexual assault, call the Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network's National Sexual Assault Hotline, at 800.656.HOPE (4673) to be connected with a trained staff member from a sexual assault service provider in your area. This resource is free, confidential, and available 24/7.

While there are many resources available and suggested actions above, “if you feel unsafe or can no longer emotionally tolerate your environment, you should feel comfortable walking away. Remember that no job is worth risking your health and safety.”<sup>25</sup>

If you decide to file a lawsuit or complaint:

- **Learn about deadlines**, which vary by state, but are usually 180-300 days from the date of the incident.<sup>26</sup> Some employers, including the U.S. Senate and U.S. House of Representatives on Capitol Hill, have even shorter deadlines (some as short as 10 days); be sure to check with the [Office of Compliance](#).
- **File complaint with EEOC**. This is required before filing a lawsuit.<sup>27</sup>
- **File a lawsuit** and consider contacting the National Women's Law Center's [Time's Up Legal Defense Fund](#).
- **Know that retaliation is against the law**.

## ALLIES AND ORGANIZATIONS

“Even if you've never experienced sexual harassment or sexual violence, there is almost a guarantee that you know someone that has.”<sup>28</sup>

- **Ask questions** of your employers and colleagues that clarify current policies and that promote a harassment-free workplace.
- **Speak up**. If you witness harassment, “a simple comment like, ‘That is making me uncomfortable,’ can show the harasser and the person being harassed that you’re aware of what just happened.”<sup>29</sup> A colleague can also file a claim on their own behalf, if witnessing harassment creates a hostile work environment.
- **Ask first**. Before reporting an incident you've observed to HR, be sure to talk directly to the person being affected: “Check on how she is doing and say, ‘I would like to take some action of the following kind.’ Whether it’s alerting a supervisor or going to HR, take her lead.”<sup>30</sup> An ally might also offer to accompany the impacted intern to HR to file a complaint.
- **Advocate for education**. Ask if your place of work has anti-harassment trainings available in place.<sup>31</sup> If not, request they be provided—or, if it’s in your role, create them.
- **Put policies in place**. Draft clear NDA language that makes it obvious signers are not waiving rights to report sexual harassment and other discrimination. Consider unpaid interns to be employees with the same rights in dealing with sexual harassment. See extensive resources from the Society for Human Resource Management from compliance to case studies,<sup>32</sup> as well as a sample code of conduct, sample employee agreement, and more from the Purple Campaign.<sup>33</sup>
- **Pay interns**, and provide them protection from sexual harassment, even if Title VII doesn’t require it.

### EFFECTIVE SEXUAL HARASSMENT TRAININGS WILL:

- Clearly define sexual harassment and the related company policy
- Outline employee rights and procedures in reporting an incident
- Be interactive
- Identify company resources for victims to turn to
- Reflect different sources and different formats
- Use inclusive language (such as harassment based on sexual orientation and gender identity, as well as harassment against men)<sup>37</sup>

## METHODOLOGY

In the spring of 2018, the B.A. Rudolph Foundation surveyed former recipients of its internship scholarship: 57 women who had held internship positions within the past seven years. Survey questions were designed by the staff of the B.A. Rudolph Foundation and were informed by a focus group of 5 former internship scholarship recipients. The women who received the survey held summer internships in academia (n=7), nonprofits (n=25), the government (n=23) and the private sector (n=2) as undergraduate and graduate students. 87.5 percent of scholarship recipients were between the ages of 19 and 25 at the time of their internship. The survey had a response rate of 39 percent, with 22 women responding; of those, 64 percent were undergraduates at the time of their internship and the remainder were recent graduates or in graduate school. The majority of respondents (72 percent) identified as white. The data from the survey were based on self-reported responses, and the survey was a reflexive design. Further, the report was informed by an exhaustive Literature and Landscape Review of the most current research on sexual harassment in the workforce, as well as discussions with key leaders in human resources and gender equity, including the American Association of University Women (AAUW), the National Women's Law Center (which hosts of the Time's Up Legal Defense Fund), the Powershift Project of the Freedom Forum Institute and hosted by the Newseum, the Purple Campaign, the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), Women in Government Relations (WGR), and the Women's March.

## ENDNOTES

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- 2 Nicholas, J. (2017 Feb 13). EEOC issues new harassment guidance. Labor & Employment Perspectives. Retrieved from <https://www.laboremploymentperspectives.com/2017/02/13/eeoc-issues-new-harassment-guidance/>.
- 3 National Women's Law Center. Frequently Asked Questions about Sexual harassment in the Workplace. (2016) Retrieved from: <https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Sexual-Harassment-FAQ.pdf>
- 4 U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. Facts about sexual harassment. Retrieved from <https://www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/publications/fs-sex.cfm>. More broadly, harassment is a form of employment discrimination that violates Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967, (ADEA), and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, (ADA). Harassment is unwelcome conduct that is based on race, color, religion, sex (including pregnancy), national origin, age (40 or older), disability or genetic information. Harassment becomes unlawful where 1) enduring the offensive conduct becomes a condition of continued employment, or 2) the conduct is severe or pervasive enough to create a work environment that a reasonable person would consider intimidating, hostile, or abusive. Anti-discrimination laws also prohibit harassment against individuals in retaliation for filing a discrimination charge, testifying, or participating in any way in an investigation, proceeding, or lawsuit under these laws; or opposing employment practices that they reasonably believe discriminate against individuals, in violation of these laws. For additional information, see <https://www.eeoc.gov/laws/types/harassment.cfm>
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# RISE UP FACT SHEET

## WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I WITNESS OR EXPERIENCE SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN THE WORKPLACE?



### SPEAK UP

Clearly tell the harasser that the behavior is unacceptable and inappropriate.



### DOCUMENT

Keep a record of events, things that were said, possible witnesses, and dates, and when possible take photographs of things that make you uncomfortable.



### TALK

Talk with a superior - it doesn't have to be your internship coordinator or your supervisor, just someone in the office whom you trust.



### KNOW POLICIES

Consult your employee handbook for organization-specific sexual harassment policy and complaint procedures.



### FIND SUPPORT

Find support in a therapist, friend, family member, or co-worker with whom you feel safe or call the National Sexual Assault Hotline at 800.656.HOPE or [chat online](#).



### TELL SCHOOL

Utilize university resources, especially the Title IX Coordinator.



### READ

Read organizational resources including from the National Women's Law Center, the American Association of University Women, the Women's Bar Association, and RAINN.



### MEET EEOC

Meet with the EEOC to discuss the situation, find more resources, and discuss next steps. "Even if you don't want to pursue a complaint, you can speak to an EEOC counselor for insight and resources." [Find an EEOC office.](#)

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES INCLUDE:

**Time's Up Legal Defense Fund:** <https://nwlc.org/times-up-legal-defense-fund/>

**EEOC's What You Should Know:** [https://www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/newsroom/wysk/harassed\\_at\\_work.cfm](https://www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/newsroom/wysk/harassed_at_work.cfm)

**AAUW's Know Your Rights Factsheets:** <https://www.aauw.org/what-we-do/legal-resources/know-your-rights-at-work/workplace-sexual-harassment/employees-guide/>

### IF YOU DECIDE TO FILE A COMPLAINT:

**Learn about deadlines**, which vary by state, but are usually 180-300 days from the date of the incident. Some employers, including the U.S. Senate and U.S. House of Representatives, have even shorter deadlines (some as short as 10 days); be sure to check with the Office of Compliance at <https://www.compliance.gov/>.

**File complaint with EEOC**, which is required before filing a lawsuit.

**File a lawsuit** and consider contacting the National Women's Law Center's Time's Up [Legal Defense Fund](#).

**Know that retaliation is against the law.**

**FOR ADDITIONAL DETAILS AND RESOURCES, PLEASE SEE OUR FULL WHITE PAPER "RISE UP" AT [WWW.BARUDOLPHFOUNDATION.ORG/RISEUP](http://WWW.BARUDOLPHFOUNDATION.ORG/RISEUP)**

# RISE UP FACT SHEET

## WHAT SHOULD ALLIES & ORGANIZATIONS DO TO PREVENT SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN THE WORKPLACE?



### ASK QUESTIONS

Ask your employers and colleagues questions that clarify current policies and that promote a harassment-free workplace.



### SPEAK UP

If you witness harassment, "a simple comment like, 'That is making me uncomfortable,' can show the harasser and the person being harassed that you're aware of what just happened."



### ASK FIRST

Before reporting an incident you've observed to human resources, be sure to talk directly to the person affected: Ask how she is doing and say, 'I would like to take some action of the following kind: Whether it's alerting a supervisor or going to HR, take her lead.'



### WRITE POLICIES

Make sure your organization's policies explicitly state unpaid interns have the same rights as paid employees regarding sexual harassment. Draft non-disclosure agreements that makes it clear signers are not waiving rights to report sexual harassment and other discrimination.



### PAY INTERNS

Pay interns, and provide them protection from sexual harassment, even if Title VII doesn't require it.



### GET TRAINED

Ask if your organization has anti-harassment trainings available in place. If not, request they be provided—or, if it's in your role, create them.



*"If you feel unsafe or can no longer emotionally tolerate your environment, you should feel comfortable walking away. Remember that no job is worth risking your emotional or mental health and safety."*

*- Natalia Marulanda  
The Girl Power Code*

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES INCLUDE:

#### The Office of Compliance's Bystander Training

<https://www.compliance.gov/>

#### The Purple Campaign's Sample Employee Agreement

<https://www.purplecampaign.org/resources/>

#### The Society for Human Resource Management's Workplace Harassment Resources

<https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/hr-topics/employee-relations/pages/workplace-harassment-resources.aspx>

### EFFECTIVE SEXUAL HARASSMENT TRAININGS WILL:

**Clearly define sexual harassment** and the organization's policies regarding sexual harassment

**Outline employee rights and procedures in reporting an incident**

**Be interactive**

**Identify organization resources for victims to turn to**

**Reflect different sources and different formats**

**Use inclusive language** (such as harassment based on sexual orientation and gender identity, as well as harassment against men)

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