



# THE IMPACT OF THE #METOO MOVEMENT ON THE WORKPLACE

## FACT SHEET

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THIS FACT SHEET MADE  
POSSIBLE THANKS TO A GENEROUS GRANT  
FROM THE WILLIAM T. KEMPER FOUNDATION

#MeToo

When the #MeToo hashtag was introduced through social media in October 2017, it was impossible to realize the viral impact it would have. Suddenly, victims of sexual harassment and assault had a platform from which to drive awareness of the situation's widespread prevalence. Now, two years later, what have been the consequences of the Me Too Movement – intended and unintended – especially as they relate to women in the workplace?

According to the EEOC, Workplace Harassment, which is not limited to legally-actionable behavior, is defined as:

“Unwelcome or offensive conduct in the workplace that: (a) is based on sex (including sexual orientation, pregnancy, and gender identity), race, color, national origin, religion, age, disability, and/or genetic information; and (b) is detrimental to an employee's work performance, professional advancement, and/or mental health. This includes, but is not limited to, offensive jokes, slurs, epithets or name-calling, undue attention, physical assaults or threats, unwelcome touching or contact, intimidation, ridicule or mockery, insults or put-downs, constant or unwelcome questions about an individual's identity, and offensive objects or pictures.”(1)

While the Me Too Movement was actually created in 2006 by anti-rape activist, Tarana Burke (2) the Twitter storm began with the introduction of the #MeToo hashtag by Alyssa Milano in October 2017, generating over 19MM tweets in the first 12 months alone. The Me Too Movement ignited the work of activists and advocates who had been working on behalf of survivors of sexual abuse and harassment for many decades. Through this Movement, women – and men – found a way to break through the legal, social, and political barriers that have kept sexual harassment in the background for decades despite it coming to the front in periodic peaks. From Hollywood to Wall Street, and everywhere in between, the public now has a clearer picture of the “sheer universality” of a problem affecting all races, nationalities and socio-economic classes. Because sexual harassment is considered less “egregious” than sexual assault or rape, it has not been well monitored (3).

Findings vary depending on sample size and scope. Four major studies found that **50%-70% of women reported experiencing sexual harassment**. These studies also found **17%-34% of men experienced some form of sexual harassment** (4). Employees of all genders may

have experienced other forms of sexual violence as children, teens or adults. In the U.S., **one in three women, one in six men, and one in two transgender individuals have experienced sexual abuse or assault**.

Victims are reluctant to report sexual harassment for fear of being accused of false allegations, disbelief, retaliation, ostracism, and loss of job or career (5). The underreporting of sexual harassment is a problem. An EEOC study shows **70% of employees never report harassment they experience in the workplace** (1).

Men are also engaging in public and private conversations about sexual harassment and violence. One survey found that many men are “unsettled and confused about how to approach a woman, handle a conversation, or give a compliment.” **Forty-one percent had never heard of the Me Too Movement** (9).

Privately, many men have acknowledged they are uneasy with “being alone with female colleagues, particularly youthful or attractive ones, fearful ... of potential liability” (10). A 2018 survey found that **“nearly half of male managers are uncomfortable participating in common work activities with a woman, and senior-level men are 3½ times more hesitant to have a work dinner with a junior-level woman – and five times more hesitant to travel with one for work – than with a junior-level man** (11). One employment attorney warns that reaction may generate a worse and opposite counter-reaction. He says, “If men avoid working or traveling with women alone or stop mentoring women ...those men are going to back out of a sexual harassment complaint and right into a sex discrimination complaint” (12).

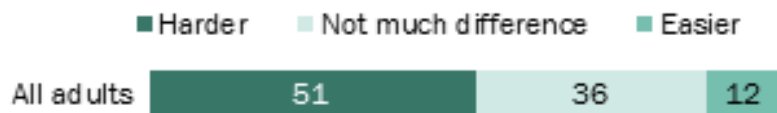
A Pew Research Center poll revealed that **“66 percent of adults 65 and older believe it's now harder for men to navigate workplace interactions.”** The study found that men in positions of authority are increasingly reluctant to “work closely with women,” in some cases declining to hold one-on-one meetings with female employees.” This is not a male-only response. The study went to indicate that **nearly half of both men and women report that increased attention make interactions at work more difficult.** (13).

One thing is clear – we need more trust and understanding across genders if we are to create safe, respectful and productive workplaces that are also gender diverse.

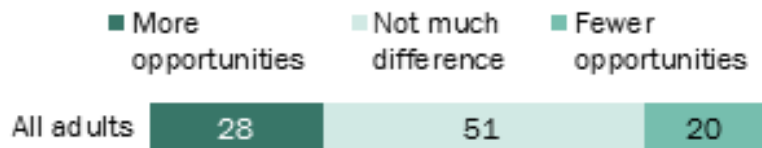
## Mixed views on implications of increased focus on sexual harassment

*% saying the increased focus on sexual harassment and assault ...*

Has made it \_\_\_ for men to know how to interact with women in the workplace



Will lead to \_\_\_ for women in the workplace



Note: Share of respondents who didn't offer an answer not shown.  
 Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Feb. 26-March 11, 2018.  
 "Sexual Harassment at Work in the Era of #MeToo"

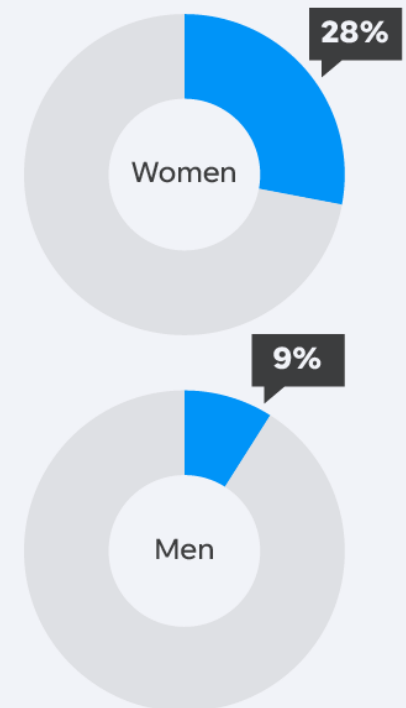
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## By gender

Women are more likely to say that the #MeToo movement will result in improved relations between men and women in the workplace.

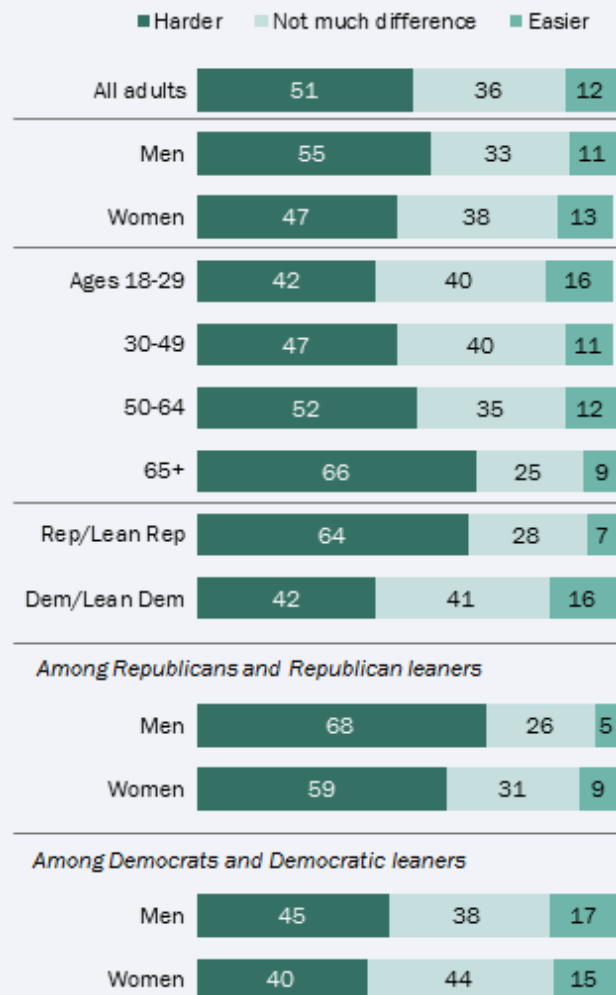


Nearly 1 out of 3 women (28%) say they're sexually harassed at work, while 9% of men say the same.



## About half say increased focus on sexual harassment has made it harder for men to interact with women at work

% saying the increased focus on sexual harassment and assault has made it \_\_\_ for men to know how to interact with women in the workplace



Note: Share of respondents who didn't offer an answer not shown.  
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Feb. 26-March 11, 2018.  
"Sexual Harassment at Work in the Era of #MeToo"

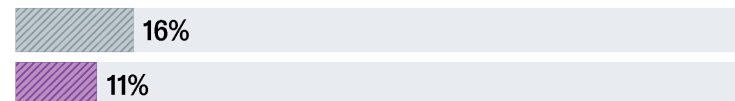
PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Source: Graf, Nikki. "Sexual Harassment at Work in the Era of #MeToo" Pew Research Center. April 4, 2018

<https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2018/04/04/sexual-harassment-at-work-in-the-era-of-metoo/>

Men who agree Women who agree

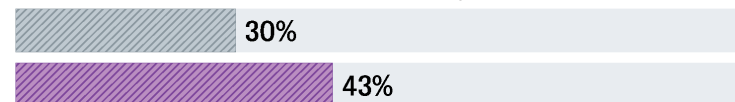
I will/would be more reluctant to hire attractive women.



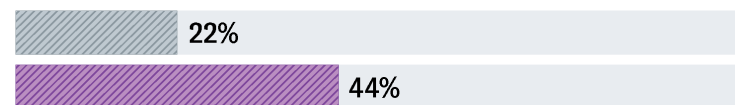
I will be more reluctant to hire women for jobs that require close interpersonal interactions with men (for example, traveling).



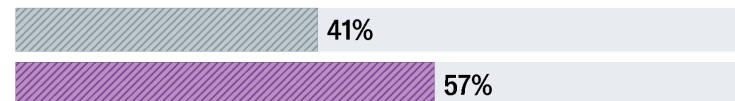
The more women who come forward about sexual harassment, the more likely it will be that men blame women for the problem.



Men in general will be more likely to exclude women from social interactions.



Men in general will be more reluctant to have one-on-one meetings with women with no others present.



Source: "Looking Ahead: How What We Know About Sexual Harassment Now Informs Us of the Future," by Leanne E. Atwater et al. (*Organizational Dynamics*, forthcoming)  
From: "The #MeToo Backlash," September–October 2019

HBR

Tim Bower. "The #MeToo Backlash." Harvard Business Review, September–October 2019.

<https://hbr.org/2019/09/the-metoo-backlash>

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- (2) Brown, Dalvin. "19 million tweets later: A look at #MeToo a year after the hashtag went viral." USA Today, October 13, 2018.
- (3) "The Facts Behind the #MeToo Movement: A National Study on Sexual Harassment and Assault," 2018, as cited on "A New Survey Finds 81 Percent Of Women Have Experienced Sexual Harassment," NPR, February 21, 2018. Survey sponsors: Stop Street Harassment, a nonprofit organization dedicated to making public places safer, and Raliance, a nonprofit organization working to end sexual violence in one generation. This work is also supported by University of California San Diego's Center on Gender Equity and Health (GEH).
- (4) The studies are: 1) 2018 Study on Sexual Harassment and Assault, February 2018, sponsored by Raliance and the UC San Diego Center on Gender Equity and Health. Study conducted by GfK; 2) Gibson, Caitlin and Emily Guskin. "Harassment Concerns on the Rise, Poll Finds." The Washington Post, October 18, 2017: C.9; 3) Bower, Tim. "The #MeToo Backlash," Harvard Business Review, September–October 2019; 4) Graff, Nikki. "Sexual Harassment at Work in the Era of #MeToo," Pew Research Center, April 4, 2018.
- (5) S. G. Smith et al., National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey: 2015 Data Brief (Atlanta, GA: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, May 2018), 2, <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/2015data-brief508.pdf> (accessed May 3, 2019). NOTE: This survey omits prison populations which is why I use an older study as a reference for male victims.
- (6) S. R. Dube et al., "Long-Term Consequences of Childhood Sexual Abuse by Gender of Victim," American Journal of Preventive Medicine 28 (2005): 430–438, <http://www.theannainstitute.org/ACE%20folder%20for%20website/37LTCG.pdf> (accessed March 2019).
- (7) Rebecca Stotzer, "Violence against Transgender People: A Review of United States Data," Aggression and Violent Behavior 14, no. 3 (May–June 2009): 172, [https://www.academia.edu/4513690/Violence\\_against\\_transgender\\_people\\_A\\_review\\_of\\_United\\_States\\_data](https://www.academia.edu/4513690/Violence_against_transgender_people_A_review_of_United_States_data) (accessed May 2019).
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- (10) "Pence Effect': In #MeToo era." Investment News, December 4, 2018.
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- (13) Graff, Nikki. "Sexual Harassment at Work in the Era of #MeToo," Pew Research Center, April 4, 2018.

Additional Resource: "A Reconvening of the Select Task Force on the Study of Harassment in the Workplace," June 11, 2018. [https://www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/task\\_force/harassment/6-11-18.cfm](https://www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/task_force/harassment/6-11-18.cfm)