

# **IN OUR OWN BACKYARD**

## **SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN CONNECTICUT'S PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOLS**

### **Executive Summary**

January, 1995

**Permanent Commission on the Status of Women  
University of Connecticut School of Social Work  
Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services**

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Status of Women**

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**The Connecticut Permanent Commission  
on the Status of Women (PCSW)** is a state  
agency established by the Connecticut  
General Assembly to conduct research,  
advocate and inform public officials and  
the public about the status of women in  
Connecticut.

**For more information contact:**

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**T**his research was conducted for the  
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**Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Ser-  
vices, Inc. (CONNSACS)** is a statewide  
association of individual sexual assault  
crisis programs working to end sexual  
violence through victim assistance, com-  
munity education and legislative action.

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**S**exual harassment is a form of sex discrimination. It is unlawful under Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and Title IX of the 1972 Education Amendments. With the aim of documenting the extent of the problem in this state, and of guiding policy makers and educators toward ensuring a healthy and fair school environment, surveys of students and Title IX Coordinators were implemented during the 1993-94 school year.

The Connecticut Permanent Commission on the Status of Women (PCSW), in association with the University of Connecticut School of Social Work, has completed statewide research assessing the incidence of sexual harassment in the states' high schools.

In conjunction with the student survey, the Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services, Inc., (CONNSACS) surveyed Title IX Coordinators in Connecticut public schools, to obtain their observations and opinions about sexual harassment in the schools.

We found sexual harassment to be pervasive. As a result, we are recommending strategies for addressing the problem in Connecticut schools.

## Key Findings

### Student Survey:

- Unwanted sexual behavior is pervasive among high school students in Connecticut. Seventy-eight (78%) reported at least one experience during their high school years.
- Harassed students indicated feelings of "anger," "embarrassment," "nervousness" and "confusion"; some "skipped school" and said their grades dropped; some "pretended it didn't happen" and some said it "was no big deal".
- Unwanted sexual behavior has been experienced by both genders. Females experience this behavior far more often than males: 92% of females and 57% of males have experienced harassment.
- Thirteen (13) students from the sample schools reported sexual harassment by teachers.
- Forty percent (40%) of students told no one about the unwanted sexual behavior they encountered at school.

### Title IX Coordinator Survey:

- Eighty-one percent (81%) of the reporting Title IX Coordinators received complaints from students who had been harassed; 85% from females, 15% from males.
- A majority of the harassers (76%) were students; 22% of the complaints were about teachers.
- Eighty-five percent (85%) of the complaints were resolved within one month.
- Nearly all (99%) of the districts reporting have sexual harassment policies; there is training for staff in a majority of these schools.
- Twenty-five percent (25%) of reports complained of sexual touching; 1% attempted rape; and 1% completed rape. These behaviors constitute criminal sexual assault.
- Sexual harassment is considered a problem by 50% of Title IX Coordinators in the survey; 37% said it is not a problem.



## Recommendations

**A**s a result of the data pointing to widespread unwanted sexual behavior among students in Connecticut high schools, the PCSW convened a series of meetings with educators and women's advocacy groups to generate and recommend steps to be taken to address the problem. Our recommendations follow:

- I. Schools must make vigorous voluntary efforts to address sexual harassment. Some steps they can take include:
  - A. Develop and implement internal sexual harassment policies which address all forms of sexual harassment including peer to peer harassment, and methods for following up with alleged harassers;
  - B. Develop peer counseling and support centers to encourage students to report sexual harassment when it occurs;
  - C. Provide sexual harassment training for administrators, staff, and students;
  - D. Inform staff and students about resources available for assistance when sexual harassment occurs.
- II. Pursue future strategies to assure high quality training about sexual harassment for teachers and administrators in all schools and to implement other activities to eliminate sexual harassment, with adequate funding and resources.
- III. PCSW will convene a Statewide Sexual Harassment Task Force with a one-year mandate.

The Sexual Harassment Task Force will, by January of 1996, develop and implement a strategic plan for effectively addressing sexual harassment in schools.

The mission of this Task Force will be:

- Identify and publicize model sexual harassment prevention programs in Connecticut;
- Determine methods for creating a climate of zero tolerance for sexual harassment;
- Determine strategies for expanding the commitment of resources for addressing sexual harassment in schools;
- Create an ongoing community dialogue among stakeholders to assist in expanding awareness and knowledge of sexual harassment issues.

Membership in the Sexual Harassment Task Force will include representatives of at least the following organizations:

Permanent Commission on the Status of Women  
Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services  
Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund  
American Association of University Women  
Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents  
Connecticut Education Association  
Connecticut State Federation of Teachers  
Connecticut Association of Boards of Education  
Connecticut State Department of Education  
Connecticut Association of Schools  
Connecticut School Counselors Association  
Connecticut Association of PTO's  
Connecticut Governor's Student Advisory Council  
University of Connecticut School of Social Work

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**PCSW**

*Equality For Women*

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