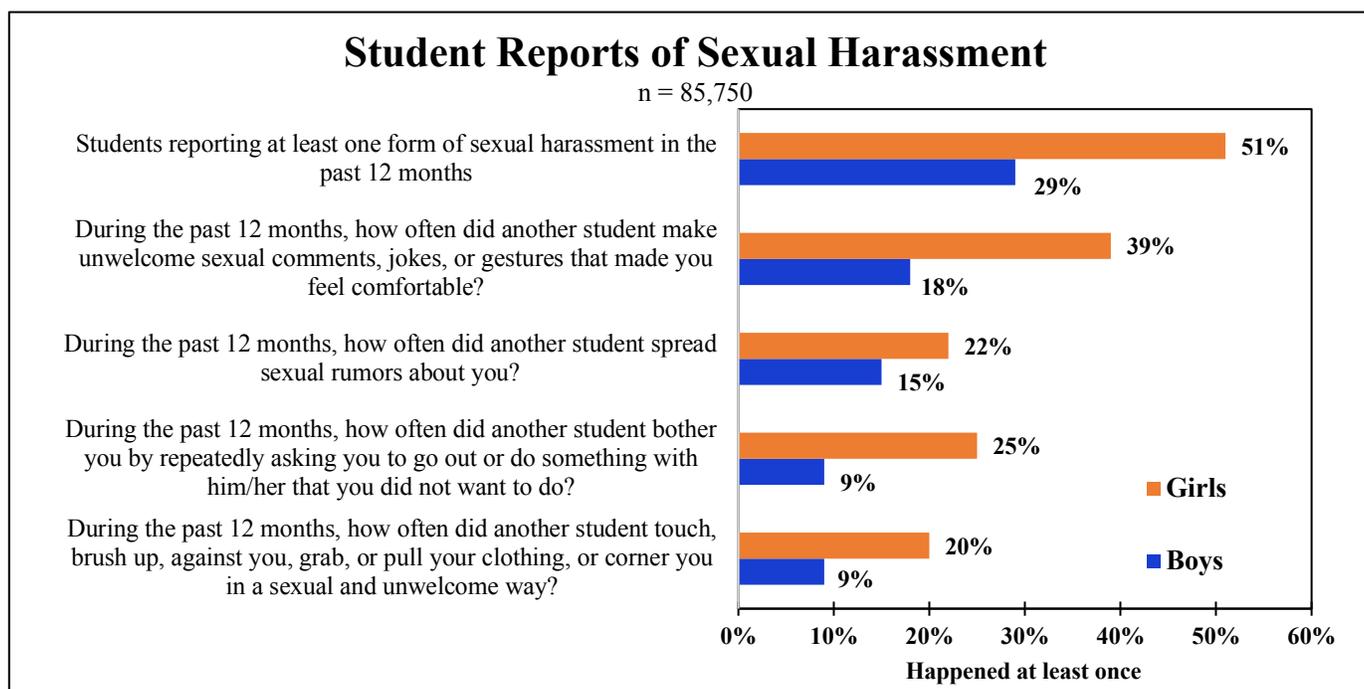


Sexual Harassment Is Pervasive in Virginia High Schools

Sexual harassment has become widely recognized as a major societal concern. In 2011, the U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights issued a Dear Colleague letter reminding schools of their Title IX responsibilities to curb sexual harassment among students <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-201104.pdf>. In 2018, the Virginia General Assembly amended § 22.1-207.1:1 to mandate that Family Life curricula in elementary, middle, and high schools incorporate age-appropriate and evidence-based programs on personal privacy and personal boundaries: “Any high school family life education curriculum offered by a local school division shall incorporate age-appropriate elements of effective and evidence-based programs on the prevention of dating violence, domestic abuse, sexual harassment, and sexual violence....”

The Virginia Secondary School Climate Survey provides information directly relevant to both sexual harassment and teen dating aggression (see Issue 14). The 2018 high school survey found that both male and female students report substantial levels of sexual harassment. The survey was completed by 85,750 students in grades 9 through 12 from 322 public high schools. Four types of sexual harassment were summed into a total score for each student. Overall, 51% of girls and 29% of boys reported at least one form of sexual harassment in the past 12 months. The most common type of harassment was non-physical harassment like comments, jokes, or gestures (39% of girls and 18% of boys). The survey did not assess the severity of each incident.



Practical Suggestions. Schools should educate students about behaviors that are considered sexual harassment, how they can obtain help, and ways to support their peers. A federal Checklist for a Comprehensive Approach to Addressing Harassment is available: <https://ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/checklist.html>. Tips for preventing sexual harassment in schools are available from the National Women’s Law Center: <https://nwc.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/Final%20SH%20Fact%20Sheet-Schools.pdf>.

Study Overview. The Virginia Secondary School Climate Survey was administered in the spring of 2018 as part of the annual School Safety Audit (§ 22.1-279.8.A) by the Virginia Center for School and Campus Safety (VCSCS) in the Department of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS), in cooperation with the Virginia Department of Education. This project was supported by grants #NIJ 2014-CK-BX-0004 and #NIJ 2017-CK-BX-007 awarded to the University of Virginia by the National Institute of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, and recommendations expressed in this report are those of the researchers at the Youth Violence Project of the University of Virginia and do not necessarily reflect those of the U.S. Department of Justice or the Center for School and Campus Safety at the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services. More detailed analyses are available from the Virginia Youth Violence Project: <http://youthviolence.edschool.virginia.edu>.