“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

REFERENCES