



May 2019

#ChescoKnows

A report on workplace sexual
harassment in Chester County





INTRODUCTION

The Chester County Women's Commission (CCWC) and the Chester County Fund for Women and Girls (CCFWG) joined together to field a survey on sexual harassment in Chester County workplaces. Given the heightened attention on sexual harassment, CCWC and CCFWG - along with the Chester County Commissioners - sought to encourage local dialogue and strategies about how to create safe, respectful and productive workplaces, with a better understanding of what is happening right here and right now.

This report presents an overview of the survey findings. CCWC, CCFWG and their partners distributed the survey in English and Spanish between November 2018 and January 2019. Over 900 individuals participated, 81% of whom identified as female.

Recognizing the complexity of sexual harassment, the survey asked about sexual harassment in a variety of ways, with an emphasis on observable and concrete behaviors. The survey was voluntary, anonymous and open to any interested participants.

While it was beyond the scope of the project to provide a complete statistical sampling that would guarantee a representative sample of people and their experiences in Chester County, studies from other communities report comparable findings. In addition, probing multiple dimensions while keeping the survey accessible demanded compromises – i.e., the survey could not explore every aspect of sexual harassment in the workplace. Even with these limitations, the findings reveal a range of perceptions, experiences and opportunities.

Please note: Some of the survey language was explicit to ensure clarity about behaviors and experiences, and some of the anecdotes and comments shared by respondents are explicit. Resources are available to help, including The Crime Victims' Center of Chester County and The Domestic Violence Center of Chester County. Both offer free hotlines 24/7. Find more resources at the end of this report.



BY THE NUMBERS

Sexual harassment is common in current workplaces in Chester County. People assess, interpret, handle and respond to sexual harassment in different ways, making it a complicated issue.

Nearly 1 in 5

of workers have experienced sexual harassment from a client, customer or contractor in their current workplace.

Nearly 2 of 3

people have witnessed or experienced sexual harassment at some point in their career.

1 in 4

of people in Chester County have witnessed or experienced sexual harassment in their current workplace.

1 in 3

of workers either do not have a process at work to report concerning behavior or are not aware of any process if it exists in their current workplace.

43%

Though awareness has increased, tolerance for harassment has decreased and employer responsiveness has improved, only 43% are confident that sexual harassment will decrease in the future.

KEY INSIGHTS

People experience a **range and breadth of impacts** as a result of sexual harassment; some perceive it as not a big deal, and others experience impacts for years.

- Many are **hesitant to talk about sexual harassment** because it is too depressing and seems like nothing can be done about it, while others believe it is overblown.
- Definitions and **interpretations about situations, comments or interactions often differ**, which creates confusion and complicates how to address sexual harassment.
- **Experiences differ as much as workplaces differ**: nurses, customer service workers, hospitality workers, nonprofit employees, government employees, and professional service providers have similar, yet different, experiences.

- The prevalence of sexual harassment does not vary much across demographics, position, tenure and sector – though **options for what people can do about it are shaped by socioeconomic factors**, and experiences are often compounded by other forms of discrimination.

Incidents often go **unreported** – often it falls on the person who is harassed to do something about it or just accept it because it is commonly perceived that:

- Sexual harassment is the norm
- Reporting sexual harassment will hurt one's career
- It is better to confront a harasser oneself

- It is hard to know what to do when one witnesses someone being sexually harassed since these are **complex issues with potential repercussions** for oneself, for one's employer and workplace, and for the person who was harassed.
- Supportive **leadership, women in management positions, training, and policies** appear to result in decreases in sexual harassment.





WHO TOOK THE SURVEY?

908

individuals completed at least part of the survey; 97% made it to the end of the survey, though skipped some questions.

739

identified as female,
106 as male

84%

reside in Chester County and 91% work in Chester County

The survey asked about race/ethnicity, income, how long respondents have worked in their current workplace, position (e.g., front line job, middle level, etc.), disability, whether or not the respondent was born in the US, education level and workplace sector. These questions were used to identify possible trends based on identity and tenure, though no significant differences were found across these demographics.

In addition, respondents generally reflect the population demographics of Chester County, though the majority of respondents are female.

WHAT WE LEARNED



Following is an overview of survey responses, including a sampling of comments provided by respondents.

Q: Have you experienced or witnessed any of the following in your current workplace?

- Unwanted attempts to establish a sexual relationship despite efforts to discourage it
- Made to feel like I/another person were being bribed with some sort of reward or special treatment to engage in sexual behavior
- Threatened with retaliation for not being sexually cooperative (e.g., not getting a good review, being passed over for an opportunity)
- Touched in a way that made me/another person feel uncomfortable
- Physically threatened or assaulted

26%

of respondents have either witnessed and/or personally experienced at least one of these behaviors in their current workplace.

18%

of respondents have personally experienced at least one behavior in their current workplace.

18%

of respondents have witnessed at least one behavior in their current workplace.

"Sexual harassment is complicated and often not black and white. If I really let myself think about what I ignore and tolerate, it would be depressing."

"No matter how confidential this survey may be I prefer not to comment due to fear of retaliation - which probably speaks volumes as to where we truly are as a society. Yes - this happened to me... far worse has happened in the past, and I always seem to suffer more when I bring this out into the open."

"My experiences and what I witnessed seemed to almost reach the descriptions you provide here but never crossed that line. I would absolutely describe it as manipulative and abusive behavior but it was subtle enough that it made it hard to define as sexual harassment."

"Witnessed a male coworker cornering a coworker while talking to her, and when she reported it, he retaliated by trying to get her disciplined."

"One of the things that I like about my current workplace is that I do not have to put up with this sort of behavior that I have experienced in several other positions."

WHAT WE LEARNED

Q: Someone at my current workplace...



- Made comments of a sexual nature about themselves or others
- Put me down or treated me in a condescending way because of my gender
- Told sexual stories or jokes that were offensive
- Made offensive remarks about my appearance, body or sexual activities
- Referred to people of my gender in insulting or offensive terms
- Asked me personal questions of a sexual nature
- Displayed materials or items of a sexual or disparaging nature, including sexual images
- Sent or copied me on emails, texts or instant messages of a sexual nature at work

28%

27%

26%

18%

18%

14%

10%

7%

"One particular man constantly winked at me and commented on my appearance, and blocked me against the wall to flirt with me by putting his hand up against the wall so I would have to duck under to leave."

"People need to relax...and brush it off...some take things too serious these days...."

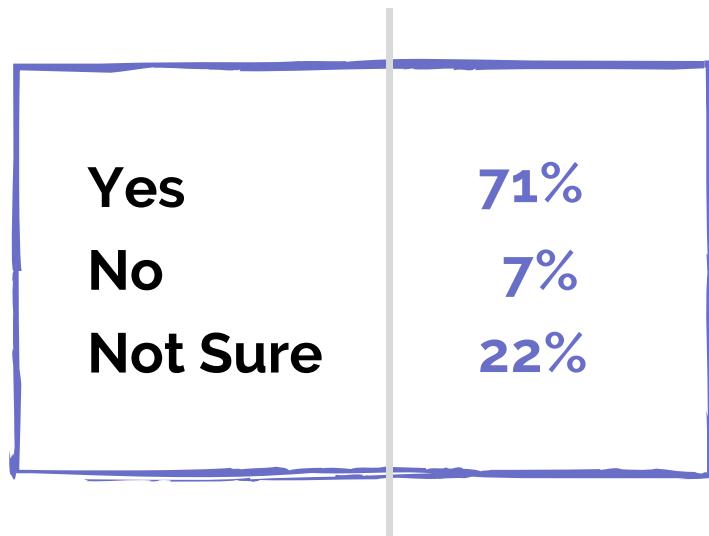
"Sometimes topics of conversation at work become sexual. At times this is slightly uncomfortable, but never threatening."

"Much less prevalent in the last 5 years compared to 20 years ago." (Respondent answered 'yes' to all prior questions)

WHAT WE LEARNED



Q: My current workplace has a process for responding to behaviors of concern:



Q: If you opted not to report a harassment incident, what were the reasons?

I did not think anything would be done	10%	I feared losing my job	5%
I thought it might hurt my career or job opportunities	8%	I was ashamed or embarrassed	4%
It's not worth doing anything because it happens so often that it seems to be the norm	8%	I did not think I would be believed	4%
I confronted the person myself	8%	I did not know how to file a complaint	2%
The behavior or experience stopped on its own	7%	I was concerned for my physical safety	1%
		N/A	44%

"If I didn't ignore 99% of what I hear or what has been said to me, I would be out of a job. I do not have the luxury of complaining since I am head of my household."

"When I did report it at my last job, my ex boss retaliated against me and I ended up eventually losing my job. So I just feel like it's not worth complaining about so I just sort of put up with it, and try to just deal with it. I've come to expect it to be this way and I've found it easier to just put up with it than to complain because it will just make my life more miserable if I complain about it, and I feel as though my job would be at risk."

"I even spoke with a trusted male colleague and he told me I should just keep my distance from the person and let it blow over."

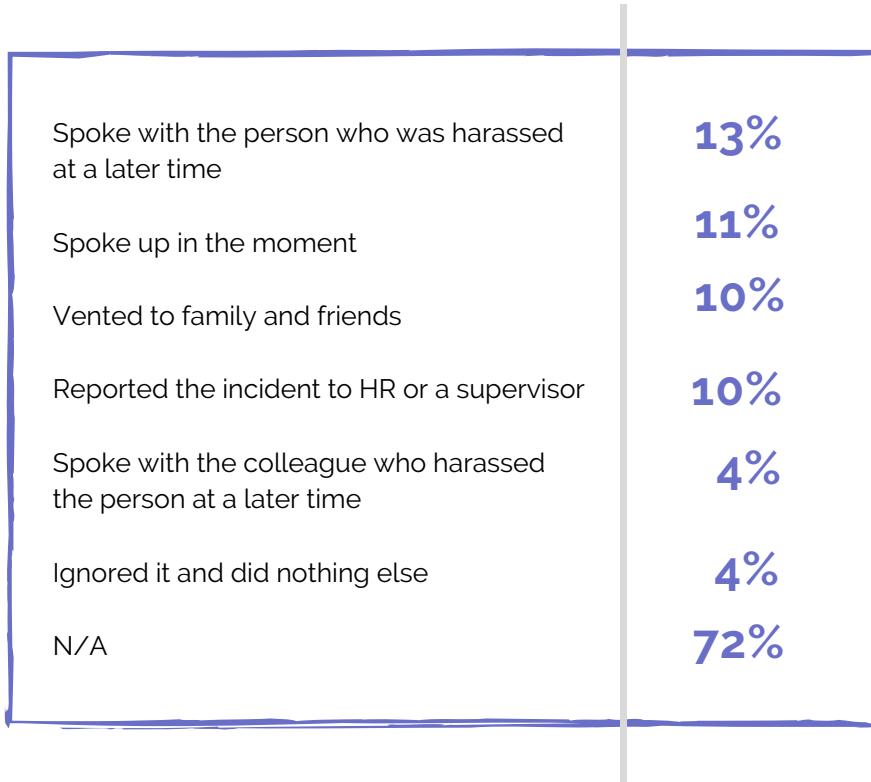
"Often it takes me longer to process and realize these comments need to be confronted and are not just normal jokes among guys, and then the opportunity seems like it has passed. Thankfully I am rarely in a situation where something is so egregious it is obvious a report or confrontation needs to happen."

"Since these incidents were related to working with the public and this is a customer service type position, it can be complicated to determine how to deal with these incidents, especially since we work in a public space where people have a right to enter."

WHAT WE LEARNED



Q: If you witnessed someone being sexually harassed, how did you react?



"A coworker of mine was raped after a happy hour with coworkers. She reported it immediately to HR and it turns out it was the 3rd time this man had a report filed on him. HR had an investigation launched but the results were "inconclusive." Their solution was for him to continue working at the company but not be allowed to talk to her. They told her if she wanted something more than that she'd need to go to the cops. I reached out to HR to express my concerns and nothing came of it."

"Man had already displayed discrimination and hostility to 4 other women. My 5th complaint to supervisor was also ignored."

"The person did not realize that it was harassment."

"Sometimes it is a joke and we have to get over it and not be offended."

"I have and will continue to come to the aid of others who are being harassed - at the very least, it lets the perpetrator know that there is a witness. There will always be safety and power in numbers."



WHAT WE LEARNED

Q: To what extent do you agree with the following statements about your current workplace?



"Reporting is a lot of lip service. HR is there to protect the company, NOT the employees. They are more concerned with a lawsuit from the perpetrator than supporting the employees and enforcing "zero tolerance"."

"I have had clients speak to me inappropriately or in a way that makes me feel uncomfortable. I reported it and completed a minor incident report but was left with no instruction on how to work with the client moving forward."

"In my experience, most people in my workplace are upstanding, respectful people. However, it is also my experience that most supervisors and managers avoid difficult topics and situations which, in effect, provides the space for inappropriate workplace behaviors."

WHAT WE LEARNED



Q: How comfortable would you feel discussing a sexual harassment behavior or experience with...



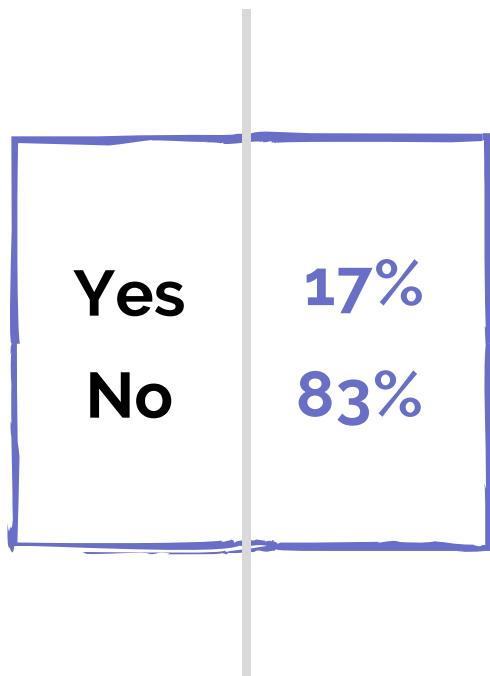
"Relief is impossible. Not for sexual harassment, not for discrimination. It's like it's deliberate. And if you complain they suggest you leave."

"People know that their career could be put in jeopardy if something was said."

"I do what I need to in order to keep my job. Maybe that is just in my head, but I do not want any bad press for myself or my organization. I primarily keep my mouth shut."

WHAT WE LEARNED

Q: Have you been sexually harassed by a client, customer or contractor (i.e., someone not employed at your workplace, but who is served by or works with your employer)?



"There have been multiple customers who I've assisted on the phone who have made uncomfortable sexual comments."

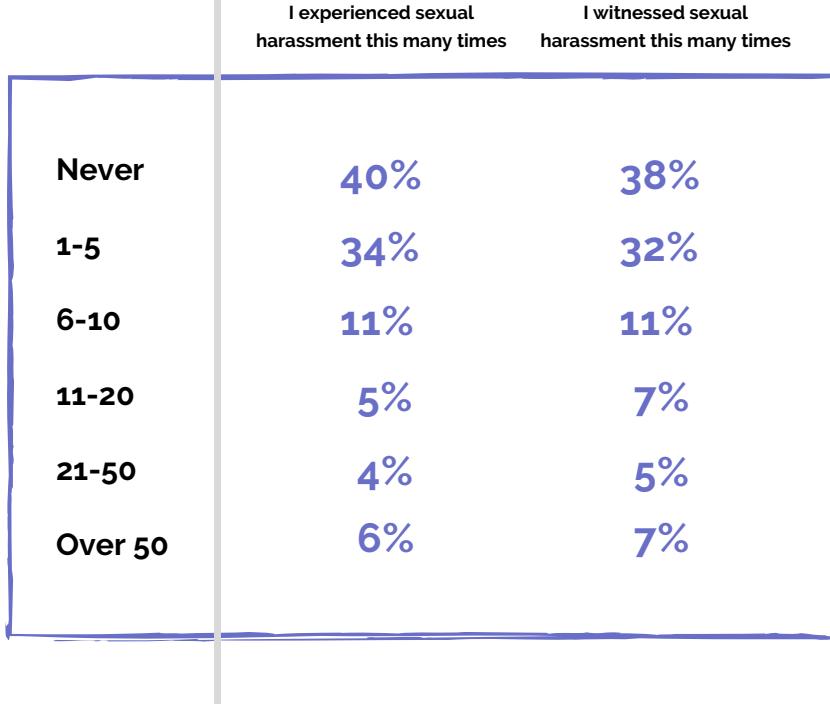
"I have had instances of unwanted sexual advances and inappropriate comments by customers. It happens at least monthly. Comments about my appearance, inappropriate jokes, comments about being married and their sex lives, and lots of inappropriate advances. Disgusting - unwanted, unprovoked and unprofessional."

"I've been told - even at age 61 - to "get on the pole" in order to make more money. I've been offered nudie texts, to which I refused. All manner of sexual innuendos have been thrown my way by a contractor to the degree where I now feel very uncomfortable around him. These comments and offers come in front of other coworkers...."

WHAT WE LEARNED



Q: Reflecting on all of your workplace experiences, how many times have you experienced or witnessed sexual harassment?



"I am accounting for workplace experiences that date back to 1980, when there were few workplace rules or processes to handle sexual harassment and men got away with everything. When I told one beast to please not touch me again, he grabbed me one last time, then mocked me every time he even came close to me ("Oh, I forgot - you don't like to be touched, do you?") - for two years til the company folded. Yes, I have psychological baggage, but I'm a lot stronger than that."

"ONE INAPPROPRIATE comment 30 some years ago. I handled it and it was over."

"My current job has, so far, had the fewest incidents of sexual harassment of any place I have worked and I believe this is due to a strong commitment on the part of leadership to addressing these issues. I also believe this is due to the fact that my workplace has a large number of women holding senior leadership positions."

"I had a female therapist tell me if I want to be taken seriously and not be objectified I need to show zero skin and wear pant suits. I turned down the sexual advances of a donor who has stopped giving to my organization. I feel like I should have had better boundaries from the beginning."

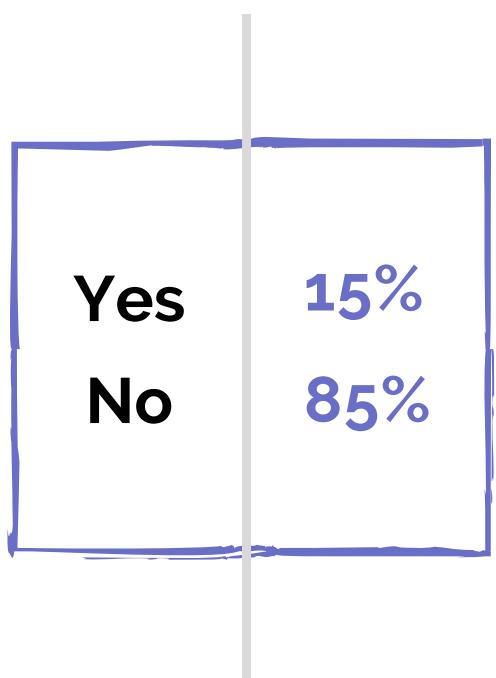
"I used to work in the restaurant business, and this behavior is ubiquitous in that area of work."

"I've worked over 40 years now and this has been the norm rather than the exception. It happens all the time... day after day, week after week, year in and year out. So yes, over 50 times. I'm so weary and tired of it all!"

WHAT WE LEARNED



Q: In the past, have you left a job because of sexual harassment?



"So to be harassed, discriminated, named against and broke. That's too much struggles."

"At the time, I felt that I had no options. Also, at the time I would not have defined the behavior as sexual harassment. Today I would - with education about what sexual harassment consists of."

"No, but many times I have wanted to quit this job. It's just not right!"

"No, but I plan on leaving this one in part because of it."

"Never left because it is everywhere and I need my paycheck."

"No, because I couldn't afford to leave the job."

"No, but I may leave my current job to get distance from an individual who has a lot of power in my organization."

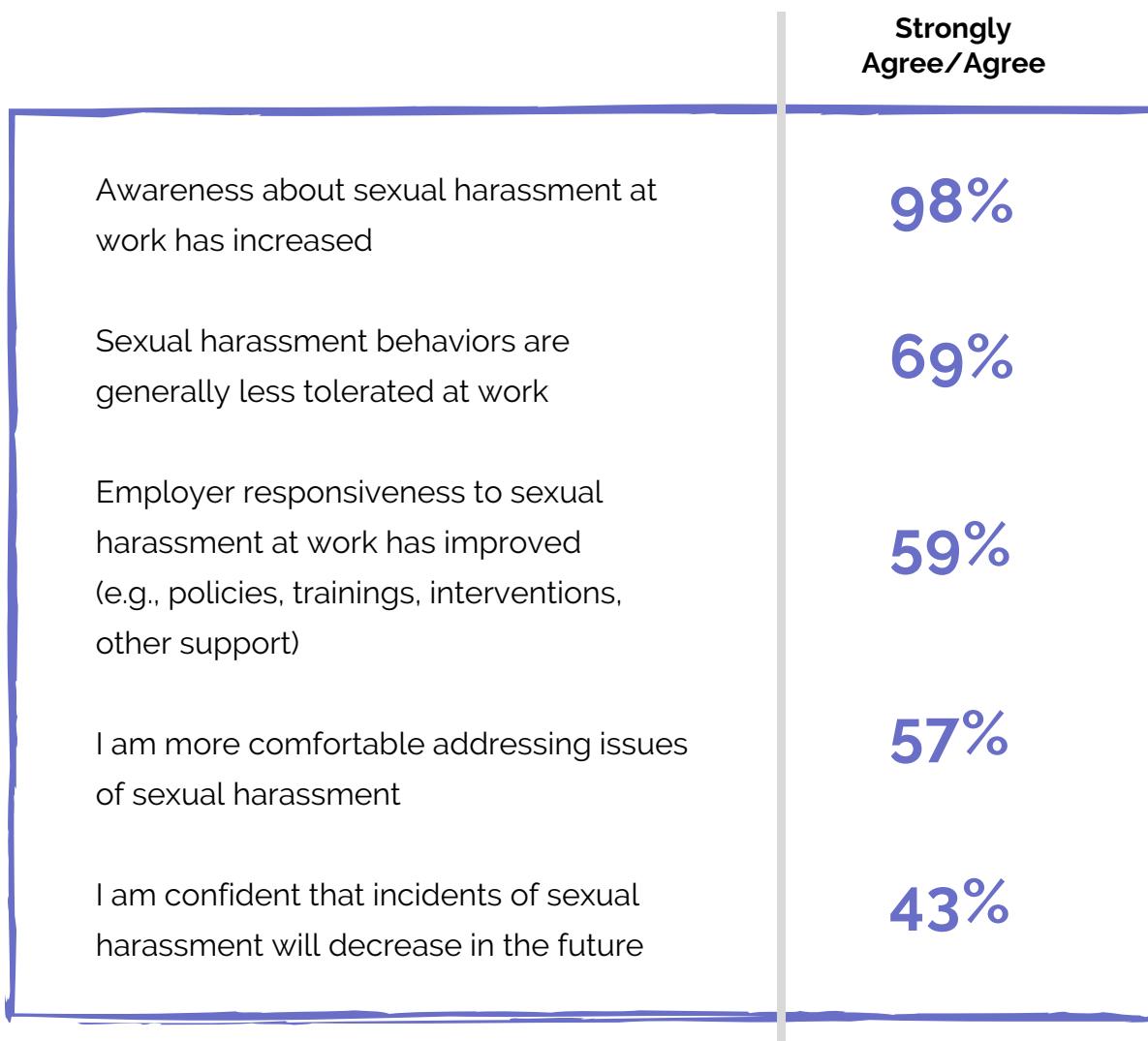
**No... because
I couldn't**

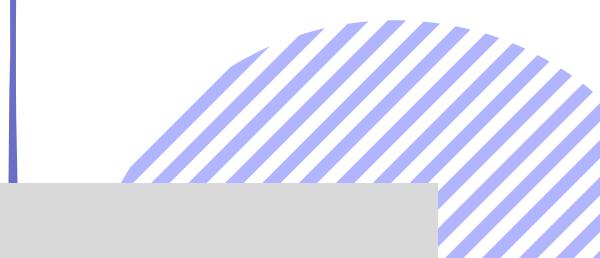
WHAT WE LEARNED



Q: To what extent do you agree with the following statement?

Compared to three years ago...





"This has been addressed broadly in media/culture but not in my workplace."

"I have always felt this should not be tolerated at any workplace. I am glad it is being openly discussed more."

"I do not condone harassment in the workplace. However, I believe we are becoming overly sensitized and may be too ready to accuse behaviors that are not intended to be offensive or inappropriate."

"There is very little sexual harassment in the workplace. This is just the latest fad of shallow people. It's ridiculous."

"At my workplace, sexual harassment was already much less prevalent 3 years ago than 15-20+ years ago. Biggest shift was about 10 years ago. The workplace also shifted to have more women at all levels of the organization."

"I am glad this survey is being done. It's one small step in a process that I hope will lead to equal respect and treatment of all people.

I'm just dubious enough to fear that the road to success will be long and complicated. But it must be attempted."

"This is an important issue for women, and I'm glad we as a society are finally starting to talk about it and uncover some of the ugly truths."

WHAT'S NEXT?

The Chester County Women's Commission and the Chester County Fund for Women and Girls are committed to facilitating constructive dialogues and leveraging resources that will contribute to improved workplace environments in Chester County.

These efforts will benefit everyone who lives, works, visits and attends school in Chester County.

Overall, workplace environments have improved, yet we know that we can make Chester County workplaces safer, more respectful, and more productive for everyone.

Now that we know what is happening in Chester County workplaces, it is time to act.

WHAT WE CAN ALL DO

Teach

- Raise awareness about what is happening right now in Chester County workplaces by sharing these study results
- Start conversations about what is possible
- Talk about each other's experiences and understandings
- Share resources to support individuals and workplaces

Act

- Put in place practices and policies that prevent and address sexual harassment in workplaces
- Build workplace cultures of respect

Learn

- Continue to explore the issues to better understand and address intersection of socioeconomics and discrimination with sexual harassment
- Identify specific strategies effective in different sectors and workplaces
- Know what is acceptable and expected in the workplace
- Learn to intervene in situations, speak-up for oneself, and support others
- Be a "champion" for change

RESOURCES

Free Hotlines in Chester County (Available 24/7)

The Crime Victims' Center of Chester County - (610) 692-7273

The Domestic Violence Center of Chester County - (610) 431-1430

Reporting Workplace Sexual Harassment in PA

Know Your Rights

Bystander Intervention Tips





The Chester County Women's Commission (CCWC) promotes opportunities for the inclusion of women as full and equal participants in all facets of life in Chester County. We identify the needs of women in Chester County and support them as we strive to advocate, empower and connect them to appropriate opportunities. We serve Chester County women by identifying services and resources available to them by partnering with relevant organizations that promote and support women's causes and initiatives. Our members represent our social, geographical, and culturally diverse community. Visit www.chescowc.org for more information.

CCFWG

Chester County Fund for Women & Girls

The Chester County Fund for Women and Girls (CCFWG) leads and unites the community through philanthropy and advocacy to ensure that women and girls have resources and opportunities to thrive. For over 20 years, CCFWG has raised awareness about the critical needs of women and girls, and has awarded \$3.1 million to 71 local non-profit organizations. To learn more about CCFWG, visit www.ccfwg.org.