Boys will be Boys

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Abstract

Sexual harassment is a problem the plagues our community. Society takes the issue lightly because they do not understand the long lasting effects it has on the victim. The mental and physical symptoms of this trauma can happen for years after the harassment first occurred. Although society has set up certain programs to aid the victims, almost nothing is being done to abolish the act committed against the victims.

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A sixteen year old girl sits next to a pond near her house sobbing, wondering what she did to deserve the injustice brought upon her. Too scared to go to the councilors, teachers, and parents, she internalized it. If she went to them, the story would go as it has many times in history: adults sympathize, suspend the boy, and she gets bullied for being too stuck up and getting him in trouble. Not once will most actually take into the consideration that the words he said or the things he did made her want to possibly disappear or self-harm. No one understood or cared how bad she was hurting. This is how most adolescents feel when they are confronted with sexual harassment. Sexual harassment is a plague in society that causes severe mental and physical problems to those affected, and although some would argue that we are fighting this barbaric act, we need to implement harsher punishments for those convicted and more avenues for help for the victims. Sexual harassment is a horrid crime that must not be pushed aside any longer.

**Definition of Sexual Harassment**

Sexual harassment has been around for centuries but is only now being identified as an act that is harmful to the person receiving. Sexual harassment is defined as any behavior (verbal or physical) caused by one person to another the expresses the belief that the second person’s gender in inferior to the first and thereby causing harm to that person (DeBruin, 1998, p. 1). Sexual harassment could be anything from

commenting on a person’s looks in a way that makes them feel threatened, snapping someone’s bra strap, slapping a person’s butt, or even prolonged staring at a specific

area on the body. If the person it is being done to feels threatened or inferior to the opposite sex, sexual harassment has just occurred on some level. The issue resides in the ambiguity of what is a compliment of wanted behavior and what crosses the line into harassment. This differs from person to person as tolerance levels differ. One person might take an act as a compliment while others find it highly offensive. Better education to society about this issue would help people find a balance so no one would have to cross that line.

**Mental Effects of Harassment**

After something as traumatic as this problem occurs, the mental effects that follow could be detrimental to the safety and well-being of the person. One effect that nearly one third of all victims share is PTSD or posttraumatic stress disorder (Avina and O'Donohue, 2002, p.71). PTSD is characterized by experiencing a traumatic event, re-experiencing the event and extreme distress, avoidance of stimuli that reminds the person of the event, and hyper arousal (Avina and O'Donohue, 2002, p.71). This causes madness and obsessive tendencies that may reside with the person in the long term. This causes nightmares, social detachment, flashbacks, difficulty sleeping and concentrating, reckless behavior, and more (Knefel& Lueger-Schuster, 2013). These could put the victim in harm’s way and in extreme cases end their life. Other symptoms that might occur that are unrelated to PTSD are “embarrassment, anxiety, depression, fear, self-blame, and lowered self-confidence” (Chrisler & Ferguson, 2013). The

symptoms associated with this behavoir are not minor. They are not something the victim can just get repress and go about her daily life as usual. Sexual harassment as lasting effects on the girl’s cognitive processes and social skills

**Physical Effects of Harassment**

Because the mental effects are so severe and include loss of self-worth, eating disorders and lack of sleep are prone to the victims (Chrisler & Ferguson, 2013). Eating disorders are characterized by not consuming the normal amount of food for digestion. Eating disorders make the person lose a great deal of weight and causes them to lack in the key nutrients needed for survival. Two popular disorders are bulimia and anorexia. Bulimia is characterized by the binge eating of a large amount of food then purging it so the calories are not consumed. Anorexia is the complete cut off from eating. This lack of proper nutrients from the disorders paired with the lack of proper rest, lower the immune system. This causes the victim to be sick and run down more often than usual. The lack of sleep also multiples the effects of the mental issues. Without proper sleep, the thoughts of depression, anxiety, and fear thrive. When the person lacks sleep, the lack the focus and the ability to function clearly and normally. It is then that the imagination wanders and can convince the victim to do irreversible things to end the painful cycle she is forced to live.

**What society is doing to help**

Today, there are programs and hotlines set aside to call to report any annoyance that some might see as sexual harassment. There are complaint boxes and different

meeting that employees are forced to go to where they learn about how to conduct themselves in the office to avoid this issue. Many would argue that these few things are enough, but it is still a major problem. If society taught children from very young that this is wrong and to speak up about the issue, sexual harassment would die out. People would begin to learn the line that they are forbidden from crossing and respect he feelings of others.

**Conclusion**

Sexual harassment ca have a lasting effect on the victims. The depression and anxiety that follows the act is worse than the act ever was. The self-hatred and blame never leaves, not completely. As an advanced society, it is our job to control these primitive behaviors. Sexual harassment, with more education to the masses, could be abolished. If education saves one person from experiencing that level of emotional and physical pain, then one step has moved in the right direction. When someone speaks up about the traumatic experience, they are reaching out for support and justice. When others brush it off like the victim is over reacting, it scares her mentally and convinces her that help is worthless. The victim feels alone. No one should ever feel as if they are alone in this world surrounded by those who do not care for that is when she finally hits rock bottom. The scared, upset 16 year old girl never deserved the harassment. She never did anything to deserve to relive the horror every day at school when she walked through those double doors. When she finally could not take it anymore, she heard the phrase that would haunt her the rest of her life: Boys will be boys.

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