



# QUICK FACTS

## Workplace Harassment

January 2022

To guarantee equality, individual rights, and social justice for a diverse and inclusive society, AAUW advocates freedom from violence and fear of violence, including hate crimes, in homes, schools, workplaces, and communities.

Sex-based discrimination and harassment in the workplace can harm the health and safety, productivity, and career advancement of employees—yet these practices continue in workplaces across the country. Sex-based discrimination and harassment can come in many different [forms](#), including derogatory language based on gender identity or expression, discrimination against pregnant workers, and sexual harassment or assault. The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) received nearly [11,500 complaints](#) of sex-based harassment, including sexual harassment, in 2020 alone. The actual incidence of sex-based harassment in the workplace, however, is likely much higher—the EEOC estimates that about 75% of these cases [go unreported](#).

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits discrimination—and harassment as a form of discrimination—in employment on the basis of sex, as well as race, color, national origin, and religion. Title VII also prohibits employers from retaliating against employees for speaking out for participating in an investigation, proceeding, or hearing on behalf of a coworker. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) is the federal government agency responsible for the enforcement of Title VII and other employment discrimination and harassment laws.

### AAUW in Action

All public policy actions take direction from the AAUW [Public Policy Priorities](#), voted on by members every two years. AAUW is a nonpartisan organization—but nonpartisan does not mean unopinionated. AAUW has been a catalyst for change. Together, through our coordinated and strategic advocacy, we've enacted invaluable legislation at the federal, state, and local levels. The 2021-2023 Public Policy priorities directly identify advocating freedom from violence and fear of violence in workplaces and beyond.

The public policy team engages in many efforts on this key issue, including but not limited to:

- Working in coalition with other gender equity organizations, including the [Employment Task Force](#) of the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights.
- Engaging AAUW advocates and members through targeted calls to action on important legislation, like the [EMPOWER Act](#) and [BE HEARD Act](#).
- Engaging directly with elected leaders and the public through calls, [letters](#), and [testimonies](#) in hearings.
- Providing voter education resources on key equity issues to consider during elections and offering information on how to [Get Out the Vote](#) guides at the [AAUW Action Fund](#).

### Workplace Sexual Harassment

[Sexual harassment](#) is unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature and can be verbal, nonverbal, or physical, including sexual assault. It is illegal under Title VII as a form of sex discrimination. Unfortunately, workplace sexual harassment continues to impact women of all ages and in all sectors. One study found that [34% of female employees](#) say they have been sexually harassed by a colleague. Workplace sexual harassment [threatens](#) women's mental health and physical safety and can lead to depression, posttraumatic stress disorder, and increased risk of long-term physical health problems. Sexual harassment also erodes women's short- and long-term economic security when women decrease their hours or leave a job to avoid their harasser. According to AAUW's [research](#), 41% of women who'd been harassed said it contributed to their decision to leave a job early and 37% said it disrupted their career advancement. These negative impacts compound over time to reduce women's lifetime earnings and contribute to the gender wage gap and leadership gap.

## Pregnancy Discrimination

Pregnancy discrimination in the workplace [can include](#)

