

Sexual Harassment – Questionnaire Survey for Education Sector

Summary of Survey Findings

Background

1. Numerous research findings reveal that sexual harassment is a serious problem for students at all educational levels in Hong Kong or overseas countries. This problem is more common than people might think because many students are scared or too embarrassed to report sexual harassment. Sexual harassment in a school environment can undermine a student's sense of personal dignity and safety, disrupt the person's education, and interfere with his/her ability to reach full potential in life. If left unchecked, sexual harassment in the school setting has the potential to escalate to bullying and violent behaviour. Education providers have a legal duty to take steps to prevent and respond to sexual harassment. Under the Sex Discrimination Ordinance, conduct of a sexual nature which creates a hostile or intimidating environment in an educational setting is unlawful.

2. As an attempt to promote awareness of sexual harassment in education sector, the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) partnered with the Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union (HKPTU) and Hong Kong Federation of Education Workers (HKFEW) to carry out a survey entitled "Sexual Harassment – Questionnaire Survey for Education Sector" in March 2013. Questionnaires were distributed to all primary and secondary schools (including government, aided, direct subsidy scheme, special, private and international schools) as well as local tertiary institutions across the territories. A total number of 1,168 questionnaires were distributed and 321 completed questionnaires were returned, giving the response rate of 27%. The survey involved 159 primary schools, 148 secondary schools and 7 tertiary institutions, with 7 questionnaires unspecified.

Key Findings

3. A total number of 170 respondents (53%) indicated that there was a policy statement on sexual harassment whereas 151 respondents (47%) did not. The inclusion of a policy statement on sexual harassment is 47%, 57% and 100% for primary schools, secondary schools and tertiary institutions, respectively. There seems to be an increasing level of acceptance progressing from primary to tertiary levels.

4. The most common items in the policy statement on sexual harassment include: "A clear statement that sexual harassment will not be tolerated" (96%), "The options available for dealing with sexual harassment complaints formally" (94%), and "A message that management is committed to eliminating and preventing sexual harassment" (93%).

5. In contrast, the least common items (frequency rate <50%) include: “Offer anti-sexual discrimination training to students” (45%), “The names and telephone numbers of officers who are responsible for dealing with complaints, providing information and advice, etc.” (42%), “Offer anti-sexual discrimination training to staff” (34%), “The policy on sexual harassment is posted on bulletin boards” (22%), and “The policy on sexual harassment is published periodically in school newspapers and new students’ orientation sessions” (14%). The option “Others” (7%) include “incorporate anti-sexual harassment policy into management and operation guideline; some schools have uploaded it to the intranet; and incorporate anti-sexual harassment policy into Teacher’s Handbook”.

6. In summary, of the 17 items listed in the anti-sexual harassment policy, only 7 items were considered common in most schools (over 80%). Another 4 items were in the acceptable range (52%-67%). The other 6 items were often omitted in the anti-sexual harassment policy (7%-45%). These results seem to imply that policy statement on sexual harassment is not comprehensive and that schools have been selective in formulating the anti-sexual harassment policy. Very often the implementation measures (e.g., training, education and contact information of complaint-handling personnel) are often lacking.

7. Among the schools without a policy statement on sexual harassment, the reasons are mainly “Staff are not trained in formulating the related policy statement” (61%) and “It appears no urgency to formulate a policy statement on sexual harassment” (45%). There are minor reasons such as “Sexual harassment has not occurred in the school and therefore, it is not a necessity to formulate the related policy statement” (19%) and “There are concerns that people may misinterpret frequent occurrence of sexual harassment in the school after the formulation of the related policy statement” (7%). Among the 147 schools without a policy statement on sexual harassment, only 31% are willing to adopt a formal policy on sexual harassment in 2013.

8. When asked if there were complaints about sexual harassment in schools in 2012, 35 respondents revealed that there have been 1-2 cases of sexual harassment. Further analysis shows that significantly more complaints about sexual harassment are received on campuses with a policy statement than those without it (26 vs 9, $p<0.05$). Also, more teachers have received training on anti-sexual harassment in schools with a policy statement than those without it (48 vs 12, $p<0.05$). It is worthy to note that this should not be interpreted as a causal relationship. Rather, it highlights the importance of having an anti-sexual harassment policy which encourages students and staff to report such cases once they have occurred.

9. In respect of respondents’ demographic background, 75% are principals whereas 11% are vice-principals. Others include panel heads in academic performance / discipline /

counselling / sex education, social workers and regular teachers. For tertiary institutions, they involve personnel in charge of human resources and student affairs.

10. Most respondents welcome the invitation if training courses are provided for them (87%) whereas only 3% of them decline. Others will consider time available and covered topics before making decision. In this regard, the EOC may collaborate with “relevant stakeholders” (viz. the EDB, school sponsoring bodies, professional associations [e.g., Hong Kong Association of the Heads of Secondary Schools] and educational associations [e.g., HKPTU and HKFEW]) in formulating training workshops. The format of case study can be employed so as to deliver practical experiences to principals, teachers, counsellors and related social workers as professional development programme.

Recommendations

11. It is alarming to note that nearly half of the surveyed schools (47%) have not adopted a policy statement on sexual harassment. These results indicate that generally speaking the level of awareness of principals, teachers, students and even parents on sexual harassment seems to be low. The EOC intends to take the initiatives and collaborate with “relevant stakeholders” in organizing anti-sexual harassment workshops in order to provide training for school staff (especially primary school teachers and principals). All schools are encouraged to take the lead to formulate and implement an anti-sexual harassment policy.

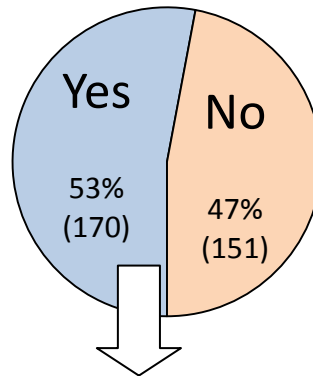
12. The most common reasons for not having an anti-sexual harassment policy are “Staff are not trained in formulating the related policy statement” and “It appears no urgency to formulate a policy statement on sexual harassment”. Some principals even considered “Sexual harassment has not occurred in the school and therefore, it is not a necessity to formulate the related policy statement”. It is important to point out that because of the potential harm of sexual harassment, educators should not wait until sexual harassment becomes serious before formally tackling it.

13. As for schools without a policy statement on sexual harassment (147 schools), it is sad that 69% would not choose to formulate this policy in the near future. Given the serious nature of sexual harassment, it makes sense for “relevant stakeholders” to encourage teachers and principals to embrace an anti-sexual harassment policy.

14. Sufficient information on anti-sexual harassment should be provided to all staff and students at a regular interval. A policy of zero-tolerance has to be implemented. It is recommended that the EDB should formally re-issue the guidelines “Questions & Answers on Preventing Sexual Harassment in Schools” (once released in 2009) to schools to encourage them to adopt the policy statement not only in the form, but also in substance.

Tables and Charts

1. Is there a policy statement on sexual harassment in your school / tertiary institution? (N=321)



2[a]. If there is a policy statement on sexual harassment in your school / tertiary institution, its content includes: (N=170)

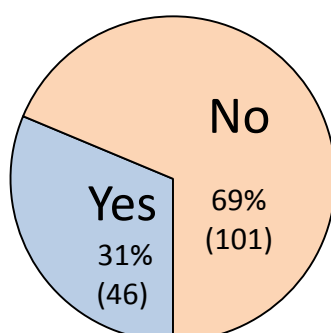
Item	n	%
A clear statement that sexual harassment will not be tolerated.	164	96
The options available for dealing with sexual harassment complaints formally.	160	94
A message that management is committed to eliminating and preventing sexual harassment.	158	93
Information about the organisation's internal complaint procedures, assuring employees that confidentiality will be observed.	149	88
The legal definition of sexual harassment.	147	86
The policy on sexual harassment is disseminated to all staff.	146	86
A behavioural definition of sexual harassment, i.e. some examples of conduct which could amount to sexual harassment.	145	85
An assurance that no one will be victimised or penalised for coming forward with a complaint.	114	67
A note that the complainant may lodge a complaint directly with the EOC or take action in the District Court.	107	63
A note about disciplinary action.	94	55
The options available for dealing with sexual harassment complaints informally.	88	52
Offer anti-sexual discrimination training to students.	76	45
The names and telephone numbers of officers who are responsible for dealing with complaints, providing information and advice, etc.	71	42
Offer anti-sexual discrimination training to staff.	57	34
The policy on sexual harassment is posted on bulletin boards.	38	22
The policy on sexual harassment is published periodically in school newspapers and new students' orientation sessions.	23	14

Item	n	%
Others:- - Incorporate anti-sexual harassment policy into management and operation guideline. Some schools have uploaded it to the intranet. - Incorporate anti-sexual harassment policy into Teacher's Handbook.	12	7

2[b]. If there is NOT a policy statement on sexual harassment in your school / tertiary institution, the reasons are: (N=146)

Item	n	%
Staff are not trained in formulating the related policy statement.	89	61
It appears no urgency to formulate a policy statement on sexual harassment.	65	45
Others:- - Do not know the necessity of formulating a policy statement on sexual harassment. - We have a grievance policy / mechanism that covers instances of this. - Some code of practice is adopted e.g., male staff never attend the needs of female students related to sex. - The policy statement on sexual harassment is included in other school policies. - Sexual harassment is tackled under existing legislation / no need of having related school-based policy. - The discipline/ counselling team keeps the related guidelines issued by the EDB. - Have committee to follow up complaints of sexual harassment. - Have meeting notes of reminding staff about anti-sexual harassment. - The sponsoring body has prepared guidelines on anti-sexual harassment. - Have no urgency / not in agenda. - In planning, study or progression. - The EBD has not provided guidelines on anti-sexual harassment. - Our staff have never raised the issue of anti-sexual harassment in the meetings.	30	21
Sexual harassment has not occurred in the school / tertiary institution and therefore, it is not a necessity to formulate the related policy statement.	28	19
There are concerns that people may misinterpret frequent occurrence of sexual harassment in the school / tertiary institution after the formulation of the related policy statement.	10	7
Sexual harassment will not bring serious consequences and therefore there is no need to formulate the related policy statement.	0	0

- 2[c]. If there is NOT a policy statement on sexual harassment in your school / tertiary institution, based on your understanding, will a policy statement on sexual harassment be formulated for your school / tertiary institution in 2013? (N=147)



3. Based on your understanding, were there any complaints about sexual harassment in your school / tertiary institution in 2012? (N=308)

School / tertiary institution	SH complaints	
	Yes [†]	No
With policy statement (n=162)	26*	136
Without policy statement (n=146)	9*	137

Notes: -

* No. of schools / tertiary institutions receiving SH complaints are significantly different if there is a policy statement or not, $p < 0.05$.

[†] The no. of SH complaint cases received per school / tertiary institution is 1 or 2.

4. Within 3 years from 2010 to 2012, have teachers received training on anti-sexual harassment in your school / tertiary institution? (N=308)

School / tertiary institution	Trained teachers		
	Yes [†]	No	Don't know
With policy statement (n=161)	48*	90	23
Without policy statement (n=147)	12*	116	19

Notes: -

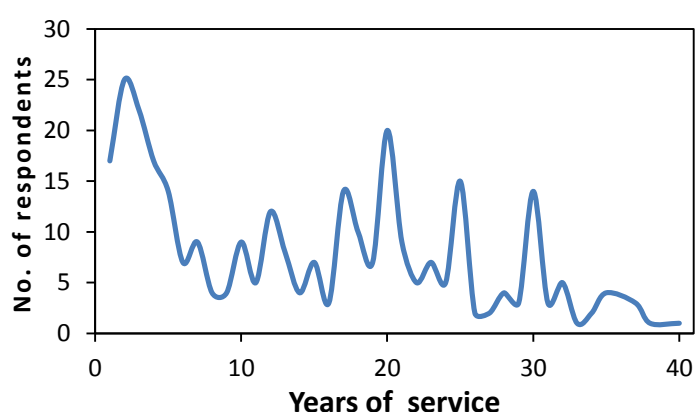
* No. of schools / tertiary institutions having trained teachers are significantly different if there is a policy statement or not, $p < 0.05$.

[†] The no. of trained teachers per school / tertiary institution varies in a range of 1-180.

5. Your position in the school / tertiary institution? (N=313)

Position	n	%
Principal	235	75
Vice Principal	34	11
Others - For schools, they involve panel heads in academic performance / discipline / counselling / sex education, social workers and regular teachers. - For tertiary institutions, they involve personnel in charge of human resources and student affairs.	44	14

6. Years of service in your school / tertiary institution? (N=304, mean=14)



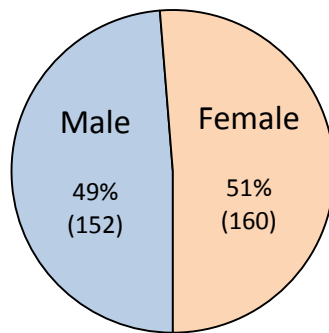
Statistical tests are run for principals. Results show that whether there is a policy statement in school is not correlated with the principal's years of service.

7. The school / tertiary institution you are now serving (N=314)

School / tertiary institution	Primary	Secondary	Tertiary
With policy statement (n=167)	75 (47%)	85 (57%)	7 (100%)
Without policy statement (n=147)	84 (53%)	63 (43%)	0 (0%)
Total	159 (100%)	148 (100%)	7 (100%)

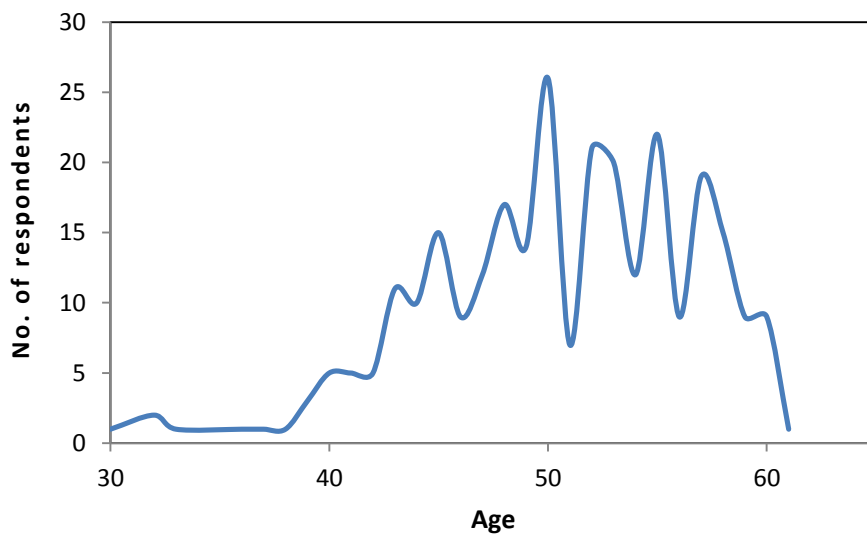
School Type	Primary	Secondary
Government	4	11
Subsidized / aided	112	84
Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS)	3	12
Special	25	23
International	1	2
Private	2	1
(not specified)	12	15
Total	159	148

8. Your gender (N=312)



Statistical tests are run for principals. Results show that whether there is a policy statement in school is not correlated with the principal's gender.

9. Your age (N=283, mean=51)



Statistical tests are run for principals. Results show that whether there is a policy statement in school is significantly correlated with the principal's age ($p < 0.05$). It indicates that there is a trend of not having policy statement in school when the principal's age advances.

10. If training courses on the prevention of sexual harassment and how to handle complaints about sexual harassment will be provided by the EOC, will you or related colleagues plan to participate? (N=312)

