

Sexual Harassment on the Job: What Are We Missing?

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Today's Talk: Sexual Harassment Contours, Consequences & Response Systems

- Definitions, examples
- Measurement
- Prevalence
- Individual risk factors
- Environmental risk factors
- Consequences for individual targets
- Why policies and practices aren't enough
- Q&A

*How does behavioral science
define and measure
sexual harassment?*

*What exactly is
sexual harassment?
How does social science
define & measure it?*

Sexual Harassment Defined

- Psychological/behavioral science definition: “behavior that derogates, demeans, or humiliates an individual based on that individual’s sex” (Berdahl, 2007)

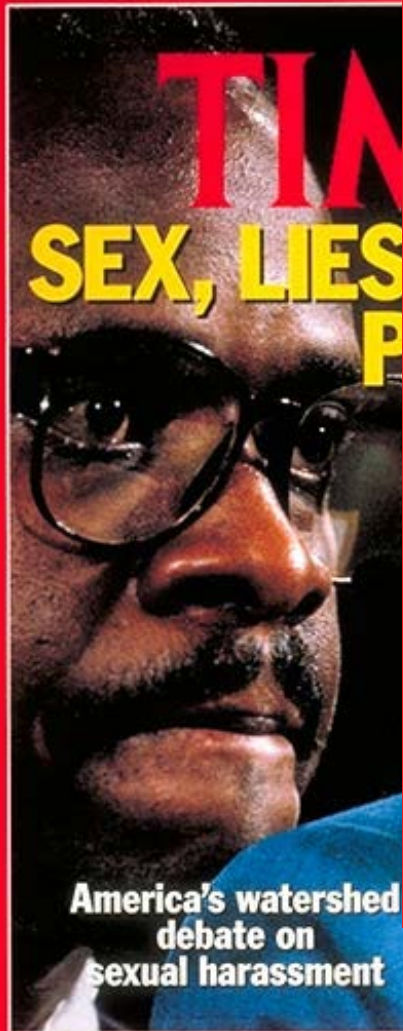
THREE BROAD CATEGORIES:

- Sexual Coercion
 - Unwanted Sexual Attention
- } “come-ons”
- Gender Harassment: verbal and non-verbal behaviors that disparage, objectify, or humiliate people based on their gender
 - a) Sexist
 - b) Crude
- } “put-downs”

Sexual Harassment Measurement

- Sexual Experiences Questionnaire (SEQ; Fitzgerald et al.)
- First-hand; behavioral; focus on recent past; 16-20 items; no reference to “sexual harassment”
- “During the PAST YEAR, has anyone at your workplace...”
(Response scale: 1 = “never” to 5 = “many times”)
 - Sexual Coercion: “implied faster promotions or better treatment if you were sexually cooperative” (sample item)
 - Unwanted Sexual Attention: “made unwanted attempts to establish a romantic relationship with you despite your efforts to discourage it”
 - Gender Harassment - Sexist: “referred to people of your gender in insulting or offensive terms”
 - Gender Harassment - Crude: “made offensive remarks about your appearance, body, or sexual activities”

News



Sexual Harassment Examples: Geologists in Antarctica



- Pelting women with rocks
- Threatening to block women's access to funding
- Pushing, grabbing, spitting on women
- Blowing volcanic ash (w/ glass shards) into eyes
- Daily name-calling: "slut", "idiot bitch," "dumbass"
- Male witness: "clearly stated he did not believe women should be field geologists"
- Female victim: "His taunts, degrading comments about my body, brain, and general inadequacies never ended ... Every day was terrifying"
- Female victim: "The worst experience of my life"

Can Men Be Sexually Harassed? Yes. (more often than not, by other men)

- Gender Harassment: “Not man enough” insults
 - for doing childcare, housework
 - for not participating in crude/lewd commentary about women
 - for being small, weak, petite, gay (e.g., “sissy”, “mama’s boy”, “p**sy”, “girl”, “fag”)
- Unwanted sexual attention, sexual assault
 - For example, *Polly v Houston Lighting & Power*: male plaintiff alleged male coworkers forcibly kissed him, grabbed/pinched his genitals, buttocks, chest
 - *Oncale v Sundowner*: male coworker threatened rape

Parallels Between Science and the Law

- Behavioral science conceptualization

Sexual Harassment

Sexual
Coercion

Unwanted Sexual
Attention

Gender Harassment
(Sexist or Crude)

- Legal conceptualization

Sex/Gender Discrimination (prohibited by Title VII)

Equal
pay,
hiring,
firing,
etc.

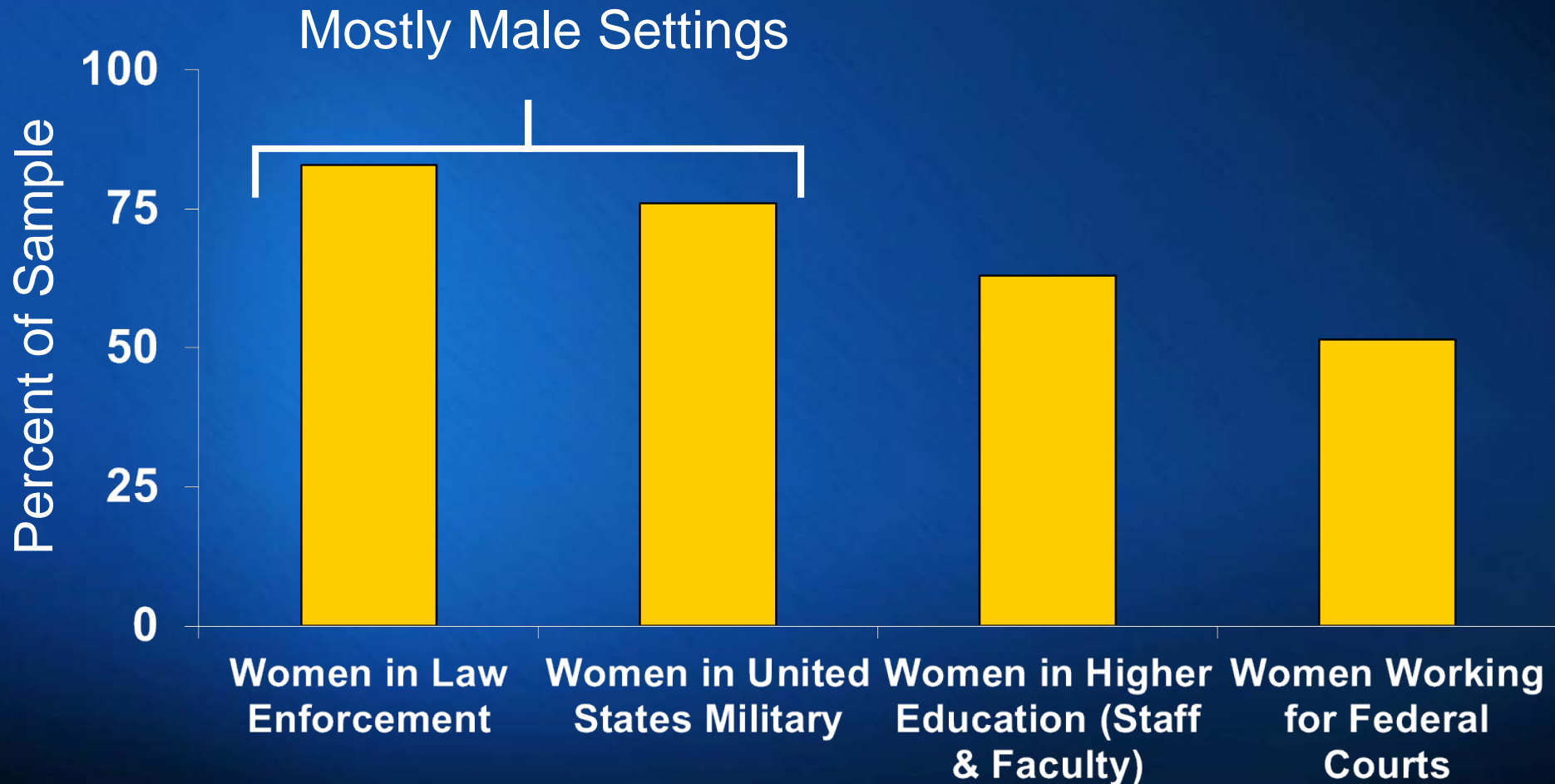
Sexual Harassment

Quid Pro Quo
(Sexual Coercion)

Hostile Environment
(Unwanted Sexual Attention &
Gender Harassment)

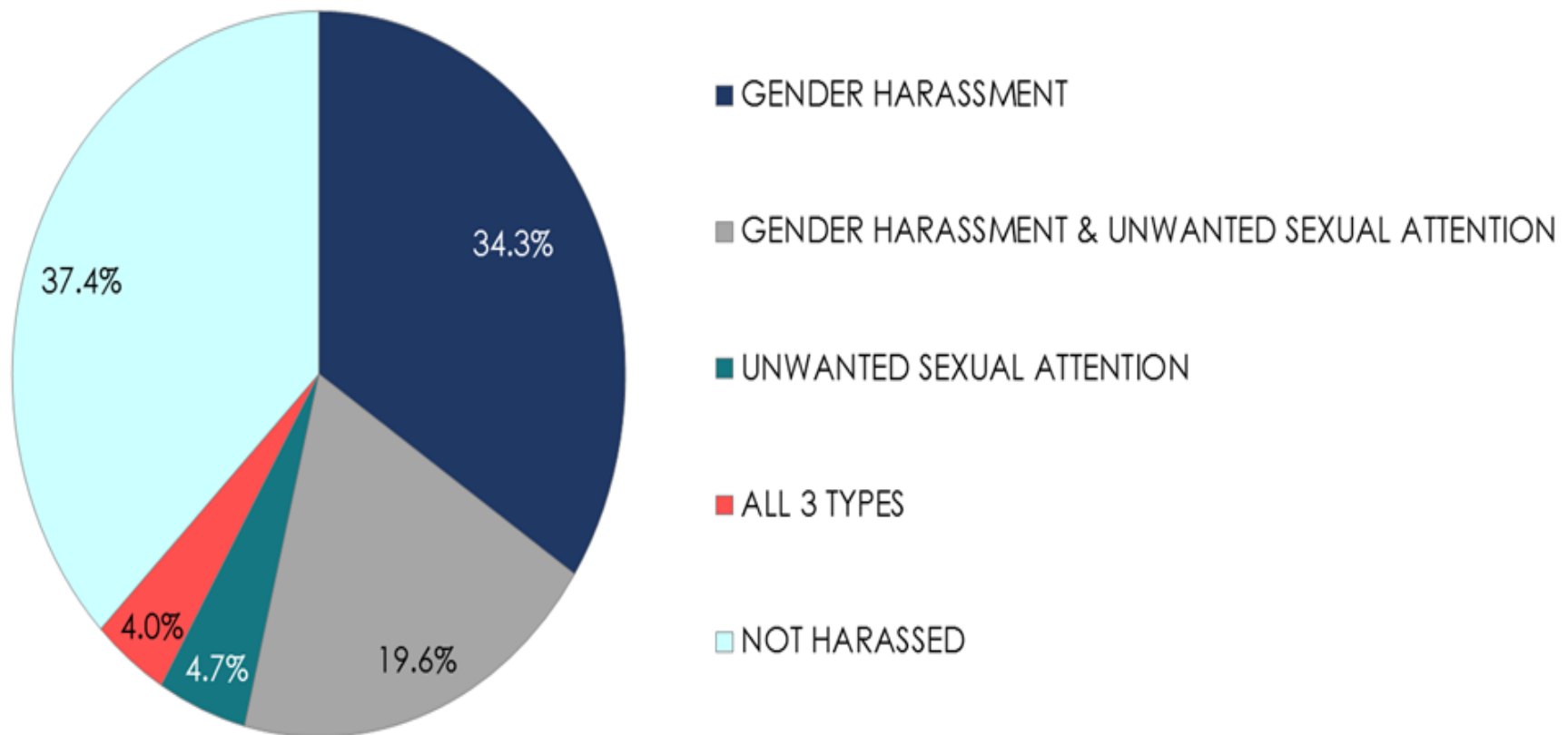
*How common is sexual
harassment
(and its subtypes)?*

Percent of Women Facing At Least One Harassing Behavior in Past Year at Work



Of the Subtypes of Sexual Harassment: Gender Harassment = Most Common

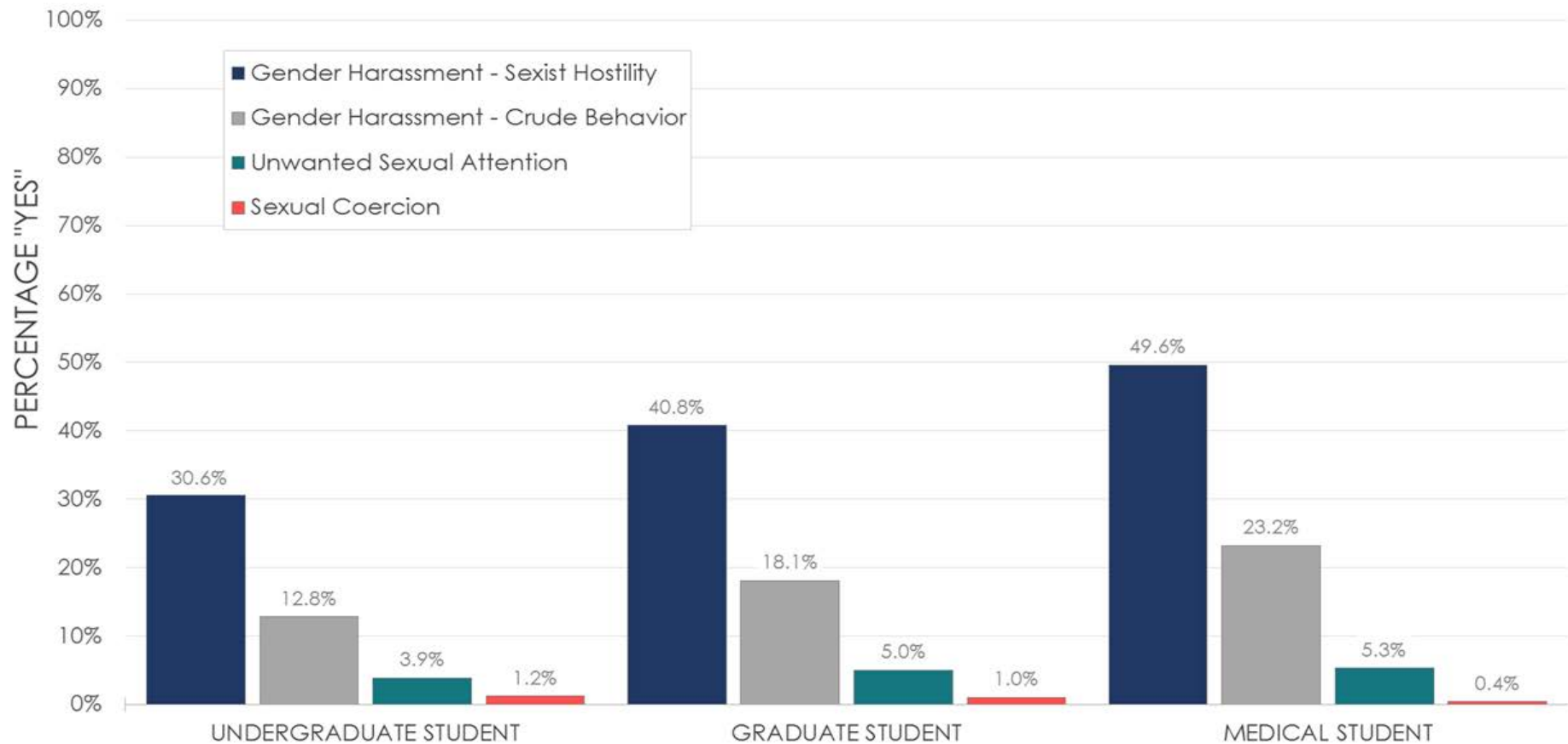
(percent of women employees who were harassed by coworkers or supervisors at a large public university)



Also for Women Students:

Gender Harassment = Most Common

(percent of women students harassed by faculty or staff within a large state university system)



THE ICEBERG OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT



The diagram illustrates the concept of sexual harassment as an iceberg. The visible tip above the water line represents 'come-ons', while the much larger submerged part represents 'put-downs'. The 'come-ons' section includes 'coerced sex', 'groping', and 'relentless pressure for dates'. The 'put-downs' section includes 'unwanted sexual discussions', 'graphic images at work', 'obscene gestures (e.g., about masturbation)', 'vulgar name-calling ("slut", "c**t")', 'crude comments about bodies', 'sexist insults ("women don't belong")', '"not man enough" insults', 'infantilization ("baby", "dear")', and 'derisive remarks about working mothers'.

come-ons

- coerced sex
- groping
- relentless pressure for dates

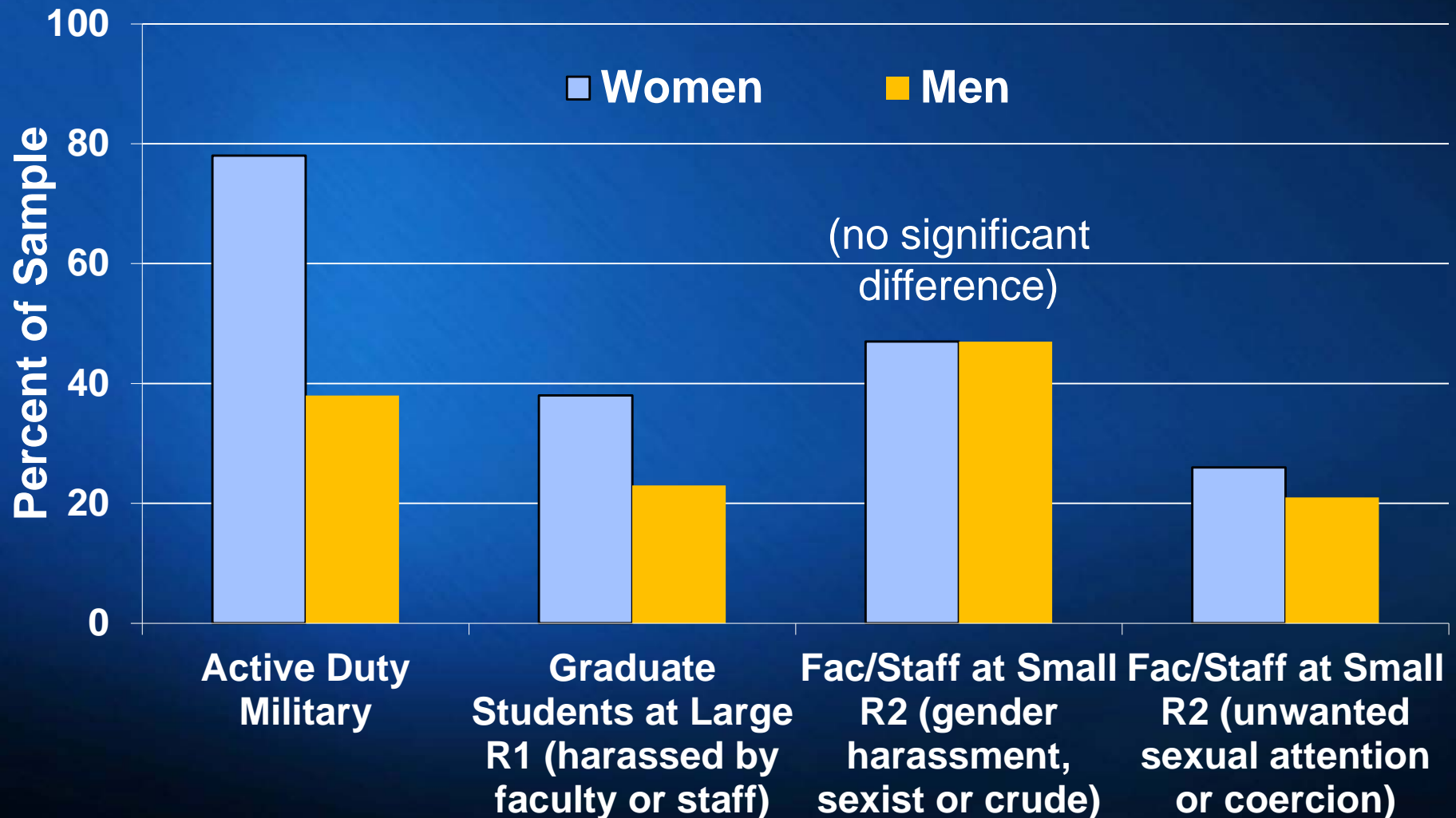
put-downs

- unwanted sexual discussions
- graphic images at work
- obscene gestures (e.g., about masturbation)
- vulgar name-calling ("slut", "c**t")
- crude comments about bodies
- sexist insults ("women don't belong")
- "not man enough" insults
- infantilization ("baby", "dear")
- derisive remarks about working mothers

*Who is most at risk for being
targeted with sexual
harassment?*

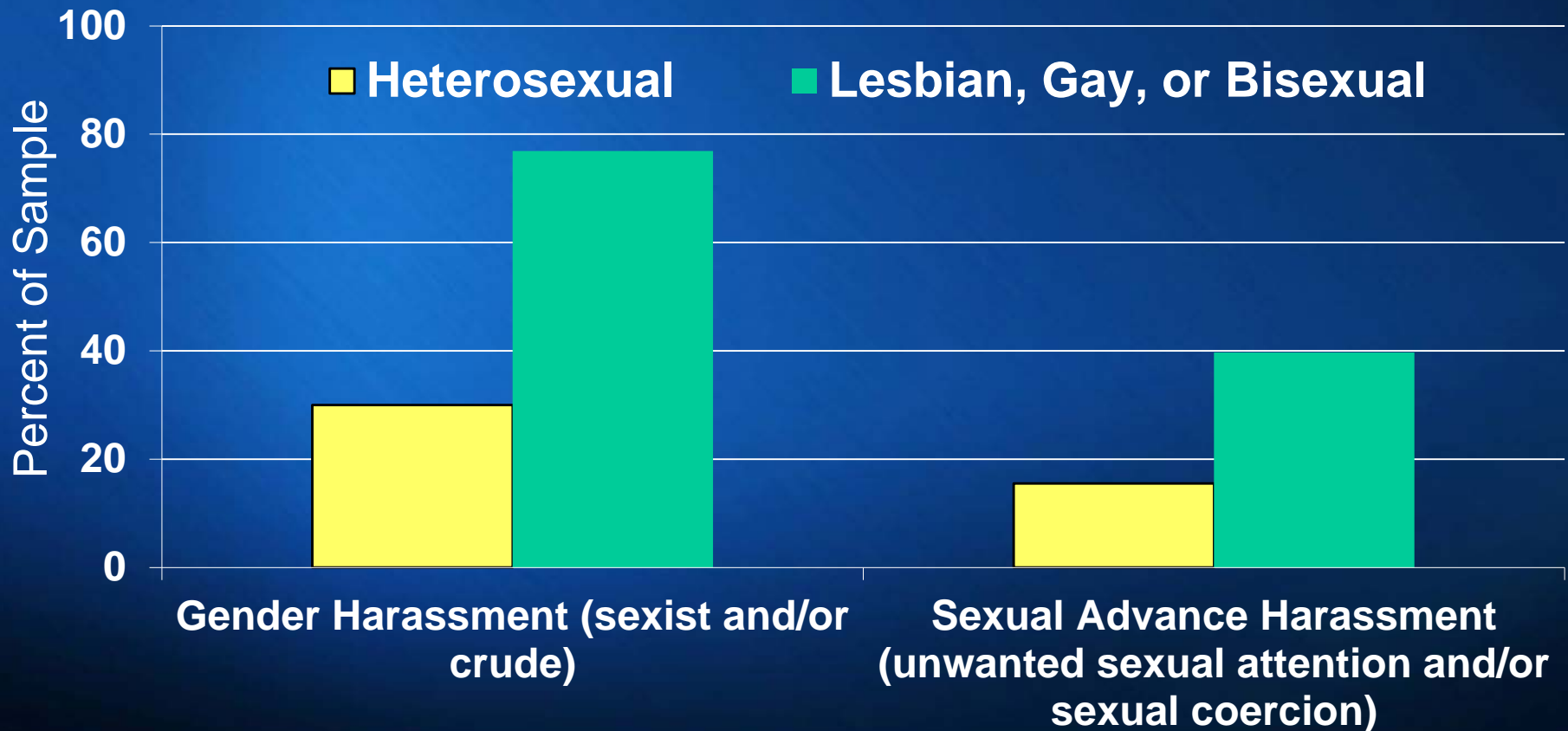
Major Risk Factor: Being Female (or Feminine)

Percent of sample facing at least one harassing behavior at work (or graduate school) during past year



Major Risk Factor: Being Sexual Minority

Percent of university faculty/staff facing at least one harassing behavior on the job during the past year
(faculty & staff at a small public R2 university)



*How does sexual harassment
relate to work and wellbeing?*

Sexual Harassment Outcomes

(for reviews, see Cortina & Berdahl, 2008; Cortina & Leskinen, 2013; Fitzgerald & Cortina, 2017; Holland & Cortina, 2016)

● Professional wellbeing

- job satisfaction
- job commitment
- job burnout
- job stress
- work withdrawal
- job withdrawal
- quitting
- performance impairment (verbal, spatial)
- team conflict
- lowered team cohesion
- lowered team financial performance

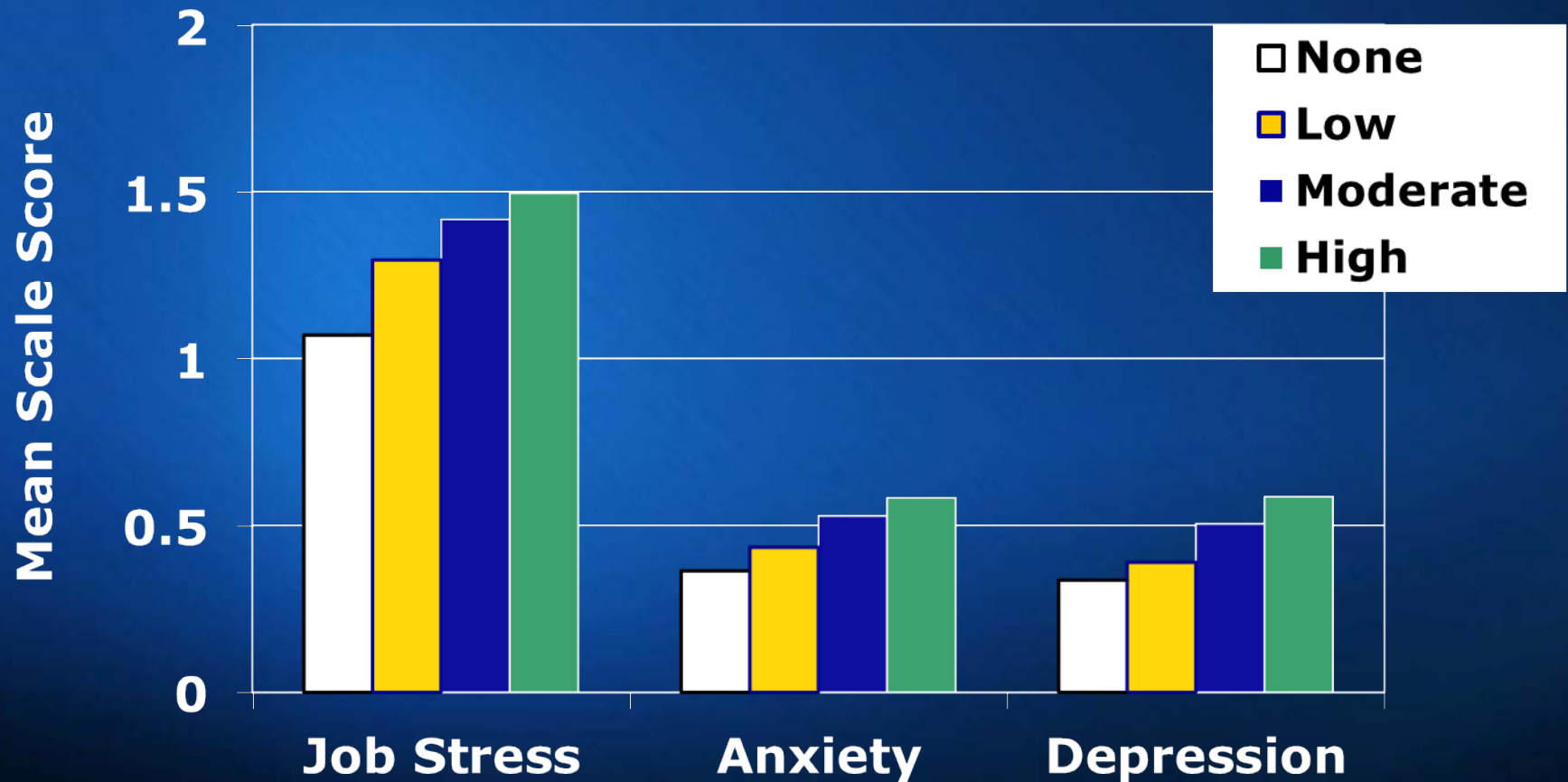
● Psychological wellbeing

- anxiety
- depression
- posttraumatic stress
- problem drinking
- disordered eating
- anger, disgust, fear
- lowered life satisfaction

● Physical wellbeing:

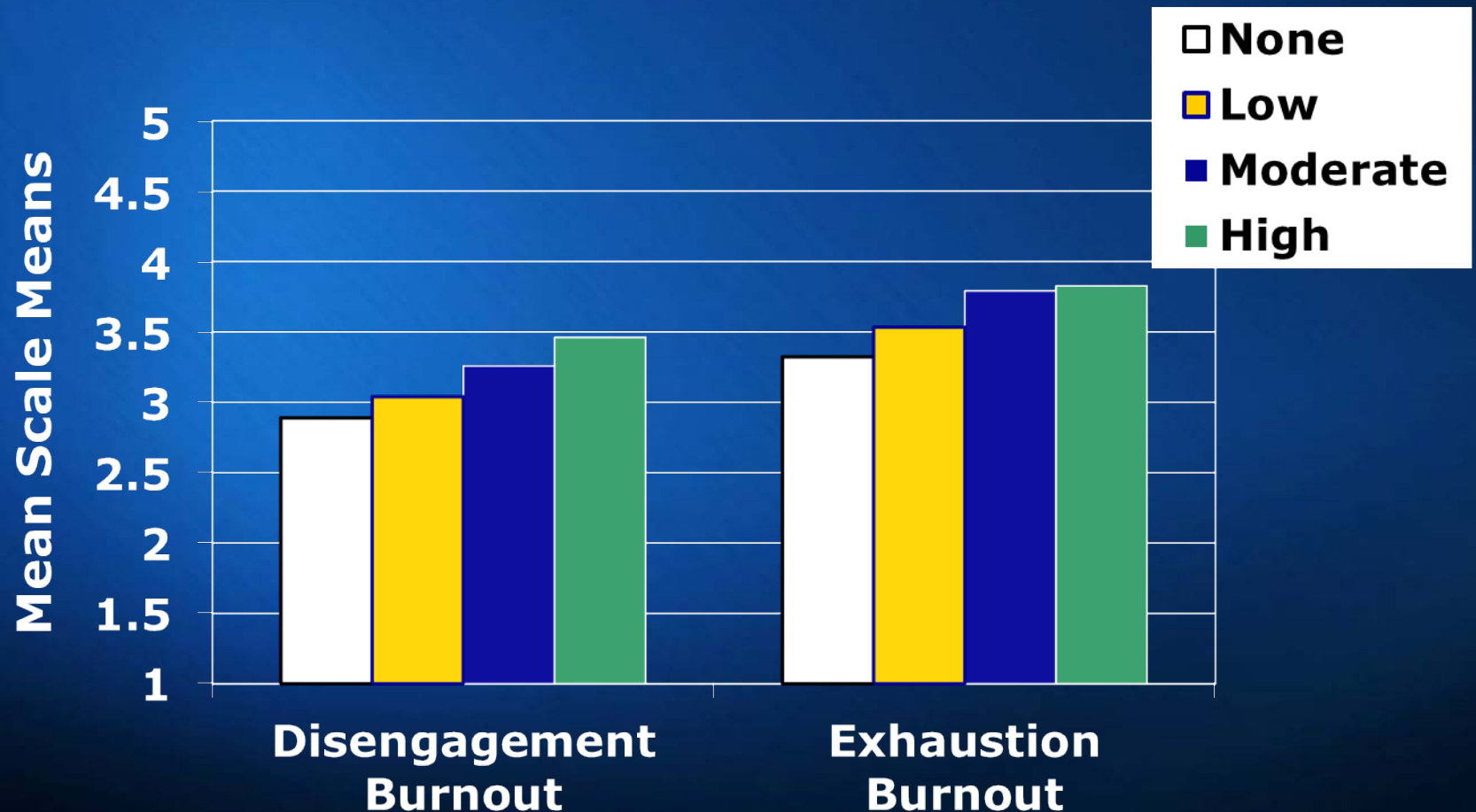
- headaches
- sleep problems
- GI problems
- weight loss/gain
- increased cardiovascular reactivity

Faculty/Staff Distress Increases as Harassment Becomes More Frequent (public university faculty/staff, male & female)



Faculty/Staff Burnout Rises as Harassment Becomes More Frequent

(public university faculty/staff, male & female)



Faculty/Staff Think About Quitting as Harassment Becomes More Frequent (public university faculty/staff, male & female)



Outcomes are *NOT* explained by

- Experience of other stressors (e.g., prior physical or sexual assault)
- Other features of the employee's job (occupational level, years on the job)
- Features of personality (neuroticism, tendency to experience negative emotions)
- Other demographics (age, education, race)

Similar Patterns of Outcomes in Studies Using Variety of Methods

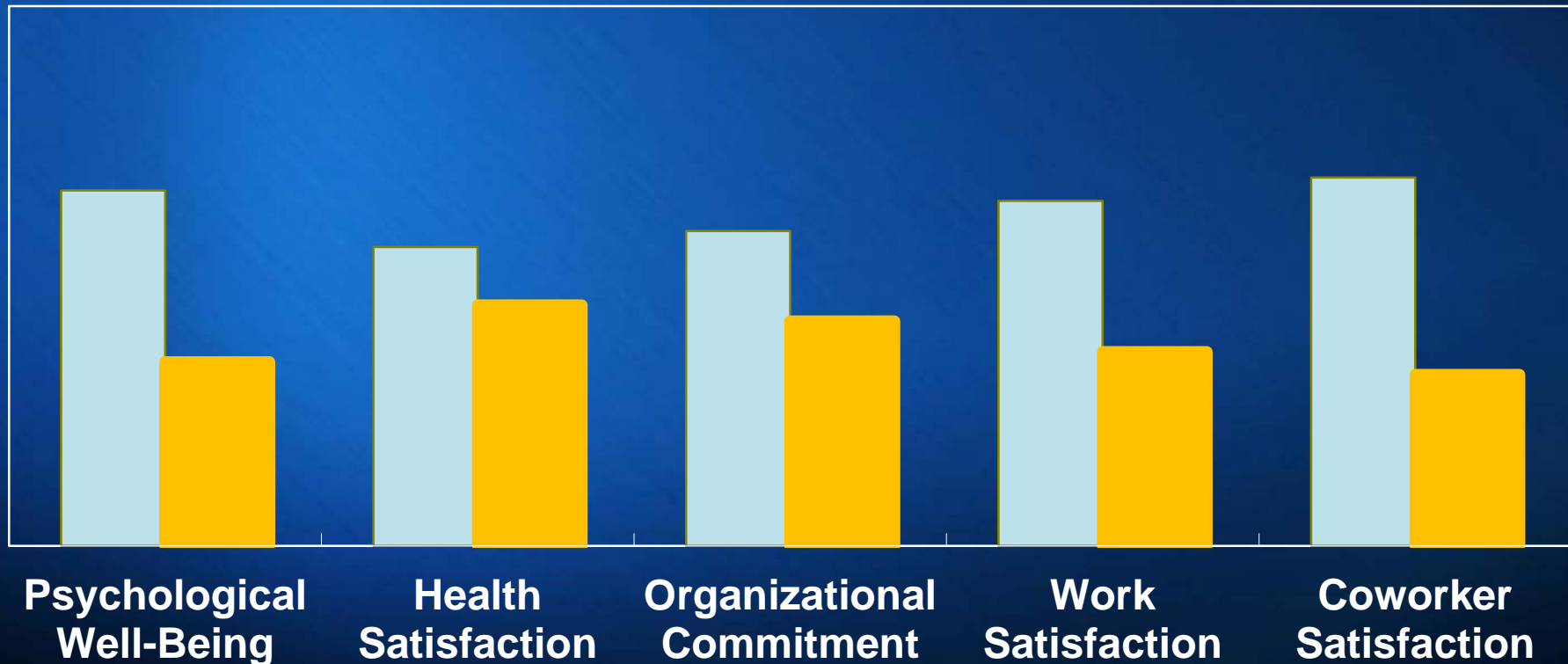
- Longitudinal designs (e.g., multi-wave surveys conducted over a series of years)
- Experience sampling methods (aka “daily diaries”)
- Laboratory experiments
- Qualitative methods (e.g., in-depth interviews)

*Do outcomes depend on the
type of harassment
(e.g., gender harassment is
no big deal, sexual coercion
is "the worst")?*

Outcomes of Gender Harassment (women working within U.S. military)

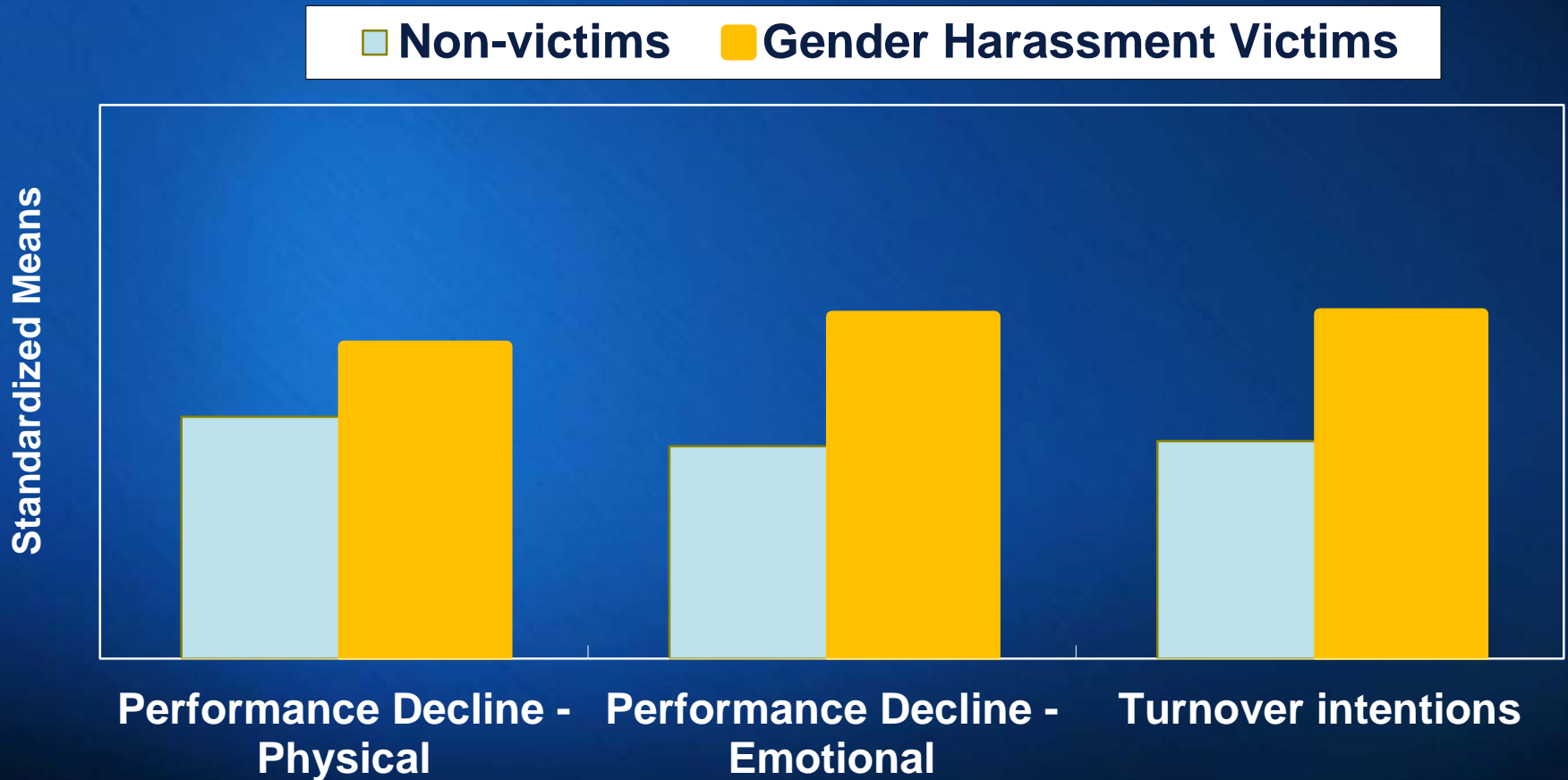
After accounting for effects of race, rank & service branch...

■ Non-victims ■ Gender Harassment Victims



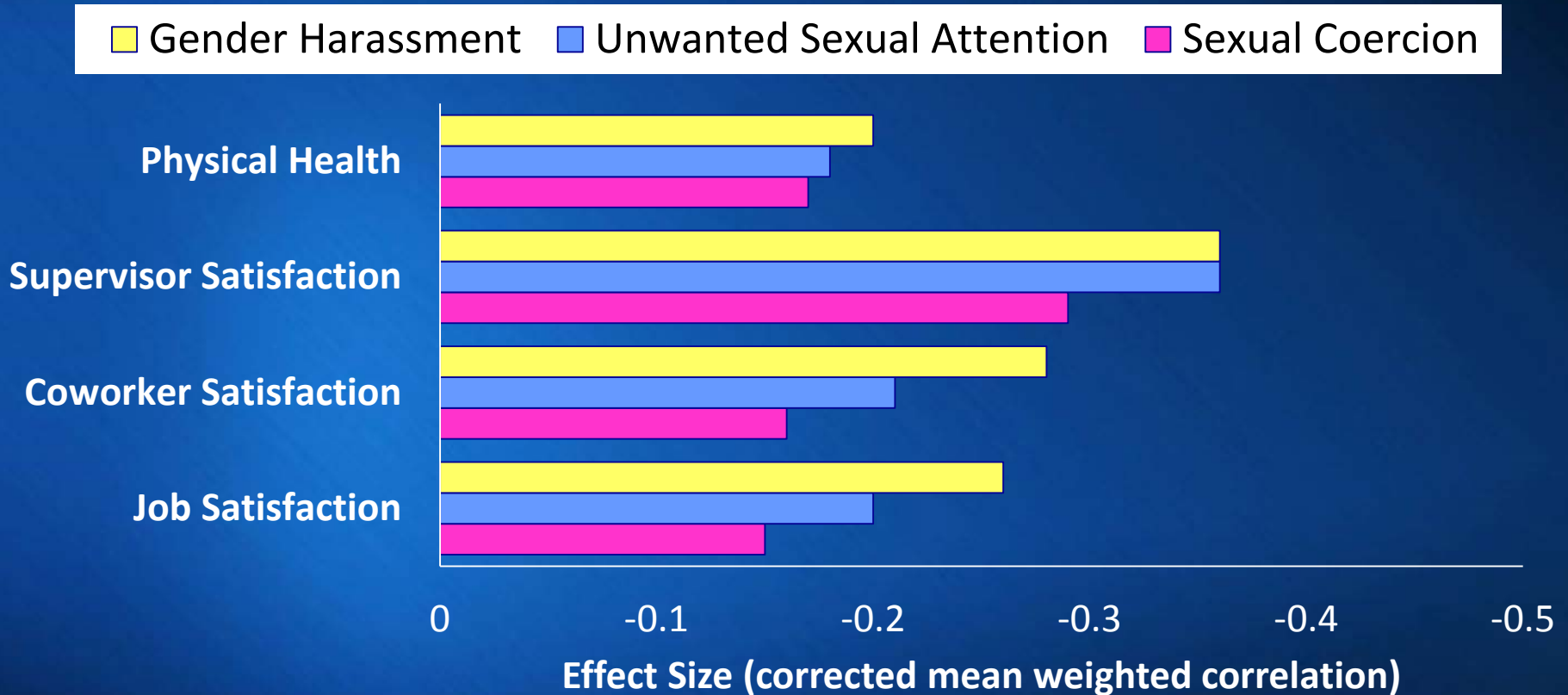
Outcomes of Gender Harassment (women working within U.S. military)

After accounting for effects of race, rank & service branch...



Sojo et al. (2016) Meta-Analysis

(integrating results across 88 studies, N = 73,877 women)



Key conclusion: Gender harassment has at least as great - *if not greater* - impact on professional & personal health, compared to unwanted sexual attention & sexual coercion.

Sojo et al. (2016) Interpretation

- *“Sexual coercion and unwanted sexual attention are traumatic for the people involved, and more likely to result in court cases and public reporting. However, in many work settings, these intense experiences are low-frequency events...The more frequent, less intense, and often unchallenged gender harassment, sexist discrimination, sexist organizational climate...appear at least as detrimental for women’s well-being. They should not be considered lesser forms of sexism.”*

Is Gender Harassment Illegal???

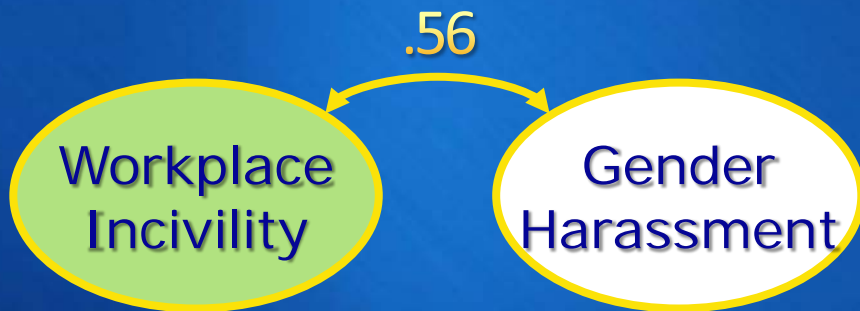
- Gender harassment can meet all legal criteria for “hostile environment” sexual harassment:
 - Occurring “because of” the victim’s sex
 - Being “severe or pervasive” enough to adversely alter conditions of employment
 - Creating an environment that a “reasonable” person would find, and the victim finds, hostile/abusive
- Title VII: no mention of sexual behavior
 - Focus on sexual behavior emerged over time as the courts revised their interpretations of Title VII
- Regardless, we should expand protections beyond those required by law: even without a Title VII violation, harassment can be corrosive to work and wellbeing

It's often not "just" gender harassment: Environments high in gender harassment tend to have other indignities...

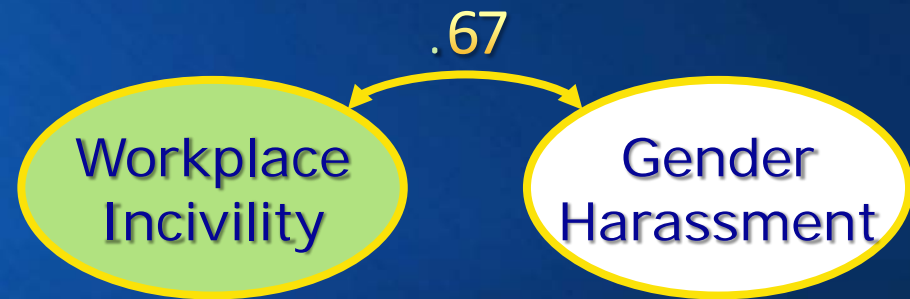
Workplace Incivility

- Definition: “low intensity deviant (rude, discourteous) behavior with ambiguous intent to harm the target in violation of workplace norms for mutual respect”
- CFA results (interfactor correlations):

N = 833 female court employees



N = 1,425 female attorneys

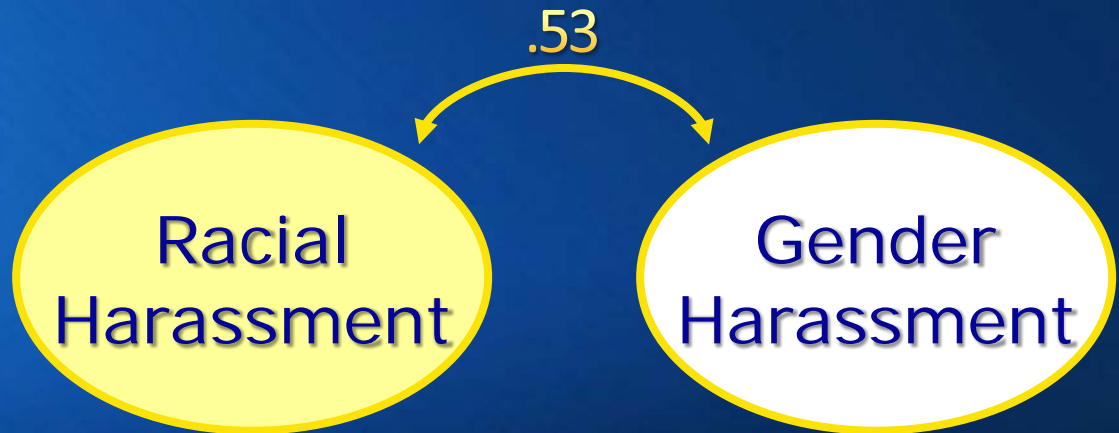


- Nearly all gender-harassed women reported incivility
- Implication: Incivility may be a “gateway drug” – opening door to identity-based abuses (e.g., gender harassment)

Racial/Ethnic Harassment

- Definition: “threatening verbal conduct or exclusionary behavior that has an [ethnic/racial] component” (Schneider et al., 2000)
- Strong correlation, in work lives of people of color
- Where there is one form of identity-based harassment, others are not far behind

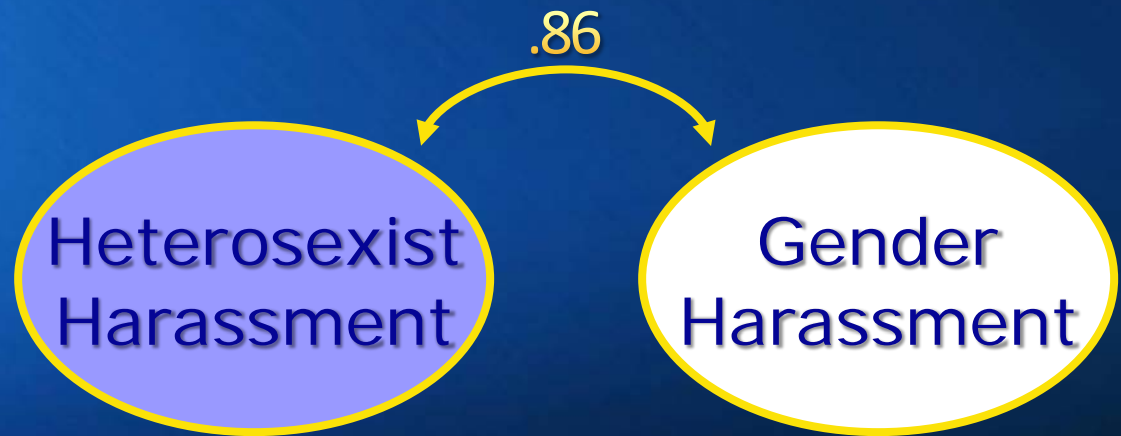
N = 476 Latinas (range of organizations)



Heterosexist Harassment

- Definition: Workplace conduct that “overtly conveys devaluation, rejection, and/or hatred of non-heterosexuality” (Konik & Cortina, 2008)
- WHOPPING correlation
- We can separate these types of harassment in research, but they’re difficult to disentangle in life
- Where there is one, you will find the other

N = 629 university faculty/staff
(58% female; 36% LGBTQ)



Key Take-Aways

- Sexual harassment takes different forms:
 - Sexual Coercion, Unwanted Sexual Attention, and (most commonly) Gender Harassment
- Sexual harassment derails work and wellbeing, even without sexual advance or legal violation
- Along with sexual harassment come other assaults to individual dignity
- To move the needle on this problem, need to think outside the box
 - Beyond policies, procedures, penalties for the most sexualized and coercive (and rare) acts

*#TimesUp:
How can organizations
move the needle on
sexual harassment???*

Beyond Sex Policies

- Contrary to popular belief, sexual harassment often entails no sexual advance
- Need to move away from emphasis on unwanted sexual pursuit as quintessential sexual harassment
- U.S. EEOC (1980) :
 - *“Unwelcome **sexual advances**, requests for **sexual favors**, and other verbal or physical **conduct of a sexual nature** constitute sexual harassment when this conduct explicitly or implicitly affects an individual’s employment, unreasonably interferes with an individual’s work performance or creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work Environment”*
- Need to take gender harassment seriously

Beyond Reporting

- Reporting is rare
 - Fewer than 1 in 3 targets talk informally with leadership
 - Fewer than 1 in 4 file formal reports
- Targets have many reasons to avoid reporting
 - Fear of blame, disbelief, inaction, retaliation, humiliation, ostracism, career damage
 - Fear of triggering an investigation; police involvement
 - Fear of triggering consequences for perpetrators
 - Widespread belief: reporting is only appropriate for the most egregious acts (sexual, assaultive, coercive)
- Reporting mechanisms are necessary, but not sufficient to move departmental cultures

**Policies
Procedures
Penalties**



**coerced sex
groping
relentless pressure for dates**

come-ons

**What
are we
doing
here?**



**unwanted sexual
discussions
graphic
images at
work
obscene gestures (e.g.,
about masturbation)
vulgar name-calling
("slut", "c**t")
crude comments
about bodies
sexist insults
("women don't belong")
"not man
enough"
insults
infantilization
("baby", "dear")
derisive remarks
about working
mothers**

put-downs

One Promising Practice: Focus on Cultivating a Culture of Respect

- Leaders: model respectful work behavior
- Mission statements, policies, codes of conduct: Explicitly state expectations for respect
- Educate all faculty & staff on those expectations
 - Explicitly discuss respect toward all social groups
 - Emphasize that discrimination includes subtle acts of devaluation, exclusion, interruption
- Reference checks: ask about interpersonal behavior
- Provide communication coaching/training as needed
- Pay attention & intervene: don't dismiss any insult as trivial, a "personal issue that will work itself out"

That's all Folks!
Comments, questions, ideas?

- For more information or copies of research articles, please contact me: lilia.cortina@umich.edu
- Or: visit my lab website (google “Gender and Respect in Organizations Lab”)