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# Most women never report their brushes with sexual harassment

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By [Matt Rocheleau](#)

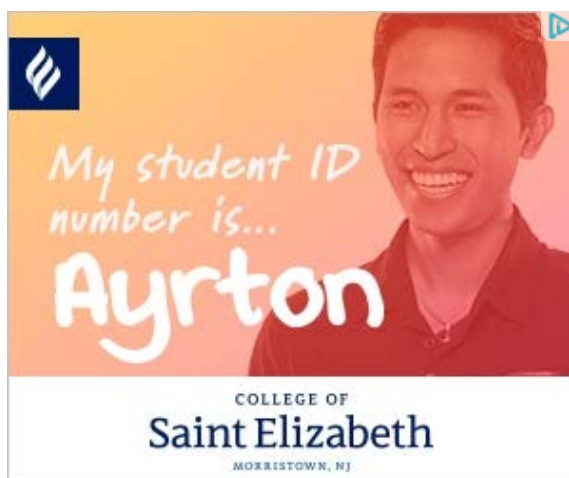
GLOBE STAFF OCTOBER 16, 2017

Following the assault and harassment allegations against movie mogul Harvey Weinstein, millions have responded on social media this week with a simple message: “Me too.”

Of course, the large number of online posts only scratch the surface of the problem. The US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, the federal agency that enforces workplace discrimination laws, [says](#) that the “most conservative” estimate of the percentage of women who have experienced [sexual harassment](#) specifically in the workplace is 25 percent, or one in four.

The agency [says](#) that by the “most accurate” estimates, 40 percent of women have experienced “unwanted sexual attention or sexual coercion” at work. And when you broaden the definition to also include “sexually crude conduct or sexist comments” at work, the percentage rises to 60 percent.

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When you consider there are 74.6 million women in the civilian labor force, according to the [United States Department of Labor](#), that would mean that at a minimum, about 18.7 million women have experienced sexual harassment at work.

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More accurate totals are that 29.8 million women have experienced “unwanted sexual attention or

sexual coercion” at work, and about 44.8 million women have experienced “unwanted sexual attention, sexual coercion, sexually crude conduct, or sexist comments” at work.



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While women are more often the target of sexual harassment, men are also victims. In [recent years](#), men accounted for between 16 percent and 18 percent of work-based sexual harassment allegations filed with the EEOC.

And all of the above statistics represent the prevalence of sexual harassment among civilian workers only.

Verbal and physical sexual harassment are well-documented problems in most if not every aspect of society: within the [military](#), at [schools](#) and [colleges](#), on [streets](#) and other public places, and on the [Internet](#).

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“Sexual harassment takes a lot of forms,” said Anne Hedgepeth, interim vice president of public policy and government relations at the American Association of University Women. “It can start young as bullying and can certainly grow as people age.”

But sexual harassment often goes unreported, experts say.

For example, according to the EEOC, upwards of 85 percent of people who experience sexual harassment at work never file a formal legal charge, and approximately 70 percent of employees never complain internally.

Workplace victims of sexual harassment often don’t report the behavior or file a formal complaint because they fear one or more of the following outcomes: they won’t be believed; nothing will be done; they will be blamed; and they will face retaliation socially, professionally, or both, the EEOC says.

The agency says the fear of retaliation is well-founded, citing a 2003 study which found that 75 percent of employees who spoke out against workplace mistreatment faced some form of retaliation.

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