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## UNH Researchers Say Companies Need to Get Schooled on Sexual Harassment Training

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DURHAM, N.H. – From Hollywood to Washington, D.C., and everywhere in between, there has been a steady stream of high-profile sexual harassment allegations making headlines and starting conversations about better awareness. While many businesses have sexual harassment training in place, they might be more successful by considering the results of sexual assault and harassment prevention programs offered on college campuses, according to researchers at the University of New Hampshire.

“There are some valuable lessons to learn,” said Jennifer Griffith, an assistant professor of organizational behavior and management. “First, the more effective training used on college campuses is more immersive and takes place over several weeks or even months. Second, there is more commitment to measurement. Unless you follow up programs with detailed surveys or other instruments, you don’t know whether a change in attitude has stuck.”



In their study (<https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/industrial-and-organizational-psychology/article/ustoo-how-io-psychologists-can-extend-the-conversation-on-sexual-harassment-and-sexual-assault-through-workplace-training/634BE392AA182B153850A1B2452380AB/core-reader>), Griffith and co-author Kelsey Medeiros, an assistant professor of management at the University of Nebraska-Omaha and a fellow at UNH’s Prevention Innovations Research Center (PIRC), evaluated more than 30 years’ worth of peer-reviewed research on sexual assault and harassment prevention programs. They focused on four key areas—individual differences, training design, evaluation and organization climate—in creating lasting behavioral change.

They found that in a college setting the programs that were more interactive were more effective. For example, along with the training, when individuals had the opportunity to practice the learned behavior both in and after training, trainees were more likely to have a shift in attitude and behavior. By contrast, many businesses tend to minimize interventions—either by limiting them to a single meeting during employee onboarding or online. Also, organizational data on training practices and outcomes is challenging to find, making it difficult to understand what is working well, or not, in workplace training.

The researchers acknowledge that finding novel ways to integrate practice into the workplace and to continue discussion on the topic can be problematic for this type of training. How to respond to sexual assault and how to avoid harassment and assault are both delicate topics that require sensitivity and thoughtfulness. They highlight the need for special care and attention in designing training programs to avoid unintended organizational consequences or backlash from trainees.

“To develop training that offers positive outcomes, we think it’s important for organizational leaders to reflect on their values and what is rewarded and prioritized in practice,” said Medeiros. “Our hope is to open a dialogue that will not only hold organizations accountable but help them develop more effective training content, methodology, and evaluation.”

To establish successful training programs, the researchers point out that businesses and their leaders need to critically reflect on their values and what is rewarded in their workplace. They also need to develop a better understanding of when training works and when it does not. Griffith and Medeiros say there is a need for transparency about a company’s training content and they encourage more collaboration between academics and practitioners and hope this study can open pathways for conversation and collaboration.

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