

# The Gender Divide in Reporting Harassment and Discrimination in the Workplace and its Outcome

by **Chad Lackey, Ph.D.**, Director and **Emma Shuck**, Consultant

Employees still struggle with the decision to report harassment and discrimination despite legal protections and increased efforts by employers to make it easier and safer. Will I be blamed or face retaliation? Will it make a difference? Will employers even take my complaint seriously? With no easy answers to these questions, victims too often decide never to report their experiences. In 2016, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) estimated as much as three-quarters of harassment in the workplace goes unreported. The #MeToo movement reminded all of us just how many women choose to keep silent about sexual harassment, sometimes for years.

This article uses self-reported data to examine the frequency with which victims of harassment and discrimination report their experiences to their employer. However, we also go further and examine the consequences of those reports for victims, specifically the degree to which they are satisfied with how the situation was resolved. Taking the lessons learned from the #MeToo movement, we focus our analysis on the gender differences between these phenomena. Overall, the data show that men are not only much more likely to report incidents of harassment and discrimination but are also more likely to be satisfied with their employer's handling of the situation.

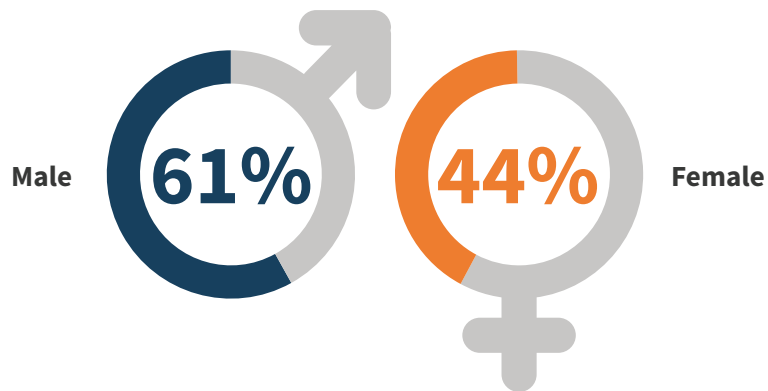
DOAR surveyed 1,000 jury-eligible adults from the Los Angeles and New York metropolitan areas. The sample included 500 respondents from the New York metropolitan area and 500 from the Los Angeles metropolitan area. The sample was half male and half female. Respondents ranged in age from 18 to 86 with a mean age of 47 and a median age of 44. The racial composition of the sample included: 61 percent Caucasians, 18 percent Hispanics, 11 percent Asians, 7 percent African Americans and 3 percent other.

The survey focused on harassment and discrimination due to gender, race, national origin and age. Respondents were first asked whether they or someone close to them had ever experienced what they thought was harassment or discrimination of any kind at work. Respondents were then asked if they or the person close to them reported the harassment or discrimination to a supervisor, human resources or any other official source. Finally, they were asked if they were satisfied with how the situation was resolved.

## Gender Divide on Reporting Harassment and Discrimination

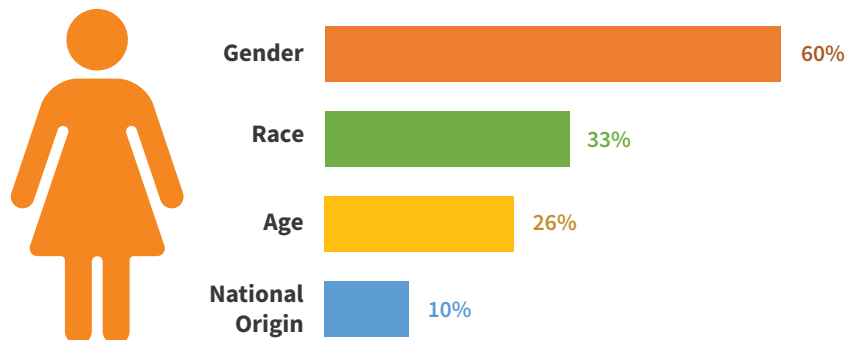
Among the 371 victims of any type of harassment or discrimination in the sample, the majority (59%) reported the incidents to their employer. However, the differences between the genders were striking. Whereas 61 percent of male victims reported the incidents to their employer, less than half (44%) of female victims did.

### Reporting Harassment and Discrimination To Employers:

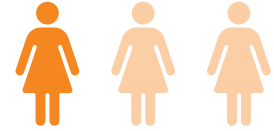


For women, the decision not to report harassment and discrimination may stem, in large part, from the type of harassment and discrimination they are most likely to experience. Among the different types women in the sample experienced, the majority (60%) experienced harassment or discrimination due to their gender. Thirty-three percent were victims due to their race, 26 percent due to their age and 10 percent due to their national origin. In contrast, among male victims, harassment or discrimination due to race was most commonly experienced, followed by harassment/discrimination due to age and national origin, with harassment/discrimination due to gender as the least common.

### Types of Harassment and Discrimination Women Experience:



Given the prevalence of sexual harassment and gender discrimination among female victims in the sample, the gender divide in reporting may be a consequence of low reporting rates for this type of harassment and discrimination. Data show that female victims of sexual harassment or gender discrimination indeed have low reporting rates; only about 1 out of every 3 female victims in the sample ever reported these experiences to their employer.



**Only 1 out of 3 Women Report**

This low reporting rate is substantially different than victims of other types of harassment or discrimination, whether they be male or female. For male victims, reporting rates vary from 73 percent (race) to 71 percent (national origin) to 53 percent (age). For female victims, reporting rates vary from 79 percent (national origin) to 60 percent (race) and 48 percent (age).

While sexual harassment and gender discrimination largely account for the gender divide in reporting, data suggest that women are less likely than men to report their experiences when it comes to other types of victimization as well, although the effect is not as pronounced. For example, whereas 73 percent of male victims of racial harassment/discrimination report their experience to employers, only 60 percent of female victims do. Moreover, this difference approaches statistical significance ( $p=.08$ ).

### Reporting Harassment and Discrimination Due to Race:



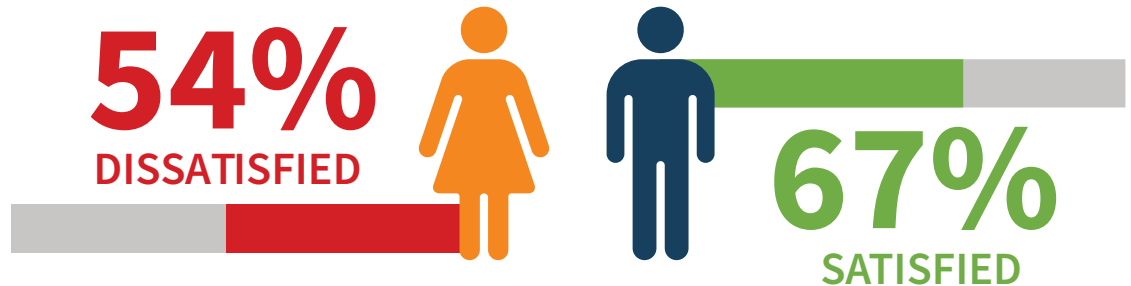
## The Gender Divide in Satisfaction with Employers' Handling of Complaints

Reporting of harassment or discrimination is merely the first step of the process. Once it is reported, employers must respond to these complaints, investigate them and take the appropriate course of action. Unfortunately, many victims lack confidence that their employers will satisfactorily address the issue. This lack of confidence leads many to remain silent about their victimization. In fact, previous analysis of data in this survey show that those who did not report their experiences did so because: they feared retaliation (42%), did not think it would help (27%), did not think they would be believed (9%), feared social retaliation (9%), and thought they would be blamed (7%).

Among those who ultimately decide to report their victimization, how satisfied are they with the result of doing so? Does this lack of confidence prove misplaced? Overall, data show the majority of respondents who had reported their victimization (58%) were satisfied with their employers' handling of the situation. However, satisfaction

rates differed significantly between men and women. While over two-thirds (67%) of male victims report being satisfied with the outcome, the majority of female victims (54%) report being dissatisfied with the outcome. Not surprisingly, these findings are statistically significant (p=.003).

### Gender Divide in Satisfaction with Outcome:



What accounts for this gender divide? Why are male victims more likely to be satisfied with the outcome than their female counterparts? We suspect that the answer lies in part with the type of harassment and discrimination women are most likely to experience and report. In fact, the data show this to be the case; sexual harassment and gender discrimination largely account for the gender divide in satisfaction.

Sixty-three percent of women who complain about sexual harassment or gender discrimination report being dissatisfied with their employer's handling of the situation. However, this high rate of dissatisfaction does not hold for female victims of other types of discrimination and harassment. For these women, the majority (55%) report being satisfied with their employer's handling of the situation.

### Women's Satisfaction with Employers' Handling of the Situation:



Still, the data suggest women are less likely as a whole to be satisfied with the outcome than their male counterparts. Seventy-one percent of male victims of age, race or national origin harassment/ discrimination report being satisfied by their employers' handling of the situation, while only 55 percent of female victims of these types of harassment/discrimination do. Moreover, this difference approaches statistical significance (p=.08).

While the #MeToo movement has shed light on the silence surrounding sexual

harassment in the workplace, what's more troubling is the notion that most women who do gather the courage to speak up are dissatisfied with the results. The question is: why?

Unfortunately, the answer deserves more attention than we can give here. Yet, we believe that the first step in unraveling this problem starts with listening to victims, particularly those who choose not to report their experiences. After all, who is better able to understand obstacles in the workplace better than employees? It is likely that many of the same factors affect women's decision to report or not to report harassment also affect their satisfaction with their employer's handling of the situation. Thus, we hypothesize that women likely are dissatisfied with the outcome, in part, due to retaliation, their allegations not being taken seriously enough, being blamed for the conduct and little, if anything, changing after the report is made. Other likely contributing factors include: the weight placed on corroborating evidence and the he said/she said dilemma, difficulty policing certain conduct often associated with sexual harassment (such as leering, sexual entredres, intrusions into personal space, etc.), gender stereotyping and the persistence of institutional discrimination. Future research is needed to identify the most significant causes of the gender divide in reporting and satisfaction with outcome.

Only when we identify and overcome the obstacles to reporting sexual harassment/ gender discrimination and producing satisfactory outcomes for victims can we make significant progress in creating workplaces that are safer and more satisfying for all women.

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We used the 2-question census model for determining ethnicity. The first question asked if respondents identified as Caucasian (70%), African American (9%), Asian (12%), Filipino or Pacific Islander (1%), Mixed (4.6%) or Other (3.7%). The second question identified respondents who had Hispanic origins (18%). The ethnic breakdown presented here represent the percentages of non-Hispanic Caucasians, non-Hispanic African Americans, non-Hispanic Asians and so on.

\* This analysis focused only on those who reported that only they had been victims. Individuals who reported that both they and someone close to them had been victims were ignored, because limitations in the data prevented us from distinguishing who was a victim of what type of harassment. Nevertheless, when this data was included, the ranking of most frequently experienced form of harassment and discrimination among men and women remained the same. Additionally, percentages reported add up to more than 100 percent because respondents were allowed to report more than one type of harassment/discrimination.

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