

The Worker Institute at Cornell

Equity at Work

Research at a Glance

Research Project

The Experience of Being Targets of Street Harassment in NYC: Preliminary Findings from a Qualitative Study of a Sample of 223 Voices Who Hollaback!

Purpose

To better understand how street harassment is experienced.

Data

Descriptions of street harassment experiences were gathered through information submitted by members of the public to the Hollaback! website between 2005 and 2008.

Project Partners

The Worker Institute at Cornell, part of the Cornell University ILR School (www.ilr.cornell.edu), advances worker rights and collective representation nationally and internationally.

hollaback! (www.ihollaback.org) is a movement dedicated to using mobile technology to end street harassment.

Researchers

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Related research

www.ilr.cornell.edu/news/WorkerInstitute_42712.html

More information

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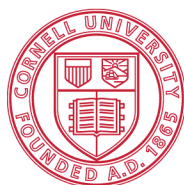
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Findings

- **Street harassment is an under-researched, but likely prevalent experience for many New Yorkers.**
- **Targets feel violated by all types of street harassment.** Anecdotes indicated that emotional reactions to street harassment varied. But, any type of harassment (e.g., verbal, groping, assault) could produce extreme feelings of fear, anger, shame, etc. This indicates that it may be the violation of being harassed, rather than specific behavior that is one of the main drivers of a target's emotional response.
- **Taking action generally has a positive influence on a target's emotional response to the experience of street harassment.** Targets who chose to take action, whether while experiencing street harassment or afterwards (e.g., taking a photo of the harasser, reporting harassment to officials), appeared to experience less negative emotional impact than those who did not. For example, those who responded assertively to their harassers tended to describe emotional responses that were outwardly focused (e.g., anger, surprise). More passive responders described inwardly-focused emotions (e.g., embarrassment, helplessness, fear).
- **Bystander presence can have both positive and negative influences on a target's emotional response to being harassed, depending on actions taken.** When a bystander took action by confronting the harasser, the harassment was more likely to cease. Importantly, bystander interventions that had a positive influence on the target could be as simple as a knowing look or a supportive, empathetic statement. In contrast, when bystanders failed to act, their presence tended to compound other negative emotional responses to the experience. Most harassment targets said bystander inaction was highly unacceptable.

Developing an Explanatory Model of Street Harassment

- **An explanatory model of street harassment informed by our research and current literature is being developed to frame early findings.** It will predict when individuals are likely to perceive street harassment and what moderating effects will modify reactions. A preliminary model has been vetted with individuals not involved in the data analysis process; it will be modified after it has been quantitatively tested.



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