



Cornell University
ILR School

hollaback!

FACT SHEET: When Street Harassment Comes Indoors: A sample of New York City service agencies and unions response to street harassment (KC Wagner, Beth A. Livingston, and Sarah T. Diaz¹)

I. Findings

Street harassment is an under-researched but likely prevalent experience for many New Yorkers. . In partnership with Hollaback!, a movement dedicated to ending street harassment using mobile technology, researchers at the Worker Institute at the Cornell University School of Industrial Labor Relations sought to better understand how often New York City-based social service providers receive reports of street harassment, and how they respond to those reports. The 110 responses to our survey of service providers indicated the following:

i. New York City-based social service, advocacy, and labor organizations receive a significant number of complaints regarding street harassment from clients, constituents, consumers, and/or staff, and believe street harassment is an issue of importance for employees and/or those they serve. ***Over 86% of respondents had received a report of street harassment in the past two years from a client, constituent, or consumer, while 96% reported that they or a colleague had been targeted by street harassment.***

ii. Upon receiving reports of street harassment, staff members of New York City-based social service, advocacy, and labor organizations are more likely to utilize informal (rather than formal) responses in dealing with them. ***96% of respondents indicated that they responded to reports of street harassment by listening, while only 20% referred the complainant to another colleague or agency, and as little as 5% called security or a city authority.***

iii. Staff members of New York City-based social service, advocacy, and labor organizations indicate having some confidence in dealing with reports of street harassment but desire increased training and resources for staff and clients, constituents, and consumers. ***Over 92% of respondents reported an interest in receiving increased resources for staff and clients, constituents, and/or consumers on how to deal with street harassment; 70% of respondents felt that their clients, constituents, or consumers should be provided with information and resources on how to deal with street harassment, regardless of organizational mission.***

¹ Lead researcher KC Wagner, Director of Workplace Issues, Cornell-ILR, with Beth Livingston, Assistant Professor of Human Resource Studies, Cornell-ILR, and Sarah T. Diaz, Graduate Social Work Intern, Hunter College School of Social Work. With acknowledgment to Sarah T. Diaz for her outstanding contributions to the study design, implementation and report writing, and great appreciation to Emily May, Co-Founder of Hollaback!, for her vision and vitality.

II. Next Steps

Based on our findings, we recommend that policy-makers and service providers invest in the following solutions to combat street harassment:

Resources

- Development of a comprehensive resource guide for service providers
- Making available and engaging consultants (such as Hollaback!) who can help guide organizations as they institute policies and practices regarding street harassment
- Providing routine trainings and webinars for those on the front lines

Public Education

- The institution of harassment free zones around schools
- Holding community safety audits, a United Nations recognized best practice for assessing the level of safety from gender-based violence in a community
- Engagement of the local business community to train proprietors and staff about street harassment and how to respond to reports of harassment
- The incorporation of an anti-street harassment curriculum into anti-bullying and sexual education efforts
- Neighborhood speak-outs that are designed to get community members to share their stories and build awareness that they aren't alone
- Public service announcements that work on educating both targets of harassment and bystanders to encourage engagement and reporting. These PSAs should be featured in heavily trafficked spaces, including bus stops and subways
- Public hearings that work to raise awareness and educate the public about the issue
- Workshops on street harassment and how to intervene safely if you witness street harassment
- E-mail blasts that educate community members that provide resources on how to respond to harassment and information on organizations that are addressing it
- Editorials and opinion pieces that denounce the behavior

Reporting

- Training for 311 and 911 operators on how to respond to and effectively track reports of street harassment
- Connecting existing reporting mechanisms, such as Hollaback!'s free iPhone and Droid apps, to 311 to allow for increased ease of reporting
- Incorporating questions on the prevalence and impact of street harassment incorporated into existing measures, such as the Department of Health's annual Community Health Survey.
- Investing in in-depth research on the impact of street harassment on community members' decisions related work, housing, education.