“Everyone Is Doing It”: When Did Teenage Peer Sexual Harassment Become “Normal”?

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**Introduction**
A disturbing trend involves the ambivalence of students towards actions and behaviors of sexual harassment that they consider “normal”.

**Purpose**
Explore perceptions among teens concerning acceptance of peer-peer sexually implicit actions and behaviors.

**Overview of the Issue**
- Approximately 75% of students state they have experienced sexual harassment within a school environment.
- Theories suggest why sexual harassment relates to different developmental and societal influences including cultural, structural, biological, development, and abuse of power.
- Victims of sexual harassment often feel embarrassed, labeled, or afraid if they speak up.
- Prevention programs and recommendations are crucial to create a safe environment.

**Objectives**
- Identify the prevalence and incidence of sexual harassment occurring in schools.
- Define sexual harassment and peer to peer sexually implicit actions and behaviors among teens.
- List attitudes and behaviors concerning peer to peer sexual implicit actions or behavior among teens.
- Suggest interventions for prevention and suggest policy changes for schools to address the issue of peer to peer sexual harassment.

**Procedures**
- IRB approval.
- Target Group- high school students attending local public high schools.
- Focus Groups

**Main Findings**
- When asked what is sexual harassment, several students said they barely knew and no one ever clearly defines it for them.
  - All students said their understanding of sexual harassment is not sufficient.
  - Students said they have discussed sexual harassment in class between 7th-10th grade.
  - Many students said their sexual education was taught by an instructor from an outside program.

**Findings cont.**
- Students said they want better programs on sexual education, prevention tips, and a better understanding of sexual harassment.

**Conclusions**
Students need to be better informed about the legal definition of sexual harassment and specific behaviors included in the definition.

**Recommendations**
- Training courses in junior high and high schools.
- Creating educational components about the value of human rights.
- Conducting the study asking questions with more cultural wording.
- Separating out the focus groups by gender.
- Recruiting from junior high through college to see trends and changes.

**REFERENCES**