

Sexual Harassment & Gender-Based Discrimination

RESEARCH SUMMARY

NO. 15 | FEBRUARY 1, 2024

INTRODUCTION

During the fall of 2023, Utah Women & Leadership Project (UWLP) researchers conducted a statewide study to establish a baseline for public perceptions related to the awareness, understanding, and attitudes about challenges that Utah women and girls face (see [Background & Methods](#) for details). The study was created to support the work of 18 areas of focus (spokes) within the movement called [A Bolder Way Forward](#), which is dedicated to helping Utah girls and women thrive. One of the 18 areas of focus is sexual harassment and gender-based discrimination, and this summary shares findings that highlight present perspectives and establishes a baseline to track progress in a few key areas.

BACKGROUND

The UWLP published a research snapshot titled [“Sexual Harassment: What Utahns Need to Know”](#) in 2018 and a research white paper titled [“Addressing Workplace Sexual Harassment: Public Policy Solutions for Utah”](#) in 2022. Other reports, such as the UWLP [series of five sexist comments](#) publications, added insight into the status and experiences of Utah women related to both sexual harassment and gender-based discrimination. Yet, it has been difficult to track current trends and to measure any progress regarding this issue. Four survey items in the current study provide additional insight that can guide changes that will improve women’s experiences in Utah workplace settings.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Participants responded to each survey item using a 7-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=somewhat disagree, 4=neither disagree nor agree, 5=somewhat agree, 6=agree, 7=strongly agree). For Sample 1 (non-probability), 2,526 Utahns responded to these four questions, and for Sample 2 (representative), there were 650 participants (Total=3,176).

1. Problem: The first survey item was “Sexual harassment and gender-based discrimination are problems in the state of Utah.” The statistical mean was 6.06 (SD 1.18) for the non-probability sample and 5.09 (SD 1.42) for the representative sample. Although there was a significant difference between samples, 2,649 (83.5%) of respondents combined agreed at some level, with 1,303 selecting “strongly agree.” See the combined demographic findings below.

DEMOGRAPHIC FINDINGS

**Gender:* Women’s agreement levels were significantly higher than men’s (6.01 and 5.21, resp.).

Age: There were no significant differences among age range categories.

**Education:* The more education, the stronger the agreement that there are problems in the state.

Marital Status: There were no significant differences among categories.

**Income:* Study participants making more money had higher agreement.

**Children:* There was no significant difference between parents and non-parents. Among parents, those with more children disagreed slightly less.

**Race & Ethnicity:* Those who identified as White had the strongest agreement, and those as American Indian had lower levels of agreement.

**Religion:* Respondents who identified as Catholics or Latter-day Saints had the lowest agreement levels. The more religiously active, the less the agreement.

**Employment:* Full-time students and employees agreed more strongly with this survey item.

Residency: There were no significant differences among categories.

**Counties:* Cache, Iron, Summit/Wasatch, and Salt Lake had the highest agreement, while Box Elder, and the Tooele, Morgan, and Rich region had the least.

**Denotes statistically significant differences within the demographic categories.*

2. A Big Deal: The second survey item was “People make a bigger deal out of sexual harassment and gender-based discrimination than is warranted.” The statistical mean was 2.05 (SD 1.34) for the non-probability sample and 2.85 (SD 1.67) for the representative sample. The combined results of both samples found that 82.3% of respondents disagreed at some level with the statement (42.0% strongly disagreed). Another 10.0% neither agreed nor disagreed, and only 8.9% agreed. Thus, the consensus establishes that there is a problem and that it is a “big deal.” See the combined demographic findings below.

DEMOGRAPHIC FINDINGS

**Gender:* Women’s disagreement levels were significantly stronger than men’s (2.07 and 2.79, resp.).

Age: There were no significant differences among age categories.

**Education:* The higher the educational attainment level, the stronger the disagreement.

Marital Status: There were no significant differences among categories.

**Income:* Respondents who had higher household incomes had statistically significantly stronger disagreement responses.

**Children:* Nonparents had higher agreement than parents. Among parents, those with teens more strongly disagreed.

**Race & Ethnicity:* The strongest disagreement came from those who identified as Asian, Hispanic, and White.

**Religion:* Respondents who identified as Catholics or Latter-day Saints did not disagree as strongly as those in other affiliations. Also, the less active respondents were, the stronger disagreement.

**Employment:* Full- and part-time employees, along with full-time students, disagreed more strongly.

Residency: There were no significant differences among categories.

**Counties:* Summit/Wasatch, Iron, and Salt Lake residents most strongly disagreed.

3. Steps to Take: The third survey item was “I know what steps to take or what resources are available if I or a friend experienced sexual harassment.” The statistical mean was 4.78 (SD 1.67) for Sample 1 and 4.61 (SD 1.61) for Sample 2 (both are less than “somewhat agree”). For the representative sample specifically, 44.5% either disagreed or were not sure, while another 20.6% selected “somewhat agree.” The findings suggest that many Utahns are uncertain of what to do if they experience or see others experience sexual harassment and other types of gender-based discrimination. See the combined demographic findings below.

DEMOGRAPHIC FINDINGS

Gender: Women and men agreed at similar levels (4.75 and 4.73, resp.).

**Age:* Respondents over 50 agreed more strongly that they knew what steps to take.

Education: There were no significant differences among categories.

**Marital Status:* Those who were married or living with a partner/cohabiting had significantly stronger agreement.

**Income:* Respondents making less than \$34,999 had significantly lower agreement responses than those with household incomes in higher ranges.

**Children:* Parents were more likely to disagree more strongly than non-parents. There were no significant differences among parents by number and ages of children.

**Race & Ethnicity:* The strongest agreement came from those who identified as Black and White.

Religion: There were no significant differences among religious affiliations or activity levels.

**Employment:* Respondents who were retired, full-time employees, and full-time students had the strongest agreement.

Residency: There were no significant differences among respondents who had lived in Utah differing lengths.

**Counties:* Residents in Cache, Iron, and the Millard, Sevier, Juab, Beaver, and Piute region were more likely to agree that they knew what steps to take and resources that were available.

4. Trust: The final survey item was “I trust that most organizations in Utah would appropriately handle a sexual harassment report.” The statistical mean was 3.25 (SD 1.66) for Sample 1 and 4.26 (SD 1.64) for Sample 2. For the non-probability sample, 59.8% of respondents disagreed at some level. In fact, only 11.1% selected “agree” or “strongly agree.” Although Sample 2 had a high mean, it was still neutral (neither agree nor disagree). Overall, there is low trust that Utah organizations will appropriately handle sexual harassment reports. See the combined demographic findings below.

DEMOGRAPHIC FINDINGS

**Gender:* Women’s agreement levels were significantly lower than men’s (3.30 and 4.17, resp.).

Age: There were no significant differences among categories.

**Education:* The more education a study participant had, the less trust.

**Marital Status:* Those who were divorced or married but separated had significantly less trust in organizations than those in other categories.

**Income:* Respondents who had annual household incomes less than \$100,000 were more agreeable.

**Children:* Parents were significantly more likely to agree than were non-parents. There were no differences related to children’s ages.

Race & Ethnicity: There were no significant differences among race and ethnicity categories.

**Religion:* Catholics and Latter-day Saints, followed by Protestants, had the strongest trust levels, but they fell between “neither agree or disagree” and “somewhat disagree.” Those who selected “very active” were the most trusting, and “not at all” active were the least trusting.

**Employment:* Although still low, full-time homemakers (3.83) had the strongest levels of agreement.

Residency: There were no significant differences among categories.

**Counties:* The counties with the lowest trust levels included Salt Lake, Summit/Wasatch, and Iron, while the most trusting included the Millard, Sevier, Juab, Beaver, and Piute region and Box Elder, but the statistical means were still around neutral (4.51 and 4.03, resp.).

CONCLUSION

This summary highlights key findings related to four sexual harassment and gender-based discrimination survey items. Respondents from across the state participated in the study (see [Background & Methods](#) for the demographic details on both samples). Both sample categories are useful in understanding perceptions and attitudes of Utahns on this topic.

Strikingly, 2,649 (83.5%) of respondents in the combined samples agreed—with 1,303 selecting “strongly agree”—that sexual harassment and gender-based discrimination are indeed problems in Utah. This is a clear message to Utah leaders in all types of workplaces (e.g., business, government, politics, education, and nonprofit) that it is time for change. However, one of the most troubling findings from this study is that Utah employees, particularly women, do not trust that organizations in the state will appropriately handle a sexual harassment situation if it is reported. Trust is essential if Utah women are going to feel safe, and feeling safe is a critically important component of thriving.

The overarching goal of [A Bolder Way Forward](#) is to make Utah a place where more women and girls can thrive. When Utah women flourish, all of Utah’s population benefits. Change is necessary.

For questions and information:

- uwlp@usu.edu
- utwomen.org
- abolderwayforward.org



We thank our partners for supporting this research:

Bed Bath & Beyond, Utah Center for Legal Inclusion, Utah Coalition Against Sexual Assault, & Nu Skin.