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In Advance of NIH Action, Stakeholders Seek Harassment Database, Services for Victims

By Theresa Defino

An independent federal office should be established to address "substantiated claims of sexual misconduct," investigators should disclose related findings against them, and perpetrators' victims—and their careers—must be protected, a group of stakeholders say in a new paper.[1]

As published in a recent issue of *Science*, the group is offering these and other strategies and calls to action just weeks before NIH is set to receive a similar set of recommendations from its Working Group on Changing the Culture to End Sexual Harassment.

NIH and research institutions can "rapidly" implement a number of "high-impact policy changes that build upon existing mechanisms for research funding" to combat both sexual harassment in science and increase gender diversity, write the 23 coauthors of "Increasing gender diversity in the STEM research workforce."

While some of the ideas overlap with interim recommendations the working group issued this summer, there are differences. Some of the commonalities may be because the first author on the paper, Carol Greider, director of molecular biology and genetics at Johns Hopkins University, is also a member of the NIH working group. Final recommendations are scheduled to be presented to the NIH Advisory Committee to the Director (ACD) when it meets later this month.

The new paper is the product of a meeting in December 2018 held at Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory following the release of *Sexual Harassment of Women: Climate, Culture, and Consequences in Academic Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine*, a report by the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine.[2] The report was the first to highlight the high incidence of sexual harassment on campuses, in particular, that "58 percent of women faculty and staff in academia (all disciplines, not limited to science, engineering, and medicine) experienced sexual harassment," and was also one of the drivers for NIH's creation of the working group.

Implementation of any of the recommendations in the *Science* paper "must be coupled to vigorous and continuous outcomes-based monitoring, so that the most successful strategies can be disseminated and widely implemented," the coauthors said. "Though our professional focus is primarily academic biomedical research in U.S. institutions, we suggest that some of the approaches that we discuss may be broadly useful across STEM disciplines and outside of academia as well."

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