

Handout on prevention of sexual harassment in student groups

Why is this relevant for student groups?

In various student groups in Germany, cases of sexual assault have already become public¹. Even though no case has yet been reported in the press at the University of Stuttgart, there are also people affected here and it is therefore an issue that we must also deal with. It is of the highest priority to prevent assaults and to help those affected.

The student council of the University of Stuttgart is represented by the stuvus, especially the executive board and the student groups. The student groups are responsible for supporting the students, especially at the beginning, and for facilitating their entry into everyday life at the university through freshers' events.

Organisers of freshers' events have a special responsibility, as they create the freshers' first impression of everyday life at the university. In the case of inappropriate behaviour, this leads to a strong negative influence on the course of studies and also to students dropping out, and thus to the exact opposite of the goal of freshers' events. New students often orientate themselves on the role models and their respective behaviour, which they see at the freshers' events of the representatives, so that they imitate and replicate this. The representatives, especially those with elective office, are required to observe this in their behaviour and not to violate the tasks of the student council with this behaviour. They are in a special role, as students turn to them in trust for professional, social, cultural, economic or political advice. Sexual harassment or even assault must not happen in this context. They not only violate the reputation of the student council, but first and foremost the dignity of the person being harassed.

What is sexual harassment?

Sexual harassment is always one-sided behaviour that is fundamentally different from flirting or compliments. The decisive factor is that the actions are unwanted, as well as violate the dignity of the person concerned and are perceived by him or her as unpleasant and or disrespectful. Out of insecurity and fear of being considered a prude, sensitive or humourless, many victims deny or gloss over sexual harassment. It can be verbal, non-verbal or physical sexualised acts - from verbal innuendos in everyday communication to criminal offences!

¹ [https://fsmath.uni-bonn.de/protokollarchiv.html?file=files/mate/documents/FSR-Protokolle/Archiv/19-10-30 Protokoll-FSR-Sitzung-Anhang-Mitteilung_Medizin.pdf](https://fsmath.uni-bonn.de/protokollarchiv.html?file=files/mate/documents/FSR-Protokolle/Archiv/19-10-30%20Protokoll-FSR-Sitzung-Anhang-Mitteilung_Medizin.pdf)
https://ga.de/bonn/stadt-bonn/uni-bonn-sexuelle-belaestigung-bei-ersti-fahrt-bleibt-unbewiesen-verfahren-eingestellt_aid-46427123
[https://asta.hhu.de/fileadmin/AStA_HHU/Unterseiten/Referate/Fachschaftenreferat/Stellungnahme_der_Fachschaftenvertretendenkonferenz - Sexuelle Belaestigung.pdf](https://asta.hhu.de/fileadmin/AStA_HHU/Unterseiten/Referate/Fachschaftenreferat/Stellungnahme_der_Fachschaftenvertretendenkonferenz_-_Sexuelle_Belaestigung.pdf)

Although all persons can be affected equally, those affected are predominantly women. Forms of sexual harassment can be, for example:

- Insinuating or ambiguous remarks about appearance and clothing,
- remarks and jokes of a sexual nature,
- Dissemination or display of pornographic images or texts, provided these do not serve scientific purposes,
- Unwanted gifts,
- persistent unwanted contact,
- solicitation and/or unwanted invitations with clear intent,
- Proposals with the promise of advantage or the threat of disadvantage,
- Unwanted physical contact or solicitation,
- Sexually motivated stalking,
- Sexual assault, coercion or rape.

Criminal offences in Germany are stalking, sexual assault and rape.²

Inappropriate remarks and jokes are also serious violations of the dignity of others. In student groups there should be a climate in which everyone is treated with respect.

Sayings such as: "She's only there for decoration", "go to the kitchen, where you belong to", "can you bend over like that again?" are shameful and hurtful and therefore completely inappropriate.

What can student groups do to prevent this?

In general, before you say something, think about whether the comment is appropriate, because sexist remarks simply don't have to be.

Also, as a bystander, you should intervene if you see someone being harassed or discriminated against.

Make sexual harassment an issue and stand up against it!

→ For example, you can name a responsible person in your student group who is open to those affected (perhaps the awareness guide can help here).

→ display information material, such as this guide, in your student group.

At freshers' events (especially the Freshers' Weekend)

→ When advertising your freshers' events, point out that you do not tolerate sexual harassment and name the contact persons (of the university and your student group or stuvus central).

→ Designate contact persons who will be present at the events and whom those affected can turn to.

→ Alcohol disinhibits and is no excuse for sexual harassment! Even under the influence of alcohol, everyone is responsible for their own actions.

→ Ensure that all games/events can also be attended with a non-alcoholic drink and that this is accepted without questions and pressure.

² https://www.beschaeftigte.uni-stuttgart.de/document/dokument_arbeitsplatz/Richtlinie-Belaestigung-2018-02.pdf

→ Ensure that games in which the aim is to undress are not part of the programme. Even if no one is forced in the strict sense, peer pressure arises. Such disinhibiting and sexualising games encourage sexual assault.

What can you do when affected persons come to you?

If someone contacts you, it probably took a lot of courage to say something. As a contact person, you can help just by listening. The person concerned alone decides where his or her boundaries are, where he or she feels comfortable. Therefore, it is very important that you take the incidents seriously and encourage the person.

In the case of minor incidents, you can ask the person whether what happened should remain between you or whether it should be addressed in the student group or together with the harasser. As a mediator, you can help to ensure that the person's boundaries are not crossed in the future. Also refer the person to the relevant university authorities.

In the case of criminal incidents, you should encourage the person to contact the university authorities, to avoid the dangerous situation and/or to call the police.

Be aware that you are not experts in the field. Ignorance and being overwhelmed are normal. You can always seek help. So take care of yourself as well. The person concerned and trusted persons who were present in the situation should document their observations of the situation. Stay in contact with the person concerned and enquire about their well-being. Check whether there is an acute danger and support the person to escape the dangerous situation.

If possible, explore whether the person has a supportive environment that can be involved. Be careful that the information about the suspicion does not get to the person who is potentially violent.

Thank you all for your commitment to fair and friendly treatment of freshers and each other. Together we can take another step towards a discrimination-free university climate.

Your Department for Gender Equality, Diversity and Social Affairs on 28th June 2021

Contact persons

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Further information:

<https://stuvus.uni-stuttgart.de/en/sdg/>

<https://www.student.uni-stuttgart.de/en/uni-a-to-z/Sexual-harassment/>

<https://www.leuphana.de/en/services/office-for-equal-opportunities/portal-sexualized-discrimination.html>

