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## National Poll Finds 21% of Women Have Been Sexually Harassed at Work

### But most Americans still believe bosses should stay out of employees' private lives

Milwaukee, WI - Valentine's Day is traditionally a time for romance - for heart-shaped chocolates, long-stemmed roses and candle-lit dinners for two. But in recent years, it also has become a relevant time for evaluating the incidence of sexual harassment in the American workplace. This year's national survey by the Employment Law Alliance, a worldwide network of employment and labor lawyers, reveals that 21% of the women polled said they have been sexually harassed at work.

Scott C. Beightol, a partner at Michael Best & Friedrich LLP and chief financial officer/ board member of the ELA, believes many observers may be surprised that this percentage isn't higher, considering the amount of litigation and the number of claims filed with federal and state government agencies each year.

"The poll results confirm that sexual harassment is still very much a fact of life in the American workplace," said Beightol. "The people who will be shocked by these findings think every American workplace is like those in 'Ally McBeal' or 'Sex and the City.' Instead, our findings strongly suggest that most employees are confident in their ability to be self-policing when it comes to sexual harassment. They want employers to stay out of their personal lives, and they perceive litigation only as a course of last resort."

"Our data clearly indicates that the American employer is doing a much better job of practicing prevention in the workplace," he added. "Although we would agree that even one case of harassment is too many, it's significant that 85% of the 1,000 American adults polled said they have never encountered sexual harassment at work."

Beightol stated that while 21% of women polled said they have been harassed on the job, only 7% of the men surveyed reported having similar experiences. He further noted that between 1992 and 2000, the percentage of men filing sexual harassment complaints with the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) rose slightly from 9% to 13%. Overall claims during the same period, however, increased by more than 40%.

Dr. Theodore Reed, survey director and a partner in the Media, Pa., firm of Reed Haldy McIntosh & Associates, said, "We continue to see a trend in which Americans overwhelmingly regard employer regulation of romantic relationships as an unwelcome intrusion."

Jude Biggs, chair of the Labor and Employment Practice Group at ELA Colorado affiliate Holland and Hart, agrees but suggests that the findings also dramatically underscore the need for better workplace education of both management and employees. "Today's workplace is more susceptible than ever to sexual harassment, largely because of the free-flowing World Wide Web and unrestricted, often sexually-suggestive e-mail communications," she said. "Employers must understand how easily the office intranet can be transformed into a tool for harassment and that they have a very important role to play in preventing that from happening."



The Employment Law Alliance is an integrated, global-practice network comprising more than 2,000 employment and labor lawyers from more than 75 premier independent law firms distinguished for their practice in employment and labor law. There are member firms in every jurisdiction of the United States and Canada and in more than 50 countries worldwide.

For more information about the ELA and the "America At Work" survey series, including production-quality charts of the findings, visit [www.employmentlawalliance.com](http://www.employmentlawalliance.com).