



Safety Respect Equity

We Need to Talk:

A Review of Public Discourse and Survivor Experiences of Safety, Respect, and Equity in Jewish Workplaces and Communal Spaces

Executive Summary

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The #MeToo movement has drawn wide attention to the pervasiveness of sexual harassment and assault. The movement provoked revelations of sexual victimization across the globe as well as across industries and faith communities. As the #MeToo movement has grown, it has laid bare an inescapable truth: the Jewish community is subject to the same kinds of issues, inequities, and power dynamics that exist in other communities. Inspired by these events, and with a desire to broaden and deepen the conversation around gender discrimination and sexual victimization and harassment within the Jewish community, the Safety Respect Equity (SRE) Coalition conducted research to better understand the state of safety, respect and equity in Jewish workplaces and communal spaces as well as the experiences of survivors of sexual harassment and assault within the Jewish communal world.

THE RESEARCH WAS ANCHORED AROUND FOUR KEY QUESTIONS:

- 01 What have been the experiences of victim-survivors of sexual harassment and assault within Jewish workplaces and communal spaces?

- 02 Where have Jewish organizations succeeded and failed in meeting their obligations regarding safety, respect, and equity and in responding to victim-survivors' needs?

- 03 How is the broader Jewish community discussing these issues and what are the possible implications of the discourse?

- 04 To what extent is discourse that has happened publicly, both within and beyond Jewish-focused media and from major Jewish organizations, aligned or misaligned with victim-survivor experiences and perspectives?

To answer these questions, the research utilized three key methods: **(1)** a qualitative review of available primary and secondary data on survivors' experiences; **(2)** an analysis of the SRE Coalition Standards Diagnostic primary dataset; and **(3)** a content analysis of public discourse (from October 2017 through April 2019) within and beyond the Jewish community.

For a more complete understanding of our findings please see the full report [here](#).

KEY FINDINGS

The key findings of the research are grouped into five main topic areas: They are **(1)** relative status of safety and respect within the Jewish communal world **(2)** presence of inequity and discrimination, **(3)** responses to allegations and disclosures within organizations and communal spaces, **(4)** the factors contributing to a lack of safety, respect, and equity in Jewish spaces, and **(5)** meaning of broader public discourse. These key findings are categorized and outlined below.

Findings

A Lack of Safety and Respect

KEY FINDINGS

- Survivors believe that there is a lack of safety and respect across Jewish workplaces and communal spaces. They report an absence of both physical and psychological safety and respect, which manifests in a range of harassing and abusive behaviors, from sexist name-calling and jokes with innuendo to sexual assault and rape.
- Most survivors are women and most perpetrators are men. Victimization happens across power levels and is perpetrated by individuals of varying roles within the Jewish community.
- Numerous risk factors to victimization and discrimination are at play including power imbalances, the structure of Jewish institutions, and Jewish views and treatments of gender.
- Victimization itself has negatively impacted survivors and the Jewish professional world. This includes disempowering and destabilizing survivors, driving survivors to leave the Jewish professional world, creating ongoing trauma to survivors, and causing a loss of faith among survivors.
- There is a strong fear of reporting among victims, driven by personal factors (e.g., feelings of fear, shock, shame, and self-blame) as well as external issues (e.g., lack of knowledge about or access to legal, financial, or organizational resources).

Inequity and Discrimination

KEY FINDINGS

- Victims report that inequity on the basis of gender exists within Jewish communities. Those who did not disclose experiences of harassment did disclose experiences of gender bias, discrimination, and sexism.
- Despite their desire to advance, women report that they have fewer opportunities to do so than their male colleagues.
- Men understand how compensation, salary, and raises are set at their organization at higher rates than women.
- Efforts towards preventing discrimination and harassment have sometimes negatively impacted women's ability to succeed in their positions and careers.
- Inequity on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, race, ethnicity, and culture are notably missing from the discussion, potentially signaling that voices of marginalized groups are not being invited to speak or are not being heard.

Responses to Allegations and Disclosures within Organizations and Communal Spaces

KEY FINDINGS

- While there have been both helpful and harmful responses to disclosures, victims report that the majority of responses to their disclosures have been harmful – often causing secondary victimization or trauma.
- Harmful responses to disclosures were especially common when the perpetrator was a donor or lay leader.
- The “bystander phenomenon,” or the lack of action by bystanders even when others around them are suffering, was reported as being a quality of Jewish organizational life.
- Victim-survivors also asserted that a response used to silence them was to invoke Jewish values and concepts (e.g. lashon hara which is the prohibition against gossiping).
- Victim-survivors have found some responses to their disclosures by organizations and individuals helpful.
- Proactively checking in with survivors about potential problems rather than waiting for them to grow was also helpful, as was the existence of mechanisms for independent external review or investigation.
- The presence of a female leader or colleague was, at times, harmful in reporting or disclosing, while in other instances the presence of a female was helpful and supportive.

Factors Contributing to a Lack of Safety, Respect, and Equity in Jewish Spaces

KEY FINDINGS

- Key factors contributing to a lack of safety, respect, and equity in Jewish spaces include: the lack of adequate organizational structures to address harassment and discrimination; a familial sense of community and a lack of professionalism; gender and power dynamics; a culture of open secrets and a lack of bystander intervention; and pressures related to Jewish continuity and Jewish values.
- Survivors report that the lack of organizational structures to address harassment and discrimination means that there are no mechanisms to address these issues when they arise.
- Organizational policies seem to commonly exist for addressing gaps in safety and respect, but much less commonly for addressing inequity.
- Even when organizational policies exist, they are often not known, understood, or clearly and adequately operationalized.
- The informal, familial, and sometimes unprofessional environment within Jewish spaces can make it difficult to differentiate between what is and is not appropriate and to address sexual harassment when it occurs.
- The gender, generational, and power gaps between typically older men who run Jewish spaces and young women who work in these spaces contribute to the victimization that occurs in Jewish spaces and survivors' ability to speak up about it. Power differentials are at play when it comes to salary differentials, economic security, and organizational seniority or respect.
- The acceptance of "open secrets," where it is known that some individuals engaged in sexual victimization and yet suffer no consequences, is prevalent and puts everyone at risk. This culture means that little is done to protect or prevent people from becoming these perpetrators' next victims.
- Pressures related to Jewish continuity can limit women to roles as wives, mothers, and procreators. Pressures also manifest for Jewish youth through acts of matchmaking, dating pressures at Jewish camps, and other pressures around teen sexuality.

Broader Public Discourse

KEY FINDINGS

- The Jewish community is talking about safety, respect and equity but it is not often in the context of these issues within the Jewish community.
- If there are broad discussions about issues of safety, respect, and equity within the Jewish community, they appear to be largely happening in private. The majority of content comes from a small subset of organizations that primarily includes women's organizations and Commitment adopters.
- Much of the conversation around safety and respect is presented as opinion, and public discourse around gender-based inequity is largely silent.
- The discourse regarding safety among adults is missing the discussion around coercion and consent.
- A notable amount of public discourse coverage on sexual harassment and abuse seemingly does not describe the allegations using those terms.
- The media tends to focus on the alleged perpetrator rather than the victim and there is a hesitance to name alleged perpetrators, especially beloved men.
- There are few media references to broader systemic issues related to safety, respect, and equity, as incidents tend to be treated in isolation. There is some discussion of how these issues relate to Judaism and Jewish values, as well as anti-Semitism.
- A focus on SRE issues in Judaism and Jewish values was notable in public discourse, including Bible and Torah stories and broader analysis of what Jewish traditions have to say about general SRE issues. There was a strong focus on teshuva, or repentance.

Key Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the above findings, the research drew the following key conclusions and recommendations:

Understanding Victimization and Disclosures

- Many of the takeaways from this research are consistent with existing research findings: the majority of perpetrators of sexual harassment and victimization were male and the majority of those victimized were female; there are links between inequity and sexual harassment; and victim-survivors are often silent following sexual victimization.
- Survivors recognize the potential negative consequences to disclosing. It is critical to ensure supportive individual and organizational responses to disclosures through education about victimization and the difficulties of disclosing. There is a further need to support and promote potential benefits for those who choose to disclose.
- There is a need to understand how discrimination and victimization impact individuals who are marginalized due to aspects of their identities, and strengthen the Jewish response to their disclosures. This includes acknowledging that there are dynamics of intersectional identities and marginalization that shape victim-survivor experiences, that both men and women can be perpetrators or victims, and that sexual victimization is not limited to heterosexual relationships.

Misalignment of Public Discourse with Findings on Victim-Survivor Experiences

- Since victim-survivor experiences indicate that the scope of the problem regarding sexual harassment, abuse, and discrimination within the Jewish community is likely much more extensive than the cases covered and discussion of the issue in public discourse, Jewish communities should persist in efforts to understand and publicly acknowledge the scope of the problem and to address it.
- Victim-survivors pointed to numerous environmental and cultural factors that they believe led to their victimization, but public discourse more often focuses on individual perpetrators rather than systemic issues. Jewish efforts at addressing safety, respect, and equity should consider the structures and systems that may need to change.
- There are likely harassers and abusers in Jewish communal and professional life that are not being held accountable, and there is reason to speculate that some are already 'open secrets' within the community. Jewish communities should continue to pursue conversations and interventions to hold people accountable and increase their awareness about and commitment to bystander intervention.

Silencing Stories or Silencing the Conversation

- It is critical to ensure that Jewish values and texts are never used to silence survivors or revelations of harassing or abusive perpetrators.
- Organizations must understand that when they respond to disclosures, they are prioritizing the perpetrator over the survivor as well as organizational or financial needs over the needs of those they serve or those who work for them.
- It is essential to consider each individual story separately from other stories without trying to weigh which kinds of stories are 'worse' than others. Using the model of the "continuum of sexual violence" will highlight the systemic problems that give rise to, encourage, enable, or hide victimization in the Jewish world.
- Victim-survivors have experienced secondary injury from the organizations and individuals working within when they came forward. When disclosures are made, organizations must respond. They should not shirk this responsibility and place it in the hands of the perpetrator.
- Safety, respect, and equity are often framed as women's issues that must also be dealt with by women. The research shows that women are rarely the heads of Jewish organizations and perceive fewer opportunities for advancement into leadership roles. Men must take an active role in preventing and addressing victimization in ways that extend beyond seeking forgiveness.

Survivor-Centered Public Responses

- Organizations should pursue an understanding of the best ways in which to privately and publicly discuss allegations so that victim-survivors feel supported and protected.
- Conversations around victimization should not minimize or qualify allegations as 'just' a grope, or 'just' verbal, or attributing them to someone's 'sense of humor'. In public discourse, abuses should be named and described as abuses and language that is descriptive of the type and dynamics that underlie it (i.e. sexual, gender, abuses of power, coercion, etc.) should be used.
- When public allegations are made, we must convey support for victim-survivors and broadly condemn the type of abuse or harassment that has been alleged. It is also important to not minimize the accusations, for example by introducing an accused's contributions into the conversation. Responding to a public allegation of abuse or harassment is not the appropriate time to discuss the position and contributions of the individual who has been accused.
- Jewish organizations should deliberate about how to respond to the harm they have caused by ignoring victims when they came forward or when their stories were publicized.

The Role of the Jewish Media

- Jewish media has an important role to play in unearthing stories of discrimination and harassment in Jewish spaces and Jewish media can, therefore, give voice to survivors and amplify their stories.
- It is critical to further reflect on how power relations and dynamics within the Jewish community may be playing into which issues and perspectives are dominant in public discourse and which are marginalized.

Reframing Jewish Narratives

- We must continue re-thinking and reframing Jewish texts, stories, and prayers in light of the revelations about victimization in the Jewish community as well as the broader world, to examine current events related to safety, respect, and equity, offer guidance on some of the dilemmas that have arisen following #MeToo, repair the harm caused through victimization, and hold people and organizations accountable.
- The Jewish tradition can be a useful educational tool and one that can lead to greater insight about the intersection between victimization and one's Judaism. Since sexual victimization is primarily about power, Jewish texts about power between members of the same and/or opposite sex can serve as supplemental teaching tools in addition to Jewish texts explicitly about sexual relationships between members of the opposite sex.

Gaps in the Jewish World Regarding Sexual Victimization

- In light of victims' experiences both with victimization and in attempting to bring it to the attention of Jewish organizations and employers, Jewish organizations should consider including survivors in the work they do to prevent and address victimization.
- Education around victimization and its many dynamics in Jewish workplaces and communal spaces is necessary.
- Ongoing support to victim-survivors should be provided including financial, emotional, and legal support, as well as tailored career coaching after experiencing or disclosing harassment and other forms of victimization.
- Education around the appropriate response to disclosures – whether by individual Jewish community members or those in the workplace – and an understanding of the secondary victimization that occurs following unhelpful responses are essential.
- Strengthening institutional infrastructure can go a long way in creating supportive environments. As the SRE Standards dictate, this means implementing systems of best practice that include: establishing clear and transparent reporting and investigative processes; utilizing experts to conduct trainings or investigations around sexual victimization in workplaces and communal spaces.
- There is also the potential for an independent body that would hold Jewish organizations and professionals accountable.
- Addressing the culture of open secrets is another key need. Efforts around accountability and protection should consider how to warn people about known harassers and to prevent perpetrators from being hired at Jewish institutions, given that secret censoring and passing known harassers from one organization to another puts potential victims at risk.
- Many victims discussed the lack of bystander intervention combined with the lack of organizational support upon reporting or disclosure. Funders and lay leaders need to take a leadership role in calling out their peers when they harass and victimize.
- Steps are being taken to prevent and address current instances of victimization, but efforts at responding to disclosures about historical cases must also be addressed.
- Inequity in the Jewish world should be addressed with as much vigor as the energy being put into addressing victimization. It is of paramount importance to drive forward conversations and actions on inequity in the Jewish community, as those on safety and respect.
- Organizations should pursue an understanding of the best ways in which to privately and publicly discuss allegations so that victim-survivors feel supported and protected.

Agendas for Future Research

- Continued research on the state of safety, respect, and equity in Jewish workplaces and communal spaces might include:

An intersectional approach to understanding sexual victimization and the experiences of survivors, with a focus on those who are most marginalized and ignored.

An agenda for future research could address victim-survivors' reactions to public discourse around specific cases and public allegations.



Opportunities and Implications for the SRE Coalition

The findings of this research additionally raised a number of opportunities and implications for the Coalition. The Coalition's priorities for 2019-2020 include:

- Access to resources to help organizations implement the SRE Standards;
- Grantmaking focused on expanding field-wide education and training; accreditation; systems for reporting and investigation, and more;
- Convenings and conversations to help drive action across the Jewish communal field (e.g., sharing research, hosting SRE panels at conferences, media campaigns, etc).

To that end, the Coalition has focused on four initial priorities in the past year:

1. Creating education and awareness resources;
2. Promulgating the SRE Commitment and Standards;
3. Sharing model policies and procedures; and
4. Providing training and support.

However, we recognize that more is needed. Opportunities and implications for the Coalition include the following:

- Grow the numbers of Jewish leaders (lay and professional) who are prioritizing this work within their organizations;
- Help Jewish organizations understand and adopt the necessary policies, procedures and training to assure individual workplaces and communal spaces are safe, respectful and equitable;
- Ensure a critical mass of the Jewish communal system—including the major centers of power—enact changes to deconstruct the structures that have led to challenges around safety, respect, and equity;
- Instigate measurable change, which includes more women having leadership opportunities and being paid equitably and a reduction in the incidents of sexual harassment and gender discrimination.

The ultimate result is that Jewish communal life will be safer, more respectful, and fairer for all.

About the Safety Respect Equity (SRE) Coalition

The SRE Coalition was founded in February 2018 after informal conversations about #MeToo in Jewish spaces evolved into a gathering of movement builders, experts, and field practitioners. The goal was to set a vision for how the Jewish community could address safety, respect, and equity within its workplaces and communal spaces and lend voice and action to the international #MeToo movement. Today, more than 100 organizations and individuals make up the SRE Coalition as an organized Jewish alliance committed to creating lasting change within Jewish institutions. **The Coalition is focused on three main objectives:**

Leadership Commitment

A broad cross-section of organizational and communal influencers widely embrace and prioritize efforts to change organizational norms and behaviors and ensure safe, respectful, and equitable workplaces.

Organizational Change

Jewish organizations implement comprehensive policies, procedures, and training for all staff and volunteers; demonstrate a recognition of and intolerance for boundary violations; and provide systems that enable victims and bystanders to report incidents and have them fairly addressed.

Cultural Shift

The Jewish community addresses the underlying systemic issues of sexism and prejudice that give rise to environments where abuse and bias persist. Eliminating sexual harassment and gender discrimination is a top-of-agenda issue for the communal workforce and the community at large.

Acknowledgments

There are a number of people without whom this research and report would not have been possible. Firstly, the SRE Coalition would like to acknowledge and thank the individuals, victims, and survivors who took the time to share their stories and experiences with us so that we could learn from them. Thank you to Rabbi Danya Ruttenberg, Guila Benchimol, and Carly Straus for conducting a focus group, survey, and interviews with these individuals. SRE also acknowledges and thanks Leading Edge, Dr. Judith Rosenbaum and Jewish Women's Archive (JWA), Jewish Women's Foundation of New York (JWFNY), The Good People Fund, and B'kavod, and Dr. Elana Sztokman for sharing their research and reports with us. The Coalition also thanks Guila Benchimol and Marie Huber for conducting the research for, and authoring, this report as well as Somoh Supharukchinda for her keen editing eye. Finally, we would like to thank all of the victims and survivors who have come forward to share their experiences of victimization and harassment in the Jewish world.