

Girls speak out about harassment

Female students reveal what goes on in T.O. high schools

They can get grabbed on the breast or the backside at any time in the halls. They hear girls being called "skank," "ho" or "slut" every day at school. Every day — sometimes from other girls.

And with sad regularity, they hear guys yell out which part of the male anatomy they want them to suck. "Guys always say that — it's disgusting, but a lot of girls laugh it off," says 16-year-old student Megan Brownlee.

"I'm shocked when girls don't get mad, because deep inside, you know the guys don't respect you."

Yet in the sexually charged halls of today's high schools, where lawyer Julian Falconer's recent report on school safety in Toronto uncovered "alarming rates" of harassment and assault, many girls don't seem to know how to say "Stop," according to a group of young Scarborough women who attend what may be the only all-girls centre in Canada.

In a recent two-hour rant about ha-

arrassment from boys, 10 teenaged girls from five east-end high schools sat in the lounge at the YWCA's Girls' Centre on Kingston Road and described the minefield of sexual tensions they navigate each day at their schools.

But more prevention programs like this are among the 126 recommendations of Falconer's report on school safety prompted by the shooting death

last spring of 15-year-old Jordan Manners.

While the girls agree this kind of boy-free spot provides an oasis where they can talk discreetly about these

touchy subjects away from school with input from trained youth counsellors, they admit the issue is complicated.

"You hear stuff like, 'What's up, bitch?' and 'Hey, ho' every other second," says Tanya, 14, a Grade 9 student. "I would be so scared to say anything back."

Piramila Ravindiran, 16, agrees "the worst thing girls can do is ignore it. When they're teaching health in Grade 9 all about condoms and saying 'No to sex,' they should also talk about how to deal with sexual harassment and name calling."

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Megan Brownlee, 16

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