

‘It destroyed my research career’: survey of sexual and gender-based discrimination and abuse in Australian Academia

Australian Women’s History Network working group

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Executive Summary

1.1 Findings

Sexism, harassment and discrimination appear to be endemic in Australian universities.

- 48.7% of the 159 Australian academics who completed the survey have experienced [sexual abuse or harassment](#) in the workplace.
- [Sexual or gender-based discrimination](#) are even more common, experienced by 66.2% of respondents.
- Academics and PhD students reported sexualised bullying, unfair workloads, sexual harassment and in some cases sexual assault, usually from their superiors and supervisors.

1.2 Background

Last August, the [Australian Human Rights Commission reported that](#) one in five Australian university students had been sexually harassed on campus. In October, a list of Indian academics accused of sexual harassment was [posted on Facebook](#). Since December, an online spreadsheet on [Sexual Harassment in the Academy](#) has attracted over 2,400 entries, mostly from the US. On Twitter, the hashtag [#MeTooPhD](#) accompanies a steady stream of disclosures from within the ivory tower.

1.3 Survey design and participants

In early 2018, the Australian Women's History Network (AWHN) established a Working Group to investigate sexual harassment in Australian academia. In March, the Group created an [online survey](#) inviting respondents to disclose experiences of workplace sexual and gender-based harassment, bullying, sexism and/or sexual assault. The survey was advertised via the AWHN email list and also promoted by the Australian Historical Association and related online networks.

In the four weeks it was open, the anonymous survey attracted 159 responses.

Respondents reported affiliations to academic institutions from around Australia (though some no longer worked within universities), and 90.6 percent identified as female.

The survey was designed to focus on the experiences of people working within the history discipline (38.9%), but also attracted respondents from other fields (39.5%) elsewhere in the arts and social sciences. The remaining 21.7 percent belonged to various fields, including information technology, psychology, law, finance, health and science.

1.4 Patterns of discrimination and harassment

In the words of one respondent, ‘Sexism is rife in universities’. The survey uncovered a continuum of inappropriate behaviour, ranging from ‘mansplaining’, ‘manterruption’ and ‘bropriation’, to leering, groping and serial sexual predation.

A recurring scenario that was reported involved female PhD students or junior academics being pressured into sex by male supervisors or senior colleagues. Respondents wrote about being lured into men’s offices, hotel rooms or homes on a professional pretext, and then having to fend off unwanted sexual advances. In many cases, coercion and intimidation were involved.

Common patterns of discriminatory behaviour include men belittling, marginalising and colluding against female colleagues. Transphobia and homophobia were also reported. Respondents described uneven workloads, with women expected to carry a disproportionate amount of teaching and service work (as the ‘work wife’)—which then goes unrecognised in a sector that rewards research.

Pregnant women and mothers experienced high rates of discrimination and harassment, with reports of inadequate parental leave and workplace cultures hostile to caring responsibilities. Respondents noted that women with children were liable to be judged less “serious” about their career.

1.5 Inadequate institutional responses

Results stressed the inadequacy of current reporting and support mechanisms. Of the 130 responses to the question “Was a formal complaint made? What was the institutional response (if any) and was this satisfactory?”, only 6 individuals answered ‘yes’ on both accounts.

By contrast, 47 respondents had made a complaint that was then ignored, dismissed or mishandled. This means that in the 53 cases in which an incident was reported, only 11.3 percent resulted in a satisfactory outcome. Respondents detailed patterns of victim-blaming and institutional inaction, as well as “unsafe” conflict resolution procedures that kept them in close proximity to the alleged perpetrator. In several cases, respondents experienced reprisals as a result of their complaints.

A further 77 respondents had not complained, in many cases citing a lack of reporting mechanisms or fear of reprisals. Junior or untenured academics in particular believe that speaking out would mean “career suicide”—especially when the alleged perpetrator occupies a more senior position.

Many expressed concerns about a culture of silence in which powerful individuals known to be serial perpetrators go unpunished. In one instance where a professor was accused of inappropriate behaviour, his colleagues refused to take action. “We know he does it but he has too much power so there’s nothing to be done,” they said.

1.6 Consequences of abuse, discrimination and harassment

Aside from reprisals, respondents reported a range of personal and professional consequences. Feeling “powerless”, “belittled” or “unwelcome” were common outcomes, as are self-doubt and imposter syndrome. “[S]elf-disgust” and “continued self-loathing” were also cited. Respondents

emphasised that being always “on my guard” to avoid predatory behaviour took a major toll. Bystanders also noted the “difficult emotional labour of providing support”, which is “unpaid, unacknowledged and exhausting”. In total, 33.3 percent reported psychological consequences, including anxiety, insomnia, stress and major depression.

Intellectual and economic consequences were also common, cited by 25.2 and 24.5 percent of respondents. Multiple people changed research area, resigned from their job, or left the profession altogether in an effort to avoid the alleged perpetrator. There were also references to bankruptcy, homelessness, and “years of insecurity.”

1.7 Respondents’ recommendations

The major recommendation arising from the survey is that institutions must improve their mechanisms to assist victims of sexual abuse or harassment. One suggestion was for every work area to have a mandated “reporting staff member”, akin to the fire wardens already stationed in each corridor.

Respondents also insisted that “more training” would be insufficient to address the entrenched culture of misogyny and discrimination. Instead they called for structural changes, including the decentralisation and diversification of institutional authority.

1.8 Recommendations of the working group

We hope this report can be used to work towards cultural change within our scholarly community. We have not carried out this survey to focus on any particular institution, rather our focus was to provide a mechanism for people to tell of their experiences and the impacts this has had on them.

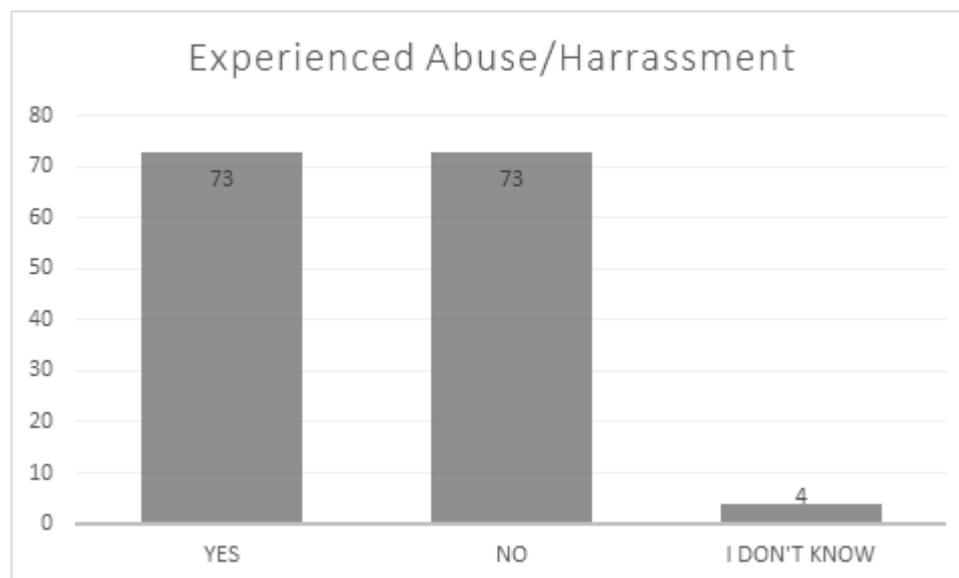
With this report we are disseminating the results of the survey to members of the Australian Women’s History Network, and will also circulate it to other academic groups and organisations. The goal in doing this is to collectively consider what would be productive and helpful to do next.

We welcome constructive suggestions and hope to work to generate further productive discussions, awareness of the issues raised, develop useful research and effect social change.

Quantitative analysis

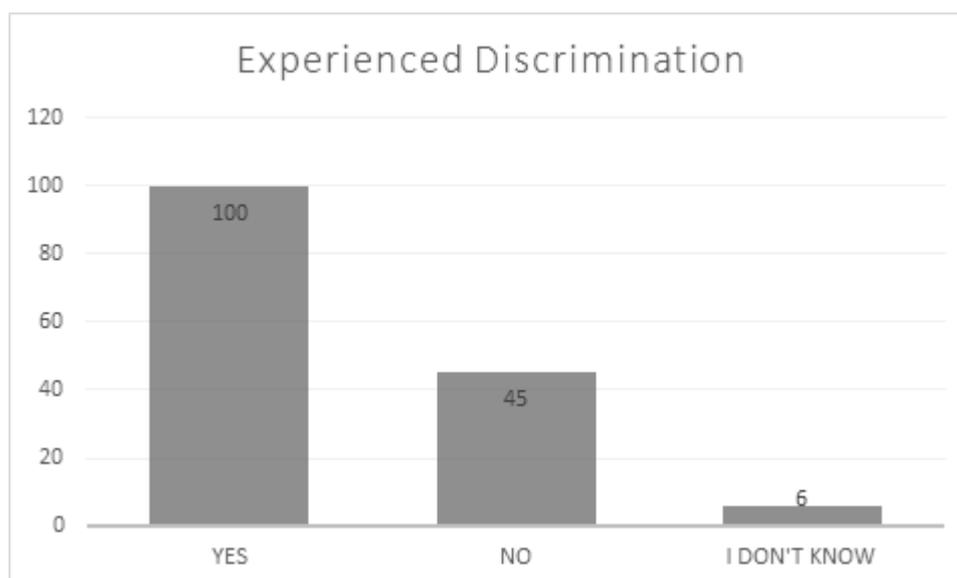
2.1 Overview of responses

Respondents were asked if they had *experienced* sexual or gender-based *harassment or abuse* in academia. Of the 159 respondents, 150 (94.3 per cent) provided responses to this question. Of these responses, there was an even divide between those returning a yes or no response, with each response garnering 73 (48.7 per cent) respondents. The remaining four respondents indicated uncertainty about whether their experiences could be defined in these terms.



Respondents were also asked if they had *witnessed* the sexual or gender-based *harassment or abuse* of others in academia. All but 6 respondents (3.8 per cent) answered this question. Of the remaining respondents, 85 (55.6 per cent) answered 'yes', 66 (43.1 per cent) answered 'no', and two (1.3 per cent) indicated they were unsure.

Respondents were also asked if they had *experienced* sexual or gender-based *discrimination* in academia. Eight respondents (5 per cent) did not provide a response to this issue. Of those who did, there was a higher 'yes' response to this question at 100 respondents (66.2 per cent), compared to 45 'no' responses (29.8 per cent). Six respondents (4 per cent) indicated that they were unsure whether or not their experiences constituted discrimination.



Respondents were also asked if they had *witnessed* the sexual or gender-based *discrimination* of others in academia. All 159 respondents provided an answer to this question. Of these, 114 (71.7 per cent) answered 'yes', 36 (22.6 per cent) answered no and nine (5.7 per cent) indicated they were unsure.

While many respondents reported having experienced and/or witnessed gender-based abuse or discrimination, fewer reported having lodged complaints in regard to such behaviour. Asked if they had made a complaint either on their own behalf or on behalf of someone else about sexual or gender-based abuse or harassment in academia, only 42 respondents answered 'yes' out of 152 present responses (27.6 per cent). Similarly, asked if they had made a complaint on their own behalf or on behalf of someone else about sexual or gender-based discrimination, only 42 answered 'yes' out of 159 present responses (26.4 per cent).

2.2 Respondent gender

Of 159 respondents, 21 respondents (13.2 per cent) did not supply information as to gender. Of the remaining 138 respondents, the vast majority (125 or 90.6 per cent) identified as female. Eleven (8 per cent) identified as male, and 2 (1.4 per cent) identified in other ways.

Perhaps because of the low number of overall male respondents, there was no statistically significant trends revealed in relation to respondent gender and any of the question items.

2.3 Respondent sexual orientation

Of 159 respondents, 26 (16.4 per cent) did not supply information as to sexual orientation. Of the remaining 133 respondents, 102 or 76.7 per cent identified as heterosexual, while 31 or 23.3 per cent identified somewhere on the LGBTQIA+ spectrum.

Chi square analysis revealed that there was a statistically significant association between orientation and two question items. These were the items related to whether respondents had *witnessed* either harassment/abuse or discrimination, with identifying as LGBTQIA+ more likely to affirm that they had witnessed such activities. In relation to witnessing harassment/abuse, 74.2 per cent of LGBTQIA+ respondents replying 'yes' compared to 46.9 per cent of the heterosexual respondents ($p < .05$). The

association was even stronger when it came to witnessing of discrimination, with 90.3 per cent of the LGBTQIA+ respondents replying 'yes' to this item compared to 62.7 per cent of the heterosexual respondents ($p < .05$).

2.4 Respondent cultural heritage

Of 159 respondents, 33 (20.8 per cent) did not supply information as to cultural heritage. Of the remaining 126 respondents, 82 or 65.1 per cent identified as coming solely from an Anglo-Australian heritage. Three respondents (2.4 per cent) identified Indigenous heritage. And there were 41 respondents (32.5 per cent) who identified as having a cultural heritage different to or in addition to Anglo-Australian heritage. These included European (both East and West), East African, Islander, New Zealander, Asian, Iranian, Jewish, Israeli, Sri Lankan, and Latin American heritages.

Chi square analysis revealed that there was a statistically significant association between cultural heritage and the two question items related to registering complaints in regards to harassment/abuse or discrimination. Those of Anglo-Australian heritage were less likely to have made complaints about harassment or abuse (20 per cent) than those with other heritage (34.1 per cent) or Indigenous heritage (100 per cent) ($p < .05$). Those with Anglo-Australian or other heritage were equally as likely to have made complaints about discrimination (24.4 per cent in both instances) and all three Indigenous respondents had made such complaints.

2.5 Respondent age

All but one of the 159 respondents provided information as to age. The bulk of remaining respondents were aged 31-40 (36.7 per cent) and 41-50 (24.1 per cent). There were also a sizeable proportion aged 51-60 (14.6 per cent) and 61-70 (9.5 per cent), and a smaller proportion of younger respondents aged 26-30 (9.5 per cent) or 18-25 (4.4 per cent). Just 2 respondents (1.2 per cent) were aged over seventy.

Chi square analysis revealed significant associations between age and having experienced either abuse/harassment OR discrimination, and with having witnessed discrimination. Those in the 61-70 and 31-40 age cohorts were the most likely to indicate they had experienced abuse or harassment, at 55.6 and 55.2 per cent respectively compared to a 49 per cent overall ($p < .001$). However, the 41-50 age cohort indicated the highest experience of discrimination, 77.8 per cent compared to 66 per cent overall ($p < .001$). The 26-30 age group was the one most likely to report witnessing discrimination at 80 per cent compared to 71.5 per cent overall ($p < .001$).

2.6 Respondent career stage

Information on respondent career stage was not supplied for 9 respondents (5.7 per cent). Of the remaining 150, there were 51 HDR students (34 per cent), 24 early career researchers within five years of having received their PhDs (16 per cent), 57 at mid-career level (38 per cent), 17 senior academics (11.3 per cent) and one respondent working as a member of professional university staff.

Chi square analyses showed there was a strong association between career stage and having witnessed discrimination, and a moderate association between career stage and having complained about abuse or harassment. While only 74 per cent of the responsive sample reported having witnessed gender-based discrimination, this figure rose to 82.5 per cent among mid-career researchers and 94.1 per cent among senior academics ($p < .001$). These groups were also more likely to have complained about abuse or harassment, with 29.8 per cent of mid-career researchers and

52.9 per cent of senior academics indicating they had done so compared to 26.7 per cent of the overall sample ($p < .05$).

2.7 Respondent employment status

Information on respondent employment status indicates that the sample was not representative of the profession as a whole, with the largest group those engaged in permanent full-time employment (58 or 37.9 per cent). The rest of the respondents were comprised of 24 in fixed term full time employment (15.7 per cent); 21 HDRs working in casual sessional employment (13.7 per cent); 14 others working in casual sessional employment (9.2 per cent); 12 in permanent part-time roles (7.8 per cent); 11 in fixed-term part-time roles (7.2 per cent); 9 HDRs (5.9 per cent); and 4 others (2.6 per cent).

Chi square analysis showed a moderate association between employment status and whether respondents indicated that they had witnessed discrimination. Those in fixed full-time positions (87.5 per cent), permanent part-time positions (75 per cent) or permanent full-time positions (74.1 per cent), were somewhat more likely to indicate they had witnessed discrimination compared to the overall sample (70.6 per cent) ($p < .05$).

2.8 Respondent discipline or field

All but two of the 159 respondents provided information about the scholarly discipline in which they studied/worked. As might be expected given the survey was organised by the Australian Women's History Network and advertised heavily to its members, a sizeable proportion (38.9 per cent) were associated with the history discipline. There was also a significant proportion (39.5 per cent) who were part of other humanities, social sciences or arts subjects. The remaining 21.7 per cent belonged to various fields, including information technology, psychology, law, finance, health and science.

The only statistically significant association between discipline and response items was in regards to having witnessed discrimination. Those in non-humanities/arts/social sciences disciplines were far less likely to indicate they had witnessed such discrimination, 58.8 per cent compared to 71.3 per cent overall ($p < .001$).

2.9 Respondent institution

Respondents came from a variety of universities, as well as some of the other higher learning institutions and colleges. The highest number of respondents from a single institution was from La Trobe University (14 or 10.9 per cent), followed by University of Queensland (12 or 9.4 per cent), Australian National University (11 or 8.6 per cent), with both RMIT University and University of Melbourne producing 10 respondents (7.8 per cent) each.

There was no association between institutional affiliation and any survey questions. There is also no evidence to suggest that institutional response rate correlates with the incidence of abuse and harassment.

2.10 Quantitative analysis of qualitative questions (this is from total respondents = 159)

- 46.5 per cent of respondents identified the perpetrator of incidents as male, while 48.4 per cent of respondents did not identify the gender of perpetrator. 3.1 per cent identified the perpetrator as female and 1.9 per cent identified both male and female perpetrators.

- 20.1 per cent of respondents indicated that they had experienced abuse/harassment by a superior
- 35.2 per cent of respondents indicated that they had experienced discrimination by a superior
- 5.7 per cent had experienced abuse/harassment by a peer
- 9.4 per cent had experienced discrimination by a peer
- 5.7 per cent indicated they had been actively discouraged from making a complaint
- 10.1 per cent of respondents expressed fears that making a complaint would lead to a reprisal
- 5.7 per cent of respondents had actually experienced reprisals as a result of their complaints
- 24.5 per cent had experienced economic consequences as a result of their experiences
- 25.2 per cent experienced intellectual consequences
- 33.3 per cent experienced psychological consequences
- 10.7 per cent experienced discrimination related to motherhood/pregnancy

Qualitative Analysis

Reports of people's experiences and statements have been collected under the following themes:

- formal processes and reporting
- options people feel are available to them
- cultures of silence
- patterns of behaviour
- the operation of power within university workplaces
- when women don't help
- what can help

3.1 Formal processes & reporting

Many people decided not to formally report their experiences, comments and reasons for this included the following:

- One person felt there was nothing to be gained though formal reporting 'So I just stayed silently resentful'
- Formal processes don't work
- Using formal processes is seen as too risky and would jeopardise career
- Too afraid of the backlash
- Fear if you speak up – you will be labelled 'trouble-maker'
- 'There's 100 people coming up behind me so if I ark up, I'm dispensable here'
- Formal processes are not supportive of people who are sex workers
- In case of micro-aggressions/more minor examples – wouldn't have known what to do and it 'would ultimately have been more difficult for me than for the perpetrators'
- When there is a clear power differential: 'he was a well-known figure and I was nobody. (Who were they going to believe?)'
- Student terrified of reporting supervisor as undergrad – what if he wouldn't pass me? I'd have no degree – risk was too high
- Wanted to take complaint further and followed up with NTEU – they were helpful but estimated it would take another year – too long to contemplate
- Too risky
- Student felt bullied into not making a complaint
- employment status of being untenured
- Institution has no means to make a formal complaint

When people did formally report the experiences, they found the processes and outcomes unsatisfactory:

- The university did absolutely nothing about his behaviour
- HR then tried to fix my behaviour
- Some of the solutions proposed by HR were untenable. 'HR told me that I had a case for discrimination and bullying but also informed me that I was going to have to continue to work with this person as my boss'
- After I complained my workload was increased
- Went nowhere – felt demeaned
- Formal process required me to confront the person

- o Investigated and began – but was told the university would protect their senior staff and the image of the university
- o Eventually received support from people working in a staff support role, but I had to do a large amount of lobbying to get this
- o Conflict resolution process felt ‘unsafe’
- o Nothing happened – any complaints taken to the person’s superior were never followed up

We reported it to [the institution]. They did FUCK ALL. Instead they interrogated her repeatedly, suggesting that she'd misunderstood his intentions.

3.2 Options available & impacts on people

Some have not felt safe on campus again after the incident, feeling always 'on my guard in the workplace' and also 'powerless'.

In an example of someone who experienced a number of minor/micro-aggressions over time, they felt 'unsafe', 'uneasy', 'unwelcome' and not treated as an equal, they were 'missing out on opportunities' and it was 'depressing'.

Others have also wondered whether any opportunities that they have received from men have strings attached 'because I'm young and a woman'.

Great toll on individuals was reported when respondents needed to work to physically avoid the predatory behaviour of particular men.

Options include:

- o leaving (or wanting to): 'I hope to leave as soon as possible'
- o Changing areas of research and work
- o Moved sideways
- o Leaving and changing direction
- o Left the field and never worked in it again – didn't want to come across person who assaulted them
- o Resigned from position – went from long term contract work to casual – 'It took me a long time to get my research track record even vaguely back on track'; 'It completely shattered my confidence for years. And casual work is a personal as well as professional consequence'

One person experienced inappropriate sexual behaviour during PhD supervision and felt a sense of 'self-disgust' at having put up with it.

People have witnessed the sustained and ongoing impact, and seen others carry this too – people have moved, taken leave or retired.

Impact of student disclosures to one respondent was experienced as 'devastating' particularly because the respondent felt powerless to effectively help the students. Supporting students in this way was described as 'unpaid, unacknowledged and exhausting'. The work is 'difficult emotional labour of providing support' which has significant impacts. Others who claim to be bystanders and not victims express similar concerns.

To the question “Did you receive any assistance you found useful? If so, what?”, of 159 respondents, 105 either explicitly said no, or provided no response. This is both staggering, and unsurprising. One of the important recommendations arising from this survey therefore, is that useful assistance must be provided. What that assistance could look like is covered below.

3.3 Cultures of Silence/Knowing laughter

Concerns that cultures of silence built up around certain abusive individuals.

I mentioned [his behaviour] to the union rep years later and she said they were well aware of his behaviour and that HR had a huge file on him. Yet he was never punished.

Perpetrators get away with their behaviour because cultures of silence and excuses get built up around them. Some victims believe that if others observe behaviour, then it should be possible to call it out, that is, established long standing patterns of behaviour should not require a formal complaint. 'One of my colleagues finally did make a complaint, and she was told that it had been taken care of. Then a year or so later another staff member made a different complaint, and then the whole book about this guy came out. It turned out that my other colleague's complaint had never been formally lodged or dealt with, and at last action was taken. Importantly, though, for years people knew this man was trouble but no action would be taken without any formal complaint.'

Another respondent, a RHD student, reported to the academic convenor of the higher degree program that a senior academic and supervisor continually made inappropriate sexual and sexualising comments and behaviours – the academic convenor ‘tried to laugh it off’.

Another person reported telling senior female colleagues that more junior females had disclosed that a senior male colleague always looked at their breasts when he spoke to them. The senior female colleagues laughingly brushed this off, saying that the man does the same to them and is known for doing this. The response of the senior women was reported as ‘completely unsatisfactory, and kind of heartbreaking’ and there was a desire by the respondent for these female colleagues ‘to have shown that they took it seriously’.

One respondent was a co-supervisor of a student who reported inappropriate physical contact by a professor – senior colleagues dismissed this saying "We know he does it but he has too much power so there's nothing to be done." The person completing the survey described the inaction as ‘cowardice’ and said that the effective sanctioning of atrocious behaviour ‘to avoid conflict is appalling’.

3.4 Patterns of Abuse and Harassment

A recurring scenario that was evident from survey responses involves female PhD students or junior academics being pressured into sex by male supervisors or senior colleagues. Respondents wrote about being lured into men’s offices, hotel rooms or homes on a professional pretext, and then having to fend off unwanted sexual advances. In many cases, coercion and intimidation were involved

A male PhD student in the same space continuously sexually harassed [a woman] and then one night in the office, once other people had left... sexually assaulted her.

In some institutions the patterns of discrimination and harassment run across a continuum from micro-aggressions to violent threats:

A female colleague who had the office next to mine received death threats from older male students when she refused to back down on points of process... Another female colleague received anonymous rape threats when she failed a student - the university did nothing.

3.4 Patterns of Discriminatory Behaviour

Reference to patterns of masculine, discriminatory behaviour were reported and included acts such as men talking over women in meetings or claiming their ideas as their own.

Work practices also differ for ECR men and women: 'Women in my department have often been given junior, labour-intensive administrative roles while the men take the lighter jobs, and junior men are protected from heavy administrative work so they can cultivate their genius and finish their books.' Women reported being asked to 'help' and 'support' others more than men. Men were directly appointed whereas women were overlooked for jobs. There was an expectation that women perform the role of 'work-wife' for the male program leader – this respondent didn't comply and reported being 'frozen out and persecuted to the point where it became impossible to do my job'. They were valued in feminised help-mate role despite being overqualified to hold this position.

It's the usual thing: being the good girl, carrying large workloads for little reward, then finding it difficult to formulate the work as a step towards promotion. Systems set up to award aggressive pushers, rather than gentle helpers.

Women almost always end up with professional responsibilities (ie program managers) related to pastoral care (me), while men (my bullying colleague) get more research positions - which look better on CVs.

Concerns that going on maternity leave and being a mother exposes women to discrimination and harassment. For one person 'Discrimination [was] mostly around pregnancy/children, i.e. that I was not a serious PhD student, that I am [described as] "a very busy mother of 3" in promotion documents ... There needs to be an awareness that mothers can also be competitive academics and it should be frowned upon to discriminate on the basis of pregnancy/childbirth.' One report said that she was told that the institution would only pay for one period of parental leave during RHD candidature as it was expected that someone would only have one baby while completing a PhD. Other concerns were expressed about departmental cultures that don't take into account caring and mothering roles.

3.5 Power

The operation of power within academic workplaces and cultures was highlighted. Respondents asserted that abuses of power are rife in academia: 'sexism is rife in Universities', 'sexism and racism seems rife in the academy'. The university is seen as a place of 'power unchecked', particularly by queer people. When people in positions of power do not exercise the authority that comes with the position – this enables bad behaviours to go unchallenged and continue.

There were also reports of actions taken against people who complain (with workload increasing with consultation after complaint).

Concerns were expressed about the influence of student surveys to evaluate teaching – and the gendered nature of the results and discrimination against women/misogyny in the responses.

Senior male staff all colluded and covered for each other, and with a weak [senior leader] knew their behaviour was not going to be challenged. As a result they created a work culture where anyone who had called them to account, such as myself, would be ostracised and targeted for attack in staff meetings, as well as have rumours circulate about them.

It is alarming the number of times terms like 'diminished', 'sustained bullying' or 'belittling' appear in the survey to describe power relationships between ECR women or queer people and their supervisor or Head of Department. 'I would like managers to understand that forcing women to do extra work while holding promotion over their heads is bullying and for it to be safe to complain about this when it happens'. This was also noted by HDR students – for example a student whose supervisor was a 'respected academic who never took me seriously or put effort into our meetings'.

3.6 'Misogyny works in inclusive ways' – When women don't help.

Some people report that workplace cultures are so bad, women buy into the gendered bullying. Some reported women attributing other women's success to their sexual attractiveness or relationship with male colleagues.

Talk about slapping down other women in a patriarchally determined, competitive hierarchy where women up the ladder feel they need to punch down. Fuck that shit.

There were a small number of incidents of sexual harassment of junior men by senior women – no complaints were filed but an 'acknowledgement it happens' was requested by some respondents.

I've made plenty of enemies by calling out fuckhead men (and some women) for being fuckheads, but that's OK. I'm a union woman, I'd fucking burn anyone who tried'

3.7 What Helps?

Working in environments where there is substantial female leadership is generally regarded as an important reason for why individuals report that they haven't been discriminated against or harassed. Decentralisation of power is also seen to be important. 'The current tendency in universities to centralise power in the hands of a few [creates problems]- heads of departments and deans are enormously powerful and in the case of heads, they are backed by their Dean almost regardless of what they do.' Speaking out against powerful people can be very difficult in these circumstances. Having friends and/or supportive colleagues was noted as helpful, as was feminist scholarship and the writings of other critical scholars.

The practical support of female colleagues can help, even if the complaints go nowhere. One respondent described such a scenario in which '[a] female colleague of his found out and approached him. He denied it. She supported me, which was helpful and less alienating but there were still no real consequences for him.'

There were examples provided of informal affirmative action: 'The only example of gender based discrimination that has occurred to me is positive, in my favour. Another academic (female) gave me a tutoring job which she felt I was qualified to do, even though it was out of field. This essentially gave me a start in academia. Positive discrimination is also potentially a thing that goes unremarked'.

Respondent Recommendations

Respondents to the survey came up with a large number of recommendations for actions, ideas, approaches which universities and individuals could take in order to achieve change. Some of these recommendations would simply require attention to detail and a committed group of managers and employees; others involve a radical revisioning of how our universities, and our disciplines, operate.

A senior woman academic puts it thus: Institutions must 'Acknowledge the toxic work culture, listen to these stories and ACT'.

Respondents differed on numerous questions, including whether or not more training would be effective and whether the presence of more women in higher positions would prevent abuse.

Recommendations have been separated into those that are linked to structural changes (relating to formal rules, guidelines and processes, training and big picture change), and more general recommendations for all.

Structural changes within the University

4.1 Positions of Power

- End the tradition of lone people as heads of teams, departments, schools, faculties or universities, and have a team instead
- Ensure there are more women in positions of power, and more high ranking female staff
- Avoid centralising power at all levels
- Ensure gender diversity in all management roles
- Never have someone in a position with so much power that they can't be complained about
- Never have all white management teams

4.2 Guidelines and Processes

- Provide and enforce clearer guidelines for classroom behaviour
- Provide and enforce clearer guidelines for the reporting of sexual abuse, assault, and inequity
- Have processes that are attentive to, and deal with, the intersection of racism and sexism
- Create an independent body that can be complained to – this could be, for instance, the AHA, or the Union
- Provide informal & anonymous processes
- Undertake a closer examination of the ways that bullies are rewarded
- Instead of dealing with problems by promoting people, encourage them to retire or demote them
- Create an official procedure for parental leave and part time work, especially for those on fixed term or casual or soft money contracts, so that it's not up to individuals to negotiate this
- Provide sexual harassment policies that have teeth and hold people to account
- Take a transformative social justice approach. It's not just about punishment, but the purpose should be to attain justice for the victim – this should be the focus
- There should be a shift of the balance of power from perpetrators to victims
- Avoid framing harassment as solely male initiated
- Embed diversity and inclusion policy across institutions at every level

- Provide a mandated 'safe reporting staff member' in every work area for reporting sexual harassment and assault (like the position of a fire warden, which is present in every workplace)
- Provide clear processes about who to report to and what the processes for reporting will be
- Provide and enforce codes of conduct for conferences
- Rethink recruitment and promotion practices, ensuring that procedures are fair, just, and legal
- Avoiding stigmatising people who are victims and speak out
- Provide the possibility of serious, proper, mediation processes
- There should be zero tolerance for abuse and discrimination
- Provide better ARC funding rules around pregnancy and child care
- A key principle of all actions should involve an acknowledgement that victims need to be in control
- Provide substantial, proper, compensation
- People, and institutions, should provide apologies

I am torn between the issue of natural justice/presumption of innocence, and knowing that these pigs are out there. What I mean - and this applies to all bullying (not just gender-based) - is that HR's line is that they cannot do anything unless formal complaints are made. I get that. But the problem is that the psychology of bullying and harassment is that harassers tend to target people who will not complain. So how do you deal with a situation where 'everyone knows' someone is a problem, but nobody formally complains?

4.3 Training

- There should be more training targeted at male academics
- There should be Gender & Equity Awareness Training for all staff, and targeted training for all senior staff
- Another view that training is not the answer is expressed in the following quote

[The] answer is not more training. Our university just made all staff go through bullying training again ... and it was a waste of time. Those sorts of trainings are 1. An HR tick-the-box joke, and 2. Do not actually reach the people who need them, who... will never believe they are actually doing anything inappropriate.

4.4 Big picture structural changes

- There should be harsher consequences
- Victims, or people affected, should be supported to stay in their current office and/or position and not moved
- There should be more support for carers
- There needs to be a recognition that mothers can also be competitive academics
- Avoid the creation and existence of boy's clubs
- There needs to be a paradigm shift
- A whole culture change in academia is required
- We need to move beyond oppressive patriarchal power structures

Guidelines for all of us

4.5 Questions and ideas that we should all be thinking about as we conduct our daily academic lives:

- Recognise that sexual harassment is often racialised
- Be attentive to the issues around precarious employment
- Don't inappropriately talk about people's clothing or bodies
- Create a mature workplace
- Take complaints, events, moments, emotions, people, seriously
- Support colleagues in the form of collective action
- Don't look at people's breasts
- Explicitly address misogyny and gender inequality
- Be more collectively vocal
- Avoid labelling people as trouble makers
- Believe and support your colleagues when they tell you about a negative experience even when they are coming from a perspective that you don't find familiar
- Don't rely exclusively on HR – but work to improve HR processes where you are in a position to do so
- Be attentive to abuses of power
- Don't sleep with your students until semester is over
- List making is not an answer
- If you have a continuing position, use your security to support those who do not have it
- Assume that everyone is finishing a book and needs to have their research time protected
- Ask yourself who gets the casual work? Who's hired on soft money and are they expected to be compliant?
- Do you ask things of your employees that they might say yes to because you are more senior?
- How are women's voices heard in the classes you take, the seminars you chair, the meetings you participate in or run?
- Do you ignore sexually predatory behaviour among male colleagues?
- Do you have a supportive attitude to people who work part time or who have carer constraints on their time? Are you flexible with deadlines & meeting times?
- Do you encourage students of all genders and backgrounds to go on to postgraduate work? Do you acknowledge that some people may need more encouragement than others?
- Can you be articulate in your own defence, and in the defence of students who are the target of bullying by senior male staff members?
- Do you offer your junior colleagues and students – verbally and non-verbally – ways to balance family and personal life with their career?
- Do you set gender balanced curriculums, create gender balanced conference panels, programs and seminars?
- What is your 'normal', your ideas of when people should just get on with it, or can't do anything about it? Where are those lines and can they be shifted?
- Do you assume that male academics have more authority than female or other academics?

Explode the system. Shut it down

Conclusion

This AWHN survey was intended as a piece of preliminary research that would draw attention to the issue of sexual and gender-based harassment, abuse and discrimination in Australian academic workplaces. The survey does not provide a comprehensive insight into the incidence of these behaviours, and should not be taken as conclusive. The respondent pool was small and self-selecting, and the survey was open for only four weeks.

However, these results do suggest that unacceptable behaviours are both widespread and underreported within Australian universities. Further research and discussion are therefore imperative. The AWHN is committed to working with its membership and partner institutions to continue addressing this issue, with the goal to ensure a safe working environment for all.

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Appendix – The survey

Sexual and gender-based abuse and discrimination in academia in Australia

The Australian Women's History Network (AWHN) would like to invite people to respond to this survey about sexual and gender-based abuse and discrimination in Academia. Given the wave of public speech happening surrounding this #MeToo moment internationally, the AWHN believes that it is vital that this be taken up within Australian academia. We have little doubt that many of us have experienced sexual and gender-based harassment, bullying, sexism, and/or sexual assault over the course of undertaking our work: this survey is intended to capture the stories of these experiences in order to provide the groundwork for undertaking appropriate, relevant, useful, necessary changes to our workplaces, our conferences, our universities, our classrooms, and our sector in general.

We are asking a broad range of people to fill out this survey – essentially, if you feel that your experience fits within the broad purview of the Australian Women's History Network then we would like to hear from you. This survey is open to people in all forms, types and levels of academic, GLAM, or public history employment. We particularly want to be attentive to the experiences of marginalised peoples. Members of the working group for this survey come from a wide variety of backgrounds. This survey is anonymous, and we would like you to provide as much or as little information as you are comfortable with. All questions are optional. It should only take 5-10 minutes.

If desired, an explanation of 'sexual harassment' can be found here:

<https://www.humanrightscommission.vic.gov.au/discrimination/discrimination/types-of-discrimination/sexual-harassment>

An explanation of 'sex discrimination' can be found here:

<https://www.humanrightscommission.vic.gov.au/discrimination/discrimination/types-of-discrimination/sex>

What will we be doing with the survey?

This will depend on what the survey says. In the first instance, we will compile and analyse the results, and share basic non-identifying results with our membership and on our website. Our overall intention is to work with other organisations in order to use the results to effect appropriate systemic change within our sector.

If we receive a significant number of stories about a specific perpetrator, we will consider the possibilities for further action. We may also be organising meet-ups around the country, which may be interest for those who completed the survey, as well as others for whom the survey is not a useful way to disclose experiences. All data collected will be stored as securely as possible, and no identifying information will be released without your explicit consent. While we will do everything possible to preserve anonymity of all respondents, please be aware that, due to the small size of the academic workforce, you might be identifiable to the working group within AWHN. When disseminating any results from this survey, however, we will disaggregate answers to ensure anonymity as best we can.

Where can I go if this survey raises issues for me?

This survey is not a mechanism for dispute resolution, nor a way to remedy what has been done. The

AWHN is also unable to provide proper support for those who find themselves troubled by the questions we are raising. We encourage you to use the services provided in your local area, by your GP or by your university or the following support services:

Lifeline: 13 11 14

BeyondBlue: 1300 22 46 36

National Sexual Assault, Domestic and Family Violence Counselling Service: 1800 RESPECT

<http://www.rape-dvservices.org.au/Get-Help/National-Services/VIC>

<http://www.nswrapecrisis.com.au/>

<https://www.health.qld.gov.au/sexualassault/html/contact>

If you feel participating in the survey would be difficult, please consider whether taking part would be the best thing for you.

Your current details

(remember all questions are optional)

Sex/Gender identity (please use whatever descriptors you feel are most appropriate)

Sexual orientation (please use whatever descriptors you feel are most appropriate)

Cultural heritage

Age

Mark only one oval.

18-25

26-30

31-40

41-50

51-60

61-70

71-80

80+

Discipline/Field

Institution

Career Stage

Mark only one oval.

Honours Student

Masters HDR

PhD HDR

ECR 5 years post PhD

ECR 5-10 years post PhD

Mid-Career

Senior Academic

Other:

Employment Status

Mark only one oval.

HDR

HDR AND casual/sessional

Sessional academic/casual

Fixed term full time

Fixed term part time

Permanent full time

Permanent part time

Other:

Quick questions about abuse and discrimination

Have you experienced sexual or gender-based harassment or abuse in academia?

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No

Other:

Have you experienced sexual or gender-based discrimination in academia?

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No

Other:

Have you witnessed sexual or gender-based harassment or abuse of others in academia?

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No

Other:

Have you witnessed sexual or gender-based discrimination of others in academia?

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No

Other:

Have you made a complaint (on your own behalf or on behalf someone else) about sexual or gender-based abuse or harassment in academia?

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No

Other:

Have you made a complaint (on your own behalf or on behalf someone else) about sexual or gender-based discrimination in academia?

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No

Other:

Your experience/s

Please describe in as much or little detail as you wish your experience/s of gender-based or sexual abuse or discrimination (or your experience in supporting others facing these). You can write about multiple incidents or experiences. Please consider including details such as:

- whether this was this a pattern of behaviour (or workplace culture) or isolated incident
- how long ago this occurred
- the context of the incident/s (conference, classroom, meeting)
- your employment status and career stage at the time
- which institution/s were involved
- actions you may have taken to report the incident (or reasons this was not possible/appropriate)

If there are any other personal details which you think were relevant, please include these if you wish. These might include:

- your ethnicity/cultural heritage
- whether you are an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person
- your religion
- your relationship status
- your sexuality/gender identity
- your pregnancy or carer status
- your English language proficiency
- disability
- your citizenship/residency status

We would like to learn about perpetrators of abuse and discrimination (or other parties), so consider including details such as his/her:

- age
- career stage
- relationship to you
- employment status

Please describe your experience/s of abuse or discrimination

Was a formal complaint made? What was the institutional response (if any) and was this satisfactory?

What were the professional consequences for you?

What were the personal consequences for you?

What were the consequences for any perpetrator/s?

Your suggestions

How would you have liked your institution and/or colleagues respond to your experience?

Did you receive any assistance you found useful? If so, what?

What more should be done to prevent similar experiences of abuse or discrimination?

Contact details and additional comments

Is there anything else you would like to share with us?

If you would like us to keep in touch, please provide an email address (optional)