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Harassment and discrimination among faculty and researchers in Canada's postsecondary institutions

by Darcy Hango

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Harassment and discrimination among faculty and researchers in Canada's postsecondary institutions

by Darcy Hango

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Overview of the study

Harassment and discrimination can exist across all Canadian workplaces, occurring in any type of occupation and setting, including postsecondary institutions. This study uses data from the 2019 Survey of Postsecondary Faculty and Researchers to examine workplace harassment and discrimination within Canada's postsecondary institutions experienced by full and part-time university faculty (including teaching staff and researchers), college instructors, postdoctoral fellows and doctoral students. It sheds light on specific types of harassment, the relationship between the harasser and the victim, as well as the grounds for discrimination and types of discrimination. The study also examines whether those who were harassed took action against their harasser, ranging from confronting the perpetrator to filing a formal complaint.

The results of the study are representative of the survey participants, of which approximately half were university faculty (49%), one-third college faculty (29%) and one-fifth doctoral students (18%). The remaining 4% were postdoctoral fellows.

- Women are 1.5 times more likely than men to experience workplace harassment and discrimination in postsecondary institutions, a finding that is present in other workplaces and society in general.
- Sexual minority groups and persons with disabilities are among the most likely to be the targets of workplace harassment and discrimination in postsecondary institutions.
- Persons in positions of authority were the most common perpetrators of workplace harassment against PhD students and postdoctoral fellows.
- In cases of workplace harassment against university and college teachers, colleagues and students were most often identified as the persons responsible.
- Men and women, regardless of role in their institution, were more likely to be harassed by a man than a woman.
- Overall, women are more likely than men to take action against their harasser, except in the cases of sexual harassment/unwanted sexual attention and physical violence.

Harassment and discrimination among faculty and researchers in Canada's postsecondary institutions

Introduction

Harassment and discrimination can exist across all Canadian workplaces, occurring in any type of occupation and setting, including postsecondary institutions. Acts of harassment and discrimination are varied and may have wide-reaching implications on workers' health and well-being, as well as their job tenure, stability and satisfaction. The consequences of harassment may range from negatively impacting one's attitude toward their job, in terms of their level of satisfaction and their level of commitment, to poorer physical and psychological wellbeing.¹ Workplace harassment and violence may also have an impact on the overall economy, such as costs associated with absenteeism, lost productivity and job turnover.²

To date, there has been very little research on workplace harassment occurring in postsecondary educational institutions in Canada. Some recent research examining harassment and discrimination in Canadian universities has focused on a particular discipline,³ a particular institution⁴ or institutions,⁵ a particular province,⁶ or type of postsecondary institution.⁷ For example, one study found that among science and engineering faculty in 12 Canadian universities, women were more likely than their male colleagues to be victims of incivility, harassment and discrimination. The same study also found that while racialized women reported only marginally less harassment than their non-racialized counterparts, racialized men reported significantly more harassment and discrimination than non-racialized faculty.⁸ Another study at a Canadian university found that women faculty were more likely to be victims of cyberbullying.⁹

Harassment and discrimination among students in Canada has been examined more extensively.

A recent Statistics Canada study¹⁰ analyzed unwanted sexual behaviour and gender-based discrimination on Canadian campuses. It found a substantial amount of discrimination based on gender, gender identity and sexual orientation, as reported by students in Canada's universities and colleges, with women more likely to experience these behaviours than men. Unwanted sexualized behaviours were also a major concern, with 45% of women and 32% of men reporting that they had personally experienced at least one of these types of behaviour in a postsecondary setting during the previous year.

Although workplace harassment and discrimination occur in all settings, some environments may pose higher risk to workers than others. Postsecondary institutions have some characteristics that may lead to increased risks of workplace harassment or discrimination. For example, there is a great deal of hierarchy in terms of authority (e.g., tenured faculty supervising graduate students), as well as interaction between professors/teaching assistants and students.¹¹ Moreover, younger adults, who are more likely to experience harassment and discrimination,¹² represent a large part of the working and student population of postsecondary institutions.

This study uses the 2019 Survey of Postsecondary Faculty and Researchers (SPFR) to help illuminate the state of workplace harassment and discrimination experienced by full and part-time university faculty (including teaching staff and researchers), college instructors, postdoctoral fellows, and doctoral students across Canada's postsecondary institutions (see [Data sources, methods and definitions](#)). In particular, it aims to add to and

expand on the body of knowledge on workplace harassment and discrimination in academia.

The SPFR allows for a focus on harassment and discrimination experienced by those who teach or conduct research in Canada's postsecondary sector, including full and part-time university and college faculty, postdoctoral fellows, and doctoral students. Often, research in this area focuses on one of these groups, usually faculty members.¹³ A key strength of the current study is that harassment and discrimination can be examined across different types of institutions, different fields of study and different provinces, thus providing a greater breadth of the topic previously unseen within Canadian academia. Workplace harassment and discrimination¹⁴ in general will be examined, as will specific types of harassment, relationships between those who experience harassment and those who perpetrate it, as well as the basis for discrimination and types of discrimination. Lastly, this study explores whether those who were harassed took action against their harasser, for example by the confronting the perpetrator or filing a formal complaint.¹⁵

The data used in this study were collected in autumn 2019 and predate the COVID-19 pandemic. It is not clear at this time, if and how some of the public health restrictions resulting from the pandemic, such as social distancing measures, loss of employment or reduced income, may have impacted experiences of harassment and discrimination across Canadian campuses. From March 2020 to June 2021, most postsecondary institutions in Canada halted in-class learning,¹⁶ meaning that harassment and discrimination involving face-to-face interaction may have decreased. Conversely, online harassment or cyberbullying

Harassment and discrimination among faculty and researchers in Canada's postsecondary institutions

may have increased, as more interactions became virtual with the shift to online learning.

The SPFR data cannot shed light on this online form of harassment, as questions on cyberbullying were not asked. There are some reports that working from home may stifle workplace harassment claims,¹⁷ in that there may be fewer opportunities for incidental observation of the harassment by others.

Women faculty and researchers are about 1.5 times more likely than men to experience workplace harassment

The SPFR asked those who teach and/or conduct research in Canada's postsecondary institutions about their experiences of five types of harassment in the past year, including verbal abuse, humiliating behaviour, threats (e.g., blackmailing, threats to career or reputation, physical threats), physical violence, and unwanted sexual attention or sexual harassment.¹⁸

In 2019, about one-third of women (34%) reported having experienced at least one type of harassment in their postsecondary institution (Chart 1).¹⁹ In contrast, about 1 in 5 (22%) men reported the same.^{20,21} This 12-percentage point gender difference aligns with previous research examining harassment across all types of workplaces in Canada. However, these proportions are higher than in other occupational settings. A Statistics Canada study found that in 2016, 19% of Canadian women reported that they had experienced harassment in their workplace in the past year, while 13% of men reported it.²²

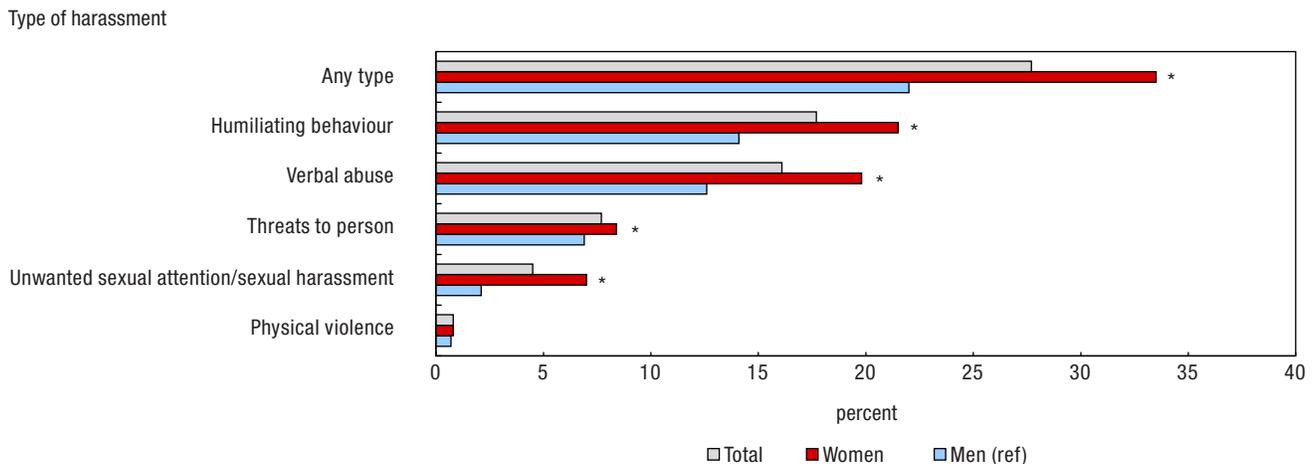
Among the five types of harassment included in the survey, humiliating behaviour was the most commonly reported, at 22% for women and 14% for men. This was closely followed by acts of verbal abuse, at 20% for women and 13% for men.

While less frequently experienced, the largest gender gap existed for unwanted sexual attention or

sexual harassment.²³ In 2019, 7% of women reported unwanted sexual attention or sexual harassment in the past year, about 3.5 times higher than the proportion for men (2%). The frequency of unwanted sexual attention or sexual harassment was also significantly higher for women. In particular, 4% of women experienced two or more instances of unwanted sexual attention or sexual harassment in the past year, compared to 0.8% of men.

Women also experienced verbal abuse and humiliating behaviour at a significantly greater frequency than men. Over a year period, 12% of women reported being subjected to two or more instances of verbal abuse, compared to 7% of men. Similarly, 12% of women said they experienced multiple instances of humiliating behaviour, while the same was true for 8% of men.²⁴ Smaller differences were observed between men and women with respect to threats and physical violence.

Chart 1
Proportion of university and college teaching faculty, PhD students and postdoctoral fellows who experienced harassment in the past year, by gender of victim, 2019



* significantly different from reference category ($p < 0.05$)

Note: The sample is restricted to only those who have a position in either a college or university but not both.

Source: Statistics Canada, Survey of Postsecondary Faculty and Researchers, 2019.

Harassment and discrimination among faculty and researchers in Canada's postsecondary institutions

Results of the multivariate analysis confirm that all else being equal, being a woman increases the probability of harassment (see [Table 7 in appendix](#)).

Persons with disabilities, Indigenous persons and sexual minority groups among those at higher risk of harassment

In addition to gender, several other characteristics are related to an increased risk of harassment in the 12 months preceding the survey. Persons with disabilities²⁵, Indigenous persons,²⁶ and sexual minority groups (i.e., those who identify as lesbian or gay, or bi or pan sexual) all reported workplace harassment at significantly higher rates. Their heightened vulnerability in a postsecondary environment is consistent with their overall higher prevalence rates of criminal and non-criminal victimization across all sectors of society.²⁷

It is worth pointing out that the prevalence of reporting harassment is consistently higher for women, whether or not they have a disability, belong to an Indigenous group, or are part of a sexual minority population.

The largest difference in the probability of experiencing harassment in the past year existed between persons with disabilities and those without. For both men and women, postsecondary teaching staff and researchers with disabilities had a probability of experiencing harassment 1.8 times higher than their colleagues without disabilities (46% versus 26%). While this was true for both men and women, women with disabilities experienced harassment more often than men (52% versus 38%).

Indigenous persons also experienced harassment at a higher rate. In 2019, 40% of Indigenous people teaching or conducting research in postsecondary institutions experienced some form of harassment in the previous year – a full 13 percentage points higher than their non-Indigenous counterparts (27%). The risk, however, was much greater for Indigenous women (45%) than Indigenous men (33%).

For the sexual minority population, 42% of bi and pan sexual teaching staff and researchers reported having experienced at least one type of harassment in their postsecondary institution, compared to 27% of their heterosexual colleagues (see [Table 1 in appendix](#)). The increased risk for the sexual minority population was seen for both men and women, with the exception of lesbian women, who had a risk that was on par with heterosexual women.

Racialized and non-racialized faculty and researchers experience similar rates of harassment

One personal characteristic generally not related to risk was belonging to a group designated as a visible minority. Specifically, visible minority teaching staff and researchers in Canada's postsecondary institutions did not have a higher probability of being harassed in the past year, compared to their colleagues who were not part of a visible minority population (27% and 28%). This finding is consistent with results on harassment in Canadian workplaces overall²⁸ and with students' experiences of unwanted sexualized behaviours in postsecondary schools.²⁹ Further

research is needed to determine any differences among specific racialized groups.

In addition, those whose mother tongue was neither French nor English did not have an increased risk of harassment, though faculty and researchers whose mother tongue was English were at slightly higher risk of harassment than those whose mother tongue was French (29% versus 25%). However, this difference was only evident among women (36% versus 28%).

Women's heightened risk of workplace harassment seen across all fields and disciplines

Based on results from SPFR, there is some evidence to suggest that faculty and researchers who work or study in science, technology, engineering or mathematics (STEM)³⁰ fields are significantly less likely (25%) to have experienced being harassed than those who work, teach or study in BHASE (business, humanities, health, arts, social science and education)³¹ (or non-STEM) fields (29%).

However, women, regardless of field of study, are significantly more likely than men in these fields to self-report that they experienced harassment in their postsecondary institutions in the past year. For instance, 34% of women in STEM fields experienced harassment, while for men in STEM fields, the proportion was significantly less at 21%. A similar gender difference was observed in BHASE fields (33% for women versus 23% for men).

Differences also emerge by role or position within the postsecondary institutions. For instance, university professors reported harassment more often than postdoctoral

Harassment and discrimination among faculty and researchers in Canada's postsecondary institutions

fellows (28% versus 20%). That being said, women were generally more likely than men to report workplace harassment in postsecondary institutions regardless of their position (e.g., PhD students, teachers), with the notable exceptions of postdoctoral fellows and researchers in colleges. In these cases, there were no significant gender differences in experiences of harassment.

Perpetrators of harassment against PhD students and postdoctoral fellows most often in a position of authority

The relationship between a person who experiences harassment and the perpetrator is critically important, as the types of impacts may vary, particularly in instances where the perpetrator holds some form of authority over the victim. More precisely, harassment perpetrated by people who are in formal positions

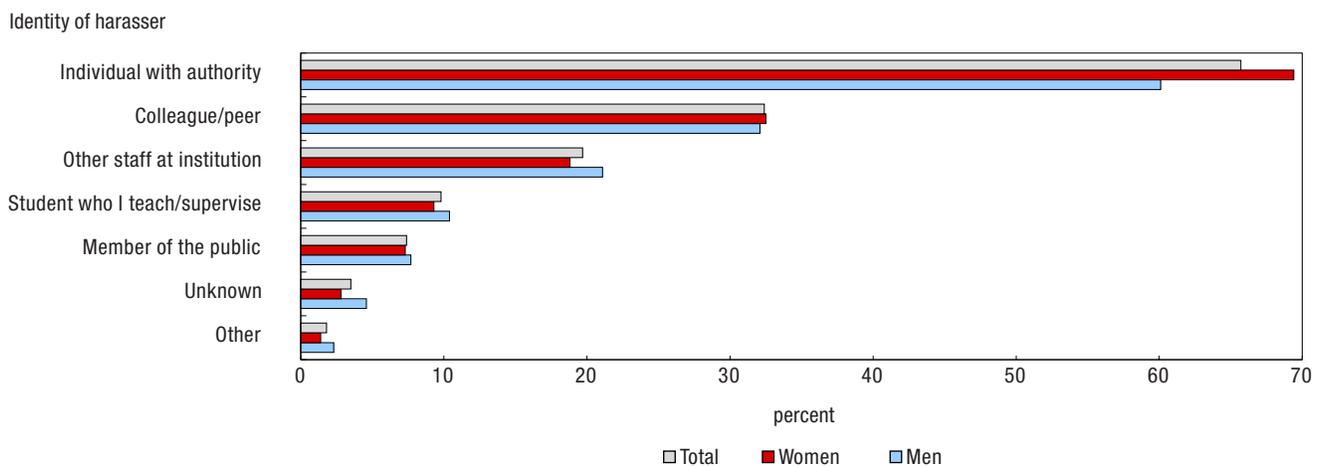
of authority may influence the career trajectory of victims, as they are likely to have a degree of control over their target's future prospects.

Formal positions of authority include people with direct authority over others, such as supervisors, but also people who occupy senior positions that may not necessarily involve supervisory functions. For example, a tenured professor may be in a position of authority over an assistant professor, and an assistant professor may hold authority over a PhD student, even if there is no direct supervisory relationship. Previous research shows that control and power differentials are quite common in instances of harassment in the workplace.³² As such, it is important to account for control and power differentials, as experiences of harassment may vary greatly according to the position that one has within their postsecondary institution.

Among PhD students and postdoctoral fellows, two-thirds (66%) of those who experienced harassment indicated that the perpetrator was in a position of authority (Chart 2).^{33,34,35} The second most common types of perpetrators were colleagues or peers (32%). In addition, 20% of PhD students and postdoctoral fellows reported that they had been harassed by other staff at their institution, while 10% stated that their harasser had been a student that they teach or supervise. There were no significant gender differences observed between men and women, suggesting that men and women who are PhD students or postdoctoral fellows tend to report similar types of relationships with the people who harass them.

Contrasting the pattern observed for PhD students and postdoctoral fellows, the most common perpetrators of harassment against university and college teachers were colleagues or peers (43%)

Chart 2
Harassment of PhD students and postdoctoral fellows, by relationship to perpetrator and gender of victim, 2019

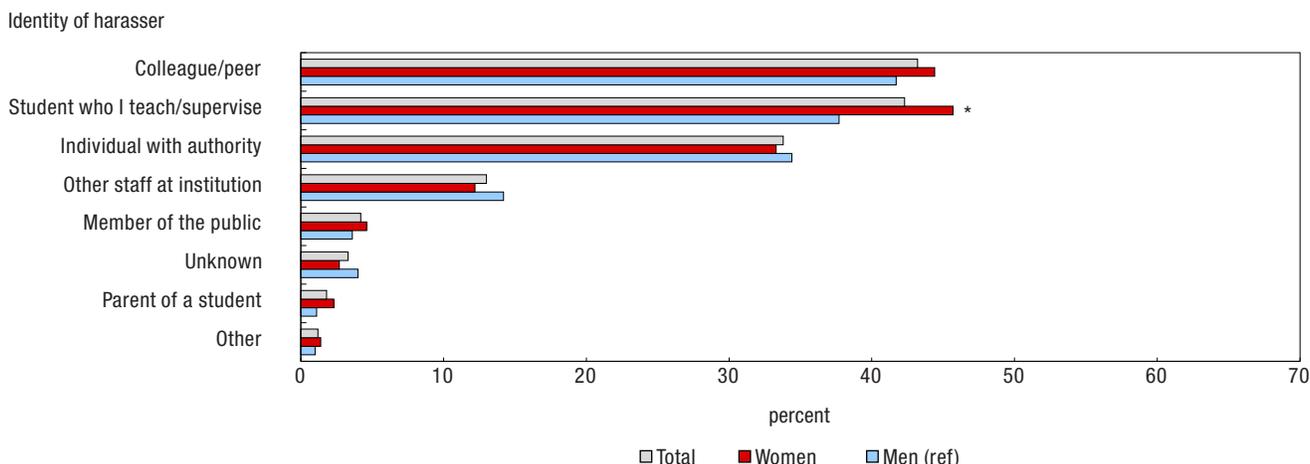


Source: Statistics Canada, Survey of Postsecondary Faculty and Researchers, 2019.

Harassment and discrimination among faculty and researchers in Canada's postsecondary institutions

Chart 3

Harassment of university or college teaching faculty, by relationship to perpetrator and gender of victim, 2019



* significantly different from reference category ($p < 0.05$)

Note: The denominator only includes those who were harassed.

Source: Statistics Canada, Survey of Postsecondary Faculty and Researchers, 2019.

or students they teach or supervise (42%) (Chart 3). In general, there were no distinct differences between men and women, with the exception of experiences of harassment perpetrated by students. Women teachers reported a significantly higher probability of being harassed by students than did men teachers (46% versus 38%). While less commonly reported, abuse of authority was still a factor in the harassment experiences of university and college teachers, as over three in ten teachers reported that they were harassed by individuals in positions of authority.

Men and women, regardless of role in their institution, were generally more likely to be harassed by a man than a woman

In general, both men and women, regardless of role in their institution, were more likely to be harassed by a man than a woman (see Table 2 in appendix). For PhD students and postdoctoral fellows,

men and women were more likely to be harassed by a man, regardless of harasser identity. For example, women PhD students and postdoctoral fellows who were harassed by a colleague or peer said that it was more often a man than a woman (77% versus 28%). A similar pattern was noted for men PhD students and postdoctoral fellows who experienced harassment by a colleague.³⁶

Among teachers, women were harassed significantly more by men students than women students (68% versus 41%). Similarly, it was much more common for men teachers to be harassed by a student who was a man (67%) than for men teachers to be harassed by a student who was a woman (48%). Men and women teachers were also significantly more likely to be harassed by men colleagues and peers.

However, when the harasser was in a position of authority, there were no significant differences between men and women teachers and the gender of their harasser.

Colleagues and persons of authority most often responsible for sexual harassment towards PhD students and postdoctoral fellows

For most types of harassment, both women and men PhD students and postdoctoral fellows identified persons in positions of authority as the persons responsible, with the notable exception of unwanted sexual attention and sexual harassment. In these cases, colleagues or peers were just as likely as persons of authority to be identified as the persons responsible for unwanted sexual attention or sexual harassment.

For teachers, the results were much more mixed, differing by gender. For women teachers, students were the predominant perpetrators of verbal abuse and threats, while acts of humiliation and unwanted sexual attention or sexual harassment were most often committed by a colleague or peer.³⁷

Harassment and discrimination among faculty and researchers in Canada's postsecondary institutions

For men teachers, colleagues and peers were most often responsible for harassment. This was also the case for verbal abuse, humiliating behaviours, and threats, albeit individuals in positions of authority were just as likely as colleagues to be the perpetrator. When the behaviour reached the level of unwanted sexual attention or sexual harassment, students were most often the persons responsible against men teachers. This result supports similar findings from the United States.³⁸

Women more likely to take some form of action against their harasser, with the exception of sexual harassment

Not all targets of harassment take action against their harassers. Some may wish to take action, but decide against reporting the behaviour for various reasons, such as fear of reprisal from their harasser. That said, the majority of women and men

targeted by workplace harassment in postsecondary institutions took some form of action, such as confronting the person or people responsible for the harassment, reporting the harassment to someone with the authority to act, talking to someone else at their institution, or filing a formal complaint.

Overall, taking some form of action was more often seen among women victims: 73% of women, compared to 65% of men (Chart 4). While women were generally more likely to say that they took action, certain types of harassment were more likely to result in confronting the harasser or reporting the behaviour. In particular, acts of physical violence most often resulted in some type of action, with 94% of women and 90% of men taking action. Next were targets of threats (89% of women and 78% of men), followed by verbal abuse (82% of women and 74% of men), and humiliating behaviour (74% of women and 63% of men).

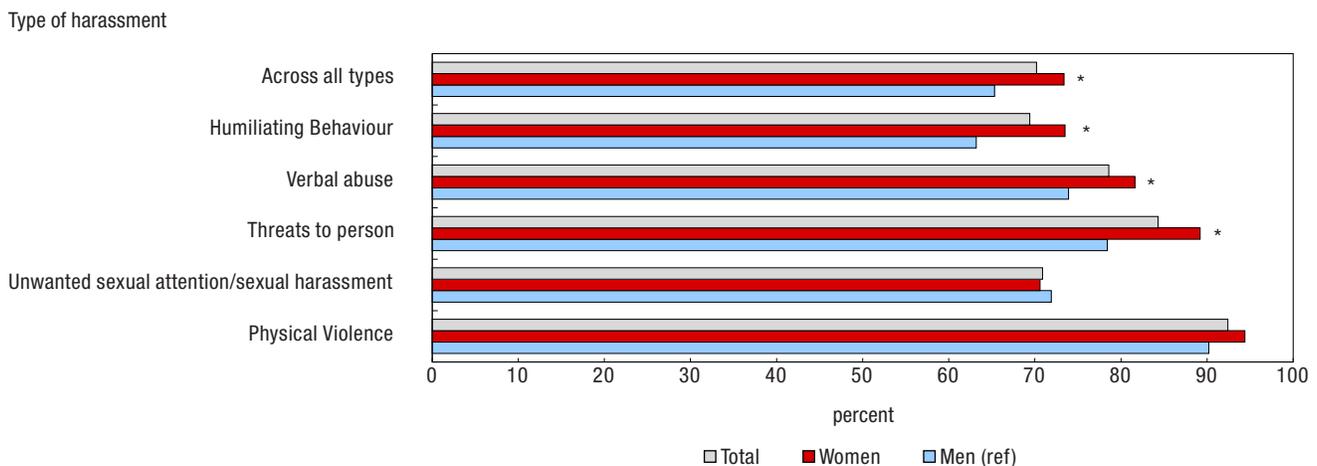
The heightened reporting by women disappears for unwanted sexual attention or sexual harassment. While the majority of targets still took action for these types of harassment, there was no gender difference: 71% of women and 72% of men.

Taking action against harasser varies by relationship and gender

Overall, taking action against the harasser was more common when the perpetrator was a parent of a student, with almost 9 in 10 victims of harassment taking some form of action in these cases. Conversely, acts of harassment involving individuals in positions of authority or members of the public were least likely to result in action on the part of the victim (66% and 67%).

There are a few gender differences in the likelihood of taking action based on the relationship between the victim and harasser (Chart 5). In particular, about 76% of women

Chart 4
Taking action against harassment, by type of harassment and gender of victim, 2019



Source: Statistics Canada, Survey of Postsecondary Faculty and Researchers, 2019.

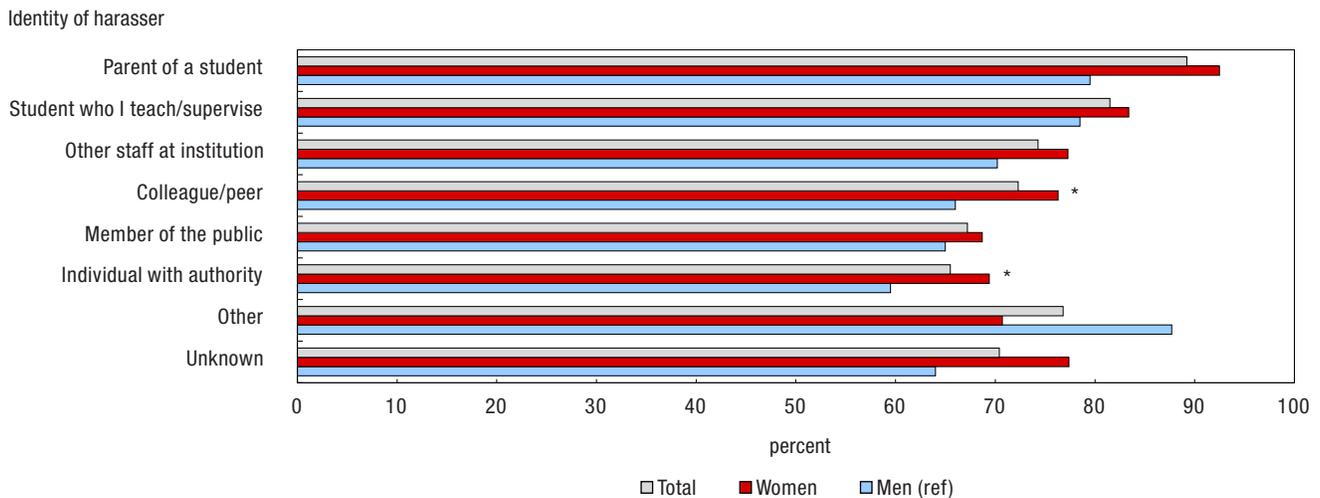
Harassment and discrimination among faculty and researchers in Canada's postsecondary institutions

who had been harassed by a colleague or peer took some type of action, compared with 66% of men. Similarly, 69% of women that were harassed by an individual in a

position of authority took some type of action, whereas only 59% of men said the same. For other types of perpetrators, there were no other gender differences with respect to taking action against the harasser.

Results show that taking action against one's harasser depends on whether the harasser was a man or a woman (Chart 6). For instance, 67% of men compared to 73% of women who were harassed by a man said

Chart 5
Taking action against harassment, by relationship to the perpetrator and gender of victim, 2019

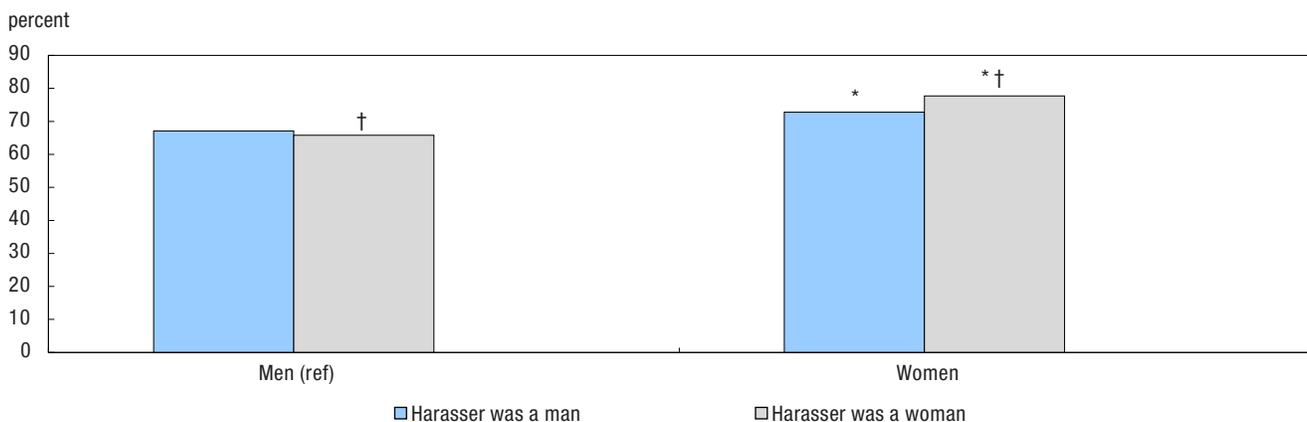


* significantly different from reference category ($p < 0.05$)

Note: The identity of harasser categories are not mutually exclusive. Respondents may have chosen more than one.

Source: Statistics Canada, Survey of Postsecondary Faculty and Researchers, 2019.

Chart 6
Taking action against harassment, by gender of the perpetrator and gender of victim, 2019



* significantly different from reference category ($p < 0.05$)

† significant difference between gender of harasser at .05 level

Source: Statistics Canada, Survey of Postsecondary Faculty and Researchers, 2019.

Harassment and discrimination among faculty and researchers in Canada's postsecondary institutions

that they took action. In contrast, 66% of men versus 78% of women who were harassed by a woman said the same. Thus, it appears that women are more likely to take action when they were harassed by a woman, whereas men took action

more or less equally regardless of whether they were harassed by a man or a woman.

More research is needed but from the evidence provided by the SPFR data, women teaching, studying

and doing research in Canadian universities and colleges are generally more likely than men to take action when they have been harassed.

Experiences of discrimination

Women more likely to experience unfair treatment or discrimination

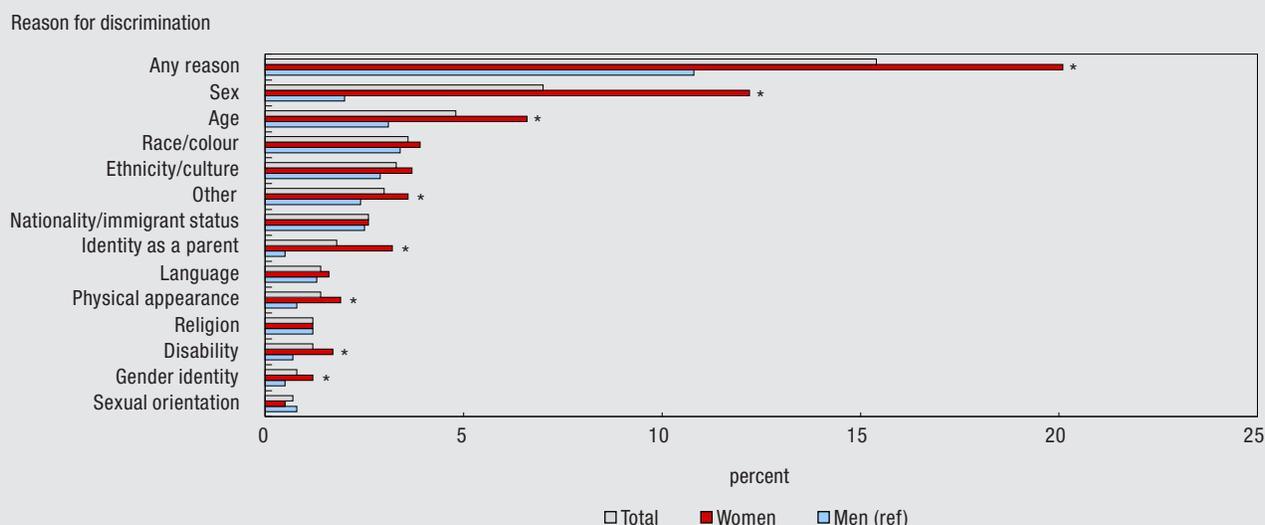
Discrimination and harassment in the workplace are closely connected. Some have suggested that discriminatory behaviours may be manifested within certain types of harassment, which may make it more difficult to label the behaviour as discriminatory. For instance, in terms of gender, a woman may be verbally harassed at work, but the underlying reason for the harassment may be rooted in discrimination based on someone's gender.³⁹ In the current context, discrimination is measured by asking respondents if, "in the past 12 months, they have experienced unfair treatment or discrimination in their current role because of their gender, race, age, physical appearance, religion, sexual orientation, ability or for any other reason".

In 2019, the two most common bases for discrimination reported by women were sex (12%) and age (7%), while for men, the most common were race/colour, ethnicity/culture and age (3% each) (Textbox Chart 1). In general, women experienced unfair treatment or discrimination in the past year at a rate that was almost double the rate for men (20% compared to 11%). This follows a similar pattern that was observed with harassment, and was generally seen across all forms of discrimination.

In particular, women reported significantly higher levels of discrimination than men based on their sex, gender identity, having a disability, physical appearance, age, and identifying as a parent, with the largest differences being related to age, sex and identifying as a parent.⁴⁰ Some previous research on parenting among faculty and career progression found that faculty members who are mothers have lower tenure rates and were more likely to be in part-time contract situations than men, and women without children.⁴¹ While findings on parenthood for women and career progression may not be exactly the same issue as experiencing unfair treatment and discrimination, some supplementary analysis showed a strong association between women having taken parental leave since their first faculty appointment and the probability that they experienced unfair treatment or discrimination on the basis of their identity as a parent.⁴²

Textbox Chart 1

Proportion of university and college teaching faculty, PhD students and postdoctoral fellows who experienced discrimination in the past year, by reason for discrimination and gender of victim, 2019



* significantly different from reference category ($p < 0.05$)

Source: Statistics Canada, Survey of Postsecondary Faculty and Researchers, 2019.

Harassment and discrimination among faculty and researchers in Canada's postsecondary institutions

Experiences of discrimination

Levels of discrimination were relatively similar between women and men for discrimination based on sexual orientation, religion, language, nationality or immigration status, ethnicity or culture, and race or colour. However, overall, the gender differences in discrimination hold even after taking into account a wide range of characteristics, such as age, sexual orientation, disability status, and role. That is, discrimination for women continues to be about two times more than men (20% versus 11%) (see [Table 8 in appendix](#)).

Discrimination higher among sexual minorities and diverse ethnocultural groups

Experiences of discrimination across Canadian workplaces are often heightened among certain populations, irrespective of gender. This includes persons with disabilities,⁴³ transgender and gender diverse populations,⁴⁴ the Indigenous population,⁴⁵ sexual minorities,⁴⁶ and population groups designated as visible minorities.^{47,48} These populations were also more likely to experience discrimination in academia (see [Table 5 in appendix](#)).

As with harassment, one of the greatest divides was found between people with disabilities and those without, with rates of discrimination being nearly 2.5 times higher for faculty and researchers with a disability (34%) than those without (14%). Similar differences were found between the transgender and gender diverse population compared to the cisgender population. Almost 40% of transgender and gender diverse teaching staff and researchers said they had experienced unfair treatment or discrimination in the past year, compared to 15% who were cisgender.

Rates were also higher among Indigenous teaching staff and researchers, with 28% reporting some type of discrimination. The same was true for 15% of non-Indigenous teaching staff and researchers. For those belonging to a visible minority group, 21% reported experiencing discrimination in the past year, compared to 14% of non-visible minority staff and researchers. This difference contrasts the similarity in rates of harassment between visible minority and non-visible minority teaching staff and researchers.

Identifying as gay or lesbian also elevated risk. The proportion of gay men or lesbian women (22%) who experienced discrimination was one and a half times greater than their heterosexual counterparts (14%). Bi or pan sexual women and women whose sexual orientation was not elsewhere classified were more likely to have experienced discrimination than heterosexual women.

The risk pattern for men and women did vary somewhat for certain characteristics. For example, transgender men report significantly more discrimination in the past year (44%) than cisgender men (11%). This finding was not present among women.

Most common types of unfair treatment vary between men and women

Experiences of unfair treatment or discrimination also include being ignored by others, being given less challenging or less interesting work, receiving poor performance evaluation, or being denied a promotion. These forms of behaviour are particularly concerning given that most countries in the world, including Canada, provide legal protections from gender-based discrimination in promotions.⁴⁹

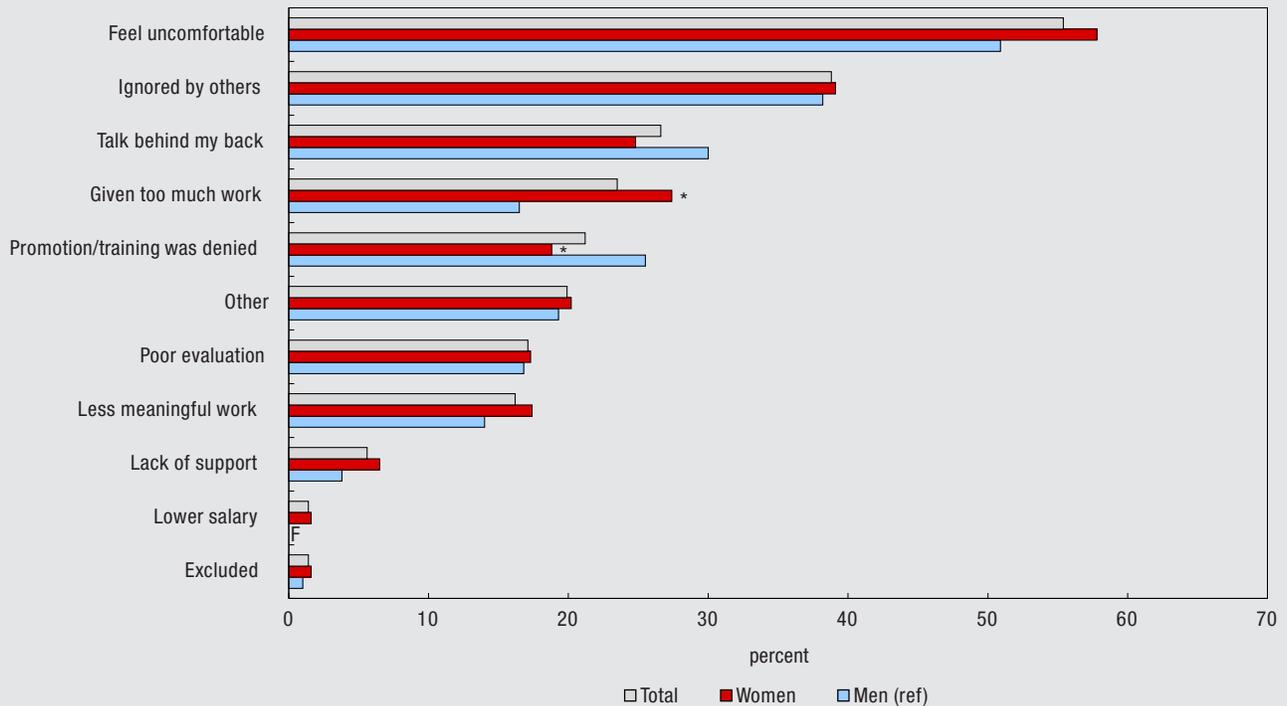
In general, among those who reported having experienced unfair treatment or discrimination in the past year, women were more likely than men to report being given too much work (27% versus 16%) (Textbox Chart 2). Men, meanwhile, were more likely than women to report that their promotion or training was denied (25% versus 19%). For both men and women, the most common type of discrimination was being made to feel uncomfortable: 58% of women and 51% of men reported this type of discrimination. The next most common for both genders was being ignored by others: close to 40% of men and women said this was the basis for their discrimination in the past year.

Harassment and discrimination among faculty and researchers in Canada's postsecondary institutions

Experiences of discrimination

Textbox Chart 2

Nature of unfair treatment or discrimination, by gender of victim, 2019



F too unreliable to be published

* significantly different from reference category ($p < 0.05$)

Source: Statistics Canada, Survey of Postsecondary Faculty and Researchers, 2019.

Conclusion

Harassment and discrimination exist across Canadian workplaces, occurring in any type of organization, with differing prevalence rates depending on gender and other characteristics. In the current context, harassment and discrimination in Canada's postsecondary institutions were examined, notably those who teach or conduct research in colleges and universities. Using newly collected survey data on this population, this study found multiple instances of gender imbalance in experiences related to harassment and discrimination in the year

preceding the 2019 survey. For instance, just over one-third of women across all types of positions (teachers, researchers, postdoctoral fellows and PhD students) reported that they had been harassed in their postsecondary institution in the past year, whereas just over one-fifth of men said the same. This gender difference aligns with previous research examining harassment across all types of workplaces in Canada.

The most common types of harassment were similar for men and women, with women experiencing each type at a higher

rate than men. The most common acts of harassment were humiliating behaviours, followed by verbal abuse, threats, and unwanted sexual attention or sexual harassment. The gender difference for unwanted sexual attention or sexual harassment is especially large and is in line with recently collected data on the student body of postsecondary institutions.⁵⁰ Meanwhile, the most common perpetrators of harassment were individuals in positions of authority and colleagues or peers, but in this case, men and women's experiences are very similar. In other words, they are harassed by people in similar positions. The exception is with

Harassment and discrimination among faculty and researchers in Canada's postsecondary institutions

respect to sexual harassment, where women are most likely to be sexually harassed by colleagues or peers, while men are most likely to be sexually harassed by students they teach or supervise.

Patterns in workplace discrimination within the postsecondary setting are very similar to harassment: women were about twice as likely to have experienced discrimination in the past year as men, and the gender difference holds even after adjusting for a wide range of factors.

The vast majority of individuals who have been harassed in the 12 months preceding the survey, in any capacity, said that they took some action regarding the harassment. Action may have been any of

these four types: confronting the harasser, reporting the harasser to the authorities, talking with someone at their institution about the harassment, and filing a formal complaint. Women were more likely than men to take some action for the harassment, while some types of harassment elicited more action from both men and women. For example, experiences of physical violence were more likely to lead to actions being taken than verbal abuse or humiliating behaviour. An important finding emerged with respect to unwanted sexual attention and sexual harassment: women, who are by far much more likely than men to have been sexually harassed, were not, however, more likely to take some action.

The current findings help shed light on the state of harassment and discrimination among people who teach and conduct research in Canadian institutes of higher learning. Further study is needed to assess the implications of harassment and discrimination on career progression, as well as how the COVID-19 pandemic shut downs and the corresponding shifts to online working and teaching may impact harassment and discrimination among faculty, graduate students and postdoctoral fellows across Canadian universities, as well as faculty in Canadian colleges.

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Harassment and discrimination among faculty and researchers in Canada's postsecondary institutions

Appendix

Table 1
Percentage reporting being harassed in the past year, by gender of victim, 2019

Characteristic	Total	Men percent	Women
Gender			
Men	22.0*	...	...
Women (ref)	33.5	...	...
Age			
20 to 34 (ref)	26.6	20.9	31.7†
35 to 44	28.1	22.7	33.2†
45 to 54	28.8	21.4	35.6†
55 to 64	29.7	24.3	35.8†
65+	21.5*	19.3	25.8
Self-reported Indigenous identification			
Non Indigenous (ref)	27.4	21.8	33.2†
Indigenous	39.7*	32.6	45.1*
Visible minority			
Non visible minority (ref)	27.9	22.0	33.4†
Visible minority	27.1	22.0	34.0†
Mother tongue			
English (ref)	29.3	22.3	35.9†
French	24.5*	20.6	28.1*†
Neither French nor English	26.2	22.0	31.6†
Multiple languages	36.4	28.2	43.2
Gender identity			
Cisgender (ref)	27.6	21.9	33.5†
Transgender or nonbinary	41.9*	50.3*	F
Sexual orientation			
Heterosexual (ref)	26.6	20.8	32.5†
Lesbian or gay	36.1*	34.3*	40.5
Bi sexual or pan sexual	42.4*	34.3*	46.7*
Sexual orientation, not elsewhere classified	45.1*	F	45.0
Persons with disabilities			
No (ref)	26.3	21.0	31.9†
Yes	45.6*	37.7*	51.7*†
Position and institution information			
Role in postsecondary institution			
PhD student	25.4	20.1	30.4†
Postdoctoral Fellow	20.0*	16.2	25.3
Researcher in University	26.3	18.9	32.5†
Teacher in University (ref)	28.2	23.1	33.9†
Researcher in College	31.4	29.2	33.1
Teacher in College	29.7	23.1	36.3†
Field of study in which one currently works or studies			
BHASE (NonSTEM) (ref)	28.8	23.1	33.3†
STEM	25.3*	20.5	34.1†
Institution information			
Province of institution (grouped)			
Atlantic	28.2	22.1	35.2†
Quebec	25.5	21.0	30.4†
Ontario (ref)	26.9	21.2	32.6†
Prairies	30.0*	22.5	37.6†
British Columbia	31.1	25.7	36.4†
Territories	F	F	F

... not applicable

F too unreliable to be published

* significantly different from reference category ($p < 0.05$)

† significant gender difference at .05 level

Source: Statistics Canada, Survey of Postsecondary Faculty and Researchers, 2019.

Harassment and discrimination among faculty and researchers in Canada's postsecondary institutions

Table 2
Gender of perpetrator of harassment, by gender of victim and role in the postsecondary institution, 2019

	Phd Student/Postdoctoral fellow		Teachers	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
	percent			
Harasser was a student				
Harasser was a woman	28.2 [†]	35.0 [†]	41.4 [†]	47.6 [†]
Harasser was a man	79.6	74.2	68.2	66.7
Harasser was an individual with authority				
Harasser was a woman	38.1 [†]	27.2 [†]	49.7	48.4
Harasser was a man	65.7	75.4	60.4	62.9
Harasser was a colleague or peer				
Harasser was a woman	27.8 [†]	33.6 [†]	44.3 [†]	44.7 [†]
Harasser was a man	76.6	71.7	65.9	65.9

[†] significant difference between gender of harasser, within gender at .05 level

Source: Statistics Canada, Survey of Postsecondary Faculty and Researchers, 2019.

Table 3
Taking action for the harassment, by type of action and type of harassment, men victims, 2019

	Men			
	Confronted harasser	Reported harasser to authorities	Talked with someone at their institution	Filed a formal complaint
	percent			
Physical violence	57.8	64.5	51.4	25.7
Unwanted sexual attention/sexual harassment	40.4	27.4	39.2	18.4
Threats to person	34.9	43.7 [†]	43.3 [†]	15.2
Verbal abuse	39.3	34.4 [†]	37.4 [†]	9.1
Humiliating behaviour	31.8	27.6	34.3 [†]	9.3
Across all types	32.9	28.1	32.8 [†]	7.6

[†] significant difference from women in Table 4 at .05 level

Source: Statistics Canada, Survey of Postsecondary Faculty and Researchers, 2019.

Table 4
Taking action for the harassment, by type of action and type of harassment, women victims, 2019

	Women			
	Confronted harasser	Reported harasser to authorities	Talked with someone at their institution	Filed a formal complaint
	percent			
Physical violence	34.4	77.3	62.5	23.8
Unwanted sexual attention/sexual harassment	37.5	29.0	44.3	8.1
Threats to person	36.7	59.1 [†]	57.2 [†]	15.8
Verbal abuse	43.4	42.2 [†]	45.1 [†]	9.4
Humiliating behaviour	36.3	33.2	44.5 [†]	7.4
Across all types	36.1	33.3	40.9 [†]	7.1

[†] significant difference from men in Table 3 at .05 level

Source: Statistics Canada, Survey of Postsecondary Faculty and Researchers, 2019.

Harassment and discrimination among faculty and researchers in Canada's postsecondary institutions

Table 5
Percentage reporting that they experienced unfair treatment or discrimination in the past year, by gender of victim, 2019

Characteristic	Total	Men percent	Women
Gender			
Men	10.8*	...	...
Women (ref)	20.1	...	...
Age			
20 to 34 (ref)	15.5	9.9	20.6 [†]
35 to 44	16.4	10.6	21.8 [†]
45 to 54	15.3	10.3	19.7 [†]
55 to 64	15.3	11.6	19.6 [†]
65+	12.7	12.2	13.7
Self-reported Indigenous identification			
Non Indigenous (ref)	15.1	10.7	19.8 [†]
Indigenous	27.6*	19.2*	33.6*
Visible minority			
Non visible minority (ref)	13.7	9.2	17.9 [†]
Visible minority	21.2*	15.6*	28.9* [†]
Mother tongue			
English (ref)	15.8	10.0	21.3 [†]
French	9.4*	7.8	11.0*
Neither French nor English	18.5*	13.8*	24.6 [†]
Multiple languages	22.1*	17.0*	26.3
Gender identity			
Cisgender (ref)	15.3	10.6	20.0 [†]
Transgender or nonbinary	36.3*	44.2*	F
Sexual orientation			
Heterosexual (ref)	14.4	10.2	18.7 [†]
Lesbian or gay	21.6*	17.9*	30.4*
Bi sexual or pan sexual	29.8*	14.3	37.9* [†]
Sexual orientation, not elsewhere classified	32.8*	F	35.1*
Persons with disabilities			
No (ref)	13.9	10.1	18.0 [†]
Yes	33.8*	22.0*	43.0* [†]
Position and institution information			
Role in postsecondary institution			
PhD student	16.8	11.5	21.7 [†]
Postdoctoral Fellow	15.0	10.3	21.6 [†]
Researcher in University	18.1	13.0	22.3
Teacher in University (ref)	16.4	10.8	22.7 [†]
Researcher in College	18.8	14.1	22.7
Teacher in College	12.1*	9.8	14.4* [†]
Field of study in which one currently works or studies			
BHASE (NonSTEM) (ref)	16.2	11.8	19.6 [†]
STEM	13.7*	9.4*	21.5 [†]
Institution information			
Province of institution (grouped)			
Atlantic	15.6	13.0	18.6 [†]
Quebec	11.0*	8.6	13.6* [†]
Ontario (ref)	16.2	11.0	21.5 [†]
Prairies	18.7	12.6	24.9 [†]
British Columbia	17.1	11.3	22.8 [†]
Territories	F	F	F

... not applicable

F too unreliable to be published

* significantly different from reference category ($p < 0.05$)

[†] significant gender difference at .05 level

Source: Statistics Canada, Survey of Postsecondary Faculty and Researchers, 2019.

Harassment and discrimination among faculty and researchers in Canada's postsecondary institutions

Table 6
Sample characteristics, 2019

Characteristic	percent
Gender	
Men	50.6
Women	49.4
Age	
20 to 34	21.4
35 to 44	24.6
45 to 54	23.1
55 to 64	21.6
65+	9.4
Self-reported Indigenous identification	
Non Indigenous	98.1
Indigenous	1.9
Visible minority	
No	77.6
Yes	22.4
Mother tongue	
English	51.9
French	19.8
Neither French nor English	25.9
Multiple languages	2.4
Gender identity	
Cisgender	99.5
Transgender or nonbinary	0.5
Sexual orientation	
Heterosexual	91.8
Lesbian or gay	4.0
Bi sexual or pan sexual	3.5
Sexual orientation, not elsewhere classified	0.7
Persons with disabilities	
No	92.6
Yes	7.4
Role in postsecondary institution	
PhD student	17.4
Postdoctoral fellow	3.7
Researcher in University	8.2
Teacher in University	39.5
Researcher in College	0.9
Teacher in College	27.4
Role in both college and university	2.9
Highest level of completed education	
Earned Doctorate	35.2
Master's Degree	39.4
Degree in medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine or optometry	3.7
Bachelor's Degree	16.3
College, other non-university certificate or diploma, or Trades certificate/diploma	5.3
Field of study in which one currently works or studies	
BHASE (NonSTEM)	67.7
STEM	32.3
Province of institution (grouped)	
Atlantic	6.7
Quebec	25.2
Ontario	38.8
Prairies	16.3
British Columbia	12.9
Territories	0.2

Source: Statistics Canada, Survey of Postsecondary Faculty and Researchers, 2019.

Harassment and discrimination among faculty and researchers in Canada's postsecondary institutions

Table 7
Probability of respondent being harassed in the past year, logistic regressions, 2019

Characteristic	Total	Men	Women
	marginal effects		
Gender			
Men	-0.110*	...	...
Women (ref)	...	...	...
Age			
20 to 34 (ref)	...	...	...
35 to 44	-0.001	-0.004	0.001
45 to 54	-0.008	-0.029	0.010
55 to 64	0.005	-0.004	0.014
65+	-0.062*	-0.051	-0.079*
Self-reported Indigenous identification			
Non Indigenous (ref)	...	...	...
Indigenous	0.084*	0.068	0.096*
Visible minority			
Non visible minority (ref)	...	...	...
Visible minority	0.024	0.016	0.032
Mother tongue			
English (ref)	...	...	...
French	-0.043*	-0.013	-0.070*
Neither French nor English	-0.013	0.016	-0.042
Multiple languages	0.065	0.054	0.081
Gender identity			
Cisgender (ref)	...	...	...
Transgender or nonbinary	0.045	0.158	-0.141
Sexual orientation			
Heterosexual (ref)	...	...	...
Lesbian or gay	0.115*	0.125*	0.071
Bi sexual or pan sexual	0.121*	0.115	0.125*
Sexual orientation, not elsewhere classified	0.101	0.129	0.076
Persons with disabilities			
No (ref)	...	...	...
Yes	0.165*	0.150*	0.186*
Position and institution information			
Role in postsecondary institution			
PhD student	-0.057*	-0.060*	-0.055*
Postdoctoral fellow	-0.097*	-0.091*	-0.109*
Researcher in University	-0.050*	-0.062*	-0.044
Teacher in University (ref)	...	...	...
Researcher in College	0.015	0.056	-0.013
Teacher in College	0.014	-0.002	0.030
Field of Study in which one currently works or studies			
BHASE (NonSTEM) (ref)	...	...	...
STEM	0.010	-0.009	0.037*
Institution information			
Province of institution (grouped)			
Atlantic	0.020	0.007	0.032
Quebec	0.027	0.016	0.036
Ontario (ref)	...	...	...
Prairies	0.038*	0.017	0.061*
British Columbia	0.044*	0.049*	0.041
Territories	-0.007	0.057	-0.061

... not applicable

* significantly different from reference category ($p < 0.05$)

Source: Statistics Canada, Survey of Postsecondary Faculty and Researchers, 2019.

Harassment and discrimination among faculty and researchers in Canada's postsecondary institutions

Table 8
Probability of respondent experiencing discrimination in the past year, logistic regressions, 2019

Characteristic	Total	Men	Women
	marginal effects		
Gender			
Men	-0.092*	...	...
Women (ref)	...	...	...
Age			
20 to 34 (ref)	...	...	...
35 to 44	0.020	0.013	0.027
45 to 54	0.010	0.013	0.006
55 to 64	0.021	0.034	0.009
65+	0.011	0.053*	-0.051
Self-reported Indigenous identification			
Non Indigenous (ref)	...	...	...
Indigenous	0.110*	0.091*	0.131*
Visible minority			
Non visible minority (ref)	...	...	...
Visible minority	0.089*	0.072*	0.109*
Mother tongue			
English (ref)	...	...	...
French	-0.038*	-0.005	-0.071*
Neither French nor English	0.007	0.022	-0.010
Multiple languages	0.027	0.042	0.012
Gender identity			
Cisgender (ref)	...	...	...
Transgender or nonbinary	0.106	0.270*	-0.087
Sexual orientation			
Heterosexual (ref)	...	...	...
Lesbian or gay	0.084*	0.076*	0.089
Bi sexual or pan sexual	0.099*	0.010	0.144*
Sexual orientation, not elsewhere classified	0.074	0.052	0.071
Persons with disabilities			
No (ref)	...	...	...
Yes	0.164*	0.106*	0.215*
Position and institution information			
Role in postsecondary institution			
PhD student	-0.020	0.005	-0.045*
Postdoctoral Fellow	-0.025	0.001	-0.052
Researcher in University	-0.012	0.022	-0.044
Teacher in University (ref)	...	...	...
Researcher in College	0.009	0.048	-0.018
Teacher in College	-0.040*	-0.006	-0.077*
Field of study in which one currently works or studies			
BHASE (NonSTEM) (ref)	...	...	...
STEM	-0.014	-0.032*	0.010
Institution information			
Province of institution (grouped)			
Atlantic	0.007	0.032*	-0.020
Quebec	-0.008	-0.007	-0.006
Ontario (ref)	...	...	...
Prairies	0.029*	0.022	0.036*
British Columbia	0.010	0.007	0.014
Territories	-0.033	0.052	-0.111*

... not applicable

* significantly different from reference category ($p < 0.05$)

Source: Statistics Canada, Survey of Postsecondary Faculty and Researchers, 2019.

Harassment and discrimination among faculty and researchers in Canada's postsecondary institutions

Data sources, methods and definitions

The Survey of Postsecondary Faculty and Researchers (SPFR) conducted in 2019 was sponsored by Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada. The SPFR aims to fill data gaps on equity, diversity, and inclusion among those who teach or conduct research in Canada's postsecondary sector, including full- and part-time university faculty, college instructors, postdoctoral fellows and doctoral students. It provides estimates of how various diversity characteristics—such as gender, visible minority status, Indigenous identity, self-reported disability, sexual orientation, use of official languages and others—may influence career experiences and affect career advancement of the survey respondents in the Canadian academic community. In the absence of a complete survey frame that lists all post-secondary institutions, faculty and researchers, several files were combined—including tax data, census, Postsecondary Student Information System, immigration, and research funding data sets—to create a survey frame.

The survey population was selected from this survey frame. Survey weights were adjusted to account for non-respondents, but were not further calibrated due to the unavailability of external control totals that were aligned with the coverage of the survey population. As a result, the survey results are only representative of the surveyed population, not necessarily the targeted population. Due to the methodology used, survey results cannot be released for individual post-secondary institutions.

Full and part-time university faculty (including teaching staff and researchers), college instructors, postdoctoral fellows, and doctoral students were contacted via email or mail, and invited to complete the survey online via Electronic Questionnaire (EQ) self-response between October 7 and December 10, 2019. The sample size is around 27,000. The sample was evenly distributed in terms of gender (49% women, 51% men), while the largest percentage in terms of role at one's institution was 40% for teachers in university (see Table 6 in appendix). Around 27% were teachers in college, while about 4% were postdoctoral fellows and 18% were PhD students. Researchers at colleges and universities made up the minority of the sample.

In the SPFR, information on sex at birth and gender are both collected. For confidentiality reasons, and given the small size of the populations concerned, it is not possible to publish data for the gender diverse population for this survey. As a result, it was necessary to derive a two-category gender variable.

Notes

1. See review articles by Hershcovis 2011, and Schilpzand, De Pater, and Erez 2016.
2. While no direct figures on the economic costs of workplace harassment exist for Canada, a 2008 report from the UK (see Giga, Hoel, and Lewis 2008) estimated that costs associated with absenteeism, turnover, and productivity as a result of workplace bullying in the UK in 2007 were estimated at about £13.75 billion. Giga et al found that 33.5 million days were lost by organizations in the UK due to bullying related absenteeism and close to 200,000 employees may have left organizations as a result of bullying.
3. Dengate et al 2019.
4. Blizard 2016.
5. Cassidy, Faucher, and Jackson 2017.
6. See a recent report by Bergeron et al 2016, that examined sexual victimization across 6 French speaking universities in Quebec.
7. Maxwell 2020 examined sexual assault and other types of sexualized aggression at Canadian military colleges.
8. See Dengate et al 2019.
9. See Blizard 2016.
10. Burczykca 2020a,b uses the 2019 Survey on Individual Safety in the Postsecondary Student Population (SISPSP) which measures behaviours that occurred in the postsecondary school-related setting including universities, colleges, CEGEPs and other postsecondary institutions.
11. Hango and Moyser (2018) found that the two most common perpetrators of workplace harassment were clients or customers and supervisors or managers.
12. See previous research from Conroy and Cotter 2017; Perreault 2015 and Rotenberg 2017.
13. See Britton et. al 2012, and Clancy et. al 2017 as recent examples.
14. Harassment and discrimination are inextricably linked. Cortina (2008) suggests that given the increase in laws and policies prohibiting discrimination against specific social groups in the workplace, certain detrimental behaviours can be masked behind every day acts of incivility or harassment.
15. The analyses are restricted to only those respondents who said they had a role in college or in university, not in both. This will help pinpoint where the harassment or discrimination may have occurred. This removed about 3% of the overall sample.

Harassment and discrimination among faculty and researchers in Canada's postsecondary institutions

16. [The Canadian Association of University Teachers \(CAUT\) is tracking institutional plans for delivery of courses during the pandemic](#), and found that in 2020, only about 2% of institutions were going back to holding primarily in-person classes in 2020/2021. See <https://www.caut.ca/latest/2020/09/re-opening-colleges-and-universities-fall-semester-plans>. Originally posted Sept 1, 2020. Site Accessed December 2020.
17. See the *Sydney Morning Herald* July 6, 2020, "[Working from home can stifle sexual harassment complaints](#)" accessed November 25, 2020 <https://www.smh.com.au/business/workplace/working-from-home-can-stifle-sexual-harassment-complaints-20200702-p558hb.html>
18. These questions were adapted from the *General Social Survey* (Canadians at Work and Home) 2016. See Hango and Moysen 2018.
19. See [Data sources, methods and definitions](#) for a discussion of how sex and gender were measured and utilized in this paper.
20. This difference remains significant even after controlling on a wide range of factors, [see Table 7 in appendix](#).
21. Women also reported significantly higher probabilities of experiencing multiple forms of harassment. For instance, 17% of women reported experiencing two or more forms of harassment, while only 10% of men said the same.
22. See Hango and Moysen 2018.
23. SPFR combines both unwanted sexual attention and sexual harassment together, no distinction is made between them.
24. These supplementary results on frequency of harassment are available upon request.
25. Persons with disabilities were defined in this survey via the following question: "Are you a person with a disability?" Accompanying this question is the following clarifying statement: "A person with a disability is a person who has a long-term or recurring impairment that could be categorized into one of ten types (vision, hearing, mobility, flexibility, dexterity, pain, learning, developmental, memory and mental health related) and considers himself or herself to be disadvantaged in employment by reason of that impairment, or believes that an employer or potential employer is likely to consider him or her to be disadvantaged in employment by reason of that impairment. Persons with disabilities are also those whose functional limitations owing to their impairment have been accommodated in their current job or workplace."
26. Indigenous identity is asked in this survey via the question: "Are you an Aboriginal person, that is, First Nations (North American Indian), Métis, or Inuk (Inuit)." First Nations includes status and non-status Indians. Respondents self-identified as belonging to an Aboriginal group in the SPFR however, the term Indigenous is used in place of Aboriginal throughout this report.
27. See Sinha (ed.) 2013.
28. See Hango and Moysen 2018.
29. See Burczykca 2020b.
30. Respondents (regardless of role in their institution) are asked to specify the subject or field of study where they spend the largest portion of their time. [In this study, the variant of CIP 2016 STEM and BHASE groupings is used](#). See <https://www23.statcan.gc.ca/imdb/p3VD.pl?Function=getVD&TVD=401856>
31. [BHASE includes the following fields of study](#): business and administration, arts and humanities, social and behavioural sciences, legal professions and studies, health care, education and teaching, and trades, services, natural resources and conservation. See <https://www23.statcan.gc.ca/imdb/p3VD.pl?Function=getVD&TVD=401856>.
32. McLaughlin et. al 2012; Tepper 2000
33. These are people in 'positions of authority' as self-reported by the PhD student or postdoctoral fellow. It is not known who exactly are in the positions of authority.
34. Estimates in Charts 2 and 3 do not add to 100 because response categories are not mutually exclusive; respondents may have chosen more than perpetrator.
35. In this analysis, PhD students and postdoctoral fellows are combined into one category because they share similar traits in that each group has a status in the university that has a certain degree of dependency on individuals (faculty advisors and senior faculty for example) in positions of power or authority over them. Teachers are combined into a separate category (either in university or college), and then the position of the person who was responsible for the most serious incident of each individual type of harassment (verbal abuse, sexual harassment, humiliating behaviour, threats and violence) is examined.

Harassment and discrimination among faculty and researchers in Canada's postsecondary institutions

36. The results in Table 2 will not align with those from Charts 2 and 3 because for this analysis gender of perpetrator was asked if one instance of harassment was reported. Also, the estimates will not add to 100 because respondents may have stated that both men and women may have been harassers. For example, for verbal abuse the harasser may have been a man, however, for humiliating behaviour the harasser may have been a woman.
37. This analysis by harassment type by role is available upon request. It was not possible to use gender of harasser for this supplementary analysis because of small sample size in many cells.
38. See Lampman et al 2009.
39. See Cortina 2008 for a discussion on the links between harassment, incivility and workplace discrimination.
40. Others include contract status, relationship status, background, health, field of study, non-parent, and power imbalance have been collapsed into one group because of small sample size and large standard errors.
41. See Jacobs and Winslow 2004; and Wolfinger, Mason, and Goulden 2009.
42. This analysis is available upon request.
43. See Cotter 2018.
44. See Hango and Moyser 2018.
45. See Boyce 2016.
46. See Simpson 2018b.
47. Individuals are asked what population group they identify with. In this case, the visible minority population is defined as those who identify as non white; specifically they identify as South Asian, Chinese, Black, Filipino, Arab, Latin American, Southeast Asian, West Asian, Korean, Japanese or some other group. Population groups in this respect should not be confused with citizenship or nationality.
48. See Simpson 2018a.
49. See *WORLD Policy Analysis Center, Discrimination at Work Database, 2017*.
50. See Burczycka 2020b; RTI 2018.

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