

Working in isolated environments enables culture of bullying among elite chefs

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Bullying, violence and aggressive behavior among chefs employed in fine dining restaurants is enabled by their working environments, research from Cardiff University has found.

The study shows how working in closed, hidden away kitchen environments left chefs feeling isolated and led to a [sense](#) that they could act in ways that would not be possible elsewhere.

The team, from Cardiff Business School, interviewed 47 chefs employed in Michelin-starred fine dining restaurants around the world.

They found feelings of isolation were common among interviewees who described kitchens as 'separate,' 'detached' and 'alienating' places to work. However, they also found that with isolation also came a sense of being freed from external scrutiny. Isolation created opportunities to, as one chef explained, "act in a different way."

A different moral universe

Lead author Dr. Robin Burrow said: "Misbehavior among chefs is something we know a lot about from TV and media coverage. Up to now research has blamed this on male-dominated cultures and extreme pressure to get things done quicker, faster and to the highest possible standard.

The team say their research demonstrates how the geography of a workplace can influence behavior.

Dr. Burrow, a Lecturer in Management and Organisational Behavior at Cardiff Business School, added: "The COVID-19 pandemic has shown how isolation can leave people feeling desperately alone, depressed and anxious.

"But our research also uncovers other, less well-known effects. We found that [isolation](#) can be experienced as a kind of freedom from scrutiny, and trigger a sense that things can be done that would not normally be possible."

"In the context of the hospitality sector our findings create a compelling case for bringing secretive, hidden away workspaces—kitchens in particular—out into the open. In the open, violence and bullying can be seen, and the perpetrators more easily held to account."

Despite the occupational hazards identified by the chefs, researchers identified a strong sense of camaraderie was also expressed by interviewees who were employed at various levels of seniority and across the UK, Europe, Asia, Australia and North America.

Co-author Dr. Rebecca Scott, a Senior Lecturer in Marketing at Cardiff Business School, said: "Modern workplaces are often open, accessible and flexible spaces but the chefs we spoke to gained a sense of belonging from their collective experience of physical, stressful, fast-paced work.

"It was this feeling of community which enables our [chefs](#) to remain highly productive and committed despite the often brutal working conditions they experience.

The paper, "Where 'The Rules Don't Apply': Organizational Isolation and Misbehavior in Elite Kitchens," is published in the *Journal of Management Studies*.

More information: Robin Burrow et al, Where 'The Rules Don't Apply': Organizational Isolation and Misbehaviour in Elite Kitchens, *Journal of Management Studies* (2021). [DOI: 10.1111/joms.12759](https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.12759)

Provided by Cardiff University

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