

Study explores sexual harassment at AADR conferences

3 March 2020

The American Association for Dental Research (AADR) released findings of a new research study, "Survey of Dental Researchers' Perceptions of Sexual Harassment at AADR Conferences: 2015-2018" in the *Journal of Dental Research (JDR)*.

The research assessed perceptions and experiences related to sexual, gender-based and nongender-based [harassment](#) among registrants at AADR annual meetings from 2015 to 2018 (n=10,495); examined demographic factors associated with reported experiences; and identified facilitators and potential solutions concerning these types of harassment. The survey received 824 responses, or 7.85%.

"In 2018, AADR introduced a Professional Conduct at Meetings Policy delineating unacceptable behaviors, including intimidating or harassing speech and actions," said Timothy Wright, AADR President. "Results of this survey form a baseline for us to monitor our events to ensure that future AADR meetings are respectful, supportive, welcoming and safe environments for all."

Quantitative data was collected across 8 types of perceived harassment. Qualitative data analysis was conducted on open-ended responses to questions.

Results

- The [quantitative analysis](#) revealed that the majority of the 824 respondents did not report perceived experiences with harassment of any type (79%).
- Women, AADR and Canadian Association of Dental Research (CADR) members, and frequent attendees were most likely to report instances of perceived harassment.
- Harassment of a nonsexual nature (i.e., put-downs/condescension) was most commonly reported (14.7%), while

harassment of a sexual nature was less frequent (0.9% to 7.9% depending on type of harassment).

- The qualitative analysis of the 229 respondents who provided input on open-ended questions revealed perceived facilitators of unwelcome behaviors as well as proposed solutions.
- Reports of sexual harassment at a scientific workplace, graduate program, or other career-related venue did not appear to be more frequent than perceived experiences of any type of harassment at an AADR meeting (22.4% vs. 20.9%) but may be more common in terms of harassment types of a more sexual nature.

Conclusion

The landmark National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine 2018 report on "Sexual harassment of women: Climate, culture, and consequences in academic sciences, and medicine" clearly articulated the problem of sexual harassment in the biomedical sciences and specifically highlighted the role of professional organizations in addressing sexual harassment. AADR conducted this survey with researchers from Boston University to assess the climate at our own meetings and address any shortcomings. While the majority of survey respondents had no personal experience with harassment at AADR meetings, the fact that 1 in 5 did is cause for concern and warrants steps for improvement. Therefore, AADR will continue promoting the AADR's Professional Conduct at Meetings Policy and continue involvement in the Societies Consortium on Sexual Harassment in STEMM in order to offer a collegial, safe and welcoming environment for all.

"The survey's findings underscore the importance of the AADR's efforts in addressing the issue of sexual harassment," said Boston University Assistant Professor Brenda Heaton, lead author of

the survey report.

More information: B. Heaton et al, Survey of Dental Researchers' Perceptions of Sexual Harassment at AADR Conferences: 2015 to 2018, *Journal of Dental Research* (2020). [DOI: 10.1177/0022034520908504](https://doi.org/10.1177/0022034520908504)

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