

Survey finds bullying and harassment systemic in astronomy and geophysics

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Results from a new survey of astronomers and geophysicists show that these sciences have a systemic bullying problem; one that is disproportionately worse for women and those from minority groups. In a survey carried out by the Royal Astronomical Society (RAS) last year of over 650 people in the field, 44% of respondents had suffered bullying and harassment in the workplace within the preceding 12 months. Aine O'Brien, RAS Diversity Officer, will present the key results in a talk at the virtual National Astronomy Meeting on Thursday 22 July.

Key initial findings show:

- Disabled, and Black and minority ethnic astronomers and geophysicists are 40% more likely to be bullied than their non-disabled and white colleagues respectively.
- Women and non-binary people in the field are 50% more likely than men to be bullied and harassed.
- 50% of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer astronomers and geophysicists were bullied in the last 12 months, and 12% of

bisexual astronomers reported being bullied at least once a week.

The RAS Committee on Diversity in Astronomy and Geophysics commissioned the survey, and O'Brien and Dr. Sheila Kanani, the Royal Astronomical Society Education, Outreach and Diversity Officer, carried out the survey for the Society and analyzed its findings.

O'Brien said, "This is the first time data like these have been collected in our field. It's bleak, sadly somewhat unsurprising, but is unequivocal evidence to show we need to improve the workplace culture in academia. We have a well-reported [diversity](#) problem in STEM and this does nothing to help. Women and minorities are feeling pushed out."

Professor Emma Bunce, RAS President, said, "The results from the survey are very concerning indeed, and we must act to change this unacceptable situation. The RAS is doing important work to uncover these facts, and we are committed to working alongside the community to urgently improve the environment in astronomy and geophysics."

Dr. Natasha Stephen, Chair of the RAS Committee for Diversity in Astronomy & Geophysics (CDAG), said, "Our RAS community is increasingly diverse, yet far from equitable. This survey highlights the disparity in lived experience across our global community, and paints a worrying picture of the way in which those from marginalized communities are often treated. We acknowledge that these largely intersectional issues cannot be solved overnight, but CDAG will work with RAS fellows and the wider field to understand and tackle these systemic problems."

The data were collected as part of a wider survey covering experiences of suffering and witnessing bullying and harassment, as well as workplace

culture, in [astronomy](#) and geophysics. The full survey results will be published by the RAS later this summer.

Provided by Royal Astronomical Society

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