



Workplace Bullying in U.S. Higher Education: Results from a Statewide Survey

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine prevalence, characteristics and sociodemographic correlates of workplace bullying among tenure-track faculty at U.S. Higher Education Institutions. A sample of 930 faculty from 20 campuses in California completed an online survey that included the Negative Acts Questionnaire – revised. Findings indicated a high prevalence of self-labeled workplace bullying (43.6% now and then/rarely, and 8.4% daily/weekly). Bullying behaviors that ostracized and excluded the target were the most commonly reported types of abusive conduct. Work sabotage, high workloads, and spreading gossip were also reported at high rates. Female professors, people who were between the ages of 50-69, Native American/Other race/ethnicity, and those who were full professors with tenure had the highest prevalence rates. Being a target of workplace bullying tended to be a long-standing experience (44.4% had been experiencing the abuse for six or more years) and 49.7% of targets were bothered 'a great deal' by the bullying. Most respondents (82.8%) indicated that the Covid-19 shutdowns had no effect or decreased the bullying and 69.0% were not sure whether their campus had an anti-bullying policy. Implications for updated workplace policies that incorporate current research on abusive conduct are discussed, as well as the need for improvements in organizational cultures and leadership practices.

Keywords: workplace bullying; higher education; ostracism; organizational culture; harassment

INTRODUCTION

Workplace bullying involves a person becoming the target of abusive behaviors from one or more people in their work environment. These behaviors become abusive when they cause harm to the target, when there is a real or perceived power imbalance between the target and

perpetrator(s), and when the behaviors persist or escalate over time (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2018). Research on workplace bullying has identified U.S. higher education institutions (HEIs) as settings that are particularly susceptible to workplace abusive conduct (Keashly & Neuman, 2018). Organizational risk factors such as role conflict, high workloads, frequent administrative changes, competition for tasks, and low levels of mutual support are all common in HEIs (Björklund et al., 2021; Keashly & Neuman, 2018, Twale, 2018). Studies of U.S. HEIs place the prevalence rate of being a target of workplace bullying among faculty to be between 32-64% (Dellifraigne et al., 2014; Freedman & Vreven, 2016; Hollis, 2015; Keashly & Neuman, 2008; Mourssi-Alfash, 2014), which is higher than the overall average of 19% for employed adults (Workplace Bullying Institute, 2021).

Being a target of workplace bullying can lead to numerous physical and mental health problems, including post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, depression, burnout, suicidal ideation, and chronic health problems (Boudrias et al., 2021; Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012). Negative work-related outcomes are also common, including an increased risk of quitting or intending to quit; a lack of engagement in work; an increased number of sick days; long-term absenteeism; and early retirement (McTernan et al., 2013). There is evidence suggesting that faculty well-being at U.S. HEIs is of concern. A recent national survey of U.S. HEI chief academic officers indicated that 60% felt faculty at their institutions were resigning at somewhat higher rates; 74% reported that their institutions had not taken concrete steps to address faculty burnout; and 62% said that their institution had no formal plan to address the mental health needs of employees (Jaschik & Lederman, 2022).

This study presents findings from a survey of tenure track faculty (N = 930) in the largest public 4-year university system in the U.S. Information on workplace bullying prevalence, characteristics of the abuse, and sociodemographic differences in prevalence are reported. In addition, the influence of Covid-19 shutdowns and the presence of an anti-bullying policy on campus are explored. Results from this study contribute to the growing body of knowledge documenting the extent of workplace bullying problems in higher education settings in the U.S. and the need for universities and colleges to address this problem.

DEFINITIONS OF WORKPLACE BULLYING

Terms used to describe workplace bullying have varied throughout the concept's history and have included labels such as harassment (Brodsky, 1976); abusive supervision (Tepper, 2000); emotional abuse (Keashly, 1997); destructive leadership (Krasikova et al., 2013); incivility (Twale & DeLuca, 2008) and hostile work environment (Yamada, 2000). Mobbing is also included in discussions of workplace bullying and involves several perpetrators targeting an individual, usually due to unresolved conflicts and misperceptions that the mistreatment is justified (Duffy & Sperry, 2012; Leymann, 1990). 'Vicarious bullying' is also used to describe abusive acts carried out by others at the request of the primary perpetrator (Hollis, 2017a). In addition, witnesses to workplace bullying are also negatively affected by the abuse and some research focuses on the role of bystanders in the phenomenon (Ng et al., 2022).

The Bergen Bullying Research Group (BBRG) further clarifies the concept by defining workplace bullying as recurring mistreatment of an employee by a coworker or supervisor who may act deliberately or unconsciously and has actual or perceived power over the target (Einarsen et al., 2011). The BBRG created the Negative Acts Questionnaire – Revised (NAQ-R),

a 22-item survey that is widely used in workplace bullying research and measures abusive conduct within three categories: person-related, work-related, and physical intimidation (Einarsen et al., 2009). Person-related abuse includes personal mistreatment that is not directly related to work tasks, such as name-calling, being ignored or excluded, or spreading gossip; organization-related (or work-related) bullying is abuse that includes some aspect of work, including being exposed to an unmanageable workload; excessive monitoring of one's work; or someone withholding information that affects your work. Last are physically intimidating behaviors, such as threats of violence or actual violence; or behaviors such as finger-pointing, invasion of personal space, shoving, or blocking (Einarsen et al., 2009).

The Context of Workplace Bullying in Higher Education Institutions

Some contextual factors that are specific to HEIs may contribute to workplace bullying in these settings (Taylor, 2013; Twale, 2018). For example, untenured professors (or those not yet at the rank of full professor) progress through a retention, tenure and promotion process in which they must rely on positive performance evaluations from their tenured colleagues, their Chair, Dean, Provost and others throughout the university. Pressures to maintain the approval of these key gatekeepers can promote exploitation of junior faculty, as well as a reluctance on the part of untenured professors and those at lower ranks to protest unfair actions (DelliFraine et al., 2014; Hollis, 2017b). Having tenure may also protect those who commit abuse in the workplace due to the difficulties in terminating tenured professors who commit misconduct (Taylor, 2013). Alternatively, in some situations professors with tenure may be more likely to become targets of workplace bullying because abusive conduct toward them could be used as a mechanism to pressure them to resign (Westheus, 1998). Moreover, the life-long job security of tenure means that the same individuals may be interacting with one another over long time periods which provides numerous opportunities for work conflicts and power struggles to develop into aggression and abuse (Keashly & Neuman, 2010).

In addition to the tenure process, the shared governance and bureaucratic structures of HEIs in the U.S., can promote problematic organizational cultures, which are common antecedents of workplace bullying (Pheko et al., 2017). Academic departments do not operate with traditional hierarchies seen in other types of businesses. Instead, a shared governance structure with discussion and voting are the primary decision-taking methods. Although intended to promote collaboration, this institutional structure can create isolated units that operate with little accountability or oversight (Twale, 2018). Pressures to conform in order to stay in the favor of key colleagues, as well as the ostracism of those who express dissenting views can be characteristic of HEIs (Pelletier et al., 2019; Sherratt, 2021). These organizational cultures can create unresolved conflict, groupthink, role confusion, competition, and isolated decision-making (Keashly & Neuman, 2018; Pelletier et al., 2019; Persky, 2018).

CHARACTERISTICS OF WORKPLACE BULLYING IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

Research suggests three common types of bullying among faculty in HEIs: 1) ostracism, discrimination and exclusion, 2) work-related abuse that negatively affects productivity/success and 3) humiliation, ridicule, and intimidation. First, having one's opinions, views or contributions ignored by others is one of the most endorsed bullying behaviors among HEI respondents (Ahmad et al., 2016; Freedman & Vreven 2016; McKay et al., 2008; Meriläinen et al., 2016; Zabrodska & Krevton, 2013). A similar, but distinct behavior, 'being excluded or ignored,' is a person-related bullying behavior that is also frequently

reported (Freedman & Vreven 2016; Meriläinen et al., 2016; Meriläinen, Käyhkö, et al., 2019) and which represents social exclusion from the work group. These covert acts are ones of omission that are inherently ambiguous and can cause confusion and uncertainty (O'Reilly et al., 2015). When an overt act of bullying occurs, the target understands that an act of aggression has been committed against them, but ignoring someone when they speak, or not including someone in a work event can be interpreted in various ways. Seeking resolution to the problem is also not a straightforward option because the absence of an action is difficult to address and easy to deny (Robinson et al., 2013).

Second, research on workplace bullying in HEIs suggests that abusive conduct related to work productivity and career success are also relatively common. The abusive act of having someone withhold needed information that affects work performance is frequently endorsed within numerous studies (Ahmad et al., 2016; Freedman & Vreven, 2016; Meriläinen et al., 2016; Zabrodska & Krevton, 2013). Bullying that undermines professional development and increases burnout is also common, including: being exposed to an unmanageable workload (Ahmad et al., 2016; Freedman & Vreven 2016; Meriläinen, Käyhkö, et al., 2019); being asked to do work below one's competence level (Zabrodska & Krevton, 2013); having key areas of responsibility removed and replaced with more unpleasant tasks (Meriläinen et al., 2016); and excessive monitoring of one's work (Ahmad et al., 2016). Other abusive acts focused on career sabotage that have been found among faculty in HEIs include: having others take credit for the target's work, not being compensated for extra work; having a supervisor or colleague demand to add their names to publications and being denied promotion, tenure, sabbatical and other critical resources such as research funds, or needed teaching schedules (Bokek-Cohen et al., 2022).

The third type of commonly reported workplace bullying in academia is humiliation, ridicule and intimidation, which is commonly reported as belittling, sarcastic or degrading remarks (Bokek-Cohen et al., 2022; McKay et al., 2008; Meriläinen et al., 2016; Meriläinen, Käyhkö, et al., 2019; Yildirim et al., 2017). In addition to humiliating comments that are made directly to the target, spreading gossip or rumors about someone is also a form of workplace abuse that is reported within HEIs (McKay et al., 2008; Pheko, 2018; Zabrodska & Krevton, 2013;). These person-related abusive acts are often overtly aggressive and dehumanizing. Research on the concepts of harassment and mobbing often describe similar types of emotional and verbal abuse as characteristic of these experiences (Duffy & Sperry, 2012; Leymann, 1990).

SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC CORRELATES OF WORKPLACE BULLYING IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

Some studies examining correlates of workplace bullying in HEIs have found gender, race/ethnicity, age, and tenure status to be linked to differential prevalence rates. Specifically, a variety of abusive workplace behaviors have been found to be more prevalent among women (Mourssi-Alfash, 2014, Zimmerman et al., 2016). Female faculty have been found to have an increased likelihood of reporting 'humiliation' and 'promotion obstruction,' (Bokek-Cohen et al., 2022), ostracism (Zimmerman et al., 2016), cyberbullying (Cassidy et al., 2014) harassment (Bjorkqvist et al., 1994) and vicarious bullying (Hollis 2019a).

Studies reporting comparisons between White faculty and those of other races/ethnicities have also found higher prevalence rates for non-White groups. Freedman and Vreven (2016)

conducted regression analyses predicting person-related, work-related, and physically-intimidating negative acts and found Asian American/Pacific Islander respondents (compared to White) to be more likely to experience all three types of workplace abuse; and Black respondents (compared to White) were more likely to experience work-related abuse. Hollis (2017a) found people of color overall to experience more vicarious bullying than Caucasian respondents, and in gender-specific analyses, both Black men and Black women were more likely to experience bullying than their White counterparts (Hollis, 2018; 2019b). In addition, Mourssi-Alfash (2014) found Native American respondents to be more likely than any other racial/ethnic group to experience bullying. And Zimmerman et al. (2016) found faculty of color were more likely than White faculty to experience workplace ostracism.

Some research has found older age to be a significant risk factor for workplace bullying in HEIs. Keashly and Neuman (2008) found that 74% of identified targets were ages 40 years or older and DelliFraine et al. (2014) found faculty in the age range of 46-64 had more bullying experiences than younger faculty. Older faculty are more likely than younger faculty to have tenure and be employed at the organization for lengthier periods of time, and as a result, the connected concepts of tenure and length of time at the HEI may also increase risk of bullying. Bokek-Cohen et al. (2022) found tenured faculty to be more likely than untenured faculty to experience promotion obstruction. Similarly, Taylor (2012) found tenured faculty to be more likely to be bullied than untenured faculty. And Giorgi (2012) found that people working seven or more years in their university position were bullied at a higher rate than those with less work experience.

Current study

The goal of the current study was to describe workplace bullying among tenure-track faculty in multiple 4-year universities in the U.S. This study addresses the following research questions: 1) What is the prevalence of workplace bullying?, 2) What are the characteristics of workplace bullying? and 3) Are there group differences in prevalence rates by sociodemographic variables?

METHODS

Research Design and Study Setting

This study used a cross-sectional design with an online survey. This study took place within the California State University system, a multi-campus 4-year public university.

Sample

A convenience sampling procedure was employed. The sample parameters included: all professors in the California State University system (20 campuses were included), with a rank listed as Assistant Professor, Associate Professor and Professor. The email addresses of tenured/tenure-track professors (determined from their rank) at each campus were compiled from publicly available information on campus websites. These email addresses (N = 7,987) were uploaded to Qualtrics survey software for data collection. A total of 1,059 people responded to the survey, and complete data was available for 930 of these respondents for a response rate of 11.6%.

Data Collection

The survey was sent via email from the lead author to each potential participant in the Spring of 2021. A reminder was sent to non-respondents approximately two weeks after the initial invitation to participate, and a final reminder was sent to non-respondents two weeks after the first reminder. The data were then downloaded to the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for analysis.

Measurement

The survey included a total of 39 questions. The Negative Acts Questionnaire—Revised (NAQ-R) was used to measure workplace bullying experiences. The NAQ-R includes 22 specific behaviors and asks respondents to indicate the frequency with which they have experienced the behavior within the previous 6 months (Einarsen et al., 2009). Response choices include 'Never,' 'Occasionally,' 'Monthly,' 'Weekly,' or 'Daily' The NAQ-R is a well-validated measurement tool (Einarsen et al., 2009). The Cronbach's alpha for the NAQ-R was .93 in this study. In addition to these items, respondents were asked a self-label workplace bullying question that provided a definition of workplace bullying ("Bullying takes place when one or more persons systematically and over time feel that they have been subjected to negative treatment on the part of one or more persons, in a situation in which the person(s) exposed to the treatment have difficulty in defending themselves against them. According to this definition of bullying, have you been subjected to it at the organization during the last 6 months") and then asked the respondent to indicate how often they experienced these conditions in the previous 6 months with 5 response categories: 'Never,' 'Yes, rarely,' 'Yes, now and then,' 'Yes, several times a week,' and 'Yes, daily.' Demographic questions, as well as questions about the influence of Covid-19 and the presence of anti-bullying policies were also included.

Human Subjects

This study was approved by the lead author's Institutional Review Board. All participants received an informed consent and provided their consent for participation prior to beginning the survey.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were generated for all study variables and bivariate statistics, including chi-square, independent samples t test, and ANOVA were used to identify group differences. Post-hoc tests including examination of standardized residuals for the chi-square tests, and Bonferroni tests for the ANOVAs were used to discern specific group differences.

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics on the study sample are provided in Table 1. A majority of the respondents were women (n = 484, 52.0%). Most of the respondents were in the age group of 50-59 (n = 291, 31.3%), followed by ages 40-49 (n = 218, 23.4%). Regarding race/ethnicity, the sample was highly skewed as 64.8% (n = 603) of the respondents were Caucasian/White, followed by Latino/Hispanic (n = 99, 10.7%), and Asian/Pacific Islander (n = 78, 8.4%). Among the 930 respondents 51.4% (n = 478) were full professors with tenure.

Prevalence and Characteristic of Workplace Bullying

Table 2 provides descriptive statistics for the NAQ-R items. Workplace bullying behaviors that occur on at least an occasional basis include: having your opinions ignored (n = 692, 74.4%);

being exposed to an unmanageable workload ($n = 644$, 69.2%); being ignored or excluded ($n = 626$, 67.3%) someone withholding information that affects your performance ($n = 609$, 65.5%); spreading of gossip or rumors about you ($n = 528$, 56.8%); and being given tasks with unreasonable deadlines ($n = 512$, 55.1%).

Table 3 provides results from the self-label workplace bullying question in which the respondents were presented with a short definition of bullying and asked if they had experienced such behavior in the last six months on a scale from 1 (never) to 5 (daily). Results indicate that 8.4% ($n = 78$) of the respondents have been bullied on a weekly or daily basis. Only 48% ($n = 464$) of the respondents reported that they have never experienced bullying.

Among respondents who answered any of the 'yes' categories for the self-label workplace bullying question, three additional questions were asked to better understand the characteristics and the consequences of the abuse. With respect to the duration of the bullying, 44.4% ($n = 209$) indicated that the bullying had been going on for 6 or more years. Between 3 and 4 years was the second most-endorsed time-frame ($n = 87$, 18.5%). When asked to what extent the bullying bothered the participant, 49.7% ($n = 238$) reported they were bothered 'a great deal.' The study was conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic, and considering the ensuing work-from-home context, respondents were also asked about the influence of Covid-19 on workplace bullying. A major decrease in workplace bullying was noted by 28.5% ($n = 136$) of respondents and no influence was reported by 36.5% ($n = 174$) of respondents. Table 3 also provides information on the respondents' awareness of anti-bullying policies on their campuses. Most respondents ($n = 642$, 69.0%) did not know whether or not their campus had an anti-bullying policy, and 20.4% ($n = 190$) do have a campus anti-bullying policy.

WORKPLACE BULLYING AND SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

Table 4 provides results on the prevalence of workplace bullying by sociodemographic characteristics. Bivariate statistics were used to identify socio-demographic differences in the prevalence of workplace bullying. The self-label workplace bullying question was re-coded as a dichotomous variable ('Never', and all 'Yes' categories combined) and Chi-square tests were used with this categorical dependent variable to determine group differences. In addition, the NAQ-R scale was summed into a continuous score and ANOVA and independent samples t tests were used to examine group differences with this continuous dependent variable.

Gender was statistically significant with both the categorical and continuous measures of workplace bullying ($X^2 = (1, N = 888) = 32.3, p < .001$). Among women, the prevalence rate with the self-label measure was 61.0% ($n = 295$), compared to men's rate of 41.8% ($n = 169$). Women's NAQ-R average score was 37.7 ($SD = 13.4$) and men's average score was 34.7 ($SD = 13.5$) ($t(886) = 3.3, p < .001$). Race/ethnicity was statistically significant with the categorical self-label measure ($X^2 = (4, N = 862) = 13.6, p = .009$), but not the continuous measure. An examination of the standardized residuals indicated that Native American/Other respondents had the highest self-label prevalence: 74.6% ($n = 44$).

Age was statistically significant with both measures. First, using the self-label measure, faculty in the age range of 60 to 69 ($n = 107$, 62.9%) had the highest prevalence rates and those in the age range of 30-39 had the lowest prevalence rate ($n = 74$, 42.8%; $X^2 = (4, N = 889) = 15.7, p = .003$). Faculty ages 50-59 also had the highest NAQ-R average scores ($M = 38.1, SD = 13.5; F(4,$

888) = 5.0, $p < .001$). Bonferroni post-hoc tests indicated that faculty ages 50-59 had significantly higher scores than faculty in the age range of 30-39 ($p = .006$), as well as higher scores than those ages 70 or older ($p = .018$). Similarly, faculty ages 60 to 69 had had significantly higher NAQ-R scores than those in the 30-39 age range ($p = .047$), and they had higher scores than those in the 70 or older age range ($p = .040$).

Tenure and rank were also statistically significant with both measures. Full professors with tenure had significantly higher self-labeled prevalence rates ($n = 280$, 58.6%) than assistant professors without tenure ($n = 103$, 41.0%) and full professors with tenure had higher NAQ-R scores ($M = 37.7$ $SD = 13.5$) than assistant professors without tenure ($M = 33.8$, $SD = 13.1$; $F(2, 929) = 7.1$, $p < .001$).

DISCUSSION

This study examined the prevalence, characteristics, and sociodemographic correlates of workplace bullying among tenure-track professors at numerous 4-year universities in the U.S. The prevalence rates found in this study (43.6% now and then/rarely, and 8.4% daily/weekly) are similar or somewhat higher than previous research within U.S. universities (Dellifraire et al. 2014; Freedman & Vreven, 2016; Mourssi-Alfash, 2014; Tran, 2019), and much higher than the average rate of 19% that is found in the general population of employees (Workplace Bullying Institute, 2021). An examination of the most commonly occurring types of workplace abusive acts suggest that ostracism and exclusion are widespread. When examining total experiences from 'occasionally' to 'daily', 74.4% of participants reported "having your opinions ignored," and 67.3% reported "being ignored or excluded." This ostracism is what Robinson et al. (2013) define as "the omission of positive attention, rather than the commission of negative attention" (pg. 208). Neglecting to engage in social interactions that are considered to be appropriate has an especially negative impact on a person's innate need to belong to their social group and can cause intense emotional distress (Robinson et al., 2013). There is evidence indicating that in many situations, when compared to harassment, ostracism is associated with greater mental health and physical health problems, less job satisfaction, and a greater intention to quit (O'Reilly et al., 2015; O'Reilly & Robinson, 2009).

Abusive acts that were related to work outcome and performance were also reported at relatively high rates. Experiences occurring from an 'occasional' to 'daily' frequency included 69.2% of respondents being 'exposed to an unmanageable workload,' 65.5% had 'someone withhold information that affects performance,' 55.1% were 'given tasks with unreasonable deadlines,' and 49.0% were 'ordered to do work below one's level of competence.' Previous research confirms these work-related abusive acts are often common types of workplace bullying in HEIs (Ahmad et al., 2016; Freedman & Vreven 2016; Meriläinen et al., 2016; Zabrodska & Krevton, 2013). Work sabotage, career obstruction, and a lack of support or mentorship are harmful to employees of all industries, however in academia such abusive acts may confer a greater level of distress on the targeted individual (Keashly & Neuman, 2018). Tenure-track faculty enter their positions only after a lengthy educational process and then once hired must then complete another lengthy tenure process (six years for this sample). Achieving needed publications, scholarly outputs, acceptable student teaching evaluations and completing service obligations depends not only on the skill of the professor, but also on the support and guidance of those gatekeepers who can either facilitate or obstruct the process

(Twale, 2018). Findings from this study suggest that these more covert acts of work sabotage may be a relatively common type of workplace bullying among tenure track faculty.

Person-related abuse that involves personal attacks on one's identity were generally reported at lower rates than the above mentioned bullying acts, however were still endorsed by a sizable number of faculty. Again when using an 'occasional' to 'daily' scale, the following rates of abusive acts were reported: spreading gossip or rumors (56.8%), being humiliated or ridiculed in connection to your work (47.9%), having allegations made against you (43.2%) and being ignored or facing a hostile reaction when you approach (43.0%). Degrading comments, malicious rumors and actions intended to humiliate have also been reported in previous research with faculty in HEIs (Bokek-Cohen et al., 2022; McKay et al., 2008; Yildirim et al., 2007). Research on the characteristics of 'spreading rumors and gossip' in the context of HEI workplaces suggests that these experiences are often intensely hostile and malicious (Pheko, 2018). Rumors and gossip have been more accurately described as false accusations, lies, fabrications, manipulations, deceptions and ridicule that are extremely damaging forms of emotional and verbal abuse (Pheko, 2018). This study suggests that a sizable proportion of faculty experience this type of malicious abuse in the workplace.

The prevalence of workplace bullying differed by gender, race/ethnicity, age, tenure and rank. Specifically, women were more likely to self-label as a target of workplace bullying and their overall average NAQ-R scores were significantly higher than men. Other studies have also found female faculty to experience workplace bullying at a higher rate than men (Bokek-Cohen et al., Hollis, 2019a; Mourssi-Alfash, 2014; Taylor, 2012). Reasons for these gender differences may be complex. For example, women may be bullied at higher rates than men due to the added abuse category of sexual harassment, which may not affect men to the same degree (Sallee & Diaz, 2013). Men tend to be bullied by people higher than themselves in the hierarchical structure, whereas women experience abusive conduct from superiors, as well as coworkers and subordinates. And women tend to be bullied by other women more than men are bullied by women (Sallee & Diaz, 2013). As a result, the pool of potential perpetrators is bigger for women targets, and they are at risk for a greater number of abusive acts than are men. There is evidence suggesting that female faculty who are bullied in the workplace are more likely to quit or intend to quit than their male counterparts (Hollis, 2017c; Meriläinen, Nissinen et al., 2019), suggesting that these differences in prevalence are important when considering outcomes of the abuse.

Using the self-label measure (but not the continuous measure), this study found Native American/Other (74.6%) respondents to have the highest prevalence rate among racial/ethnic groups. Some previous studies have noted racial/ethnic differences in prevalence with people of color having higher prevalence rates than Whites (Freedman & Vreven, 2016; Hollis, 2015, 2017c; Mourssi-Alfash, 2014). Johnson-Bailey (2015) suggests that both gender and race differences can affect the bullying phenomenon because identity group differences can obscure traditional rank-based power differences existing in all workplaces. Similar to gender, there may be some situations in which a target's race/ethnicity increases the number of potential perpetrators, as well as the number and variety of abusive acts directed toward the target (Sallee & Diaz, 2013).

Age was also statistically significant and faculty in the age ranges of 50-59 and 60-69 had higher NAQ scores than faculty between the ages of 30-39 and those ages 70 or older. In addition, this study found full professors with tenure had higher prevalence of workplace bullying than assistant professors without tenure, which is consistent with the older age finding, as those who are at higher ranks are likely to be in the more advanced stages of their career. These findings are similar to other research that has reported older age as a significant variable in workplace bullying experiences in HEIs (Ahmed et al., 2016; DelliFraine et al., 2008; Keashly & Neuman, 2008). Previous research has found tenured faculty to be more likely to be bullied than untenured faculty (Bokek-Cohen et al., 2022; Taylor, 2012). According to Einarsen and Skogstad (1996), risk of bullying increases with age due to difficulty of finding a similar job and lower tolerance for hostile behavior. It is possible that younger employees may consider bullying as a rite of passage and will be more tolerant towards it. Alternatively, untenured faculty may be hesitant to report bullying behaviors due to a fear of retaliation in their own tenure process. Younger faculty may also have a greater ability to resign and find other employment, thereby reducing the number of younger bullied employees (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2013).

This study also found that 44.4% of respondents who self-labeled as a target of workplace bullying had been experiencing the abuse for six or more years and that the abusive conduct caused a great deal of distress to them. Previous research on the consequences of workplace bullying for faculty in HEIs suggest that the experience has far-reaching personal and occupational effects that are often devastating to the target (Bokek-Cohen et al., 2022; DelliFraine et al., 2014; Hollis, 2019c; McKay et al., 2008; Meriläinen et al., 2016; Yildirim et al., 2007). It is also interesting to note that a vast majority of the respondents (69%) did not know whether their campus had anti-bullying policies, while just 20% of the respondents indicated their campus did have an anti-bullying policy. Smith and Coel (2018) found that U.S. HEIs lack clear policies and procedures to manage workplace bullying and there is a need for revised faculty codes of conduct that are not restricted to protected classes.

We also attempted to check the influence of the Covid-19 situation on workplace bullying. Our results indicated that 36.5% of respondents reported that Covid-19 did not have any effect on workplace bullying and more interestingly 28.5% of respondents reported a major decrease in workplace bullying, with just 6.9% of respondents who reported a major increase in bullying. This contradicts the work by Mahmoudi and Keashly (2020) which reported an increase in academic bullying during the Covid-19 situation. Unlike the IT sector, where work from home and virtual teams were already prevalent, for the faculty of HEIs, it was a relatively new experience. In the absence of extensive literature, we could only make assumptions based on the professional experiences of the authors. Workplace bullying is defined as an interpersonal conflict and during the work from home situations, the frequency and duration of direct interpersonal communication are limited and this could have led to a decrease in workplace bullying. Another reason for reduced bullying could be that the faculty were overwhelmed with adjusting to the online mode of teaching and that they were less focused on work conflicts.

This study has a number of limitations that should be noted. First, our sampling procedures are non-random and thus, findings from this study cannot be generalized to the larger population of tenure-line professors. In addition, this study is cross-sectional and thus causal inferences about the relationships between variables cannot be determined by the methods used in this

study. Moreover, although the NAQ-R is a well-validated measurement tool for workplace bullying, it may not capture all of the unique aspects of abusive conduct in the workplace and some scholars have developed measures that are specific to faculty in HEIs (Bokek-Cohen et al., 2022; Meriläinen et al., 2016). Future research should seek to address these limitations through random sampling techniques, longitudinal methods, and measurements that are specific to faculty populations.

Findings from this study have implications for future research and policy. First, the overall high prevalence rate of workplace bullying found in this study, combined with the findings that the abuse tended to be a multi-year experience indicates widespread organizational dysfunction within HEIs. This dysfunction suggests a need for updated workplace policies to address abusive conduct. The United States, unlike Canada, Australia, Japan and many European and Scandinavian countries does not have a national workplace bullying policy that defines abusive conduct in the workplace and creates mechanisms for organizations to be held accountable (Cobb, 2018). Such policies would benefit from research-based definitions of workplace bullying that include both the overt acts of abuse that are in existing U.S. harassment laws, as well as the more covert abusive acts that were more commonly reported in this study. The acts of omission and work sabotage that were frequently found in this study are difficult to prove through existing complaint processes to Human Resources, or a labor union. As a result, these types of workplace bullying may go unreported for long periods of time, or if they are reported, the organization may not have effective mechanisms to intervene to stop the bullying. Updated policies that incorporate current research on workplace abusive conduct are needed to provide guidelines that prevent the misconduct (Smith & Coel, 2018). Among those campuses that do have anti-bullying policies, more research is needed to understand the role of these interventions in the actual incidence of workplace bullying and how these policies are used in the workplace.

In addition to updated policies, there is also a need to improve leadership practices and organizational cultures in academia. Empirical connections between workplace bullying and problematic work cultures are well known (Pheko et al., 2017). As a result, any anti-bullying policies will only be effective to the degree that they integrate organizational changes that improve leadership quality and organizational dynamics (Barratt-Pugh & Krestelica, 2019). Studies on interventions to prevent and intervene in cases of workplace bullying are limited and most research is narrowly focused on individual level interventions that seek to educate employees about workplace bullying (Gillen et al., 2017). Educational interventions to raise awareness about abusive conduct in the workplace are delivered with the assumption that increases in knowledge will lead to positive behavior changes; however there is no evidence that individual-level educational interventions change behaviors in the workplace (Hodgins, 2013; Gillen et al., 2017). Instead, an integrated approach with visible engagement from leaders in the organization has been found to be more effective than individual-only interventions at reducing conflict and improving civility (Hodgins, et al., 2013). Future work in the area of workplace bullying in HEIs would benefit from research on the organizational cultures and leadership practices that reduce and prevent workplace abusive conduct.

This study adds to the growing body of knowledge documenting the widespread problem of abusive conduct among faculty in HEIs. Given the well-known negative consequences of workplace bullying for mental and physical health, results from this study should raise serious

concern among anyone connected to U.S. HEIs. Researchers, policy-makers, educators and advocates from across disciplines and ideologies need to work together to address workplace bullying among faculty. Such collaborative and consistent efforts have the potential to improve working conditions and faculty well-being.

Table 1. Sample Demographics

	n (%)
Gender	
Male	404 (43.5%)
Female	484 (52.0%)
Prefer not to say/non-binary	42 (4.5%)
Age	
30-39	173 (18.6%)
40-49	218 (23.4%)
50-59	291 (31.3%)
60-69	170 (18.3%)
Over 70	37 (4.0%)
Prefer not to say/under 30	41 (4.4%)
Race/ethnicity	
African American/Black	23 (2.5%)
Asian/Pacific Islander	78 (8.4%)
Caucasian/White	603 (64.8%)
Latino/Hispanic	99 (10.7%)
Native American/Other	51 (5.5%)
Prefer not to say	68 (7.3%)
Job designation	
Full professor	478 (51.4%)
Assistant/Associate professor with tenure	201 (21.6%)
Assistant professor without tenure	251(27.0%)

Table 2. Descriptive statistics on NAQ-R items

	Never	Occasionally	Monthly	Weekly	Daily	Total yes categories combined
	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)
Someone withholding information that affects your performance	321 (34.5%)	403 (43.3%)	83 (8.9%)	86 (9.2%)	37 (4.0%)	609 (65.5%)
Being humiliated or ridiculed in connection with your work	491 (52.8%)	293 (31.5%)	83 (8.9%)	53 (5.7%)	10 (1.1%)	439 (47.9%)
Being ordered to do work below your level of competence	474 (51.0%)	272 (29.2%)	67 (7.2%)	68 (7.3%)	49 (5.3%)	454 (49.0%)
Having key areas of responsibility removed or replaced with more trivial or unpleasant tasks	568 (61.1%)	248 (26.7%)	48 (5.2%)	40 (4.3%)	26 (2.8%)	362 (38.9%)
Spreading of gossip or rumors about you	402 (43.2%)	340 (36.6%)	71 (7.6%)	66 (7.1%)	51 (5.5%)	528 (56.8%)
Being ignored or excluded	304 (32.7%)	370 (39.8%)	102 (11.0%)	85 (9.1%)	69 (7.4%)	626 (67.3%)
Having insulting or offensive remarks made about your person, your attitudes, or your private life	509 (54.7%)	275 (29.6%)	72 (7.7%)	47 (5.1%)	27 (2.9%)	421 (45.3%)
Being shouted at or being the target of spontaneous anger	548 (58.9%)	307 (33.0%)	51 (5.5%)	17 (1.8%)	7 (0.8%)	382 (41.1%)
Intimidating behaviors such as finger-pointing, invasion of personal space, shoving, blocking your way	720 (77.4%)	176 (18.9%)	18 (1.9%)	10 (1.1%)	6 (0.6%)	210 (22.6%)
Hints or signals from others that you should quit your job	690 (74.2%)	177 (19.0%)	36 (3.9%)	18 (1.9%)	9 (1.0%)	240 (25.8%)

Repeated reminders of your errors or mistakes	561 (60.3%)	276 (29.7%)	61 (6.6%)	20 (2.2%)	12 (1.3%)	369 (39.7%)
Being ignored or facing a hostile reaction when you approach	530 (57.0%)	255 (27.4%)	76 (8.2%)	41 (4.4%)	28 (3.0%)	400 (43.0%)
Persistent criticism of your errors or mistakes	624 (67.1%)	210 (22.6%)	57 (6.1%)	28 (3.0%)	11 (1.2%)	306 (32.9%)
Having your opinions ignored	238 (25.6%)	397 (42.7%)	137 (14.7%)	93 (10.0%)	65 (7.0%)	692 (74.4%)
Practical jokes carried out by people you don't get along with	847 (91.1%)	70 (7.5%)	6 (0.6%)	4 (0.4%)	3 (0.3%)	83 (8.9%)
Being given tasks with unreasonable deadlines	418 (44.9%)	390 (41.9%)	79 (8.5%)	31 (3.3%)	12 (1.3%)	512 (55.1%)
Having allegations made against you	528 (56.8%)	312 (33.5%)	46 (4.9%)	30 (3.2%)	14 (1.5%)	402 (43.2%)
Excessive monitoring of your work	612 (65.8%)	235 (25.3%)	33 (3.5%)	34 (3.7%)	16 (1.7%)	318 (34.2%)
Pressure not to claim something to which by right you are entitled (e.g. sick leave, holiday)	668 (71.8%)	196 (21.1%)	31 (3.3%)	27 (2.9%)	8 (0.9%)	262 (28.2%)
Being the subject of excessive teasing and sarcasm	732 (78.7%)	152 (16.3%)	26 (2.8%)	15 (1.6%)	5 (0.5%)	198 (21.3%)
Being exposed to an unmanageable workload	286 (30.8%)	330 (35.5%)	99 (10.6%)	93 (10.0%)	122 (13.1%)	644 (69.2%)
Threats of violence or physical abuse or actual abuse	880 (94.6%)	44 (4.7%)	3 (0.3%)	2 (0.2%)	1 (0.1%)	50 (5.4%)

Bullying takes place when one or more persons systematically and over time feel that they have been subjected to negative treatment on the part of one or more persons, in a situation in which the person(s) exposed to the treatment have difficulty in defending themselves against them. According to this definition of bullying, have you been subjected to it at the organization during the last 6 months:

Table 3. Self-label bullying

	n (%)
Responses	
No,	446 (48.0%)
Yes, rarely	179 (19.2%)
Yes, now and then	227 (24.4%)
Yes, several times a week	49 (5.3%)
Yes, daily	29 (3.1%)
How long has the bullying been going on?	
Under 12 months	52 (11.0%)
Between 1 and 2 years	79 (16.8%)
Between 3 and 4 years	87 (18.5%)
Between 5 and 6 years	44 (9.3%)
More than 6 years	209 (44.4%)
To what extent does the bullying bother you?	
A great deal	238 (49.7%)
Moderately	128 (26.7%)
A little bit	103 (21.5%)
Not at all	10 (2.1%)
How have the Covid-19 shutdowns influenced the bullying	
Major decrease	136 (28.5%)
Minor decrease	85 (17.8%)
No influence	174 (36.5%)
Minor increase	49 (10.3%)
Major increase	33 (6.9%)
Does your university have an anti-bullying policy?	
Yes	190 (20.4%)
No	98 (10.5%)
Don't know	642 (69.0%)

Note: sample sizes may vary depending on omitted 'do not apply' or missing responses

Table 4. Prevalence of workplace bullying by demographic characteristics

	Never	Yes (rarely-daily)	Chi-Square Test Statistic and p value	Score NAQ Mean (SD)	P value for t-test or ANOVAs
	n (%)	n (%)			
Gender			$X^2 = (1, N = 888) = 32.3, p < .001$		$t (886) = 3.3, p < .001$
Female	189 (39.0%)	295 (61.0%)		37.7 (13.4)	
Male	235 (58.2%)	169 (41.8%)		34.7 (13.45)	
Race/Ethnicity			$X^2 = (4, N = 862) = 13.6, p = .009$		$F (4, 857) = 1.8, p = .126$
African American/Black	12 (52.2%)	11 (47.8%)		35.6 (10.6)	
Asian/Pacific Islander	34 (43.6%)	44 (56.4%)		36.6 (11.6)	
Caucasian/White	299 (49.6%)	304 (50.4%)		35.9 (13.4)	
Latino/Hispanic	50 (50.5%)	49 (49.5%)		36.1 (12.4)	
Native American/Other	15 (25.4%)	44 (74.6%)*		40.6 (14.0)	
Age			$X^2 = (4, N = 889) = 15.7, p = .003$		$F (4, 888) = 5.0, p < .001$
Ages 30-39	99 (57.2%)	74 (42.8%)*		33.7 (12.3)*	
Ages 40-49	109 (50.0%)	109 (50.0%)		36.5 (14.2)	
Ages 50-59	132 (45.4%)	159 (54.6%)		38.1 (13.5)*	
Ages 60-69	63 (37.1%)	107 (62.9%)*		37.8 (13.8)*	
Ages 70 and over	20 (54.1%)	17 (45.9%)		30.8 (10.5)*	
Rank			$X^2 = (2, N = 930) = 20.6, p < .001$		$F (2, 929) = 7.1, p < .001$
Full professor/tenure	198 (41.4%)	280 (58.6%)*		37.7 (13.5)*	
Assistant/Associate/tenure	100 (49.8%)	101 (50.2%)		36.3 (13.1)	
Assistant/untentured	148 (59.0%)	103 (41.0%)*		33.8 (13.1)*	

***Significant $p < .05$ in post-hoc tests**

Note that sample sizes may differ due to missing responses.

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