

# Bullying and harassment in ophthalmology: a trainee survey

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**B**ullying, harassment and gender-based discrimination within the medical workforce in New Zealand has received significant media and academic attention in recent years. Considering this, we completed a survey in which ophthalmology trainees in New Zealand and Australia responded on bullying, discrimination and sexual harassment experiences. It is important to assess the prevalence and extent of discrimination and sexual harassment, as these experiences can significantly limit job satisfaction and career advancement. We wanted to further our understanding of the prevalence of these experiences within the field of ophthalmology.

A 35-question survey was sent to all Australian and New Zealand ophthalmology trainees registered with RANZCO in May 2017 (n=185, 65 female, 120 male). Four questions explored experiences of discrimination and sexual harassment in the workplace, derived from the RACS survey, created by the Australian Surgical Focus Group.<sup>1</sup> The response rate was 31% overall, with 32 responses from female trainees (49%) and 23 from male trainees (19%).

The majority (56%) of trainees had experienced some form of bullying, discrimination, harassment and/or sexual harassment during training, with no significant difference between male and female trainees (43% vs 66%,  $p>0.05$ ). The rates of discrimination, bullying and sexual harassment (21%, 49% and 9% respectively) were similar to those recently described

in surgical training in Australia and New Zealand (24%, 54% and 12% respectively).<sup>2</sup>

Male ophthalmologists were cited as more frequent sources of these behaviours than female ophthalmologists (35% vs 12%,  $p=0.005$ ). Other reported sources of these behaviours were other medical consultants (26%), hospital administration staff (24%) and nursing staff (24%).

A frequent form of gender-based discrimination reported was receiving less respect based on gender from medical team members (reported by 40% of women vs 0% of men,  $p<0.001$ ). Women also reported experiencing discrimination for making family-centred choices (57% vs 20% for men,  $p>0.05$ ) and reported child-bearing had slowed their career progression (80% vs 30% of men,  $p=0.035$ ). The gender-based discrimination reported in our study could be a barrier to career progression<sup>3</sup> and could have contributed to the perception reported among two-thirds of women that it was more difficult for women to achieve career success in ophthalmology than men. Limitations of this study include potential response bias associated with a self-reported survey and the low response rate.

These data provide a baseline to measure future progress for initiatives commenced by The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Ophthalmologists, including education programmes for trainees and consultants, support services and promoting diversity in college leadership roles.<sup>4</sup>

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**Competing interests:**

Nil.

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