

Harassment in Dutch Academia

**Exploring manifestations,
facilitating factors, effects and
solutions**

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Harassment:

Overarching term for patterns of intense behavior that have the aim and/or the effect of violating a person's dignity and/or that create a hostile working environment, thereby obstructing scholars in their academic work and their career progress.

Research background

- Explorative qualitative research
- Focus on women academics
- 20 interviews / 33 written testimonials
- Research questions:
 - What practices of harassment can be identified?
 - What structural and cultural characteristics and developments in the academic system facilitate harassment?
 - What are the consequences of harassment for individuals, organisations and science in general?

Respondents

Table 1. Respondent's position during participation in this study (n=53).

	n	%
Applying for PhD position	1	2%
PhD student	3	6%
Postdoctoral researcher	4	8%
Assistant professor	14	26%
Associate professor	9	17%
Professor	16	30%
Other	5	9%
Unknown	1	2%

Practices of harassment

- Scientific sabotage
- Sexual harassment
- Physical and verbal threats
- Denigration
- Exclusion
- Problematizing “special needs”

Scientific sabotage

- All behaviours that directly obstruct a person's work as a scientist
 - Making a person's work, ideas and expertise invisible
 - Refusal of promotion, or denial of tasks/ functions needed for promotion
 - Blocking access to spaces, documents, objects or information
 - Labelling of people as incompetent
 - Physical or financial destruction of a person's research project.

Facilitating factors

- **Hierarchies within and outside of academia**
 - *Organisational authority, dependency and fear*
 - *Academic stardom and strategic alliances*
 - *Definition power and the silencing of critical voices*

Definition power and the silencing of critical voices

“A lot of the above [experiences with multiple manifestations of harassment] has happened because I’m very critical: I do not let other people tell me what to do. I speak up if I disagree. I stand out from the crowd, and I’m being cut down for that. Many of the professors I met are extremely authoritarian, and have difficulties dealing with criticism” (V35).

Facilitating factors

- **Hierarchies within and outside of academia**
 - *Organisational authority, dependency and fear*
 - *Academic stardom and strategic alliances*
 - *Definition power and the silencing of critical voices*
- **A competitive and individualistic culture**
- **Inadequate responses to incidents**
- **“Self-silencing” among victims**

Asking for help

Table 6. Outcomes of participants' efforts for getting help (n=35).

	n	%
Received no help	21	60%
Received some support, but no (satisfying) solution	10	29%
Received adequate help	1	3%
Awaiting outcomes	3	9%

Asking for help

“It was made into my individual problem. The Dean said: ‘If you want to change something, you’ll have to talk to him.’ I said that I didn’t dare to do that, because I didn’t feel safe, but the Dean insisted: ‘You’ll have to, if you want to move on.’ So that was where it ended for me. [...] It feels like you have to be raped here before they undertake any action. I feel that what happened to me doesn’t really count” (R1).

“Our Dean is very kind, but I wish he was a bit stricter. Because in my case, he disagrees [with the professor performing the harassment], but [apparently] he still thinks: ‘I want to preserve my relationship with that professor, so that relationship will be my priority’ (R17).

Effects of harassment

- Feeling unwelcome, excluded and unsafe
- Psychological and physical problems
- Negative effects on personal relations
- Productivity, creativity and motivation problems
- Negative effects on organisations and science in general