



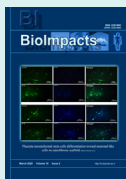
# The absence of legal remedies following academic bullying

Morteza Mahmoudi<sup>1\*</sup>, Sherry Moss<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Radiology and Precision Health Program, Michigan State University, MI, USA

<sup>2</sup>School of Business, Wake Forest University, NC, USA

## Article Info



**Article Type:**  
Editorial

### Article History:

Received: 23 Oct. 2019  
Accepted: 23 Nov. 2019  
ePublished: 30 Mar. 2020

### Keywords:

Academic bullying  
Law  
Harassment

## Summary

Currently, victims of discrimination and sexual harassment have institutional reporting systems and legal remedies which support them in finding justice for these crimes. However, victims of academic bullying, who suffer similar repercussions, have no legal or institutional remedies. Because academic bullying is not a crime, targets often suffer in silence because there is no recourse. It is time for institutions to ask for governmental support to create legislation, similar to that for sexual harassment and discrimination, which will bring justice to academic bullies and relief to their victims. In the absence of legislation, institutions should create reporting procedures and educational programs which mirror those they have in place for sexual harassment and discrimination.

### Authors' Biosketch

**Dr. Morteza Mahmoudi** is an Assistant Professor of Radiology and Precision Health Program at Michigan State University (MSU). Prior coming to MSU, he was an Assistant Professor of Anesthesiology at Brigham and Women's Hospital, Harvard Medical School. His specific research interest is in nanomedicine and regenerative medicine for the development of new nano-based platforms for prevention/treatment of life-threatening conditions. Aside from nanomedicine and regenerative medicine, Dr. Mahmoudi is also very active in social sciences and specifically in drawing the attention of the scientific community in the rising issue of academic bullying.



**Dr. Sherry Moss** is the Benson Pruitt Professor in Business and Professor of Organizational Studies in the School of Business at Wake Forest University. Sherry Moss received her Ph.D. in 1991 from Florida State University. She has served as the Director of the Full Time MBA Program at Wake Forest and as the Area Chair for the Management Faculty. Before coming to Wake Forest in 2005, she was an Associate Professor and Director of the Executive MBA Program at Florida International University in Miami, Florida. Her research interests include leadership, feedback, abusive supervision, multiple jobholding, authenticity and meaningful work. Her research has been published in prestigious academic journals such as *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, *Academy of Management Journal*, *Journal of Management*, *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, *Academy of Management Executive*, *Journal of Business Ethics* and *Nature*. Her research on abusive supervision has also been featured in several outlets including Harvard Business Review, the BBC, radio shows and podcasts.



Targets of sexual harassment/violence and academic bullying suffer from similar long-term serious emotional, mental, organizational and physical side effects. Although the targets of sexual harassment have a well-defined path toward speaking up and getting support in many ways,<sup>1-4</sup> the targets of academic bullying have no legal recourse.<sup>5</sup>

One of the main problems is the absence of laws and organizational guidelines on academic bullying. While institutions and funding agencies have strict and well-defined legal policies for dealing with sexual harassment, they are ill-equipped to deal with academic bullying.<sup>6</sup> Fear of legal consequences has forced institutions and funding agencies to invest in educational programs and easy-to-access, reliable reporting systems for sexual harassment

with minimum risk of retaliation. In contrast, although academic bullying results in similar side effects on targets, it is not illegal unless it is concomitant with sexual violence or discrimination based on sex, race, and so forth.

We strongly believe that the scientific community desperately needs the help of government to consider all aspects of academic bullying and propose appropriate legislation to support, and find justice for the targets. In the presence of legal actions, all stakeholders will treat academic bullying incidences similar to sexual harassment or discrimination and therefore create suitable educational and reporting systems that can substantially minimize the bullying problem in science. In the absence of strong legislation, institutions should create reporting and accountability systems which mirror those in place



\*Corresponding author: Morteza Mahmoudi, Email: [mahmou22@msu.edu](mailto:mahmou22@msu.edu)



© 2020 The Author(s). This work is published by BioImpacts as an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>). Non-commercial uses of the work are permitted, provided the original work is properly cited.

for sexual harassment, pairing these with educational programs aimed at reducing the occurrence of bullying in academic science.

We are currently conducting a survey on academic bullying and would like your participation. Whether or not you've been a witness to or target, we would appreciate you completing our survey: [https://wakeforest.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_0uZSsSRmzJDVnb7](https://wakeforest.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_0uZSsSRmzJDVnb7).

#### **Funding sources**

None to be declared.

#### **Ethical statement**

There is none to be declared.

#### **Competing interests**

The authors are directors of the Academic Parity Movement, a non-profit organization to address academic bullying issues.

#### **Authors' contribution**

Both authors contributed equally in this work.

#### **References**

1. McCall B. Taking the battle against sexual harassment in global academia online. *Lancet* **2019**; 393: 512-4. doi: 10.1016/S0140-6736(19)30314-9
2. The Lancet. Time's up for sexual harassment in medicine. *Lancet* **2018**; 391: 2576. doi: 10.1016/S0140-6736(18)31428-4
3. Viglianti EM, Oliverio AL, Meeks LM. Sexual harassment and abuse: when the patient is the perpetrator. *Lancet* **2018**; 392: 368-70. doi: 10.1016/S0140-6736(18)31502-2
4. Minkina N. Can #MeToo abolish sexual harassment and discrimination in medicine? *Lancet* **2019**; 394: 383-4. doi: 10.1016/S0140-6736(19)31731-3
5. Mahmoudi M. Improve reporting systems for academic bullying. *Nature* **2018**; 562: 494. doi: 10.1038/d41586-018-07154-x.
6. Mahmoudi M, Moss S. Tie institutions' reputations to their anti-bullying record. *Nature* **2019**; 572: 439. doi: 10.1038/d41586-019-02493-9.