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How to combat workplace bullying in academia: insights from previous initiatives and ideas to move forward

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Workplace aggression, including workplace bullying and mobbing, can have tremendous impacts on both the professional and the personal well-being of the target. The experience is an immense source of distress and can lead to physical health issues such as high blood pressure and increased risk for strokes, and to mental health issues, such as anxiety, depression and suicidal tendencies. The negative effects of workplace aggression go beyond those on the target. For instance potential bystanders and the overall work performance of teams and collaborations may suffer, leading to failed projects, loss of research funding and prematurely terminated careers. The latter also adds to the continued loss of a diverse workforce in the Geosciences, since historically marginalised groups are more affected by workplace discrimination than the current majority of geoscientists in senior positions. Creating healthy and safe working environments should therefore be the top priority of academic institutions, and thus also the Geosciences community.

To raise awareness and provide clarity around some terminology and dynamics, we previously shared the blog post "*Mind your Head - An introduction to workplace bullying in academia*" (1). It includes references to other resources, such as a 10-step practical guideline (2) which scientists can follow to counteract the detrimental effects of abusive academic work environments. The blog post also served as a stimulus for "Great Debate 5" (GDB5) during vEGU21, which allowed early career scientists in the Geosciences to engage in a discussion on "*Bullying in Academia - towards creating healthy and safe working environments*" (3). During GDB5, 86% of the participants confirmed to have witnessed a bullying or harassment situation at work and ~65% of the session attendees estimated that the academic community is unaware of or uninformed about bullying and harassment. GDB5 participants stated that, amongst others, they a) would like to learn how to become better allies/bystanders, b) would like

to know what to do as an ally/bystander, c) want to find systematic and structural solutions on an institutional level for safe working environments, d) would like to learn how to deal with bullying and harassment on a personal level and e) would like to create more awareness about bullying and harassment. The Great Debate helped people to feel supported and trusted, become aware of the problems at an institutional level, and to connect and talk about appropriate and not-appropriate behaviour.

Following the GDB5, we created a list of bottom up, lateral and top down actions to foster safe and healthy work environments within the Geosciences, which serves as a basis for our current work to tackle workplace bullying and mobbing in the Geosciences. This includes, for instance, an in-depth survey around this topic to obtain more quantitative information and data. By creating visibility for our efforts during EGU22, we hope to broaden our initiative and receive new input from the scientific community.

References:

- (1) Pieber, van Rijsingen, Gürer, Beniést (2021) <https://blogs.egu.eu/divisions/ts/2021/03/24/mind-your-head-an-introduction-to-workplace-bullying-in-academia/>
- (2) Popp, Hall, Yılmaz (2020) <https://doi.org/10.1029/2020EO151914>.
- (3) Beniést, Gürer, Pieber, van Rijsingen (2021) <https://meetingorganizer.copernicus.org/EGU21/session/39992>