

NIH Workplace and Harassment Survey Institutes, Centers, and Offices (ICOs) Key Results Summary

[Frequently Asked Questions](#)

February 2020

NIH Workplace and Harassment Survey: *Frequently Asked Questions*

Survey Measures and Methodology

Q: How did the survey define sexual harassment?

A: In order to assess NIH employees' experiences with harassment and inappropriate conduct in the workplace, the survey used the Sexual Experiences Questionnaire (SEQ), which has undergone considerable testing in a range of occupational settings.¹ Based on this questionnaire, sexual harassment is a form of discrimination that is “composed of three categories of behavior: (1) gender harassment: verbal and nonverbal behaviors that convey hostility, objectification, exclusion, or second-class status about members of one gender; (2) unwanted sexual attention: verbal or physical unwelcome sexual advances, which can include assault; and (3) sexual coercion: when favorable professional or educational treatment is conditioned on sexual activity.”²

Q: Did the survey define sexual harassment in the same way as NIH's CIVIL program?

A: [NIH Policy](#) defines sexual harassment as “A form of harassment that violates [Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964](#). Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitute sexual harassment when this conduct explicitly or implicitly affects an individual's employment, unreasonably interferes with an individual's work performance, or creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work environment.”

To assess the NIH workforce's experiences with sexual harassment, the survey used the Sexual Experiences Questionnaire (SEQ).¹ In this questionnaire, sexual harassment *not only* includes sexual harassment as defined by NIH Policy above, but also gender harassment (i.e., behaviors conveying “hostility, exclusion, or second-class status about members or one gender”).² NIH chose to use this definition in order to capture a more complete picture of employees' experiences with harassment consistent with the research literature and the National Academy of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine 2018 report, including incidents that may not meet the legal definition of sexual harassment currently used by NIH's CIVIL program.

Q: Did the survey measure harassment that is not sexual, such as bullying?

A: Yes. The NIH Workplace Climate and Harassment Survey addressed a range of objective behaviors, including workplace incivility and bullying, which are described in Table 3 of the ICO report.

¹ Fitzgerald, L. F., Magley, V. J., Drasgow, F., & Waldo, C. R. (1999). Measuring sexual harassment in the military: The Sexual Experiences Questionnaire (SEQ—DoD). *Military Psychology*, 11(3), 243–263. doi:10.1207/s15327876mp1103_3

² National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2018). *Sexual Harassment of Women: Climate, Culture, and Consequences in Academic Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.

Q: Why are there so many values labeled as “NR” in my report?

A: To protect individual anonymity, the contractor fielding the survey did not provide the NIH with breakdowns of any subgroups with fewer than 15 respondents (labeled as NR). This approach was recommended by the contractor to preserve respondent confidentiality and prevent any potential re-identification of survey respondents, which could have detrimental personal or career implications. Some NIH ICOs therefore, had sample sizes that were not large enough to result in cells with samples larger than 15. In these cases, we recommend looking to the trans-NIH results included in the ICO report for more general insights.

Q: What should I do if most of my ICO report is labeled as “NR”?

A: The trans-NIH report will be released in spring 2020 and will include more detailed survey findings that apply to all ICOs. In addition, we have secured a new data management and analysis contract that will allow ICOs to make additional data requests through a Data Access Committee to supplement the results in the current Key Results Summary. To protect individual anonymity, the contractor fielding the survey did not provide NIH with breakdowns of any subgroups with fewer than 15 respondents (labeled as NR). Some NIH ICOs therefore, had sample sizes that were not large enough to result in cells with samples larger than 15. In these cases, we recommend looking to the trans-NIH results included in the ICO report for more general insights.

Q: Can we tell if a cell labeled “NR” (less than 15 respondents) had any data at all?

A: No. In the Key Results Summary, cells labeled “NR” correspond to a value between zero and 14 respondents. However, we have secured a new data management and analysis contract that will allow ICOs to make additional data requests through a Data Access Committee. Further analyses can be requested through the Data Access Committee, including inquiries about cells with zero respondents. In addition, we recommend conducting internal focus groups, in-depth interviews, or using other assessment methods to gain a more complete picture of your unique ICO workplace climate.

Q: Why do you report percentages instead of samples sizes?

A: To encourage respondents to complete and submit the survey, the survey platform allowed respondents to skip any question they did not wish to answer. Respondents could have skipped a question or response for any number of reasons, such as feeling uncomfortable or not wishing to disclose certain information on a survey administered by NIH. This functionality impacts the way in which survey results are presented, such that the total number of respondents, and therefore the denominator, may differ slightly for each survey question reported. Percentages allow readers of the report to instead focus on overall trends, key findings, and comparisons between groups of respondents.

Data Tables

Q: Are the percentages in Table 1 mutually exclusive?

A: No, the percentages are not mutually exclusive and will not sum to the total for *any sexual harassment*. The Sexual Experiences Questionnaire (SEQ) has three subscales: *gender harassment*, *unwanted sexual attention*, and *sexual coercion*. Each of the 25 SEQ survey items maps to one of the three subscales. Since respondents may have had multiple sexual harassment experiences across different subscales in the past 12 months, these values are not mutually exclusive.

Q: What is the purpose of reporting “NA” in Table 2? Is this different than “NR”?

A: Due to the volume of analyses required for the NIH survey (including obtaining findings at the Trans-NIH and ICO levels), the original data reports received from the contractor who fielded and analyzed the survey employ a crosstab format. In this format, overall sample sizes and percentages are not reported for each vulnerable group (e.g., total number/percentage of trainees experiencing sexual harassment). Rather, the groups are broken down by gender identity. Since some cells have sample sizes of less than 15 and were therefore, suppressed to preserve respondent anonymity, we were unable to calculate overall sample sizes and percentages (i.e., sum across columns). However, future analyses with these data will address this limitation to provide a fuller picture of vulnerable populations at each ICO.

Q: Should the percentages reported by gender in Table 2 add up to the total percentage of all respondents experiencing sexual harassment?

A: No, the percentages reported in Table 2 are subgroup-specific percentages. For example, the percentage reported for *Women* can be interpreted as: “Among respondents identifying their gender as women, X% experienced any sexual harassment in the past 12 months.” In this example, the denominator is all respondents who identified their gender as women, and the numerator is all respondents who identified their gender as women *and* experienced any sexual harassment in the past 12 months. Since the denominators differ across each of the gender subgroups based on the total number of respondents in that gender subgroup, the percentages do not add to the overall percentage of respondents experiencing any sexual harassment.

Q: How do I interpret the percentages reported in Table 3 for my ICO?

A: On the survey, respondents were asked a series of questions from the Workplace Incivility Scale³ about their experiences with incivility in the past 12 months. Respondents were also asked if they had experienced bullying in the same time frame. In Table 3, the top left-hand cell can be interpreted as follows: “Among survey respondents *not* experiencing any sexual harassment in the past 12 months, X% experienced any bullying in the past 12 months.” Similarly, the bottom left-hand cell can be interpreted as: “Among respondents *not* experiencing any sexual harassment in the past 12 months, Y% experienced any workplace incivility in the past 12 months.” This table is intended to depict the association between experiences of workplace incivility or bullying, and sexual harassment.

³ Cortina, L. M., Magley, V. J., Williams, J. H., & Langhout, R. D. (2001). Incivility in the workplace: Incidence and impact. *J Occup Health Psychol*, 6(1), 64–80.

Q: How do I interpret the percentages reported in Table 4 for my ICO?

A: Respondents were asked about their perceptions of their supervisor, manager, or NIH point of contact, in order to understand more about the organizational climate of their work unit. In Table 4, the top left-hand cell can be interpreted as follows: “Among respondents *not* experiencing any sexual harassment in the past 12 months, X% indicated on the survey that their supervisor is *slightly or not fair at all* when making decisions that affect salaries, other professional rewards, evaluations, promotions, and work assignments of people in their work unit.” This table is intended to depict the association between organizational climate and sexual harassment.

Q: Why don't the percentages in Table 5 add to 100%? What does *None of the Above* mean?

A: Respondents who experienced any sexual harassment were asked if they had talked about or reported the experience that had the greatest effect on them to any of the people or entities listed in Table 5. The response options were not mutually exclusive and do not add to 100%; that is, respondents could indicate talking to or reporting to *more than one* person or entity. However, respondents could also select the response option *None of the Above* to indicate that they had not talked about or reported the experience to any entity listed, or to anyone at all.

Q: What is the denominator for Table 6? Why does my ICO have so many NRs in Table 6?

A: The denominator in Table 6 is all respondents who experienced any sexual harassment in the past 12 months *and* selected *None of the Above* as their answer on Table 5; that is, they did not talk about or report the experience to any entity listed or to anyone at all. This table is intended to depict the reasons why individuals experiencing harassment may not talk about or report the incident, to help NIH further understand barriers and disincentives involved in reporting.

Q: Who should I contact if I have more questions about my ICO report?

A: If you have questions, please contact us at workclimate@od.nih.gov.