

Sexual Harassment in the Fire and Emergency Services

**Dr. John C. Griffith, Dr. Marian C. Schultz, Dr. James T. Schultz, Dr. Donna L. Roberts,
and Dr. Ronald T. Wakeham,**

Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University

i-Women in Firefighting and Emergency Services 4 Mar, 2016



i-Women in Firefighting – 1995 Study

- 551 respondents
- 88% indicated they received “some form” of sexual harassment
 - 70% indicated it was still ongoing
- Over 50% - Unwanted physical contact – 69% of those indicated >1
- 30% - inappropriate demands from boss/coworker, of those 13% >1
- 4% - demands for sex – 16 of 22 times were told “to keep job” or “for promotion”
- Of 339 who reported issues – 34% were completely satisfied but.....
 - 57% “nothing was done” 41% “Problem was solved” 15% “violator was disciplined

Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University Study 1

- *Does the Fire Station Have a Glass Ceiling* (Griffith, Schultz, M. C., Schultz, J. T., & Wakeham, 2015)
- 10 question survey
- 339 participants
- Attempted to gauge if sexual harassment was as prevalent in fire stations has had been reported in the 1995 *Sexual Harassment* and 2008 *National Report Card* studies.

Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University Study 1

- 84% of female firefighters would still enter the fire service
- 73% would encourage a female relative or friend to pursue a firefighting career.
- 75% indicated they gained more acceptance the longer they were in the job.

Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University Study 1

- However, 54% of female firefighters indicated they were not treated as an equal by male firefighters.
- 56% indicated physical requirements limited female success
- Reasons for leaving the fire service included “Gender” 2.3% and problems with male co-workers 6.8%

Purpose

1. Determine current perceptions of harassment in the fire service to include not only gender, but race and sexual orientation.
2. Compare and contrast results with previous research, most notably the *National Report Card 2008* study.

Scope

This research examines voluntary responses from firefighters across the United States.

Relevance

- Harassment impacts productivity and recruitment efforts for any organization.
- Decreasing budgets and increasing workloads require the most effective use of staffing possible.
- Understanding and eliminating harassment practices will prevent marginalization of a significant number of firefighters.

Literature Review

- Workplace Bullying Institute (WBI) 2014 report
- 27% of Americans had suffered abusive conduct at work
- 7% reporting that the bullying was currently happening
- 20% having the experience at some time in their work life

Literature Review

- Their findings indicate that a full 72% of adult American workers are aware that bullying is a real and substantial threat in the modern workplace
- Extrapolating these results over the broad U.S. labor force equates to 37 million workers being directly subjected to abusive conduct and a total of 65.6 million affected either personally or vicariously

Finding the Solution in Court


- In 2015 Philadelphia, Tampa and at least 12 large U.S. cities involved in harassment lawsuits for allowing culture of inappropriate or sexual harassment behavior
- Female firefighters have won wrongful termination suits - Delaware County TWP. \$1.67M
- Sex toys in a bunk cost Albuquerque NM \$180,000

Literature Review

- 2008 - Cornell's Institute for Women and Work published the groundbreaking report entitled *A National Report Card on Women in Firefighting*
- Analyzed survey results from 675 firefighters working in 114 different departments in 48 states
- Conducted in depth interviews 175 female firefighters

Report Card Study

- Participation of Women in the fire service
 - Hulett et al. – should be 17% Fire service participation by women
 - Current participation rate is 3.7%
- Fitness testing
 - Pre-training programs – 52%
 - No pre-training program – 34%



**Not till
2080 at
this pace**

Literature Review

- 85% of those interviewed indicated that they were treated differently
- 80% reported that they were issued ill-fitting equipment
- 37% reported that their gender prevented career advancement
- 50% experienced shunning or social isolation
- 37% stated that they were verbally harassed

Research Design

- Cross sectional survey research design Mar-Nov 2015
- Survey distributed through the National Fire Academy TRADENET e-mail service
- Used the same questions as the 2008 National Report Card study
- Open area comments on the surveys were also reviewed to identify significant trends.

Who took the survey?

- 113 firefighters responded to the survey; 56 were female (49.6%) and 57 were male (50.4%).
- 95% were over 30; 69% were 40 or older
- 92% white, 3% African American and 3% Hispanic/Latina(o).
- 70% had a college degree and 93% had completed at least some college courses

Who took the survey?

- 61% were either firefighters, company officers or chief officers involved with suppression
- 14% identified themselves as a firefighter/paramedic.
- 82% indicated they had been in the fire service 8 or more years.
- 63% had served in their current department and 50% indicated they were in their current position for at least 8 years.

Hypotheses

- H_{a_1} There will be a significant difference between the number of respondents who believe bullying/harassment is an issue compared to the number who do not.
- H_{a_2} There will be a significant difference in perceptions between survey respondents in this study compared to the 2008 National Report Card study with regard to questions on bullying/harassment.

Findings

- Significantly fewer survey takers seemed to believe that there were bullying/harassment issues at work with regard to treatment on the job than those who indicated it was an issue.

Recruiting, Testing, Policies (All)

| Survey Results | | | | |
|--|-------|----------|----------|-------|
| | Agree | Disagree | χ^2 | p |
| My Dept. takes extra steps to recruit Women? (n=111) | 30 | 47 | 3.753 | .053 |
| My Dept. takes extra steps to recruit Minorities (n=113) | 36 | 45 | 1.0 | .317 |
| Entry-level physical exam accurately reflected my ability (n=101) | 54 | 22 | 13.474 | .000* |
| Men and women were treated the same during the physical test (n=100) | 79 | 12 | 49.34 | .000* |

Policies and Equipment (All)

| Survey Results | | | | |
|---|-------|----------|----------|-------|
| | Agree | Disagree | χ^2 | p |
| Have you been treated differently due to gender (n=112) | 52 | 60 | .571 | .45 |
| Different treatment due to race or ethnic origin? (n=107) | 13 | 94 | 61.318 | .000* |
| Formal procedure for gender or race based complaints? (n=112) * | 80 | 32 | 20.571 | .000* |
| Experienced ill-fitting uniforms or gear? (n=113) | 56 | 57 | .009 | .925 |

Supervisor Treatment, Promotions/Development

| Survey Results | | | | |
|---|-------|----------|----------|-------|
| | Agree | Disagree | χ^2 | p |
| My supervisor addresses complaints concerning –gender related incidents (n=113) | 66 | 20 | 24.605 | .000* |
| My supervisor addresses complaints concerning race- related incidents (n=111) | 57 | 12 | 29.348 | .000* |
| Treated differently due to sexual orientation? (n=112) | 25 | 55 | 11.25 | .001* |
| Promotions are decided upon fairly (113) | 55 | 32 | 6.08 | .014* |
| Gender <u>is not</u> a barrier to my career development (n=111) | 73 | 27 | 21.16 | .000* |

Supervisor Treatment, Promotions/Development

| Survey Results | | | | |
|---|-------|----------|----------|--------------|
| | Agree | Disagree | χ^2 | p |
| Ethnic origin <u>is not</u> a barrier to my career development (n=111) | 69 | 12 | 40.11 | .000* |
| Would you advise a young minority woman to become a firefighter? (112) | 80 | 23 | 31.54 | .000* |
| Would you advise a young white woman to become a firefighter? (n=113) | 81 | 22 | 33.796 | .000* |
| Would you advise a young minority man to become a firefighter? (112) | 92 | 9 | 68.208 | .000* |
| Would you advise a young white man to become a firefighter? (n=113) | 97 | 5 | 82.98 | .000* |

Findings

- However **when responses from men and women were compared, there was a significant difference** in the way women perceived their work environments compared to men.

Comparison with 2008 National Report Card: Recruiting, Testing, Policies and Equipment

| | 2015 Survey Results | | | 2008 National Report Card | | |
|---|---------------------|-----|------|---------------------------|-----|-------|
| | Women | Men | P | Women | Men | p |
| My department takes extra steps to recruit Women? (n=111) | 22% | 33% | .138 | 36% | 69% | .001* |
| Entry-level exam physical exam accurately reflected my ability on the job (n=101) | 52% | 61% | .397 | 43% | 53% | .307 |
| Men and women were treated the same during the physical test (n=100) | 82% | 76% | .633 | 87% | 90% | .822 |

Comparison with 2008 National Report Card: Recruiting, Testing, Policies and Equipment

| | 2015 Survey Results | | | 2008 National Report Card | | | Difference? | |
|---|---------------------|-----|------|---------------------------|-----|-------|-------------|------|
| | Women | Men | P | Women | Men | p | χ^2 | p |
| My department takes extra steps to recruit Women? (n=111) | 22% | 33% | .138 | 36% | 69% | .001* | .51 | .475 |
| Entry-level exam physical exam accurately reflected my ability on the job (n=101) | 52% | 61% | .397 | 43% | 53% | .307 | .032 | .859 |
| Men and women were treated the same during the physical test (n=100) | 82% | 76% | .633 | 87% | 90% | .822 | .252 | .616 |

Comparison with 2008 National Report Card: Recruiting, Testing, Policies and Equipment

| 2015 Survey Results | | | | 2008 National Report Card | | |
|---|-------|-----|-----------------------|---------------------------|-----|-------|
| | Women | Men | P ($\alpha=.05$) | Women | Men | p |
| Have you been treated differently due to gender (n=112) | 79% | 14% | .000* | 85% | 12% | .000* |
| Formal procedure for gender or race based complaints? (n=112) | 59% | 84% | .037* | 35% | 57% | .022* |
| Experienced ill-fitting uniforms or gear? (n=113) | 80% | 19% | .000* | 80% | 21% | .000* |

Comparison with 2008 National Report Card: Recruiting, Testing, Policies and Equipment

| 2015 Survey Results | | | | 2008 National Report Card | | | Difference? | |
|---|-------|-----|-----------------------|---------------------------|-----|-------|-------------|------|
| | Women | Men | P ($\alpha=.05$) | Women | Men | p | χ^2 | p |
| Have you been treated differently due to gender (n=112) | 79% | 14% | .000* | 85% | 12% | .000* | .28 | .59 |
| Formal procedure for gender or race based complaints? (n=112) | 59% | 84% | .037* | 35% | 57% | .022* | .241 | .623 |
| Experienced ill-fitting uniforms or gear? (n=113) | 80% | 19% | .000* | 80% | 21% | .000* | .08 | .777 |

Comparison with 2008 National Report Card: Supervisor Treatment, Promotions/Development

| | 2015 Survey Results | | | 2008 National Report Card | | |
|--|---------------------|-----|-------------------|---------------------------|-----|--------------|
| | Women | Men | P $\alpha=.05$ | Women | Men | p |
| My supervisor <u>does not</u> address complaints concerning –gender related incidents (n=113) | 32%* | 3%* | .000* | 23% | 6% | .002* |
| Treated differently due to sexual orientation? (n=112) | 33% | 12% | .002* | 31% | 14% | .011* |
| Promotions are <u>not</u> decided upon fairly (113) | 41% | 16% | .001* | 34% | 18% | .027* |
| Gender <u>is</u> a barrier to my career development (n=111) | 44% | 5% | .000* | 37% | 7% | .000* |

Comparison with 2008 National Report Card: Supervisor Treatment, Promotions/Development

| | 2015 Survey Results | | | 2008 National Report Card | | | Difference? | |
|--|---------------------|-----|-------------------|---------------------------|-----|--------------|-------------|------|
| | Women | Men | P $\alpha=.05$ | Women | Men | p | χ^2 | p |
| My supervisor <u>does not</u> address complaints concerning –gender related incidents (n=113) | 32%* | 3%* | .000* | 23% | 6% | .002* | 1.92 | .165 |
| Treated differently due to sexual orientation? (n=112) | 33% | 12% | .002* | 31% | 14% | .011* | .216 | .642 |
| Promotions are <u>not</u> decided upon fairly (113) | 41% | 16% | .001* | 34% | 18% | .027* | .543 | .461 |
| Gender <u>is</u> a barrier to my career development (n=111) | 44% | 5% | .000* | 37% | 7% | .000* | .671 | .413 |

Findings

- The second hypothesis stated that there would be a significant difference in perceptions between survey respondents in this study compared to the 2008 National Report Card study with regard to questions on bullying/harassment.
- Findings supported the null hypothesis.
- The responses in this study were quite similar to the findings in the 2008 National Report Card study.

Conclusions

Overall, firefighters in this study indicated that most did not perceive workplace bullying/harassment such as discrimination or deferential treatment as being an issue.

Conclusions

- However, after female and male comments were compared, there were significantly different levels of comfort with regard to the elimination of workplace bullying/harassment issues.
- Significantly **more women** than men **indicated** that there were **issues with treatment based on gender, race, and sexual orientation**.
- Significantly **more females** than males **felt that promotion decisions were not fair**.

Conclusions – Open Comments

- Results were mixed.
- Some indicated that the fire service was a great experience, the best of their lives.
- Some discussed discrimination, ill-fitting equipment, issues with promotion and training.
- Other comments brought out issues with privacy regarding sleeping areas, showers and bathrooms.

Recommendations

- Future research should continue to examine the differences in female and male perceptions in the fire service with regard to perceived discrimination, promotion issues, and mentoring and ill-fitting equipment issues
- More efforts should be made to cast a wider net to gauge perceptions from female and minority firefighter populations.

Recommendations

- Future researchers should **identify best practices** in supervisor and firefighter training that effectively address **fair treatment** for all firefighters.
- Fire Chiefs should ensure all firefighters have **properly fitting equipment**.

Recommendations

- Fire Chief organizations should become involved with equipment vendors to offer female sized **protective clothing**.
- The environment in fire stations should be designed to ensure that female firefighters have **appropriate showering, bathroom and sleeping areas** that afford privacy.

What to do if harassed

- **Let the offender know**
- **If it happens a second time – or if major – report to supervisor (or designated person)**
- **Provide issue in writing, get statements from witnesses**
- **If supervisor or designated person does not resolve issue, let the supervisor know you are going up the chain**
- **Know the policy on how the department handles harassment/bullying issues**
- **Write everything down with dates and times**

How to help each other

Be a mentor – have a mentor

Do not hang around negative people

Take care of yourself – physically and spiritually

People talk so don't give them much to talk about

Know your job

- **Supervisors**

- **Lead by example - Be professional**
- **Don't tolerate substandard behavior**
- **Look out for newbies**
- **Know your job**

Questions?

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