

October 23, 2015

# Bullying at the Fire Station? Perceptions Based on Gender, Race and Sexual Orientation

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A row of yellow coconuts with faces drawn on them, set against a background of fire station equipment. The coconuts are arranged in a horizontal line, and each has a simple face drawn on it with a black dot for an eye and a curved line for a mouth. The background is a blurred image of fire station equipment, including what appears to be a fire hose and a fire extinguisher.

# **Bullying at the Fire Station? Perceptions Based on Gender, Race and Sexual Orientation**

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**NWBC Bullying Conference 22-23 Oct, 2015**

# 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 bullying 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.



# Research Questions

1. Does a bullying problem exist in the Fire Service and if so, what groups are affected and in what ways?
2. How do the results from questions involving bullying compare to similar questions in the 2008 National Report Card study?

# Scope

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



# Relevance

- Bullying impacts productivity and recruitment efforts for any organization.
- Decreasing budgets and increasing workloads require the most effective use of staffing possible.
- Understanding and eliminating bullying 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

- Workplace Bullying Institute (WBI) 2014 report
- An additional 21% have witnessed firsthand the bullying of others
- An additional 23% were aware of others being bullied (without directly observing the actions)

# 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

# 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

# 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
- 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.



# Population

- Survey was made available to all firefighters through TRADENET (National Fire Academy) and TWITTER (International Association of Female Firefighters and Emergency Services) throughout the United States.
- Available for a four month period from March through June, 2015.

# Demographic Data

- 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

# Demographic Data

- 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

- $H_{a1}$  There will be a significant difference between the number of respondents who believe bullying is an issue compared to the number who do not.
- $H_{a2}$  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.

# Findings

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

# Recruiting, Testing, Policies and Equipment (All)

Survey Results				
	Agree	Disagree	$\chi^2$	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	.0002*
Men and women were treated the same during the physical test (n=100)	79	12	49.34	.000*
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	$\chi^2$	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	.0008*
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*
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

Survey Results				Comparison with 2008 National Report Card			
	Women	Men	P ( $\alpha=.05$ )	Women	Men	$\chi^2$	p
My department takes extra steps to recruit Women? (n=111)	22%	33%	.138	36%	69%	.51	.475
Entry-level exam physical exam accurately reflected my ability on the job (n=101)	52%	61%	.397	43%	53%	.032	.859
Men and women were treated the same during the physical test (n=100)	82%	76%	.633	87%*	90%*	.252	.616
Have you been treated differently due to gender (n=112)	79%	14%	.000*	85%	12%	.28	.59
Formal procedure for gender or race based complaints? (n=112)	59%	84%	.037*	35%	57%	.241	.623
Experienced ill-fitting uniforms or gear? (n=113)	80%	19%	.000*	80%	21%	.08	.777

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

Survey Results				Comparison with 2008 National Report Card			
	Women	Men	P ( $\alpha=.05$ )	Women	Men	$\chi^2$	p
My supervisor <u>does not</u> address complaints concerning –gender related incidents (n=113)	32%*	3%*	.000*	23%	6%	1.92	.165
Treated differently due to sexual orientation? (n=112)	33%	12%	.002*	31%	14%	.216	.642
Promotions are <u>not</u> decided upon fairly (113)	41%	16%	.001*	34%	18%	.543	.461
Gender <u>is</u> a barrier to my career development (n=111)	44%	5%	.000*	37%	7%	.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.
- 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 such as discrimination or differential 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 issues.
- Significantly more women than men indicated that there were issues with treatment based on gender, race, and sexual orientation.
- Significantly more female 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.

A row of yellow coconuts with green husks, hanging from a wooden stand. The coconuts are arranged in a line, and the background is a light-colored wall.

Questions?

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