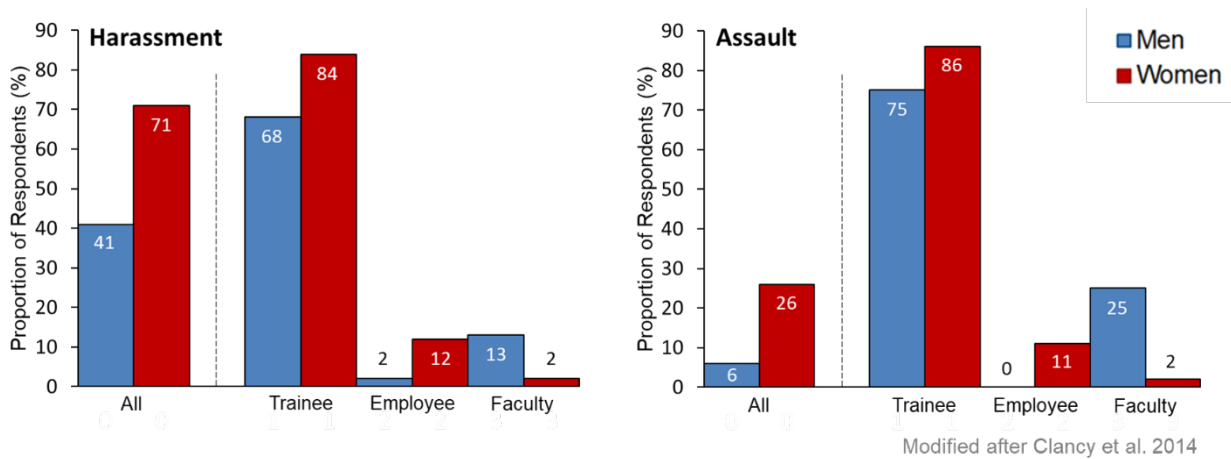[Summary] **Safe Field Work: Risks, proactive strategies, and responding to harassment in the field**

By Kate Brown

Kate Brown, the Station Manager of the Koffler Scientific Reserve at Joker's Hill, led a seminar on field work safety, harassment, and risk mitigation. Below are some of the key findings from a literature review presented in the seminar. For a full list of resources and presentation slides, follow this link or email Kate at ksr.manager@utoronto.ca.

A survey-based study by Clancy et al. (2014) on sexual harassment and assault in field settings revealed that both men and women experience sexual harassment (41% and 71%, respectively) and assault (6% and 26%, respectively) in field settings, and that sexual violence towards both genders is most often targeted at students and postdocs (trainees).

Modified after Clancy et al. 2014

Though the study did not disclose the gender of the perpetrators, Clancy et al. reported that 48% of men experienced harassment from their peers, or field researchers at the same professional level (i.e., male trainees are most often harassed by other trainees), while women most often experienced harassment from personnel superior to them (47%) suggesting that women are more often the victims of an abuse of power.

There is generally a limited awareness of workplace policies or mechanisms for reporting harassment and assault in the field, with only 19% of women who experienced unwanted physical contact knowing the available mechanisms for reporting the assault (Clancy et al. 2014). A follow-up study by the same research team (Nelson et al. 2017) found that harassment and assault (among other negative experiences including gendered labour and alienation) were more common in field settings with absent or ambiguous rules. The majority of field settings (67%) had ambiguous rules or a complete lack of rules regarding appropriate and acceptable behaviour, compared to only 24% of field settings with clearly defined and enforced rules (Nelson et al. 2017). Of the settings lacking clear rules, 56% of field experiences included an incident of sexual harassment compared to 15% of field experiences in settings with explicit and enforced rules.

Other forms of harassment in the field

The vast majority of research on harassment and risks in field settings are focused on sexual violence in the field. However, fieldwork poses greater risks for anyone whose identity is viewed as different from the local community in which the research is being conducted. Members of the LGBTQ+ community are speaking up about harassment in the field based on their LGBTQ+ identity, with 55% of respondents in a 2020 survey reporting that they felt unsafe in the field because of their identity, expression, or presentation (Olcott & Downen 2020). These safety concerns have ultimately led to 34% of respondents refusing to do fieldwork, contributing to the lack of diversity in field researchers. By creating safe, inclusive workspaces, we are supporting a greater diversity for field researchers to gain the skills necessary for researchers to achieve their professional goals.

Though there is limited data on racism in field settings, more and more horror stories from the field have been brought to our attention following the May 25 racial attack in Central Park against Christian Cooper. A common response in interviews was that safety looks different depending on who you are – the typical advice of calling the police if they feel unsafe is not practical for everybody, especially in the wake of continued police brutality against members of the black community. Without creating a safe work environment that presents equal opportunities to BIPOC individuals and other minorities, we will continue to lose talented scholars and fail to address the low-diversity issues in EEB and STEM.

Strategies to minimize risk

Individuals
- Take advantage of training opportunities to increase field safety and promote awareness
- Reach out to your network – what issues have occurred in the past?
- Introduce yourself to local community members you may interact with during data collection
- Carry credentials with you (Photo ID, permits, research info)
- Carry a list of contacts and resources for help
- Where university-branded clothing
- ALWAYS have a phone or walkie talkie on you
- Keep others informed of your location and timeline (departure, return)
- Research the field site – laws, bylaws, customs, demographics

Supervisors
- Self-educate/do your research - What are the politics, demographics, culture, etc.? What are the potential risks? Participate in risk management, diversity training, antidiscrimination, and self-awareness training. **Do not ask researchers to relive trauma**
- Validate researchers' potential or experienced risk, modify projects to safely continue conducting research
- Foster an inclusive environment by confronting harassment, using inclusive language, being a visible ally, asking for preferred pronouns, etc.
- Introduce researchers to field managers, host community, previous site researchers, etc.
- Document hostile encounters and connect researchers to resources
- Provide materials to identify researchers and their purpose in the field
- Provide information about local and institutional safety resources for researchers to carry in the field **(911 is not the only or best option)**
- Make safety training available for researchers
- Create a field risk management plan explicitly discussing risks
- Assist researchers in establishing safe housing accommodations pre-field season
- Review and agree upon fieldwork and safety plans before fieldwork begins; have contingency plans in place – **Do this with all team members**
- Ensure researchers always work in pairs or teams
- Review code of conduct for field site, if available

Institutions
- Provide a code of conduct for researchers and supervisors to review before the field season
- Have in-person conversations about the code of conduct, unacceptable behaviour, and consequences for inappropriate, unprofessional behavior
- Explicitly discuss ways to report harassment, identify allies
- Confront harassment and enforce regulatory action
- Hire a diverse management team
- Create space for recommendations to improve field work environment (anonymous option recommended)
- Lead by example – use inclusive language, include all field researchers in academic and leisure activities, express your appreciation for others and the value they bring to the research team
- Make a list of resources available for safety concerns and contacts
- Provide and require risk assessment training for all fieldwork supervisors
- Provide and require bystander, sexual harassment, and anti-discriminatory training for everyone
- Collate information on field sites, risks, and past/current issues
- Provide an official letter of support for researchers doing fieldwork with contact information
- Review the effectiveness of training and reporting mechanisms, adjust regularly

Demery and Pipkin 2020
Anadu, Ali, and Jackson 2020
Viglione 2020