Work Environment Perceptions of Full-Time Dental Educators: Does Gender Matter?

Paula E. Nesbitt, D.D.S., M.S.D.; Marita R. Inglehart, Dr. phil. habil.; Jeanne C. Sinkford, D.D.S., Ph.D.

Abstract: This study investigates whether female and male full-time dental faculty members in U.S. dental schools differ in their workplace experiences and perceptions. A questionnaire was mailed to the 2,203 U.S. members of the American Dental Education Association (ADEA) in May 2001, and 870 faculty members responded (response rate: 40 percent). The data of the 738 full-time employed faculty members (female: 257, 34.8 percent; male: 481, 65.1 percent) were analyzed. The results showed that male and female faculty did not differ significantly in the average hours per week worked (men: 46.1 vs. women: 47.1), in the amount of time spent on research (11.67 percent vs. 12.76 percent), and in available grant support (20.1 percent vs. 19.7 percent). Men were more likely than women to have office space (99.2 percent vs. 96.5 percent; p=.012), secretarial support (87 percent vs. 75.8 percent; p=.000), protected time for research (37.8 percent vs. 31.6 percent; p=.056), and lab space (23.2 percent vs. 10.6 percent; p=.000). Compared to men, women spent more time on teaching (men: 16.84 percent vs. women: 19 percent; p=.078), and perceived the work environment as less supportive (30 percent vs. 9.3 percent; p=.000). While 73.8 percent of men felt welcome as members of the dental school community, only 50.2 percent of the women felt welcome (p=.000). Male and female respondents differed significantly in the degree of experienced and perceived harassment. We thus concluded that female and male faculty members differ in their experiences and perceptions of the academic climate at U.S. dental schools. These results may be useful when school leaders explore effective recruitment and retention strategies for dental faculty members.

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discrimination and sexual harassment among medical school faculty. These authors also explored the relationship between gender-based discrimination and the number of publications, career satisfaction, and perceptions of career advancement of men and women. The results showed that female faculty members perceived gender-based discrimination in the medical school environment 2.5 times more often than their male colleagues. Foster et al.9 investigated faculty perceptions of the climate in U.S. medical schools in the year 2000. Female and male faculty differed significantly in their perceptions of the professional environment. Female faculty members reported that their gender created specific and serious obstacles to their professional development.

In summary, prior research in U.S. academic settings and medical school settings during the past fifteen years has documented significant differences in male and female respondents’ workplace experiences and perceptions of their work environment.

The purpose of our study was to explore whether these findings can be replicated in U.S. dental school environments. The objective was to investigate whether, and if so how, female and male full-time faculty members in U.S. dental schools differed in their professional experiences and in their perceptions of the workplace. These findings will be beneficial to develop recommendations for the future recruitment and retention of female and male dental faculty. They could guide the identification and implementation of recommended changes in the dental school workplace environment, initiate a continuous monitoring process of the climate for full-time female and male faculty, and further the notion of cultural competency in dental education.

Materials and Methods

The sample consisted of dental faculty members who were identified with the help of the 2001 membership roster of the American Dental Education Association (ADEA). (This study had IRB approval.) A questionnaire was mailed to the 2,203 ADEA members in U.S. dental schools in May 2001. No follow-up mailing was conducted. Eight hundred and seventy faculty members responded (response rate: 40 percent); 34.8 percent of these respondents were women and 65.1 percent were men. Dental hygienists were 17.9 percent of the female respondents.

A comparison of the percentages of female and male respondents with the percentages of female and male dental faculty in 2000 showed that a slightly larger proportion of women than men had responded to the survey (24.5 percent female faculty vs. 34.8 percent female respondents).15 Given the wide range of specific arrangements made for part-time employed dental faculty and resulting concerns, this study considers only data from full-time employed respondents (N=738). All surveys were returned within a six-week time frame. To maintain confidentiality, the respondents were not asked to self-identify or to name the institution where they were employed. All data were reported on an aggregate level, and only the researchers involved in this study and the ADEA professional staff had access to the surveys.

We developed the “Full-Time Dental Educator Work Environment” survey based on a review of the literature regarding perceptions of academic work environment and career development.4-13 The survey was designed to gather quantitative and qualitative information of academic characteristics, experiences, and workplace perceptions of male and female dental faculty in the United States. Survey items obtained from the literature were complemented with additional items formulated by the primary author based on conversations with other female dental faculty members about issues important to them. The survey was pre-tested for clarity and brevity with five male and five female faculty members. The final version of this self-administered mailed survey contained seventy-five questions in the following subsections: Demographic Background (five questions), Education and Professional Activity (twelve questions), Mentoring Relationships (eight questions), Workplace Environment (thirty-two questions), and Career Success and Recognition (eighteen questions).

Answers to the closed-ended items were provided on 5-point rating scales ranging from 1 (very dissatisfied/strongly disagree) to 5 (very satisfied/strongly agree). Intermediate points 2, 3, and 4 did not have verbal designations. A response of 4 or 5 was reported as an agreement/positive response to a given item. Open-ended questions were concerned with faculty recruitment, faculty retention, reasons for underrepresentation of female faculty in U.S. dental schools, and career impediments.

Chi-square tests were used to analyze whether the frequencies of responses of male and female respondents to the questions differed.
Results

Demographic and Professional Background Characteristics

The overall response rate for full-time, part-time, and administrative faculty was 40 percent with 870 respondents of the 2,203 contacted ADEA members returning their surveys within a six-week period. Of these respondents, 34.8 percent were women, and 65.1 percent were men. The number of full-time employed respondents was 749 members (86.1 percent of respondents). Eighty-six faculty members worked part-time (9.9 percent), and thirty-five faculty members (4 percent) did not indicate their work status. Of the 749 full-time respondents, 738 members (98.5 percent) held a faculty position, while seven did not hold a formal faculty position, and four did not indicate their position. The following analyses are based on the responses of the 738 full-time employed faculty members. Of these respondents, 257 were female (34.8 percent), and 481 were male (65.1 percent).

Academic Rank. The female respondents were on average approximately seven years younger than the male respondents (mean age: female: 45.99 vs. male: 53.37 years; p=.000). Given this age difference, it is not surprising that female respondents had been in academic dentistry for approximately four years less than their male peers (average years of full-time employment: female: 13.00 vs. male: 17.01 years; p=.000). The percentages of women and men at different levels of employment may be partially due to this age difference. The data showed that the percentage of female respondents who were full professors was relatively smaller than the percentage of male respondents who held full professor positions (women: N=39, 15.2 percent; men: N=208, 43.2 percent). However, compared to men, the percentages of associate professors (men: 39.1 percent vs. women: 47.1 percent), assistant professors (men: 16.4 percent vs. women: 33.9 percent), and instructors (men: 1.2 percent vs. women: 3.9 percent) were higher among the female respondents.

Women and men did not differ significantly in whether they had a tenure-track appointment (women: 65.2 vs. men: 71.4 percent; chi square=3.69; d.f.=2; p=.16). The female faculty members had spent significantly less time in their present academic rank than male faculty (women: 6.06 years vs. men: 8.82 years; p=.000).

Ethnicity/Race. Overall, 608 respondents (82.3 percent) were white, forty-two (5.7 percent) Hispanic/Latino, thirty-three (4.5 percent) black, and twenty-one (2.8 percent) Asian/Pacific Islander/East Indian. Only four respondents (.5 percent) indicated that they were American Indian or Alaskan Natives. No gender differences were found for ethnicity/race (chi square = 4.40; d.f.=4; p=.354).

Family Background. Compared to men, women were significantly less likely to be married or to have a partner (men: 90.0 percent vs. women: 69.3 percent; chi square=50.09; d.f.=1; p=.000). While 86.7 percent of the male faculty members with a spouse/partner reported that their income was higher than their spouse’s income, only 40.1 percent of the female faculty members indicated that this was the case (p=.000). While 43 percent of the women faculty had no children, only 12.1 percent of the men reported not having a child. Of those respondents who had children, men had on average 2.10 children, while women had only 1.14 children (p=.000).

Educational Background. Male respondents were more likely to have a D.D.S./D.M.D. than female respondents (men: 90.5 percent vs. women: 63.8 percent; p=.000). Women were more likely to have a dental hygiene degree (men: 2 percent vs. women: 17.9 percent; p<.000). Men and women did not differ significantly as to whether they held an M.S. degree in dentistry (20.2 percent vs. 17.2 percent) or an M.D. degree (3.5 percent vs. 2.7 percent). However, male respondents were significantly more likely to have received a certificate for attaining specialty graduate training than female respondents (35.3 percent vs. 28.3 percent; p=.034) and significantly less likely than women to have a master’s degree outside of dentistry (23.8 percent vs. 32.3 percent; p=.009). Thirty-nine women (5.27 percent) had a Ph.D. as compared to eighty-nine men (12.02 percent).

Discipline. Men and women faculty differed significantly in their primary discipline named (p=.000). Men reported more frequently than women that their primary discipline was general dentistry (29.9 percent vs. 25.9 percent), endodontics (6.4 percent vs. 1.6 percent), oral surgery (5.9 percent vs. 1.2 percent), orthodontics (4.7 percent vs. 3.6 percent), periodontics (8.3 percent vs. 5.6 percent), and prosthodontics (13.1 percent vs. 8.8 percent). Compared to men, more women reported that their primary discipline was dental hygiene (2 percent vs. 0 percent).
17.9 percent), pediatric dentistry (7.4 percent vs. 8.4 percent), dental public health (4.7 percent vs. 6 percent), radiology (2.1 percent vs. 2.4 percent), or behavioral sciences (.8 percent vs. 1.6 percent).

Workplace Experiences and Perceptions

Time Allocation. As can be seen in Table 1, women and men did not differ significantly in the average number of hours worked per week nor in the percentage of time spent on research, clinical teaching, committee work, administrative duties, and other employment. There was a trend that women spent a higher percentage of their time on didactic teaching than men (16.84 percent vs. 19.00 percent; p=.078). Compared to men, women spent significantly more hours per week on dependent childcare (men: 0.82 vs. women: 4.49; p=.000) and household chores (men: 3.21 vs. women: 5.16; p=.02).

Academic Resources. As can be seen in Table 2, a lower percentage of female faculty than male faculty had certain resources such as office space (men: 99.2 percent vs. women: 96.5 percent; p=.012), secretarial support (87.0 percent vs. 75.8 percent; p=.000), protected time for research (37.8 percent vs. 31.6 percent; p=.056), and lab space (23.2 percent vs. 10.6 percent; p=.000). Despite these differences in academic resources, men and women did not differ significantly in the degree to which they had grant support available to them (20.1 percent vs. 19.7 percent).

Career-Related Activities. Female respondents had significantly fewer publications overall than male respondents (men: 33.5 vs. women: 16.6; p=.000). However, male respondents under thirty-five years of age did not differ significantly in their number of publications from female respondents in the same age range (men: 5.73 vs. women: 4.94; n.s.).

Academic Climate: Professional Environment. As can be seen in Table 3, most male respondents felt like welcomed members of their dental school community, while only half of the female faculty members felt welcomed. More male respondents agreed with the items that indicate gender equality, such as “Faculty members are comfortable raising issues about the treatment of women,” “Equal pay for male and female faculty is no longer an issue,” and “Most faculty would be as comfortable with a female chairperson as a male chairperson.” More female respondents agreed with the statements that indicate gender inequality, such as “The work climate in my department and/or division is less supportive of female than of male faculty,” “Male faculty are more likely to be sought for collaborative research, given comparable scientific expertise,” “I have observed situations in which a faculty member has been denigrated based on gender,” and “Male faculty have difficulty taking careers of female faculty seriously and accepting females as colleagues.”

Workplace Perceptions and Demographics. The older the male respondents were, the more they felt welcome in the dental school environment (r=.095; p=.039), and the less they agreed with the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Female and male respondents’ time allocations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Women</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td># of hours per week worked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># of hours per week spent on dependent childcare</td>
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<tr>
<td>percent time spent on research</td>
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<tr>
<td>percent time spent on didactic teaching</td>
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<td>percent time spent on clinical teaching</td>
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<td>percent time spent on committee work</td>
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<tr>
<td>percent time spent on administrative duties</td>
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<td>percent time spent on other employment</td>
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<tr>
<th>Table 2. Percentages of female and male respondents with certain academic resources</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Availability of Academic Resources</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Office space</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Secretarial support</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Protected time for research</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lab space</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Grant support</strong></td>
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statement that the environment was “less supportive of women” \( (r=-.085; p=.066) \). However, women did not differ in their response to these two items as a function of their age \( (r=.058; n.s.; r=.039; n.s) \). Compared to men, women of all ages felt less welcome than their male colleagues and felt that the environment was less supportive of women.

Tenured and nontenured faculty members differed significantly in the degree to which they felt welcome in the dental school environment. While 68.9 percent of the tenured faculty felt welcome, only 57.1 percent of the nontenured faculty members felt welcome \( (p=.007) \). However, tenure status did not affect the responses to whether the environment was less supportive of women than men (tenured: 16.8 percent vs. nontenured: 16.2 percent).

Finally, the data showed that larger percentages of women at lower ranks felt less welcome than men (assistant professors: women: 59.3 percent vs. men: 33.3 percent; associate professors: 51.7 percent vs. 25.9 percent). At the full professor level, female faculty members did not differ from male faculty members in their perceptions of being welcome (23.1 percent vs. 23.1 percent). However, independent of academic rank, more women than men perceived that the environment was less supportive of women (assistant professors: 25.3 percent vs. 8.9 percent; associate professors: 37.2 percent vs. 9.8 percent; full professors: 20.5 percent vs. 9.3 percent; interaction effect gender x rank: \( p=.002 \)). The percentages of women with different academic ranks who agreed with this statement did not differ significantly \( (p=.109) \).

The number of women in a department and the degree to which they felt welcome were not significantly correlated. Just having more female colleagues around did not make women feel more welcome. However, the greater the number of women in a department, the less likely the women were to agree with the statement that the environment was nonsupportive of women \( (r=-.131; p=.043) \). In short, having more women around helped women to perceive that the environment was more supportive for women. However, having more women around did not make women feel more welcome.

**Perception and Experience of Bias and Harassment by Gender.** Table 4 shows that more female respondents than male respondents perceived gender bias in the academic environment (men: 9.9 percent vs. women: 33.3 percent; \( p=.000 \)). Significantly more women (28.7 percent) than men (6.6 percent) reported that they had experienced gender bias in professional advancement \( (p=.000) \). While only a small percentage of women reported that their gender had given them a professional advantage (16.4 percent), an even smaller percentage of male respon-

### Table 3. Faculty perceptions of the dental school environment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perception</th>
<th>Percent Who Agree with Statement</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I feel like a welcomed member of my dental school scientific community.</td>
<td>Women (n=257) 50.2 percent (n=128)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The work climate in my department and/or division is less supportive of female than of male faculty.</td>
<td>30 percent (n=77)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male faculty are more likely to be sought for collaborative research, given comparable scientific expertise.</td>
<td>45.1 percent (n=114)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have observed situations in which a faculty member has been denigrated based on gender.</td>
<td>41.3 percent (n=105)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male faculty have difficulty taking careers of female faculty seriously and accepting females as colleagues.</td>
<td>45.9 percent (n=117)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty members are comfortable raising issues about the treatment of women.</td>
<td>28.9 percent (n=73)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most faculty would be as comfortable with a female chairperson as a male chairperson.</td>
<td>31.3 percent (n=80)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal pay for male and female faculty is no longer an issue.</td>
<td>28.1 percent (n=72)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal networks in my department/division systematically exclude faculty on the basis of gender.</td>
<td>28.1 percent (n=72)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = “disagree strongly” to 5 = “agree strongly” was used to measure the responses to these statements. The percentage of agreement reported in this table was determined by adding the percentages of respondents who answered with a response of 4 = “agree” or 5 = “strongly agree.”
dents (6.5 percent) agreed with this statement (p=.000). Almost one-third of female faculty (32.7 percent) reported that they had been sexually harassed by a superior or colleague compared with only 3.4 percent of male faculty (p=.000). Compared to men, more women felt that harassment had been a major problem at work (men: 1.8 percent vs. women: 8.5 percent) and that they did not feel comfortable raising issues related to sex bias with colleagues (men: 14.7 percent vs. women: 34.9 percent; p=.000).

Discussion

Work Environment

In our study, male and female dental faculty differed significantly in the perceptions of their work environment. On the whole, male dental faculty members evaluated their work environment more positively than did female faculty members. Compared to male respondents, female respondents agreed significantly more with statements indicating that

• they were less welcome as members of the dental school community,
• the professional environment in departments and divisions was less supportive of women,
• male faculty with comparable expertise were more likely to be sought for collaborative research efforts,
• they had observed more situations in which women faculty were denigrated based on gender,
• males had difficulty taking the careers of female faculty seriously,
• faculty members were not comfortable raising issues about the treatment of women,
• most faculty would not be comfortable with a female chairperson,
• equal pay for male and female faculty was still an issue, and
• informal networks in their department/division systematically excluded faculty members based on gender.

These results lead to the conclusion that, overall, female dental educators perceive their environment as more “chilly” than their male counterparts. An interesting question is why this is the case. Two structural factors may be of importance here. First, women have been and are still underrepresented in dentistry in the United States. In 1970, less than 1 percent of U.S. dental school graduates were women, and in 1980, only about 4 percent of practicing U.S. dentists were women. Currently, approximately 38 percent of dental students are women, but only 14.1 percent of practicing dentists are female. In many instances, women dentists—and female dental educators—may still be in a minority position. A second factor may stem from the historical division of labor in the dental field in the United States. While women have been and are still underrepresented in dentistry, 99 percent of dental hygienists and 96 percent of dental assistants are female. The balance of

Table 4. Perception and experience of bias and harassment by gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perception</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I have encountered unwanted sexual comments, attention, or advances by a</td>
<td>32.7</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>superior or colleague.</td>
<td>(n=183)</td>
<td>(n=16)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My encounter or unwanted sexual comments, attention, or advances by a</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>.000</td>
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<tr>
<td>superior or colleague has been a major problem.</td>
<td>(n=21)</td>
<td>(n=8)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender-specific biases to career satisfaction are present in my academic</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>environment.</td>
<td>(n=85)</td>
<td>(n=46)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have been left out of opportunities for professional advancement based</td>
<td>28.7</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on gender.</td>
<td>(n=73)</td>
<td>(n=31)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am uncomfortable raising issues related to sex bias with my colleagues.</td>
<td>34.9</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(n=89)</td>
<td>(n=69)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have had increased opportunities for professional advancement based on</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gender.</td>
<td>(n=42)</td>
<td>(n=30)</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

A five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = “disagree strongly” to 5 = “agree strongly” was used to measure the responses to these statements. The percentage of agreement reported in this table was determined by adding the percentages of respondents who answered with a response of 4 = “agree” or 5 = “strongly agree.”
power between women and men in dentistry may be influenced by perceptions of power differentials between dentists and dental hygienists and assistants. These dentistry-specific considerations contribute to the more general historical situation of professional women in the United States.21

Medical vs. Dental Faculty Responses

When these dental faculty responses were compared with the responses of medical school faculty members from the surveys administered by Fried et al.7 and Foster et al.,9 comparable results were found:

• 30 percent of dental female faculty and 9.3 percent of dental male faculty supported the item “The work climate in my department and/or division is less supportive of female than of male faculty” (p=.000). This same trend was found in the medical school surveys by Fried et al. (women: 45.0 percent vs. men: 22.5 percent; p=.028) and Foster et al. (women: 37.5 percent vs. men: 7.5 percent; p<.001).

• Comparable trends were also found concerning the statement “Male faculty are more likely to be sought for collaborative research, given comparable scientific expertise.” We found that 45.1 percent of the female dental respondents as compared to 8.4 percent of male dental respondents agreed with this statement (p=.000), whereas 59 percent women vs. 16 percent men (p=.001) in the survey conducted by Fried et al. and 67 percent women vs. 7 percent of men (p=.001) in the survey conducted by Foster et al. agreed.

• The statement “I have observed situations in which a faculty member has been denigrated based on gender” was supported by 41.3 percent of the female dental respondents as compared to 8.4 percent of male dental respondents agreed with this statement (p=.000), whereas 59 percent women vs. 16 percent men (p=.001) in the survey conducted by Fried et al. and 67 percent women vs. 7 percent of men (p=.001) in the survey conducted by Foster et al. agreed.

• The statement “I feel like a welcomed member of my dental school scientific community” was supported by 50.2 percent women vs. 73.8 percent men; p=.000; medical surveys: 57 percent women vs. 72 percent men; p=.003; and 38 percent women vs. 74 percent men; p=.001).

These comparisons between the faculty responses concerning the dental school vs. medical school environment demonstrate that a faculty member’s gender still plays a powerful role in both environments.

Sexual Harassment

The responses of dental faculty members to the questions in this survey dealing with harassment and the previous data reported by Carr et al.8 for medical school faculty showed that gender-specific harassment remains an issue in both environments. Both studies showed that, compared to men, female faculty members were more likely to experience and perceive gender-based discrimination and harassment in both academic settings:

• 33.3 percent of female dental faculty vs. 9.9 percent of male dental faculty and 77 percent of female medical faculty vs. 30 percent of male medical faculty agreed with the statement “Gender-specific biases to career satisfaction are present in my academic environment.”

• In addition, 28.7 percent of female dental faculty respondents, but only 6.6 percent of male dental faculty respondents indicated that they had experienced gender bias in professional advancement (p=.000), as compared to 60 percent of women vs. 9 percent of men in the medical profession.8

• In the dental survey, more female dental faculty than male dental faculty also felt that gender had given them an advantage in professional advancement (16.4 percent and 6.5 percent; p=.000). It is interesting that even more female medical faculty as compared to male medical faculty had agreed with this statement (31 percent vs. 11 percent; p<.001).8

• However, almost one-third of the female dental faculty respondents (32.7 percent) reported having been sexually harassed by a superior or colleague compared with only 3.4 percent of male
dental faculty (\(p=0.000\)), and more than one-half of the female medical faculty (52 percent) reported sexual harassment by a superior or colleague compared with only 5 percent of the male medical faculty respondents (\(p=0.001\)).

When the effects of age and faculty status/rank on workplace perceptions were explored, an interesting pattern emerged. The data showed that older male respondents felt more welcome than younger male respondents, while women of all ages felt less welcome than their male colleagues and felt that the environment was less supportive of women than their male colleagues. These data suggest that it will take supportive and active leadership such as was the case at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology to create the conditions conducive to change women faculty members’ perceptions of the environment and the degree to which they are welcome and integrated as fully accepted colleagues.

Conclusions

The results of this survey showed that, compared to male faculty, female dental faculty reported:

• having fewer resources such as office space, secretarial support, protected time for research, and lab space;
• feeling less welcome and perceiving the environment as being less inclusive of them; and
• experiencing more gender bias and sexual harassment.

These findings in the dental school setting are consistent with the results of surveys in U.S. medical schools showing that female faculty experience and perceive their work environments as more chilly than their male colleagues. In both environments, women faculty reported that they were likely to be the recipients of gender bias.

The increasing numbers of women in academic medicine and dentistry show that women are making progress in entering the academic workforce. However, the results of this survey showed that male and female faculty members still do not encounter comparable situations in their professional lives. Hostler and Gressard sum up the perception of the gender fairness issue: “The level of sexism at any institution can be a matter of perception. . . . it is well known that perceptions are not necessarily fact. It may be that inequities and sexism exist, but not necessarily at the level of severity that women perceive. It may also be that men perceive a level of gender fairness that is far above what really exists. Regardless, a significant difference in perceptions is problematic. . . . without a method of identifying such a magnitude of discrepancy, needed changes may go unrecognized or be slow in coming.” Acknowledging that the dental school climate is not gender blind can be a first step on the way to improving the work environment for all dental faculty members.

Given the fact that these findings are reported on an aggregate level, it might be easy for senior administrators in a given dental school to conclude that the findings reported here describe problems in all but their own school. However, administering these items in one’s own school and thus conducting a gender-specific cultural audit might be eye-opening for a given dental school leadership. A first recommendation based on these results to dental school leaders is therefore to explore the situation of female and male faculty in their own institutions in order to gain a better understanding of school-specific problems, develop strategies to remedy gender-biased situations, and create a dental workforce that is able to provide culturally sensitive care.

Given the crisis in the recruitment and retention of dental faculty members, it seems crucial to gain a better understanding of how to create a work environment in which both male and female faculty members feel welcome and supported. Creating such environments will create a more positive attitude toward work and hopefully will encourage more faculty to remain in the academic workforce. It will also ultimately provide the role models needed for dental students to encourage them to choose dental education careers and thus aid faculty recruitment in the future.

Acknowledgments

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