



Researchers Under Attack

A One-pager Overview Explaining Online and Hybrid Forms of Abuse

Intimidation and harassment of experts is a widespread problem, with nearly half of all US researchers reporting that they or someone they know has been targeted.

Intimidation and harassment come in many forms, from coordinated smear campaigns to abusive records requests. These attacks aim to discredit, delay, or end the researcher's work, inflicting reputational damage, discouraging researchers from sharing their ideas, and undermining trust in public scholarship.

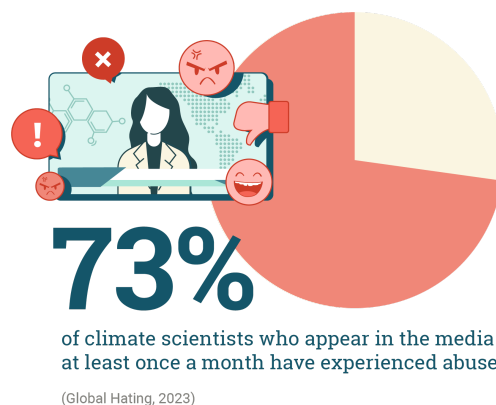
Who is affected?

Though researchers from all backgrounds and fields of study cite this abuse as a growing occupational hazard, women, sexual minorities, and racial minorities report being harassed at higher rates and receiving a greater share of harassment in the form of personal insults and threats of violence. Researchers who study topics that become contentious and those who regularly appear in the media are significantly more likely to experience online abuse.

What are the consequences?

Well-documented health effects resulting from being threatened, doxxed, or falsely maligned include anxiety, depression, sleeplessness, and social withdrawal. Harassment also takes a professional toll; affected researchers may stop publicizing their work, exercise self-censorship, or leave the profession altogether. The impact of online and hybrid abuse extends beyond the individual researcher, contributing to a breakdown of trust in expert knowledge and harming the quality of information and debate.

For researchers, coordinated intimidation and harassment is an occupational hazard. It is the important work that they do—the research they conduct—that places them at risk. We need to take action to support researchers. As champions of knowledge for public good, funders and institutions are positioned to lead the charge in supporting experts so that they can persist in their important work.



Overall confidence in the scientific community in the United States

