

# Undermining Behaviour and Bullying: Are These Issues Encountered by Medical Students as well as Doctors?

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# Background

- In 2014, 8% of doctors in training reported a personal experience of undermining behaviour and/or bullying, and 13.6% reported witnessing such events<sup>1</sup>
- Linked to detrimental effects on trainees' confidence, physical and mental health, and progression through training, as well as patient safety<sup>1</sup>
- Limited research exists relating to undermining behaviour and bullying toward medical students in the UK<sup>2,3</sup>
- It has been suggested that an “authority gradient” may exist, with individuals more likely to experience such behaviours the further down the medical hierarchy they are<sup>4,5</sup>

# Aim

To explore medical students' experiences of undermining behaviour and/or bullying whilst on their clinical placements

# Methods

- An online survey was distributed to all *clinical* medical students (years 3, 4 and 5)
- A combination of multiple choice questions and free-text boxes was used
- Participation was voluntary and all results anonymised
- Ethical approval was granted by University of Bristol ethics committee

# Results

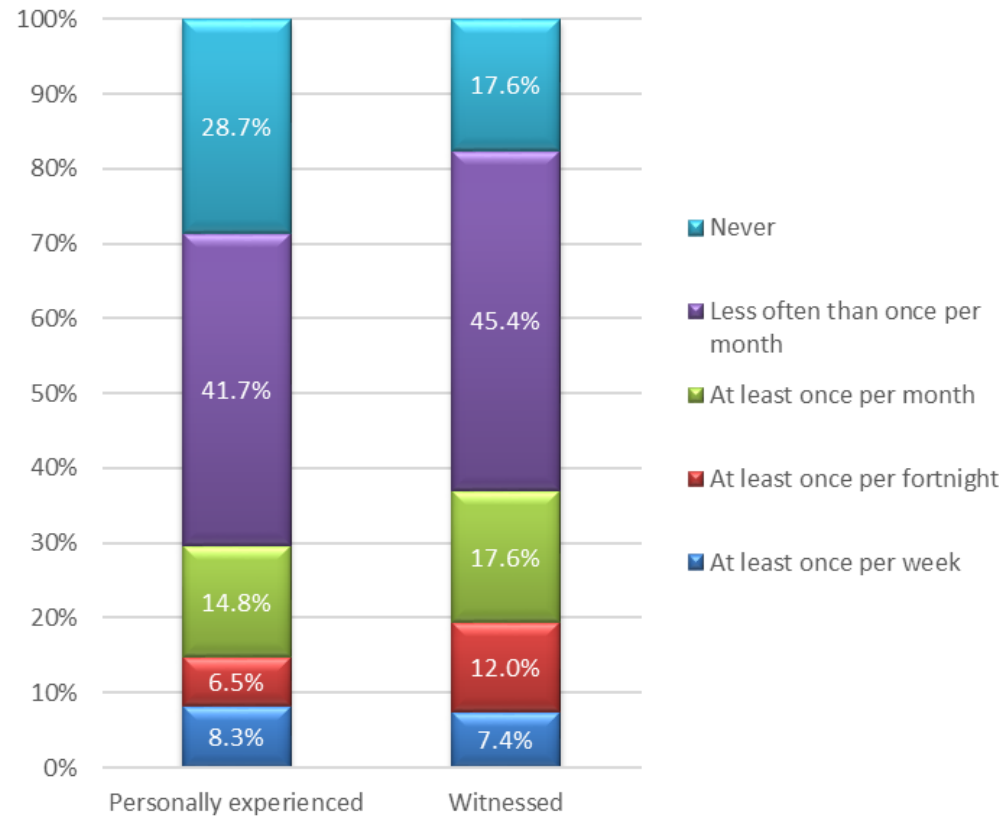
**108 survey responses**

3<sup>rd</sup> year: 44 students

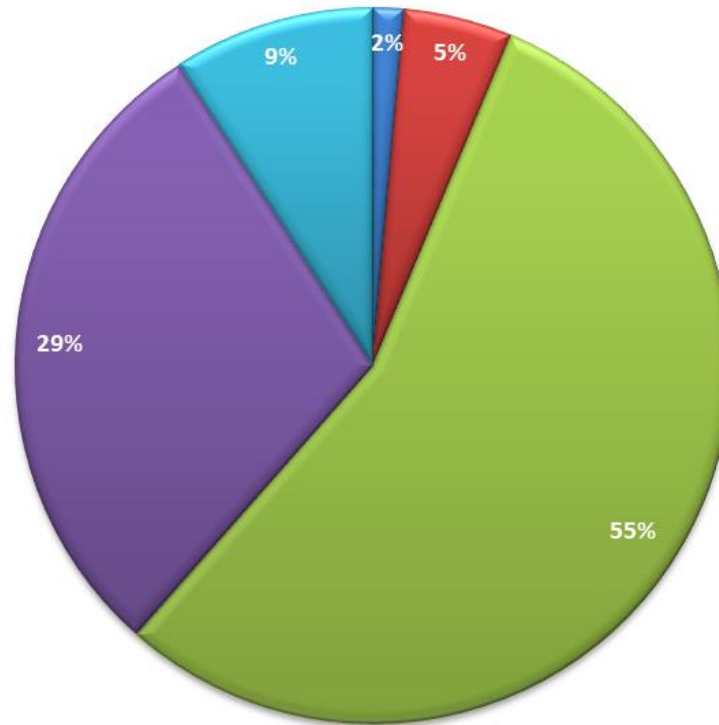
4<sup>th</sup> year: 41 students

5<sup>th</sup> year: 23 students

# Incidence

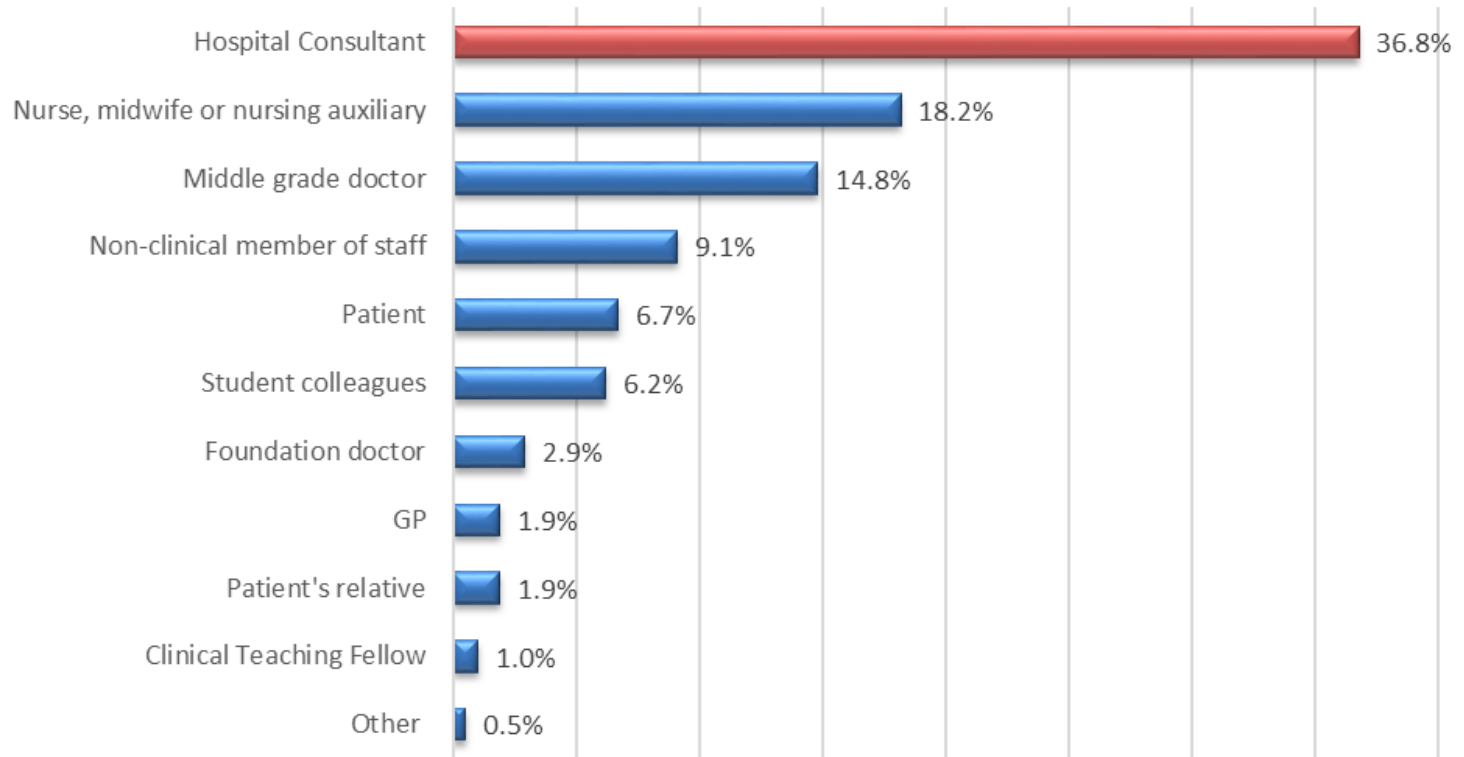


# Year of study



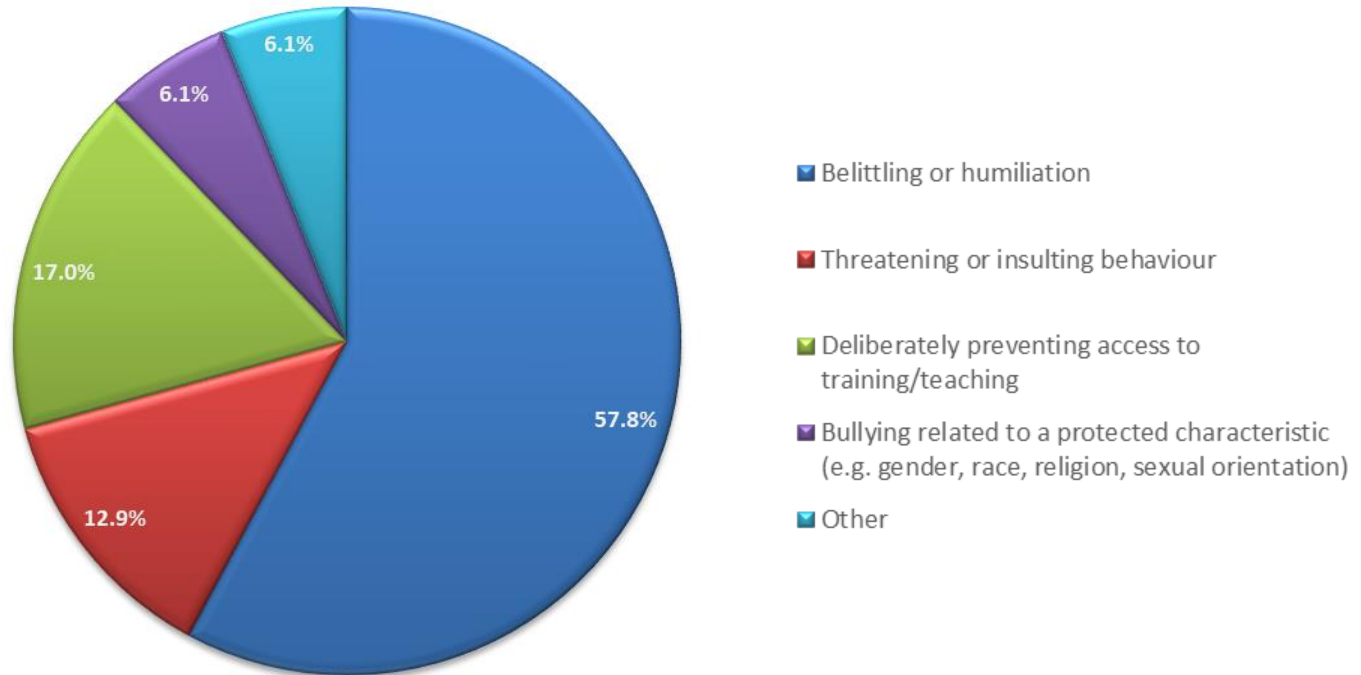
■ Year 1 ■ Year 2 ■ Year 3 ■ Year 4 ■ Year 5

# Perpetrator



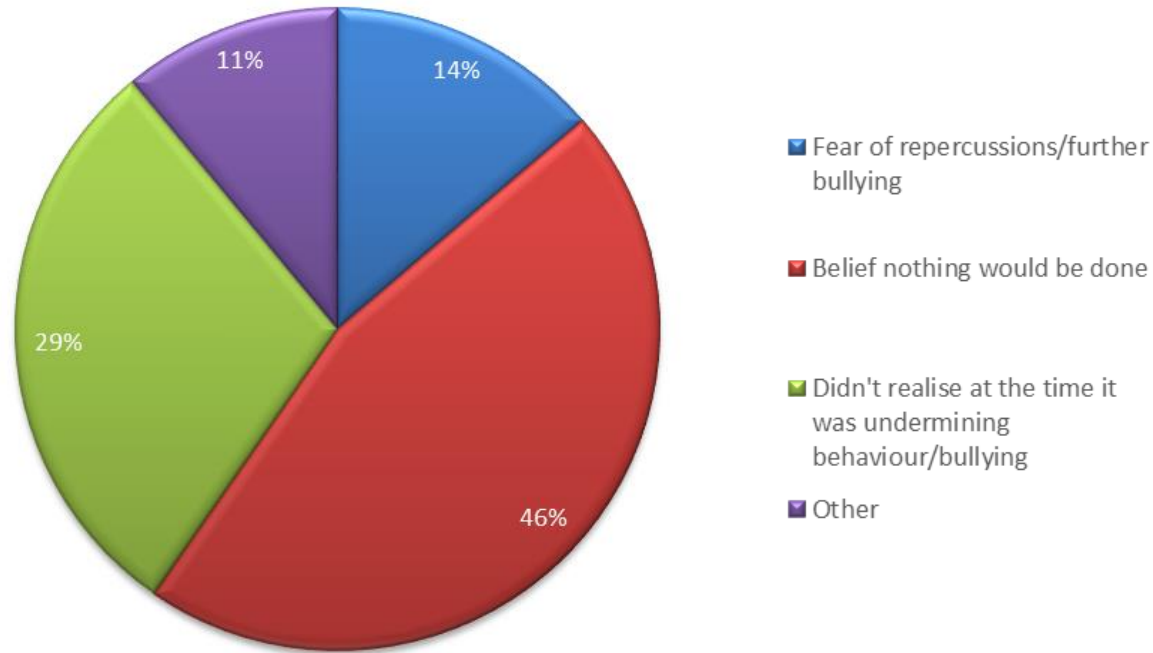


# Nature of incidents

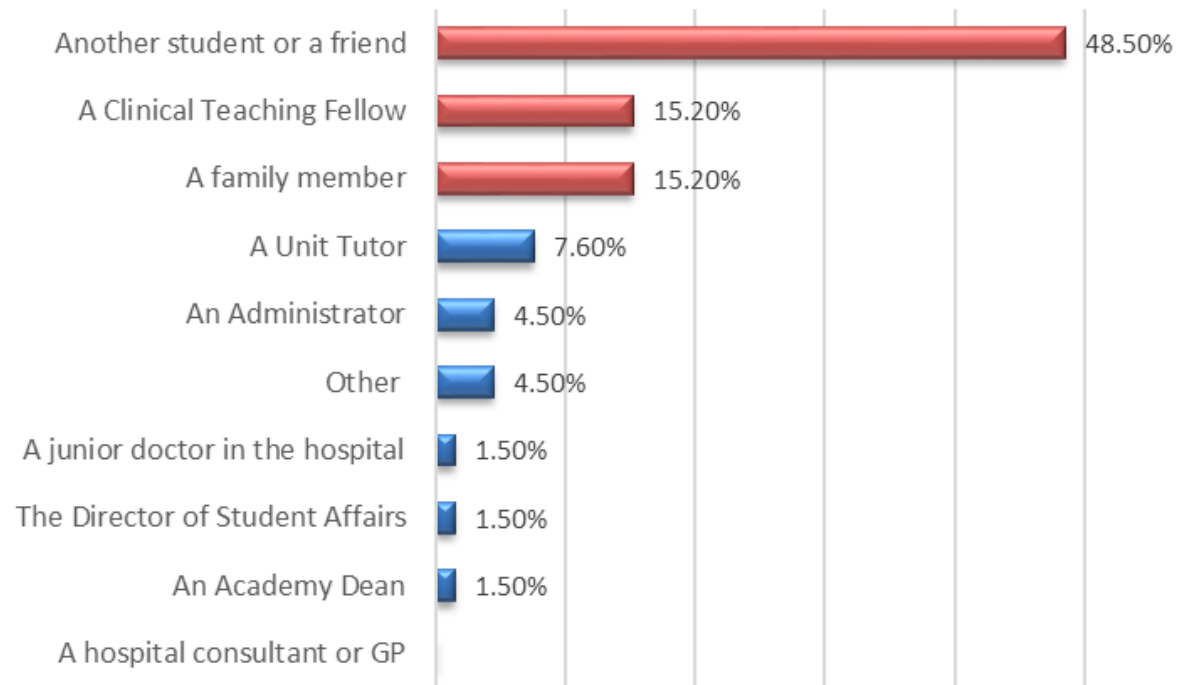


# Non-disclosure of incidents

**55% of students did not report** incidents of undermining behaviour/bullying

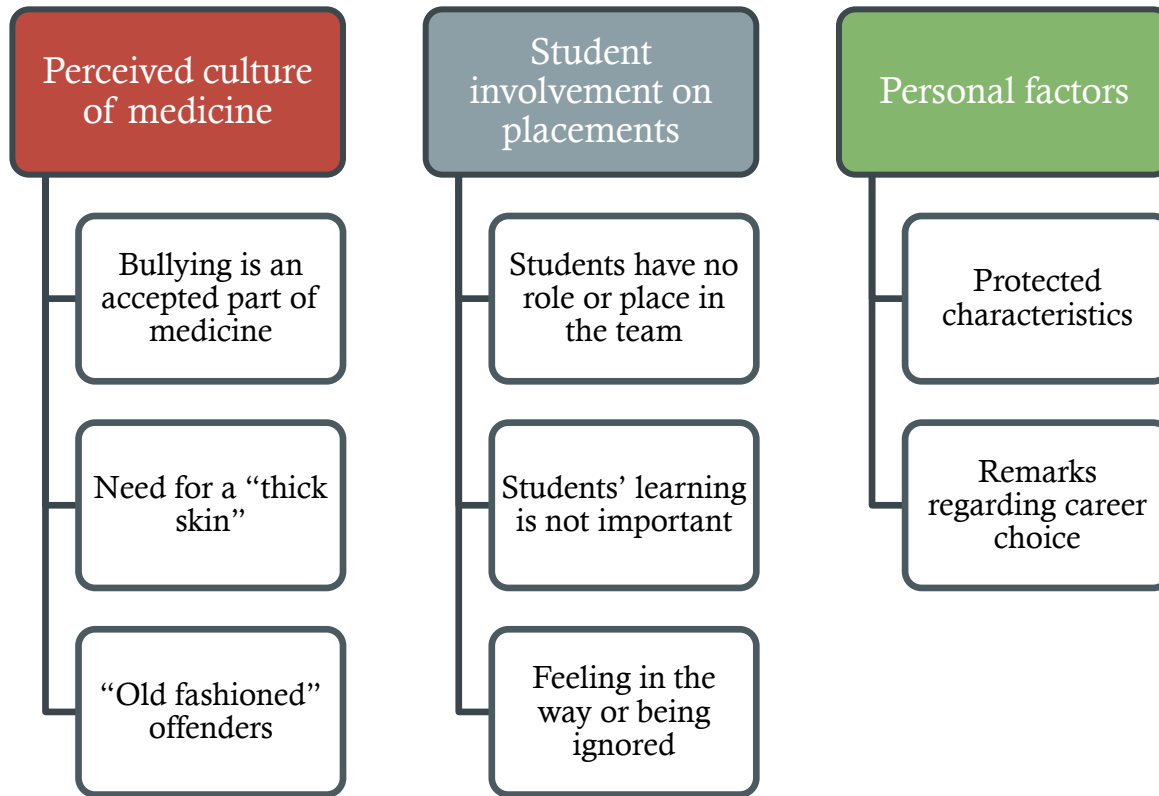


# Disclosure of incidents



# Results from thematic analysis

# Key themes



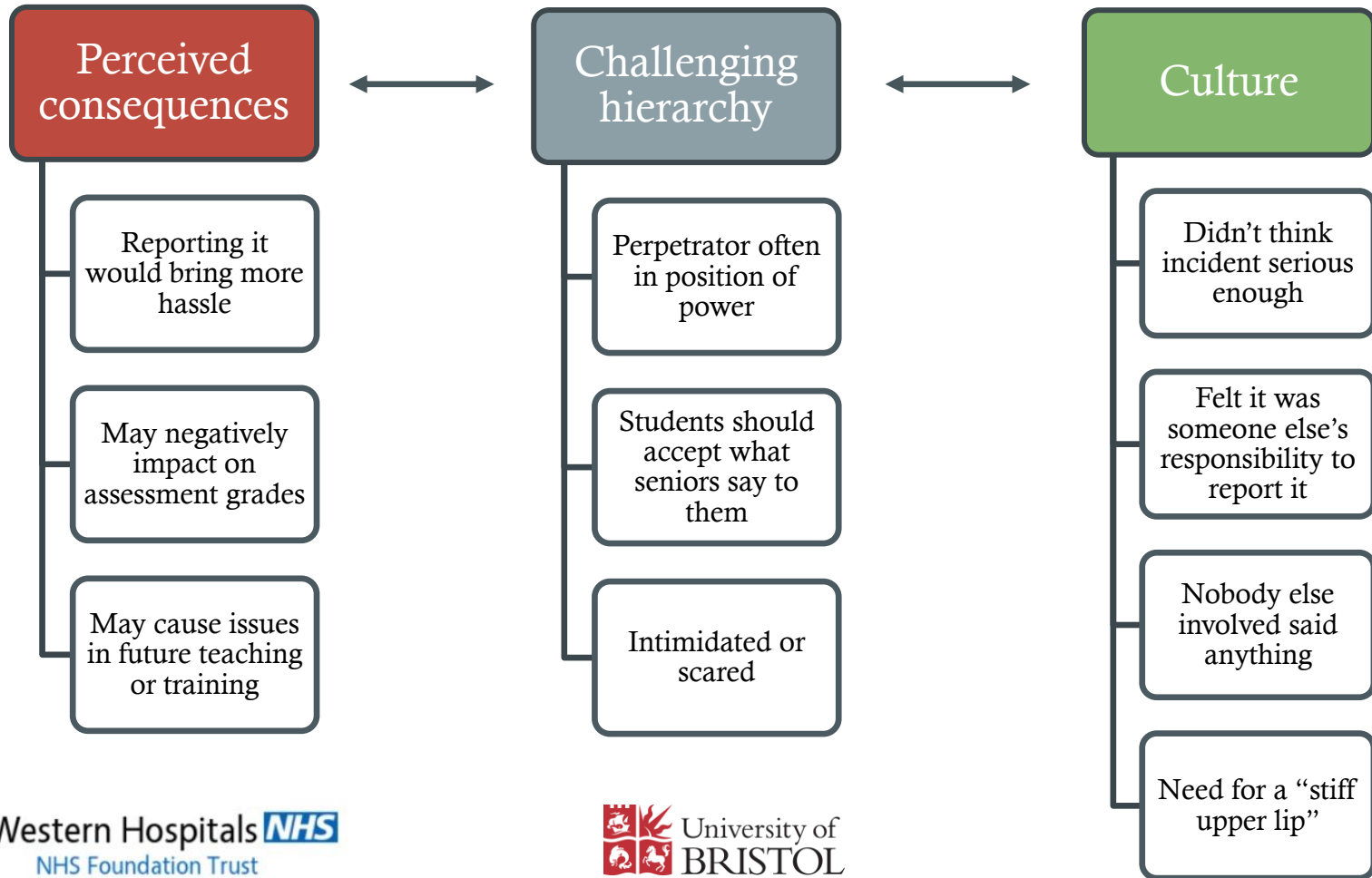
“...more like being **ignored** or made to feel very **in the way**. Just made to feel like your learning is the **lowest priority**.”

“...there is a **wider attitude of disdain** towards medical students in general. These can't be pinned down to specific incidents- more like **constant small things** which happen every day.”

“Having 100% attendance emphasised at the beginning of a block, then turning up on the wards and **having no-one expect you, and no role to perform**. I've found this to be a huge contrast to the allied health professions students, who are made to feel like a **functioning part of the team** to which they are attached.”



# Barriers to reporting undermining/bullying



“I was advised by another consultant/tutor not to report the event to the medical school, as it would **probably follow me around for years to come.**”

“Ashamed to admit I did not report blatantly sexist and inappropriate comments once I knew the consultant concerned was marking my portfolio”.

“...everyone just seemed to accept it was normal and not a big deal.”

# Discussion

- Undermining behaviour and bullying towards medical students is not uncommon
- The “authority gradient” seems to play a role
- Over half of events are not reported, with many reasons stated for this
- Our study is by no means perfect...but it provides food for thought

“There have been countless times where I and my fellow medical students have been **put down, shouted at, belittled and humiliated** in front of others and it’s just “one of those things”. I think it’s really sad to be honest and **I genuinely don’t think things will ever change**..... It’s a major factor which is putting me off wanting to practice as a doctor, I’m dreading August”.

What are your thoughts?

What can be done to improve things?



# Any Questions?

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# References

1. **General Medical Council (2014).** *National Training Survey 2014: bullying and undermining*. Available from: [http://www.gmc-uk.org/NTS\\_bullying\\_and\\_undermining\\_report\\_2014\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.gmc-uk.org/NTS_bullying_and_undermining_report_2014_FINAL.pdf) 58648010.pdf (accessed August 2018)
2. **Timm A. (2014).** 'It would not be tolerated in any other profession except medicine': survey reporting on undergraduates' exposure to bullying and harassment in their first placement year'. *BMJ Open*. 2014; 4 (7). Available from: doi:10.1136/bmjopen-2014-005140 (accessed August 2018)
3. **Rees CE and Monrouxe LV (2011).** "A morning since Eight of just pure grill": a multischool qualitative study of student abuse. *Academic Medicine* 2011; 86 (11): 1374 – 1382. Available from: [https://journals.lww.com/academicmedicine/Fulltext/2011/11000/ A Morning Since Eight of Just Pure Grill A.30.aspx](https://journals.lww.com/academicmedicine/Fulltext/2011/11000/A_Morning_Since_Eight_of_Just_Pure_Grill_A.30.aspx) (accessed August 2018)
4. **Cosby KS and Croskerry P (2004).** Profiles in patient safety: authority gradients in medical error. *Acad Emerg Med*. 2004; 11 (12): 1341-5. Available from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/15576526> (accessed August 2018)
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