The extreme results of bullying and toxic behaviors are seen on the news repeatedly, but what about the everyday experiences of professionals in the library field? This poster details the results of a 2018 survey of librarians asking about their experiences as a target, witness, or perpetrator of bullying or other toxic behaviors. Bullying behavior can be aggressive or passive-aggressive, blatant or subtle. The common thread is intention to harm another. The most common toxic behaviors witnessed or experienced by the 684 respondents were: passive-aggressive communication, gossiping, showing favoritism, and micromanagement. Respondents represented a variety of library types and sizes, and myriad positions and lengths of service.

PARTICIPANTS

There were 684 completed surveys representing a variety of library types and functional areas. Fifty-one surveys were excluded from the final analysis due to a lack of demographic information; other responses with partial demographic information were included in the study.

LIBRARIES & FUNCTIONAL AREAS REPRESENTED

Most respondents work in Public (49%) or Academic (34%) libraries and nearly half work in a small library with 20 or fewer employees. All functional areas of libraries were represented in the results, from approximately a quarter working in Technical Services including Systems to nearly half working in Information Services including Reference and/or Special Collections/Archives. The population served varied by library type.

PROCEDURES

The researchers reviewed recent literature in library science, social sciences, and management/human resources to identify toxic behaviors (Fox and Stallworth 2009; Henry et al. 2018). University provided templates were used to draft the consent form and email invitations. Institutional Review Board (IRB) exempt approval was gained from both researchers’ institutions in late December 2017 and early January 2018. Qualtrics via Wichita State University was used to administer the survey and collate the results. Invitations to participate in the survey were submitted to 79 library and archive-focused list-servs on January 24-25, 2018 with reminders sent on February 8th and February 14th. Additionally, the invitation was posted in February to two library specific Facebook groups, the Library Think Tank - ALATT and the Library Employee Support Network (LESN). The survey remained open until February 23, 2018. A total number of invitations received could not be determined due to the lack of detail on active membership on the list-servs.

FINDINGS

Top 10 Toxic Behaviors EXPERIENCED (6-10/month or more)

- Communicate Passive Aggressively 60%
- Gossip About Library Employees 45%
- Show Favoritism 44%
- Micro-manage 38%
- Display Hostile Nonverbal Communications 37%
- Misrepresent Personal Contributions 37%
- Withhold Important Information 37%
- Make Unreasonable Demands on Time 32%
- Isolate Someone from Other Library Employees 31%
- Make Inflammatory Jokes 29%

Top 10 Toxic Behaviors WITNESSED (6-10/month or more)

- Communicate Passive Aggressively 63%
- Gossip About Library Employees 45%
- Show Favoritism 50%
- Micro-manage 48%
- Display Hostile Nonverbal Communications 43%
- Dismiss Ideas Without Consideration 44%
- Misrepresent Personal Contributions 37%
- Make Unreasonable Demands on Time 35%
- Isolate Someone from Other Library Employees 31%
- Block Opportunities for Advancement 29%

Top 10 Toxic Behaviors PARTICIPATED (6-10/month or more)

- Gossip About Library Employees 26%
- Communicate Passive Aggressively 11%
- Display Hostile Nonverbal Communications 8%
- Show Favoritism 7%
- Micro-manage 5%
- Verbally Abuse 4%
- Dismiss Ideas Without Consideration 4%
- Isolate Someone from Other Library Employees 2%
- Make Unreasonable Demands on Time 2%
- Make Inflammatory Jokes 2%

CONCLUSIONS

As expected, respondents reported more cases of toxic behaviors experienced or witnessed than cases of participating in toxic behaviors. More than 82% of respondents reported “never” participating in 13 toxic behaviors. Bullying and other toxic behaviors are present in library workplaces. This survey of experiences and perceptions shows a broad picture view of current organizational culture in many libraries and suggests toxic behaviors are noticed by both targets and witnesses.