



Academic Freedom and Censorship in Biodiversity Conservation

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Introduction

- ✓ This project assessed the pressure and censorship faced by researchers working in biodiversity conservation.
- ✓ It looks at the concept of academic freedom and contributes to the global discourse on the integrity of knowledge production.
- ✓ Ensuring that global biodiversity conservation solutions are informed by comprehensive and unbiased science leads to more effective outcomes than those derived from selective or incomplete evidence.

Research Objectives

- ✓ To use anonymous surveying to gauge the extent of censorship in academic research.
- ✓ To create a platform for researchers to freely disclose their experiences, free from retribution.
- ✓ To get insight into why there is such a distinct lack of knowledge on the extent of this issue.



Research Question

How do censorship and restrictions on academic freedom affect research and knowledge production in biodiversity conservation?

Method

Research Design

Used mixed-method research design, combining quantitative and qualitative data through an anonymous survey. Combined the statistical breadth of quantitative data with the contextual depth of qualitative data.

Data Collection

The survey included 73 questions with the option to report multiple instances. Data was analysed by theme, such as types of constraints (illustrated in the table).

Data Analysis

Thematic coding enabled systematic, replicable analysis.

Result & Discussion

Starting Point

Precise definitions played a key role, as academic freedom is conceptually related to, but crucially distinct from phenomena such as bullying and harassment. We define academic and scientific freedom as the right to acquire, develop, and communicate knowledge.

Challenges Identified

Timely responses were difficult to secure, particularly as data collection occurred during the summer months, when many potential participants were absent. Engagement from NGOs and organisations, who are often central to defending the issue was limited, restricting access to key voices.

Key Results

From the first 138 survey responses:

- 50% said they experienced censorship
- 57% said it affected their willingness to conduct similar research in the future
- 69% discussed their treatment with people outside their project, whilst only 12% discussed it online
- 68% said no action was taken after their reporting

Constraint	% (n)
Self-censored - colleagues/institutions	18% (12)
Self-censored - funders/sponsors	21% (14)
Self-censored - governments/authorities	13% (9)
Forced to match desired outcome	18% (12)
Editors/publishers	7% (5)
Bureaucracy/administration	29% (20)
Blocked access to data/resources	16% (11)
Surveillance/monitoring	9% (6)
Informal pressures	12% (8)
Threats to career/funding	41% (28)
Threats of legal action	15% (10)
Threats of violence/intimidation	9% (6)
Other constraints	28% (19)

Recommendations

We hope that this work will inform and encourage future research to sustain dialogue on these issues, fostering greater transparency and developing institutional mechanisms to safeguard academic freedom.

References

Scholars at Risk | Protecting scholars and the freedom to think, question, and share ideas. 'Free to Think Report' 2024.

Academic freedom and the 1997 UNESCO Recommendation