WORKPLACE BULLYING IN AUSTRALIA: A REVIEW OF CURRENT CONCEPTUALISATIONS AND EXISTING RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT

This review paper considers the increasing recognition that workplace bullying is attracting in the practitioner and academic literature. The paper defines workplace bullying as an abuse of power, and identifies coercive power as the main source on which bullies rely. The paper shows that bullying starts in childhood, where it is receiving considerable attention as a problem in schools, and has also been exposed in some Australian universities. It is becoming an issue in the Australian workplace, although stronger empirical support for this argument is still needed. The paper concludes with eleven specific recommendations to alleviate workplace bullying, with the most pressing being to implement legislation and organisational procedures under which victims of workplace bullying can seek redress.

INTRODUCTION

As one victim of workplace bullying has observed, 'to be either on the receiving end of bullying or to see bullying in action is a gut wrenching experience. To watch adults acting so irrationally and causing pain, discomfort and anger in people is distressing' (pers. comm., 1998). Staff may leave as a way of coping, because human resource management and senior management have ineffectively dealt with their complaints and comments. This may make the affected employee wonder whether the workplace bullying is all their fault and they may become disheartened with management. It is this sort of experience that prompted this review.

Workplace bullying is a form of harassment that is becoming recognised as a management problem for employers (Smith 1999). The increased recognition of workplace bullying has highlighted the need for employers to review or change their workplace policies, and grievance and mediation procedures. Such changes need to ensure that all employees are aware and educated that workplace bullying is a form of harassment and will not be accepted or tolerated. Trade unions are now agreeing that workplace bullying has become an important issue to be addressed. Some also assist bullied employees in taking any appropriate or necessary action (Cunningham 1995; Dean 1996; *HR Report* 1998; Overell 1995; Overell 1996; Parkin 1997;

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People Management 1995; *Public Sector Voice* 1997; *Queensland Nurse* 1998).

This review has six objectives as follows:

- to define workplace bullying;

- to examine the antecedents of workplace bullying;

- to examine how coercive power is involved in workplace bullying;

- to review existing research on workplace bullying;

- to investigate current Australian legislation and see how it encompasses workplace bullying; and

- to develop recommendations to alleviate workplace bullying.

Given their position of power, human resource practitioners and managers have the potential to introduce policies and procedures to ensure that workplace bullying is addressed. These polices and procedures should be established to support the complainant, investigate the issue, and resolve the situation to the complainant's satisfaction. Governments also have a responsibility to ensure legislation adequately covers workplace bullying. Until such procedures and legislation exist, workplace bullying will continue to be prevalent, with associated costs for victims, employers, insurers, and governments. Without effective action, bullies could be unintentionally rewarded for their behaviour and, if they are managers, for their particular management style.

INCREASED RECOGNITION OF THE PROBLEM

Workplace bullying is becoming recognised as an important problem in the workplace — thanks to research, investigation, publications, and presentations by authors, academics, journalists, associations, trade unions and governments. This section will briefly review these sources.

While much research and publication has been done on bullying in schools, workplace bullying is a relatively new area for research and publication (Adams 1992; Byrne 1994; Randall 1997; Rayner & Hoel 1997; Spurgeon 1997). Bullying behaviour and its effects can be similar, even if the victim is different in terms of age, gender, or position in the organisation (Sheehan & Wilkie in McCarthy et al. 1996).

Six different sources have been identified as contributing significantly to early research and awareness of bullying. They are firstly the BBC (*BBC Education* 1998; Rayner 1997; Byrne 1994) and second, Scandinavian research, which is said to be more advanced than that elsewhere (Rayner & Hoel 1997). Emily Bassman, an American psychologist is credited with connecting her research on bullying to the psychological literature, and especially to learning theory (Rayner & Hoel 1997). The fourth source is Randall (1997) who contributed to knowledge on adult workplace bullying from information gathered when adults responded to a helpline set up for child victims. In Australia, workplace bullying has become a recent topic for research. For, McCarthy et al. (1996, p. viii) became interested in bullying after seeing articles on 'the huge cost to the nation if victimisation in job restructuring were allowed to continue unchecked'. Finally, recent media coverage also gives the issue a higher profile in Australia (Smith 1999).

DEFINING WORKPLACE BULLYING

Several authors believe that no agreed definition for workplace bullying exists (Byrne 1994; Randall 1997; Rayner 1997; Rayner & Hoel 1997). Randall (1997, p. 3) suggests that '... adults have clear ideas about the subject ... it is sufficient to define it by listing the behaviours of bullying adults'. Randall (1997, p. 4 & p. 12) defines bullying as 'aggressive behaviour from the deliberate intent to cause physical or psychological distress to others'. Alternative organisational sources describe bullying as a form of degradation, humiliation, intimidation and unfavourable treatment (*Queensland Chamber of Commerce & Industry* 1998; *Queensland Working Women's Service* 1997).

Rayner (1997, pp. 199-200) felt 'there were clear parallels between workplace bullying and sexual harassment'. This was because there are '... quite major methodological problems which begin with definition'. Some researchers have used the sexual harassment parallel to define bullying. A study of Staffordshire University students came up with a similar problem when trying to define bullying (Rayner 1997). For this study, the researchers used the sexual harassment parallel. Some literature defined bullying from a legal perspective, while other literature dealt with it from the harassment perspective (Rayner & Hoel 1997). The harassment perspective includes sexual and racial harassment.

Work culture can define what workplace bullying is and what behaviours are acceptable (Einaissen et al. in Rayner & Hoel 1997). Work culture increases the opportunity for bullying when organisations undertake and continue restructuring programs (McCarthy et al. 1995). One of the reasons for this is that victims' opportunities to find alternative employment may be more limited when organisations are downsizing. A second reason is that downsizing creates added workload pressures, resulting in an environment where bullying is more likely (Smith 1999). That is, restructuring and job insecurity from restructuring can bring out bullying behaviours. McCarthy et al (1996) argued that job insecurity caused by regular and continued restructuring brings out the bully in managers and staff. Others view bullying as a tactic used in downsizing to force 'unwanted' employees to leave (Smith 1999).

Since workplace bullying has no clear definition, it was decided for this review to define workplace bullying as an abuse of coercive power by either individuals in the internal workplace or external clients. Because the power theme comes up in several descriptions of bullying (James 1997; Marano 1995b; McCarthy et al.; Spiers 1996), the power that bullies have over their victims is a significant aspect of this issue and will be considered next.

COERCIVE POWER AS THE PSYCHOLOGICAL BASIS FOR BULLYING

Bullying is seen as an abuse of the power relationship between the bully and the victim (Spiers 1996). The office playground can be compared with the school playground. In the office playground, '... power is the chief perk in most companies ... offices can bring out the bully in people' (Marano 1995b, p. 58). In describing the A to G management styles, James (1997, p. 86) felt bullying managers 'thrived in the downsizing of the 1990s. They enjoy power for its own sake'. McCarthy et al. (1996) reached the same conclusion.

What then is power? Power is the ability to influence a person to do something you want done, or the ability to make things happen the way you want them to happen (Bailey 1991; Campbell

1997; Helriegel et al. 1992; Mosley et al. 1996; Parry 1996).

It is interesting that Doyle (1995, pp. 8-9) sees power as real or perceived. 'Harassment is about power, real or perceived and it is used to make people do things they do not have to, or stop people doing things they are entitled to do'. This perception comes from both parties. The bully thinks they have power to continue inappropriate behaviour. The victim perceives the bully as having the power to make them feel inadequate and intimidated.

Of the five sources of power (reward, coercive, legitimate, expert, and reference) (French & Raven in Helriegel et al. 1992), it appears that coercive power is the main one that bullies use. With coercive power, an individual uses their ability to influence other's behaviour by means of punishment for undesirable behaviour (Helriegel et al. 1992; Robbins et al. 1998; Schermerhorn 1989). Workplace bullying is therefore defined as that which involves the inappropriate use of coercion. Some forms of bullying also manifest from legitimate or expert power (McCarthy, Sheehan & Kearns 1995). Examples of such behaviour include verbal reprimands or abuse, allocation of undesirable work duties, and tighter and closer supervision (Smith 1999). These types of behaviours are seen by the victim as inappropriate.

An interesting suggestion by Galbraith (in Campbell 1997) is that an individual's pre-conditioning arises as a source of power. Learned behaviour from family life or schooling could have conditioned the bully to behave this way. Some of the research suggests that bullying starts in the home, continues at school and/or university, becomes an issue at work, and has a major impact when the individual starts his or her own family. These points will be elaborated in the next three sections.

SCHOOL BULLYING AS A PRECURSOR TO ADULT BULLYING

Children, especially males, 'confront deeply conflicting messages about their identities' (Douglas 1997, p. 17). These messages come from the media, family, movies, sports coaches, and peers. They portray images of it being good to hit and that hitting should be hard. Maslen (1994) supports this argument, indicating that children bring more than just their school books to school. They also bring their parents' baggage and television-instilled beliefs. Their parents' past also accompanies them during their life. Parents think their children should be able to defend themselves by being able to stand up for themselves, fight back, not get pushed around by people, or bullied by others (Ladd 1995). It has been suggested that bullying is a given of childhood, a passing stage, one inhabited largely by 'boys being boys' (Marano 1995a).

Research on school bullying has increased over the past ten years. Of relevance to this review is that researchers have found links between childhood bullying and workplace bullying, self-esteem, confidence, violent behaviours and aggression (Payne 1995; Smith & Madsen 1996; Tritt & Duncan 1997). In parallel with this increase in research on school bullying, research on workplace bullying has also steadily gained in volume.

Bullying in schools has been well researched. Rayner and Hoel (1997) found the definition revolves around several descriptive factors such as frequency, unbalanced power, and intent. As in harassment, bullying in schools can be both indirect and direct (Rayner & Hoel 1997). Studies have found that fifteen to twenty percent of children are involved in bullying more than once or twice a term either as bullies or victims (Marano 1995a). Studies have also found bullies have a

different makeup to others. One study has shown that bullies have a unique cognitive makeup compared to others which includes a hostile attributional bias, and elements of paranoia (Marano 1995a). This paranoia leads them to justifying their aggressive behaviour.

Their aggressive behaviour leads them to be unable to relate to others, understand others' feelings or comprehend the anxiety they cause (Marano 1995a). Researchers have found that bullies can demonstrate their power or authority by setting out to select the 'perfect victim' — smaller, younger, different looking, or weaker individuals. These victims may be unable to defend themselves against the bully (Marano 1995a; Maslen 1994).

While much research has concentrated on boys being bullies, it has been recognised that girls are just as capable of bullying. The difference is the way they go about it. Boys will use physical aggression and verbal aggression while girls tend to use manipulation to hurt and harm others (Marano 1995a). Violence amongst girls is on the rise in Australian schools (Maslen 1994). Research in Australian schools found up to one in seven students (or up to one in four in some schools) reported being bullied at least once a week (Maslen 1994; Rigby 1998). This incidence was as high as that from overseas. Australian researchers are now looking into victims' health problems. It has been demonstrated that victims display evidence of poorer health, which continues in later life (Marano 1995b; Rigby 1998). Other research has found that both the bully and the victim suffer lifelong problems from this experience (Marano 1995a; Rigby 1998; Slee 1993; 1994).

FROM SCHOOL TO UNIVERSITY

Recent research suggests bullying in schools continues at university. Garner (1995) and O'Brien (1997) both looked at bullying in universities. The recently released report on the Australian Defence Force Academy (1998) shows the defence force is not immune from bullying either.

To elaborate on bullying in Australia's universities, reports include *Sex, Booze and Australian Universities* by O'Brien (1997) which examined life at St Andrew's College, Sydney University. This publication followed the release of *The First Stone — Some Questions about Sex and Power* by Garner (1995), which investigated life at Ormond College, University of Melbourne. Even the Australian Defence Force Academy has come under the spotlight as a result of the *Report of the Review into Policies and Practices to Deal with Sexual Harassment and Sexual Violence in the Australian Defence Force Academy* being released in June 1998. This report came about as a result of allegations of sexual harassment and violent acts within the Australian Defence Force and the Australian Defence Force Academy. The report emphasised the power and bullying senior cadets have over junior cadets (Garan 1998; Greene 1998, Wright & MacDonald 1998).

… AND SO TO WORK

Research also suggests childhood bullies become adult bullies. Spouse abusers commit most of the aggressive and more serious crimes, have more drink-driving convictions and more court appearances, rely on more alcohol, make more use of the mental health services, have problems with long term relationships and suffer poor self esteem (Marano 1995a; Smith & Madsen 1996). This research suggests that if bullying continues in adult life, it will impact heavily on both work and social life for the bully. It will also affect the bully's employer and co-workers.

Workplace bullying occurs regularly and is costly for employers and employees. Reporting levels are slowly increasing (Smith 1999). In the United Kingdom, one in eight employees, responding to an Institute of Personnel and Development (IPD) study, agreed they had been bullied at work during the last five years (Luxton 1995). This compares with research done with students from Staffordshire University, where it was found that one in two of the students had been bullied at work (Rayner 1997). This research suggests that victims feel that workplace bullying is a common occurrence. Assuming that the IPD members were at a higher level in the organisation than the students, then bullying may occur less frequently at higher levels. This assertion would be consistent with the theory of power's role in bullying, since higher level positions have more legitimate power and, therefore, may be less vulnerable.

However, other evidence suggests that workplace bullying may not always be based on position or gender. King (1996) found victims of workplace bullying came from all levels, professions, and both genders. Other research does suggest that the majority of victims are female administrative staff (King 1996). For example, a Royal College of Nursing survey found female nurses were the main victims of workplace bullying (Cox 1997).

In the United Kingdom, thirty-eight percent of callers to a Trade Union Congress telephone hotline complained about workplace bullying (Overell 1998). Sixty-seven percent of 380 responses to the Royal College of Nursing survey said they had been victims of bullying (Cox 1997). Of those who believe they are victims of workplace bullying, only one in three will raise it in the workplace (*People Management* 1996). Those who do not report workplace bullying believe it is not overt and, therefore, is difficult to prove (King 1996). In Australia, current estimates are that 350,000 employees are being systematically bullied (McCarthy, cited in Smith 1999).

COSTS ASSOCIATED WITH WORKPLACE BULLYING FOR EMPLOYERS AND EMPLOYEES

There are varying costs associated with workplace bullying. Some of these costs are financial, while others are psychological. Costs for both the employer and the employee will be considered here.

Employer costs include those from litigation, and organisation costs from staff turnover, long-term absences, potential workers' compensation claims, early retirement costs, and counselling program costs. As well as the direct and indirect financial expenses, there are behavioural costs associated with this problem (Smith 1999). These include such factors as poor morale, motivation and productivity; and higher turnover and absenteeism. There is also the potential for adverse organisational publicity arising from any legal action taken by employees.

Australian and overseas data confirm these employer-related costs. Over fifty million dollars was paid to two former Wal Mart employees as a result of litigation proceedings related to workplace bullying (*Wall Street Journal* 1995). However, to date there is little empirical evidence of the costs directly associated with bullying. Sources tend to view bullying as a subset of the causes of work stress, and use figures associated with work stress as an indicator of some of the likely costs of bullying. At present, the proportion that bullying contributes to stress is unknown, so these figures are indicative, not definitive. For example, because of stress related illnesses — some of which can be attributed to bullying — lost production in the United Kingdom costs between one

and two million pounds per year (Venning 1995). Whitehead (1996) puts the economic costs due to stress on taxpayers, in the United Kingdom, at four billion pounds annually. Toohey (1992), while investigating trends in Comcare stress claims in Australia, found there was a strong relationship between workplace bullying and stress related claims.

Workplace bullying has psychological health effects and costs for the victims. These effects include: feelings of helplessness and isolation, withdrawal, fear of being labelled as a troublemaker, fear of dismissal or loss of job promotion opportunities, fear of being transferred to dead-end or mundane jobs, anxiety, feelings of self-blame, suicide, stress, nervous breakdown, depression, loss of appetite, eating disorders, reliance on medication, increased drinking, smoking, insomnia, fatigue, lack of concentration, headaches, nausea, backaches, stomach aches, infections and other illnesses, ill health or early retirement due to stress related illness, low morale, low self-esteem, poor job performance, absenteeism, physical violence to others, and additional impacts on victims' family life and relationships (Alderman 1997; Beasley & Rayner 1997; Hindell 1997; MacLeod 1996; Mendelson 1990; Overell 1995; *Queensland Nurse* 1998; Spiers 1996).

Such wide-ranging costs are detrimental to the efficient running of organisations. If a significant proportion of this stress arises from bullying, employers should have appropriate systems, procedures and policies to ensure workplace bullying is not tolerated.

BRIEF EXPLORATORY STUDY TO SUPPLEMENT THIS REVIEW

A brief exploratory questionnaire was administered in one workplace to supplement this review. The results were consistent with much of what other researchers have previously found. This included the fact that the culture of the organisation encouraged workplace bullying by indoctrinating new employees with the mentality that this was acceptable or a 'fact of life'. As indicated in previous research, the bully was seen as being insecure, and feeling threatened by the victims because the victims were young, educated, articulate, and did not agree with the bully's view on life.

Another issue identified in the exploratory study was inaction by management and human resource management once the bullying situation had been reported. Some facilitation did occur, but nothing clearly changed to the victims' satisfaction. Some staff stayed because the bully was forced to leave the organisation for other reasons. Others left the organisation vowing never to go back. Leaving the organisation was the one way they were able to change the situation. Respondents felt little was done because of the seniority of the bully and the inadequacy of internal grievance procedures.

The health and relationships of the respondents were affected by workplace bullying. Respondents had trouble sleeping, felt stressed, required time off work, were depressed, felt abused, 'had a good cry', and family and friends were burdened with their problems and concerns. These effects are similar to some of the costs identified by other researchers as noted above.

It can be seen from this brief study in one workplace that the findings support much of the research already done on workplace bullying. More extensive empirical research on the nature and prevalence of bullying in Australian workplaces is clearly required.

ACTION THAT CAN BE TAKEN UNDER EXISTING LEGISLATION

While there are appropriate International Labor Organisation conventions for sexual harassment, anti-discrimination, workplace health and safety, and industrial relation issues, there is little evidence to suggest suitable legislation exists worldwide on workplace bullying.

In addition, workplace bullying is not effectively addressed under current Australian legislation. Do victims have any avenues of redress? Although sexual harassment or discrimination are viewed as sub-sets of workplace bullying behaviour in this paper, the current legislation does not recognise this relationship. Instead, some attempts have been made to bring bullying cases against employers under existing harassment or discrimination legislation. If the bullying involves any element of sexual harassment or anti-discrimination as defined by the current legislation, then action may be taken *(Queensland Nurse* 1998*; Queensland Working Women's Service* 1997; *South Australian Working Women's Centre* 1998). However, proving cases of workplace bullying under the current legislation can be difficult. The legislation clearly sets out the characteristics for lodging harassment or discrimination cases. However, bullying is not covered under these categories, and therein lies the difficulty of proving workplace bullying allegations.

Under current state workplace health and safety legislation, employers have a duty of care to provide a safe work environment for employees, visitors, and contractors (*DETIR* 1995). This includes a workplace free of bullying and other forms of harassment (*DETIR* 1999). The *Queensland Nurse* (1998) reinforces the notion that workplace bullying may be a breach of the current state workplace health and safety legislation. Employers, as part of their duty of care, should encourage employees to report bullying. The problem is that the victim often lacks the self-confidence and self-esteem to lodge a complaint, may feel they have contributed to the bullying, may believe they are powerless to report the incident, and may fear job dismissal if they lodge a complaint (*Queensland Nurse* 1998; *Queensland Working Women's Service* 1997; *South Australian Working Women's Centre* 1998).

Despite these obstacles, there are isolated incidences where bullying has been addressed under current state workplace health and safety legislation. A recent Queensland case found the employer was vicariously liable for the manager's negligence. The employer failed to provide a safe system of work and the complainant was to be compensated for the illness that was exacerbated by the manager's conduct (*Australian Torts Reports* 1998). In another Queensland case, a council was found vicariously liable for the actions of one supervisor towards an employee. The council was also found to be in breach of its duty to provide its employees with a safe working environment, in breach of its contract of employment and in breach of the statutory duty imposed by the Queensland Workplace Health and Safety Act (Spry 1997).

Similarly, under current state industrial relations legislation there have been some relevant cases. Action has been taken at an industrial tribunal for the unfair dismissal of a teacher — who was dismissed without proper procedures — which was attributed to bullying (Dean 1996). A mining employee was found to have suffered a long history of bullying and of being the subject of false rumours (*Manufacturing Worker* 1997). Furthermore, one male employee was found to have been badly treated by his supervisor and then treated unfairly by on-site management (*HR Report* 1998). Another employee successfully made a stress-related claim in the Queensland Supreme Court. One of the causes of the stress was said to be receiving severe verbal abuse and being subjected to animosity at work (Jones 1999).

Unions, here in Australia and overseas, have presented arguments for the influence of workplace bullying in unfair dismissal or harassment cases before industrial tribunals (*Manufacturing Worker* 1997). Some United Kingdom unions have taken a proactive step by presenting anti-bullying codes of practice at the Trade Union Congress (*The Guardian* 1995, p. 2) or lobbying government to introduce suitable legislation (*HR Report* 1998; Overell 1995). Union journals have started to highlight workplace bullying by defining it and suggesting appropriate action (*Public Sector Voice* 1997; *The Queensland Nurse* 1998).

Unions are also pressuring government to ensure legislation covers workplace bullying (Parkin 1997; *HR Report* 1998). They are able to assist members with advice and representation at work or before industrial tribunals. In the United Kingdom, the Management, Science and Finance Union proposed a bill to make bullying at work a crime (Overell 1995; 1996). The British National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers assisted two of its members with an industrial compensation case, as a result of extensive bullying by their head teachers (Dean 1996). As well as unions, specialised bullying associations are pressuring governments to recognise workplace bullying within the courts (Hilpern 1996).

Unions have found that managers have bullied their members over issues. Management has been accused by unions of intimidating staff, making staff work long hours of overtime, threatening workplace raids, using excessive surveillance, threatening employees who are active union members or show an interest in the union, and manipulating employees (*Globe and Mail* 1997; *Interpress Service* 1998; *New York Times* 1997).

In summary, the current legislation does not fully recognise workplace bullying. Action has been taken to put workplace bullying on the political agenda by unions and various associations. Until legislation is changed to make workplace bullying illegal, the costs associated with it will continue to rise, governments will be pressured to implement changes, and unions will be called on to assist members at work and before industrial tribunals.

NEW ACTION BEING TAKEN BY ORGANISATIONS

Some organisations have acknowledged the existence of workplace bullying and done something about it. The Midland Bank in the United Kingdom has set up a program to investigate and report on allegations of intimidation, bullying and physical violence (Crabb 1995). This organisation is one of the few to have implemented a program to tackle workplace bullying.

Programs have been developed to increase awareness and educate a broader range of people about workplace bullying. BBC 2 put together a two-part program on workplace bullying (*People Management* 1997a). Videos have also been released to educate people about this issue (*People Management* 1997b). Some use case studies or information about workplace procedures and policies to relay the importance of alleviating bullying. Printed publications are also available to inform people about how to address and manage bullying, investigate it and establish policies and procedures in the workplace (*People Management* 1997a).

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations have been developed for legislators and employers as a consequence of this review. It is recommended that:

- anti-discrimination, sexual harassment, workplace health and safety, and industrial relations legislation be reviewed to determine whether it is appropriate for them to recognise the existence of workplace bullying, and whether the procedures required for legal action need to be documented within this legislation. Alternatively, separate legislation addressing workplace bullying may be required;

- private and public sector organisations of all sizes develop codes of conduct, and educate managers and employees on suitable workplace behaviours. Such behaviours should include problem solving methods for addressing cases of workplace bullying, as well as mediation techniques;

- appropriate procedures be established to report and investigate allegations of workplace bullying;

- human resource practitioners be educated in investigation processes to ensure workplace bullying allegations are looked into correctly;

- grievance procedures be established for employees to use should the victim be unhappy with the results of the investigation. Information about these grievance procedures needs to be made available to the bully and the victim;

- work cultures of private and public sector organisations should be reviewed to see if they are contributing to workplace bullying;

- employees have access to employee assistance programs or similar services to discuss workplace bullying issues with independent professionals;

- long term absences from work be monitored to identify any stress-related absence due to workplace bullying;

- rehabilitation co-ordinators assist where appropriate in monitoring workers compensation claims and incapacity claims for stress related illnesses, to ensure workplace bullying is not contributing to these claims;

- suitable reporting mechanisms be established between human resource departments and senior management to report on workplace bullying; and

- senior management actively support the introduction of procedures, policies and practices to alleviate workplace bullying.

CONCLUSIONS

Workplace bullying has become an issue of concern for human resource practitioners, management, employees, governments, and unions. Existing research undertaken on bullying suggests it takes place regularly within the workplace. Victims though, are apprehensive to report workplace bullying because of the difficulty in proving it under current legislation and workplace procedures. More qualitative and longitudinal research needs to be carried out to establish the nature and the extent of the effects of workplace bullying in Australian organisations. Also, further research into the effectiveness of any new policy and legislation aimed at reducing the incidence and severity of bullying would be beneficial.

Since existing research highlights the seriousness of workplace bullying, action needs to be taken by all parties concerned to ensure workplace bullying is adequately addressed in workplaces, policies and procedures, and by legislation. Until these changes are made, workplace bullying will continue to be a costly problem for employers and employees. Research also shows it to be necessary to have bullying education in schools and universities as a proactive means of preventing workplace bullying. Until action is taken to stop children from being bullies, adults will continue to use such tactics.

Recommendations have been developed here as a step towards preventing workplace bullying. It is hoped human resource practitioners and governments will consider introducing changes to legislation, policies, and procedures to ensure that workplace bullying is seriously addressed.

INSTRUCTIONAL COMMENTARY

1   What are the main points that the authors make about the sources, antecedents, and prevalence of workplace bullying?
2   In your experience, how extensive do you think workplace bullying is? What have you seen or experienced? How does this experience fit with the authors' description?

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