

Workplace Bullying: Nature, Consequences, and Recommended Policies

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This paper examines workplace bullying, the repeated, harmful mistreatment of an employee by other employee(s). Extensive research on workplace bullying has generated overwhelming evidence to support a long list of qualitative conclusions that challenge most traditional assumptions. Institutional responses to workplace bullying, which tend to be guided by these traditional assumptions, typically intensify the problem and often trigger the loss of high-quality employees. The research identifies a set of policies and procedures that offers greater likelihood of success. Key recommendations include establishing a workplace culture of mutual respect, holding leaders accountable for promoting that culture, and educating the workforce.

INTRODUCTION

Workplace bullying, the repeated, harmful mistreatment of an employee by one or more employees (Workplace Bullying Institute, 2021), is a perennial challenge for organizations. Managers and human resource personnel typically confront requests for protection from both perpetrator and target, each bolstered by a plethora of ugly claims and counterclaims (Gunsalus, 2006). Their responses are naturally guided by traditional assumptions that confuse workplace bullying with a personality clash or strong leadership (Tim Field Foundation, 2021a) and devalue targets who do not just shrug it off (Ferris, 2004). Most commonly the problem is ignored or the target faces adverse consequences (Rayner, 2003; Namie and Namie, 2009). Unfortunately, these responses typically intensify the problem and often trigger the loss of high-quality employees (Field, 1996).

Fortunately, better approaches to addressing workplace bullying have been identified through the worldwide efforts of social scientists and expert practitioners. This paper summarizes a long list of qualitative conclusions about workplace bullying itself and the appropriate policies for addressing it that are supported by overwhelming evidence: they hold for every occupation, industry, and country studied to date. The paper also highlights cutting-edge findings and a few topics that are still under debate.

Critically, all of this research challenges traditional assumptions about workplace bullying. The defining feature of workplace bullying, typically assumed to be intensity, proves to be persistence –intensity is neither necessary nor sufficient (Einarsen et al., 2009). Rather than a personality clash, workplace bullying turns out to be an abuse of power (Namie and Namie, 2011). Most workplace bullying cannot be shrugged off: once entrenched, it damages the health and professional success for essentially all targets, regardless of coping strategy (Reknes et al., 2016; Leymann and Gustafsson, 1996; Matthiesen and Einarsen, 2004; Tehrani, 2004). Workplace bullying is not just an irritation to the institution (Namie, 2014a); instead, “bullying is bad management at its absolute worst – and it represents a real risk to your

organization if left unchecked” (Society for Human Resource Management, 2021). Workplace bullying depresses productivity and creativity (Pearson and Porath, 2005); reduces employee trust and commitment (Dirks et al., 2001); and increases outright costs for healthcare, turnover, absenteeism, and lawsuits (Rospenda, 2002; Berthelsen et al., 2011; Porath and Pearson, 2010; Thorpe, 2001). For U.S. businesses the costs of turnover alone are comparable to the cost of cyberattacks (Korn/Ferry International and Level Playing Field, 2007; President’s Council of Economic Advisors, 2018). Overall, this body of research introduces profound new insights that can help institutions address a perennial and costly challenge, thereby demonstrating the value of rigorous inquiry.

By 1993 the costs of workplace bullying were sufficiently well-documented that Sweden prohibited such behavior by law and required employers to implement appropriate policies and procedures (Hoel and Einarsen, 2010). Most other high-income countries and some middle-income countries have passed similar legislation, though the U.S. is not among them (Table 1). The insurance industry now considers workplace bullying to be a source of business risk (e.g., Query and Hanley, 2010).

Based on this research, academics and practitioner experts have developed a strong consensus with regard to recommended policies and procedures to protect targets and institutions from workplace bullying (e.g., Pearson and Porath, 2005; Namie and Namie, 2011; Daniel and Metcalf, 2016). These experts stress prevention via a culture of mutual respect promoted by senior leadership. This, in turn, requires a code of conduct that is explicit and enforced, education and bystander training for employees, training and accountability for leaders, and screening for toxicity at the hiring stage. Experts also consistently recommend that institutions provide multiple low-key as well as formal approaches for addressing workplace bullying grievances. Finally, individuals assigned to respond should have clear, unmixed incentives to protect employee health and safety (Guest and Woodrow, 2012).

To be clear, this paper is a review of existing expert findings, not a source of original empirical results or original theories. It synthesizes over 100 hundred rigorous studies to provide a detailed portrait of workplace bullying and its consequences. These studies are published in journals including *Academy of Management Journal*, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *Journal of Business Ethics*, *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, *The Leadership Quarterly*, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*. Unusually, this review also presents common recommended policies for preventing workplace bullying and handling grievances from academic specialists, expert consultants, and organizations that oversee workplace safety. Their suggestions have been published in practitioner-oriented journals such as the *Harvard Business Review* (e.g., Porath and Pearson, 2005); in books by practitioner-experts such as Field (1996), Namie and Namie (2011), or Daniel and Metcalf (2016); or as online resources from institutions that serve employers such as Worksafe New Zealand (2017c).

DEFINITIONS, PATTERNS, PREVALENCE

Most formal definitions of workplace bullying share a set of critical features. The definition that follows adopts these shared features plus the most common words, and phrases from thirty legal definitions (see Table 1):

Workplace bullying is a persistent pattern of unwelcome conduct that a reasonable person in the same circumstances would consider unreasonable. It includes behavior that is belittling, intimidating, humiliating, offending, or disempowering. The behavior must have the cumulative purpose or effect of harming an employee’s health, reputation, career success, or ability to perform.

This definition incorporates six critical features.

1. The requirement of persistence. This directs attention away from angry outbursts or other high-intensity aggression. It communicates, instead, that workplace bullying is a long sequence of low-intensity degradation that progressively strips a person of their dignity and self-worth. The

- average duration of bullying by one individual exceeds two years, and when targets are mobbed the duration exceeds four years (Zapf and Gross, 2001).
2. The absence of any requirement of intent. This is critical for enforcement, because many bullies are unaware that their conduct is offensive and others will not admit intent regardless (Namie, 2013).
 3. & 4. The “reasonable person” standard of judgment and the requirement that the behavior has the “purpose or effect” of harm. This pair is often replaced with by the requirement that the person knew or could have known that their behavior was likely to cause harm.
 5. The one-sided nature of abuse. The definition distinguishes bullying from conflict. The latter “may be seen as inherent in social interaction, whereas bullying must be seen as deviant and unacceptable behavior, never to be minimalized or normalized” (Einarsen and Matthiesen, 2010, pp. 211-212). The one-sided nature of bullying is reflected in its many labels: workplace aggression (Keashly, 2010), workplace harassment (Björkqvist et al., 1994), generalized workplace harassment (Rospenda and Richman, 2004); emotional abuse (Keashly, 1998) sub-lethal, non-physical violence (Namie, 2003a), psychological violence, and psychological terror (Leymann, 1996, p. 165).
 6. The absence of any justification for such harmful behavior. This communicates that abuse cannot be justified by dissatisfaction with an employee.

TABLE 1
COMMON STRUCTURE AND CONTENT OF LEGAL DEFINITIONS OF
WORKPLACE BULLYING

Feature	Percent of 30 definitions	Text in legal definitions
Identified as harassment	67%	
Stress persistence	77%	Persistent , repeated, consistent, systematic, recurrent, pattern continued over a period,
Broad characterization	97%	Unwelcome, Unwanted, Offensive, Objectionable, Unreasonable, Inappropriate Vexatious, Abusive, Hostile, Improper Use of Authority, Derogatory, Negative, Reprehensible
Standard of judgment	37%	Known or ought reasonably to know Reasonable person standard
Provide more specificity	97% Average number of verbs: 4.5	By category: 1. Humiliate , Embarrass 2. Belittle , Condescend, Demean, Insult, Degrade 3. Intimidate , Threaten 4. Offend , Victimize 5. Violates dignity or personal integrity
No requirement of intent	97%	
Protects respondents by specifying risk or reality of harm	33%	Constitutes threat to health and safety Adversely affects worker’s health Endangers job, undermines performance ... Make workplace harmful

Table highlights the most common features in the 30 legal definitions discovered over a multi-day online search. Jurisdictions: Alberta, Australia, Belgium, British Columbia, Colombia, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Manitoba, Netherlands, New Brunswick, New Zealand, Newfoundland, Norway, Nova Scotia, Ontario, Poland, Quebec, Saskatchewan, Singapore, Slovenia, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, UK. Most common individual words highlighted in **bold**.

Canada, Germany, Denmark, and a number of other high-income countries define workplace bullying as a subcategory of harassment, all of which is outlawed. These countries define harassment itself to include any misconduct motivated by a target's membership in protected classes defined by race, gender, age, etc., such as sexual harassment or age discrimination. In the U.S. by contrast, workplace bullying is not legally defined as a form of harassment and only harassment is outlawed at the federal level or at the state level with the exception of Puerto Rico (Alvarez-Sanchez et al., 2020). Existing prohibitions, such as those prohibiting a hostile work environment, apply to only about one-fifth of U.S. workplace bullying cases (Namie, 2014a), and most organizations limit employee protections to legally-prohibited abuse. In short, most targets of workplace bullying in the U.S. have no legal recourse.

Three important behaviors are not covered by standard definitions of workplace bullying:

- Occasionally-insensitive language or conduct. Everyone will be uncivil at work now and then; such behavior, when rare, does not constitute bullying.
- Appropriate workplace supervision carried out respectfully and fairly. This includes: setting aggressive performance goals; determining fair committee assignments; coaching or providing constructive feedback; investigating alleged misconduct; disciplining an employee for substantiated misconduct.
- Protected free speech.

Lists of illustrative bullying behaviors are often quite long, as illustrated by the list from UC Santa Cruz provided in the Appendix. It is helpful to group these behaviors into the following three categories:

- Outright abuse, which includes: insulting or humiliating the target; blocking or providing insufficient opportunities for advancement; shouting at target in anger.
- Passive-aggressive abuse or “velvet violence” (Sarran 2008), which includes: Unwarranted or invalid criticism; unjustified blame; failing to respond to inquiries or requests, or responding with unjustified delay; withholding necessary information; excluding from important discussions; treating someone as invisible.
- Mobbing, or workplace bullying carried out by a group (Duffy and Sperry, 2014). Mobbing includes outright and passive-aggressive abuse plus: character assassination via rumors, gossip, or innuendo; exclusion from relevant events; stonewalling targets who inquire about such treatment.

Within each of these categories, attacks can be personal or work-related (Einarsen, 1999). Note that workplace bullying often amounts to a failure to act, such as withholding information or failing to include someone at a meeting (Keashly, 2010). Due to omission bias, the normal but false assumption that acts of commission are more harmful than acts of omission (Baron and Ritov, 1994), the harm associated with those failures is often underestimated.

For research purposes, workplace bullying is most frequently identified using the “Negative Acts Questionnaire, Revised” (Einarsen et al., 2009). Self-reported bullying is strongly correlated with this measure, though men self-identify as targets less frequently than the NAQ-R (Salin, 2011).

The rest of this section outlines some of the most striking inconsistencies between traditional assumptions and the core qualitative conclusions from research on workplace bullying.

“Slow Poison”: Severity Comes from Persistence

The common image of a workplace bullying involves an angry boss yelling at subordinates. In reality, most targets report a long series of degrading but low-intensity events, and studies uniformly reveal that the *persistence* of degradation, rather than its intensity, gives bullying its destructive power (e.g., Leymann, 1990). A group of founding researchers clarifies:

Many of these single acts may be relatively common in the workplace and, when occurring in isolation, may be seen as signs of merely uncivil behavior [However], when persistently directed towards the same individual(s) over a longer period of time, they may

turn into an extreme source of social stress ... capable of causing severe harm (Einarsen et al., 2009).

The damage from persistent low-intensity degradation is perhaps unsurprising given human negativity bias, the tendency to react more strongly to negative than positive events (Kanouse and Hanson, 1972). “It takes numerous encounters with positive people to offset the energy and happiness sapped by a single episode with one [bully]” (Sutton, 2007, p. 31). Negative interactions in the workplace are especially disturbing. Work performance is critical to one’s self-respect (Field, 1996), and bullying typically involves threats to one’s professional or even personal status such as professional humiliation in front of colleagues, questioning a person’s ability to supervisors, spreading rumors or gossip, or outright insults (Keashly, 2010). Further, threats to one’s job are perceived as threats to the survival of self and family.

Persistence elicits chronic fear because targets anticipate further degradation without knowing when it will occur. With severe bullying that fear becomes terror (Leymann, 1990). Targets come to recognize that they are trapped: their professional livelihood and their family’s well-being requires them to experience frequent degradation (Field, 1996). Workplace bullying has strong parallels with domestic violence (e.g., Klein and Martin, 2011; Yamada, 2020). “Being bullied by a serial bully is equivalent to ... being battered by a partner ... and should be accorded the same gravity. (Tim Field, 2006).

Common but Hidden

It is traditionally assumed that workplace bullying is uncommon, but studies consistently find the opposite. The prevalence of bullying, typically evaluated as the percent of workers who report being a target over the previous six or 12 months. As summarized in Nielsen et al. (2009), representative 12-month figures include 55% for Turkey, 41% for the U.S., 21% for Ireland, and 2% for Denmark. Figures between 20% and 30%, like Ireland’s, are representative for the EU. Denmark is representative of Scandinavia, where these figures tend to be relatively low.

Across industries, workplace bullying tends to most prevalent in healthcare and education (Zapf et al., 2011). In academia bullying occurs relatively frequently and tends to be prolonged (Keashly and Neuman, 2010). At Canadian universities, for example, over half (52%) of respondents responded that they had been bullied within the past five years and 21% of targets were bullied for five years or more (McKay et al., 2008). Bullying occurs at every rank, even among executives (King, 2012).

Workplace bullying is a significant impediment to achieving diversity, equity, and inclusion, because minorities and women are bullied disproportionately. In the U.S. 33% of black, Hispanic, and Asian employees report being bullied, a percentage that is statistically higher than the 24% percent figure reported by white employees (Namie, 2014a). Women are also bullied disproportionately: the fraction of workers reporting that they were bullied at some point is consistently above 50% for women and below 50% for men (Björkqvist et al., 1994; Zogby 2007). The tendency of historically disadvantaged workers to be chosen as targets follows logically from the nature of workplace bullying as an abuse of power and the fact that such workers are disproportionately represented in lower-level positions. The consequence is that an institution’s success in hiring diverse candidates can be undone by bullying after they join the institution.

The frequency of workplace bullying is commonly underestimated in part because workplace bullying is usually hidden. Most bullies shrewdly avoid censure by attacking covertly (Baron and Neuman, 1998; Giga et al., 2008). Some attack only in private settings; others rely on subtle attacks such as gas-lighting, manipulation, sabotage, isolation, or spreading malicious rumors (Baron and Neuman, 1996; McKay et al., 2008; Phoko, 2017). Covert bullying is especially common in academia (Keashly and Neuman, 2010).

Bullying is also invisible because targets generally remain silent. Less than 5% of targets file lawsuits, and most never file complaints even internally (Zogby, 2007). “Workplace bullying is often hidden away because complaining is a sign of weakness, and people often don’t want to admit they are having difficulty coping with pressure and workplace relationships” (Query and Hanley, 2010; p. 4).

Targets and institutions are often trapped in ignorance by traditional assumptions. Targets do not speak up, knowing they according to traditional assumptions they should shrug it off and could suffer adverse repercussions. Because targets do not speak up, however, the prevalence of bullying is not recognized and

traditional assumptions remain unchallenged. Thanks to the research by social scientists reviewed here, institutions now have the insights needed to escape this trap.

Abuse of Power

Based on traditional assumptions, institutional authorities generally interpret individual cases of workplace bullying as personality clashes or a strong leadership style. Instead, research shows conclusively that workplace bullying is a form of power abuse and bullying is a toxic form of leadership (e.g., Kurtulmus, 2020). In the U.S., roughly three-quarters of bullying involves the mistreatment of subordinates by supervisors (Namie and Namie, 2011); a similar fraction (70%) has been documented for Australia (ACTU National Health and Safety Campaign, cited in Query and Hanley, 2010, p. 2). The 55% share at the universities studied in Björkqvist et al. (1994) is smaller but still exceeds half. Of course, power comes in many forms beyond supervisory authority, including friendship with the supervisor, star performance, membership in a culturally dominant group, and inspiring fear in others.

Expert consultants often describe bullying as a process with multiple stages. Though the exact number of these stages remains an open question, there is a strong consensus about certain features of the process. Bullying begins gradually and intensifies over time. Along the way “[b]ullying nearly always escalates to engage more than one person who joins the instigator to torment the target” (Namie, 2017, p. 10). It ends with a campaign of character assassination by the perpetrator intended to force the target out, which is labeled “expulsion” (Leymann, 1996; Glambek et al., 2015) or “elimination” (Field, 1996). A broad 2007 study of the U.S. found that 40% of targets leave their institution (Zogby, 2007). Targets are significantly more likely than others to be unemployed five years after their bullying (Glambek et al., 2015, 2016).

Perpetrators and Targets

The nature of perpetrators and targets is still a topic of active research but some conclusions seem firm. Bullying often occurs in stressful professional environments (Einarsen et al., 1994; Björklund et al., 2020). Not everyone responds to these stressors by bullying, however, and not all bullying is associated with stressors. Experts commonly note that a fraction of perpetrators are “workplace psychopaths” (e.g., McCulloch, 2010) who are not averse to causing distress (Field, 1996). “The best indicator of a sociopath serial bully is not a clinical diagnosis but the trail of devastation and destruction of lives and livelihoods surrounding this individual throughout their life” (Field, 2006). It is also well-documented that bullies tend to have high levels of trait anger (Kant et al., 2013; Glasø et al., 2011). One study finds, perhaps unsurprisingly, that those who engage in bullying behaviors tend to be high on the Dark Triad of narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy (Dåderman and Ragnestål-Impola, 2019).

Consultants familiar with hundreds of bullying cases find that “targets are generally non-confrontational people who do their best to avoid trouble rather than ... prickly or opinionated people” (Namie and Namie, 2009, p. 13; see also Field, 1996). Targets also tend to be highly conscientious (Podsiadly and Gamian-Wilk, 2017) and principled (Namie, 2014b). This contrasts starkly with the traditional assumption that targets invite bullying. “[T]hose around regularly assume that the cause of the problem lies in the deviant personality of the victim (that is, one observes the victim's defensive behavior and from that draws the conclusion that the victim is suffering from a personality problem)” (Leymann, 1996, pp. 121-122).

Targets tend to be highly competent. This tendency has important implications for the traditional tendency of management to ignore bullying concerns, as discussed in Section 2. Two related explanations have been documented. First, workplace bullying is often motivated by envy (Björkqvist et al., 1994; McGrath, 2010). Second, insecure and unskilled managers tend to become aggressive when working with highly skilled and empathic subordinates (Field, 1996). “Bullying consists of the least competent most aggressive employee projecting their incompetence on to the least aggressive most competent employee and winning” (Field, 2006).

Fundamental attribution error may help explain the common conclusion that the target is the problem (Malle, 2006). Targets rarely report the issue until the situation has escalated severely, by which time most targets have displayed irritation, at least. These responses can readily be misrepresented as bullying by the

perpetrator, who by this time is typically engaged in a manipulative effort to expel the target (Leymann, 1996; Field, 1996; Klein and Martin, 2011; Glambek et al., 2015).

Target personalities shift in response to bullying. Many shows decreased interest in their appearance, in punctuality, in their own efficiency or productivity (Field, 1996). Some targets become less agreeable or worse, defensive or suspicious, and withdraw socially (Mills et al., 2008; Podsiadly and Gamian-Wilk, 2017). One study traces these shifts to a progressive depletion of a target's personal and professional resources due to fear, stress, fatigue, and/or depression (Tuckey and Neall, 2014).

An important study documents that these personality shifts, in turn, inspire further bullying (Reknes et al., 2014). This is one way in which workplace bullying becomes a vicious cycle in which the abuse generates depression, anxiety, and fatigue in the target, and these symptoms then trigger further bullying.

HARM TO INSTITUTIONS: COSTS, RISK, PRODUCTIVITY

The research provides overwhelming evidence that workplace bullying imposes substantial costs on employers. Productivity and creativity fall, as do trust and commitment. Meanwhile, costs rise for healthcare, turnover, and legal protection. These costs so imperfectly recognized, however, that some institutions not only tolerate bullying but strategically employ it to eliminate unwanted workers. In 2007–2008 a large French firm adopted bullying organization-wide with the goal of reducing payroll by 22,000 workers. After 35 employees committed suicide the CEO, his deputy, and the head of Human Resources were convicted of criminal offenses and sentenced to jail terms and fines (Chrisafis, 2019).

Higher Turnover, Damaged Reputation

Bullying generates a lot of turnover. Not only do targets commonly leave, but one-fifth of witnesses leave as well (Rayner, 1997, cited in Sutton, 2007; Berthelsen et al., 2011). According to an extensive survey by Korn/Ferry International in 2007, roughly two million U.S. workers quit that year in response to unfairness by their employer, at a cost to employers of roughly \$64 billion (Korn/Ferry International and Level Playing Field, 2007). For perspective, \$64 billion is comparable to the 2016 cost of data breaches in the U.S. (President's Council of Economic Advisors, 2018). U.S. employers actually lost far more, of course, because those who leave tend to be highly skilled and conscientious (Namie and Namie, 2011).

Tolerating workplace bullying can tarnish an institution's reputation. Targets who leave will often share their experiences with colleagues at their next employer or post them online at sites like Glassdoor.com. A reputation for bullying undermines an institution's ability to recruit and retain talent (Namie and Namie, 2011); for non-profits it can also undermine the ability to attract donations.

Lower Productivity and Creativity

Carefully designed studies have also brought to light subtle but important consequences of workplace bullying that would not be apparent to most observers. Among these is the finding that the job performance of neurotypical individuals is highly sensitive to social cues. Merely observing incivility compromises performance in creative as well as routine tasks (Porath and Erez, 2007); the consequences of bullying for productivity and creativity are likely stronger.

Bullying also compromises productivity by increasing absenteeism and time lost to self-protection. Porath and Pearson (2010) report a study of over 700 US employees in which 63% reported spending time avoiding the offender. At universities many employees simply disengage to avoid toxic colleagues, ceasing to serve in administrative roles or to advise Ph.D. students (e.g., Klein, 2005; Robinson and Rousseau, 1994; Keashly and Neuman, 2010). Time lost to absenteeism and avoiding perpetrators is estimated to cost roughly \$7,000 per employee per year at U.S. four-year colleges and universities (Hollis, 2012).

Another subtle cost of workplace bullying is a loss of trust and commitment to the institution (Dirks et al., 2001) among those who consider bullying to be “inconsistent with the normative expectations of a civil society” (Twale and DeLuca, 2008). Workers perceive themselves as having a relationship with their employer. According to Social Exchange Theory (Homans, 1958), all relationships are based on give and take. Implicit in the relationship between worker and employer is a psychological contract (Robinson and

Rousseau, 1994; Kakarika et al., 2017) in which the employer commits to provide a safe workplace, among other things. When bullying is tolerated – or worse, promoted – employees perceive the workplace as dangerous and the psychological contract is broken. The perception that the institution is hypocritical, and the associated loss of trust and commitment, tends to be especially acute at institutions that publicly espouse the values of integrity and social justice.

Loss of trust has a substantial impact on employee behavior. In the study by Porath and Pearson (2010) mentioned above, 78% of targets reported lower commitment to the organization, 47% intentionally reduced work quality, and 48% intentionally devoted less effort to their work. Without trust, employees also do not undertake altruistic behaviors that support group productivity, such as sharing information (Bonacich and Schneider, 1992) or sharing limited institutional resources (Messick et al., 1983; Tyler and DeGoey, 1996; Kramer et al., 1996). Trust is especially important for success at institutions that are service-oriented, that put a strong emphasis on values, and that hire employees early in their careers and support their development over decades, such as universities (Rousseau, 1990, p. 391).

When bullying is met with tolerance rather than adverse consequences it generally spreads and intensifies over time (Andersson and Pearson, 1999), and institutional costs rise in parallel. The message goes out that abusive behavior is acceptable, because “what is not condemned is condoned.” Perpetrators become more aggressive (Bandura, 1973) and others become perpetrators. Perpetrators hire and promote other perpetrators (Sutton, 2007), and the culture of abuse intensifies. It further intensifies as those with empathy and integrity disengage, resign, or are forced out (Rayner, 1997). Fear comes to dominate interpersonal interactions, undermining cooperation (Deutsch, 1973), individual problem-solving, and performance (Boss, 1978; Zand, 1972). “The serial bully's inefficiency and dysfunction ... can spread through an organization like a cancer” (Tim Field, quoted in Vaknin, 2017).

These adverse consequences of bullying for institutions highlight the first of many reasons why workplace bullying is not a constructive form of leadership: it worsens rather than improves employee productivity, creativity, time on the job, and commitment.

Higher Legal Risk and Expense

The frequency of legal claims from work-related stress has risen in recent years (Thorpe, 2001). Their premise is that institutions are obligated to protect employee health and safety. Some insurance providers now assess this legal exposure and, presumably, cover it in corporate premiums (Query and Hanley, 2010; King, 2012).

A policy of tolerating bullying compounds this legal risk by creating health risks for other employees. It is known that perpetrators generally choose a new target soon after their existing target quits (Field, 1996). It is also known that bullying has severe health consequences (this evidence is discussed in Section 3). By implication, the next target can claim that the institution knew, or should have known, that employees were at risk due to the institution's inaction.

Higher Health-Care Costs

Workplace bullying has severe health consequences for targets and witnesses, as outlined in the next section. Targets and witnesses naturally increase their reliance on health services (Rospenda, 2002), raising employer health-care costs. In a 2012 survey, 71% of US targets reported having been treated by a doctor for bullying-related health symptoms and 63% reported seeing a mental health professional (Namie, 2012). Targets are significantly more likely than average to become disabled and receive disability benefits (Glambek et al., 2015). Witnesses, especially those who are female, are more likely to develop depressive symptoms over the following two years (Nielsen et al., 2012).

HARM FOR TARGETS AND WITNESSES: STRESS, DEPRESSION, PTSD

One of the earliest, strongest, and most robust findings in the research is that workplace bullying severely damages the health of targets and witnesses (e.g., Leymann, 1990; Harrington et al., 2015). Notably, this finding holds for men as well as women (Einarson and Reknes, 1997). Indeed, in 2015 the

government of New Zealand formally listed workplace bullying as a workplace “health risk” (Worksafe New Zealand, 2020), putting it in the same category as poisonous chemicals and heavy machinery. This potential harm clarifies why leaders who bully are considered toxic.

Bullying destabilizes and ultimately compromises a target’s sense of self-worth (Leymann, 1990). Many interpret their experience through traditional assumptions and feel ashamed that they experience distress (Lewis, 2004). Targets feel fearful, trapped, and alone (Dussault and Frenette, 2014).

The health damage from workplace bullying can hardly be overstated. At least one study finds that the psychological distress of bullying exceeds that from gender- or race-based harassment (Raver and Nishii, 2010). Symptoms of PTSD are common (Björkqvist et al., 1994; Matthiesen and Einarsen, 2004). The damage remains statistically significant even five years after the bullying ends, after controlling for initial mental health status, demographic factors, and job factors (Einarsen et al., 2015).

Anxiety, stress, and excessive worry, the most common adverse health outcomes, are experienced by over 76% of targets (Namie, 2003b). A strong causal link from bullying to anxiety and stress remains after controlling for job demands, gender, initial symptoms, and other relevant factors (Reknes et al., 2014). With stress come the related symptoms of disrupted sleep (77%), loss of concentration or memory (76%), and insomnia (61%) (Namie, 2012). Stress also compromises physical health, in part by suppressing the immune system and increasing the risk of infectious disease. Because stress affects mood, 60% or more of targets display heightened irritability, frustration, anger, and/or hostility (Björkqvist et al., 1994; Namie, 2012). Stress becomes chronic in 40% of bullying cases (Vartia, 2001), bringing tension headaches (55% of cases), panic attacks (32%), and migraine headaches (23%) (Namie, 2003b). Chronic stress can also lead to cardiovascular disease (Kivmäki et al., 2003); targets often experience heart palpitations (61% of cases treated by a professional) and hypertension (60%) (Namie, 2012). Other known consequences of chronic stress include Parkinson’s, type-2 diabetes, cancer (Ahola et al., 2012), and Alzheimer’s disease (Gregoire, 2013).

Depression is experienced by roughly 40% of targets (Namie, 2003b), well above the 14% depression rate for non-targets (Butterworth et al., 2013). Target depression often brings physical symptoms of chronic fatigue syndrome (35% of cases) and exhaustion that makes work performance impossible (41%) (Namie, 2003b). Depression in the workplace becomes apparent to others as low morale, uncooperative behavior, absenteeism, safety risks, and accidents (NIH National Worksite Program, 1995). Workplace bullying brings increased consumption of alcohol among both men and women (Richman et al., 1996).

The health effects of workplace bullying vary according to the nature of the psychological attack. Stress is most strongly associated with an unfair or offensive assessment of one’s work. Depression is most strongly associated with direct personal denigration – which includes being treated as invisible – and with attacks on a person’s privacy (Vartia, 2001). Though only one study formally confirms this, the finding is consistent with widely accepted definitions of psychological stress (e.g., American Psychological Association, 2021; Schneiderman et al., 2005) and depression (e.g., American Psychiatric Association, 2021).

As summarized by Reknes et al. (2014), psychologists have developed at least two hypotheses to explain why workplace bullying is so harmful to target health. First: the ever-present threat of further bullying brings fear and anxiety. These trigger outright distress when the natural fight-or-flight response collides with the target’s powerlessness (Ursin and Eriksen, 2004); see Section 4. Second: bullying – as a series of traumatic events – challenges a set of beliefs that provides the foundation for mental health: “(1) the world [i]s benevolent, (2) the world [i]s meaningful and, (3) the self [i]s worthy” (Janoff-Bulman, 1992).

Witnesses to workplace bullying experience the same difficulties as targets, but on average less intensely. One-quarter of witnesses experience moderate to severe stress; other common symptoms are depression (Emdad et al., 2013), sleeping problems, head-ache, strain, fatigue, and lack of energy (Vartia, 2001).

EXISTING RESPONSES TO WORKPLACE BULLYING

Research on workplace bullying also investigates the success of different possible solutions for targets. Common suggestions from colleagues are to adjust their own attitudes, stand up to the bully, seek help from others, or to simply quit. Men tend to confront the perpetrator more than women, and women are more likely to seek help or to simply avoid the perpetrator (Ólafsson and Jóhannsdóttir, 2004). Black women are especially likely to self-isolate (Hollis, 2017).

Overall, the research consistently concludes that quitting, or moving to a different part of the organization, are the only approaches that provide reliable relief for targets (Zapf and Gross, 2001). “The nature of bullying in a workplace is such that if you do nothing to deal with it, it gets worse, and if you make an effort to deal with it, it gets worse still. . . . Where a workplace culture sustains bullying, it is almost impossible for a target to make it stop” (Tim Field Foundation, 2021a). The target cannot stop it by adjusting their own attitude or, in most cases, speaking to the bully, and seeking help from the institution usually brings more grief than relief. In one broad and representative study, institutions were helpful in only 32% of cases; otherwise they did nothing (44%) or worsened the problem (18%) (Zogby, 2007). Institutions normally display “defensiveness, conflict avoidance, and self-protection” (Vickers, 2012), or more colloquially they “[s]ee no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil” (Ferris, 2004).

For targets the lack of institutional support represents “institutional betrayal” (Smith and Freyd, 2014) or “corporate violence” (Byrne and Senehi, 2012) and is often devastating. “[S]taff who have been badly treated [by institutional authorities] can become isolated, and disadvantaged in their ability to obtain appropriate alternative employment. In short, lives can be ruined by poor handling of staff who have raised concerns” (Francis, 2015). Most U.S. targets report no support beyond family and friends (Namie, 2014b). Many targets experience “a feeling of desperation and total helplessness, a feeling of great rage about lack of legal remedies, great anxiety and despair” (Leymann, 1996).

Fix Your Attitude?

The approach most frequently recommended by colleagues, by far, is to adjust their own attitude, according to a study by Tye-Williams and Krone (2017). More specifically, that study finds that targets are told to “ignore it, blow it off, do not let it affect you” or to “toughen up” (21% of responses); they are advised to “stay calm,” “be rational,” and “journal” (19%); or they are encouraged to simply “avoid the bully and keep their mouth shut” (12%). A few targets are even told to “quit making things up.”

Certain attitudes do moderate the effects of modest bullying, such as a “sense of coherence” (Nielsen et al., 2008). However, no coping style provides protection from severe bullying (Reknes et al., 2016; Leymann and Gustafsson, 1996; Matthiesen and Einarsen, 2004; Tehrani, 2004), and with nothing to stop it the bullying just gets worse.

Overall, the suggestion that targets adjust their attitude contribute to the distressing sense of unfairness described above (Leymann, 1996). They are unfair because they put the burden of adjustment on the target – who has already borne the burden of prolonged abuse – and leave the perpetrator, the cause of the abuse, free of any burden. Bullying “does not start from the victim, but from the tormentor, the same way as torture starts from the torturer and rape from the rapist” (Björkqvist et al., 1994, p. 176). The suggestion also creates distress by implying that the target has not been calm or rational or honest. However, by the time a target seeks help they have already patiently and rationally tolerated the problem until it has become severe and they honestly have no other option. “Bullying at work is like a malignant cancer. It creeps up on you long before you – or anyone else – are able to appreciate what it is that is making you feel the ill effects” (Adams and Crawford, 1992, p. 9).

Stand Up to the Perpetrator?

Many targets do confront their bully: in one large study the share was 69%. However, only 7% of those attempts actually stopped the bullying and retaliation is common (Namie, 2013). Further, these attempts were equally unlikely to succeed whether they occurred at the beginning, soon after the beginning, or months after the end of the bullying (Namie, 2013). The effort only succeeds when the perpetrator is an

individual committed to behaving with integrity who was simply unaware that their conduct was offensive (McCulloch, 2010). In most cases communicating with the perpetrator fails because they are unwilling to admit the nature of their behavior (Namie, 2013).

Solicit Help From Co-Workers?

Research reveals that few co-workers will speak up for the target. “Work colleagues, who may formerly have been friendly and supportive, melt away and the target is left feeling like a pariah and an outcast” (Tim Field Foundation, 2021b). Most co-workers are unaware of the problem, as noted earlier, but even witnesses rarely speak up. Some witnesses are naturally conflict averse. Others assume, based on traditional assumptions, that “there are two sides to every story” when in fact bullying is one-sided abuse. Others witnesses find themselves trapped: according to one study, “more than one-third of witnesses wanted to intervene to help victims but were afraid to do so” (Sutton, 2007, p. 33). Witnesses naturally fear becoming a target themselves (O'Reilly and Roberts, 1976; Leymann and Gustafsson, 1996; American Academy of Experts in Traumatic Stress, 2016).

Co-workers often side with the perpetrator (Zapf and Gross, 2001), which turns bullying into mobbing (Duffy and Sperry, 2014). This alignment is facilitated by the perpetrator’s efforts at character assassination (Leymann, 1996; Glambek et al., 2015; Field, 1996) and reinforced by the human drive for success: “When there's conflict in the air, most people want to be on the winning side, or the side they think will survive” (Tim Field Foundation, 2021c).

Solicit Help From Management?

Managers are generally the first line of defense against workplace misconduct. Historically, however, the responses of most managers to concerns about workplace bullying have been unhelpful. Some managers choose not to invest the time required to adjudicate responsibly. Bullying cases demand substantial time and focus because they involve many instances of negative behavior and because perpetrators tend to portray themselves as victims, so both charges and countercharges must be investigated (Gunsalus, 2006).

Many managers that have not received education and training about workplace bullying are unhelpful because they misunderstand the situation. “It is the lack of knowledge of, or the unwillingness to recognise, or the deliberate denial of the existence of the serial bully which is the most common reason for an unsatisfactory outcome for both employee and employer” (Field, 2006). Misunderstandings arise for a number of reasons.

- Manipulation: Archetypal bullies excel at charming, deceiving, and frightening others, consistent with their high rating on the Dark Triad (Namie and Namie, 2011). “Bullies remain glib and credible and continue to manipulate managers with uncanny guile” (Hout, 2020).
- Lack of training: Managers are not typically educated on the nature of workplace bullying and appropriate responses. Some, for example, accept the traditional assumption that well-adjusted employees can just shrug it off (Lewis and Orford, 2005) and therefore advise the target to “toughen up” (Ferris, 2004).
- Targets outnumbered: Because targets typically wait a long time before seeking help from others, the bully will typically have enlisted the help of others (Namie, 2017). “Gullible investigators ... will have their judgement swayed by many against one, and believe the tale that many tell even if those versions are not true” (Namie, 2014b, p. 1).
- Fundamental attribution error: By the time a target seeks help from HR, the target’s internal resources are depleted (Tuckey and Neall, 2014) and even the most patient targets will have displayed irritation or some other negative response. When the perpetrator brings that to the manager’s attention, fundamental attribution error leads the manager to infer personal shortcomings rather than adverse circumstances (Malle, 2006).
- Other common heuristics and biases. “Motivated reasoning” may distort a manager’s understanding of bullying because they have many reasons to avoid such issues (e.g., Keashly and Neuman, 2010). Some are simply conflict averse; some are friends with the alleged bully;

some would prefer their domain to be considered bully-free (Sperry and Duffy, 2009). Given these incentives to suppress, well-documented heuristics and biases – e.g., wishful thinking, overconfidence, hostile attribution bias – could lead managers to conclude that suppressing the case is appropriate.

Solicit Help From Human Resources?

HR departments are more likely to harm targets than to help them (Smith and Freyd, 2014; Tim Field Foundation, 2021b; Rayner, 2003; Hollis, 2012; Twale and DeLuca, 2008). One illustrative survey found that HR, when informed of the problem, “stopped the bullying fairly and completely” in just 2% of cases (Namie, 2012); HR responded in ways that were “not helpful” to the target in 64% of cases and otherwise did nothing. “Not helpful” responses include accusing the target of over-reacting, accusing the target of lying and siding with the bully, putting targets on probation, or forcing the target out of the institution (Rayner, 2003; Namie and Namie, 2009). A target should “expect personnel/human resources to disbelieve [the target] and deny the bullying...” (Tim Field Foundation, 2017). “Do not trust HR – they work for management” (Namie and Namie, 2009, p. 231). One thoughtful study suggests that HR is a “wolf in sheep’s clothing” (Rayner, 2003).

There is by now a small literature devoted to understanding why HR intervention in workplace bullying cases is so frequently damaging to the target and, indirectly, the institution. It is important to rule out one potential hypothesis at the outset: this pattern cannot be attributed to a consistent lack of good will or integrity among individual HR representatives because it emerges so consistently in the data. More plausible hypotheses include misunderstandings and the impossibly conflicting incentives facing most HR representatives when they are assigned such cases (e.g., Pelletier, 2016).

Misunderstandings are natural for HR representatives because workplace bullying has not historically been covered in HR textbooks or training programs. Indeed, there are consensus attitudes among HR representatives that clearly reflect traditional-but-incorrect assumptions. For example: bullying is “just another name for people who can’t get on with each other?” (McCulloch, 2010). Likewise, “an HR person is likely to start with the assumption that the [target] is exaggerating the problem ... However, if multiple people are coming with the same complaint, you really need to investigate” (Lucas, 2010). The research reviewed so far highlights the misconceptions embedded in these attitudes and actions. Fortunately, HR professional education increasingly covers workplace bullying, so such misunderstandings should become progressively less frequent.

Educating HR representatives will likely bring only limited gains, however, because structural forces also impede HR departments from protecting targets (Rayner, 2003; Guest and Woodrow, 2012; Ferris, 2004; Harrington et al., 2012). When addressing bullying cases most HR representatives face multiple conflicting incentives with no good options (Rayner, 2003; Guest and Woodrow, 2012). Finding such situations “too hot to handle” (Harrington et al., 2012), they often choose suppression.

- Conflict 1: Relationships with managers. HR representatives need the cooperation of line managers to fulfill obligations such as tracking vacations and sick days. If HR finds that a target was bullied that cooperation could cease if the perpetrator is the manager, or if the manager reasons from traditional assumptions and disagrees (Harrington et al., 2012).
- Conflict 2: Conflicting goals of HR. HR is traditionally tasked with ensuring that illegal behavior does not occur in the workplace. Institutions may prohibit HR representatives from admitting that workplace bullying occurred based on the fear that the admission could support allegations of, say, a hostile work environment (Tim Field Foundation, 2021c).
- Conflict 3: Rank. HR representatives often have lower rank than the bully, so their job could be threatened if they conclude that there was indeed bullying.
- Conflict 4: Time. HR representatives may be unwilling or unable to devote the substantial time required for responsible adjudication. “Rather than listen to the victim and deal with workplace bullying it is easier to threaten the victim with termination unless they tolerate the abuse...”

(Hout, 2020). This strategic choice is especially likely when bullying is not an institutional priority.

- Conflict 5: Strategic relevance. A longstanding goal for HR professionals is to become a strategic partner of management (Ulrich, 1997; Lawler and Morhman, 2003). Findings of bullying may not promote HR's advancement to "the room where it happens" (Miranda, 2015).
- Conflict 6: Retaliation. In the U.S., HR representatives are not protected against retaliation, since workplace bullying is legal (Kumin and Schroeder, 2017).

Underlying these conflicts is a single core challenge that has been well-understood for decades; the twin goals of championing employees and supporting management are not always aligned (Legge, 1978). Unfortunately, reliable solutions to this challenge have proved elusive (Guest and Woodrow, 2012).

RECOMMENDED POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

The literature on workplace bullying applies the insights gained from rigorous studies to provide recommended policies for minimizing this problem and constructively addressing bullying cases that arise nonetheless. These recommendations come from active researchers (e.g., Porath and Pearson, 2005; Sutton, 2007), expert practitioners (Field, 1996; Namie and Namie, 2011), and experts in the private sector or government (e.g., Holloway and Kusy, 2010; Query and Hanley, 2010; Worksafe New Zealand, 2017b). Grievance procedures are necessary but prevention is most effective.

To minimize bullying employers must "deal with the problem proactively on an organizational level" (Hoel and Einarsen, 2010, p. 30) because "[b]ullies thrive wherever authority is weak" (Field, 2006). Leadership must begin at the top. "[A]n anti-bullying policy is not just about catching bullies, it's about fostering a climate of dignity and respect" (Field, 1996). Senior executives must pro-actively communicate the importance of respectful behavior, guide the implementation of appropriate policies and procedures, and support their enforcement (Yamada, 2008).

To create and maintain a culture of mutual respect requires a multipronged effort. The most common expert recommendations can be grouped into the following six categories:

- A. Establish a culture of mutual respect
- B. Educate the community and encourage upstanding
- C. Screen out toxicity during the search process
- D. Hold leaders accountable
- E. Monitor the community climate
- F. Provide informal as well as formal approaches to resolution.

Establish and Enforce an Explicit Code of Conduct

Experts universally stress the importance of setting clear expectations by adopting an explicit code of conduct (e.g., Hollis, 2012), models for which are offered by the Society for Human Resources Management, Worksafe New Zealand, among other expert bodies. Professionally-designed codes are invariably somewhat lengthy because they define workplace bullying, provide specific examples, specify relevant exemptions such as respectful management practice, and highlight multiple approaches to resolving grievances.

Meaningful consequences should be imposed on those who violate community behavior standards. "Any anti-bullying scheme, initiative or policy which fails to mention accountability for the bullies is likely to meet with little, and often no, success" (Field, 2006). The absence of consequences demonstrates that such behavior is safe, so it is necessary to hold bullies accountable to deter one individual from bullying again and to deter others from bullying (Porath and Pearson, 2013). Potential consequences for short-duration bullying include anger management training, coaching, mandated counseling, and monitoring. Potential consequences for more bullying that extends for months or years include flat or declining compensation, loss of titles, and loss of responsibility. The most substantial consequences are, of course, demotion or dismissal (Namie and Namie, 2011). Moving the perpetrator to another department without consequences is not recommended because it invites more of the same behavior (Porath and Pearson, 2013).

There are different views within this field regarding the advisability of a “no tolerance policy.” Many experts view zero tolerance to be essential (e.g., Porath and Pearson, 2005), and some policies certainly adopt that position. The University of New Mexico, for example, states that workplace bullying, among other “destructive actions,” “will not be tolerated” (University of New Mexico, 2021). Other institutions, by contrast, choose to point towards zero tolerance without actually naming it. To pick one of many examples, Australian Catholic University states that “we are committed to providing a working and learning environment free from discrimination, harassment and bullying ...” (Australian Catholic University, 2021).

Educate the Community and Encourage Upstanding

Educating the entire community is essential (Twale and De Luca, 2008; Namie and Namie, 2011). As stressed throughout this review, traditional assumptions are contradicted by overwhelmingly evidence, and responses guided by those assumptions are usually harmful rather than helpful. All employees must learn to recognize bullying. They must know, for example, that it is typically covert and low-intensity and that silent co-workers may be experiencing pain or trauma. Employees must also know the institution’s behavior standards and recognize that those standards are enforced (Feldblum and Lipnic, 2016)

Critically, employees must recognize the importance of speaking up when they observe or suspect bullying (Baras, 2020). Silence with respect to workplace bullying is not neutral. To the contrary, it implicitly supports the perpetrator by communicating that the behavior is acceptable. Speaking up can be difficult and risky, however, so bystanders benefit from being provided a menu of options – e.g., good-humored deflection, a question about the code of conduct – and practice (Rowe, 2018). Further, bystanders must feel confident that they will be supported by managers and peers if the perpetrator retaliates.

Training should involve active learning, personal accounts of bullying experiences and role playing (see, e.g., ELI, Inc., 2021). Online questionnaires, such as those commonly used for sexual harassment training, provide legal protection to the institution are generally discredited as a means to raise employee behavior standards (Curry, 2016).

Training should be more extensive for anyone who might adjudicate workplace bullying cases, a group that includes some or all of the following: senior management, supervisors, Human Resources representatives, the Office of Equal Opportunity, and the Office of the Ombuds (Namie and Namie, 2011). These individuals must be familiar with consensus findings on workplace bullying, even the details, so they can make sense of long histories of claims and counterclaims. They must they must understand that most perpetrators act covertly, so one cannot generalize from their behavior in other contexts, and they must be able to recognize the tell-tale signs of distorted, false, or manipulative claims by perpetrators claiming to be victims (Klein and Martin, 2011). And, critically, they must be aware of their own heuristics and biases. Those entrusted with management should also be trained in how to respond in the moment to bullying concerns, because responses guided by traditional assumptions are often harmful. These individuals must learn to treat targets with empathy and respect; to respond immediately and decisively: “[w]hen incivility occurs, hammer it” (Pearson and Porath, 2005, p. 9); and to be on the alert for retaliation.

Beyond training, information on workplace bullying should be readily accessible to the community. As illustrated by the material provided online by Worksafe New Zealand (2020b; 2020c; 2020d), it is wise for an institution’s website to have extensive, easy-to-find links to material designed to attract and hold the reader’s attention. Some institutions create poster campaigns (e.g., NYSUT, 2021).

Screen Out Toxicity During the Search Process

Experts universally stress that employers should take advantage of the interview process to “[w]eed out trouble before it enters your organization” (Pearson and Porath, 2005, p. 9; also, Hollis, 2012). Robert Sutton of Stanford sums this up emphatically with the title of his book, *The No Asshole Rule* (Sutton, 2007). This imperative holds even for potential star performers. “Nothing is more costly to an organization’s culture than a toxic employee” (Porath, 2016). Housman and Minor (2015) use a large database of detailed employee data from 11 firms to evaluate the cost of toxic workers against the benefits of star performance, defined as the top 1% of performers. They conclude that a single toxic worker reduces annual profits by USD 12,000, over twice the USD 5,000 gain from a star performer.

Hold Leaders Accountable

Experts recommend that an institution's leaders be held accountable – not just responsible – for promoting a culture of mutual respect and for protecting the safety of every community member (Namie and Namie, 2011). Aggression, like all workplace troubles, should be managed promptly and firmly because “[i]gnoring problems, covering them up, passing them on to subordinates and replacements, or losing them through the committee process ... spawns more problems” (Twale and De Luca, 2008). More broadly, research reveals that “laissez-faire” or “avoidant” leadership is no less damaging to institutions than overly aggressive leadership (Skogstad et al., 2014; Baillien et al., 2011).

Accountability should begin at the top, specifically the Board, CEO, and President. To protect targets and achieve a respectful local culture, managers must lead by example. They must refrain from bullying subordinates; communicate and enforce clear behavior standards; and address allegations of bullying promptly, firmly, and fairly (Pearson and Porath, 2005). Those who fail to fulfill these responsibilities should incur consequences such as monitoring, coaching, anger management training, reprimands, lower compensation, or loss of responsibility (Namie and Namie, 2011).

In holding managers accountable, their superiors cannot rely on self-reports and must instead gather independent information. This can be achieved through skip-level interviews or 360-degree evaluations (Hollis, 2012; Curry, 2016). Skip-level interviews are one-on-one meetings in which a manager's superior meets the manager's subordinates. A 360-degree evaluation provides insights about an employee from peers, supervisors, and subordinates as well as the employee.

Monitor the Community Climate

To address any problem, it is critical to know its extent. The literature highlights a number of ways that institutions can monitor their communities.

- Conduct periodic climate surveys and include questions on workplace bullying (Hollis, 2012; Namie and Namie, 2011; Field, 1996).
- Conduct periodic skip-level interviews or 360-degree evaluations of managers (Hollis, 2012; Curry, 2016).
- Conduct stay interviews and exit interviews (Field, 1996; Pearson and Porath, 2005).
- Establish an Ombuds Office. Without compromising confidentiality, ombuds can provide senior executives with important qualitative information, such as departments which workplace bullying is especially common, that would otherwise be difficult to identify.

Provide Informal as Well as Formal Grievance Procedures

Because bullying is one-sided abuse, rather than a conflict among equals, resolution necessarily involves grievance procedures (Keashly and Nowell, 2010; De Guzman, 2010).

The consensus among experts is that employees should have access to multiple approaches to resolving grievances about workplace bullying. “The usual business reporting mechanisms may not work for bullying, and businesses need to be flexible about how it is reported to avoid the risk of issues not being raised with them” (Worksafe New Zealand, 2020a). In addition to formal grievance procedures, multiple informal or low-key processes should also be available (e.g., Rowe, 1990; Tim Field, 1996; Namie and Namie, 2011). These build on dialogue and are not intended to be disciplinary.

Informal Resolution

The approaches discussed in Section 4 are regularly listed by experts because they should be helpful in a culture of mutual respect where employees are well-informed about workplace bullying and institutions have adopted appropriate policies.

- Speak to the Bully: This option is consistently listed, but targets are rarely encouraged to choose this route (e.g., Worksafe New Zealand, 2020b). Nonetheless, individuals can be more receptive to reasoned expressions of difficult news when there are known consequences for deviating from local conduct standards.

- Managers:** Managers should view a target’s expression of concern as an opportunity (Vickers, 2012). If the concern is substantiated, a manager who wisely “hammer[s] it” (Pearson and Porath, 2005) not only protects the target but burnishes their own career credentials. In their domain productivity will be enhanced and costs reduced as discussed in Section 2. Managers will want to encourage subordinates to report early, because “... long term exposure to bullying effectively disables and damages the target and often others so that a ‘return to normal’ is highly unlikely. This highlights the importance of addressing harmful interactions early ... before more damage occurs and when there is a chance for (re)building productive relationships” (Keashly, 2010). Managers can wisely seek help from an independent party if the alleged perpetrator is a friend or star performer (Worksafe New Zealand, 2020c).
Targets should have the option but not the requirement of reporting to their manager. As described previously, workplace bullying is an abuse of power and the manager is often the bully. Further, in some cases a constructive response may be unlikely, for example if the manager still accepts traditional assumptions or is unskilled at handling subordinate concerns.
- Ombuds:** Some ombuds provide mediation or even investigation services for grievances. However, the advisability of mediation for workplace bullying is debated. Ombuds and others with experience highlight the value of mediation for in their experience. Others stress that mediation is appropriate for conflicts among equals but not for abuses of power, drawing on an analogy to physical violence. When someone is being attacked on the street, responsible passersby stop the attack, protect the victim from further violence and, if possible, have the justice system penalize the attacker. They do not treat the victim and the mugger as equal contributors to the violence, or require the victim to reason with the mugger in hopes of an agreement to stop. The latter options would be experienced by the victim as frightening and unfair (Ferris, 2004; Namie and Namie, 2011).
The research provides a clear resolution to this debate. Mediation does constructively resolve many low-level bullying cases. However, with severe cases, when the perpetrator is a “workplace psychopath” (McCulloch, 2010), or when the perpetrator is a supervisor (Lempp et al., 2020), mediation is ill advised. It usually re-traumatizes targets without resolving the issue (Keashly and Nowell, 2010; De Guzman, 2010).
- Human Resources:** Well-informed and well-trained HR representatives facing appropriate incentives can promote informal efforts at resolution. They can, for example, mediate, gather information, find independent authorities to help a direct line manager, or bring in outside experts.
Guest and Woodrow (2012) review multiple structural adjustments that could promote ethical HRM with respect to workplace bullying. Unfortunately, most of these prove unlikely to achieve the goal. The authors suggest that employers reward HR representatives for championing employee well-being. Overall, however, they conclude that “it is unrealistic to look to HR managers, or at least HR managers alone, to achieve an ethical HRM” (p. 109).
Another option has emerged in recent years. In the U.S., some employers assign issues of discrimination and harassment (of protected classes) to an office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. Many of these offices report directly to the president or CEO, rather than through HR, an arrangement that eliminates some of the incentive conflicts described in Section 4. The responsibility for workplace bullying – a.k.a. “generalized workplace harassment” (Raver and Nishii, 2010) – might belong in that setting. Such cases would benefit from the existing expertise on harassment and from the absence of incentive conflicts.

Formal Grievance Procedures

Formal grievance procedures are essential for codes of conduct to be meaningful, though they should be considered a last resort. Formal grievance procedures should include the core elements required for dealing with any form of misconduct: a statement of complaint, notification of the respondent, prompt action, an official investigation, impartial adjudication, confidentiality, and protection from retaliation.

Investigators and adjudicators must be trained to understand workplace bullying and to discriminate allegations of bullying from counter-allegations by perpetrators. Formal investigations can be time-consuming because the amount of evidence that must be gathered and carefully considered is typically extensive because bullying is a persistent pattern rather than one or a few specific events.

When a complaint is substantiated the perpetrator should face significant adverse consequences, as discussed previously. This deters future violations of community standards and reassures other employees, including the target, that their health and safety are importance. The target must be immediately protected from further aggression; enlightened institutions will also implement restorative measures (Andiappan, 2010) and might require an apology from the perpetrator (NYSUT, 2021b). Any effort at resolution should protect the target's professional standing; for example, if target and perpetrator need to be separate the perpetrator rather than the target should be required to move.

CONCLUSION

Over the past half-century science has dramatically advanced the world's understanding of workplace bullying. A multitude of rigorous studies have produced a body of consistent findings that will guide employers in creating safer and more productive workplaces. This paper reviews this literature, synthesizing over 100 individual studies and over a dozen books. These paints a clear and consistent picture of the problem that defies traditional assumptions that is summarized here. For readability this summary eschews citations, though they are legion in the main text.

Bullying is defined by persistence and often involves a long series of low-intensity degradation of the target. Workplace bullying is common in every workplace studied to date: every industry, every culture, every continent. Workplace bullying is a serious health hazard (Worksafe New Zealand, 2017); severe bullying leaves the vast majority of targets highly stressed or depressed; most ultimately leave the institution; some commit suicide. Witnesses experience similar symptoms and quit at almost the same rate as targets. No coping style successfully protects targets against severe bullying.

Workplace bullying imposes substantial costs on employers. Productivity and creativity wither along with commitment to the institution, work effort, and work quality. Absenteeism, disengagement, and turnover all rise, as do healthcare costs and legal risk. Workplace bullying also compromises efforts to achieve diversity, equity, and inclusion because targets are disproportionately women and/or members of disadvantaged groups and women are more strongly offended or distressed by bullying than men, on average. Targets tend to be highly competent and principled, and they generally endure bullying in silence. Perpetrators tend to have trait anger and to be high on the Dark Triad. Envy motivates some bullying, as do personal psychopathies.

In response to the new scientific consensus, workplace bullying is now legally prohibited in most developed and some middle-income countries. U.S. federal or state governments do not prohibit it but a few U.S. institutions have nonetheless chosen to implement appropriate policies and procedures.

Institutional responses to workplace bullying have historically tolerated or promoted bullying and traumatized targets. The institution becomes complicit because "what is not condemned is condoned."

Experts have identified six essential elements of successful workplace bullying policies. Institutions should establish explicit behavior standards and educate the community. Search committees should screen out toxic candidates. Institutions should train leaders and hold them accountable for maintaining a respectful community, which in turn requires that the institution monitor the community climate. Finally, institutions should provide multiple informal as well as formal approaches to resolution.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author thanks Susan Holcombe, Sarah Mead, Liuba Shrira, Lawrence Simon, and Marion Smiley for editorial help on an earlier version of this work and Sandra Cha for editorial assistance on the current version.

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APPENDIX: ILLUSTRATIVE LIST OF EXAMPLES OF BULLYING BEHAVIOR

From University of California at Santa Cruz (UC Santa Cruz, 2021)

Language or behavior that frightens, humiliates, belittles or degrades the recipient or target may be part of a pattern of workplace bullying. For example:

- Persistent or egregious use of abusive, insulting, or offensive language
- Aggressive yelling or shouting
- Unwarranted physical contact or threatening gestures
- Making repeated negative comments about a person's appearance, lifestyle, family, or culture
- Regularly inappropriately teasing or making someone the brunt of pranks or practical jokes
- Circulating inappropriate or embarrassing photos or videos via email or social media

Behavior that undermines a person's work performance, working relationships, or perceived value in the workplace may also be part of a pattern of bullying. For example:

- Unnecessarily interrupting or disrupting someone's work; inappropriately interfering with a person's personal property or work equipment
- Repeatedly discounting a person's statements in group meetings; unfavorably comparing one person to others
- Blaming a person for problems they did not cause
- Taking credit for another's contributions
- Spreading misinformation or malicious rumors
- Purposefully inappropriately excluding, isolating, or marginalizing a person from normal work activities

When the bully is a supervisor, the pattern may also include:

- Assigning tasks that are beyond a person's skill level
- Establishing unrealistic timelines, or frequently changing deadlines
- Denying access to information, consultation, or resources
- Excessively monitoring an employee's work
- Giving feedback in an insincere or disrespectful manner
- Repeatedly reminding someone of past errors or mistakes
- Inconsistently following or enforcing rules, to the detriment of an employee
- Ignoring an employee, or isolating them from others
- Denying equal access to earned time off