

Workplace Bullying in Academia

At the end of 2005 and the beginning of 2006 the link to an anonymous survey on workplace bullying was circulated to AUS members and other university staff. 1,117 staff followed the link and completed the questionnaire. A summary of findings are presented below. The findings from this research are in the process of being written up for submission to academic journals. Please contact the Primary Researcher on this project, Dr. Juliana Raskauskas, J.L.Raskauskas@massey.ac.nz, with any questions.

Prevalence

The number of staff who reported experiences with workplace bullying activities at their current university was as follows:

Bullied a Colleague (out of 1,111)	8%
Witnessed Bullying (out of 1,106)	75%
Bullied by a Colleague (out of 1,114)	68%

Forms

Those who had experienced workplace bullying (n = 754) were asked about what forms bullying had taken. The most common forms were intimidation (56%), undermining authority (49%), humiliation in front of colleagues (43%), and mood swings/tantrums (39%).

One of the purposes of this survey was to identify university specific workplace bullying. Academic staff (n = 617) reported the following forms of bullying that may be unique to the university setting:

Been directly or indirectly pressured to do something that is a detriment to your performance but would benefit a co-worker.	54%
Questioned your competence to a colleague or manager.	34%
Questioned your value to the university.	29%
Insulted your work or publications.	25%
Stole your ideas and presented them as their own.	15%
Made disparaging remarks about your prior university or quality of your degree.	14%

In the "Other" box staff members could write in additional forms. The following forms were each written in by several academic staff members:

- Colleague sent letters or notes to a funding agency or committee to prevent you from getting funding.
- Referred to mediation for trivial reasons.
- Silent Treatment
- Deprived of laboratory or research space.
- Harassed due to union membership or involvement.
- Spread or told lies to cause problems.
- Gave negative reports in application for tenure or promotion.
- Released confidential information.

Effects

Those staff who had experienced workplace bullying at their current university (n = 754) were also asked about whether they felt that bullying had affected them. 69% felt that it had affected their health and 71% felt it had affected their performance at the university.

The most common effects included stress and anxiety (76%), self-doubt (57%), sleeplessness (57%), and a loss of self-esteem (54%).

Occupational Stress

Comparisons of the scores of those who had experienced bullying and those who had not on subscales of Maslach's Burnout Inventory found that staff members who were victims of bullying reported significantly more occupational stress than non-victims.

Implications

- Findings indicate that workplace bullying within the university is problematic and harmful.
- Universities who do not have an anti-bullying policy should consider adopting one.
- Reporting of bullying needs to be taken seriously and acted on by the university. 46% of victims who reported (n = 415) said that reports of bullying were not acted on.
- 37% of those who reported had reported to the union. The majority of those who reported to the union said that when action was taken by the union it helped to reduce bullying.

Limitations

- This is not a random sample and should not be considered representative of all university staff.
- It is possible that those who have experienced bullying at work were more likely to respond to the on-line survey. If so, this would limit generalizability of the prevalence numbers. However, responses from more victims would strengthen the findings regarding the different forms of bullying and the effects reported by staff.