



Health Promotion in the Context of Workplace Bullying

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Workplace bullying

- Prevalent; consists of persistent and repeated offensive behaviours; humiliates or intimidates
- Psychological, physical, sexual
- An international problem
- Effects physiological, psychological, social, and economic health

Workplace Bullying

Workplace
Abuse

Workplace
Harassment

Psychological
Harassment

Mobbing

Horizontal
Violence

Incivility

Who Bullies?

- Most often supervisors or bosses (70%–80%)
- Also
 - Coworkers or peers
 - Groups of coworkers
 - Someone you supervise
 - Clients or customers

Who is Targeted?

- Women are targeted slightly more (58%)
 - Most bullying is same-sex
 - Woman on woman 86%; on men 14%
 - Man on man 64%; on women 36%
 - No protected status

Bullying Tactics

- Setting unreasonable expectations
- Changing rules, policies, responsibilities
- Denying accomplishments, rewards
- Criticizing, blaming, undermining
- Threatening, intimidating, insulting
- Yelling, screaming, stomping, banging
- Excluding, isolating, shunning

Purpose

- To study how men and women bullied at work (targets) care for their health and approach their work afterwards
- To understand variation in how they manage
- To learn from targets' perspectives

Method

- Two grounded theory studies (one with men and one with women)
- Recruited community samples, semi-structured interviews with 40 women in Canada and 36 men in NB
- Developed substantive theories of how targets promote health and engage in work

Participants

- Many types of jobs (professionals, non professionals, labourers)
- Lived in urban and rural areas
- Age of women: range 22 to 60 (mean 46)
- Age of men: range 30 to 81 (mean 52)
- Education levels varied (most had at least high school)

Findings: Central problems

- **Women:** disruption in ability to promote health
- **Men:** erosion of sense of self

Similarities:

- Impact on health, how to care for self
- Impacts on life and work, how to work

Central problem for women

- Workplace bullying causes **disruption**
 - Interferes with women's health and health promotion practices
 - Consumes women's focus
- Process of **Managing Disruption** stages
 - Sustaining
 - Mobilizing
 - Rebuilding

Central problem for men

- Workplace bullying **erodes** sense of self
 - Creates feelings of being diminished, devalued, and devastated
 - Interferes with men's health and care of self
- Process of **Sustaining Self** stages
 - Noting discrepancies
 - Gauging damage
 - Persisting
 - Coming to terms

Comparisons: Who bullies?

- 54% of women were bullied by women
- 45% of men were bullied by men

- 72% of women were bullied by bosses
- 66% of men were bullied by bosses

- 63% of women reported prior abuse
- 58% of men reported prior abuse

Similarities

- Types of bullying tactics
- Interference with health
- Interference with work

Similar bullying tactics

Most bullying was psychological. Tactics:

- Micromanaging
- Severe, persistent, unwarranted criticising
- Intimidating, humiliating, disrespecting
- Excluding, isolating, shunning
- Shouting, throwing things, blocking way
- Removing tasks

Similar interferences on health

Many men and women experienced:

- Psychological effects (anxiety, stress, depression, PTSD, suicidal thoughts)
- Physical effects (headaches, weight changes, sleep pattern changes, pain)
- Social (withdrawal, isolation, relationship changes)
- Financial (job, income loss, reputation)

Similar interference with work

- Lack of concentration
- Feeling distracted, being watchful
- Making mistakes, concern for safety
- Less attentive to detail and quality
- Less confidence in self, questioning self
- Inability to invest time and energy
- Changed meaning of work in lives

Stayed at work or left

Left or Stayed at Work	Women	Men
Fired, laid off, or forced out	$8/40 = 20\%$	$14/36 = 39\%$
Transferred	$4/40 = 10\%$	$4/36 = 11\%$
Quit	$20/40 = 50\%$	$7/36 = 19\%$
Stayed	$4/40 = 10\%$	$9/36 = 25\%$
Still on leave	$4/40 = 10\%$	$2/36 = 5\%$

Other similarities

- Difficulty recognizing and naming experience
- Disbelieving, wondering why
- Importance of support to help manage
- Impact on how good workers work
- Many men and women seek help
- People's careers and lives are changed

Resuming health promotion

- Sports or physical activities
- Quiet walks, reading, music
- Spiritual resources
- Support from family, friends
- Take sick time away from work
- Redefine importance of work in life

Helping restore health promotion

- Health professionals can
 - Assess and identify problems at work
 - Advise leaves of absence or time off
 - Remind of former health practices
- Support is essential to manage being bullied
 - Help connect with others
 - Help employers develop resources

Actions to help promote health

- Recognize that gendered social expectations may limit ability to manage
- Need to promote public awareness of bullying
- Need to examine and create workplace policies that foster respectful workplaces

Women: Managing disruption

- **Sustaining**
 - Enduring
 - Fending
- **Mobilizing**
 - Assessing
 - Engaging
- **Rebuilding**
 - Reclaiming
 - Making sense

Men: Sustaining self

- **Noting discrepancies**
 - Comparing
 - Responding emotionally
- **Gauging Damage**
 - Gathering evidence
 - Taking stock
- **Preserving**
 - Positioning
 - Considering Help
- **Coming to terms**
 - Persisting
 - Strengthening