



Good practice, good business

Eliminating discrimination and harassment from your workplace

WORKPLACE BULLYING

One definition of workplace bullying is “the repeated less favourable treatment of a person by another or others in the workplace, which may be considered unreasonable and inappropriate workplace practice. It includes behaviour that intimidates, offends, degrades or humiliates a worker”. (Source ACTUQ/QCCI/Qld Govt Dept of Workplace Health and Safety)

Bullies usually utilise power attributed to their status, skills or position in the workplace, and both men and women can be the targets and/or the perpetrators. Workplace bullying can occur between a worker and a manager or supervisor, or between co-workers.

Bullying behaviour can range from very obvious verbal or physical assault to very subtle psychological abuse. This behaviour may include:

- physical or verbal abuse
- yelling, screaming or offensive language
- excluding or isolating employees
- psychological harassment
- intimidation
- assigning meaningless tasks unrelated to the job
- giving employees impossible jobs
- deliberately changed work rosters to inconvenience particular employees
- undermining work performance by deliberately withholding information vital for effective work performance

There are a range of psychological and physical illnesses and injuries that can be caused by exposure to bullying in the workplace, including anxiety disorders, stress, depression and insomnia.

Using international research, The Beyond Bullying Association, estimates that between 400,000 and two million Australians will be harassed at work (in 2001), while 2.5 to 5 million will experience workplace harassment at some time during their career.

Workplace bullying has serious economic effects on Australian organisations.

A recent impact and cost assessment calculated that workplace bullying costs Australian employers between \$6–\$36 billion dollars every year when hidden and lost opportunity costs are considered.

The effects on a workplace can include decreased productivity, increased staff absenteeism, staff turnover and poor morale. Financial costs can include legal and workers’ compensation and management time in addressing cases of workplace bullying.

Many people refer to bullying as harassment or discrimination. However, while the effects are essentially the same, bullying may not be unlawful under federal and state anti-discrimination legislation unless the bullying is linked to, or based on, one of the attributes covered by various federal anti-discrimination legislation (age, sex, race, disability, etc).

Everyone has the right to work in an environment free from bullying, harassment, discrimination and violence. Under Occupational Health and Safety Acts, employers and employees have a legal responsibility to comply with any measures that promote health and safety in the workplace. Because of this duty, employers need to eliminate or reduce the risks to employees’ health and safety caused by workplace bullying.

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If you are being bullied you should report it via your workplace complaint procedures – this can be to your employer, a supervisor/manager or health and safety representative. You could also seek advice from your union or other relevant organisations such as JobWatch.

It is in everyone's interest to ensure that workplaces are free from damaging and costly behaviour such as bullying.

This fact sheet is part of *good practice, good business* – information and resources for employers to address discrimination and harassment in the workplace.

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