Workplace bullying in United Kingdom

Professor Helge Hoel
The University of Manchester, UK

Fairness at Work Research Centre (FairWRC)

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Prevalence of bullying in the UK

- Prevalence rates vary between 10-20% depending upon method applied
  - On-line surveys
    - 20% plus... (e.g. Unison, 2009)
  - Random, representative self-administered survey
    - 10% plus (e.g. Hoel & Cooper, 2000)
  - Representative surveys, face-to-face in peoples’ homes
    - 4-7% (e.g. Grainer & Fitzner, 2007)
Patterns of bullying

• Men and women report similar exposure rates

• Some ‘protected groups’ (ethnic minorities, disabled, Lesbian, Gay men and Bisexuals) over-represented

• More widespread in public than private sector

• **Vertical bullying (top-down) dominates (75-80%)**
  – Also bullying by colleagues, by subordinates and by clients
Consequences of bullying

- Impact on job-satisfaction, psychological and physical health (Hoel et al., 2004; Quine, 1999, 2000)
- Organisational consequences are the focus of discussion: **making the business case**
  - Turnover
  - Productivity
  - Absenteeism
  - Litigation
  - Bystanders
- Bullying tentatively estimated to cost UK economy £13.75Bn annually
Reasons for bullying

• Work-environment quality (Coyne et al. 2003; Rayner et al., 2002)

• Style of leadership (Hoel et al., 2010)

• Professional socialisation processes
  – Adoption of shared destructive norms (e.g. Archer, 1999; Bloisi & Hoel, 2008)

• Industrial relations climate: bullying as a tool of managerial control
Addressing the problem through regulations - 1

- No specific UK legislation against bullying
  - ‘Dignity at Work Bill’ blocked by successive governments
- A range of statutes and legal provisions available to victims
- Health and Safety at Work Act (1974)
  - Employers’ duty of care to ensure, so far as it is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and wellbeing of employees
Addressing the problem through regulations - 2

• Anti-discrimination legislation (UK Equality Act 2010)
  – Outlaws employment discrimination and harassment of ‘protected groups’
  – Conduct that has the effect of creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading etc. environment

• Protection from Harassment Act (Anti-stalking)
  – “A person must not pursue a conduct a) which amounts to harassment of another and which b) which he knows or ought to know amounts to harassment of the other”
  – Compensation: Currently up to £1M

• Employment Rights Act (1996)
  – Protection against unfair or ‘constructive dismissal’: leaving job against your will/being forced out
Interventions: Employer actions

- Focus on bullying policies
  - Content and development

- Problems with policies:
  - Often considered ineffective
  - Not communicated
  - Not enforced by managers

- The appropriateness of mediation as a tool?

- Critique of employer approach:
  - The opportunity for a fair hearing is questioned
Interventions: Trade Union actions

• Trade unions actively involved since late 1990s

• Focus on policy development and implementation

• Provided evidence of prevalence and risk-factors through membership surveys
  – ‘Bullies able to get away with it’
  – ‘Workers too scared to report it’ (Unison, 1997, 2008)
A partnership approach

• Dignity at Work Partnership Project (£1.3M) (BERR, 2008)
  – Employers: e.g. British Airways, British Telecom
  – Trade Unions: Unite the Union

• Success depends on:
  – Commitment from the top
  – Buy-in from workforce
  – Policies to be combined with employee involvement
  – Creating joint ownership and trust
  – Zero tolerance
  – A special focus on minority workers/’protected groups’

• Critique:
  – Formal approach perceived to be biased in favour of management and does not provide redress
Thank you!