Workplace bullying in United Kingdom

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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 <u>Partnership</u> 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!