

PSYCHOTERROR!

ACTION IS NEEDED TO END BULLYING IN THE WORKPLACE

HAZARDS FACTSHEET 70

In Germany they call it "psychoterror". Here, we call it bullying. The International Labour Office (ILO) says it is "one of the fastest growing areas of workplace violence." Most of us have witnessed it and alarming numbers have been on the receiving end of what TUC calls an "epidemic" of workplace bullying.

ILO defines bullying as "offensive behaviour through vindictive, cruel, malicious or humiliating attempts to undermine an individual or groups of employees."

It might get called teasing or harassment. The term mobbing - ganging up on an employee and harassing them - is also used (*Hazards* 65). The TUC says it is long-term and persistent negative behaviour, ranging from abuse, humiliation and ridicule to the imposition of unmanageable workloads, unreasonable deadlines and continual fault-finding.

And it is a potentially deadly problem. In Sweden, bullying is alleged to be the cause of 10-15 per cent of all suicides. In Japan, bullying people until they resign has been used as a method of corporate downsizing, and has also been linked to record levels of suicide in the country (*Hazards* 67).

In March 1998, UNISON established for the first time in UK law that suicide can be related to workplace bullying, obtaining £25,000 compensation for the family of Richard Pocock, who took his own life after being subjected to what UNISON legal experts described as a vindictive, oppressive and ruthless style of macho management (*Hazards* 62).

Bully beef

Almost half of Britain's employees (47 per cent) have witnessed bullying at work, one in 10 (10.5 per cent) report having been bullied in the last six months, and one in four (24.4 per cent) have been bullied in the last five years, according to TUC research published in February. The findings of the biggest British bullying study suggest the bullying problem is significantly worse than elsewhere in Europe.

Based on a survey of 5,300 public, private and voluntary sector employees, the results suggest workplace bullying contributes to the loss of 18 million working days every year. And victims of workplace bullying take an average seven extra days off each year than those who are not bullied.

Those who reported being bullied within the last six months consistently reported the poorest health, the lowest work motivation and satisfaction, the highest absenteeism figures as well as the lowest productivity, compared to those who were not bullied.

Those who witnessed bullying at work were also more likely to report poor health and low morale than those who worked in bullying-free environments.

Bossy bosses

The TUC survey found that in most cases (75 per cent) a manager was identified as the bully. Victims of bullying were more likely to experience autocratic and divisive styles of management than those who hadn't experienced bullying at work.

A July 1999 Institute of Management (IOM) report suggested bullying was part of the new management credo. It concluded that new "leaner" business practices are a breeding ground for "corporate bullying on a large scale." (*Hazards* 67).

IOM added that people are expected to "work longer hours with fewer



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resources, put into head-to-head competition with colleagues and treated unsympathetically if they flag under the strain. This attitude starts at the top and filters down through an entire organisation spawning a whole brood of macho style managers in its wake."

The TUC research also found that long hours and job insecurity has helped to fuel the epidemic of workplace bullying. TUC study author Professor Cary Cooper of UMIST linked the higher UK incidence compared to other European countries to the growth of long hours - we work the longest hours in Europe - job insecurity and the effects of "downsizing" on workloads.

Research published in April 2000 linked downsizing to higher sickness levels (page 11).

Action

The TUC report calls on employers to:

- Develop procedures for dealing with complaints
- train managers so they are aware of the negative effects of bullying and
- undertake regular risk assessments or stress audits to identify bullying at work.

Public service union UNISON says all workplaces should have a bullying policy covering all staff and agreed jointly by the employer and the union. It says unions should check whether the policy includes:

- A commitment from senior management
- acceptance that bullying is an organisational issue
- a statement that bullying is unacceptable and will not be tolerated
- clear definitions of unacceptable

behaviour

- a statement that bullying will be treated as a disciplinary offence
- steps to assess and prevent bullying
- duties of heads of departments and supervisors
- confidentiality for complainants
- guarantees that complainants will not be victimised
- clear complaints procedure, separate from the normal grievance procedure
- both informal and formal complaints procedures
- information and training about bullying and the policy and
- review and monitoring.

The law

In July 1999 UK organisation ACAS issued workplace bullying guidance. The guidance for employees notes safety, discrimination, disability and stalking laws may all apply (*Hazards* 67).

It adds: "Employers are usually liable in law for the acts of their workers and this includes bullying or harassing behaviour."

General duties under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 require employers to protect the health, safety and welfare of their employees, with these duties explained further in safety regulations including the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999.

Where employers have failed to take the required care of their staff, workers can claim compensation.

In 1996, UNISON won a major bullying victory in the courts, securing £66,000 in an out-of-court settlement for social worker Janet Ballantyne who suffered anxiety, depression and panic attacks caused by a bullying manager.

In March 2000, a former army private was awarded £745,000 at the High Court after an attack by a bullying corporal led to mental collapse.



Information

Violence at work. ILO. 1998. ISBN 92-2-110335-8. Details from ILO, Millbank Tower 21-24 Millbank, SW1P 4QP. Email: london@ilo-london.org.uk

Hazards factsheet 65, Violence at work. From *Hazards*.

Bullying at work factsheet. London Hazards Centre, November 1999. Details from LHC, Interchange Studios, Dalby Street,

London NW5 3NQ. Tel: 020 7267 3387. Email: mail@lhc.org.uk web: www.lhc.org.uk

The bully at work: What you can do to stop the hurt and reclaim your dignity on the job. Gary and Ruth Namie. ISBN 1-57071-534-3 £12.99 Roundhouse Books, Millstone, Limers Lane, Northam, EX39 2RG, Tel: 01237 474474. round.house@virgin.net

BullyProof yourself at work! Personal strategies to stop the hurt from Harassment.

Gary and Ruth Namie. ISBN 0 96686 2953. Double-Doc Press, 1998-99.

Beating bullying at work: A guide for trade union representatives and personnel managers. TUC guide. £10.00 trades unionists; £20.00 others. Video: *No excuse: Beating bullying at work*. Price per copy to TUC affiliates, £134.00. Details from TUC, Congress House, Great Russell Street, London WC1B 3LS. www.tuc.org.uk (click on health and safety)

ACAS guides: *Bullying and harassment at work - Guidance for employees and Bullying and harassment at work - Guidance for managers and employers* are free from ACAS, although a £1.00 post and packing fee is charged (for up to six leaflets). Make sure you order both - the employees leaflet is clearer on employees' rights, the employers' leaflet has far more information on the law and on policies. From: ACAS Reader Limited, PO Box 16, Earl Shilton, Leices-

ter LE9 8ZZ. Tel: 01455 852225.

Bullying and sexual harassment at work. Tina Stephens. Institute of Personnel and Development. September 1999. ISBN 0 85292 804 1. £9.99. see: www.ipd.co.uk

More help

Most unions have produced detailed guides and leaflets on bullying, stress and harassment. Check with your union safety department.

A TUC rights leaflet on how to tackle bullying at work is available on the know your rights line 0870 600 4 882. Lines are open every day from 8am-10pm. Calls are charged at the national rate.

TUC website: www.tuc.org.uk (click on health and safety).

Bully OnLine: www.successunlimited.co.uk

Andrea Adams Consultancy, Maritime House, Basin Road North, Hove, East Sussex. Tel: 01273 704901.

The Campaign Against Workplace Bullying, PO Box 1886, Benicia, CA 94510, USA. Tel: 00 1 707 747 9000. Fax: 00 1 707 746 5820. www.bullybusters.org

Swedish web encyclopaedia on mobbing, created by Heinz Leymann who establish the world's first Work Trauma Clinic: www.leymann.se