

VICTIMS OF BULLYING AND POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER

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Bullying at school involves the psychological, emotional, social or physical harassment of one student by another. It includes behaviours and actions that are verbal, physical and or anti-social, such as exclusion, extortion, gossip and non-verbal body language. It can be transmitted via threats, telephone, notes and e-mail. It can occur at school or in transit between school and home. The nature and extent of bullying can vary from direct to indirect harassment, from minor irritation to major assault, from "just having a bit of fun" to breaking the law. Bullying can happen sporadically or over a long period of time.

The crucial feature is that the victim feels powerless and perceives themselves as having been bullied. Bullying is a subjective concept. The critical issue is the extent of physical, psychological and other damage that affects the victim. The impact of bullying on the victim is further exacerbated by their fear or threat of future attacks.

There is often confusion in the meaning of the term bullying. Some children believe that physical bullying is a problem but not teasing or exclusion. Schools are often frightened to identify their bullying strategies and disguise them as anti-harassment policies. Some schools identify bullying when the attacks occur over a period of time. However I would disagree. Many sensitive children are affected by just one occasion, just as we would expect from victims of crime. Thus bullying on one occasion may be incredibly traumatic to a sensitive child and damage their behaviour. Although all forms of bullying are harmful, the research indicates that nasty verbal comments hurt the most and linger for a longer period of time in the child's memory. According to prof. Ken Rigby about one in six children are bullied weekly on a regular basis. This does not include those who are bullied sporadically or occasionally.

However, there is increasing evidence that bullying also occurs in the workplace. It can range from verbal, racist, and sexual harassment, exclusion to physical violence. Threats include areas such as age, competence level, exclusion, and threats to career. One person in 30 is a serial bully; Bullies try and project their incompetencies on to others to take away attention from their own inadequacies. Bullies do a lot of damage in organisations, they make subordinates scared. They put people in protective mode, which interferes with the company's ability to generate innovation. Employees are kept in a state of psychological emergency. Add to this the sense of rage at what the bully is doing means that the employee is less able to work efficiently and successfully.

The victim is generally very competent and popular. Victims will suffer similar symptoms to victims of bullying at school but in addition, they suffer financially, their employment opportunities are directly affected, their marital and family relationships are affected and the workplace suffers. Bullying costs in terms of staff wasting time, staff turnover, sickness, poor productivity, low morale, poor customer service etc. Staff can spend more time covering their backs than doing their work. Cost of bullying to the employer: The bully is not fulfilling his duties but consumes salary, he steals other peoples work and gets credit for it. The bully prevents other staff from fulfilling their duties; the bully is the main but least recognised cause of negative stress in the organisation. The divisive, disruptive and dysfunctional behaviour of a serial bully can spread through the organisation like a cancer. Bullies do a lot of damage in organisations, they make subordinates scared. They put people in protective mode, which interferes with the company's ability to generate innovation. Employees are kept in a state of psychological emergency. Add to this the sense of rage at what the bully is doing means that the employee is less able to work efficiently and successfully. The main areas where there is bullying are the following professions: - education, hospitality, emergency services, and medical/nursing. One could speculate how this affects the other victims we are trying to help at this conference.

Here are some definitions:

" Bullying is the aggressive behaviour arising from the deliberate intent to cause physical or psychological distress to others." Peter Randall (1997)

" Bullying involves an initial desire to hurt, this desire is expressed in action, someone is hurt, the action is directed by a more powerful person or group, it is without justification, it is typically repeated, and it is done so with evident enjoyment." Ken Rigby (1998).

Damage:

Students: At school- short and long term impacts: the victim, the bully, the school, teachers, parents and peer group, eg physical and mental health, suicide, dep. anxiety disorders, school work social life, self esteem,

Employee: the individual, (financial, career opportunities, sabotage by them or others, physical and emotional health difficulties,) their family, the work climate, the economics of the organisation, success of the organisation, union and legal structures, anger at their lack of rights and justice,

Case Studies:

1. Jim who was bullied at school and later harassed at university camp gave up his dream career and has been looking for alternatives.
2. Mary the nurse, excluded, put down, given poor shifts, told off, denigrated, affected her marital relationship, Worked at same place for 11 years, abuse began with new supervisor, who changed shifts, made it exhausting, she couldn't listen to the rosters that nurses wanted to work, not sleeping, pains in body, very angry, felt ostracised
3. Bella lost her voice, depressed and couldn't think. She was too competent but was criticised, rumours spread, harassed re age and being middle class and told she couldn't balance budgets, after many years of excellent work,

Trauma

According to Peter Randall the core cluster of symptoms include persistent re-experiencing of the trauma, recurring nightmares, sudden feelings and sometimes actions associated with a belief that the stressful event is still occurring, intense psychological distress when exposed to situations similar to those in which the trauma occurred, persistent symptoms of increased psychological arousal eg sleep difficulties, poor concentration, irritability, etc, aggressive behaviour problems, moodiness and feelings of guilt,

Peter Randall sees many child victims are unable to develop appropriate social survival skills and are thus more likely to become victims of bullying trauma as adults. He states, eg " I don't seem to be able to do anything to help myself, when I see the bully coming I freeze." Unresolved childhood PTSD is known to have significant influence on adult social behaviour and may well act to predispose individuals in adult life to block effective response against would-be bullies."

Diagnosis of Posttraumatic stress disorder: According to current research and clinical experience, PTSD can be seen with students and employees.

Students: Type 1, single event, Type 2, prolonged exposure.

SCHOOL: This diagnosis affects the school; they have to diagnose a trauma more carefully, recommend or provide the appropriate treatment, consider the role of secondary victims eg traumatised parents who can maintain the problem longer or sabotage therapy attempts by the school to make changes, a variety of therapeutic approaches need to be included eg career guidance, study methods, stress management, dealing with anger and pain, social skills assertiveness skills, parent counselling, supporting relatives,

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER: Who pays: school, parent, clinic or victims referral services eg VRAS? Who is appropriate?

EMPLOYMENT: Victims need to be referred to appropriate therapy eg Bella not referred for months and thus her condition deteriorated. They need career guidance, help with finances, family /marital counselling, dealing with the trauma and loss of self esteem, stress and anger management, releasing their anger, pain and powerlessness, empowerment, assertiveness skills.

Who Pays: Work care, employer assistance program? Who else.

Conclusion:

Bullying is another form of violence and may cause a PTSD, which can occur and re-occur over a person's lifetime if not dealt with appropriately.

Some Facts And Statistics

Check Bully online web site of the UK National Workplace Advice Line by Tim Field (no relation to Evelyn Field) From: web site <http://www.successunlimited.co.uk/costs.htm>

November 1996 the Institute of Personnel and Development published results of a survey revealing that 1 in 8 (around 3 million) UK employees have been bullied at work in the last five years. Over half of those people who experienced bullying say it is commonplace in their organisation and a quarter said that it has become worse in the last year. One in three people leave their job because of bullying in the UK.

Stafford university business school survey: 1994 535 of UK employees (about 14 million) have been bullied at work during their working life. The number of calls in 1997 to the Bad Boss Hot line revealed 38% bullying, higher than other complaints (web site <http://www.tuc.org.uk/>)

Cost of Bullying to industry and taxpayers : estimates the cost of stress range from 5 billion pound to 12 billion pound each year, ie 500 pound per adult.

The replacement cost for an employee is at least 5000 pound for advertising and basic recruitment costs plus an amount approx. equal to the employee's annual salary while the person gets to grips with the job, learning procedures, making contacts, builds networks etc. Some estimates put the induction and retraining at three times the annual salary.

Legal costs: - Grievance procedures cost the employer at least 1000 pound for lost staff time

Employment tribunals cost a minimum of 10000 pounds upwards.

Personnel cost: - affects career and livelihood, family life, reduction in confidence and self-esteem, social life affected, personnel health, separation /divorce, up to one half of all stress related illnesses are estimated to be caused by bullying.

Many Australian managers are bullies who use sarcasm, verbal abuse, threats, intimidation, and assignment to unpleasant jobs and isolation s tools of their trade. The bosses gave confusing information, were authoritarian, poor communicators, vindictive.

A recent study by Griffith's University, Australia, found that of 222 people who were the direct butt of a bully, 71 sought counselling or medical attention, 74 took time off work for an average of 50 days. Morgan estimates the cost of bullying in Australia and Banks is about \$3-4 million a year. This includes sexual and racial harassment.

Reasons why workers are bullied, to be made an example of, force their resignation, bosses can't communicate, makes manager feel good, to gain power, to be made a scapegoat, gain a sexual advantage, teach a lesson, usual behaviour,

Recent conference,1999, in Queensland on bullying: 1-4% people are bullied in the workplace in Europe, the numbers vary per country, eg 22% in the UK and 3.55 in Sweden. The duration can vary between 15 months to 3 years average. It includes rumours, organisations measures, attacking the persons' private life, their attitudes, and some physical abuse, Women bully at same rate as men bully men.

Contact the Author:

Evelyn M. Field is a practising psychologist and professional speaker in Melbourne. She is the author of the successful book ‘Bully Busting’ (Finch 1999). She is currently doing further research on bullying in the workplace in order that she can provide workshops and further written material. She is looking for more stories and solutions of how to deal with bullying at work. If you would like to contact her please do so at efield@netspace.net.au.