

Workplace Bullying: More Common Than You Might Think

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Objectives:

1. Recognize different types of bullying.
2. Describe how bullying can affect one's health and well-being.
3. Identify strategies to manage workplace bullying.

NCCHC Standard

- J-B-09 (2018) Staff Safety
 - Staff safety refers to the health and well-being of staff who work in the facility. It is directly related to administrative practices that ensure staff safety within the facility

U.S. Workplace Bullying Survey of Adult Americans (2021) Statistics

- 48.6 million Americans are bullied at work.
- 79.3 million U.S workers are *affected* by workplace bullying.
- 30% have direct experience being bullied (up 57% from 2017).
- 43.2% is the bullying rate for those doing remote/virtual work.
- Targets have a 67% chance of losing a job they loved when targeted for bullying.
- Women bullies bully women at twice the rate they bully men.
- Bullying during remote work happens most in virtual meetings, not e-mails.
- The rate of bullying for Hispanics, 35%, is higher than for other races.

How Does Bullying Affect the Workplace?

- Workplaces with high rates of bullying can also experience negative consequences such as:
 - Financial loss resulting from legal costs or investigations
 - Decreased productivity/morale
 - Increase employee absences
 - High turnover rates/difficulties in recruitment and retention
 - Poor team dynamics
 - Reduced trust, effort, and loyalty from employees.
 - Loss of innovative ideas from employees.

Definition of Harassment:

- The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission defines harassment as:
 - unwelcome verbal or physical behavior that is based on: race, color, religion, sex, gender/gender identity, nationality, age (40 or older), physical or mental disability, or genetic information.

Definition of Bullying:

- The American Nurses Association defines bullying as:
 - Repeated, unwanted, harmful actions intended to humiliate, offend, and cause distress in the recipient, and as a very serious issue that threatens patients and nurse safety.

Types of Bullying:

- **Verbal:**

- This could include mockery, humiliation, jokes, gossip, or other **spoken** abuse.

Intimidating:

- This might include threats, social exclusion in the workplace, spying, or other invasions of privacy.

- **Retaliatory:**

- In some cases, talking about the bullying can lead to accusations of lying, further exclusion, refused promotions, or other retaliations.

- **Institutional:**

- This happens when a workplace accepts, allows, and even encourages bullying to take place.

Early Warning Signs of Bullying

- Co-workers might become quiet or leave the room when you walk in, or they might ignore you.
- You might be left out of office parties, events, lunches.
- Your supervisor or manager might check on you often or ask you to meet multiple times/week without a clear reason.
- You may be asked to do new tasks or tasks outside your typical duties without training or help (even if you request it).
- It may seem like your work is frequently monitored, to the point where you begin to doubt yourself and have difficulty with your regular tasks.
- You might be asked to do difficult or seemingly pointless tasks and be ridiculed or criticized when you cannot get them done.
- You may notice a pattern of your documents, files, other work-related items, or personal belongings going missing.

Bullying May Increase in Work Environments That:

- Are stressful or change frequently
- Have heavy workloads
- Have unclear work policies about employee behavior
- Have poor employee communication and relationships
- Have more employees who are bored or worried about their job.

Common Traits of a Nurse Bully

- Bullies:
 - Need targets to survive.
 - Tend to be really good clinicians.
 - See the workplace as a battlefield.
 - Enjoy keeping their targets guessing about when the attack will occur.
 - Don't play by the rules.

Overt Nurse Bullying

- Verbal criticism or name calling
- Intimidation
- Blaming
- Jokes or slurs
- Finding fault
- Threatening physical violence

Covert Nurse Bullying:

- Sabotage
- Withholds information
- Excludes others
- Unfair assignments
- Undermines
- Downplays accomplishments
- Takes advantage of others

Subtle Signs of Bullying

Deceit: repeated lying, concealing the truth, deceiving decisions, conversations and work-related events.

Intimidation: threats, fear-inducing communication and behavior

Ignoring: purposefully ignoring, avoiding, or not paying attention to someone.

Isolation/exclusion: intentionally making a person feel socially or physically isolated from a group; excluding a person from decisions, conversations, and work-related events.

Rationalization: constantly defending behavior for acting in a particular manner.

Subtle Signs of Bullying (con't)

- Minimization: discounting or failing to address someone's legitimate concerns or feelings.
- Diversion: dodging issues, acting oblivious, or changing the subject to distract away from an issue.
- Shame and guilt: making someone feel that they are the problem, shaming them for no real wrongdoing, making them feel inadequate and unworthy.
- Undermining work: deliberately delaying and blocking an employee's work, promising them a project then giving it to others.

Suble Signs of Bullying (con't)

- Pitting employees against each other.
- Removal of responsibilities: changing their role, or replacing aspects of their job without cause.
- Impossible or changing expectations: setting someone up to fail.
- Constant change/inconsistency: changing guidelines, scope of assignments, not following through on things said.
- Mood swings: sharp and sudden shifts in emotions.
- Criticism: constantly criticizing someone's work or behavior, usually for unwarranted reasons.

Subtle Signs of Bullying (con't)

- Withholding information: intentionally withholding or giving wrong information.
- Projection of blame: shifting blame to others and using them as a scapegoat, not taking responsibility for problems or issues.
- Taking credit: taking/stealing credit for other people's ideas and contributions without acknowledging them.
- Seduction: using excessive flattery and compliments to get people to trust them, lower their defenses, and be more receptive to manipulative behavior.
- Creating a feeling of uselessness: making someone feel underused, giving unfavorable duties and responsibilities.

Physical Health Effects of Bullying

Have physical symptoms such as:

- Digestive issues; nausea, diarrhea
- High blood pressure
- Heart palpitations/chest pain
- Sleep disruption
- Loss of concentration/memory
- Headaches
- Ulcers
- Tremors of hands or lips
- Temperature issues; chills or excessive sweating

Psychological/Mental Health Effects of Bullying

- Depressive disorders
- Anxiety disorders (PTSD, OCD, generalized anxiety and panic attacks).
- Substance dependence
- Anti-social personality disorder
- Suicidal thoughts
- Eating disorder
- Uncontrollable crying

Emotional Effects of Bullying

- Thinking and worrying about work constantly, even during time off.
- Dreading work and wanting to stay home.
- Needing time off to recover from stress.
- Loosing interest in things you usually like to do.
- Low self-esteem.
- Self-doubt, or wondering if you've imagined the bullying.

What to Do If You Are Being Bullied At Work

- Document the bullying
 - Note the date/time/where the bullying took place, and other people in the room
- Save the evidence
 - Keep (in a safe place) any threatening notes, comments or e-mails you receive, even if they are not signed.
- Report the bullying
 - Follow your facility policy (supervisor, human resource representative, designated person)

What to Do (Continued)

- Confront the bully
 - Bring a trusted witness, be calm, direct, polite and ask them to stop the behaviors.
- Review work policies
 - Check employee handbook, P &P manual, union rules
- Seek legal guidance
 - Consider talking to a lawyer, depending on the circumstances of the bullying. Legal action may not always be possible but a lawyer can offer specific advice.
- Reach out to others
 - Family, friends, therapist

To Correct Bullying Behaviors

- Educate all team members on appropriate professional behaviors that are consistent with the organizations code of conduct.
- Hold all team members accountable for modeling desirable behaviors.
- Make a committee to evaluate aspects of workplace bullying
- Develop and implement policies/procedures/processes that address:
 - Bullying
 - Reducing fear of retaliation
 - Responding to those who witness bullying
 - Beginning disciplinary actions (how and when)

Managements Role

- Conduct a climate survey to learn about the problems in their particular workplace and use the survey's findings to tailor policies and procedures for that workplace.
- Adopt clear, written anti-bullying policies.
- Foster an organizational culture that prioritizes inclusion and doesn't tolerate bullying.
- Conduct workplace civility training.
- Implement clear and straightforward reporting procedures.
- Maintain employee confidentiality during any investigation.
- Advise reporting employee about the possibility that co-workers will learn about their complaints.
- Employees who are victims of bullying or harassment should know they should promptly report incidents to the designated person outlined in the procedure, (supervisor, HR rep, management contact).

Federal Laws: Workplace Bullying

- There is no federal law that specifically targets workplace bullying, yet employees are protected by:
 - Title VII of the Civil rights Act of 1964
 - The Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967(ADEA)
 - Americans With Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA).

Workplace Bullying Institute

- Introduced the Healthy Workplace Bill (HWB)
- It has been introduced in 30 state legislatures.
- A few states/territories have enacted laws that protect workers from bullying and harassment by requiring training and outlawing bullying actions.

California

- Now requires workplaces with 50 or more employees to have abusive conduct training as part of existing state-mandated harassment prevention training.

Massachusetts

- SB 1013, a bill that was introduced in 2017, would prohibit all “abusive conduct” against employees-even if it isn’t based on a protected characteristic.

Tennessee

- Passed a “Healthy Workplace” bill in 2015 that encourages employers to adopt anti-bullying policies which immunized them from liability in lawsuits alleging intentional or negligent infliction of mental anguish due to the abusive conduct of employees.

Utah

- Passed a law in 2015 requiring its state agencies to train supervisors and employees on ways to prevent abusive conduct. The training must define abusive conduct, its ramifications, and provide the resources available to employees who are subject to abusive conduct and the grievance process.

Healthy Workplace Bill For The Bullied Employees (Plaintiffs)

Features

- Public lawsuits allow details of employer misconduct to be aired without gagging or suppression.
- Plaintiff's can be anyone, not just "protected status group" members as discrimination and harassment laws require.
- "Workplace bullying" is replaced with abusive workplace conduct, so as not be discounted or trivialized.
- This would be a civil lawsuit (money for harm)
- Plaintiffs can show that they were distressed and suffered harm
- Harm can be health, adverse employment actions or constructive discharge

Healthy Workplace Bill For A Bullied Employee (con't)

- Plaintiffs may sue employers (with insurance to cover their costs) for exposure to a harmful work environment.
- No workers comp claim if lawsuit is filed (except in Wisconsin where both are permitted).
- Retaliation for filing the lawsuit is also a violation.
- If plaintiffs win, relief may include:
 - Reinstatement or bully removal
 - Back pay/front pay
 - Compensation for pain and suffering and emotional distress
 - Punitive damages
 - Attorney's fees

Healthy Workplace Bill for Good Employers

■ Features:

- If “reasonable care” to prevent and correct abusive conduct (creation of a relevant policy and enforcement procedure) is taken AND the employee fails to take advantage of the policy, the employer escapes liability.
- Employers still have right to act on actual poor performance or investigated illegal or unethical activity by the employee.
- In the absence of an adverse employment decision (termination, demotion, failure to promote, discipline, reduction in compensation), employers can only be liable for emotional distress damages if misconduct was extreme and outrageous.
- Plaintiffs may choose to sue perpetrators who may only escape liability if they prove they acted at the direction of the employer under actual or implied threat of an adverse employment action.

An Questions?



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