

Meeting in Lisboa January 2015

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The phenomenon of workplace bullying, a universal/global problem where some people are being systematically teased, tormented and harassed or socially excluded at work is of course nothing new, but have probably existed since the beginning of time.

However, it is only during the last 10-15 years that this subject has been in focus as a workplace phenomenon. As a technical term, the Norwegian word for bullying –“mobbing-” is somewhat problematic. Firstly, it has an English origin but is not being used in English, where the terms bullying or harassment are being used. Secondly, in everyday Norwegian, the term is being used both to describe friendly and innocent teasing or joking and as a synonym for the clearly more loaded concept of harassment.

The concept refers to serious personal differences where a co-worker is systematically being subjected to acts involving degrading and disrespectful treatment/or sexual harassment. **(although, a study conducted by researchers at the University of Manitoba Canada found that workplace bullying inflicts more harm on employees than sexual harassment. In fact, bullied employees showed more job stress, less commitment to the company and higher levels of anxiety and anger than sexually harassed employees.**

In everyday Norwegian the term is being used to describe isolated incidents involving this type of treatment and to describe more prolonged, continuous processes where an individual gradually becomes more and more stigmatised at his or her place of work.

Thus, even though the term has its limitations, the concept of bullying is generally accepted both as a technical term and as a commonly used word in everyday Norwegian. Despite it's deficiencies, the Norwegian term “mobbing” – bullying in English is here to stay.

The impact of bullying:

- feel a sense of isolation
- may struggle with depression
- post-traumatic stress disorder
- eating disorders

One example from Norway – a study among assistant nurses

A study /survey conducted some years ago can be as an example of bullying at a workplace. The study includes of 745 Norwegian assistant nurses. Total of 80 per cent of this work group gave response. The aim of the study was to look closer at the potential negative consequences of such bullying on the psychological well-being of the victims.

In addition the study included relationships between exposure to bullying and the victims' psychological health and well-being, job satisfaction and symptoms of burnout were investigated. A highly elevated level of burnout symptoms was expected among bullied assistant nurses as compared with non-bullied assistant nurses in the present study.

After introducing a definition of bullying, respondents were asked whether or not they felt bullied themselves, whether they had observed others being bullied at work, and to what degree they felt that bullying was a serious strain within their daily lives.

While almost 5 per cent of the assistant nurses currently experienced problems with bullying, 8.4 per cent had former experiences as victims of bullying. Moreover, one out of five had witnessed others being bullied.

The most common kinds of bullying behavior experienced by the victims were serious slander, rumors and serious slander, rumors and silent hostility. Fellow assistant nurses and nurses were seen as the offenders in most cases.

None of the victims felt bullied by patients or relatives.

The results clearly indicate that bullying at work is a problem among assistant nurses. Bullied assistant nurses had significantly higher levels of burnout, and reported a lowered level of job-satisfaction and psychological well-being compared with their non-bullied colleagues. In sum, the study showed that some assistant nurses have experienced the highly aggressive behavior of other nurses against them, causing them to feel victimized and bullied.

Symptoms of burnout, lowered job satisfaction and lowered psychological well-being were highly related to these experiences of victimization.

What is stated in the Norwegian Working Environment Act?

- The purpose of the Working Environment Act is to safeguard employees against harmful physical and mental influences.
- The law also contains provisions concerning protection against improper conduct and preserving of the employees' dignity and integrity.
- The employer is expected to ensure that work is organized and managed in such a way that the employees are not subjected to undesirable physical or mental strain.
- The union and safety representative is the employees' spokesman on working environment matters.

Our attitude – three main aspect

- Prevention - before anything happens
- Handling – when it is happening

- Follow-up – after something has happened

What are some general tips for the workplace?

The Norwegian Labour Inspection Authority recommends:

TO DO

- ENCOURAGE everyone at the workplace to act towards others in a respectful and professional manner.
- HAVE a workplace policy in place that includes a reporting system.
- EDUCATE everyone that bullying is a serious matter.
- TRY TO WORK OUT solutions before the situation gets serious or "out of control".
- EDUCATE everyone about what is considered bullying, and whom they can go to for help.
- TREAT all complaints seriously, and deal with complaints promptly and confidentially.
- TRAIN supervisors and managers in how to deal with complaints and potential situations. Encourage them to address situations promptly whether or not a formal complaint has been filed.
- HAVE an impartial third party help with the resolution, if necessary.

DO NOT

DO NOT IGNORE any potential problems.

DO NOT DELAY resolution. Act as soon as possible.

Thank you for your attention.