



Mental health effects of work place bullying and harassment

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Have you been a victim of bullying or harassment at work?



Have you ever
bullied or harassed a
fellow work mate,
employee, manager
or employer?



Content

- Definition of terms
- Examples of workplace bullying and harassment
- Statistics
- Effect on mental health
- What can we do about it?

- **What is mental health?**

Our emotional, psychological and social well being.

- **What is bullying?**

Psychology today: “A distinctive pattern of repeatedly harming and humiliating others, specifically those who are smaller, weaker, younger or in any way more vulnerable than the bully.”

- **Workplace bullying:** “Situations where an employee repeatedly and over a prolonged time period is exposed to harassing behavior from one or more colleagues (including subordinates and leaders) and where the targeted person is unable to defend him-/herself against this systematic mistreatment.”

- **What is harassment?**

When the harm and humiliation targets a person’s race, age, gender, color, religion, disability or national origin.

Examples

- Gossip
- Yelling
- Unreasonable work demands (e.g. deadlines)
- Micromanagement
- Isolation/exclusion
- Stealing another's work credit
- Threats
- Intrusion of work privacy
- Unfair refusal of leave or training



- Constant change of work guidelines, policies, procedures or standards
- Invasion of work space
- Inappropriate remarks
- Inappropriate non verbal behavior
- Unfair and continuous criticisms
- Withholding of work information



Workplace bullying is not...

- Consequences for poor work performance.
- Warranted discipline, demotion, counselling or termination.

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Statistics

- A survey carried out in 2008- 75% of employees affected as a target or a witness.
- A 2019 survey- 94% reported to have been bullied.
- 19% increase in 11 years.
- Mode of bullying:
 - Aggressive email tones (23.3%)
 - Gossip (20.2%)
 - Yelling (17.8%).
- Law firms notorious for bullies- globally.
- Survey carried out across 135 countries reported: half of the female respondents and 1 out of 3 of males had experienced bullying.
- A third of women and one in 14 of men have been sexually harassed.

How does it affect our mental
health?



Lower self-esteem

- To have a negative perception of one self. Seeing oneself as unworthy, unlovable, incompetent etc.
- Going through bullying and harassment can dent a person's self esteem, especially those that already had somewhat low self esteem.
- Preoccupation with faults and self blame.
- Can lead to:
 - Depression
 - Anxiety
 - Substance use
 - Eating disorders
 - Self destructive decisions
 - Harming others
 - Affects relationships



Anxiety

- Feelings of worry, dread or fear.
- Anxiety is natural as it helps us to prepare, avoid danger and make meaningful choices. However, it becomes abnormal when it interferes with daily functioning.
- Work place bullying can result in:
 - **Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD)**- marked fear and worry about what the future will bring; a preoccupation that something bad is going to happen.
 - **Social Anxiety Disorder (SAD)**- marked fear and avoidance of social situations where the individual is preoccupied with being negatively evaluated by others, humiliated, rejected or offending others.
 - **Panic Disorder**- recurrent, unexpected panic attacks and persistent worry about having more panic attacks.



Panic attacks

- Abrupt surges of intense fear or intense discomfort that peaks within minutes.
- Symptoms:
 - Palpitations, pounding heart, or accelerated heart rate
 - Sweating
 - Trembling or shaking
 - Sensations of shortness of breath or smothering
 - Feelings of choking
 - Chest pain or discomfort
 - Nausea or abdominal distress
 - Feeling dizzy, unsteady, light-headed, or faint
 - Chills or heat sensations
 - Numbness or tingling sensations
 - Derealization (feelings of unreality) or depersonalization (being detached from oneself)
 - Fear of losing control or “going crazy.”
 - Fear of dying

Depression

- The prolonged stress associated with bullying can result in depression.
- Depression is a serious but treatable medical condition that affects the way a person thinks, feels and behaves.
- Symptoms:
 - Feeling sad/hopeless/empty most of the day nearly every day
 - Loss of interest
 - Significant weight loss or gain/decrease or increase in appetite
 - Insomnia/hypersomnia
 - Loss of energy
 - Feeling worthless
 - Reduced ability to concentrate/think
 - Suicidal thoughts
 - Unexplained head/body aches



C-PTSD

- **Complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (C-PTSD):**
- PTSD generally the result of a single traumatic incident.
- C-PTSD the result of ongoing or repetitive traumatic incidents or stressful situations where the person feels there is no escape from the situation.
- Symptoms include:
 - Flashbacks
 - Nightmares
 - Difficulty regulating emotions
 - Feelings of detachment

Substance use

- Some individuals turn to using substances as a coping mechanism.
- Can lead to alcohol and substance addiction.
- Can affect the user, family and community.

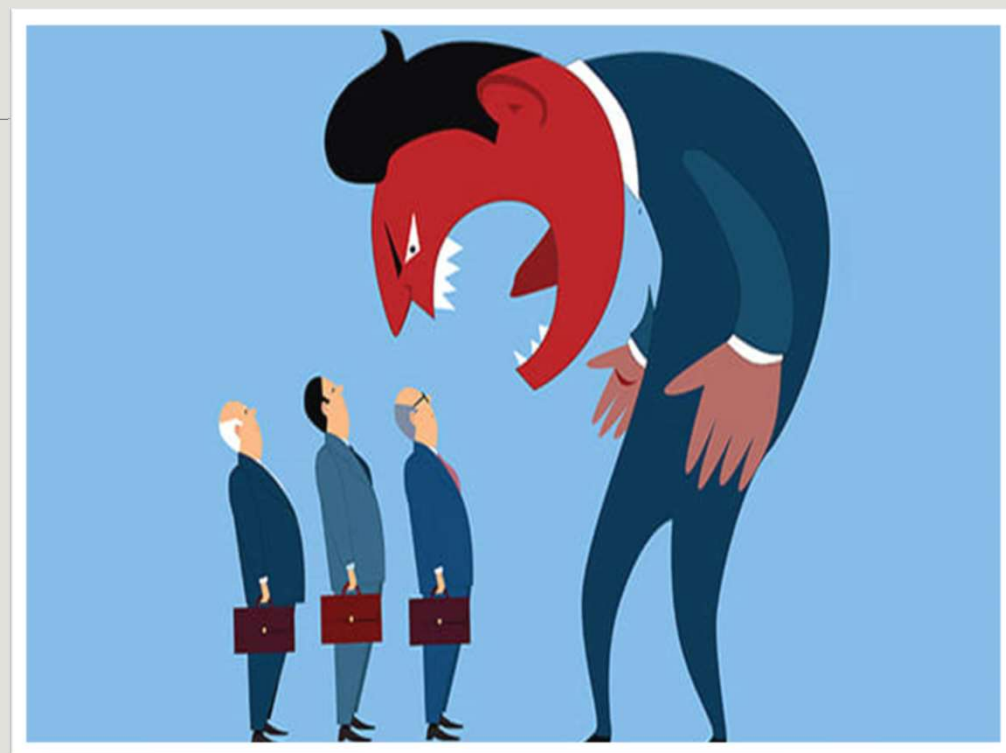


Increased risk of suicide

- In extreme cases, the victim can turn to suicide as a solution.
- Untreated mental health issues can result in suicide.



What can we do
about it?



If you are an employer

- Consider carrying out a survey
- Lookout for those that might be victims of bullying:
 - Soft spoken ones
 - Very skilled workers
 - New employees
 - Minority groups
- Educate yourself about bullying
- Carry out trainings especially for managers, supervisors and authority figures
- Investigate complaints promptly
- Encourage a zero tolerance environment
- Consider an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) for your organization:
 - A voluntary, confidential workplace service that helps employees through various life challenges.



If you are a victim

- Acknowledge that there is a problem
- Know your rights
- Have evidence
- Speak/stand up to the bully (They might be unaware that they are harming you)
- Build support outside of work with family and friends
- Seek help from medical or mental health professionals



