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Population Health

title	"Shut up and Put up" - Barriers to Tackling Workplace Bullying in a Public Sector Organization
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INTRODUCTION

Workplace health promotion, concerned as it is with promoting the health of those in the workplace setting, has paid surprisingly little attention to the phenomenon of workplace bullying, despite its prevalence and well-documented negative impact on health. Tackling workplace bullying provides an opportunity to work coherently within the settings approach, focusing not only on what health difficulties workers report, but how the organisation and work itself contributes to these difficulties and how the organisation (as opposed to the worker) can change to reduce ill health. Such an approach assumes that how work is constructed, how the organisation is structured, work-based relations, the explicit and implicit expectations of workers all are central to improving health.

OBJECTIVE

This paper explores qualitative responses about perceived organizational responses to the problem of workplace bullying, collected as part of a larger study on workplace bullying conducted in a medium-sized public sector organization.

METHODOLOGY

Respondents replying to the open-ended questions within the instrument numbered 179, which represented 61% of the 293 respondents to the survey. The survey was emailed or posted to all staff on the payroll at that time (1,495). Comments made in the course of an on-line survey that were qualitative in nature. The basis of the process of data analysis in this study follows a general template analysis style, involving the generation of themes, patterns and interrelationships in an interpretive process.

RESULTS

Three main themes emerged in the analysis; the nature of bullying, the nature of hierarchical power and 'head-in-the-sand' culture.

Findings are discussed in the context of the need to explore the problem of workplace bullying from an organizational perspective and advocates strongly for organizational level interventions that go beyond the provision of anti-bullying policies. The need in particular to explore the organization and expression of power within work organizations is highlighted.

CONCLUSIONS

To address bullying in the workplace a whole-organisation, ecological approach is required. Ensure that Anti-Bullying policies in the workplace:

- Have visible and explicit back-up from top management
- Are proactive about informing employees
- Apply procedures that are fair, transparent, consistent and timely

PRESENTED

At the "Awareness and Perceptions of Staff of the Anti-Bullying Policy in a Public Sector Organization" 5th International Conference: Workplace Bullying- the Way Forward in June 2006, by Margaret Hodgins.