

Final Report

# Workplace Bullying in Australia

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## 2 Overview

- Workplace bullying is characterised by repeated and unreasonable behaviours directed towards a worker or group of workers. It can encompass behaviours that target an individual's work (e.g., unreasonable demands) and personal characteristics (e.g., teasing and spreading rumours).
- Workplace bullying is a major issue, with nearly half of Australian employees having experienced some workplace bullying during their lives. Furthermore, it is associated with a range of adverse outcomes such as poor mental health and reduced quality of life.
- Crucially, workplace bullying can also significantly impact negatively on organisations through increased absenteeism and presenteeism, higher rates of staff turnover, and high legal costs.
- Currently, workplace bullying tends to be framed as an individual and interpersonal psychological issue. This research suggests the need to conceptualise workplace bullying as a cultural, organisational and structural issue.
- Many existing strategies are targeted at the individual level, and are not effective in preventing and /or managing workplace bullying.
- Strategies that focus on leadership, communication, promotion of positive workplace cultures, empowerment of employees, and timely action may be most effective in addressing workplace bullying.
- The following strategies are recommended to **prevent and reduce** workplace bullying:
  - Develop and implement clear and succinct workplace bullying policies;
  - Incorporate workplace bullying into risk management approaches;
  - Promote positive and psychologically healthy workplaces beyond merely the absence of bullying;
  - Provide adequate training and support to employees so that they are empowered and protected to address workplace bullying, and;
  - Ensure that management (particularly, lower levels of management) are adequately trained and supported to address workplace bullying;
- The following strategies are recommended to **manage** workplace bullying:
  - Support workplace bullying policies with clear procedures and guidelines;
  - Investigate and resolve reports of workplace bullying in a timely manner via independent investigation;
  - Use a balance of probability approach to ensure that action can be taken where definitive proof lacking, but the likelihood of bullying is beyond reasonable doubt;
  - Continually review and refine approaches to workplace bullying.

### 3 Executive Summary

Workplace bullying is a common occurrence in Australian workplaces, and has important implications for the well-being of employees, and productivity of organisations. Precise estimates of the prevalence of workplace bullying vary depending on factors including the specific approach used to assess bullying, sampling methodology, cultural factors, and sample characteristics (Nielsen, Matthiesen, & Einarsen, 2010). However, in Australia, it is estimated that 5 – 7% of employees have experienced recent workplace bullying (i.e., within a 6 month timeframe); a further 40% report having experienced workplace bullying earlier in their career.

The aim of this project was to investigate the nature of workplace bullying in Australia, and identify strategies to prevent and manage workplace bullying. This involved addressing five research questions (RQs):

1. What behaviours or experiences constitute bullying in the workplace?
2. What factors predict workplace bullying?
3. What are the consequences of workplace bullying for individuals and organisations?
4. What practical strategies are currently used to prevent and manage workplace bullying?
5. How effective are these strategies in preventing and managing workplace bullying?

This project involved the conduct of a rapid review of the literature, a survey with 1528 Australian employees, and a Delphi process with experts in workplace bullying. Results of the three phases were combined to address each of the RQ's; the key findings are summarised below.

#### ***RQ 1: What behaviours or experiences constitute bullying in the workplace?***

There are many different definitions and terms used to describe workplace bullying. However, it is generally agreed that the key characteristics of workplace bullying involve prolonged exposure to negative acts and unreasonable behaviour from other employees (Einarsen, Hoel, & Notelaers, 2009; Lutgen-Sandvik, Tracy, & Alberts, 2007; Notelaers, Einarsen, De Witte, & Vermunt, 2006). This encompasses numerous types of behaviours, which can be broadly grouped as work-related bullying and person-related bullying (Bartlett & Bartlett, 2011; Einarsen, et al., 2009).

- **Work-related bullying** occurs when an employee attempts to dominate another employee by targeting and deliberately impeding their work (Einarsen, et al., 2009). Examples include unreasonable demands, withholding necessary information, delegation of menial tasks, and excessive monitoring of work (Bartlett & Bartlett, 2011).
- **Person-related bullying** refers to attempts to undermine and demoralise victims in terms of their personal qualities (Einarsen, et al., 2009). Examples include ignoring, undermining, spreading rumours, threats, and aggression (Bartlett & Bartlett, 2011; Einarsen, et al., 2009).

### ***RQ 2: What factors predict workplace bullying?***

All phases of the present research indicated that organisational factors are the main drivers of workplace bullying. For example, workplace bullying is more likely to occur in stressful work environments, where clear policies on workplace bullying are lacking, communication is poor, and leadership is weak or indistinct. Addressing these organisational factors could facilitate the prevention and management of workplace bullying.

### ***RQ 3: What are the consequences of workplace bullying?***

Victims of workplace bullying have higher rates of depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder, as well as physical health problems such as cardiovascular diseases, migraines, and obesity. These consequences appear pronounced in employees who are younger, male, have less social support at work, and work in more stressful environments. Witnesses and perpetrators of workplace bullying are also at risk of mental and physical health problems, career disruptions, and poor job performance.

Workplace bullying has considerable implications for organisations, as it increases absenteeism and presenteeism, which translate into lost productivity. Workplace bullying also increases legal costs, and can harm reputations of organisations if it is not dealt with in a timely or appropriate manner. Previous data estimate that workplace bullying costs Australian organisations \$6 - \$36 billion a year, and is thus a major financial issue.

### ***RQ 4: What practical strategies are currently used to prevent and manage workplace bullying?***

A range of strategies are used to prevent and manage workplace bullying. These vary considerably in terms of scope. Organisational level strategies aim

to improve organisational culture and prevent the occurrence of workplace bullying. Examples of these strategies include policies and guidelines, risk management, and leadership training. Job level approaches aim to minimise the occurrence of workplace bullying by modifying job descriptions or the physical work environment. Individual level approaches aim to prevent and manage workplace bullying through employee education, coaching, and mediation.

***RQ5: How effective are these strategies in preventing and managing workplace bullying?***

There are very limited data examining the effectiveness of existing strategies. However, there was consensus among the Delphi experts that most existing strategies are not effective in preventing and managing workplace bullying. In particular, experts believed that organisations do not take a long-term view to addressing workplace bullying, with many current approaches argued to further harm and inconvenience victims. In addition, experts believed that workplace policies are unclear and inconsistent, and that individual level approaches such as mediation tend to be over-used.

**Conclusions and Recommendations**

Eighteen recommendations based on a social marketing framework are provided to guide the prevention and management of workplace bullying. These recommendations incorporate the following key themes:

- Organisations need to identify and target the cultural and organisational factors that enable the occurrence of workplace bullying.
- Empowerment of employees through communication and clear policies is needed to better address workplace bullying;
- There is a need for clear and succinct workplace bullying policies that are implemented and backed up by strong leadership;
- Adequate training should be provided for front-line managers and supervisors to prevent and deal with instances of workplace bullying;
- Cases of workplace bullying should be investigated and dealt with in a timely manner;
- Organisations need to ensure that action is taken in response to workplace bullying; this should involve a balance of probability approach;
- Organisations need to continually monitor and refine their strategies regarding workplace bullying.



## 4 Introduction

### 4.1 Workplace Bullying in Australia

Workplace bullying is a major issue in many countries, including Australia. Available research indicates that nearly half of all Australian employees have experienced workplace bullying at some stage during their working life (Butterworth, Leach, & Kiely, 2013). These figures are comparable with findings from Europe and North America.

The occurrence of workplace bullying has a range of important implications for the mental and physical health and well-being of employees and organisations. For instance, victims and witnesses of workplace bullying have higher rates of depression, suicide ideation, chronic stress, and other psychological conditions (Monks et al., 2009), as well as physical health conditions such as hypertension (Kivimaki et al., 2003). It also has broader organisational implications, leading to reduced employee motivation, greater employee turnover rates, lower employee satisfaction, and overall reduced workplace productivity (Bartlett & Bartlett, 2011).

A variety of strategies are currently implemented by workplaces to prevent and/or manage workplace bullying. However, the efficacy of these approaches, particularly in an Australian context, remains largely unclear. As a result, there is a need for research to better understand the nature of workplace bullying, and examine strategies that could be developed and implemented to better address workplace bullying.

### 4.2 Project Aims

The aim of this research project was to investigate the nature of workplace bullying in Australia, and identify strategies that could be developed and implemented to prevent and manage workplace bullying. This involved addressing five research questions (RQs):

1. What behaviours or experiences constitute bullying in the workplace?
2. What factors predict workplace bullying?
3. What are the consequences of workplace bullying for:
  - a. Victims
  - b. Individuals accused of workplace bullying;
  - c. Witnesses; and
  - d. Organisations?
4. What practical strategies are currently used to prevent and manage workplace bullying?
5. How effective are these strategies in preventing and managing workplace bullying?

On the basis of these results, recommendations are providing for the development of strategies to prevent and manage workplace bullying in Australia.

## 5 Method

### 5.1 Overview of Methods

This research project involved three inter-related phases to address the five RQs (Figure 1). These included a rapid review of relevant literature, an online survey of Australian employees, and a Delphi process with relevant experts in Australia. These three methods of inquiry allowed unique insight into bullying in Australia.

- The rapid review phase summarised current Australian and international literature on the conceptualisation, causes and consequences of workplace bullying, and also shed light on potential strategies already being used to reduce it.
- The employee survey collected current Australian data on workplace bullying from those who may have experienced it, been accused of it, or observed it, and thus generated a pool of data specific to the RQs at hand.
- Finally, the two Delphi rounds utilised expert opinion to uncover the strategies, initiatives and approaches thought to be effective (and ineffective) in preventing and managing workplace bullying. The combined use of empirical literature, employee data, and expert input is one of the core strengths of this project.

The methodology associated with each phase is briefly outlined below, with more detail provided in Appendices A – C. Ethics Approval was received from the University of Wollongong’s Human Research Ethics Committee.

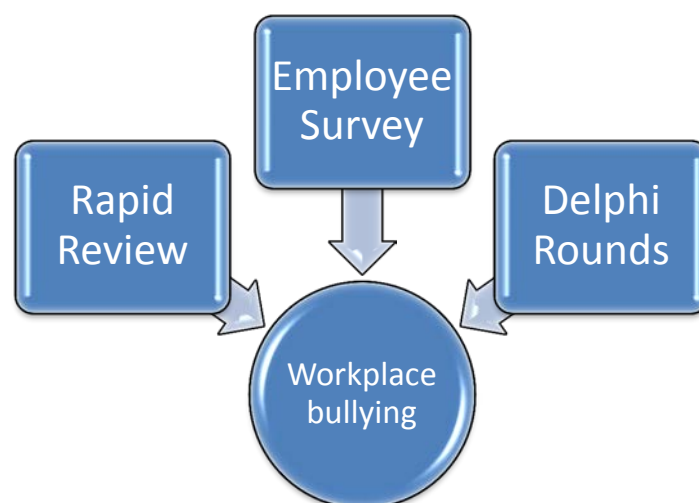


Figure 1. The three interconnected phases used to examine workplace bullying.

## 5.2 Rapid Review Methodology

The purpose of the rapid review was to examine published academic and grey literature to address all five RQs:

1. What behaviours or experiences constitute bullying in the workplace?
2. What factors predict workplace bullying?
3. What are the consequences of workplace bullying for:
  - a. Victims
  - b. Individuals accused of workplace bullying;
  - c. Witnesses; and
  - d. Organisations?
4. What practical strategies are currently used to prevent and manage workplace bullying?
5. How effective are these strategies in preventing and managing workplace bullying?

Detailed information on the rapid review methodology and results are provided in Appendix A. In brief, rapid reviews are increasingly common, and have developed in recognition of the requirements of policy makers and stakeholders for knowledge in an area to be synthesised in a short time period. They streamline traditional systematic review methods in order to achieve a synthesis of evidence within a short timeframe (Ganann, Ciliska, & Thomas, 2010). Streamlining can be achieved, whilst still enabling the key evidence to be synthesised in a rapid review, through introducing restrictions at the literature searching and data extraction stages of the process. Such strategies may include limitations on date and language of publication, the number of electronic databases searched, and searches of unpublished literature. Importantly, evidence comparing rapid reviews and full systematic reviews found that the overall conclusions did not vary significantly (Watt et al., 2008).

The current rapid review was conducted following recognised protocols for the conduct of systematic literature reviews, particularly the NHMRC guidelines (National Health and Medical Research Council, 2000) and the Cochrane Collaboration guidelines (Higgins & Green, 2009). The rapid review involved a search of relevant academic literature published between 2003 and 2013 using databases such as Web of Knowledge, PsycInfo, and Scopus.

These databases cover a comprehensive database of peer reviewed academic literature.

The grey literature search involved Google searches using the same search terms used in the Academic literature search, and searching the websites of relevant government, employment relations, mental health, and other stakeholder organisations from Australia, New Zealand, the UK, the US, and Canada. Relevant articles and other material were extracted, with the results used to inform each of the five research questions. The findings of the rapid review helped inform the development and execution of the survey phase.

### **5.3 Employee Survey**

An online survey of Australian employees was conducted to investigate experiences, potential antecedents, and potential consequences of workplace bullying.

#### **5.3.1 Participants**

A sample of 1528 Australian employees was recruited through an online panel provider ([www.oru.com.au](http://www.oru.com.au)). The following quotas were set to achieve a sample with sufficient heterogeneity and with characteristics broadly representative of the Australian workforce:

- A male-to-female ratio of 55%/45%;
- Workers of different ages and at different levels within a business (frontline workers, supervisors/managers, senior managers, business owners and leaders);
- Businesses of different sizes across different industries and geographical locations.

Detailed demographic characteristics of the sample are shown in Appendix B. In brief, there were comparable numbers of males and females (53.5% male and 46.5% female), a diverse age range (e.g., 16.5% aged 18 – 29 years, and 36.2% were aged 45 years and over), and a number of job types and roles (e.g., 27.7% were professionals, 18.1% were clerical/administration workers, 14.7% were managers, and 11.5% were labourers). Furthermore,

46.4% worked in a small business, 31.5% in a medium business, and 22.1% in a large business.

### **5.3.2 Survey**

Participants were invited to complete a 30 minute online survey administered through Qualtrics. No personal identifying information was collected, ensuring that participants remained anonymous. The survey consisted of four sections:

- Demographic characteristics
- Health and well-being
- Workplace Characteristics
- Experiences of workplace bullying. The two measures used to assess workplace bullying are shown in Table 1.

### **5.3.3 Statistical Analysis**

The survey data were analysed using SPSS version 19. The analyses involved:

1. Providing descriptive data for the sample (including frequencies on the extent of workplace bullying experiences);
2. Performing regression analyses to examine the demographic and organisational factors associated with workplace bullying;
3. Performing regression analyses to examine the associations of workplace bullying with mental and physical health outcomes;
4. Conducting moderation analyses for part 3 to examine whether associations observed varied by socio-demographic and work-related factors.

Table 1. Measures of workplace bullying included in the questionnaire.

Approach	Description
<b>'Objective' approach</b>	Participants completed the Negative Acts Questionnaire (Einarsen, et al., 2009). This 22-item scale assesses a range of work-related and person-related negative behaviours in the workplace. The word 'bully' does not appear in this questionnaire; this reduces potential biases and stigma surrounding workplace bullying.
<b>Self-assessment (or subjective) approach</b>	Participants were provided with a definition of workplace bullying (House of Representatives Committee, 2012). They were then asked to indicate whether they had: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Been a victim of workplace bullying in the last 6 months;</li> <li>• Ever been a victim of workplace bullying;</li> <li>• Witnessed workplace bullying;</li> <li>• Had ever been accused of workplace bullying.</li> </ul> Participants were asked follow up questions about the characteristics of the bullying behaviour experienced/witnessed (e.g., type of bullying, number of perpetrators etc.), and help seeking behaviours.

## 5.4 Delphi Process

The Delphi method involves systematic and rigorous collection of data from a group of experts to arrive at consensus regarding topics (Bowles, 1999; Stewart, 2008). Although there are many variations of the Delphi method, essentially it involves engaging relevant experts in an iterative and multi-directional process. That is, information is collected from participants, and then the results are fed back to respondents and used to inform the development of the next round of data collection. Through this iterative process, the Delphi method can be used to arrive at consensus regarding various issues (Bowles, 1999; Stewart, 2008).

For the purposes of this project, we utilised a modified Delphi method to:

1. Identify strategies currently used by Australian workplaces to prevent and manage bullying;
2. Arrive at a consensus regarding strategies that are most effective in preventing and managing bullying.
3. Identify strategies that should be developed to prevent and manage workplace bullying in Australia.

These steps are shown in Figure 2.

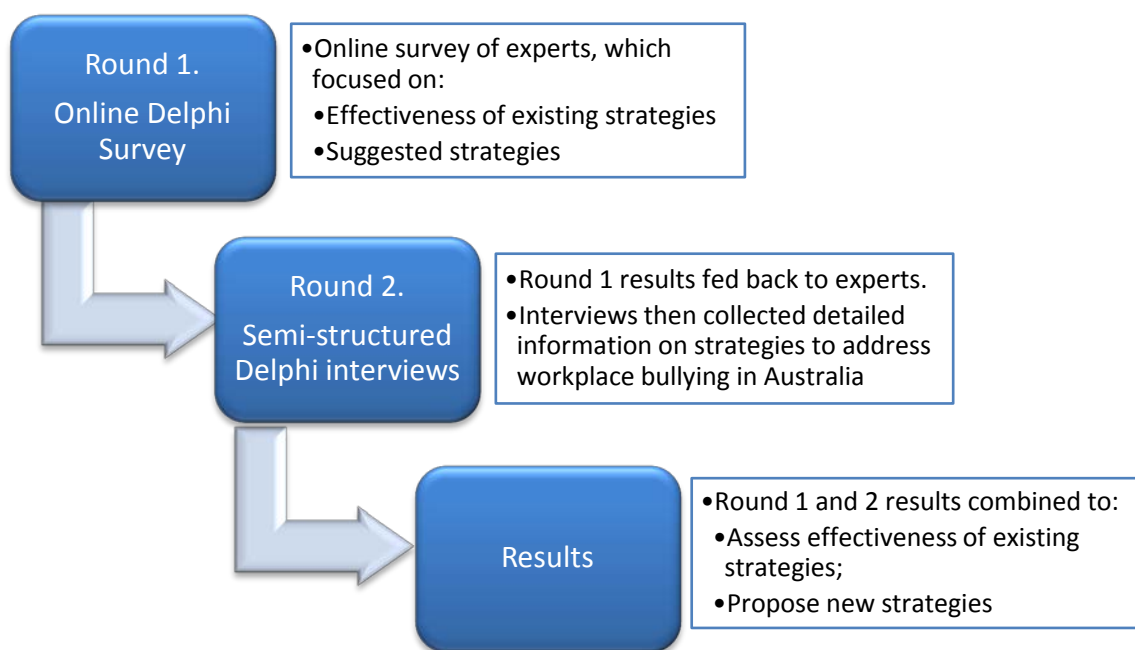


Figure 2. Modified Delphi Method used to examine workplace bullying strategies.

### 5.4.1 Delphi Experts

We contacted professionals working in areas relevant to workplace bullying in Australian workplaces. We attempted to contact professionals from a broad range of backgrounds. This led to a sample of 22 professionals who completed Round 1 of the Delphi process (see Table 2). Six participants from Round 1 also participated in Round 2.

Table 2. Characteristics of Round 1 Delphi participants

Area of expertise/industry type	Number
Academic – workplace bullying	6
Organisational Psychologist	4
Management	3
Workplace Health and Safety	3
Law	2
Human/Industrial Relations	2
Employee advocate	1
Not specified	1



## 5.4.2 Delphi Rounds

**Round 1.** This round involved a brief (approximately 10 minute) online survey that consisted of open and closed ended questions. Experts were first asked to indicate what they believed were the key characteristics of workplace bullying (open ended question).

The experts were then presented with nine broad strategies used to prevent and manage workplace bullying as informed by the Rapid Review (e.g., workplace policies and guidelines, leadership training, risk management). On a 5-point scale (from strongly disagree to strongly agree) experts were asked to rate each strategy in terms of:

- Ease of implementation;
- Effectiveness in preventing workplace bullying;
- Effectiveness in managing workplace bullying;
- Acceptability of each broad strategy.

The experts were then asked the following open ended questions:

- “In your opinion, what strategies or initiatives should be used to prevent and manage workplace bullying, and why?”
- “Do you have any other comments you would like to make about strategies or initiatives aimed at preventing and managing workplace bullying?”

The responses to the open ended questions were analysed by members of the research team, coded, and interpreted for key themes. Furthermore, the ratings of the nine strategies were aggregated. These results were summarised and emailed to participants for Round 2.

**Round 2.** In this round, eight experts who had agreed to be contacted for a follow-up participated in a semi-structured interview. The purpose of this interview was to collect detailed information from experts regarding their opinions of the results from Round 1, and to further clarify the effectiveness (or lack thereof) of existing strategies. Experts were also asked to identify and describe strategies they believed would be ideal for preventing and managing workplace bullying in Australia. The interviews were transcribed and coded for key themes.

## 6 Summary of Key Findings

For clarity, the main findings of this research are summarised according to the five research questions. This includes combining, where appropriate, evidence from the three different phases of the project.

### 6.1 RQ 1: What behaviours and experiences constitute bullying in the workplace?

Workplace bullying refers to a wide variety of negative behaviours in occupational settings. The term workplace bullying is often used interchangeably with other terms such as deviance, mobbing, incivility, harassment, and aggressive behaviour. The behaviours that constitute workplace bullying are diverse and can include direct behaviours (e.g., unreasonable demands, verbal abuse and humiliation) and indirect behaviours (e.g., social isolation, withholding of information, and spreading of rumours).

Two key characteristics of workplace bullying are that the behaviour is intended to harm, embarrass, or dominate another individual, and occurs over a prolonged period of time (i.e., it is not a single occurrence of a behaviour). These characteristics are reflected in the current Australian definition of workplace bullying:

**Workplace bullying refers to repeated and unreasonable behaviour directed towards a worker or a group of workers that creates a risk to health and safety** (House of Representatives Committee, 2012).

A number of different typologies have been proposed to describe workplace bullying. Although the precise terminology varies, most researchers (Bartlett and Bartlett, 2011; Butterworth et al., 2013; Einarsen et al., 2009) differentiate

between **work-related bullying** and **person-related bullying dimensions**.<sup>1</sup> These are described in Table 3.

- Work-related bullying: aspects of the victim’s work are the target.
- Personal bullying: the victim is targeted on a personal level, rather than via work or work-related demands.

**Table 3. Dimensions of workplace bullying**

Bullying Subtype	Example Behaviours
<b>Person-related bullying</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Persistent attempts to belittle and undermine work</li> <li>• Persistent unjustified criticism and monitoring of work</li> <li>• Persistent attempts to humiliate</li> <li>• Undermining personal integrity</li> <li>• Making inappropriate jokes</li> <li>• Spreading gossip and rumours</li> </ul>
<b>Work-related bullying</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Withholding necessary information</li> <li>• Being ignored or excluded</li> <li>• Unreasonable refusal of application for leave, training and promotion</li> <li>• Unreasonable pressure to produce work</li> <li>• Setting impossible deadlines</li> <li>• Shifting goalposts</li> <li>• Removal of areas of responsibility without consultation</li> </ul>
<b>Violence and intimidation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Verbal threats</li> <li>• Persistent teasing</li> <li>• Threats of physical violence</li> <li>• Threats of physical violence to property</li> <li>• Being shouted at or the target of spontaneous anger</li> </ul>

The results of the online survey indicated that work-related bullying is more commonly experienced than personal bullying. This is consistent with previous research (Butterworth et al., 2013).

- **The most common forms of work-related bullying involved having information withheld (15.6%) or being ordered to do work below one’s level of competence (14.5%).**
- **Person-related bullying (e.g., undermining or criticism) are only reported by 6.2% to 8.4% of participants.**

<sup>1</sup> Some authors split person bullying into two categories: indirect bullying and direct bullying (overt aggression and intimidation).

## 6.2 RQ2: What factors predict workplace bullying?

Different theories of workplace bullying have been proposed that provide insight into the antecedents of bullying. In particular, empirical and theoretical research suggests three main psychological explanations of workplace bullying; these are shown in Figure 3.

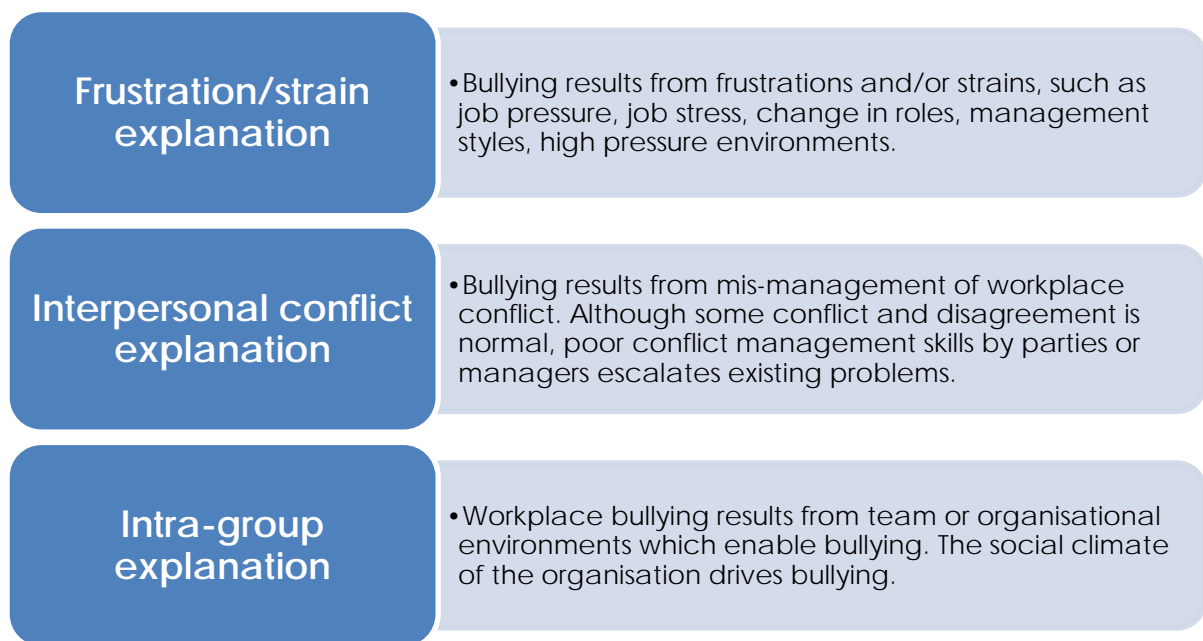


Figure 3. Potential explanations of workplace bullying behaviour.

The rapid review indicated that although some personality characteristics are associated with workplace bullying (e.g., high neuroticism) there is no clear personality profile of victims or perpetrators of workplace bullying. Similarly, although the online survey found some demographic characteristics (e.g., age, gender, income, and education levels) to be associated with experiences of workplace bullying, again there was no clear profile. It is also important to note that it would be very difficult for strategies to be implemented that target personal characteristics. Instead, work-related and organisational factors are more strongly associated with workplace bullying, and may be more amenable to interventions and strategies.

The rapid review and employee survey identified several work and organisational factors that could contribute to workplace bullying (Table 4). In general, these results indicate that bullying flourishes in cases where the expectations on workers are ambiguous and unpredictable, when workers are under high amounts of pressure but lack control over the outcomes of their work (Hoel, Einarsen, & Cooper, 2003), and where the organisation lacks strong clear policies on workplace bullying and/or ethical behaviour.

**Table 4. Work-related antecedents of workplace bullying.**

Antecedent	Description
<b>Workplace policies</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anti-bullying policies can aid prevention and management of workplace bullying by clarifying the distinction between appropriate and inappropriate behaviour in the workplace.</li> <li>• Workplaces that do not have strong and clear policies surrounding workplace bullying or standards of behaviour have a greater risk of bullying</li> </ul>
<b>Physical work environment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aspects of the physical work environment can increase interpersonal conflict and bullying behaviours.</li> <li>• For example, workplaces that are hot, cramped or crowded, noisy, and where tools and equipment are shared, have higher rates of bullying.</li> </ul>
<b>Organisational change</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Changes within an organisation can also predict workplace bullying. These can include changes in budgets and technology, and restructuring.</li> <li>• Changes can promote bullying via stress, frustration, ambiguity, and uncertainty about job security.</li> </ul>
<b>Psychosocial work environment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The culture and climate of the workplace are important predictors of workplace bullying.</li> <li>• Bullying is more common in organisations where competitive behaviour is rewarded, abuse is normalised, and large power imbalances exist.</li> </ul>
<b>Work Stressors</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workplace bullying is strongly related to psychosocial aspects of an individual's job. These include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Higher job demands (e.g., time pressure);</li> <li>○ Low autonomy (e.g., limited flexibility over work);</li> <li>○ Role ambiguity;</li> <li>○ Low job security;</li> <li>○ Low levels of social support at work.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Leadership</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leadership is an important predictor of the nature and extent of workplace bullying. Leadership perceived as weak or indistinct may result in unresolved conflicts between workers, and lead to increases in bullying.</li> </ul>

## 6.3 RQ3: What are the consequences of workplace bullying?

### 6.3.1 Victims of Workplace Bullying

The Rapid Review and Employee Survey indicated that victims of workplace bullying have a greater risk of physical health problems such as:

- Chronic diseases such as cardiovascular disease;
- Headaches and migraines;
- Obesity;
- Fibromyalgia;
- Dizziness, stomach aches and chest pains.

The Rapid Review and Employee Survey also indicated that workplace bullying increases the risk of mental health problems such as:

- Depression and anxiety;
- Chronic stress;
- Post-traumatic stress disorder;
- Suicide ideation and suicide behaviours;
- Lower quality of life.

The Employee Survey indicated that the effects of personal bullying on mental health were most pronounced in younger employees and males, those with less social support at work, and those with less decision latitude and more job demands.

The Employee Survey indicated that the relationships between work-related bullying and mental health were most pronounced in employees with higher incomes. This could reflect the effects of socio-economic status; that is, higher income employees may have a better understanding of what workplace bullying and what is considered reasonable. As a result, they may be more likely to recognise workplace bullying.

### **6.3.2 Witnesses of workplace bullying**

The Rapid Review indicated that witnesses of workplace bullying also experience poorer mental and physical health. This is because bullying can have a negative effect on the overall workplace, leading to reduced engagement, job satisfaction, and greater distrust (particularly if the situation is not adequately dealt with). Employees who reported both experiencing and witnessing workplace bullying had poorer health outcomes compared with those who reported no bullying experiences. This suggests that effects could be most pronounced in workplaces where individuals are experiencing and witnessing workplace bullying.

### **6.3.3 Individuals accused of workplace bullying**

There is some evidence that individuals accused of workplace bullying experience a range of negative outcomes including:

- Depression,
- Anxiety,
- PTSD,
- Suicide ideation,
- Social isolation,
- Negative career consequences, and often tended to leave the workplace regardless of the outcome of the investigation.

While the rapid review uncovered a scarcity of empirical research on the consequences for those accused of bullying, comments from experts who participated the second Delphi round showed the potentially devastating consequences of being unfairly accused of bullying. Two interviewees spoke about cases where managers had suffered psychological trauma as a result of being unfairly accused of bullying, and had trouble returning to work. Furthermore, it was noted that some individuals do not recognise their own bullying behaviour until a complaint is made, and then in some cases still do not believe they are behaving unfairly. Given the scarcity of research on those (rightly or wrongly) accused of bullying, this remains an important topic for future research.

### 6.3.4 Organisations

The Rapid Review and Employee Survey indicated that workplace bullying also has considerable adverse effects on the organisation. Some of the main factors are outlined below:

- **Absenteeism.** Victims are significantly more likely to take longer and more frequent bouts of sick leave due to poor health and/or because of a desire to withdraw from the workplace (Askew et al., 2012; Kivimaki, Elovainio, & Vahtera, 2000; Voss, Floderus, & Diderichsen, 2001). Some studies report an increase in illness related absences from 25% to 90% as a result of bullying (Voss, et al., 2001). These effects may be greater for work-related than person-related bullying.
- **Presenteeism.** Bullying can increase the likelihood of presenteeism, a concept which refers to individuals being physically present at work but less productive due to poor mental health, disability, or other factors. Workplace bullying could contribute to presenteeism via: (1) Ruminating about bullying situations, which could lead to lowered effort, increased errors and lost time due to worrying (Gardner & Johnson, 2001); (2) Decreased organisational commitment (Askew, et al., 2012; Loh, Restubog, & Zagenczyk, 2010; Quine, 2001); (3) Lower job satisfaction (Askew, et al., 2012; Loh, et al., 2010; Quine, 2001); (4) Reduced creative potential (MacIntosh, 2005), increased errors (Paice & Smith, 2009), and less efficient use of time (Gardner & Johnson, 2001).
- **Lower Job Satisfaction.** Individuals who experience workplace bullying have lower levels of job satisfaction.
- **Turnover Rates.** Individuals who experience workplace bullying have greater turnover rates, which can translate into productivity losses through cost of re-hiring and training staff (Namie, 2003, 2007).
- **Reputational Harm.** This can affect relationships with customers and suppliers, and also make it more difficult to retain and attract staff (Saam, 2010).
- **Direct Financial Costs.** The Rapid Review indicated that the costs of workplace bullying to organisations are considerable. For example, it is estimated that workplace bullying costs Australian employers \$6-\$36 billion each year (Productivity Commission, 2010). This estimate includes both direct and indirect costs (e.g., absenteeism, turnover, legal costs and loss of productivity), and mental health claims cost organisations twice as much as physical claims (Comcare, 2010).

The Employee Survey indicated that some of these associations varied between different employees. For example, the relationships between



workplace bullying and lower job satisfaction was more pronounced for employees with less co-worker and supervisor social support.

#### 6.4 RQ4: What practical strategies are currently used to prevent and manage workplace bullying?

A range of strategies are utilised by organisations to prevent and manage workplace bullying (Table 5.). These strategies can be categorised as:

- **Organisational strategies:** whole of organisation approaches such as policies/procedures, and strategies to address workplace culture, and attitudes about bullying;
- **Job-level strategies:** modifications of the work environment (e.g., job descriptions, assignment of tasks, functioning of unit) as a way of preventing/managing bullying;
- **Individual level strategies:** attempts to influence employee attitudes, perceptions, interaction styles, behaviour;
- **Multi-level strategies:** Integrative approaches, which combine elements of more than one of the strategies above in order to comprehensively address bullying and prevent its recurrence.

Table 5. Main categories of approaches to workplace bullying

Categories of Approaches	Description	Examples
<b>Organisational Level</b>	Strategies to improve organisational culture and guide interpersonal interactions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workplace policies</li> <li>• Risk Management</li> <li>• Awareness raising</li> <li>• Leadership training</li> <li>• Organisational development</li> </ul>
<b>Job Level</b>	Focus on mitigating the effects of workplace bullying or reinstating feelings of security for victims of bullying	Changes to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work conditions</li> <li>• Job descriptions</li> <li>• Physical work environment</li> </ul>
<b>Individual Level</b>	Strategies which involve intervening with employees to prevent and manage workplace bullying	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employee education</li> <li>• Coaching sessions</li> <li>• Executive coaching</li> <li>• Cognitive rehearsal</li> <li>• Expressive writing</li> <li>• Mediation</li> </ul>

## 6.5 RQ5: How effective are these strategies in preventing and managing workplace bullying?

The Rapid Review indicated that there are very limited data examining the effectiveness of these strategies. This was echoed in responses to the two Delphi Rounds, with many experts indicating that evaluation data are lacking and as a result it is difficult to draw definitive conclusions regarding the effectiveness of different approaches. However, the Delphi Process provided some very useful and important insights into the effectiveness of existing strategies and interventions for workplace bullying.

Table 6 provides a summary of Delphi participants' ratings of existing strategies. These indicate that many commonly used strategies were considered by experts to be:

- **Relatively easy to implement in organisations**, with the exception of mediation which was considered more difficult to implement.
- **Not effective in preventing workplace bullying**. The main exceptions were leadership training and employee coaching.
- **Not effective in managing workplace bullying**. Although employee coaching and leadership training were considered to be effective.

The open ended responses examining the effectiveness of existing workplace bullying strategies indicated the following main results:

- **Existing approaches and strategies to addressing workplace bullying are not appropriate**. There was consensus that organisations do not take a long-term view to addressing workplace bullying (e.g., "no one seems to want to tackle it in any strategic long term way"). Furthermore, many experts indicated that current approaches tended to further harm/inconvenience victims.
- **Workplace policies are often unclear and inconsistent**. Many workplace policies and codes of practice are not clearly worded, acted upon, or well communicated.
- **Individual level approaches may not be effective**. This is consistent with the results of the Rapid Review and Employee Survey. Experts indicated that whole-of-organisation approaches are needed to effectively address workplace bullying.
- **Mediation is often misused**. There was a consensus that mediation approaches can exacerbate the situation, particularly because of the

imbalance of power that already exists. Experts also indicated that mediation tends to be overused.

**Table 6. Average assessments of existing strategies to prevent and manage workplace bullying.**

Strategy	Ease of implementation	Effectiveness in prevention	Effectiveness in management
<b>Policies, guidelines, etc.</b>	High ease	Neutral	Slightly negative
<b>Employee coaching</b>	High ease	Slightly positive	Slightly positive
<b>Leadership training</b>	High ease	Positive	Positive
<b>Providing services for victims</b>	High ease	Neutral	Slightly negative
<b>Mediation</b>	Low ease	Negative	Negative

## 6.6 Strategies that should be used to prevent and manage workplace bullying

Overwhelmingly experts recognised that no single strategy or initiative should be used on its own to prevent and manage bullying. Rather, strategic, multi-component, comprehensive and complementary approaches that target bullying at every level of the organisation were cited as holding potential. Individual level strategies, when used in isolation, were seen to be addressing bullying at the wrong level, as they are aimed at treating behaviour rather than the underlying cause and context for bullying – the culture in which it flourishes.

Hence, a whole of organisation approach for prevention and management of workplace bullying was recommended. Some of the individual components of these approaches that were suggested included:

- Development and solidification of a positive workplace culture and a norm of ‘respect’, which is demonstrated to employees from the first point of contact with the organisation and carried through at every level.

- Risk management approaches, and reviewing of any incidences of bullying to prevent reoccurrence of bullying.
- Positive leadership practices and leadership development.
- Widely available policy and procedures which specifically and clearly outline acceptable versus unacceptable behaviour, which are consistently applied, and which support positive workplace climate.
- Well trained peer contact networks as a trusted point of contact for employees, and way of early identification of problem behaviours.
- Investigations and punitive action for those found to be bullying. The organisation should demonstrate impartiality and a commitment to providing natural justice.
- Training and education for managers and leaders that is tailored to the structure and type of organisation, and to the role of the person.

It should be noted that although many holistic, proactive preventative measures were recommended, some experts expressed disappointment with the lack of implementation of preventative strategies in real world contexts. It was felt that despite strong evidence in favour of preventative approaches, these approaches were rarely taken (if ever).

A number of other themes emerged in addition to (or to expand on) these strategies. These additional themes included:

- The importance of early identification and action – experts consistently emphasised that action must be taken quickly to avoid issues escalating to more serious cases of bullying. This was seen as an important preventative measure.
- The importance of proper and consistent implementation - some experts emphasised that the mere presence of an initiative or strategy is not sufficient. Any strategy requires consistent and effective implementation in order to be successful.
- Employer responsibility – penalties considered for organisations that fail to intervene appropriately, and on the flip side, mechanisms to protect employers from vexatious or mischievous claims.
- Provide clear communication about bullying, to ensure that reasonable performance management is not construed as bullying.
- Mediation – while some experts considered mediation to be an acceptable part of the management process, others perceived mediation to be over used and inappropriate due to the power imbalance entailed by the bully/victim relationship.

- Zero tolerance stance on bullying – again, this was suggested by many experts as a method of demonstrating commitment to positive workplace culture, but was noted by some to undermine efforts to curb workplace bullying because the definition of bullying is unclear. Thus, it is unclear what ‘zero tolerance’ means from a practical standpoint.

## 7 Conclusions and Recommendations

The results of the three phases of research from this project provide insight into strategies that may be effective in preventing and managing workplace bullying. A consistent theme that emerged from the research is that workplace bullying tends to be framed from an individual personality and psychology of behaviour perspective. Our rapid review and Delphi results suggest a need for a paradigm shift towards an organisational culture approach to workplace bullying, in which structures, cultures and frameworks are created to support good behaviour in the workplace and prevent or mitigate workplace bullying.

Furthermore, consistent themes relating to a need to engage and empower employers and employees, and to promote a positive workplace culture that does not support bullying emanated from our research. Therefore, we propose that social marketing – “a strategic multi-component, marketing based approach to social policy selection and development that aims to influence personal, community and organisational behaviour” offers a useful framework for tackling workplace bullying (French and Gordon, 2014, p1).

Social marketing as a change process involves consideration of the following key factors:

1. Sets clear *behavioural/organisational/environmental change* goals;
2. *Consumer (people) oriented*;
3. *Theory based*;
4. *Insight driven*;
5. Present motivational *exchanges* to encourage change;
6. *Assesses and addresses competition* to change;
7. Uses *segmentation* to engage and empower different stakeholders;
8. Makes use appropriate of the intervention *marketing (methods) mix*.

(Source: NMSC, 2007)

## 7.1 Specific Recommendations

*“There should be much more concentration on preventative strategies which address the risk factors for bullying occurring”*

(Expert 16, Delphi Round 1)

### **Recommendation 1. Organisations must identify and target the cultural factors that enable workplace bullying to occur.**

Organisational factors are key drivers of workplace bullying, with research consistently indicating that workplace bullying reflects the values, culture, leadership, and structures of an organisation. Thus, the prevention and management of workplace bullying must:

- Be embedded across all levels of an organisation.
- Target organisational and cultural factors that allow workplace bullying to occur and flourish.

*“The key strategy to resolve workplace bullying is dealing with the cultures within organisations that allow this kind of behaviour to flourish”*

(Expert 3, Round 1 Delphi)

Social marketing offers a useful framework for shifting organisational cultures as it takes a consumer (people) oriented approach to social change. To achieve this, social marketing encourages seeing the world through the eyes of the people you are trying to influence, by doing research with them, speaking to them, involving and engaging them in change processes. Use of *internal social marketing* strategies have been demonstrated to be effective at empowering people to become part of, and take ownership of change processes, to build consensus and shift cultures towards more positive environments in workplace organisations (Smith and O’Sullivan, 2012).

### **Recommendation 2. Organisations need to be aware of the financial implications of workplace bullying.**

Workplace bullying has considerable financial costs to individuals, organisations, and the economy more broadly. Highlighting the financial

implications in addition to the legal obligations and the benefits of Corporate Social Responsibility practices more broadly could be an effective way of engaging organisations to address workplace bullying.

*“There is a need to bring understanding of the costs, real and imagined to the individual, workgroup and wider communication and the wider community of abusive and violent behaviour towards others.”*

(Expert 1, Round 1 Delphi)

Addressing workplace bullying could also have substantial financial benefits for organisations (e.g., via more satisfied, engaged workers). Thus, organisations have a lot to gain financially by preventing and managing workplace bullying.

Again, social marketing offers a useful lens for highlighting that workplace bullying is an important issue for organisations to proactively address as it affects the bottom line. Commercial organisations often conduct competitive analysis to assess strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, and the same principles apply in social marketing. According to social marketing perspectives, workplace bullying acts as competition for organisations running efficiently and effectively as it can create absenteeism through health effects, high turnover, and lower productivity. This ultimately can have a major effect on the bottom line for organisations. This creates a financial as well as an ethical and moral imperative for organisations to tackle workplace bullying. Furthermore, social marketing provides a framework for communicating and promoting this to organisations – through awareness raising and stakeholder engagement programmes to highlight these issues.

### **Recommendation 3. Empowering employees through involvement and communication is essential to prevent and manage workplace bullying.**

One of the key barriers to addressing workplace bullying is that victims and managers often feel powerless to take action for fear of retribution, concerns that nothing will be done, and a lack of support. These issues could be more pronounced in small and medium organisations. Social marketing provides a useful framework for engaging and empowering stakeholders, as it is consumer oriented, and focuses on developing change processes built around the needs, wants and views of the participants rather than taking a top down approach.



Empowerment can be fostered by:

- Conducting research with staff, and undertaking extensive and meaningful consultation;
- Having clear policies and procedures for workplace bullying;
- Management taking a clear and visible stance against bullying;
- Involving staff in discussions and feedback mechanisms around workplace bullying and standards of behaviour;
- Ensuring clear, equitable and open communication between employees and management.

**Recommendation 4. Workplace bullying strategies must be tailored towards the specific organisation.**

Workplace bullying strategies need to be segmented and tailored according to the specific needs and characteristics of organisations. Social marketing acknowledges that one-size fits all strategies often fail, and that it is important to segment, target and position intervention strategies based on knowledge and insight about the relevant organisation, groups and individuals. For example, the types of issues and behaviours facing small organisations are very different compared with those faced by large organisations. Similarly, the types of workplace bullying behaviours in industries that can be considered more ‘blue collar’ in nature could differ substantially from those in ‘white collar’ industries. Adopting a risk management approach (discussed below) is one way of ensuring that strategies are tailored to specific organisations.

**Recommendation 5. Organisations must be informed of their legal requirements to address workplace bullying.**

Organisations have a legal obligation to address workplace bullying in a timely and effective manner to protect the rights and welfare of all employees. Organisations (particularly small-medium enterprises) must be made aware of the legal obligations relating to workplace bullying. Again, this relates to the focus in social marketing on assessing and addressing the competition, and a broader framework for organisational competitive analysis that considers workplace bullying should be encouraged.

**Recommendation 6. Organisations should focus on promoting positive interpersonal relationships and workplace cultures – not just overt bullying.**

Focusing on terms such as workplace bullying may not capture more subtle forms of negative workplace behaviours (e.g., social exclusion), which are common and have a range of adverse outcomes. There may also be stigma

associated with the term 'bullying' that hinders reporting, help seeking, and action. Therefore, strategies need to emphasise that workplace bullying includes overt and more subtle forms of negative workplace behaviours. This requires judicious use of insight about organisations and individuals based on research, and consultation to inform marketing mix strategies. For example, workplaces should communicate clearly with staff on what behaviours do, and do not constitute workplace bullying, and what strategies are in place to deal with it. Furthermore, such marketing mix strategies should also communicate to staff the role and stake they hold in the workplace culture so that staff feel engaged and take ownership of the process.

**Recommendation 7. All organisations must have clear and succinct workplace bullying policies.**

Policies provide an important starting point for the prevention (and also management) of workplace bullying. Policies are not sufficient on their own to address workplace bullying. However, they can be effective in clarifying standards of behaviour expected by employees of an organisation, and are a critical component of a broad, multilevel approach to address bullying. As such, developing, promoting, and communicating good workplace bullying policies is an important part of the social marketing mix to tackle the issue.

In order to be most effective, a workplace bullying policy should:

- Be consumer oriented and be developed in consultation with staff. This approach creates a sense of ownership and empowerment, but also ensures that the policy is segmented and targeted to the appropriate people and is practical and logical for the specific workplace;
- Clearly promote and communicate what workplace bullying is, and the standard of behaviours expected within the organisation as part of the marketing mix strategy. This includes statements around appropriate and inappropriate behaviours;
- Be succinct and clear. For example, it is not feasible to cover all specific types of appropriate and inappropriate behaviours. Instead, the policy should attempt to capture the essence of expectations of behaviour, and present this in a simple and clear manner.
- Be well communicated to all staff to ensure consistency and clarity over appropriate behaviours. This also involves creating feedback loops in which policies are live documents that can adapt and evolve according to relevant organisational and social changes.

## **Recommendation 8. Organisations must adopt a risk management approach to workplace bullying.**

A risk management approach should be adopted to prevent workplace bullying. As documented throughout this report, there are many factors (particularly organisational factors) that increase the risk of workplace bullying (e.g., demanding work environments, change management). Having a formal mechanism in place to identify and manage these risks can provide an effective strategy to prevent workplace bullying. This also ensures that the approach to addressing workplace bullying is specifically tailored to the specific organisation.

Furthermore, there is often considerable emotion and stigma surrounding workplace bullying which can hamper efforts to address it. Viewing workplace bullying in the context of risks can lessen the emotional element and promote a more objective and comprehensive approach.

This needs to include the following steps:

1. **Risk Identification.** The results of this project clearly indicate that a range of factors (particularly organisational level factors) increase the risk of workplace bullying. It is important that organisations identify and understand the different sources of risk for the occurrence of workplace bullying in their organisations;
2. **Risk Assessment.** Identified risks need to be assessed in relation to their severity (e.g., impact), likelihood of occurrence, and extent to which the risk can be controlled/managed;
3. **Risk Evaluation.** Risks need to be scored (e.g., likelihood × severity), ranked, and prioritised in terms of which need to/should be addressed by the organisation;
4. **Risk Management.** There are many approaches to addressing different risks (e.g., avoid, mitigate, transfer, or accept the risk). Based on the evaluation results, appropriate approaches need to be identified and implemented. For example, if overcrowded work areas are identified as an important risk for workplace bullying, then a strategies such as rescheduling work tasks could be effective in mitigating the risk;
5. **Monitoring and Evaluation.** Risk management needs to be an iterative approach, with processes in place to continually monitor risks and evaluate risk management approaches.

### **Recommendation 9. Implement interventions that create positive and psychologically health workplaces, beyond the absence of bullying**

The prevention of bullying can also be considered as part of workplace wellbeing programs, particularly those that seek to emphasise positive workplace relationships. Interventions that emphasise high quality connections, civility, trustworthiness, perspective taking, humour and psychological safety are more likely to give employees a sense of the expected culture. There are numerous existing workplace interventions within the workplace wellbeing, positive psychology and positive organisational scholarship literature consistent with this recommendation. The essence of this recommendation is to build a positive interpersonal culture that makes bullying unacceptable, unusual and effectively eclipsed by a normative set of positive relationships.

### **Recommendation 10. All employees require adequate training and support in terms of what workplace bullying is and how it should be addressed.**

One of the major concerns relating to workplace bullying is a lack of awareness of what it actually is. Prevention of workplace bullying requires employees to be aware of relevant standards of behaviour, what constitutes workplace bullying, and what the procedure is for dealing with workplace bullying.

*“There should be more awareness training for all staff as to what workplace bullying is (and what it isn't), and what they need to do should they witness or experience behaviours which fall in this category.”*

(Expert 16, Round 1 Delphi)

Specific approaches could involve:

- Using good strategic social marketing to raise awareness of the organisation's values and stance relative to issues such as workplace bullying through all stages of the employment cycle. That is, from recruitment, through to induction, promotion, progress reviews, and exit from the organisation.

- Regular training or education sessions for workplace bullying. These could include a mix of face-to-face and online modules, and where possible should be integrated into workloads;
- Clearly communicating workplace bullying policies and procedures. These should be easily accessible for all staff.

**Recommendation 11. Organisations should invest in providing the necessary training for managers.**

Positive and effective leadership is critical to preventing workplace bullying. Lower management (e.g., particularly frontline managers and frontline staff with leadership roles) is in the most direct contact with employees and are most likely to witness the occurrence of workplace bullying (or precursors to bullying). However, they may not be adequately trained in how to identify and resolve issues.

Organisations need to ensure managers (particularly middle management and front-line supervisors) and leaders have the appropriate skills and training to:

- Model appropriate behaviour;
- Identify risks to the occurrence of workplace bullying;
- Resolve issues in their infancy;
- Ensure they can intervene without exacerbating the situation or increase the chance of repercussions (e.g., legal issues).

**Recommendation 12. Organisations should develop and implement clear procedures and guidelines for workplace bullying.**

As noted above, policies are an important starting point in the prevention of workplace bullying. Importantly, the development of workplace bullying policies should be consumer oriented, and facilitated through a process of proper consultation and engagement with staff. Policies should also be supported with clear procedures for how the organisation deals with workplace bullying. This serves two purposes. First, it ensures that the organisation has very clear steps in place to address workplace bullying. Second, by providing a clear pathway, employees are well informed of the process and of what to expect.

These documents should specify:

- The relevant individual/department to contact;
- What happens when a complaint is made;
- Relevant forms/paperwork need to be completed;
- The actions that could take place;
- What happens during investigations;
- How they will be protected (e.g., anonymity).

**Recommendation 13. When a case of workplace bullying is reported, it is critical that it is addressed and resolved in a timely manner.**

Delays in dealing with a report of workplace bullying can be harmful to the victim, perpetrator, and witnesses, and undermine trust. This project indicates that organisations often fall into the trap of 'box ticking' and fail to "walk the talk" on dealing with workplace bullying proactively.

**Recommendation 14. Investigation should be carried out by an independent person (not necessarily external to the organisation) who is appropriately qualified.**

Often internal investigations are carried out by employees who despite best intentions, are not suitably qualified to deal with the complexities of workplace bullying. Organisations need to invest in training investigators and ensure they meet minimum competency levels.

In smaller organisations, it may be necessary to procure the services of external investigators. This would depend on the specific organisation, but it is important to note that in some cases external investigation can be intimidating and bewildering for employees so this needs to be considered carefully.

**Recommendation 15. Organisations should adopt balance of probability approaches to workplace bullying.**

A major challenge in addressing workplace bullying is that definitive proof over what occurred is often lacking. In the absence of definitive proof, action is either not taken or is too lenient. The lack of action in response to bullying is a major issue. It can place the victim, perpetrator, witnesses, and organisation more broadly at further, continued harm. Therefore, appropriate action needs to be taken to protect the welfare of all parties involved. For

example, perpetrators need to understand that their behaviour is not appropriate and is detrimental to themselves and others.

*“Failure to ‘walk the talk’ on workplace bullying can severely undermine all efforts to stamp it out.”*

(Expert 12, Delphi Round 1)

Adopting a balance of probability approach means that organisations can determine the probability with which bullying has occurred. Once a certain threshold of probability is passed, definitive action can be taken on the basis of what policies have been breached and how serious these breaches are. This is important because it means that appropriate action can be taken if it is highly likely that workplace bullying has occurred.

**Recommendation 16. Individual level approaches should be considered carefully before implementation.**

Many individual level interventions and strategies have been developed (e.g., cognitive training, mediation etc.). There is conjecture over the effectiveness of these approaches, and this project suggests that other organisational and structural level approaches are likely to be more efficacious. For example, this project identified that use of strategies such as mediation can often exacerbate the situation and cause more harm.

This does not mean that any intervention strategies should be immediately discounted. What is most important is that organisations and managers are aware of the advantages and disadvantages of these approaches. By being informed, they are better able to decide whether strategies such as mediation are appropriate for a given situation.

**Recommendation 17. In larger organisations, the establishment of peer support networks could be effective in dealing with workplace bullying.**

Often employees are not comfortable approaching management or do not trust them to listen and act. Having peer representatives at different levels who are trained appropriately that employees and managers feel

comfortable of an organisation may be important in preventing workplace bullying.

**Recommendation 18. Organisations should continually review their strategies, and their management of workplace bullying.**

*“Review what has occurred and ensure preventative strategies are put in place to prevent a reoccurrence”*

(Expert 13, Round 1 Delphi)

Organisations should continually review and refine their approaches to managing workplace bullying. For example, for each case of workplace bullying that is reported, the following types of questions need to be asked:

- What type of bullying occurred?
- What factors contributed to the workplace bullying?
- How could it have been prevented?
- What action was taken and why?
- What were the consequences of the action for victims, perpetrators, witnesses, and the organisation more broadly?
- What could be done better in the future to prevent and manage bullying?

## **7.2 Other Considerations**

Many of the strategies outlined above are relevant for small organisations. For example, regardless of size, organisations need to have policies and procedures surrounding workplace bullying, adopt a risk management approach, educate employees, and ensure owners and managers are appropriately trained. The challenges that small businesses face are very different to larger organisations, and a lack of personnel and financial resources could make it difficult to invest considerably in the prevention of workplace bullying. Thus the extent to which smaller organisations implement the following recommendations will vary. However, it is recommended that all businesses regardless of size incorporate the prevention of workplace bullying as part of what they do.



### **7.3 Suggestions for Future Research**

This project also identifies a number of areas of research that need to be addressed in the future.

#### ***Development, piloting and Evaluation of Strategies***

The development and pilot testing of strategies to tackle workplace bullying based on the findings of this research and that also builds on the extant evidence base would be welcomed. For example, strategies that utilise a strategic social marketing approach have not yet been extensively used to tackle workplace bullying, but as we propose in this report, appear well suited to application to this topic. Evaluations are also needed to examine the effectiveness of different approaches to addressing workplace bullying.

Although randomised controlled trials would not be feasible or appropriate, multiple method research designs utilising techniques including exploratory qualitative research, wait-list controls, pre-post observational studies, or using comparison sites as controls could be relevant. Furthermore, evaluations should also incorporate process evaluation to identify learning on what works and what does not in practice from a people centred perspective. Doing so can identify useful insights and learning that add further information to statistical evaluation data.

#### ***Accurate Economic Data***

There is a need for more economic data regarding workplace bullying. This is not only important for quantifying the magnitude of the problem for Australia, but also has an important role in engaging organisations to address it. Research is needed to more accurately estimate the economic cost of workplace bullying in relation to productivity losses due to depression, absenteeism, and/or presenteeism, health care costs, legal costs, and the costs of reputation loss. In addition, cost effectiveness studies are needed to determine the economic benefits associated with addressing workplace bullying.

### ***Investigate Workplace Bullying in Different Contexts***

There is a need to better understand workplace bullying in the context of different industries and organisation sizes. This is particularly the case for small businesses, where the nature of workplace bullying is often very different and the approaches needed to prevent and manage workplace bullying may also need to be different.

### ***More Longitudinal Research is Needed***

More longitudinal research is needed to clarify the organisational factors that influence the experiences of different forms of workplace bullying behaviours. This should also involve clarify the influence of different workplace bullying behaviours on a broad range of outcomes (e.g., mental health, job performance, and organisational productivity).

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# Workplace Bullying: A Rapid Review

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# 1 Executive Summary

Workplace bullying is a common problem in Australia, with as many as 45% of employees indicating they have experienced workplace bullying during some stage of their working lives. **Workplace bullying** refers to *repeated and unreasonable behaviour directed towards a worker or a group of workers that creates a risk to health and safety* (House of Representatives Committee, 2012). This encompasses a range of behaviours that relate to an individual's work (e.g., excessive criticism) or are more personal in nature (e.g., threatening behaviour, spreading of rumours). Importantly, workplace bullying can include overt behaviours such as aggressive or hostile behaviour, and spreading of lies and rumours. Workplace bullying can also be more subtle in nature and include ignoring opinions, withholding information, and overruling decisions.

This review demonstrates that the consequences of workplace bullying are widespread and pervasive. Victims of workplace bullying have an increased risk of depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, suicide ideations/behaviours, and chronic health conditions (e.g., hypertension). Victims are also more likely to experience low job satisfaction and career disruptions. Workplace bullying also has consequences for co-workers, leading to lowered morale and a culture of fear, particularly if it is not well managed or addressed by the organisation. In addition, bullying behaviours have broader implications for the organisation, through lowered levels of workplace productivity (via absenteeism and presenteeism), increased costs associated with recruiting new staff, legal fees, and lost revenue through reputational harm.

Numerous strategies are used by organisations to prevent and manage workplace bullying. Most strategies are based on workplace bullying policies or codes of conduct that are developed and implemented by organisations. The precise nature of these policies varies between organisations, but they generally clarify standards of behaviours, and procedures for reporting and dealing with bullying behaviour. Individual-level approaches to workplace bullying can include employee awareness training, education, and coaching. Unfortunately, there is very little empirical evidence assessing the effectiveness of different workplace bullying approaches. However, it is generally agreed that mediation and conflict resolution are not effective strategies for addressing workplace bullying.

Based on the evidence examined in this review, strategies to prevent workplace bullying should target organisational factors and leadership, and be based on clear and well communicated policies. Increased awareness and education of workplace bullying may reinforce appropriate workplace behaviour and prevent workplace bullying. Approaches should also be multi-component and tailored according to the characteristics of the organisation (e.g., size, and male/female dominated industry).

This review also indicates that research on workplace bullying in male-dominated industries is lacking. There is some evidence that the frequency and nature of workplace bullying differs in male dominated industries, and that the effects of workplace bullying could vary by gender. However, more research is required to better understand these issues.

# Introduction

## 1.1 Workplace Bullying in Australia

Workplace bullying is a common occurrence in Australian workplaces. It is estimated that 5.2% - 6.8% of Australian employees currently experience, or have experienced, workplace bullying in the past 6 months (Butterworth, Leach, & Kiely, 2013; House of Representatives Committee, 2012). A further 40% of employees report having experienced workplace bullying either in their current workplace (15.7%) or a previous job (24.1%) at least once in their working life (Butterworth, et al., 2013). This suggests that approximately 45% of Australian employees have experienced bullying in their working lives. These figures are consistent with data reported from other countries such as the US, UK, and Sweden (Leymann, 1996). However, because workplace bullying is often a 'hidden problem', its occurrence is likely to be underestimated statistically.

Workplace bullying has a range of important implications for the mental health and well-being of employees and organisations. For instance, victims and witnesses of workplace bullying have an increased risk of depression, suicide ideation, chronic stress, and other psychological conditions (Monks et al., 2009). It also has broader implications, leading to reduced employee motivation, greater employee turnover rates, lower employee satisfaction, and overall reduced workplace productivity. Other organisational consequences of workplace bullying include increased financial costs, decreased productivity, and reputation lost (Bartlett & Bartlett, 2011).

A variety of strategies are implemented by workplaces to prevent and/or manage workplace bullying. Most strategies acknowledge the multi-faceted aetiology of workplace bullying, and attempt to establish organisational procedures for victims of bullying, those accused of bullying, and observers of bullying (Kieseker & Marchant, 1999). Despite a proliferation of potential strategies to address workplace bullying, the efficacy of these approaches, particularly in an Australian context, remains unclear.

## 1.2 Aims of the Current Review

The aim of the current rapid review is to provide a clearer insight into the nature and consequences of workplace bullying, and identify strategies to prevent and manage workplace bullying. This involves addressing five research questions:

1. Which specific behaviours or experiences constitute bullying in the workplace (indicators)?
2. What are the risk factors or predictors of workplace bullying (antecedents)?
3. What are the impacts and consequences of workplace bullying for:
  - a. victims

- b. Individuals accused of workplace bullying;
  - c. Witnesses; and
  - d. Organisations as a whole?
4. Which practical strategies are currently used to prevent and manage workplace bullying, and how effective are they?
  5. How effective are these strategies in preventing and managing workplace bullying?

This review also includes a separate section examining issues specific to workplace bullying in male-dominated industries.

## 2 Method

In order to address Research Questions 1, 2 and 3, we reviewed recent (2003-2013) academic literature and grey literature identifying the antecedents, indicators, and consequences of workplace bullying.

Research Questions 4 and 5, were reviewed in a similar manner. However, the search terms and key words were modified slightly to accurately pinpoint literature relating specifically to strategies for managing workplace bullying.

The methodology utilised for the literature search is described in detail below.

1. *Academic literature.* A search of relevant academic literature published between 2003 and 2013 was conducted using the following search engines: Web of Knowledge (includes Web of Science, Medline), PsycInfo, and Scopus. Table 7 presents details of these electronic databases.

Table 7: Electronic databases used to conduct searches

Electronic Database	Types of Literature
<b>PsycInfo</b>	PsycInfo is an expansive abstracting and indexing database of more than 3 million records devoted to peer reviewed literature in the behavioural sciences, and mental health.
<b>Scopus</b>	The largest abstract and citation database, containing over 46 million indexed records from more than 19500 titles in the scientific, technical, medical and social sciences including arts and humanities.
<b>Web of Knowledge</b>	Database containing over 40 million records from approximately 23,000 publications in social sciences, arts and humanities

*Search Strategy (Research Questions 1, 2, and 3).* This strategy involved combining search terms (including truncated and wildcard search term characters) such as (work\*, employ\*, job, career), (bully\*, incivil\*, agres\*, harass\*, mobbing, horizontal violence), (cause\*, antecedent, indicator, predict\*), (effect, outcome, impact, damage, harm), (stress, anxiety, depress\*, illness), and (review). The literature searches were completed in sequence to ensure each of the three areas of focus; antecedents, indicators, and effects of workplace bullying were comprehensively reviewed.

*Search Strategy (Research Questions 4 and 5).* Search terms used included combinations of the following: (work\*, employ\*, job, career), (bully\*, incivil\*, agres\*, harass\*, mobbing, horizontal violence), (strateg\*, policy, manage\*, prevent), (efficacy\*, effective\*) and (review). Again the searches were completed in sequence to ensure sufficient coverage of the Research Questions.

In order to accurately capture literature relating to male-dominated workplaces, both searches were conducted a second time with the addition of the search terms: (male\*, industry\*, sector\*)

The reference lists of identified articles were then scanned manually for any additional publications not already included in the review.

2. *Grey Literature*. The systematic searches of published academic literature were supplemented by unpublished (grey) literature searches. This process involved searching the websites of relevant government, employment relations, mental health, and other stakeholder organisations to identify pertinent literature for inclusion in the review. These searches were conducted using the same search terms as above. Relevant websites primarily from Australia, New Zealand, the UK, the US and Canada were searched for information antecedents, indicators and consequences of workplace bullying, and strategies used to prevent and manage workplace bullying. The following websites were highlighted as potentially containing information on workplace bullying:

- *Comcare*
- *Safework Australia*
- *COSBOA*
- *The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry*
- *Australian Public Service Commission*
- *WorkSafe Victoria*
- *NSW Health*

*Google* and *Google Scholar* searches were also conducted using the search terms above in an attempt to uncover any literature (grey or otherwise) not previously identified.

All identified literature was then reviewed, and classified based on its relevance (high or low) to one (or more) of the research questions.

### 3 Which specific behaviours or experiences constitute bullying in the workplace (indicators)?

#### 3.1 Definition of Workplace Bullying

Workplace bullying is a complex and multidimensional construct, and is often used interchangeably with other counterproductive workplace behaviours, such as deviance, retaliation, revenge, and low level incivility. Although there are many definitions of workplace bullying, for clarity, this review uses the definition provided by the House of Representatives Committee on Workplace Bullying (2012):

**Workplace bullying refers to repeated and unreasonable behaviour directed towards a worker or a group of workers that creates a risk to health and safety (House of Representatives Committee, 2012).**

Within this context, **repeated behaviour** indicates that the behaviour occurs over a prolonged period of time and is not a one-off or stand-alone event. A behaviour is considered **unreasonable** if it is victimising, humiliating, intimidating or threatening (as determined by a reasonable person, having regard for the circumstances). It is important to note that “reasonable management action carried out in a reasonable manner” is not considered to constitute workplace bullying.

Workplace bullying can include aggressive forms of behaviour, but can also be more subtle or covert in nature (e.g., denying access to information, spreading of rumours). It is also important to note the growth in cyberbullying which refers to use of information and communication technology to send or post text or images intended to hurt or embarrass another person. The multi-faceted (and often covert) nature of bullying makes identification of specific bullying behaviours difficult, but recently researchers have proposed useful frameworks for classifying and understanding workplace bullying behaviours.

*Key points:*

- *Workplace bullying is defined as behaviour towards a worker or a group of workers which is repeated and unreasonable, and which creates a risk to health and safety.*
- *Workplace bullying is a multifaceted phenomenon – it can be covert or overt in nature, and can occur via personal interactions or online (cyberbullying).*

## 3.2 Types of Workplace Bullying

Bartlett and Bartlett (2011) proposed that workplace bullying can be categorised as work-related, and personal bullying, with each having different sub-types. These categorisations are summarised below.

### 3.2.1 Work-related bullying

Work-related bullying refers to instances where aspects of the victim’s work are the target of bullying. Accordingly, Bartlett and Bartlett (2011) there are three main subtypes of work-related bullying, as described in Table 8.

Table 8: Subtypes of work-related bullying

Subtype of Work-related bullying	Description	Examples
<b>Workload</b>	An individual takes advantage of positional power over the victim, and places unreasonable demands on their work behaviours.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work overload</li> <li>• Removing responsibility</li> <li>• Delegation of menial tasks</li> <li>• Refusing leave</li> <li>• Unrealistic goals</li> <li>• Setting up to fail</li> <li>•</li> </ul>
<b>Work processes</b>	An individual interferes with normal processes at work in order to dominate the victim. This type of bullying could exist in any work relationship (e.g., peers, subordinates, supervisors).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shifting opinions</li> <li>• Overruling decisions</li> <li>• Flaunting status/power</li> <li>• Professional status attack</li> <li>• Controlling resources</li> <li>• Withholding information</li> </ul>
<b>Evaluation and advancement</b>	This occurs mostly between supervisor and subordinate victim. This involves unreasonable monitoring and judgement of the victim’s work.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Excessive monitoring</li> <li>• Judging work wrongly</li> <li>• Unfair criticism</li> <li>• Blocking promotion</li> </ul>

### 3.2.2 Personal Bullying

Personal bullying refers to cases where the individual is attacked on a personal level, rather than via work or work-related demands. Personal bullying is split into two separate categories – indirect or direct personal bullying –shown in Table 9.



Table 9: Subtypes of personal-related bullying

Personal bullying	Description	Examples
<b>Indirect Personal</b>	This occurs via “ignoring” and exclusionary behaviours towards the victim, or when the victim is the target of malicious gossip and rumours.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Isolation</li> <li>• Ignoring</li> <li>• Excluding</li> <li>• Not returning communications</li> <li>• Gossip</li> <li>• Lies</li> <li>• False accusations</li> <li>• Undermining</li> </ul>
<b>Personal direct</b>	This occurs when an perpetrator directly contacts the victim (either face-to-face or online) and engages in threatening behaviour.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Verbal attack</li> <li>• Belittling</li> <li>• Yelling</li> <li>• Interrupting others</li> <li>• Persistent critic</li> <li>• Humiliation/inappropriate personal jokes</li> <li>• Negative eye contact</li> <li>• Manipulation</li> <li>• Threats and intimidation</li> </ul>

### 3.3 Other Typologies

Other researchers have proposed similar frameworks to describe different workplace bullying behaviours. For instance, Butterworth, et al. (2013) classified bullying behaviours in terms of person-related experience, work-related experiences, and violence and intimidation experiences. These classifications correspond closely with the categories proposed by Bartlett and Bartlett (2011).

- **Person-related experiences.** Attempts to undermine and demoralise the victim in terms of their *personal qualities*. Includes behaviours such as spreading rumours or gossip, persistent attempts to humiliate the victim, persistent and unjustified criticism, monitoring of work, and destructive innuendo/sarcasm.
- **Work-related experiences.** Instances where work is deliberately impeded. Examples of this type of bullying include placing unreasonable pressure to produce work, shifting of goalposts without telling the victim, withholding necessary information, and unreasonable refusal of applications for leave, training or promotion.
- **Violence and intimidation.** Generally considered the most severe type of bullying and include being shouted at, verbal threats, and threats of physical violence to the person or their property (Butterworth, et al., 2013).

Examples of behaviours constituting bullying in the workplace based on these 3 classes are presented in Table 10.

Table 10. Behaviours constituting bullying in the workplace (Butterworth et al., 2013).

Bullying Subtype	Example Behaviours
<b>Person-related experiences</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Persistent attempts to belittle and undermine work</li> <li>• Persistent unjustified criticism and monitoring of work</li> <li>• Persistent attempts to humiliate</li> <li>• Undermining personal integrity</li> <li>• Destructive innuendo and sarcasm</li> <li>• Making inappropriate jokes</li> <li>• Persistent attempts to demoralise</li> <li>• Spreading gossip and rumours</li> </ul>
<b>Work-related experiences</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Withholding necessary information</li> <li>• Being ignored or excluded</li> <li>• Unreasonable refusal of application for leave, training and promotion</li> <li>• Unreasonable pressure to produce work</li> <li>• Setting impossible deadlines</li> <li>• Shifting goalposts</li> <li>• Constant undervaluing</li> <li>• Removal of areas of responsibility without consultation</li> </ul>
<b>Violence and intimidation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Verbal threats</li> <li>• Persistent teasing</li> <li>• Threats of physical violence</li> <li>• Threats of physical violence to property</li> <li>• Being shouted at or being the target of spontaneous anger</li> </ul>

*Key points:*

- *Australian research has supported use of a taxonomy of workplace bullying experiences: Person-related experiences, work-related experiences and violence and intimidation experiences.*
- *Using this taxonomy, 21 bullying behaviours have been identified, but this list is non-exhaustive due to the complexity of human interactions.*

### 3.4 Incidence of Different Workplace Bullying Behaviours

Butterworth et al., (2013) investigated how common different workplace bullying behaviours (shown in Table 2) are in Australian workplaces. The most frequently reported bullying behaviours were work-related and included:

- “Unreasonable pressure to produce work” and shifting goalposts without telling you” (17%);

- “Setting of impossible deadlines” (15%);
- “Withholding necessary information” (12%);
- “Being ignored or excluded” (11%);
- “Constant undervaluing” (10%).

Person-related bullying experiences were less common:

- “Spreading gossip and rumours” (1.5%);
- “Making inappropriate jokes” (2%).

The least frequently reported experiences involved violence and intimidation:

- “Verbal threats to you” and “persistent teasing to you” (1%);
- “Threats of violence to you” and “threats of violence to your property” (< 1%)

### 3.5 Summary

Whilst legal definitions of workplace bullying tend to be broad in their terms, Australian and international evidence supports the existence of three types of bullying experiences: (1) person-related, (2) work-related and (3) violence and intimidation experiences. From this distinction, 21 specific workplace bullying behaviours can be identified. This list of behaviours (Table 4) may not be exhaustive, but it provides an evidence-based context in which to differentiate other negative (or normal) workplace interactions from workplace bullying.

## 4 What are the risk factors or predictors of workplace bullying (antecedents)?

Different theories of workplace bullying have been proposed which provide insight into the antecedents of bullying and provide a context for examining these antecedents. In particular, empirical and theoretical research suggests three main psychological explanations of workplace bullying:

- **The frustration/strain explanation.** Bullying is the result of frustrations and/or strains, such as job pressure, job stress, change in roles, management styles, high pressure environments. In other words, bullying occurs when individuals have ineffective coping strategies to deal with stresses and frustrations, and anger is projected towards someone else (Baillien, Neyens, De Witte, & De Cuyper, 2009).
- **The interpersonal conflict explanation.** Bullying is the result of the mismanagement of workplace conflict. That is, it is a normal occurrence for employees to disagree and have arguments. However, poor conflict management skills by parties or managers escalates existing problems (usually regarding work-related issues). When combined with power differences (formal or informal) between workers, it can manifest in bullying behaviours (Baillien, et al., 2009).
- **The intra-group explanation.** From this perspective, workplace bullying results from team or organisational environments which enable bullying. Negative everyday interactions between team members can be interpreted as condoned by the organisation, and promote 'a culture of gossip'. From this perspective, the social climate of the organisation drives bullying (Baillien, et al., 2009).

In addition to proposing explanations for why workplace bullying occurs, research has also identified predictors of workplace bullying. These predictors are presented according to two main categories: (1) Personality antecedents; and (2) Organisational antecedents.

### 4.1.1 Personality Antecedents

**Characteristics of the Victim.** Research has demonstrated that certain personality characteristics increase the risk that an individual will be a victim of workplace bullying (Baillien, et al., 2009; Beswick, Gore, & Palferman, 2006; Butterworth, et al., 2013; Coyne, Seigne, & Randall, 2000). These include:

- Low assertiveness;

- A history of victimisation;
- Low tolerance;
- Low self-efficacy;
- Fewer supportive networks (e.g., fewer family and friends),
- Low emotional stability (i.e., high neuroticism).

Findings for certain personality traits (particularly extraversion, conscientiousness and agreeableness) have been mixed (Samnani & Singh, 2012). Some research findings indicate victims are likely to be high in extraversion (Persson et al., 2009), whilst others have found that extraversion is either unrelated or negatively related to being a victim of bullying (Glaso, Matthiesen, Nielsen, & Einarsen, 2007). One explanation for the discrepant findings is that there maybe two types of targets, which differ in terms of personality and interaction style:

- **Vulnerable:** those who are introverted, and more agreeable.
- **Provocative:** those who are extroverted, and less agreeable.

Consequently, the idea of a single distinctive 'victim profile' may not be appropriate when considering workplace bullying (Glaso, et al., 2007).

**Characteristics of individuals accused of bullying.** Research examining the characteristics of individuals accused of workplace bullying (from herein referred to as accused) of workplace bullying is comparatively scarce (Moyaed, et al., 2006). However, available research (Ahmed & Braithwaite, 2011; Beswick, et al., 2006; Boddy, 2011; Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996; Rayner, 1997) indicates that accused individuals:

- Are more likely to be male;
- Lack social competence;
- Are politically motivated;
- Are more narcissistic and have higher psychopathy;
- Have lower self-esteem and lower emotional stability.

Some of these characteristics are shared with victims. This may be because accused individuals engage in bullying as a way to protect themselves (e.g., from insecurity and low levels of self-esteem) (Baillien, et al., 2009).

An examination of the personality characteristics of workplace bully victims and perpetrators provides some insight into antecedents of workplace bullying. However, these personality traits are highly variable (Appelbaum, Semerjian, & Mohan, 2012), and it is believed that workplace characteristics may be better predictors of bullying than personality characteristics.

*Key points:*

- *Research has identified some personality characteristics linked with workplace bullying victims and accused individuals.*
- *Some results indicate that victims and accused individuals share a similar personality profile.*
- *Findings are mixed, however, and there does not appear to be a clear personality profile of victims or individuals accused of workplace bullying.*

## **4.2 Work and Organisational Antecedents**

Certain organisational factors may facilitate workplace bullying, and this could be the target of strategies and interventions to prevent and manage workplace bullying (Samnani & Singh, 2012). The main organisational antecedents are outlined below.

### **4.2.1 Workplace Bullying Policies**

The lack of clear anti-bullying policies in an organisation increases the risk of bullying (Samnani & Singh, 2012). This may be because the lack of an agreed upon bullying policy could indicate to workers that workplace behaviour is not monitored and that punishments to perpetrators will not be followed through. Victims may also perceive a lack of organisational commitment to bullying and may be discouraged from reporting or redressing the issue, or may not have access to information on the appropriate actions to take (Salin, 2003). In contrast, organisations with rules-based ethical guidelines have fewer bullying behaviours (Bulutlar & Öz, 2009). The presence of rules and policies may serve to clarify the distinction between appropriate and inappropriate behaviour in the workplace, and prevent bullying.

### **4.2.2 Physical Work Environment**

Physical aspects of work environments can serve to increase stress and lower tolerance to the behaviour of others in the workplace. For instance, Baillien, et al (2009) found workplaces described as hot, cramped or crowded, noisy, and where tools and equipment were shared, had higher rates of bullying. Such factors could promote bullying via increased frustration or strain which increase interpersonal conflict.

Organisational change, particularly change in management, has been linked with increased workplace bullying. For example, Hoel and Cooper (2000) found that major organisational changes, changes to budgets (i.e., cuts), technological changes, and internal re-structuring were significantly related to bullying. Changes

at work (e.g., changes in supervisor, of job or wider organisational change) and role ambiguity/conflict are common antecedents of bullying (Hoel, Einarsen, & Cooper, 2003).

### **4.2.3 Psychosocial Work Environment**

Employee perceptions of the psychosocial work environment (e.g., culture, attitudes, values, and practices within an organisation) have also been linked with workplace bullying. For example, bullying is more common in organisations where competitive behaviour is rewarded, abuse is normalised, and large power imbalances exist between staff members (Samnani & Singh, 2012). In contrast, workplaces with caring ethical climates, or an ethical climate based on references to rules, tended to have lower rates of bullying (Bulutlar & Öz, 2009).

Characteristics of an individual's job are also associated with higher rates of bullying. (Balducci, Fraccaroli, & Schaufeli, 2011; Demir, Rodwell, & Flower, 2013; Helge Hoel & Cooper, 2000; Quine, 2001). These include:

- Higher job demands (e.g., time pressures, heavy workloads);
- Low autonomy (e.g, limited flexibility or control over work);
- Role ambiguity;
- Low job security;
- Low levels of social support from co-workers or supervisors.

Butterworth, et al. (2013) found that these associations varied depending on the nature of workplace bullying (i.e., person, work or violence and intimidation experiences). Person-related and work-related experiences of bullying were positively associated with job characteristics like high job demands, low control, job insecurity, lack of support from managers, lack of support from colleagues, and poor organisational culture. Violence and intimidation experiences however were significantly related to poor organisational culture and lack of support from colleagues.

### **4.2.4 Leadership**

Leadership is an important predictor of the nature and extent of workplace bullying (Helge Hoel & Cooper, 2000). Available literature indicates that bullying flourishes in cases where the expectations on workers are ambiguous and unpredictable, when workers are under high amounts of pressure but lack control over the outcomes of their work (Hoel, et al., 2003), and where the organisation lacks strong clear policies on workplace bullying and/or ethical behaviour. Leadership perceived as weak or indistinct may result in unresolved conflicts between workers, and thus, may lead to increases in bullying (Strandmark & Hallberg, 2007).

Key points:

- *Workplace factors are important determinants of workplace bullying.*
- *The main workplace determinants include leadership and the psychosocial work environment.*
- *A lack of clear policies regarding workplace bullying is also a key predicting factor.*

### 4.3 Summary

Although personality characteristics are associated with workplace bullying, organisational characteristics are stronger predictors. Factors such as the development and implementation of clear workplace bullying policies, combined with leadership and organisational climate, and job demands are likely to be particularly important.



## 5 What is the impact of workplace bullying - for victims, perpetrators, witnesses and organisations as a whole (consequences)?

A large body of research has demonstrated that individuals who are bullied in the workplace are at greater risk of physical illness, somatic complaints, mental illness, emotional problems, and work-related problems like low job satisfaction and low motivation. However, it is important to note that the effects of workplace bullying are more far-reaching and can influence observers, bystanders, groups and organisations as a whole. The next section reviews literature relating to the consequences of workplace bullying.

### 5.1 Consequences for victims

#### 5.1.1 Physical Outcomes.

Victims of workplace bullying have an increased risk of:

- Chronic diseases such as cardiovascular disease (Kivimaki, Elovainio, & Vahtera, 2000);
- Headaches and migraines (Tynes, Johannessen, & Sterud, 2013),
- Obesity (Kivimaki et al., 2003);
- Fibromyalgia (Kivimaki et al., 2004);
- Dizziness, stomach aches and chest pains (Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2002);
- Poorer self-rated health (Dehue, Bolman, Völlink, & Pouwelse, 2012).

These health outcomes are pronounced as the frequency of bullying increases (Dehue, et al., 2012), and are likely to be attributable to the effects of prolonged stress (Tuckey, Dollard, Saebel, & Berry, 2010). For example, elevated and prolonged levels of stress have been shown to compromise the health of the cardiovascular system (via elevated sympathetic nervous system activity), elevate hormones, such as cortisol, which affect the regulation of body weight, and promote tension headaches and migraines.

In addition, many individuals who experience workplace bullying may engage in health compromising behaviours as a way to cope with the stress and trauma of workplace bullying; this could also contribute to poor physical health. For instance, victims of workplace bullying engage in behaviours such as increased smoking, alcohol use and drug use/abuse (Traweger, Kinzl, Traweger-Ravanelli, & Fiala, 2004), and use of sleep medication (Niedhammer, David, Degioanni, Drummond, & Phillip, 2009),

### Key Points

- *Workplace bullying increases the risk of physical health problems such as hypertension, obesity, and headaches and migraine.*

### 5.1.2 Psychological Outcomes.

Extensive research has demonstrated links between workplace bullying and psychological health. Victims of workplace bullying tend to report feelings of being exhausted, afraid, sad, angry, unmotivated, upset, and isolated (Bartlett & Bartlett, 2011). These can manifest in a range of chronic and severe psychological conditions. The more severe psychological effects are:

- **Depression and anxiety.** Numerous studies have indicated that victims of workplace bullying are at an elevated risk of depression, anxiety, and psychological distress more broadly (Butterworth, et al., 2013; Demir, et al., 2013; Hauge, Skogstad, & Einarsen, 2010; Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2002; Rugulies et al., 2012).
- **Chronic stress.** Being bullied can be a highly stressful experience, with the individual experiencing a workplace that is less supportive, more demanding, and less enjoyable. Numerous studies have demonstrated that victims of workplace bullying experience significantly high levels of stress (Finne, Knardahl, & Lau, 2011; Vartia, 2001).
- **Post traumatic stress disorder.** Researchers indicate that 76% of bullying victims reported PTSD symptoms, with one-third of these individuals meeting the criteria for a formal diagnosis of PTSD. Leymann and Gustafsson (1996) also found that experiencing workplace bullying can result in PTSD symptoms that are comparable in magnitude with rape victims, and train drivers involved in fatal accidents.
- **Suicide** Workplace bullying is associated with suicide ideation and suicide behaviours (Cristian Balducci, Alfano, & Fraccaroli, 2009; Leymann & Gustafsson, 1996). Leymann (1996) found that 10-20% of employees who had experienced bullying either contracted serious illnesses or committed suicide.

**Other Personal Outcomes.** Research also indicates a range of other adverse outcomes for victims of workplace bullying including loss of income – this is because victims may cut back hours or change jobs, as a way of managing the situation (Gardner & Johnson, 2001). In addition, workplace bullying can affect an individual's career, and spillover and adversely affect their family life. Employees who have been bullied may as a result be hypersensitive to, or intolerant of, criticism at work, and may withdraw from colleagues for fear of further criticism. This withdrawal and sensitivity may lead to a cycle of victim behaviour. That is, the behaviours of the victim change because of the bullying, their motivation to work and social interactions at work suffer because of bullying, and consequently, they

may be more likely to receive a negative evaluation of their work performance from superiors increasing feelings of alienation (Bartlett & Bartlett, 2011).

**Types of bullying.** The effects of workplace bullying on mental health depends on the type of bullying. Several researchers have indicated that the mental health effects could be more pronounced for work-related bullying behaviours. For instance, Quine (2001) found that work-related factors such as overwork (e.g., being given impossible deadlines, undue pressure to work) and destabilisation (e.g., being given meaningless tasks, removal of responsibility, setting up to fail, shifting goalposts, repeated reminders of errors) were most highly correlated with anxiety and depression for nurses who had experienced bullying.

Whilst work-related bullying is most likely to result in an assertive response from the victim (e.g., approaching the bully), personal bullying is more likely to be dealt with through avoidance (e.g., ignoring the bully or using sick leave to avoid the situation) or in extreme cases, seeking formal help. Violence and intimidation experiences were most clearly related to seeking formal help, probably because these actions constitute definite and widely agreed upon legal and moral grounds for lodging a complaint (Djurkovic, et al., 2005).

**Upwards bullying.** Whilst literature has traditionally examined workplace bullying as a downwards (supervisor to subordinate) or horizontal (co-worker to co-worker) phenomenon, limited research has examined the mental health and physical consequences of upwards bullying – bullying of a supervisor by subordinates. It has been suggested that upwards bullying may have especially severe consequences for victims, as it may escalate in severity more quickly than other types of bullying (Leymann, 1996).

Upward bullying has commonly been found to be a reaction of staff to an unpopular decision or to organisational change (e.g., restructuring). For the perpetrator, upwards bullying may represent a dysfunctional attempt at redistributing power by taking it away from the manager. Furthermore, managers and bosses are often perceived as a salient 'outgroup' member, enhancing their potential as targets (Branch, et al., 2008). The limited literature that is available indicates that managers who are bullied experience similar feelings of threat, powerlessness, isolation and intimidation as other victims (Branch, et al., 2007). Upwards bullying behaviours are also similar to those reported for other forms of bullying, and can range from covert behaviours like failing to attend meetings, snide comments, sabotage, gossip and constant scrutiny of work, to overt behaviours like yelling, damage to property, threats and verbal intimidation (Branch, et al., 2007).

### Key Points

- *Victims of workplace bullying are at an increased risk of mental health problems such as depression, stress, and anxiety.*
- *These effects may depend on the nature of workplace bullying. For instance, work-related bullying could have more severe effects on mental health.*

## 5.2 Individuals Accused of Workplace Bullying

There is some evidence that individuals accused of workplace bullying (rightly or wrongly) experience a range of negative outcomes (Coyne, Craig, & Smith-Lee Chong, 2004). Two recent Australian studies (Jenkins, et al., 2011; Jenkins, et al., 2012) indicate that serious negative mental health outcomes, such as depression, anxiety, PTSD and suicide ideation, can result from accusations of bullying (Jenkins, et al., 2011), whether they are substantiated or not. Those accused of bullying also experienced negative career consequences, and tended to leave the workplace regardless of the outcome of the investigation. Twenty five percent either were dismissed from their position or were forced to resign. Accused bullies also lost confidence in their own managerial skills, and those who were found guilty of bullying lost confidence in procedural/organisational justice procedures (Jenkins, et al., 2011).

Research on perceptions of those accused of bullying indicated that over half believed themselves to be the target of workplace bullying, particularly 'upward bullying'. In this way, alleged perpetrators may perceive similar experiences of intimidation, labelling, and aggressive behaviour (e.g., yelling) as those reported by victims. None of those who experienced this kind of behaviour reported it despite the distress it caused, and many perceived that dealing with inappropriate and aggressive employee behaviour was 'part of their job' as a manager (Jenkins, et al., 2012). This finding demonstrates the means by which upwards bullying and bullying towards those who are accused of it themselves may be under-reported.

## 5.3 Bystanders of Workplace Bullying

Observers of bullying experience greater job stress, chronic anxiety, and are generally more dissatisfied with the work environment, particularly with the social climate and the leaders of the organisation (Einarsen & Mikkelsen, 2003; Einarsen, Raknes, & Matthiesen, 1994; Lutgen-Sandvik, Tracy, & Alberts, 2007; M. A. L. Vartia, 2001). Observers of bullying may also share similar susceptibility to depressive symptoms as victims of bullying (Niedhammer, David, & Degioanni, 2006).

"Toxic organisational cultures" (Bartlett & Bartlett, 2011, p.76) can emerge as a result of bullying. Bullying can serve to change the organisational climate and can,

therefore, be perpetuated even after bullies are removed from the workplace (Samnani & Singh, 2012). A lack of willingness or an inability to address bullying at an organisational level can impact teamwork and morale within the organisation (Baillien, et al., 2009), and can decrease commitment to the organisation (Gardener & Johnson, 2001). Workplace bullying has been shown to affect the relationship between the victim and other workers, like peers and supervisors (Glaso, Nielsen, & Einarsen, 2009; Samnani & Singh, 2012).

#### Key Points

- *Limited research suggests that workplace bullying also has adverse effects for co-workers and individuals accused of workplace bullying.*

## 5.4 Organisational Outcomes

Workplace bullying also has considerable adverse effects on the organisation. Some of the main factors are outlined below:

**Absenteeism.** Victims are significantly more likely to take longer and more frequent bouts of sick leave due to poor health and/or because of a desire to withdraw from the workplace (Askew et al., 2012; Kivimaki, et al., 2000; Voss, Floderus, & Diderichsen, 2001). Some studies report an increase in illness related absences from 25% to 90% as a result of bullying (Voss, et al., 2001).

**Presenteeism.** Bullying can increase the likelihood of presenteeism, a concept which refers to individuals being physically present at work but less productive due to poor mental health, disability, or other factors. Workplace bullying could contribute to presenteeism via:

1. Rumination about bullying situations, which could lead to lowered effort, increased errors and lost time due to worrying (Gardner & Johnson, 2001);
2. Decreased organisational commitment (Askew, et al., 2012; Quine, 2001; Loh, et al., 2010);
3. Lower job satisfaction (Askew, et al., 2012; Loh, Restubog, & Zagenczyk, 2010; Quine, 2001);
4. Reduced creative potential (MacIntosh, 2005), increased errors (Paice & Smith, 2009), and less efficient use of time (Gardner & Johnson, 2001).

The cost of stress-related presenteeism exceeds that of stress-related absenteeism – an estimated \$9.69 billion dollars each year, compared to \$5.12 billion for absenteeism (Medibank Private, 2008). Eighty percent of lost productive time associated with depression is due to presenteeism (Collins, et al., 2005). This is particularly pertinent, as depression is one of the most commonly reported mental health consequences of bullying.

**Turnover Rates.** Individuals who experience workplace bullying have greater turnover rates, which can translate into productivity losses through cost of re-hiring and training staff (Bartlett & Bartlett, 2011; Namie, 2003; Namie, 2007).

**Reputational Harm.** This can affect relationships with customers and suppliers, and also make it more difficult to retain and attract staff (Saam, 2010).

**Direct Financial Costs.** It is estimated that workplace bullying costs Australian employers \$6-\$36 billion each year (SafetyHazard: Workplace Bullying). This estimate includes both direct and indirect costs (e.g., absenteeism, turnover, legal costs and loss of productivity), and mental health claims cost organisations twice as much as physical claims (Comcare, 2011). Overall, workers compensation claims associated with workplace bullying cost the Australian economy \$60 million over 2 years (2008-2010) (SafetyHazard: Workplace Bullying). Furthermore, the cost of presenteeism and absenteeism as a result of work stress is estimated to be \$14.8 billion per year in Australia (Medibank Private, 2008). There are many other direct costs of workplace bullying. These include costs associated with conflict resolution, compensation for victims, and law suits (e.g., wrongful discharge, sexual harassment, discrimination) (Gardner & Johnson, 2001).

#### *Key Points*

- *Workplace bullying has a number of implications for organisations. In particular, workplace bullying increases absenteeism and presenteeism rates, and has substantial direct and indirect financial costs.*

## 5.5 Summary

There are many important and pervasive effects of workplace bullying. Victims are at a significantly greater risk of psychological distress and physical health problems. In addition, they are likely to experience social isolation, career disruptions, and disrupted family life. Evidence on the effects on perpetrators is limited, but it is clear that workplace bullying also has adverse effects on witnesses and co-workers. A considerable amount of research also indicated that workplace bullying has implications for organisations. These include lost productivity, direct financial costs associated with legal fees and conflict resolution, and reputational harm.

## 6 Which practical strategies are currently used to prevent and manage workplace bullying, and how effective are they?

There are a range of strategies utilised by organisations to prevent and manage workplace bullying. These strategies can be categorised as (Beswick, et al., 2006; M. Vartia & Leka, 2011):

- **Primary interventions (prevention):** proactive or pre-emptive approaches aiming to reduce the risk of bullying occurring;
- **Secondary intervention (interventions):** reducing or slowing the progression of bullying; prevent re-occurrence of bullying; and/or provide strategies to help victims cope with the effects of bullying;
- **Tertiary interventions (rehabilitation):** Redressing and restoring damage done by workplace bullying once this has occurred in order to reinstate a sense of well-being.

Strategies to prevent and manage workplace bullying can also be distinguished on the basis of the primary target. For the purposes of this review, these can be categorised into (see Table 11):

- **Organisational strategies:** whole of organisation approaches such as policies/procedures, and strategies to address workplace culture, and attitudes about bullying;
- **Job-level strategies:** modifications of the work environment (e.g., job descriptions, assignment of tasks, functioning of unit) as a way of preventing/managing bullying;
- **Individual level strategies:** attempts to influence employee attitudes, perceptions, interaction styles, behaviour;
- **Multi-level strategies:** Integrative approaches, which combine elements of more than one of the strategies above in order to comprehensively address bullying and prevent its recurrence.

The remainder of this section provides a summary of the main strategies utilised to prevent and manage workplace bullying, and summarises research evaluating the effectiveness of these approaches. Studies examining the efficacy of interventions and strategies for workplace bullying are very limited. Research has instead tended to focus on classifying the different approaches to intervention, the appropriateness (or not) of mediation as an intervention, or describing ways in which organisations manage bullying without proper evaluation or comparison (Beswick, et al., 2006; Saam, 2010).

Table 11. Main categories of approaches to workplace bullying

Categories of Approaches	Description	Examples
<b>Organisational Level</b>	'Top down' strategies to improve organisational culture and guide interpersonal interactions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workplace policies</li> <li>• Risk Management</li> <li>• Awareness raising</li> <li>• Leadership training</li> <li>• Organisational development</li> </ul>
<b>Job Level</b>	Focus on mitigating the effects of workplace bullying or reinstating feelings of security for victims of bullying	Changes to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work conditions</li> <li>• Job descriptions</li> <li>• Physical work environment</li> </ul>
<b>Individual Level</b>	'Bottom up' strategies which involve intervening with employees to prevent and manage workplace bullying	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employee education</li> <li>• Coaching sessions</li> <li>• Executive coaching</li> <li>• Cognitive rehearsal</li> <li>• Expressive writing</li> <li>• Mediation</li> </ul>

## 6.1 Organisational Approaches

Organisational approaches are the most commonly used means of preventing workplace bullying. These are initiated by the organisation itself and aim to curb bullying behaviour from the 'top down' by developing clear guidelines for acceptable behaviour and punishment for non-compliance, for example.

### 6.1.1 Approaches based on policies and guidelines

One of the most common approaches utilised by organisations to prevent and manage workplace bullying involves the development and implementation of formal policies, ethical guidelines, and codes of conduct relating to interpersonal behaviours and workplace bullying. These can also include national policies, declarations, and stakeholder agreements. By providing clear guidelines for behaviour, relevant policies aim to prevent (primary) or manage (secondary) workplace bullying.

The precise nature of these policies varies across different types of organisations. However, the following characteristics are common to the more effective workplace bullying policies (House of Representatives, 2012; Worksafe Victoria, 2012):

- Workplace bullying is defined and examples provided;
- Consequences for noncompliance are clarified;



- There are processes for reporting misconduct;
- There are processes for dealing with malicious (vexatious) reports;
- Staff responsibilities and accountability (depending on category/level) are made explicit;
- Intra-organisational contacts for more information on workplace bullying are available;
- Details of how investigations proceed are outlined;
- Well communicated;
- Outline punishments for non-compliance;
- Encourage reporting of incidents.

Research regarding the effectiveness of workplace bullying policies is limited. Cooper-Thomas, et al. (2013), using a sample of 727 employees across nine healthcare organisations in New Zealand, recently found that organisational initiatives were effective in buffering the relationships with bullying and negative outcomes (Cooper-Thomas et al., 2013). The five components rated of the initiatives rated most effective by employees across the organisations were:

- Development of workplace bullying policies;
- Fostering open and respectful communication between workers;
- Having clear procedures to handle complaints;
- Increasing awareness about bullying;
- Supporting appropriate interactions between employees.

Two additional case studies, described by Beswick (2006), illustrate the effectiveness of policy-based organisational interventions in European countries.

**The 'Work Culture Agreement'.** This formalised policy was used within a public transport and mobility company in Italy, and addressed harassment, bullying and discrimination in the workplace. The aim of the agreement was to make new employees and potential employees aware from the beginning of their employment that bullying would not be accepted by the organisation, and to clarify standards for interpersonal interaction. The agreement:

- Defined acceptable versus unacceptable behaviour;
- Provided instructions on how to deal with complaints and outlined procedures to follow in these cases;
- Provided workers with access to training and further information, and monitoring from an independent equal opportunities commission.

Informal evaluations of this preventative policy initiative concluded that it was successful in promoting awareness of bullying in the workplace and sent a clear message about the organisations standards for interpersonal interactions. In the ten months following the initiation of the agreement only two cases were handled by the commission, indicating a potential reduction in bullying. However, a formal evaluation was not undertaken so the effectiveness of this approach is not clear.

The Health and Safety Authority in Ireland implemented a Code of Practice for organisations, which referenced Irish laws and outlined best practice for managing and preventing workplace bullying. Employers with over 100 staff were required to have an anti-bullying policy for risk assessment purposes. A hotline was also set up to provide advice and assistance to organisations implementing this code. Evaluations suggested that this was a useful initiative with approximately 10,000 Codes of Practice disseminated, an average of 35 calls to the hotline per week. Whilst this initiative was only evaluated at a basic level, its wide dissemination and use among Irish organisations seems to indicate success.

### **6.1.2 Risk Management**

Incorporation of workplace bullying into organisational risk management policies is also a common approach for preventing and managing workplace bullying. Having strategies and systems in place to monitor the occurrence of bullying, identify and mitigate sources of risk, and control bullying when it occurs is considered an important component of addressing workplace bullying (Bartlett & Bartlett, 2011).

### **6.1.3 Awareness Raising**

Organisations and governments also often aim to address bullying by implementing education campaigns to raise awareness of workplace bullying in order to promote more positive work behaviours. Although awareness raising campaigns are common, evaluation data are limited. Beswick (2006) presented the results of a case study evaluating an anti-workplace bullying awareness campaign in Germany. This campaign used publicity, networking and an extensive media campaign to raise awareness and combat workplace bullying. The campaign involved key actors such as the Minister for Labour, employers, insurers and journalists. Resources were also provided, including information (e.g., good practice guidelines), a telephone helpline for victims, a website, and a manual for counsellors dealing with workplace bullying reports. Evaluations showed that the involvement of key actors and the networking component of the initiative were factors crucial to its success.

### **6.1.4 Leadership Training**

Educating senior managers and supervisors in effective leadership is another common approach to addressing workplace bullying. Leadership is important in preventing and managing workplace bullying (Comcare, 2010), particularly if senior managers:

- Demonstrate commitment to a bullying free workplace. This includes modelling positive behaviours and respect, communicating with staff regardless of their level, making sure complaints are taken seriously;
- Establish a co-operative, communicative and consultative relationship with staff; and
- Provide regular training for managers and other employees who supervise others to ensure compliance and monitoring of the anti-bullying policies.

Again evidence for the efficacy of leadership training is limited. However, it is generally agreed that in order for any workplace bullying initiative to be successful, it is important to engage with senior managers and supervisors within an organisation. This is to ensure that the initiative is well supported and communicated (Beirne & Hunter, 2013).

#### *Key Points*

- *Workplace policies and strategies are commonly used to address workplace bullying. Preliminary evidence suggests that these could play a role in preventing and managing workplace bullying.*
- *Risk management, leadership, and awareness raising may also be useful organisational strategies.*

## **6.2 Job level approaches**

Job-level approaches encompass changes to the work environment aimed at mitigating the effects or reinstating feelings of security for victims of bullying (Vartia & Leka, 2011). As a result, they tend to be tertiary-based approaches, and include changes to work hours, the physical environment, the functioning of the unit, and/or job descriptions. Although evaluation data are limited, it has been recommended that the following approaches may help to redress bullying and restore balance to the workplace (Bartlett & Bartlett, 2011; House of Representatives Committee, 2012):

- Changing physical work areas of the victim or accused individuals;
- Punitive action - taking action against the perpetrator within the bounds of workplace relation laws (e.g., demotion, dismissal);
- Re-instating leave to account for time taken off work as a result of bullying;
- Offering training and skill development;
- Offering ongoing monitoring (either formal or informal); and
- Offering mentoring and support for the victim within the organisation and counselling outside the organisation.

## **6.3 Individual level approaches**

These approaches are focused on intervening with employees (including victims and perpetrators) to prevent and manage workplace bullying. These approaches may be initiated by the individual or the organisation itself, but are specifically targeted at influencing workplace interactions by changing individual attitudes, educating individuals, and encouraging self-reflection.

### 6.3.1 Employee education and coaching

Educating employees about relevant ethics, policies, and forms of workplace bullying (e.g., cyber bullying) is often used to counter bullying on an individual, dyadic, or even group level (Bartlett and Bartlett, 2011). Changing attitudes of employees and promoting an understanding of different perspectives and interaction styles may address bullying by creating a positive workplace culture, and by teaching methods to prevent escalation of incivility and bullying.

Strategies include:

- Mentoring - by senior organisational staff;
- Coaching - where skilled 'coaches' from outside the organisation provide (one-on-one or small group) support and individualised training to leaders within the organisation;
- Education sessions – to improve knowledge about workplace bullying policies and procedures, and appropriate workplace behaviour.

A specific example is the “Civility, Respect, and Engagement in the Workplace” (CREW) intervention (Laschinger et al., 2012). This intervention was targeted at nurses and involved five main components:

- Promoting respectful interactions between staff through: weekly meetings; development of individual toolkits; group discussions of respectful behaviours and interpersonal styles; personal reflection; “huddles” at the beginning of shifts to remind one another to focus on the quality of interactions while at work.
- Developing skills to manage conflicts through: discussion of conflict management techniques during weekly meetings; role playing to rehearse potentially difficult interactions.
- Teambuilding, including: teambuilding exercises (e.g., “ice-breaker” activities, games); and development of initiatives to recognize and acknowledge achievements of peers (e.g., anonymous gifts to acknowledge and reward helpful acts in the workplace, creation of a “brag board” for individuals to post their achievements).
- Sharing and promoting the success of the CREW program, by: providing summaries of useful intervention aspects at staff meetings and via email; creating posters to promote CREW at events, such as Nurses Week.
- Removing negative communication associated with a lack of, or flaws in, resources, by discussing issues and formulating solutions (e.g., development of a system to ensure essential supplies are available).

This intervention led to a significant reduction in incidences of supervisor incivility compared to the control group one year after the intervention. Furthermore, nurses in the intervention group reported an increase in feelings of empowerment, and greater trust in management. However, the CREW intervention had no significant effect on co-worker civility. Thus, the CREW intervention did appear to show

moderate efficacy in reducing incivility between supervisors and nurses, but appeared to have little effect on nurse to nurse interactions.

### **6.3.2 Cognitive approaches**

Other techniques are based on teaching individuals cognitive behavioural techniques to counter bullying themselves, and prevent the escalation of bullying. Cognitive rehearsal involves individuals being asked to imagine, or visualise, a difficult situation (e.g., exposure to bullying behaviours) and mentally practice useful responses in order to allow greater control over their reaction in real world situations. This technique has been shown to be effective in countering self-reported bullying experiences for nurses (Stagg, et al. 2011).

Expressive writing interventions have also been studied in relation to workplace incivility and bullying (Kirk, Schutte, & Hine, 2011). Expressive writing is primarily focussed on describing, or communicating, personal feelings, opinions, and attitudes, and thus can help build emotional intelligence and empathy. Kirk et al. (2011) found that over a period of two weeks, this approach led to a decrease in workplace incivility, indicating that this novel method has potential application as part of broader proactive prevention strategies for bullying.

### **6.3.3 Approaches based on mediation (dyadic)**

Mediation attempts to address bullying on a dyadic level, by focussing on reaching a compromise between the perpetrator and victim. Mediation is a means of dispute resolution, whereby an independent, impartial person (the mediator) assists parties to negotiate an agreement and assess options for moving forward. When bullying has not reached a severe level, mediation may help parties reach an agreement and see each other's perspectives. However, mediation is not advised for moderate to severe cases of bullying as this may further exacerbate the harms. In essence, mediation is not suitable for all cases of bullying (House of Representatives Committee, 2012).

Saam (2010) found that mediation was found to be an inappropriate strategy for dealing with workplace bullying, as it emphasises power imbalances and exacerbates situations (particularly for the victim). This is because at times it may be felt that mediation processes (and the 'no blame' philosophy that accompanies mediation) fail to recognise the harm done to the victim.

#### *Key Points*

- *Individual-level approaches to workplace bullying include cognitive approaches and employee coaching. The effectiveness of these approaches is not clear.*

## 6.4 Multi-component approaches

Multi-component strategies use coordinated (and often simultaneously executed) strategies at the individual, organisational and job level, to prevent, manage and redress bullying in the workplace. While most strategies for the prevention and management of bullying incorporate a mixture of approaches to some extent, one case study was identified which combined risk assessment, external consultants, awareness campaigns, individual education, policies, executive coaching/education, and conflict resolution training. This intervention was considered successful and reduced the rate and cost of bullying in the organisation. The importance of using policies in conjunction with changes to the working environment was deemed integral to the success of the intervention. This case study also highlighted the need for the parties involved to agree on acceptable versus unacceptable behaviour, and to then translate these behavioural standards to the relevant policy documents (Beswick, 2006).

The findings of Saam (2010) also indicated a need for multi-level interventions to maximise the efficacy of anti-bullying strategies. The absence of co-ordinated follow up strategies after the initial strategy (usually undertaken at the individual level) was found to be the primary reason for the failure of many anti-bullying interventions, and especially a lack of follow up at the group/organisational level. Furthermore, it was argued that the cause of the bullying should dictate at what level the interventions are aimed. For example, the level most commonly addressed through intervention is the dyadic level – the bully and the victim – but further interventions are likely to be necessary, especially if there are antecedents and consequences outside of the bully-victim relationship (e.g., distressed observers, declines in quality of workplace culture, declines in productivity). Interventions are, therefore, needed at the group, and sometimes at the organisational level, to reduce negative consequences and the risk of further bullying behaviour.

## 6.5 Summary

Overall, results from studies on the efficacy of different bullying interventions indicate that multi-level interventions for workplace bullying – which encompass intervention at the individual, group, job and organisational level, and which also attempt to address the specific situation, and the level of escalation (stage) at which the intervention occurs – may be the most effective means of preventing and managing workplace bullying. When formulating bullying initiatives, complementary strategies addressing all levels should be formulated, and follow-up measures (e.g., monitoring and organisational development) should ensure that ‘lesson learned’ are incorporated into future approaches. Further research should address the lack of empirical comparative research examining the efficacy of various strategies for countering workplace bullying.

## 7 Workplace bullying in male-dominated workplaces

The prevalence, nature and experience of bullying may differ according to gender, and that particular risks may be associated with bullying in male-dominated workplaces. However, research in male-dominated workplaces is scarce, as the volume of workplace bullying research originates from the nursing sector (a female-dominated industry). Furthermore, the bulk of workplace bullying research is European in origin, where the workplace attitudes, ethics, cultures and traditions may not be generalisable to the Australian context. The following section reviews available literature to uncover the specific issues pertinent to the impact of bullying in male-dominated workplaces.

### 7.1 Gender difference in the rates of workplace bullying

Evidence suggests that the *prevalence of bullying* is influenced by the gender ratio of the organisation. Specifically, bullying may be more prevalent in male-dominated workplaces. Although many international studies have found no significant gender difference in rates of bullying across the board, gender differences have emerged in certain sectors. In general, bullying is higher in male-dominated industries, and in organisations with a higher male to female ratio (Privitera & Campbell, 2009). Furthermore, bullying prevalence seems to be higher for women in traditionally male-dominated industries (e.g., business, police, fire services) and males tend to report bullying more often in traditionally female-dominated sectors (e.g., childcare, nursing) (Ortega, Hogh, Pejtersen, Feveille, & Olsen, 2009; Salin & Hoel, 2013).

A small body of research has also noted that *men tend to be perpetrators of bullying* to a slightly higher degree than women (Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996; Raynor, 1997) even when controlling for the position of the perpetrator in the organisation and the kind of aggression (direct or indirect) (Lee & Brotheridge, 2011).

The *type of accused individual* may also vary according to gender. In a sample of Finnish prison officers, Vartia and Hyyti (2002) found that the perpetrator profiles for men and women differed. Women reported being bullied by co-workers only, and men tended to report being bullied by both co-workers and superiors.

Furthermore, the *type of bullying* perpetrated by men and women appears to differ. Whereas men tend to perpetrate work-related bullying, women tend to use social manipulation to a greater extent (Salin, 2001). However, this is also industry specific. For example, Salin and Hoel (2013) found that the highest level of gossip/rumours existed within a male-dominated sector –the police force (Salin & Hoel, 2013).

### 7.2 Gender differences in perception of bullying

Research indicates that *perceptions, recognition and reactions* to bullying also tend to differ according to gender. Women are more likely to recognise bullying, label negative acts as bullying (Olafsson & Johannsdottir, 2004), and acknowledge the negative impact of bullying for the work group or organisation (Salin, 2011).

Men are less likely to seek help in response to being bullied, less likely to use avoidance to cope with bullying, and are more assertive in their reactions to bullying than women (Olafsson & Johannsdottir, 2004). Therefore, men tend to be more active in their response to bullying than women (Salin & Hoel, 2013), but are less likely to recognise or report workplace bullying.

The *perceived antecedents of bullying* also tend to be viewed differently. Qualitative research by Salin (2011) showed that men were more likely to perceive bullying as an individual problem, consistently emphasising characteristics of the target. Conversely, women were more likely to see it as an organisational problem – with clear organisational antecedents and consequences.

### **7.3 Gender differences in the consequences of bullying**

There has been little research investigating gender differences in terms of the outcomes of bullying. Some research suggests that the consequences of bullying are similar for men and women (Vartia and Hyyti, 2002).

However, other studies have demonstrated the presence of gender differences in specific types of bullying behaviours which lead to poor mental health. Hoel, Faragher and Cooper (2004) found that particular negative behaviours, rather than bullying more generally, were associated with more severe mental health consequences, and moreover, that this association displayed marked gender differences. For example, bullying that incorporated “hints or signals from others that you should quit your job”, had more negative effects for females whereas “persistent criticism of your work an effort” was more detrimental to mental health in males.

### **7.4 Bullying in male-dominated industries**

Research on male-dominated industries (e.g., prison officers, police) and research utilising predominantly male samples, has supported links between bullying and adverse physical and mental health consequences for males. In a study of prison officers, Brewer and Whiteside (2012) found that a supervisor being dismissive of an employee was one of the most damaging and wide-reaching forms of workplace bullying and suggest the need for strategies to be put in place to counter these kinds of interactions. In a sample of Australian police (a primarily male workplace), Tuckey, Dollard, Saebel and Berry (2010), found that exposure to negative workplace behaviour predicting both poorer cardiovascular health (high blood pressure, and consultation with a medical professional about cardiovascular symptoms) and mental health.

Research on manufacturing companies in Europe and Australia have supported the link between male-dominated workplaces and increased bullying. Mikkelsen and Einarsen (2002) examined rates of workplace bullying in a Danish manufacturing company and found that 88% of the participants reported they had experienced at least one of the bullying behaviours (Einarsen & Raknes, 1997) over the previous 6 months, and 8% reported exposure to the acts weekly or more often, indicating that



they were a victim of workplace bullying. In an Australian study, Privitera and Campbell (2009) explored rates of bullying and cyberbullying in workers randomly selected from the Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union, and found that 34% of workers surveyed experienced face to face bullying, while almost 11% reported experiencing cyberbullying, and all who were cyberbullied were also bullied face to face. Thus, Australian research supports international research indicating high rates of bullying in the manufacturing sector, a male-dominated industry.

## 7.5 Summary

There are important gender differences in the experiences, nature, perceptions, and consequences of workplace bullying. Given these differences, strategies used to prevent and manage bullying should be tailored not only to the size and type or organisation, but should also take into account specific differences in work culture associated with male-dominated workplaces.

## 8 Conclusions

### 8.1 Summary of Findings

#### **Research Question 1 – Which specific behaviours or experiences constitute bullying in the workplace (indicators)?**

This rapid review has demonstrated that workplace bullying encompasses a range of behaviours which can broadly be grouped as work-related bullying and personal bullying. Work-related bullying includes behaviour associated with workload demands (e.g., a supervisor overloads an employee with work), work processes (e.g., an individual attempts to dominate a co-worker through withholding information), and evaluation and advancement (e.g., a supervisor unreasonably monitors an employee). Personal bullying occurs when an individual is targeted on the basis of personal, rather than work-related factors. These can include indirect personal bullying, where an individual is ignored or rumours are spread, or direct personal bullying where the individual is harassed or humiliated in the workplace.

#### **Research Question 2 - What are the risk factors or predictors of workplace bullying (antecedents)?**

Research suggests that organisational characteristics are important predictors of workplace bullying. For instance, workplace bullying is more likely to occur where there is a lack of clear workplace bullying policies, poor leadership, and more competitive and demanding work environments. In addition, the nature of leadership within an organisation has important implications for workplace bullying. Leadership styles that are less involved and perceived as 'weak' are more likely to allow workplace bullying to occur.

#### **Research Question 3: What are the impacts and consequences of workplace bullying?**

Bullying has a range of adverse outcomes for individuals and organisations. Victims have substantially higher risk of poorer physical health perhaps reflecting the cumulative effects of chronic stress. Victims also have higher rates of depression, anxiety, PTSD, and suicide. The magnitude of these effects varies depending on the nature of workplace bullying. For example, the effects of personal workplace bullying can be particularly pervasive and long-term. Workplace bullying also has

implications for co-workers as it can create a culture of mistrust and fear, and increases the risk of psychological distress. Research has also demonstrated that there are substantial implications for organisations, which include lost workplace productive, reputational harm, and legal costs.

#### **Research Question 4: What strategies are currently used to prevent and manage workplace bullying?**

The overwhelming majority of approaches documented in the grey and academic literature are focused on organisation-level factors including a focus on clear and well-communicated policies and procedures surrounding workplace bullying. Many other strategies are primary or secondary in that they also attempt to prevent or manage bullying in the workplace. These include personal interventions such as cognitive rehearsal and employee training. Tertiary approaches to workplace bullying can include mediation (e.g., conflict resolution), external counselling, ongoing monitoring of the situation, and physically moving victims or perpetrators to new work areas.

#### **Research Question 5: How effective are these strategies in preventing and managing workplace bullying?**

Anecdotal evidence indicates that workplace bullying policies can prevent workplace bullying to some extent, and are important in managing workplace bullying effectively when it occurs. Some evidence also suggests that individual approaches (e.g., cognitive rehearsal) have some effect. However, there is generally very little evidence regarding the effectiveness of these different approaches.

#### **Workplace bullying in male-dominated industries**

This review also examined evidence for gender differences in the experiences, antecedents, and consequences of workplace bullying. There is some evidence that workplace bullying is more common in male-dominated industries and the nature of the effects could differ in males and females. However, evidence is limited and there is a need to further investigate how workplace bullying varies by gender, and male and female dominated industries.

## **8.2 Recommendations and Conclusions**

This review therefore indicates that although there has been considerable research examining workplace bullying, there is a need for rigorous research investigating:

- A broader spectrum of workplace bullying behaviours, not focusing merely on aggression, but other important work-related and person-related types of bullying. This should include cyberbullying which is an increasingly common and often covert form of bullying;
- The antecedents, experiences, and consequences of work-place bullying in male-dominated industries;
- The efficacy of different approaches to workplace bullying;
- An examination of workplace bullying in the context of small-medium enterprises. This is a particularly important point given that the vast majority of research has been conducted in large organisations;
- Research into the mental health implications for individuals accused of bullying behaviour;
- Research of the mental health effects on individuals who witness workplace bullying.

Existing data are not sufficient to draw strong conclusions regarding the efficacy of strategies to prevent and manage workplace bullying. However, taking a multi-component approach could be the most effective strategy and should:

- Address organisational factors and leadership, to ensure that bullying is prevent and addressed properly if it occurs;
- Develop and implement clear and well communicated policies relating to workplace bullying;
- Raise awareness and education of workplace bullying to reinforce appropriate workplace behaviour and minimising workplace bullying;
- Be tailored for different workplaces – this is particularly relevant for male versus female dominated industries. It is also possible that different strategies may be needed for small-to-medium enterprises.

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## Appendix B. Employee Survey

### 1 Method

#### 1.1 Participants

Participants in this study were recruited through an online panel provider, which manages a large online panel of Australians ([www.theoru.com](http://www.theoru.com)). Members of this panel are able to earn points by participating in research, which are be used to exchange for a variety of rewards (e.g., supermarket vouchers etc.). The panel provider was instructed to recruit a sample of approximately 1500 Australian employees, with 55% males, and a mix of industry types and job levels. There are some limitations associated with the use of online panels, such as low response rates and a lack of representativeness. However, there are also several advantages in being able to recruit a large and heterogeneous sample which allows for subgroup analyses.

#### 1.2 Measures

Participants were invited to complete a 30 minute online survey administered through Qualtrics. All data were anonymous. The survey consisted of four major sections:

- Demographic characteristics
- Health and well-being
- Workplace Characteristics
- Experiences of workplace bullying.

Detail on each of these sections is provided in Table 12.

Table 12. Description of the online survey.

Survey Section	Description	Scales Used
<b>A. Demographic characteristics</b>	This section of the survey collected information on socio-demographic characteristics such as age, sex, education, income, marital status, sexual orientation, work hours etc.	Standard items widely utilised in epidemiological and psychological research.
<b>B. Health and Well-Being</b>	This section asked participants about their physical and mental health.	The following validated scales were used: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Short Form Health Survey 12</li> <li>• Kessler 6 scale of Psychological Distress</li> </ul>
<b>C. Workplace Characteristics</b>	Participants were asked about their current job including industry type, their level within an organisation, work engagement, job satisfaction, job demands, decision authority, skill discretion, and social support.  The Negative Acts Questionnaire was also included in this section to assess experiences of behaviours associated with bullying, without overtly using the word 'bullying'.	The following validated scales were used: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Job Content Questionnaire</li> <li>• Brief Index of Affective Job Satisfaction (Thompson and Phua, 2012).</li> <li>• Job Satisfaction Index (Quinn and Shepard, 1974)</li> <li>• Utrecht Work Engagement Scale</li> <li>• Negative Acts Questionnaire</li> </ul>
<b>D. Workplace Bullying</b>	This section included a variety of items to assess workplace bullying. It first began with a definition of workplace bullying, and then a series of direct questions asking about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Experiences of bullying (victim and witness),</li> <li>• the nature of bullying experienced/observed</li> <li>• Help seeking</li> </ul>	Definitional questions to assess experiences of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Victims</li> <li>• Witnessing</li> <li>• Accused</li> </ul> Help seeking questions were developed and included in the survey.

Survey Section	Description	Scales Used
	<p>behaviour.</p> <p>Participants were also asked to indicate whether they had ever been accused of bullying.</p>	

### 1.3 Demographic Characteristics

Table 13 on the following page outlines the demographic characteristics of the employee survey sample. This indicates similar numbers of males and females, and heterogeneity in terms of age, marital status, ethnic background, education levels, and income.

Table 13. Demographic characteristics of the employee survey sample

	n	%
<b>Age</b>		
18 – 29 years	252	16.5
30 – 44 years	723	47.3
≥ 45 years	553	36.2
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	818	53.5
Female	710	46.5
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Partnered	1057	69.2
Single	471	30.8
<b>Sexual Orientation</b>		
Heterosexual	1325	86.7
Same sex attracted/intersex/transgender	100	6.5
Prefer not to answer	103	6.7
<b>Country of Birth</b>		
Australia	1068	69.9
Other country	460	30.1
<b>Ethnicity</b>		
Australia and New Zealand	876	57.3
North West European	208	13.6
Southern and Central Asian	142	9.3
East Asian	138	9.0
Southern and Eastern European	104	6.8
Other	60	3.9
<b>Highest education level</b>		
High School	334	21.9
Certificate/diploma	509	33.3
Tertiary degree	685	44.8
<b>Income Level</b>		
≤ \$18,200	66	4.3
\$18,201 - \$37,000	205	13.4
\$37,001 – \$80,001	573	37.5
\$80,001 - \$180,000	599	39.2
> \$180,000	85	5.6
<b>State of residence</b>		
New South Wales	455	29.8
Victoria	428	28.0
Queensland	314	20.5
Western Australia	126	8.2
South Australia	113	7.4
Tasmania	43	2.8
Australian Capital Territory	36	2.4
Northern Territory	13	0.9

The work-related characteristics of employees are shown in Table 14. This indicates that the sample included employees with a wide range of job types, job levels, work hours, and industry types.

Table 14. Job characteristics of employee survey sample

	n	%
<b>Job contract type</b>		
Permanent	875	57.3
Casual	365	23.3
Self-Employed	223	14.6
Fixed-term contract	74	4.8
<b>Industry type</b>		
Health care and social assistance	189	12.4
Retail trade	179	11.7
Education and training	176	11.5
Professional, scientific, technical services	162	10.6
Administrative and support services	135	8.8
Information media /telecommunications	97	6.3
Manufacturing	91	6.0
Transport, postal, and warehousing	90	5.9
Accommodation and food services	79	5.2
Other	330	21.6
<b>Job Type Description</b>		
Professional	424	27.7
Clerical/Administrative worker	277	18.1
Manager	225	14.7
Labourer	176	11.5
Sales worker	150	9.8
Technician/Trade worker	123	8.0
Community/personal service worker	108	7.1
Machinery Operator/driver	44	2.9
<b>Job Level</b>		
General staff member	846	55.4
Manager/Supervisor	335	21.9
Self-employed	194	12.7
Business owner	42	2.7
Director/CEO/Senior manager	37	2.4
<b>Job Location</b>		
Metropolitan	909	59.5
Outer Metropolitan	196	12.8
Regional	385	25.2
Remote	38	2.5
<b>Work hours</b>		
1 – 15 hours	245	16.0
16 – 34 hours	326	21.3
35 – 44 hours	608	39.8
≥ 45 hours	245	16.0
<b>Organisation size</b>		
Micro	346	22.6
Small	363	23.8



	n	%
Medium	338	22.1
Large	481	31.5

## 1.4 Experiences of Workplace Bullying

### 1.4.1 Victims of Workplace Bullying

The employee survey indicated that 41.6% of employees had experienced workplace bullying at some time during their career. A total of 16.0% of employees had reported workplace bullying at least once in the past 6 months (7.9% on a monthly basis and 8.2% on a weekly/daily basis). As shown in Table 15, the most common form of bullying involved unjustified criticism or complaints (44.5%).

Table 15. Types of Workplace bullying experienced in past 6 months

Type of Workplace Bullying	%
Unjustified criticism or complaints	44.5%
Abusive, insulting or offensive language or comments	35.5%
Continuous and deliberate exclusion	33.1%
Excessive scrutiny at work	32.2%
Withholding vital information	31.8%
Setting unreasonable tasks	31.8%
Changed work arrangements	29.8%
Spreading misinformation or malicious rumours	29.0%
Denied access to information/supervision/consultation/resources	27.3%
Setting unreasonable timelines, constantly changing deadlines	26.5%
Cyberbullying	4.2%

Of those individuals who reported they had experienced bullying in the past 6 months:

- 41.2% indicated they had been bullied by one individuals; with 48.6% indicating that they had been bullied by 2 – 3 people.

- 46.5% indicated that the perpetrator was a more senior staff member in their department/unit; 22.8% indicated they had been bullied by a co-worker from their department/unit.

When asked what action they took in response to being bullied:

- 54.7% tried to ignore the situation;
- 48.2% tried to avoid the situation;
- 35.1% discussed the situation with colleagues;
- 25.7% attempted to confront the bully.
- A small proportion of individuals indicated that they made use of the organisation’s grievance procedure (9.0%), human resources (13.5%), or a relevant union/staff association (6.5%).

### 1.4.2 Experiences of Negative Acts

As shown in Tables 16 and 17 below, work-related bullying experiences were reported more than person-related bullying experiences. The online survey indicated that the most common forms of bullying experienced were work-related. In particular, the most common forms of work-related bullying involved having information withheld (15.6%) or being ordered to do work below one’s level of competence (14.5%). In contrast, 6.2% to 8.4% of participants indicated person-related bullying on a weekly or daily basis.

Table 16. Percentage of employees who report regular (i.e., weekly or daily) work-related bullying.

Type of Work-related Bullying	% weekly/daily
Someone withholding information which affects your performance	15.6%
Being ordered to do work below your level of competence	14.5%
Being ignored or excluded	12.4%
Having key areas of responsibility removed or replaced with more trivial or unpleasant tasks	11.9%
Being exposed to an unmanageable workload	11.5%
Excessive monitoring of your work	11.1%
Having your opinions ignored	10.7%
Being given tasks with unreasonable deadlines	10.6%
Pressure not to claim something to which by right you are entitled	8.3%
Being humiliated or ridiculed in connection with your work	8.0%

Person-related bullying was less common than work-related bullying (see Table 6). However, a notable proportion of employees still indicated experiencing gossip or rumours (8.4%), being ignored (8.2%), or being insulted (7.9%) or shouted at (7.8%).

**Table 17. Percentage of employees who report regular (i.e., weekly or daily) person-related bullying.**

Type of Person-related Bullying	% weekly/daily
Spreading of gossip and rumours about you	8.4%
Being ignored or facing a hostile reaction when you approach	8.2%
Having insulting or offensive remarks made about your person, attitudes or your private life	7.9%
Being shouted at or being the target of spontaneous anger	7.8%
Repeated reminders of your errors or mistakes	7.5%
Persistent criticism of your errors or mistakes	7.2%
Intimidating behaviours such as finger pointing, invasion of personal space, shoving, blocking your way	7.1%
Hints or signals from others that you should quit your job	6.9%
Being the subject of excessive teasing or sarcasm	6.7%
Practical jokes carried out by people you don't get along with	6.3%
Having allegations made against you	6.2%
Threats of violence or physical abuse or actual abuse	5.5%

### 1.4.3 Witnessing Bullying

Most employees indicated that they had not witnessed workplace bullying (74.8%). Only 4.3% reported having witnessed bullying on a weekly or daily basis. The most common types of bullying behaviours witnessed were:

- Unjustified criticism or complaints (57.4%)
- Abusive, insulting, or offensive language or comments (41.8%)
- Excessive scrutiny at work (30.4%)

#### 1.4.4 Accused of bullying

Only 5.2% of participants indicated that they had been accused of workplace bullying in the past 6 months. Of these participants, most indicated that they had been accused of abusive, insulting, or offensive language or comments.

### 1.5 Antecedents of Workplace Bullying

Regression analyses were then conducted to examine work-related and demographic characteristics associated with workplace bullying. This involved two main analyses.

- First, multinomial logistic regressions were performed to examine the factors associated with subjective experiences of workplace bullying. This involved creating four categories of experiences: (1) Victim of workplace bullying; (2) Witness of workplace bullying; (3) Victim and witness of workplace bullying; (4) no reported experience of workplace bullying.
- Second, linear regressions examined the factors associated with work-related and person-related bullying as measured by the NAQ.

These results indicate that individual difference factors were not major predictors of workplace bullying experiences. However, there were some significant results”

- Males were less likely than females to be victims or victims & witnesses of workplace bullying.
- Individuals with lower levels of education were less likely to report having been a victim of workplace bullying.
- Younger employees (i.e., 18 – 29 years) were more likely to report having witnessed workplace bullying.

Several work-related factors were significantly associated with experiences of workplace bullying.

- Individuals from medium-sized organisations were more likely to report witnessing bullying;

- Individuals from small organisations were less likely to report being a victim & witness of bullying;
- More demanding jobs were linked with elevated odds of being a victim and a victim and witness of bullying.
- More co-worker social support was associated with reduced odds of being a victim & witness of workplace bullying;
- More supervisor social support was associated with reduced odds of witnessing workplace bullying.
- Higher affective job satisfaction was linked with lower rates of victim & witness of bullying.

Table 18. Factors associated with experiences of workplace bullying. Results are reported as Odds Ratios.

	Victim vs. No Bullying	Witness vs. No Bullying	Victim & Witness vs. No Bullying
<b>Gender</b>			
Male	.56**	.113	.59**
Female	Ref	Ref	Ref
<b>Age</b>			
18 – 29 years	.96	.186	1.00
30 – 44 years	.75	1.33	.84
≥ 45 years	Ref	Ref	Ref
<b>Marital Status</b>			
Single	1.35	.88	1.36
Partnered	Ref	Ref	Ref
<b>Education</b>			
High School	.60*	.68	.90
Trade/Certificate	1.16	.86	.93
Tertiary	Ref	Ref	Ref
<b>Income</b>			
< \$37,000	1.46	.67	.86
\$37,000 - \$80,000	1.07	.76	.72
> \$80,000	Ref	Ref	Ref
<b>Ethnicity</b>			
Australia and Oceania	Ref	Ref	Ref
South Central Asia	.56*	.59	1.05
East Asia	.75	.60	.87
South East Europe	.83	1.28	.93
North West Europe	.88	1.47	.71
Other	.51	.77	.96
<b>Sexual orientation</b>			
Heterosexual	Ref	Ref	Ref
Other Sexual Orientation	1.29	1.44	1.63
Not specified	1.34	1.65	1.19
<b>Job Level</b>			
Manager/Director	.89	.81	1.02
Self-employed	.80	.60	.83
Other	1.50	.65	.77
General staff	Ref	Ref	Ref

	Victim vs. No Bullying	Witness vs. No Bullying	Victim & Witness vs. No Bullying
<b>Hours</b>			
1 – 15 hours	1.08	.84	.77
16 – 34 hours	Ref	Ref	Ref
35 – 44 hours	.99	1.15	.94
≥45 hours	1.15	1.69	.93
<b>Occupation type</b>			
Machinery/Labourer	.63	1.65	1.18
Clerical/Sales	.71	.73	1.09
Technician/trade	.93	1.60	1.10
Manager/Professional	Ref	Ref	Ref
<b>Organisation Size</b>			
Micro	.72	.27*	.55*
Small	1.05	.41**	.47
Medium	Ref	Ref	Ref
Large	.95	.48*	.43
<b>Workplace Location</b>			
Regional/remote	1.17	1.47	1.36
Outer metropolitan	.89	.59	.76
Metropolitan	Ref	Ref	Ref
<b>Co-worker Social Support</b>	.94	1.06	.79**
<b>Supervisor Social support</b>	.97	.87	.90*
<b>Decision Latitude</b>	1.00	1.00	1.00
<b>Perceived Job Demands</b>	1.04**	1.02	1.07**

\* p < .05

\*\* p < .001

Ref, Reference category.

The results of the regression analyses examining factors significantly associated with work-related and person-related bullying are shown in Table 19. These results indicate that several individual difference factors were associated with experiences of workplace bullying.

- Lower levels of education were linked with less person-related and work-related bullying;
- Individuals identifying their ethnic background as from South East Europe reported less work-related and person-related bullying;
- Younger individuals reported more person-related bullying;
- Males reported more person-related bullying;
- Individuals who did not specify their sexual orientation reported higher levels of person-related and work-related bullying;

Several work factors were also associated with work-related and person-related bullying.

- More senior employees (e.g., managers/directors etc) reported more person-related bullying;
- Individuals who worked in outer metropolitan areas reported more person-related and work-related bullying;
- Co-worker social support was linked with less person-related bullying.
- Supervisor social support was linked with less work-related bullying.
- Affective job satisfaction was linked with lower work-related bullying.



Table 19. Factor associated with work-related and person-related bullying.

	Work-related Bullying	Person-related Bullying
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	.07	.11
Female	Ref	
<b>Age</b>		
18 – 29 years	.14*	.21**
30 – 44 years	.12*	.21**
≥ 45 years	Ref	Ref
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Single	.04	-.01
Partnered	Ref	Ref
<b>Education</b>		
High School	-.26**	-.19**
Trade/Certificate	-.15**	-.10
Tertiary	Ref	Ref
<b>Income</b>		
< \$37,000	.115	.20**
\$37,000 - \$80,000	.094	.12*
> \$80,000	Ref	Ref
<b>Ethnicity</b>		
Australia and Oceania	Ref	Ref
South Central Asia	-.05	.13
East Asia	-.09	-.02
South East Europe	-.13	-.13
North West Europe	-.03	-.03
Other	.03	-.01
<b>Sexual orientation</b>		
Heterosexual	Ref	Ref
Other Sexual Orientation	.11	.25*
Not specified	.28	.14
<b>Job Level</b>		
Manager/Director	.08	.09
Self-employed	-.12	-.02
Other	-.09	.03
General staff	Ref	Ref
<b>Work Hours</b>		
1 – 15 hours	-.02	-.02
16 – 34 hours	.12	.07
35 – 44 hours	.08	.03
≥45 hours	Ref	Ref

	Work-related Bullying	Person-related Bullying
<b>Occupation type</b>		
Machinery/Labourer	.02	.07
Clerical/Sales	-.02	-.01
Technician/trade	.09	.03
Manager/Professional	Ref	Ref
<b>Organisation Size</b>		
Micro	-.01	.02
Small	-.03	.00
Large	-.03	-.06
Medium	Ref	Ref
<b>Workplace Location</b>		
Regional/remote	-.08	-.11*
Outer metropolitan	-.10	-.18*
Metropolitan	Ref	Ref
<b>Co-worker Social Support</b>	-.04*	-.06**
<b>Supervisor Social support</b>	-.08**	-.03
<b>Decision Latitude</b>	-.01*	-.01
<b>Perceived Job Demands</b>	.03**	.01**

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .001$ ; Ref, Reference category.

## 1.6 Potential outcomes of Workplace Bullying

Analyses were then conducted to examine whether experiences of workplace bullying were associated with measures of health and well-being, as well as organisational outcomes:

- Psychological distress
- Mental and Physical Health
- Quality of life
- Turnover Intentions
- Absenteeism
- Job satisfaction

Consistent with the previous section, this involved conducting separate analyses for categories of workplace bullying experiences (i.e., subjective reports of being a victim or witness of bullying) and scores on the negative

acts questionnaire (i.e., work-related and person-related bullying). Each model controlled for the following covariates: age, gender, marital status, education, income, ethnicity, sexual orientation, job level, work hours, occupation type, organisational size, workplace location, co-worker social support, supervisor social support, decision latitude, and psychological job demands.

### 1.6.1 Workplace Bullying and Health

The results in Table 20 indicate that individuals who identify themselves as victims of workplace bullying have higher psychological distress and poorer mental health. Witnesses of workplace bullying did not have significantly different levels of health compared with individuals who had no experiences of bullying. However, individuals who reported being a victim and witness of workplace bullying had the highest levels of distress and poorest mental health. This suggests an additive effect of experiencing and witnessing bullying. There were no differences in physical health based on bullying experiences.

Table 20. Relationships between subjective experiences of bullying and mental and physical health. Results are reported as beta coefficients.

	Psychological Distress (K6)	Mental Health (SF-12)	Physical Health (SF-12)	Quality of Life
<b>Victim only</b>	1.30**	-5.06**	.53	-.07
<b>Witness only</b>	.79	-4.11	-2.17	.04
<b>Witness and Victim</b>	2.86**	-9.23**	-1.25	-.17*
<b>No bullying</b>	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref

Table 21 shows the results of the regression analyses examining the relationships of work-related and person-related bullying with health outcomes. These results indicate that both work-related and person-related bullying experiences are associated with greater psychological distress and poorer mental health. Furthermore, person-related bullying was linked with poorer physical health.

Table 21. Relationships between negative acts and mental and physical health. Results are reported as beta coefficients.

	Psychological Distress (K6)	Mental Health (SF-12)	Physical Health (SF-12)	Quality of Life
<b>Work-related Bullying</b>	.91*	-4.94**	-.47	-.11
<b>Person-related Bullying</b>	1.46**	-2.81*	-1.72*	.00

Several of the associations between workplace bullying and mental health outcomes varied by demographic and work-related factors. For example, the relationship between person-related bullying and psychological distress was more pronounced

- in younger than older adults ( $p < .001$ );
- in males compared with females ( $p < .001$ );
- where levels of supervisor social support ( $p = .05$ ) and co-worker social support ( $p < .001$ ) were lower;
- in employees working longer hours ( $p < .001$ );
- in larger organisations ( $p < .001$ );
- in employees with lower levels of decision latitude ( $p < .001$ ) and higher levels of job demands ( $p < .001$ ).

The relationship between work-related bullying and psychological distress was more pronounced:

- in individuals with greater incomes ( $p = .046$ );

### 1.6.2 Workplace Bullying and Organisational Outcomes

Experiences of workplace bullying were also significantly associated with organisational outcomes. As shown in Table 22, victims or workplace bullying had higher turnover intentions and greater levels of absenteeism. Witnesses of bullying also had higher levels of absenteeism. Individuals who reported being a victim and a witness of bullying had higher turnover intentions, higher absenteeism, and poorer job satisfaction.

Table 22. Workplace bullying experiences and organisational outcomes

	Turnover intentions	Absenteeism	Job Satisfaction - Cognitive	Job Satisfaction - Affective
<b>Victim only</b>	.15*	.74**	-.12	-.12
<b>Witness only</b>	.16	.44**	-.13	-.02
<b>Witness and Victim</b>	.39**	.91**	-.21*	-.26*
<b>No bullying</b>	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref

As shown in Table 23, work-related bullying was associated with higher turnover intentions, higher absenteeism, and lower affective job satisfaction. Person-related bullying was linked with lower turnover intentions and lower affective job satisfaction. The direction of the relationship with turnover intentions is unexpected.

Table 23. Work-related and person-related bullying experiences and organisational outcomes

	Turnover intentions	Absenteeism	Job Satisfaction - Cognitive	Job Satisfaction - Affective
<b>Work-related Bullying</b>	.41**	.61**	-.12	-.45**
<b>Person-related Bullying</b>	-.14*	.02	.04	-.28**

The relationship between person related bullying and job satisfaction was stronger in:

- Older adults (affective job satisfaction,  $p = .012$ );
- Employees with lower levels of co-worker social support (cognitive job satisfaction,  $p < .001$ );
- Employees with lower levels of supervisor social support (affective job satisfaction,  $p = .004$ );

- Employees with lower levels of decision latitude and higher levels of job demands for both affective and cognitive satisfaction.

The relationship between work-related bullying and job satisfaction was stronger in:

- Employees with lower levels of supervisor worker social support (cognitive job satisfaction,  $p < .001$ );
- Employees with lower levels of co-worker social support (cognitive job satisfaction,  $p < .001$ );
- Employees with lower levels of supervisor social support (affective job satisfaction,  $p = .004$ );

## Appendix C. Delphi Methodology

### 1 First Round Delphi

#### 1.1 Participants

Participants for the initial Delphi survey were recruited via a number of avenues in order to obtain a diverse mix of individuals from different workplaces and fields. First, web searches and database searches were used to identify prominent researchers and leaders in the area of workplace bullying in Australia. Organisations known to deal with workplace issues, such as WorkSafe VIC, the ACTU and Workcover were contacted via email to identify relevant individuals to take part. Human resources managers and industrial relations experts at universities around Australia were contacted, as were organisational psychologists. Personnel firms were also searched for relevant experts. Large companies known to have existing workplace bullying strategies were identified and searched for employees who may provide the relevant expertise to complete the survey on behalf of their workplace. Snowballing was also part of this process – if the initial contact person was not the relevant individual for workplace bullying matters, then they identified the best person to complete the survey.

A comprehensive list of contacts was then generated, and each potential expert was sent a personalised email invitation to complete the brief online Delphi survey. This recruitment method resulted in 22 professional completing Round 1 of the Delphi Survey. A breakdown according to area of expertise and industry type is shown below:

Area of expertise/industry type	Number
Academic – workplace bullying	6
Organisational Psychologist	4
Management	3
Workplace Health and Safety	3
Law	2
Human/Industrial Relations	2
Employee advocate	1
Not specified	1

## 1.2 Materials

The potential participants were invited to complete a 10 minute online survey administered through Qualtrics software. The survey contained a combination of likert style and open ended questions, to allow both thorough elaboration of responses. All data were anonymous, and the survey consisted of four major sections:

1. Participants were asked their job type/industry (categorical response)
2. Participants were asked to provide their perceptions of the key *characteristics* of workplace bullying in open ended response format.
3. Next a list of the broad strategies and initiatives commonly used to prevent and manage workplace bullying (generated from results of the rapid review) was provided for comment. Participants were asked to indicate whether these strategies were used a lot, not used often, or if they were undecided/didn't know. Following this, they were asked to rate the ease of implementation, the perceived effectiveness, and the acceptability of each of these strategies on a likert style scale. At the end of this section, participants were given space to add any strategies they felt had been omitted from this list, and describe how effective they perceived these 'other' strategies to be.
4. The final section asked participants to give their opinion on which strategies should be used to best manage and prevent bullying in the workplace. This was presented in open ended format, and participants were prompted to give details on why they perceived these to be the best strategies. Participants were also invited to provide an email address for future input and feedback (Delphi Round 2).

The online Delphi survey therefore covered a wide number of topics relevant to the research question. It provided detail on:

- What is *recognised* by professionals as workplace bullying;
- What *is currently* used in organisations to curb workplace bullying (and the effectiveness, ease of implementation and appropriateness of these strategies); and
- What ideally *should be* used to curb workplace bullying.

In addition, the survey allowed elaboration of any potentially omitted strategies, and so could add to those identified by the rapid review.



## 2 Results

Thematic analytic techniques were used to uncover perceptions and opinions surrounding workplace bullying and the strategies that are used to prevent and manage it. These results are presented below.

### 2.1 The key characteristics of workplace bullying

In general, workplace bullying was defined by the 22 expert respondents not only in terms of the nature and types of behaviours which constitute bullying, but also in terms of the causes and consequences of bullying for both victims and the organisation itself.

#### 2.1.1 Type of behaviour considered to be bullying:

Workplace bullying describes behaviour directed at one or more workers (targets) which is repeated, targeted, negative and unreasonable. Behaviours which were seen to fall outside of the definition of workplace bullying included sexual harassment, and other discrimination based on age, race, etc. General performance management was seen to fall outside this definition, as the behaviours should not be considered “unreasonable”. The risk of harm to the victim was also consistently highlighted as a key factor, and the intention of the bully to inflict harm was also noted.

One of the main themes emerging was bullying as an abuse or imbalance of power. The use of power to harm others and the imbalance of power that occurs as a result of bullying were both salient characteristics used to define bullying.

Types of bullying behaviours tended to be described as falling on a continuum, from more covert behaviours like ignoring and subtle put downs, through to more aggressive and overt behaviours like verbal abuse, and even physical assault. Respondents noted that a wide spectrum of behaviours can be considered bullying. Some expert respondents

commented that definitions of bullying tend to be poorly understood, and that perceptions of the behaviours that constitute bullying tend to vary widely.

Bullying was noted to exist within many types of worker relationships: peer to peer, supervisor to worker and upwards bullying (worker to supervisor). One expert described a conflict escalation type of bullying – where bullying comes about via escalation of a dispute between the perpetrator and the victim. This was contrasted with predatory bullying, where the perpetrator uses their power to marginalise the target.

### **2.1.2 Consequences of bullying:**

Many potential consequences were elucidated by the expert respondents, including psychological, physical, and social harms, as well as the more general references to the risk to health and safety. Specific emotions attributed to victims included feelings of distress, intimidation, isolation, hopelessness and humiliation. Bullying was also seen to create a dysfunctional or toxic working environment and thus affect not only the victim, but the organisation itself.

### **2.1.3 Causes of bullying**

Bullying was overwhelmingly attributed to poor organisational culture, poor leadership/management styles, and an unhealthy work environment. The majority of expert respondents cited these as causes or (at very least) contributors to bullying.

## **2.2 What strategies or initiatives should be used to prevent and manage workplace bullying?**

Overwhelmingly experts recognised that no single strategy or initiative should be used on its own to prevent and manage bullying. Rather, comprehensive and complementary approaches that target bullying at every level of the organisation were cited as holding potential. Individual strategies, when used in isolation, were seen to be addressing bullying at the wrong level, as they

are aimed at treating behaviour rather than the underlying cause and context for bullying – the culture in which it flourishes.

Hence, a whole of organisation approach for prevention and management of workplace bullying was recommended. Some of the individual components of these approaches included:

- Development and solidification of a positive workplace culture and a norm of 'respect', which is demonstrated to employees from the first point of contact with the organisation and carried through at every level.
- Risk management approaches to prevention and reviewing any incidences to prevent reoccurrence of bullying.
- Positive leadership practices and leadership development.
- Widely available policy and procedures which specifically and clearly outline acceptable versus unacceptable behaviour, which are consistently applied, and which support positive workplace climate.
- Well trained peer contact networks as a trusted point of contact for employees, and way of early identification of problem behaviours.
- Investigations and punitive action for those found to be bullying. The organisation should demonstrate impartiality and a commitment to providing natural justice.
- Training and education for managers and leaders that is tailored to the structure and type of organisation, and to the role of the person.

It should be noted that although many holistic, proactive preventative measures were recommended, some experts expressed disappointment with the lack of implementation of preventative strategies in real world contexts. It was felt that, despite strong evidence in favour of preventative approaches, these approaches were rarely taken (if ever).

A number of other themes emerged in addition to (or to expand on) these strategies. These included:

- The importance of early identification and action – Respondents consistently emphasised that action must be taken quickly to avoid issues escalating to more serious cases of bullying. This was seen as an important preventative measure.
- The importance of proper and consistent implementation- Some respondents emphasised that the mere presence of an initiative or strategy is not sufficient. Any strategy requires consistent and effective implementation in order to be successful.

- Employer responsibility – Penalties considered for organisations that fail to intervene appropriately, and on the flip side, mechanisms to protect employers from vexatious or mischievous claims.
- Provide clear communication about bullying, to ensure that reasonable performance management is not construed as bullying.
- Mediation – While some expert respondents considered mediation to be an acceptable part of the management process, others perceived mediation to be over used and inappropriate due to the power imbalance entailed by the bully/victim relationship.
- Zero tolerance stance on bullying – Again, this was suggested by many experts as a method of demonstrating commitment to positive workplace culture, but was noted by some to undermine efforts to curb workplace bullying.

These results were presented to participants in order to provide feedback for the subsequent interviews (Round 2).

## **3 Second Round Delphi**

### **3.1 Participants**

Six expert participants agreed to take part in the interview process. The average length of interview was approximately thirty minutes, and participants were encouraged to provide in depth exploration of the issues. Participants were again from a wide range of industries, including operations management in a manufacturing company, workplace law, the health care sector, academia and human resources. Despite the small number of respondents, the level of depth of interviewing allowed data saturation to be reached.

### **3.2 Materials**

A semi-structured interview guide was developed and utilised for the interviews. The skilled interviewer was instructed to encourage participants to

elaborate on the specifics of the strategies that were discussed, so an in depth understanding of the issues surrounding these could be generated.

The interview guide is presented below.

**Centre for Health Initiatives: Telephone Interview Guide:**

*As you know we carried out a Delphi survey of experts in workplace bullying from a range of different backgrounds and roles, and found that some strategies were mentioned quite frequently as good ways of preventing and managing workplace bullying. Next we would like to ask your opinion of these ideas. Specifically we are interested in which components of these strategies make them effective (or ineffective, if you think they are ineffective).*

**Note:** Prompt to find out components of these which are thought to work, and which don't (e.g., what is a good policy versus an ineffective one).

1. Development and reinforcement of a positive workplace culture and a norm of 'respect'

- What components are effective in achieving this aim (and why)?
- What doesn't work (and why)?

2. Risk management approaches to prevent bullying

- What components work (and why)?
- What doesn't work (and why)?

3. Policies and/or procedures about workplace bullying

- What components work (and why)?
- What doesn't work (and why)?

4. Investigations and punitive action for those found to be bullying.

- What components work (and why)?
- What doesn't work (and why)?

*Going back to the original focus of our study - and thinking about an ideal situation where you have no restrictions or constraints to do with time, money, etc - can you talk me through what you think is the best way to prevent and manage workplace bullying? (Another way of asking the question or clarifying): How would your ideal workplace bullying strategy look from start to finish?*

*That's all the questions that I have for you. Do you have any questions for me about this interview or the workplace bullying project in general?*

## 3.3 Results

Thematic analysis of the interview transcripts gleaned important details about the components of particular strategies which made them successful (or unsuccessful) in preventing and managing workplace bullying. Detailed results are included below, and are organised under themes.

### 3.3.1 Effective strategies and practices for preventing and managing bullying

- **Culture** is the key component in managing and preventing bullying, as it sets up expectations of acceptable versus unacceptable interactions and behaviours towards others in the workplace. A collaborative, rather than adversarial, culture was seen as key, with staff at all levels able to give feedback and have their voices heard.
- **Education and training** should be used in order to achieve this- not just at the highest levels of the organisation but in middle management and other leaders in the organisation. Education should be revisited on an annually or biannually at least. Some believe training should be mandatory, and not on an ad hoc basis. Training on how to conduct difficult conversations with employees was also deemed important so that line managers have the skills and confidence to identify potential problems and deal with incidences. It was also recommended that training for managers should be subject to audit, to check whether it is effective and is being implemented properly. Training could occur in multiple modes, including face to face, online, social media modules, etc.
- **Leadership** is intricately linked with culture. Positive respectful leaders both reinforce a respectful culture and demonstrate the organisation's commitment to respectful workplaces. A commitment from leaders also implicitly demonstrates the organisation's refusal to accept poor behavioural interactions which can allow bullying to flourish.
- **Swift action** when an incident occurs is crucial. Some participants suggested that an investigation (either formal or informal) needs to begin within 3 days and conclude as quickly as is reasonable to obtain the facts. This again reinforces a commitment to addressing employees concerns, reduces the victim's distress, and sends a message that bullying will not be tolerated.
- Whether bullying is **direct as opposed to more subtle** influences the ease of identification and investigation. Direct bullying usually involves incidences where poor behaviour can be pinpointed and action can be

taken, whereas more subtle bullying is considered more insidious and therefore more difficult to deal with.

- **Clear communication and awareness** for staff at all levels about what constitutes bullying is essential to create shared understanding of behavioural standards in the workplace.
- Clarification of the **difference between appropriate management techniques/action and bullying** is also vital. These issues are frequently confused, and are difficult to tease apart. Legitimate performance management issues can become confused particularly in cases of illness or mental illness, which can sometimes lead to poorer performance at work.
- **Promotion** of the values of the organisation is important, and this can occur using posters, the internet, and policies/procedures. The messages do not need to be centred specifically on bullying, but instead around the broader ideal of promoting respect towards others in the workplace. These messages should be tailored to the type of organisation.
- **Consultations with staff** about their perception of the work environment is also an important tool in identification of any potential bullying behaviour, and overcomes barriers associated with reluctance to make a formal complaint about another person's behaviour. This encourages victims to come forward earlier, hopefully before the behaviour has had a negative effect on the culture. Staff cultural surveys can be used as part of the consultative process.
- **Risk management** is less about having an actual strategy in place, and more about being proactive, monitoring and auditing the workplace culture and having an understanding of the various conditions that may lead to or indicate bullying. Organisational risk factors are different for each workplace so there is no set rule for managing risk across the board. Risk management was also seen to reduce the likelihood of involving external parties, like the Fair Work Commission, WorkSafe or a union. Risk mitigation should also be part of the strategy for employers, as this can avoid self-incrimination should they be accused of bullying or discrimination.
- **Care fatigue** was highlighted as a possible risk factor for negative workplace interactions, particularly in health sector jobs like nursing. Exhaustion from the pressure of caring for patients may result in workers having nothing left to give to one another.
- For the organisations/employers, **knowledge of the laws and legal obligations** surrounding bullying is key to mitigating risk. For example, employers should know that they have a legal obligation to ensure health and safety in the workplace, so if victims come forward but do not want action to be taken, they may be legal obliged to take action regardless. Organisations large and small were perceived to be unaware of this, and were generally thought to have only a vague understanding of bullying and discrimination law.
- Most participants felt strongly that **policies and procedures** should be in place and should be used as "building blocks", but need to be

implemented, audited regularly, and used in conjunction with other approaches. They should capture the spirit of the values put forward by the organisation, and should have the following features:

- A clear definition of what constitutes workplace bullying. Language should be consistent with that of the Fair Work Commission definition.
  - A clear statement that bullying will not be tolerated
  - Bullying framed as an OH&S issue from a legal perspective
  - Advice on what to do in cases of bullying (formal and informal approaches)
  - A contact person or people to go to for further advice or action
  - Information about consequences and appeal mechanisms
  - Links to support or counselling
  - Clearly written, but not a lengthy document
  - Written so it can be understood by staff from all cultures and backgrounds
  - Developed in consultation with staff at all levels, so staff perceive ownership of the principles and are therefore more likely to comply.
- Two participants felt that policies and procedures are rarely developed in conjunction with workers, and so are not effective, as there is no collaboration, agreement or empowerment of the individuals who are expected to uphold them. Involvement of people at all levels within the organisation was seen as key to having a successful policy, but this was thought to occur very rarely.
  - **Investigations** should be independent, unbiased and conducted by someone with no vested interest in the outcome. It is also important that the investigation is *perceived* as being unbiased by those involved. The success of the investigation depends on its timeliness, and the skill of the person conducting it. Outcomes should be carefully based on the balance of probability rather than absolute proof, as often there is no proof available to substantiate a bullying claim. Investigators should be knowledgeable about current workplace bullying laws.
  - **Punitive action** should depend on the case, and can range from official warnings, to moving the physical location of the accused bully, to dismissal, depending on the decision and the needs of and costs to the organisation. There is a need for privacy surrounding the nature of the action taken. The victim needs to be reassured that action has been taken, but not necessarily the details, although it was acknowledged that this might be difficult for the victim to accept. Punitive action traditionally relies on the burden of proof rather than probability and so was perceived by some participants to be too lenient on bullies – utilising warnings, counselling, coaching, etc. Consensus from participants indicated that many people continue to “get away with” bullying behaviour because of this.
  - **Mediation** is not necessarily helpful due to the power imbalance that exists between the accused perpetrator and the victim. It can in some occasions do more harm than good and can reinforce bullying.



Mediation can only help when both parties are motivated to solve the problem.

### 3.3.2 Ineffective strategies or practices for workplace bullying

- **Ignoring** negative behaviour implies that it will be tolerated and creates an environment where bullying can occur as a norm. A “head in the sand” attitude to bullying was noted by most participants.
- A **lack of implementation** of policies and procedures implicitly supports bullying behaviour. **Unclearly worded, unnecessarily long policies** were also considered ineffective.
- **Poor investigations** tend to only skim the surface without finding the root cause of the problem. Poor investigations are characterised by a reliance on rules taken directly from a rule book or policy, rather than individualised consideration of the various issues at play. Investigations conducted too long after the incident were also deemed ineffective, and can be detrimental rather than helpful to the process. Poor investigations were also characterised by a lack of knowledge surrounding workplace bullying laws. Those conducting the investigations should have legal training among other skills.
- A **lack of preparation** for managers (particularly middle/line managers) and a lack of training in how to handle bullying cases can be problematic, and can contribute to cases of bullying being ignored, sometimes unintentionally.
- Discussions between ‘high up’ managers occurring **behind closed doors** tend to disempower staff and can lead to discord and a negative culture. Staff should be informed and consulted when large structural or cultural changes are being made.
- **Problematic leadership** can occur when leaders tend to take a “stick rather than carrot” approach. This approach diminishes motivation, and damages workplace culture.
- One participant felt that use of language like “**zero tolerance**” is a flawed approach to bullying, as human behaviour is not a black and white issue, and zero tolerance implies that it is.

### 3.3.3 General Recommendations and Suggestions

Overall, the following recommendations were made by participants:

- A **co-ordinated multi-faceted range of strategies** should be used to prevent and manage bullying
- **Appropriate resources** – such as staff/line managers with available time to monitor and deal with bullying issues or a staff member/steering group dedicated to bullying – should be allocated.
- **Empowerment of staff**, so they can feel confident incidences will be dealt with fairly and appropriately, with reference to natural justice.

- Regular (e.g., monthly) grass roots level **consultation with staff** (in small groups) to increase motivation and identify specific pressures, or areas where management could improve conditions for workers. It was thought that this would shift the focus away from money and productivity, and on to the workers psychological well-being and job satisfaction.

## 4 Integrating the results: Conclusions from the Delphi process

The Delphi process was successful used to gain expert consensus on the best strategies and initiatives to prevent and manage workplace bullying, and also flaws in the current approach to addressing this in practice.

To summarise, Delphi rounds supported results of the rapid review. Results indicated overwhelmingly that co-ordinated, multi-faceted strategies targeted at every level of the organisation, tailored to the specific needs and structure of the organisation, promoted widely through policies and procedures (among other things), and demonstrated via implementation and commitment of leaders in the organisation are fundamental to creating an environment which discourages bullying.

A dominant (higher order) theme emerging from both rounds of the Delphi process was the importance of a culture of respect within an organisation. Not only was a poor culture viewed as responsible for bullying, but improvements in culture were posed as the main preventative (proactive) measure used to combat workplace bullying. This culture can be grown through positive leadership (another main theme) as this empowers workers and models respectful interactions. Furthermore, standards for behaviour must be clearly stated (both formally and informally) and a demonstrated commitment to these must be shown by the organisation, especially when cases of bullying are brought to light.

In terms of the management of bullying, a process of investigation was elucidated, emphasising the need to provide swift natural justice for those affected, a need for impartiality, and a need to treat (and sometimes punish)

each case individually in order to come to a conclusion which redresses rather than represses the problem.

Mediation was not considered to be a helpful method of managing bullying, because of the imbalance of power present in the bully-victim relationship. This finding again supported results of the rapid review as many participants noted that mediation can be detrimental to the management process.

Finally, a gap in knowledge about bullying definitions and legislation was noted for employers/organisations and also for many employees. The solution to this was thought to be education, training and awareness raising strategies. Training should be conducted regularly and should cover topics like recognising signs of a bullying/poor culture, positive leadership, how to have difficult conversations with employees (e.g., regarding performance or behaviour), and communicating respect to others in the workplace.