Helping men rebuild their sense of self following workplace bullying

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Disclosure and thanks

Thank you to Dr. Donna Bulman and Dr. Judy Wuest, UNB. We have no conflicts to declare.

Thank you to men who talked about being bullied at work

Thank you to Canadian Institutes of Health Research, New Brunswick Health Research Foundation, University of New Brunswick

Learning Objective: Identify how men manage, and how workplaces can help with managing, workplace bullying
What is workplace bullying

• Broadly:
  ◦ Repeated verbal abuse, threats, physical force, or sexual abuse, harassment, or anger at work
  ◦ Words, images, acts, failures to act

• It is:
  ▫ Unwanted or unwelcome behaviour
  ▫ Ongoing and repeated over time
  ▫ Abuse of power or control
Purpose

- To study how men bullied at work (targets) look after their health and approach their work afterwards.
- To understand variation in how men manage being bullied.
- To hear from men about what might help them manage.
Research method

- Grounded theory (constant comparison, simultaneous data collection & analysis, complex coding processes), ethics, rigour
- Recruited community sample, screened men, arranged, recorded interviews
- Developed substantive theory of effects of bullying and how men manage being bullied
Sample

- 36 men in eastern Canada; urban and rural areas
- Professionals, office workers, skilled and unskilled labourers; some unionized
- Average age: 52 (range 30 to 81 years)
- Education: most had high school, some university
- 95% Caucasian; 36% spoke languages other than English at home
Bullying experienced

- Most bullying was verbal, psychological; some physical, some sexual
- Almost all men reported their health was affected
- 45% participants were bullied by other men
- 66% were bullied by bosses or supervisors
- 58% reported having experienced prior abuse
Research findings

- Central problem: Erosion of sense of self; eating away who men believed they were
  - Interfered with health, work, lives
  - Men felt devalued, diminished, and devastated

- Analysis showed men addressed this central problem by a 4-stage process we called Sustaining Self
Illustrations of central problem

Central Problem

- I was knocked off my feet
- It was a blow to my ego
- I felt like such a loser

Effects of being bullied

- It ate me right up
- It ruined my life
- I was beat down the lowest
Process of Sustaining Self

- **Noting discrepancies**
  - Comparing
  - Responding emotionally

- **Gauging damage**
  - Gathering evidence
  - Taking stock

- **Preserving**
  - Positioning
  - Considering Help

- **Coming to terms**
  - Persisting
  - Strengthening
Bullying changes targets

- Work and live differently, many withdraw
- Replay things over and over in the mind
- Feel self-doubt, become overly watchful at work
- Become sick, develop health problems
- Have trouble focusing at work
- Dread working or going to work
Influences on the process

- **Socialization**
  - Men’s upbringing
  - Nature of work environments

- **Health status**
  - Extent of effects

- **Support sought from**
  - Health professionals
  - Workplace resources
  - Family and friends
How men managed

- **Seeking help and support**
  - Health professionals, counsellors
  - Union reps, managers, work policies
  - Human resources, assistance programs
  - Spouses, friends

- **Being active**
  - Sports, gardening, physical activities
  - Quiet walks, reading, music, spiritual resources
  - Redefining importance of work in life
Outcomes of seeking support

- Health professionals prescribed medication, sick leaves, perspective
- Families and friends helped
- Workplace resources: limited help; often denied so
  - Men felt belittled; dreaded going to work
  - Poorer team work because everyone affected
  - Men took more time off, less focused when there
  - Men lost faith in fairness of system, employer
  - Men incurred financial problems
Work outcomes

When men were not supported by workplace resources, many left their jobs:

- Fired, laid off, or felt forced out: 39%
- Transferred out: 11%
- Quit: 19%
- Stayed in the workplace: 25%
- Still on leave when interviewed: 5%
Men said this would help

Policy and workplace culture change

- Observe, find facts, act promptly, avoid blaming
- Apply workplace policies; develop new ones
- Ensure men’s privacy when acting
- Give, or connect men with, support resources
- Deal with problems before they escalate
Men also said this would help

- Listen carefully when men report bullying
- Examine broader workplace impacts
- Take responsibility for stopping bullying
- Emphasize workers’ strengths and value
- Provide workers with time, support to rebuild
- Promote respectful workplaces for everyone
Promoting respect at work

- Give feedback promoting growth
- Make comments privately, clearly, calmly
- Choose words that do not hurt or blame
- Focus on behaviours not people
- Know that others may see things differently
- Help promote public awareness of bullying
TOWARDS A RESPECTFUL WORKPLACE

website

www.unbf.ca/towardarespectfulworkplace/