

# Helping men rebuild their sense of self following workplace bullying

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

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# 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 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



# **Questions**

## **Comments**

## **Criticisms**

# *TOWARDS A RESPECTFUL WORKPLACE* website

[www.unbf.ca/towardarespectfulworkplace/](http://www.unbf.ca/towardarespectfulworkplace/)