



Bullying amongst managers rockets as organisations fail to take action

Bullying is rife across UK organisations according to research published recently by the Chartered Management Institute. The survey, which questioned 512 executives in public and private sector organisations, revealed that many senior managers are victims of bullying and identifies psychological intimidation as the biggest problem. The research also shows an alarming lack of awareness about dealing with workplace bullies.

'Bullying at work: the experience of managers' published in association with UNISON and Acas, reveals that 39% of all managers have been bullied in the past three years. Middle managers are the most bullied amongst the UK management population, with half of them (49%) having suffered. This suggests that 'management squeeze' is a serious issue - with pressures from above and below the reporting line creating problems for those in between.

However, victims appear at all levels of the organisation. Almost a third (29%) of directors and two fifths (42%) of junior managers reported incidences of being bullied.

Managers are observing incidents of bullying between peers, by external customers or clients and a quarter have reported bullying of managers by junior staff, dispelling the myth that it only occurs in formal hierarchical relationships. Women appear to be more frequent victims of bullying than men with over half (54% compared to 35%) having suffered from bullying in the past three years.

Levels of bullying appear to be higher in public sector organisations than in any areas of the private sector, according to the survey. On a five point scale (with five meaning a high level of bullying prevalent) individuals working in the public sector gave their organisations an average score of 2.55, while those working for public limited companies gave an average score of 2.31. Private limited companies have the lowest levels of bullying with a rating of just 1.98.

The research found that the most common forms of bullying are misuse of power or position (70%), verbal insults (69%) and undermining by overloading or criticism (68%). Physical intimidation or violence are the least common forms, with less than one fifth (17%) having been bullied in this way.

A lack of management skills is cited as the top reason (66%) for bullying in the workplace. Other factors included personality of colleagues/managers (57%) and authoritarian management style (55%). Mary Chapman, chief executive of the Chartered Management Institute comments: "This suggests that poor management is at the root of the problem since senior staff lack the skills to prevent incidents of bullying from occurring. Organisations must create an open, empowering culture and develop the skills of those who enter management positions to ensure that the potential for bullying is minimised and that a positive, productive working environment develops."

Three quarters of respondents, when asked about their initial reactions to a colleague in a bullying relationship, said they would talk to one of the parties involved. Others (11%) would raise the issue with a senior manager while some individuals (5%) would inform the HR team. Despite this, almost half

(48%) of those who have been bullied reported that no action was taken by their employers.

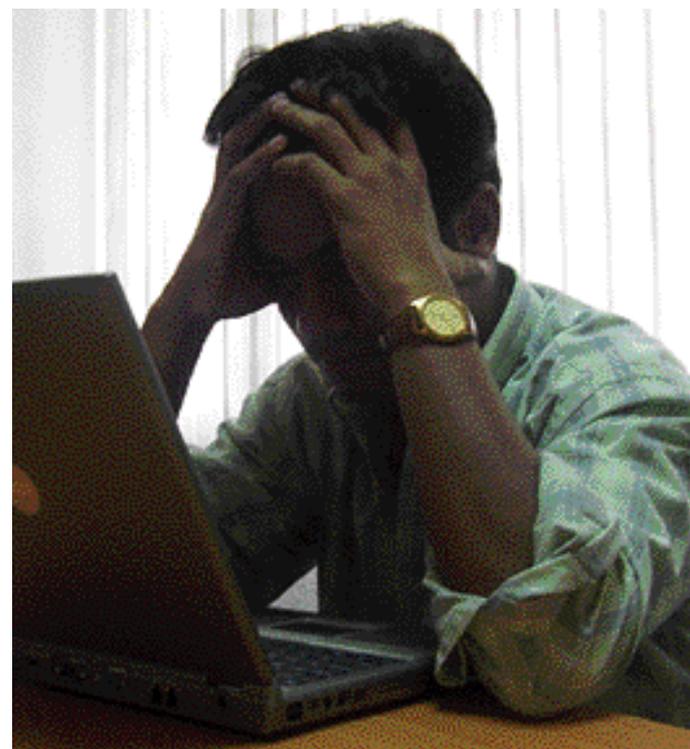
This suggests that the good intentions of managers are not reflected in practice - more than two thirds have spent one day or less dealing with bullying in the past year. Acas Chief Executive John Taylor says: "It is essential that employees are able to report inappropriate behaviour and be confident that the issue will be dealt with in a professional manner. Managers need to realise the impact bullying has on employees - both the victims and observers - and prioritise workforce welfare."

For those with policies, training is particularly effective with most (83%) of those managers whose policies include training rating their organisations as quite or very effective at deterring bullying. Other effective but uncommon policies include: a contact point for advice (82%), internal confidential counselling (82%) and external mediation (81%).

The involvement of line management is seen as very important by the majority (90%) while 79% felt that employee involvement was also essential. The



public sector, particularly, also favours support from HR teams (78%) and commenting on the impact of bullying in the public sector, Dave Prentis, General Secretary of Unison says: "Public sector managers are under increasing pressure to implement a constant



raft of government reforms and at the same time deal with recruitment and retention difficulties. I believe this conflict is reflected in the higher level of bullying in the public sector.

An executive summary of the research is available, free of charge, at www.managers.org.uk/researchreports

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